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Hunt for dog owners after sheep mauled

Victoria Young
Thursday, 19 May 2005

FIVE sheep which were part of a specialised breeding program at Esperance Senior High School have been mauled by domestic dogs.

A large Rhodesian ridgeback cross and a smaller red heeler cross were found on Monday morning at the school's demonstration farm attacking the sheep.

ESHS agriculture technical officer Christine Tholstrup said she arrived at the farm at 8am and as soon as she turned into the driveway she caught sight of the two dogs.

She jumped out of the car and telephoned an Esperance Shire ranger.

Agricultural training officer Brent Montgomerie arrived soon after and shouted at the dogs to stop them attacking the sheep.

Ms Tholstrup said five sheep were attacked. One was killed. Three were injured and had to be destroyed. One is still alive but has puncture wounds around its neck and it is stressed.

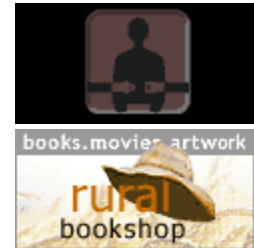
She said the attack was brutal as the sheep were chewed around their back ends and their necks and their faces were torn and chewed while they were still alive.

The injured and destroyed sheep were Wiltshire ewes which were breeding stock for a school program working towards breeding the uncommon Wiltipoll sheep.

It takes five years of cross breeding to get a pure bred Wiltipoll and the injured sheep were part of the first step in breeding them.

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Esperance Shire ranger Bernie von Castel removed the dogs from the block and said they were domestic because they were well looked after and not aggressive.

The dogs were impounded on Monday and were to be kept for 72 hours. The dogs have no form of identification.

Mr von Castel said he would call for the dogs to be destroyed.

"Once dogs exhibit this sort of behaviour they can get the taste for that type of behaviour," he said.

Owners can face a fine of \$100 for not having a dog registered, and \$100 for the dog causing nuisance and being on a property without consent.

If the incident reaches the courts, owners face up to a \$10,000 fine and an order for the dogs to be destroyed.

He said the investigation to find the owners had stalled. He doubted if the owners would come forward because they were probably aware of the costs involved.

But rangers took into consideration that the owners could be away and may have people caring for the dogs.

Ms Tholstrup said the attack was upsetting for the students who had witnessed it. It was planned to enter the sheep in shows.

"A couple of kids saw it happen and one was very upset," she said.

"The kids feed them, handle them and it does affect the kids of course because they get to know them."

Ms Tholstrup blames the owners for the dog attacks.

"It's the owner's fault because the owners haven't contained the dogs on their property," she said.

"I don't like it when the dogs get the blame for owners' irresponsible behaviour. I don't know the circumstances but if they were properly locked up in a yard it wouldn't happen."

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