

by Ria Hörter



Part one: Introduction and the Dingo

It's hard to imagine, but in 1606 – the year William Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* in England and Rembrandt was born in the Netherlands, Australia was still *terra incognita* – uncharted land. Its discovery took place in phases. In 1606, crew members of the Dutch vessel *Duyfken* disembarked on the rough west coast but did not stay ashore. In 1770, the famous Capt. James Cook did the same, this time on the east coast. It wasn't until 1788 that the first Europeans landed at Botany Bay and settled near Port Jackson. Australia was indeed *terra incognita* at that time, but it was not uninhabited; there was a population of about 300,000 Aborigines.

In 1788, France was facing a great revolution and Australia stood on the threshold of a white invasion. The continent was a British penal colony until 1868; the first parliament opened in 1901. Today, about 19 million people live in Australia.

CANINE AFFAIRS

Australia includes five states and two territories, each independent when it comes to pedigree dog affairs. The Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC) is not

involved in organizing shows and does not keep stud books. The various dog societies in the states and territories are responsible for these two important duties.

The Australian National Kennel Council is a member of the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), but the influence of Great Britain, thanks to an alliance for centuries with this country, is noticeable everywhere. More information about the ANKC and breed-registration numbers can be found at: www.ankc.aust.com.



From Cassell, *The Book of the Dog* (1881).

In 1862, the first dog show was organized in Hobart, on the island of Tasmania, by the Society for the Improvement in the Breed of Dogs. The entry of 91 included Pointers, setters, Greyhounds, Beagles, Bulldogs, terriers, Newfoundland Dogs, Bull Terriers and Poodles. The first

show on Australia's mainland was in Melbourne in April 1864, organized by the Acclimatisation Society, which was normally occupied with importing European and British birds and plants. This Melbourne show attracted 381 dogs.

Today, the biggest show in Australia is the Royal Melbourne, held every year in the city of Melbourne. The show lasts 10 days and between 5,000 and 7,000 dogs



Dogs down under The Australian breeds



(Top) An Aborigine and his Dingoes (that may carry some Greyhound blood). (Above) Pintubi tribesmen with Dingoes.

In 1880, a Dingo was entered at the Westminster KC show in New York. His owner was listed as W.A. Conklin from Central Park Menagerie.

from the same period. What we know for certain is that the Dingo was held in high regard for hunting and guarding and as a family dog.

The second theory about the arrival of the Dingo is that these dogs were bred about 3,000 years ago in the delta of the River Indus in India and brought to Australia by Indian traders via the Indonesian island of Timor. The Dingo group derives from the pale-footed Asian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*), a homogeneous group of dogs that breed largely true to type.

Whatever the truth about the Dingo's ancient history, we know that the first official statements about a "wild dog" were made in 1699 by Capt. William Dampier, a British explorer who sailed to Australia in 1688 as a crew member of the English pirate ship *Cygnets*. The first Governor of New South Wales, Capt. Arthur Phillip (1738-1814), wrote in a letter that a Dingo puppy he had acquired was very shy of white people, but devoted to the Aborigines.

When Europeans first arrived in Australia, Dingoes were tolerated, even welcomed at times. It is assumed that settlers' dogs crossbred with Dingoes, but such a crossing can be hazardous. From the 1920s to the 1970s the Australian Government forbade crossing German Shepherd Dogs and Dingoes, fearing a kind of "super sheep killer" – the Dingo itself has the reputation of killing thousands of sheep per year. Since sheep became an important part of the Australian economy, Dingoes have been destroyed using every available means.

The Australian Government has always spent a great deal of money on scientific research on the Dingo. In 1985, a study proved that only 55 per cent of 407 examined "Dingoes" in southeast Australia were purebred Dingoes; 34 per cent were the result of a crossing and the rest were wild dogs.

After so many years, the conclusion can be drawn that Dingoes are survivors, without human intervention and in spite of their unpopularity. In many areas in Australia, it's illegal to own a Dingo. In other areas, it can be kept as a pet, with or without a license. It is not possible to export a Dingo privately; the Federal

are entered. Usually only judges from abroad are invited to judge. Apart from the Royal Melbourne, every state has its own Royal Show.

From a dog fancier's point of view, Australia is interesting, not only because it has several native breeds, but because one of these native dogs, the Dingo, helped create two other breeds. This series will look at the eight native Australian breeds.

