

DANIELA ZAMPERINI

ITALY

29 YEARS OLD



1. How long have you been working as a shepherd?

I have always participated in shepherding activities with my family, but I started to be a full-time shepherd eight years ago.

2. How did you become a shepherd?

Shepherding is a family business. My grandparents from both my mother's and father's side were livestock owners. They owned sheep, goats and cows.

3. Please describe your flock and herding system.

I own a mixed holding with 170 sheep, five goats and eight adult bovines with their calves. Two donkeys are also part of the stock. I have two adult livestock guarding dogs (LGDs) and one pup recently received from the LIFE MEDWOLF project.

4. Where do you graze the flock?

I am from *Roccalbegna*, a small village in the west of the province of Grosseto, in a subalpine area at 500 m a.s.l.. In winter I keep the stock in a nearby property, mainly inside stables, while in spring-summer I move to higher pastures and stay with the animals in *Monte Labbro* until October. There, I find rocky pastures with shrubs that are not suitable for being cultivated and therefore the area is used for grazing. It is about 800 m a.s.l. and provides the opportunity to have fresh summers, although it is necessary to leave the sheep grazing overnight because during the day it is too hot and they tend to group in the shade without grazing. This requires constant guarding that I do myself. I usually stay with the sheep until midnight, then I take them into a pen with the dogs overnight. Around 4 a.m. I go again to let them out of the pen. My mother helps me with the workload.

5. What is your main motivation to work as a shepherd?

When I was a little girl I wanted to continue the job of my parents, but they wanted me to have other opportunities and made me go to school. After secondary school I started working as a waitress in a restaurant

for two years but longed to go home and help with the animals. When my father got injured falling off an olive tree and had to rest I was finally allowed to help. I happily left my job in the restaurant and started to be a full-time shepherd!

6. What difficulties do you face working as a shepherd?

The main difficulty is making time to deal with all the administration and bureaucracy required by national laws. The agricultural association provides some support but it is far from satisfactory. This is crucial in the presence of predators: I could not leave the flock even for a few hours without having the feeling that I was leaving my animals unattended and easy prey for wolves. In 2014 I left the animals for one day and lost 12 heads to predation. Now with the LGDs things are getting easier. I get more confident and leave the animals with the LGDs which gives me more time to dedicate to administration.

7. What kind of large carnivores do you have in your area?

Wolves. Before them foxes used to predate on newborn lambs.

8. What are your experiences with them?

I only saw them once for certain, at dusk. On other occasions I saw something at a distance that could have been other animals. I had various attacks, some of them I didn't even claim. Until 2014 it was compulsory to have insurance for obtaining damage compensation, which I did not have so I didn't claim them.

The most vulnerable moment is in summer when they graze and the flock separates into different small groups because of terrain, and the dogs find it diffi-

cult to keep them grouped because of vegetation and topography. I had an average of 4-5 attacks per year in the last 10 years, mainly in summer. From October to December only a few sheep remain in the mountain pastures and they are so few nothing happens to them.

9. Please describe one experience with large carnivores.

I remember my first experience. I was a little girl (4-5 years old) and had no idea about the wolf and the threat it could pose. It was also very rare to have an attack. In the grazing pastures there was a shrub with tender leaves and we used to leave the yearlings grazing there as they liked it very much. I had to go and check them every 2-3 days which I did on a donkey. One day I arrived and found many sheep on the ground dead or wounded. I was shocked and ran back home to call for my grandparents. They were not sure when the attack happened, given the animals were left there for over two days. I was so shocked I didn't go back again to check the sheep. From that event my grandparents decided to build pens to keep the animals at night and after that we only had one more attack. Back then, the attacks happened at night but during the last 4-5 years they also happened during the day.

10. Which measures do you take to prevent damage and what are the pros and cons?

I have three LGDs and an electric fence. In the beginning it was difficult for adult sheep to get used to the dogs. I am generally happy with the dogs and

I try to keep them away from the village, but there are sometimes people in the neighbourhood who are afraid and say they should not be left roaming. Since having LGDs I have noticed a bit of hostility from some villagers. Before I was often invited to graze for free in privately owned pastures which does not happen anymore. I think this is because of the dogs.

I trust less in the electric fences. I am afraid the sheep could get injured by poking their heads through the net holes. I use them in summer to group the sheep at night together with the dogs. In winter I use them as an outer fence in addition to the inner fixed one.

11. Do you get subsidies or counselling support?

I never got any incentive for damage prevention measures before the LIFE MEDWOLF Project offered me a dog and a fence. I received compensation for losses, but so far only for the claims of damages suffered in 2016.

12. What are the main challenges when dealing with large carnivores in your area?

I receive little information from the agricultural associations. I would like to receive more support.

Some livestock owners do not care about their stock as they should do: they leave the older animals unattended and then claim for losses. Those animals were not productive anyway, and for them compensation represents a way to make some profit. The problem is that if they leave the animals nearby they might constitute an attraction for wolves and my animals will also be in danger.

Another problem is that some LGDs are not properly managed. Some owners leave them roaming and neglect to train them. They become aggressive and become a bad example, leading to many people having a negative image of LGDs. A competent authority should make an in-depth analysis of those details in holding management and provide support to those who really care.

Maybe some form of direct guarding of the animals during summer night time could be useful, some kind of shepherd help. But this very much depends on who will be doing it since some people are naturally passionate and have a feeling for animals while others may scare them and do more harm than good.

