



**Lion  
Dog Digest**

Sponsored by the  
Rhodesian Ridgeback International Foundation

**APRIL 2001**

The latter half of February 2001 saw that excellent programme on human/animal society, 50/50, screen a programme on the elimination of predatory vermin. The two types of vermin-predators which cause farmers untold stock losses are jackal (involving sheep) and leopard (concerning cattle). Fortunately the principal cattle rearing areas are not in leopard country so that animal attracts the displeasure of a fairly select group of farmers. However jackal enjoys a very broad occupancy of the country and were, for example, seen within the last ten years only 25 km from the heart of Johannesburg (could quite possibly be seen there today, or rather tonight).

The episode on 50/50 covered the jackal problem and showed how hunters solved it using dogs very effectively in part. Leopard and jackal operate nocturnally and there are obvious risks attached to the use of firearms in the dark. All of us would prefer to move about the bush in daylight conditions even if, as was the case in this instance, there isn't a tree to stumble into within 50 km. The scene was in the Karoo and the hunter enjoyed a clear line of fire even if the jackal could hide behind every bush.

Daylight operation is obviously the preferred route for any farmer facing numerous stock losses and here the dogs proved their worth. They were a pretty motley bunch to be sure and one felt that one or two Ridgebacks would have been far more effective. Also no mention was made of using dogs in a protective role. 50/50 did screen that episode on the Anatolian Shepherd a few months ago; rather fancifully one would think, the proponent of the concept suggested that these dogs would be equally effective in providing protection against leopard. Neither was mention made of the ultimate protection dog in that field, the Ridgeback/Rottweiler cross. Hopefully this practice has been discontinued as, though deadly efficient at despatching any predator approaching the sheep, such dogs should not be found anywhere near an urban area.

It was nonetheless interesting to see the screening of dogs in action against vermin in an active hunting role rather than the norm where they are used to assist the hunter in whatever passive capacity the need arises.

An unfortunate recent incident involved the death of Kotie de Beer in the Kruger National Park, caused by a 53kg leopard. On 9 March 2001, the Citizen ran the event as its lead story, such was the public interest generated by this tragic occurrence. Death was instantaneous, but it is somewhat unusual for a leopard to secrete itself between two houses in the unfenced Village at Skukuza. It has long been our view that everyone at the KNP who can come in contact with the wild animals should have a Ridgie off lead at heel. The reason is quite simply explained; the animals are losing their natural instinctive fear of man, and the reason for this happening is equally simple to clarify, [a] the visitors behave in an abominable fashion, giving animals far too much exposure to 'homo ' so-called 'sapiens' [b] the predators' enthusiasm for 'long pig' is well-sated by itinerant Mozambicans, otherwise described as job-seekers, and [c] that debilitating disease TB is prevalent in the South of the Park, resulting in lion battling to catch their zebra for breakfast. So the soft target becomes very much in demand, and as a result every worker there needs an early warning system. Lion was the high risk consideration at the time this approach evolved whereas leopard is causing the greater problem in reality. We must consider further how many dogs it would take to provide individual cover for all those employees potentially at risk, and how many of those employees have an affinity for dogs in the first place. Nonetheless the judicious introduction of more dogs must be beneficial for many of the Park's workers, and it would also allow them to concentrate more on the tasks in hand and reduce/remove the natural inclination to worry about whatever dangers are creeping up on them from behind. We shall continue to recommend that they consider Ridgies seriously.

And regarding that Kennel Name – we had hardly grown accustomed to the provisional acceptance of 'Shangoni' than it was withdrawn. So it is now 'Shashanga' and there are already quite a few of them around, registered and all.

So on to our story on Marloth Park where people live in circumstances not wholly dissimilar from Skukuza Village:-

## **MARLOTH PARK**

We have made mention of Marloth Park in the Lion Dog Digest over the past year and probably the best remembered story concerns the bitter reaction of the residents when three lion were put down because they had taken out a robber. There are several sides to that event, but it was felt nonetheless to be of interest to readers to know just what goes on at Marloth. So we interviewed one of the property owners there (we are indebted to Wally Hopton for providing most of the background information) with the following result.

