

Fourteenth-century engravers, 18th-century painters and yesterday's photographers all show us dogs as seen through their eyes. Their work is an enlightening way to follow the development of breeds and how they were seen...

In the Eyes of the Artist The Field Spaniel

Text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

Bird Dogs

A common type of dog in 15th-century Europe was the so-called bird dog, a small gun dog of spaniel type, used for hunting (netting) birds. The bird dog pointed the game, then pressed itself to the ground so the hunters could throw their nets over dog and birds. The gun was not yet in general use for hunting, so ingenuity played a role. The bird dog was also used in falconry. After the dog jumped the game, the released falcon would catch the bird in flight.

Bird dogs can be seen in miniatures illustrating the famous manuscript *Le Livre de Chasse* (1387-9) by Gaston de Foix (Gaston Phoebus). He described "the Bird Dogs called Spaniels" as "dogs with a large body, a sturdy head and a beautiful white or spotted coat."

There's a bird dog in the early-15th-century *Devonshire Hunting Tapestry*, and they can be seen in old depictions of hunting with nets.

The old European bird dog has evolved into breeds such as the German Münsterlanders and the Dutch Drentsche Patrijshond.

The bird dogs development was a long process of breeding for various functions and eventually accepting the different

types as breeds. By the turn of the 18th to 19th century, British land spaniels had their own appearances and descriptions, which we now call breed standards.



*A liver-colored Field Spaniel
Painting by Maud Earl, ca. 1890*

Land Spaniels and Water Spaniels

Although manuscripts about dogs were published before the Renaissance, English physician Iohannes Caius (1510-73) was the first to divide British dogs into various categories and types. In 1576, his work *De Canibus Britannicus* (1570) was translated into English by Abraham Fleming: *Of Englishe Dogges, the diversities, the names, the natures, and the properties*.

Caius divided the dogs into groups: *Venatici* (Hunting Dogs: Bloodhounds, Harriers, Sighthounds, Greyhounds, Terriers); *Aucupatorii* (Fowling Dogs: Land Spaniels, Setters, Water Spaniels); *Delicati* (Gentle Dogs: Spaniel Gentle); *Rustici* (Working Dogs: Mastiffs, Shepherd's Dogs, Butcher's Dogs);

and *Degeneres* (Mongrels).

Most dog writers in the past divided spaniels on the basis of their work: setting, springing and water but, whatever their type, 17th- and 18th-century spaniels were all described as medium-sized, with round bodies, long ears, dark eyes. Today's Clumber,

*In his book *Dogs of the World* (1931), Arthur Craven stated that two-thirds of the Field Spaniels in England were owned by people with no interest in field trials or dog shows.*

HISTORY

Cockers, English Springer, Welsh Springer, Sussex and Field Spaniel share the old land spaniel as common ancestor.

Three centuries after Caius, dog writer John Henry Walsh made a more detailed division in his work *Manual of British Rural Sports* (1855) where he divided the spaniels into field spaniels (land spaniels) and water spaniels. In this period, field spaniels were mostly black or, to a lesser degree, liver-colored or parti-colored. In the 1800s, “field spaniel” became the collective term for spaniels weighing between 25 and 45 pounds. Spaniels under 25 pounds were called “cocking” or “cocker” spaniels. At mid-18th century

“The Field Spaniel. These are of two kinds, black & ‘any other colour.’ Their origin is a Sussex cross Cocker.”

— (Edward C. Ash, *Dogs and How to Know Them*, 1925)

dog shows where Cockers and Fields were divided by weight, a dog could be shown as a Cocker one year and a Field the next.

The bird dogs evolved first of all, followed by the old land spaniel. By the beginning of the 20th century, Clumber Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels, English Springer Spaniels, Welsh Springer Spaniels, Sussex Spaniels and Field Spaniels were being recorded as separate breeds.

