

Debarking (Bark Softening) - Myths and Facts

By: **Charlotte McGowan** Date: **01/8/2012** Category: | **Animal Rights vs Animal Welfare** | **Canine Issues** |

There is a move around the country by animal rights interests to outlaw the practice of debarking dogs. So much misinformation about this procedure abounds that it is truly time to set the record straight. As a dog breeder for over 40 years, I can tell you that debarking in the hands of a well trained veterinarian is a very useful tool for breeders and owners and it saves lives. I have had a lot of dogs debarked over the years and the usefulness of this procedure should not be ignored. I know friends who have used debarking for decades with no ill effects on the dogs.

Q: What is debarking?

A: This is a surgical procedure to reduce tissue in the vocal chords. Some vets use a punch to remove tissue. Other surgeons make cuts of varying sizes and I have heard of some using a laser. The goal of the surgery is to lower the volume of the dog's bark and the ability of the bark to carry over a wide area.

Q: Does debarking remove the dog's ability to bark?

A: No. Debarked dogs continue to bark. What debarking does is to lower the volume of the bark so that it does not carry for miles around.

Q: Is the surgery always successful?

A: Sometimes scar tissue forms and heavy barkers will become louder than when first debarked. The skill of the veterinarian is also a factor.

Q: Is this a "cruel and barbaric procedure?"

A: No. People with little or no experience raising naturally noisy and talkative breeds may tell you this. People with breeds like Shetland Sheepdogs (Shelties) can tell you that this procedure is simple and that it saves lives of dogs that might otherwise be dumped in the pound for their barking. Debarking is a more simple procedure than removing the uterus in spaying or removing testicles in neutering.

Q: Do dogs suffer emotionally from debarking?

A: It is a huge myth to suggest dogs are emotionally disturbed by debarking. Debarked dogs can bark. Even if reduced sound comes out of their mouths, they don't seem to notice at all! Debarked dogs that are not being constantly disciplined for barking, in fact, tend to be much happier dogs!

Q: Is it true that only criminals and drug dealers debark dogs?

A: This is the biggest myth about debarking! The majority of people who debark dogs are responsible dog owners at the end of their rope with dogs whose bark is so piercing that they can be heard for miles around. To be breed specific, Sheltie, Collie and other herding breed owners are the people most apt to do this. Herding breeds, by nature can be very vocal in their work. They also are joyful in their barking. They bark at squirrels, strangers, in play. They bark just to bark. Sheltie and Collie breeders are not criminals and drug dealers!

Q: Is it true you can train any dog not to bark?

A: I defy some of the so-called new wave of dog behaviorists to train a group of Shelties not to bark! Shelties in numbers larger than one love to do group barking. It is part of who they are.

Q: Isn't debarking a hazardous procedure?

A: Any procedure that requires anesthesia, whether it is a dental cleaning, spay, or debarking has intrinsic risks. The key to success is good veterinary skill in all these procedures.

Q: Do people debark just to avoid training their dogs?

A: The majority of people who debark have run out of options and are trying to be good neighbors. We are not talking about people who are irresponsible and leave their dogs out all night or ignore chronic barking. We are talking about people who understand that the piercing bark of a Sheltie, even on limited occasions, can be enough to cause a war in built up residential neighborhoods. Animal rights interests have painted debarking as a cruel quick fix when in fact it is something no owner does lightly.

Q: Is excessive barking due to bad breeding?

A: Here's another myth. Shelties kept birds of prey away from lambs on remote Shetland. They also kept livestock out of the crofters meager gardens and protected fish drying on the beach from eagles and other raptors. Barking is a useful tool for this work. It also helps let the owner know where the dog is. Unfortunately, in modern life, neighbors are not impressed when Shelties bark at birds!

Q: Anti debarking legislation is being put forth around the country as part of anti dog fighting bills. Isn't this a good idea?

A: Criminals pay not attention to laws. They are not going to license their dogs in the first place, let alone report any that may be debarked. The people impacted by anti debarking laws are responsible owners, especially people with Shelties and Collies. Animal rights interests want to outlaw any procedures they deem unnecessary. Responsible and compassionate veterinarians should understand that debarking can save lives by keeping dogs out of shelters and in homes. While some dogs, especially when they are the only dog in a home, can be trained to reduce their barking, others cannot be trained to the point where neighbors will not be annoyed.

Q: Do you debark ALL your dogs?

A: No. Some dogs are less noisy than others. I do debark the dedicated squirrel chasers because they can be extremely noisy and the squirrels are always going to be out there. I wish I could train the squirrels to move to another neighborhood but that's just about as hard as training a sheltie not to bark.

About The Author



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