



GAP Information Leaflet 15

Gathering stock on site

Gathering grazing animals safely and efficiently is a must for all those involved in conservation grazing systems, especially when site managers are relatively inexperienced and / or the animals are on sites where they are relatively unhandled and the conditions are challenging; for example topography and vegetation make gathering difficult. Below are some suggestions to help:

1. Planning

The objective when gathering stock from site is to do so calmly, quietly and patiently with the minimum of stress and risk to people, stock and dogs.

Plan the grazing system with stock management in mind and if you don't have the knowledge, seek advice from an experienced shepherd or stockman, or another conservation grazier or organisation with experience in managing stock a similar situation.

It is imperative to plan how gathering is going to happen before starting!

Ensure there is enough help, equipment (mobile phones, sticks, protective clothing etc) and time.

Any helpers must be knowledgeable in working with animals and if not, trained. Body language, temperament and demeanor all have a big influence on the calmness and 'biddability' (i.e. manageable in terms of herding / shepherding / gathering) of the animals. Minimise shouting, waving of arms and rapid movements.

Prepare a risk assessment for gathering and all other stock husbandry operations (information available from www.grazinganimalsproject.org.uk) and COSHH assessment for zoonoses and any chemicals used in stock management.

Once animals and people are agitated, it takes some time for them to calm down, so if this happens it is probably better to leave them and come back later (or another day).

Be extremely careful not to isolate individual cattle and ponies from the rest of the herd (a lone animal is dangerous), and if using feed to call animals to you, beware of being hurt inadvertently as they try to get to the food.

2. Fences

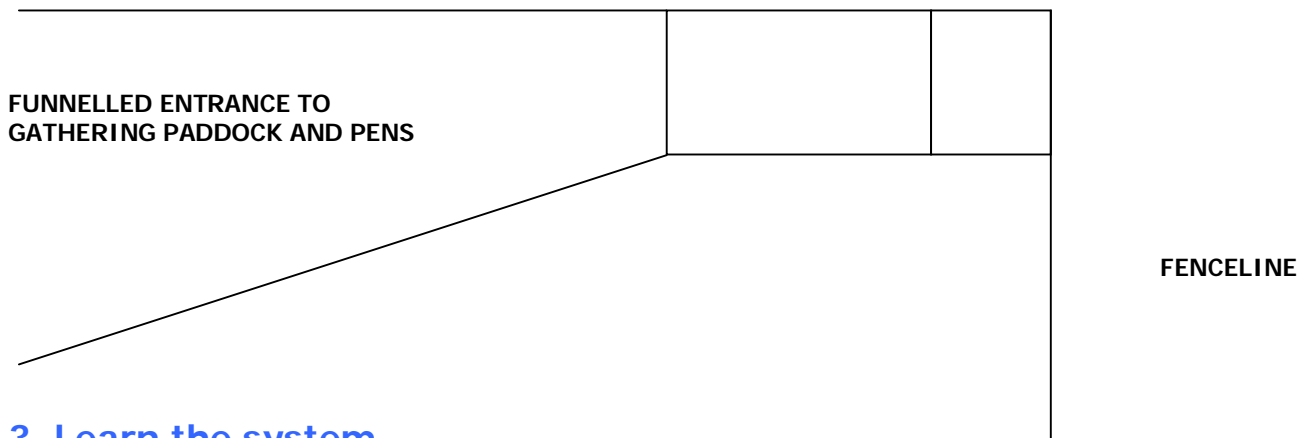
When designing the grazing system and its infrastructure, plan the positioning of fences and handling systems with the management of the grazing animals in mind:

- In general handling pens / systems should be put in corners within compartments
- Avoid pinch points or dead ends where stock can come in to contact with people with or without dogs
- Position the fence in relation to the topography and vegetation cover so that it can be used to guide animals and funnel them towards handling areas and pens
- Ensure that the fence is of suitable construction and in good condition to keep the animals contained and without risk of injury.

Gathering stock on site

2

- Avoid putting access gates, loading / unloading points and gathering routes for the stock where other public use will cause problems to gathering and loading
- Design the grazing system so that if animals escape from a compartment they will always be contained within another fenced area
- Try to have larger sites sensibly sub-divided so that animals can be slowly maneuvered across the site to the handling pens by letting them in to the next compartment once they have finished in one, with the final move being in to the handling area paddock
- Gathering areas should consist of a gathering paddock (preferably with animals funneled in to it) with animals moved in to smaller and smaller areas until they are in the pens
- Funnels to guide animals can be permanent post and wire stock fencing or electric tape or mesh put up and taken down as needed



3. Learn the system

Once you have gathered stock on a site a few times, you, the animals and any stock dogs will start to learn the system, i.e. all will know what is happening and what to do next! This can be facilitated by gathering animals when it isn't necessary and running them through handling pens / systems a few times without doing anything unpleasant to them. Conversely, if the first experience that cattle have of a handling system is dehorning and castration, they will remember the experience and be reluctant to enter the pens subsequently.

