

# TRAINING A DOG FOR HGH

## MOVING THE FLOCK

By Ulf Kintzel

At some point the dog will now learn how to move the flock. This will be needed when a graze is eaten down and the sheep have to be moved to the next pasture. Moving can mean just a few hundred feet or several miles. The dog is now definitely older than a year. Like anything else I start teaching this when I don't really need it, when I expect the flock to move in a more or less organized fashion anyway. Another option would be to use a second trained dog when the flock doesn't move forward anymore.

I find it ideal to start moving the sheep through an eaten down pasture into the next one. The sheep often know that and are more willing to move anyway. I don't find it helpful to start training the dog to execute this exercise on an actual road or farm road, especially when there are hay fields or fields with crops right next to it which the sheep shouldn't enter.

Before I call the dog into the graze I try to gather the sheep as much as possible by simply calling them. A well gathered flock leaves less room for the dog to make mistakes. A widely spread out flock makes it a lot easier for the dog to cut into the flock.

Then I call the dog into the graze. I prefer not to try to send the dog along the sheep immediately. First, I let the dog come to me and praise it and pet it to let the dog know it is okay to come into the graze. This is new or at least fairly new to the dog since previous attempts to come into the graze have been corrected. It may very well be that the dog even refuses to break the border and come into the graze to the handler when this has not been done before. Firm calls will not bring the dog in, the dog should be called in nicely that it sees it is permitted to do that. A strong voice will actually keep the dog on the border where it feels safe. Having the dog come first to the handler speeds the training up quite a bit when the dog sees that it receives praise and a pat when it comes into the graze.

Now the dog is guided along the sheep to go back along the flock. The dog doesn't have the safety of a border either. These are already two reasons why the dog may not feel very confident in this situation when doing this the first few times. In addition, the dog has to learn to move along the flock without cutting into the flock. Needless to say, this part of the training needs not only control, it also needs a lot of feeling as to how to handle the dog.

I like to hold my crook in the hand opposite to the direction I will be sending my dog. I have the crook there before the dog is called in. This way I keep the dog from going where it shouldn't in the first place. This seems to be especially important to beginner

handlers in order to avoid any wrong signals that the dog might get when the handler starts waving the crook around in a situation where the dog is especially keen to watch what the owner has to say. After the pat I just move myself in the direction I want the dog to go and at the same time encourage the dog to move in the same direction along the flock. I often don't even use a formal command at the beginning. I just show what I want from the dog and encourage the dog to do it. It is not important at the beginning that the dog covers the entire length of the flock. It is only important that the dog does things accurately. When the dog tries to cut into the flock I simply call the dog back. When a sheep jumps away from the flock I strongly call the dog off. One of the least desired behaviors of a tending dog is splitting sheep off the flock and chasing them away.

Once the dog goes somewhat back along the flock I move back to the head of the flock while it is moving back. After the dog is finished I call the dog over to the other side. That means the dog switches sides in front of the flock and the handler (never in between handler and flock, that turns the flock away). On the other side I repeat the same, encourage the dog to move back. After a while the dog will move a bit more freely. Now I start adding a command for the dog to move back along the flock. I choose "Geh weiter", the English command could be "Go back" or simply "Go".

It is also possible to teach this exercise while moving the flock along an existing border, for instance along the edge of the graze. This way the dog still has that comfort and just has to learn to move back while all movement is heading the opposite direction. However, that still means the dog will have to learn to work without having a border to "hold on" to.

At this point I'd like to point out a few training mistakes that I have seen. The most common mistake would be to insist that the dog covers the entire length of the flock right from the beginning. I suggest teaching flock movement in a way that the dog gets the idea what is required. It is for instance helpful to encourage the dog to move some sheep that stray from the road back into the flock rather than demanding the dog to go back along the flock. I still use some force to get the dog back. However, a lot of motivational words are used. If the dog goes only half way back I praise the dog anyway instead of insisting that the dog goes all the way.

Another common training mistake in my view is to teach this before a solid foundation is laid. The dog can learn a lot of the needed commands, signals, body language etc. when worked in a graze. The commands "Go", "Bleib", "Come" etc. should be taught when working the dog in the graze. They should not be foreign commands to the dog anymore once the sheep are moved along a road.

A third common mistake is to use a dog that is too young when this exercise is practiced. Very young dogs may work well in a graze but yet not be ready "to take the heat" when moving sheep.



Ariana vom Quasliner Moor is keeping the flock well together and on the road.