Valid Hunting Companion

John Henry Walsh was one of the first dog writers to describe the modern Field Spaniel. In his work *The Dogs of the British Islands* (1867) he wrote: “He is remarkable among his compeers for tenderness of nose, high intelligence, devotion to his master.” The Field Spaniel was certainly a valid hunting companion: “...pluck, stamina and perseverance in the pursuit of his game.” Walsh continued: “...he is not suitable for all sorts of hunting and some years ago he was displaced by the Pointer, Setter or Terrier.”

The experiences of hunters then and now are the same: The Field is a thorough hunter, but at his own pace. To be honest, they can’t compete with quick-working cockers or springers.

In 1906, Arthur Wardle painted *Field Spaniels of the 20th Century* (above right). Every land spaniel except the Welsh Springer is depicted. It shows two Field Spaniels (lower left), a brown and a black. They are about the same size as the Sussex Spaniels (lower right) and larger than the Cockers (upper right), longer in back and lower on leg.

In the 1930s, the coat color was specified by The Kennel Club as “Black or a ‘Sport’ from Black, i.e., Liver, Golden Liver, Mahogany Red, Roan; or any one of these colours with Tan over the eyes, on the cheeks, feet and pasterns.” Further on: “Black and White, Liver and White, Red or Orange and White, etc., while not disqualifying a dog is not desirable.”

Caterpillar, Cucumber, Stovepipe

Thomas Jacobs and Moses Woolland deserve all the questionable credit for changing the Field Spaniel into a caricature. The breed’s back slowly became longer and the legs shorter. The standard required “long and very low,” while the legs had to be “immensely boned.” Jacobs wrote: “Much has been written and said on the purity of the breed; deprecating the means I have adopted to produce them as calculated to alter a presumed type, and frequent missiles have at me and my dogs from behind the hedge. But where is the pure bred



*In 1906, Arthur Wardle painted **Field Spaniels of the 20th Century**, using “field spaniels” as a collective term to include (clockwise from top left): Clumber, English Springer, two Cockers, two Sussex and two Fields. The Field Spaniels are Ch. Shillington Rona and Ch. Druid.*

black spaniel we hear so much about? Proof of the existence of the pure bred one (if there ever was one!) has not been forthcoming. Like most sporting dogs, they are the result of different crosses.”

Every hunter knew that this type of long, low spaniel that was disdainfully called a caterpillar, cucumber or stovepipe could not be an ideal working dog; yet, at that time, it seemed that the Cocker Spaniel and Sussex Spaniel were following the Field model. This was not hard to do – in the second half of the 18th century, these three were often interbred. A Sussex Spaniel, for example, could have a Field dam and a Cocker grandsire.

In his book *Dogs of the World* (1931), Arthur Craven stated that two-thirds of the Field Spaniels in England were owned by people with no interest in field trials or dog shows. This trend was followed in America, and frantic efforts were made to restore the Field’s working ability.

Made-to-Measure

The Field Spaniel has a number of features that make him a family dog and sporting companion. If he gets sufficient exercise, the Field is quiet at home. His noble head, hazel eyes and shining coat give him the appearance of an aristocrat. But don’t be fooled by his lovely appearance. The Field has an independent disposition and needs a firm hand. Some love water, others not. Most Fields wait to see which way the wind blows; others are outgoing. To put it briefly, made-to-measure does not exist.

The history of the Field Spaniel shows rise and decline. Miraculously, the breed survived the First and Second World Wars. In Britain, English Springer blood was added in the 1920s and ‘30s, and there was an English Springer cross in 1958.

The Field Spaniel is on The Kennel Club’s list of Vulnerable Native Breeds. In 2016, only 80 pups were entered in the British studbook.

Something About Field Spaniels in America

The American Spaniel Club was founded in 1881, three years

HISTORY



A young bitch from the Dutch 'Of the Field's Society' kennel.