4. Topography

Consider the topography of the site and how animals are likely to use the site to meet their needs (in other words how they forage, find water, shelter, resting areas etc). Make a record of the *actual* daily, seasonal and annual ranging behaviour of the animals. Then use this information to anticipate how animals are likely to behave on the site when they are being gathered so that they can be prevented from 'escaping' your control during the operation. In addition the gathering time can be planned so that they will already be using an area where it is easier to gather them when you plan to do it.



USE TOPOGRAPHY AND NATURAL FEATURES TO HELP GATHERING

GET ANIMALS ON TO THE TRACK IN THIS PHOTO AND THEN YOU CAN WALK THEM CALM UP THE VALLEY

5. Vegetation cover and type

As well as considering topography in relation to how animals are likely to use the site, also consider vegetation

Gathering stock on site

3

type and its spatial cover. In general when animals are visible and on open landscapes they are more 'biddable'; in dense vegetation they can become quite 'wild' very quickly! They will also use dense vegetation to get away from you and any dogs during gathering. As you get to know how they behave you can place people or use temporary fencing to block these 'escape' routes.



USING DENSE SCRUB TO GUIDE STOCK DURING GATHERING

6. Water

Consider any water features, streams, rivers and ditches in the same way as topography and vegetation to aid gathering.

In arid zones watering points are used to attract free ranging stock which then 'catch' themselves by entering pens and not being able to get back out. Put "trapping feral goats" into "Google" and see information from Australia in particular.

In a similar way you can use water to manipulate livestock use of sites especially if troughs are the only supply. Put a trough in the handling pens and animals will come to it. This can be facilitated if you have multiple troughs by turning off the others).

7. Supplementary feed

Animals will loiter around supplementary feeding areas. This behaviour can be used to aid gathering by feeding animals with hay or a bit of concentrate feed for a few days to a week before gathering in the handling areas or pens. They will get used to this and hang around; when it comes to the day you need to shut them in you can just close the gate behind them. You can even combine the feeding with a call or whistle so that you can call them to you (this saves traipsing around site trying to find the animals). I used to check and gather sheep from steep, scrubby chalk grassland sites by breaking down the branches of palatable scrub species and calling the sheep; they soon associated the sound of breaking branches and the call with food and it saved me getting cut to pieces!



GATHERING STOCK WITH FOOD AND A CALL

8. Dogs

Well-trained sheep and cattle dogs used by a skilled shepherd or stockman are a major bonus for managing livestock. If these conditions aren't present they can be unhelpful! Remember that some dogs are droving dogs for driving animals forward rather than dogs which can gather to you.

For advice on where to get dogs and training contact the International Sheep Dog Society:

Tel: 01234 352672

Email: office@isds.org.uk

Web: www.isds.org.uk

9. Horses and ponies

On larger and more challenging sites using a pony or horse will save time and labour.

10. 'Tame' animals

Having 'tame' animals that come to you on a call and / or that are present in the handling areas can help with gathering other stock; the rest of the animals will come in more readily.

11. Difficult animals

Sometimes you will get individual animals that are difficult and disruptive during gathering. If possible it might be worth getting rid of these individuals.

12. Shepherding

The best way to manage and control animals is to shepherd or herd them, i.e. the animals are walked to and from grazing areas each day by a shepherd who spends the day with them. This is a system still in operation in parts of Europe, especially Holland and Germany.



**SHEPHERD, FLOCK AND NATURE CONSERVATIONISTS
ON HOOG BURLOOGE, HOLLAND**

13. Contract shepherds

Contract shepherds are available to help gather stock and carry out all aspects of stock husbandry. Ask local sheep farmers for any local contacts.

14. Training

Invest in some training to improve your skills:

- GAP run 2-day Introduction to Stock Management courses that includes some practical exercises
- Contact your nearest agricultural college to see if they run stock husbandry courses
- For all aspects of managing free-ranging native ponies contact:

