

Watching the flock

Llama keeps coyotes at bay in Kilbride

By **BARB SWEET**

THE TELEGRAM

Inside an iconic red barn, Skipper, a saucer-eyed, long-necked llama, is watching a small flock at Howard Morry's sheep farm in Kilbride.

The rest of Morry's flock, about 200 in total, are on islands off Ferryland and Tors Cove, but five are kept behind to keep Skipper company.

"If you take the sheep away from them, they are lonely, dejected," Morry said.

Morry has had the llama for seven years, and also owns a four-year-old llama for part of the flock he keeps in Goulds.

One of his sons, Howard Jr., also has a llama, Skipper's baby. Holly was born on Christmas Day.

The llamas aren't just for show. They protect the sheep from coyotes.

Skipper and her summer flock of five sheep and lambs are in the barn while haying season is on.

"Once hay is done, the llama lays down in the field and all the sheep lay down around her. They got a sense of security," explained Howard Sr., who has been raising sheep for 70 years, ever since his father gave him a lamb for passing Grade 1 in Ferryland.

"I don't know what nature does, but they are always on guard. I wouldn't be without them."

According to the website of Llama Canada, a non-profit organization, the aristocratic animal — a South American cousin of the camel — is easy to care for and can live up to 20 years.

They emit a shrill rhythmic alarm call at the sight of a strange animal, especially coyotes and dogs.

Skipper feeds on hay, but likes treats of bread. Both Skipper and the unnamed four-year-old were bred in Nova Scotia for guarding sheep. He paid \$700 for one and \$500 for the other.



Howard Morry's llama Skipper watches over her small flock of sheep in the barn next to Morry's house. He keeps a llama with his sheep to protect them against coyotes.

— Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram

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"I can't emphasize enough how good they are," Morry said, adding his sons have heard coyotes howling in the woods behind the farm.

"They watch my flock of sheep like nothing else."

Morry comes from a line of sheep farmers — his father and grandfather raised them, his sons have taken it up as a hobby and his grandchildren seem keen on it, too.

Morry, who trained at the agriculture college in Nova Scotia, worked in government agriculture research for decades. He used the sheep farm to help support his wife and eight children.

He sells to grocery stores and downtown St. John's restaurants, marvelling at the \$4.50 a pound he gets for lamb.

"I tell people that's an awful price to pay for it. People don't mind if they get a good product. (One of the restaurants) asked me out to dinner one day. I wasn't out yet, but I wonder what they charge people a plate? I'd say nothing less than 40 bucks," Morry said.

"There's no end to the market. It's a lot of work, but the boys do most of the work now. My knees are bad."

Back in the 1930s, Morry said there were about 125,000 sheep on the island, but raising them fell out of favour as economic times improved.

That number dropped to a fraction and coyotes have been trouble in recent years, cutting the numbers down to about 2,000, he said.

He said in one week four years ago he lost 20 lambs to coyotes on pastureland in Ferryland.

"Coyotes are the big thing now. People just can't rear the sheep, especially out on the Cape Shore where (the coyotes) are running around the cliffs and that," Morry said.

He doesn't worry about them at his property in Kilbride, as long as Skipper is around.

"She knows when they are



Skipper the llama watches over her small flock of sheep. — Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram

around, don't you worry. You look out and see her lookin,' lookin,' lookin.' And she snorts, too. They fight with their front legs," he said.

"She herds all the sheep in one corner and stands guard over them. The coyotes have a fear of them — they smell them."

The llamas can't guard huge acreages and can't be paired.

"They'll buddy up and ignore the sheep," Morry said.

The woolly-haired llama is content in any weather, even snowstorms, though when really bad weather hits, Morry puts the sheep and the llama in the barn.

The llama seems gentle, but keeps a close eye on the tiny flock when visitors appear.

Morry has never seen aggressive behaviour from Skipper.

"They say they spit at you, and I



Howard Morry checks on his llama, Skipper, in the barn next to his house.

— Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram

never saw her spit yet. They'd have to prove it to me," he said.