The Park derives its name from the Marlothi Aloe. It was started up by a large construction firm who offered a stand for free at Marloth Park if you purchased a developed unit at one of their schemes. It was not uncommon for people to acquire stands sight unseen, and many of them remain undeveloped to this day with price tags ranging from R10,000 to R70,000.



Marlothi Aloes

Marloth is located between the Kruger National Park to the North and the N4 approximately 15 Km west of Komatipoort. It is separated from the Park by the Crocodile River and (approx. 50m south of the riverbank to provide a corridor for the animals) by a conventional five-strand non-electrified barbed wire fence (which can only be of psychological benefit for the residents). Just down the road from Wally the water buffalo have created a wallow on Marloth property and they move inland from their riverine reserve whenever they wish to enjoy a high-class mud bath in the best sociable circumstances provided by human society. There are many animals permanently on the Marloth side of the river and they even have their own residential pride of lion. Groups of elephant pass by everyday, old ones, young ones and babies.

This non-existent security position has caused concerns. The Park wanted to improve the fence on the Marloth side, i.e., replace the barbed wire fence with a veterinary control fence, but this was not legally possible because the boundary between the two properties is actually located in the middle of the river. Alternatively the KNP could put the fence on their own side of the river and thereby lose the use of that river. Another possibility was that they put the fence on the far side of Marloth, i.e., on the N4/ south side and thereby, to all intents and purposes, include Marloth in the KNP. That would leave the Marloth residents with as much protection from the animals as they had had before (nothing) but this seemed to be what they wanted as they had very successfully relied on that barbed wire fence for so long. They would however be prohibited from taking meat out of Marloth and this would require monitoring but that should be of no practicable hindrance.

So the fence is the one problem area Marloth suffers from. The other is now lion. For 30 years those lion had not created any difficulties whatsoever but now, for no apparent reason, they have become aggressive to humans. As a result of an investigation through the use of radio collars it was discovered that the resident pride of lion was innocuous enough but that several "wild" lion were moving in and out of Marloth presumably to and from Kruger. Now Marloth is being caught up in the general re-alignment of municipalities, giving them yet another problem. They'd had their own municipal authority but now they are being consolidated with other authorities in their vicinity. So residents all contribute to special funds to propose or fight this scheme or that.

They are not allowed to have lawns, and exotic trees are not permitted. The idea of having indigenous flora to accompany the very indigenous fauna is all very commendable, but at the end of the day these residents are in the same position in Marloth as a visitor to Kruger would be if they removed all the elephant/lion proof fencing around the camps.

Most people have stopped going for a walk around Marloth. Wally has carried on but he does not go down to the river and walk along the fence, nor does he go out in the dark anymore. There is a theory that instead of walking one should ride a bicycle; this idea has been brought about by several instances of riders being approached by lion whereupon they hopped off and fended the lion away by holding the bicycles in front of them. Also, having been cornered by a lion, residents have offered the big cat their tee shirt, which was immediately attacked and carried off.

Wally has suffered one burglary so far; obviously small children were pushed through the burglar bars, and only very small items were removed, primarily foodstuffs and eating utensils.

There is a resident game ranger but he does not interfere in matters, he only observes. The animals are allowed to move in on the gardens and take and do with the plant life as they please. Due to persistent baboon raids Wally does happen to protect a very few special items with chicken wire but the concept remains the same, they establish their houses in the bush but leave

the area wide open for the animals to continue their normal life-style as they see fit. There are special baboon-proof cages for refuse. Monkeys still come into the houses pretty frequently. Only once has Wally had baboon in his home, and residents and baboon were equally upset by the incident. Monkeys come around twice a day and Mrs. Hopton keeps a catapult close to hand. The furry four legged ones come in regardless and pick up as much as they can carry, and away they run as soon as you appear. Of course many of the animals are most attractive, like the golden mongoose, which come around collecting crickets from the lawn. Warthog visit frequently but they have never dug up anything. Blue Wildebeest on the other hand cause general havoc, and of course everything is at greater risk in the wintertime.