Tel: 01409 221166

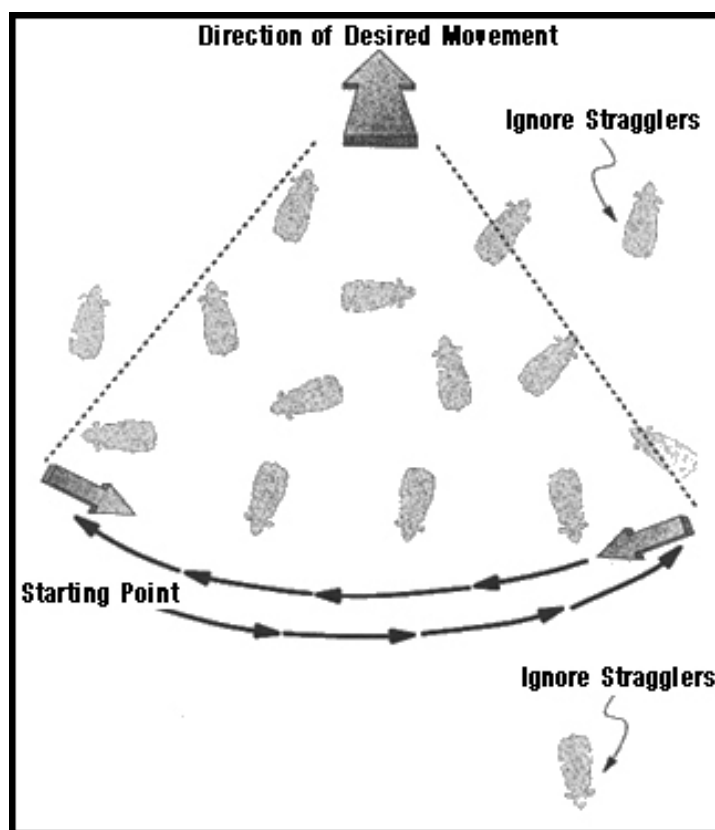
Email: mail@positivehorsemanship.com

Web: www.horsemanship.com

15. The Bud Williams method - Gathering cattle from sites – utilizing stalking and predator avoidance behaviour

a.) First bunch the animals

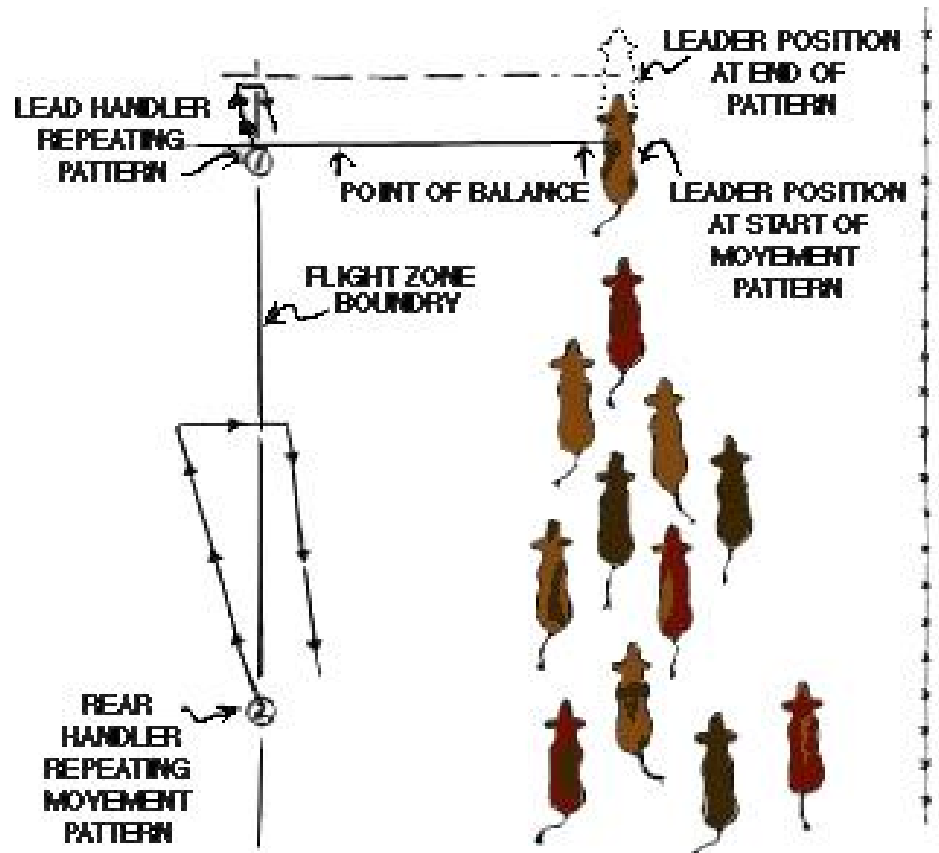
- A predator locates the herd and slowly circles it to identify potential old/weak/diseased individuals. This causes anxiety (not fear) in the herd which **bunches** in response
- By mimicking this initial stalking behaviour, a cattle handler can gather animals from a large area by making cattle **bunch**, and **once this has happened** encouraging movement in desired direction of travel by entering and withdrawing from the collective flight zone. Initially the bunching response will be instinctual, but if repeated, gradually this will become **calmer, learned behaviour**. This technique only works with patience and **calm, quiet steady behaviour**; if animals become excited to the point of flight, they must be given at least 30 minutes to calm down
- When gathering cattle from a large area, you can move animals in a calm and orderly fashion (see below)



Gathering stock on site b.) Then move them

6

- To keep animals moving in an orderly fashion the handler alternates between penetrating and withdrawing from the collective flight zone – alternating pressure is more effective than continuous pressure
- By walking in rotational manner, the handler penetrates the flight zone walking in the opposite direction to desired movement of stock – this encourages cattle to move in the right direction!



CATTLE SHOWING GOOD BUNCHING BEHAVIOUR



References:

- GAP: www.grazinganimalsproject.org.uk
- Bud Williams: <http://stockmanship.com/index.htm>
- Temple Grandin: www.grandin.com
- Low stress stock handling: www.lss.net.au