Avoiding the Big Baaad Wolf

New technology helps sheep to escape their biggest predator.

By Elizabeth Aaron

Wolves have been attacking sheep more frequently in Europe.

Sheep farmers in Switzerland and other parts of Europe have had a lot to worry about in recent years. Why? Wolf attacks have been on the rise. The wolves break through fenced areas where the sheep herds are kept, and then feed on the defenseless animals. By the time farmers discover the problem, it's usually too late.

So, can anything be done to better protect the sheep? Scientist Jean-Marc Landry believes so. Landry recently developed a sheep collar that sends farmers text messages when their sheep are in danger.

Messaging With a Collar

To come up with this unique messaging system, Landry spent a lot of time studying the way sheep respond to danger. He discovered that the average sheep's heart beats 80 times per minute when the animal is at rest. But when a sheep is stressed, its heart rate nearly triples. That's usually the case when a sheep encounters a wolf.

Using these findings, Landry developed a special collar that can monitor a sheep's heart rate. If the collar detects an increased heart rate, a microchip inside the device alerts the farmer with a text message or phone call. When the farmer receives the message, he or she knows that the sheep are in danger, and can do something to help.

Scare Tactics

According to Landry, the collar will only be useful if the farmer is close enough to the sheep to react.

So, he's currently working on new versions that will include defense mechanisms. "Some collars may play a loud noise while others will emit a chemical spray that will scare the wolves without harming them," he says.

This sheep's collar can transmit text messages.

These new collars could help a lot of sheep and their farmers. In the future, this technology could help other animals and their owners as well. Who knows, maybe one day you'll be getting text messages from your pet!

p. 1: © Baronb/Shutterstock; p. 3tr: © mch67/Fotolia