Elephant do cause great damage and you must just be patient and wait for them to move on. You are not allowed to install fences. Insurance is an interesting exercise but Wally has had no problems with any claims he has lodged. (Imagine, “I had this Wildebeest tearing around my front lawn destroying...”)

Marloth is regarded as a Nature Reserve and it is basically impossible to convert it to normal urban residential living. If given a choice the residents would probably opt for inclusion with Kruger. Non the less it is very much a hybrid having all the animals of the Park without having any of the security fencing around the living units.

There are people permanently resident there “under exemption”, because theoretically they should only be living there for 4 months of the year. There is more than one access point so checking/policing is not foolproof at present but they are keen to install an official boom under 24 hour surveillance and will thereby control security more efficiently. This will help as the absence of a fence around the property leaves you vulnerable. Wally is building up a perimeter “barrier” around the garden consisting of sisal with thorn trees growing out through the sisal. However Kudu have an aversion to sisal presumably because the leaf shapes resemble their horns. They “lock horns” with the plants and wrestle them causing terminal damage to what appears to us to be an impregnable growth. Kudu also break branches off the trees and do not consume any of the leaves. One of his neighbours has hand fed apples to the Kudu, so they are actually quite docile.



Sisal

There are 4000 stands in Marloth covering approx. 2500ha and only 900 are occupied (housed). No pets are allowed which, with the resultant absence of Ridgebacks, obviously and without any doubt whatsoever accounts for frequent incursion by lion. The bird life is extensive with the Marlothi Aloes attracting many bees, which in turn attract large numbers of bee-eaters, and of course many birds such as sunbirds go for the aloe’s honey.

## **E-COLLAR**

We interviewed Carol Rhodes concerning the use of an E-collar on her dogs. Her situation is somewhat unusual in that their property has been incorporated within the KNP fenced area. That large river, the Crocodile, constitutes the boundary along almost all of the bottom (southern) end of the Park. However, several properties on the south side of that river were, from the animals' point of view, included in the park by dint of locating the strong, electrified fence on the south side of those properties. So when you visit Carol you drive along the game park fence for quite a distance before passing through a large gate and, technically, entering the Park.

So, from their stoep, you have a beautiful view over their swimming pool down to the Crocodile River, some fifty metres away, and across it deep into the Park which stretches for four hundred kilometres to the north. The river may be large but it certainly is no impenetrable barrier; so they have put up a strand of electric fence in an effort to gain some privacy, at least around the pool, for what it was worth.

As far as their dogs are concerned the danger of crocodiles remains, and a very real and frightening danger that is. The river wasn't given the name Crocodile by mistake: large numbers of those prehistoric reptiles abound along its banks and they represent a constant threat to all animals, domestic or wild. She has three dogs, a Rottweiler, a Pitbull X Bullterrier, and the young Ridgeback. The terrier is elderly and causes no problems, but the Rottie was encouraging the RR to go on jaunts down to the river and somehow a stop had to be put to that activity. After much discussion it was decided to try an E-collar. Advice was sought from wherever possible and the video was watched with care.

They started with the Rottie which was allowed to wear the collar for three days in the 'Off' position to grow accustomed to its presence. Apart from visiting the river she was also hassling the gardener, biting the tyres of arriving cars, and getting over-excited at the edge of the pool when the children were swimming: this presented the ideal opportunity to try out the equipment at short range. The remote was set at five and they went through the stage of saying 'no' and giving the tone several times before applying the electrical reprimand: she could be reprimanded two times per day, but once she understood what it was about she would come running back as soon as she heard the tone. She was trained off and on for a month before the collar was applied to the Ridgeback.

As far as the Ridgie is concerned he hardly reacted to the reprimand at all and the Rottie was recalled on hearing the tone, more rapidly than him. However, he required less reprimanding and at this stage it is felt that there is merit in the method.