The Australian Dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*)

A SHORT HISTORY

How and when the Dingo arrived in Australia is difficult to say. One theory is that the Dingo was taken to this continent by inhabitants of Southeast Asia. The oldest Dingo fossil dates from more than 3,000 years ago. Several Aboriginal rock-drawings of Dingoes date

PHOTOS: (TOP) J. AND P. VILLEMINT • (BOTTOM) COURTESY RIA HÖRTER

The breed standard – the Dingo reflects its surroundings

The ANKC interim standard was published in 1994; the Dingo is classified in the Hound Group. The following text precedes the standard: “Recognition by the A.N.K.C. of the Australian Dingo as a pure breed of dog does not allow the exhibition, breeding or ownership of Australian Dingos in those States of Australia where private ownership, breeding or exhibition of the Australian Dingo is unlawful.”

The general appearance of a Dingo is that of “an elegant, medium sized dog of great agility, speed and stamina. The Australian Dingo is longer than high on leg yet stands over a lot of ground. [He is] ever alert, hardy and rangy and instantly reflexive, carrying not an ounce of excess flesh.” A Dingo is “highly intelligent, sensitive, gentle, curious and affectionate.” They don’t bark, but produce a howling sound, varying in tone; sometimes it seems as if somebody is whining, crowing or yodelling.

The wedge-shaped head is somewhat coyote-like; in relation to the whole dog, it’s never coarse. The muzzle is long and straight, tapering only slightly.

The lips cover the exceptionally long sabre-like teeth. The almond-shaped, obliquely placed eyes are medium-sized and hazel to dark. A Dingo has upright, triangular ears with a slightly rounded tip. They are small to medium in size and never large or thick. A scissor bite and a full dentition are required. The head is carried loftily by a well-developed, moderately long neck. The chest is narrow to medium in width, the brisket long and carried well back beyond the elbows, denoting enormous stamina. “The back is strong, straight, very well ribbed, showing no sign of slackness. The ribcage is light and racy.”

“The entire hindquarter is sound and powerfully muscled.” The feet may turn slightly outward and are of medium size with short nails. The coat “varies from a dense, dry undercoat with a sparse outer coat of coarse protective guard in cool climates, to a hard single coat in warm areas. The Dingo reflects his surroundings.” The coat colour must be “red, ginger, gold to palest cream, and black and tan.... All colours may have white spots restricted to feet, chest spot, neck flash, underbelly and tail top.”

The size is 52-60 centimetres for males, less for bitches. Bitches must show femininity and are somewhat shorter in the loin. Weight is 13.5 to 19 kilograms. Type and balance are more important than size.

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Dogs down under The Australian breeds



PHOTO: (FAR LEFT) DR. ELLEN K. RUDOLPH • (LEFT) MRS. V. TUDOR-WILLIAMS

At the end of the 19th century, materials and tools were developed by which large pieces of land could be fenced. There are several so-called “Dingo fences,” one of them running through Central Queensland for 5,531 kilometres; it’s 1.8 metres high. The maintenance of Dingo fences costs about \$1 million Australian per year.

Government considers this dog wildlife and therefore only game parks and zoos are eligible to obtain one.

A DINGO AS A PET

Although the Dingo is considered wildlife, the ANKC is involved in its welfare. In 1993, rules were drawn up under which a Dingo could be kept as a pet in some states, and 40 Dingoes were registered in the ANKC’s Development Register. The one and only aim of the ANKC in this regard is to register purebred Dingoes. It is not their intention to create a new breed for the show ring.

Where keeping a Dingo as a pet is allowed, the puppy must be sold to the owner before it’s six weeks old. Older Dingo puppies are very difficult to domesticate.

Dingoes are generally not aggressive toward people; instead of biting, a Dingo tends to run away. They are independent and require more maintenance than ‘normal’ dogs. They love climbing and digging and an owner must never forget that a Dingo is a wild animal. They have difficulties when something in their environment changes; normally a Dingo chooses its boss

and home for life, but sometimes, out of the blue, the call of the wild is too strong and a Dingo, joining a pack, will never return.

WILD DINGOES

Wild Dingoes (about 70 per cent of Dingoes) live alone or in a small family group. They can be seen throughout Australia, except on the island of Tasmania. Dingoes rarely leave their territory and, if living in a group, only the alpha male and alpha female breed. Gestation is about 63 days, the same as in dogs, and the average litter is four or five puppies. They produce one litter a year. The Dingo is a carnivore, but eats certain plants and insects as well. A Dingo can live 18 or 20 years.

Because Australia is bringing large areas into cultivation, the number of wild Dingoes is declining. Australians living in the country consider the Dingo a killer of their cattle. However, others consider the Dingo a unique animal that must be protected.

The antiquity of the Dingo is demonstrated not only by his primitive character, breeding and barking habits, but by the absence of dewclaws on the hind legs. He is undoubtedly an example of living history that must be preserved.

Next: The Australian Cattle Dog, Australian Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog and Australian Kelpie

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