



# The Influence of Body Size on Predatory Drift

## Dogs' Ancestors Were Predators

Chasing is a natural behavior for some dogs. Dogs are descended from wolves, and wolves are expert predators. Some of the key instincts needed to be a top predator are the ability to focus, chase, and disable prey. Consequently, it is not surprising that dogs have inherited varying degrees of this hunting instinct. Some dogs love to chase balls, Frisbees, and squirrels. Other dogs love to vigorously shake their toys. And you've probably seen those dogs that hunker down in the grass and assume a stealth approach towards an unsuspecting butterfly or bird.

## Predatory Drift and How it Applies to Your Dog

ALL dogs have inherited some degree of this predatory behavior. In fact, some dog breeds were created with the intent of emphasizing an aspect of this predatory instinct. For example, Treeing Walker Coonhounds were bred to maximize on their ability to track and chase prey both on the ground and up trees!

For some dogs, the sight of a running or vocalizing animal may trigger part of this predatory reflex. Predatory drift can even happen during a playful, social interaction between two dogs.

This should be a concern for ALL dog owners.

- Large breed dogs are of obvious concern because a transition into predatory drift can pose a serious threat to small breed dogs.
- Herding breeds and Terriers can also easily fall into predatory drift, but who can blame them? They were bred according to their abilities to target and chase livestock and vermin of various sizes.
- Small breed dogs can also retain those primal predatory instincts from their ancestors, but they can also appear to be excellent prey. They are small — like a bird or vermin; they will often make high pitched, prey-like noises. Both of these can effectively trigger a predatory response in another dog with predatory propensities.

The risk of predatory drift can increase between playful dogs or feuding dogs when there is a significant size difference, and it has the potential to result in serious injuries or death.

ARF encourages the “50% Rule” for potential adopters who already have another dog — the smaller of the two dogs must be at least half the weight of the larger dog. It is in the best interest of all dog owners to manage and monitor their dog around the home and in environments where other dogs may be present — like dog parks and off-leash areas.

**Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation**

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