### ***Comment***

It seems likely that the impulse used is not strong enough for the RR even though it may be adequate for other breeds. As we have already discovered (a) the collar must be put onto the dog for an extended period in the "Off" position so that he doesn't recognise it (the collar) as the source and (b) he learns exceedingly quickly. It is also likely that the major attribute of this technique is, after training, to obtain recall at great distances using only the tone control.

## **SITKAS IN CONSERVATION**

We interviewed Ranger Campbell Scott in the DJuma Reserve. Our interest in him stemmed from his desire to use Sitkas in the bush. From our particular viewpoint, Sitkas are probably at the start of Ridgeback evolution and consequently to use them instead of what was specifically

designed to meet specific criteria in the bush smacks of retrogression. But, then, maybe we've 'lost' or 'misplaced' a bit of the required, inborn ability of the Sitka and need to be reminded of it.

Whatever the case we can only benefit from improved knowledge of the RR building blocks and Campbell Scott's experiences with his two can only be of help. We must also remember that these dogs are now given the breed name of Africanis and we remind you, they may or may not have a ridge, i.e. our exclusivity (overlooking the Thai RR's) is lost.



Campbell's two Sitkas Zee (left) and Bulu

Campbell wanted the ultimate tracking dog for use in the bush and in his Bulu he is convinced he has found it. There are six dogs at the camp and regardless of the challenge Bulu (Mambulu) comes out on top. She is the smaller of the two (the other is called 'Zee' or Mdzeilo) and is almost as large as an African Wild Dog (which has a much more powerful muzzle). Because of her authentic rural origin he feels that she has really operative survival genes and that she is a well oiled machine, purpose designed for survival in the bush, intelligent, agile, capable of dealing with so many different problems. She is excellent at finding snakes and, so that his young daughter is safe, he habitually puts Bulu into the house first after a few days absence to check it out because he knows she will disclose the presence of such reptiles. Only the day before she had started to growl inside the house as a result of snake being there, and he feels she can scent it. Even though they have slithered into appliances like ovens or washing machines, she can still detect them. She has been hit by spitting cobra three times in the eye so far and though it swelled up a bit it always returned to normal within twelve hours. She resents attention after a snake strike and he has given up holding her down and irrigating the affected eye.

As far as crocodile is concerned she doesn't like water particularly, and at the water's edge she is as careful as a Kudu. On one particular day she encountered both baboon and hyena. As to the latter she bit it in the back legs whereupon it spun around and sat on its haunches while she jumped clear. With the former she closed on a large male and they tumbled fleetingly in the dust before she jumped clear: it all happened so quickly: she knows her limitations and doesn't overface herself. Campbell has travelled extensively in Africa and seen this type of dog and its genetic make-up which survives because of its own abilities and not as a result of the people it is with. At 16 or 17 kilos she is also very cost effective; she is very friendly, a companionable pet, and of the type he has witnessed throughout the continent. Though he may hint at criticism of her light weight he would still prefer the progeny to be of her type even if he used a male which was, say, 5 kg heavier than her.

She has been fashioned by the environment to be a survivor and therefore she is what he wants to replicate. She is geared to the environment, and she is what he wants to use in that environment. He has his type requirements, e.g. the nose is at the front of a narrow muzzle (it's almost as though the nose is at the end of a stick), and the ears must be wide open, i.e. they are

either pricked or the tips fold over slightly. His dog must also be self-sufficient in feeding for example, finding its own rodents or insects to eat. Africa goes through bad climatic conditions and his dog must be able to fend for himself in any environment, it mustn't carry excess baggage. The only occasion upon which she has failed him was when he put her on the track of a baby duiker; this has caused him to conclude that the scent of a baby buck is disguised. She can track an adult easily so is there not perhaps a natural anti-predatory scent which inhibits her tracking ability?

## FROM THE NET.

Our walk today. (South Africa) The weather balanced on the cusp twixt winter and spring, warmer than some days past and the brisk northerly wind whisked words from my mouth as I called the dogs to walk with me (my personal pack of 7; Rhodesian Ridgeback, two German Shepherds, two Golden Retrievers, lastly the kangaroos of the pack, the hopping, bobbing Jack Russell Terriers - legs too short to navigate the long grass.)