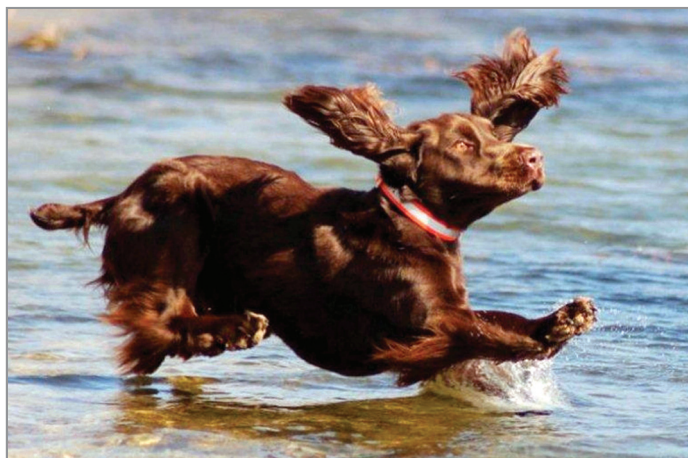
before the American Kennel Club in 1884. But well before then, Field Spaniels were being shown and registered in the U.S. and they appear in some of America's earliest stud books. Black Field Spaniel Ch. Benedict was an American champion by 1883. The first Field Spaniel registered with the National American Kennel Club (founded 1876) was Dash, whelped in 1879, imported by Mr. A.H. Moore of Philadelphia.

The first Field Spaniel registered with the American Kennel Club was Coleshill Rufus, a liver male, in 1894. Nine Fields competed at the 1909 Westminster Kennel Club show.

No Fields were entered in the AKC Stud Book from 1942 until 1967, when three were imported from English breeder Mrs. A.M. Jones (Mittina). The puppies were sired by Ridware Emperor out of Elmbury Morwenna of Rhiwas, both liver-colored. The first American-bred litter from the Mittina stock was born in 1968.

The Field Spaniel Society of America was formed in 1978; 10 years later it was officially recognized by the AKC as the breed's parent club.

On its website, the AKC states: "Although the breed was improved, considerable difficulty was encountered in establishing the modern Field Spaniel in the U.S. due to the necessity for introducing Springer and Cocker crosses in order to eliminate the exaggerations." Exaggerations that started with Jacobs' and Woolland's caricatures.



Some Field Spaniels love to swim, while others do not.

The usual colors of the Field Spaniel's coat are liver and black. The AKC standard specifies: "Black, liver, golden liver or shades thereof, in any intensity (dark or light); either self-colored or bi-colored. Bi-colored dogs must be roaned and/or ticked in white areas. Tan points are acceptable on the aforementioned colors and are the same as any normally tan-pointed breed. White is allowed on the throat, chest, and/or brisket, and may be clear, ticked, or roaned on a self color dog."

The Kennel Club's standard says: "Black, black and tan, blue roan, blue roan and tan, liver, liver and tan, liver roan and tan. In self-colored dogs, white or roan on chest is permissible. Clear black and white, liver and white, orange, red or golden unacceptable."

Not that long ago I saw a blue roan Field Spaniel for the first time in my life and had to ask the owner in the show ring what breed it was!

The breed's American history is published in two of Becky Jo Wolkenheim's books, *Field Spaniel, a Complete and Reliable Handbook* (T.F.H. Publications, 1997) and *Field Spaniel* (Interpet Publishing, 2001).



Left to right: Brush (Field Spaniel), Nellie (Field Spaniel) and Ladybird (Cocker Spaniel).

From: Stonehenge, Dogs of the British Islands, 1882

We have tried to find the names of all photographers. Unfortunately, we do not always succeed. Please send a message to the author if you think you are the owner of a copyright.

A retired bookseller and publisher, Ria Hörter is a dog writer from The Netherlands. She is the contributing editor of the leading Dutch National Dog Magazine Onze Hond (Our Dogs) and works for the Welsh Springer Spaniel Club of the Netherlands of which she was one of the founders. She was nominated twice and a finalist in the 2009 Annual Writing Competition of the Dog Writers Association of America, for her articles in Dogs in Canada.

On April 12, 2014 she was awarded the Dutch Cynology Gold Emblem of Honour. The award was presented by the Dutch Kennel Club. Ria is a member of the World Press Dog Association.

For more information visit: riahorter.com