August is windy season in these southern climes way beyond the equator, and will hopefully bring the long awaited rains after a dry, temperate winter.

We tramped the veldt, moving from frost burnt grasses undulating in the wind where small birds and other small creatures nest, through long ashened strips, burnt to provide protection against run-away fires that plague rural areas during the winter months.

Down across the rolling valley where cattle grazed in the sweet marsh grasses between the farm ponds that link like a precious necklace with baubles spaced at regular intervals. Cows scattered as the dogs ploughed among them, raucous barks of mischief urged stragglers to join in their frolic.

We turned, headed for the boundary, the Shepherds ran, floundered into the shallows of the pond, scattered the ducks who flew furiously off. Shaya plunged in, surprising me for I had never seen her swim before! (My previous RRs loathed water with a passion - what swim?!! You must be kidding!!) I watched in amazement! The Jack Russells hunted keenly between the clumps of short grass looking for who knows what. I was keenly observed by seven pairs of eyes as I turned and headed up the hill to continue meandering across the veldt, storing images in my brain for ever.

Shaya (RR) displayed the elegance of a race horse as she galloped across the veldt, weaving through the long grass. She bounded with joy and exuberance. Her sinuous and sleek body, moulded and sculpted, muscles rippled under her short red coat. The sun enhanced the sheen of burnished copper as she raced through the long veldt grass, nose headed into the wind, ears flapping. Head balanced proudly on her graceful neck, she appeared to be searching, sniffing the wind (with her long tongue she seemed to be tasting it too!) for lion her ancestors once proudly hunted on the African plains.

Past some remnants of an ancient village, for these were the hunting grounds of not only folks long gone in this millenium, but also of the world renowned Mrs Ples, the first hominid skull found on the South African sub continent over 70 years ago, in the Sterkfontein Caves some 10 minutes away. The area abounds with natural caves where there once dwelt hunting sabre toothed cats and other evolutionary game. Today these areas are home to private game parks catering to wealthy tourists (we need their \$\$\$).

The dogs spread about me as we approached the gate of the farm, but veered off further into the burnt veldt into a copse of thorn trees, looking for rabbits and meerkats (mongoose) to hunt. Jack Russells turned greyish white, ashes rubbed into their coats from rolling. The Retrievers, bedraggled long coats tangled with grass, seeds and ash. still soaked from their swim. Shaya dried off quickly, her red coat showing bronze in the sunlight. Muscles obvious, undulating under her short sleek coat. The proud dog of Africa at home on the brown, burnt veldt.

Walking further, we approached the furthest boundary where an almost forgotten grave yard is tucked into a corner. Small granite headstones with weathered script lovingly engraved lie patiently under the warm African sun.

My thoughts had wandered. I was standing pensive, hair blown about my eyes - inhaling the smell of the veldt - when an excited yip from a scavenging Jack Russell warned the pack of her success. A francolin flushed from the grass. It startled me. Further afield, I could catch a glimpse of Shaya following the spoor of some veldt creature. Rabbit, jackal, civet or some thing as exotic as a badger.

I whistled and knew perhaps they would not hear for the wind was beginning to strengthen to gusts. But they watched and followed me as I turned my footsteps for home. Two hours had passed very quickly indeed!

Their disappointment was short lived. A rabbit was flushed. A bark shrieked excitement, immediately the dogs scattered, eager to join the hunt. I stood on a pile of rocks, watched as they dispersed and tracked the rabbit as it jinxed avoiding them all. I stood patiently and waited for I knew there would be little chance of them listening to my call.

At last, their hunt was done. Their heads turned in unison as I called them to return to the house. Dry mouthed, tongues lolling we headed back.

They tired, panting and looking for a place to rest. I, to my computer, to share our walk. I am renewed and revived and now refreshed for there is a cold beer, waiting to be drunk.

Hope your day started as well as mine.

*(Quoted from the Internet)*

*Gail Pomerantz - Sunny South Africa*



**Let  
them  
run  
free**