
NEW DOG BREEDS RECOGNIZED BY THE FCI

The FCI (Fédération Cynologique Internationale), the World Canine Organization, includes 87 member countries and contract partners (one member per country). Each issues its own pedigrees and trains its own judges. The FCI ensures that the pedigrees and judges are mutually recognized by all FCI members.

Recognition of a breed by the FCI means that in almost every European country, that breed can be awarded FCI championship prizes. One of the recently recognized breeds is the:

DOGO CANARIO
also known as the
Canary Dog

The Dogo Canario is classified by the FCI in Group 2, Pinscher and Schnauzer – Molossoid breeds – Swiss Mountain and Cattle Dogs (section 2.1 Molossoid Mastiff type). Its country of origin is Spain. Using the Spanish breed standard of 2001, the Dogo Canario was provisionally recognized by the FCI in June 2001 and fully recognized on July 5, 2011.

The Perro de Presa Canario is also being recorded in the AKC Foundation Stock Service®. The AKC provides this service to allow purebred breeds to continue to develop while providing them with the security of a reliable and reputable avenue to maintain their records. FSS® breeds are not eligible for AKC registration. Several of the FSS® breeds are approved to compete in AKC Companion Events and AKC Performance Events.

DOGO CANARIO

(Perro De Presa Canario, Canary Dog)



A Dogo Canario from the Bronzowy Kennel in Poland
Photo courtesy of Pieski.net

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER
Courtesy MANUEL CURTÓ GRACIA.
Quotations in italic are from his book
Perro de Presa Canario

VOLCANIC ISLANDS

The mountainous Canary Islands, which came into being from volcanic eruptions, form an archipelago off the northwest coast of mainland Africa. One of the islands, Gran Canaria, rises almost 13,000 feet above sea level; at some places between the islands, the sea is 1,000 feet deep. The four largest islands include Tenerife, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria and Lanzarote. The Canaries are a popular holiday destination for Europeans.

Their name in Spanish, *Islas Canarias*, is likely derived from the Latin name *Canariae Insulae* meaning Canine Islands. According to Pliny the Elder, a Roman author and naturalist, the Mauritanian

*... in those islands there were dogs that looked like wolves, but smaller...
There are pigs, goats, sheep and wild dogs that look like wolves.*

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Boys and a Mastiff, ca. 1786, by Spanish painter Francisco de Goya (1746-1828)
The present-day Dogo Canario type is identifiable.
Courtesy of Museo del Prado, Madrid

visited the islands from the 14th century onward, and some attempts were made to colonize the archipelago.

In 1402, French explorer Jean de Béthencourt claimed the island of Lanzarote for Castile, and by the end of the 15th century, all islands of the archipelago were under Spanish authority. Today, the Canaries are one of Spain's 17 autonomous communities.

NOT LARGE DOGS

In his book *Perro de Presa Canario* (2003), dog writer and breeder Manuel Curtó Gracia refers to the story of the Mauritanian King Juba II. In his opinion, there is no proof that the dogs that went from the Canary Islands to Mauritania were large dogs of a Dogo Canario type.

In *Le Canarien*, a 15th-century book (now available in reprint) written by Bontier and Le Verrier, the two Franciscan priests travelling in the company of the conqueror Jean de Béthencourt wrote, "... in those islands there were dogs that looked like wolves, but smaller.... There are pigs, goats, sheep and wild dogs that look like wolves."

These observations correspond with archaeological evidence from excavations in the necropolis of El Llano de Maja (Tenerife) and those on Gran Canaria, where relics of a shepherd and the skull of a small dog were found. According to Luis Diego Cuscoy, arche-

(African) King Juba II (25 BC to AD 23) named the island Canaria because of its "vast multitudes of dogs of very large size." It is said that the aboriginal inhabitants of Gran Canaria, the Guanches, worshipped dogs, mummified them and treated them as holy animals.

The islands were visited by Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians, and in 40 BC by the Romans. Sailors from Spain, Portugal and Italy

pig shepherds can have a dog on their herds as long as it is not a Canary dog." Whether a "Canary dog" was a mastiff, a molossoid dog, a shepherd dog or a shooting dog was not stated.

DRASTIC MEASURES

Dogs were regularly mentioned in documents of the 16th to 18th centuries, but the texts usually referred to stray dogs, catch dogs, hunting dogs and dogs that attacked the flocks.

In 1516, the government announced drastic measures regarding dogs: "Related to the great damage that dogs inflict upon the cattle, major and minor, and such dogs belong to pitch manufacturers, muleteers and other people of poor living who take the dogs with them to their rides

and hunting and stealing." Everybody owning a dog was ordered to kill it. However, "this ordinance does not apply to butchers cutting and weighing meat, so that each of them can have two dogs at the meat market, keeping them tied up day and night and only letting



'Derby,' a type of Dogo Canario, in 1952.
The influence of the Majorero is obvious.
©Manuel Martín Bèthencourt, *El Presa Canario*

them loose to chase the cattle." But there were exceptions: "... the two dogs that are kept on the outskirts of town to kill the stray feral dogs should remain so that they can perform this needed task, provided that they do not come into town."

Nowhere in the archives is there information about the appearance of these dogs, but the distinction between those that caused trouble and those that did a good job was obviously important.

ALANOS

During the conquest and colonization of the Canary Islands in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, dogs became more and more important. They could drive flocks, guard and watch cattle and

For more information about the Dogo Canario:

Manuel Curtó Gracia, *The Perro de Presa Canario*; Kennel Club Books, 2003; ISBN 1593783310

Manuel Martín Bèthencourt, *El Presa Canario*; Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, 1997; ISBN 84-605-8240-X

ologist and director of the Archeological Museum on Tenerife, there were traces of mummification in various areas, and the excavated dogs had a short coat of a dark cream colour.

Frey Alonso de Espinosa, a 16th-century Spanish priest and historian, wrote that the domestic dogs "were mongrels or small yappers which the natives called 'cancha.' Yappers, not dogs "of very large size."

Nevertheless, according to a document from 1515, keeping a dog in the house was forbidden: "No person should have a dog inside the house or property and he should keep it tied up all day, and the

chase stray dogs. Only many years later were dogs used for guarding goods and property. At that time, "catch dogs" was the general term on the islands, but there is still no information about their appearance.

However, on mainland Europe – especially in Spain – this was certainly not the case. In his work *Los Toros Encyclopedia*, the Spanish writer Jose María de Cossío (1892-1977) described this type of dog – Alano – as "very strong and muscular, with a big head, drop ears that are usually cropped, a flat nose and long tail."

Spanish and Italian painters such as Velázquez, de Goya and Ti-

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tian immortalized dogs of mastiff type in their paintings from this period. *Las Meninas (The Maids of Honour)*, painted by Velásquez in 1656, shows a room in the Royal Alcazar of Madrid during the reign of King Felipe IV of Spain. A large mastiff, probably a forerunner of the Dogo Canario, is prominently placed.

SPANISH COLONISTS

Spanish colonists took their dogs – Alanos, Perros de Ganado Majorero (or Bardino Majorero, an old type of shepherd dog originating from the island of Fuerteventura) and other mastiff types – with them to the Canary Islands. In the 18th century, these dogs mingled with bulldogs and mastiffs, owned by Spanish immigrants for the most part, since trade with England was disrupted at that time. It was only after abolition of



There are sculptures of Spanish dog breeds on the Plaza de Santa Ana in Las Palmas (Gran Canaria). This is the Dogo Canario. Photo courtesy of Marinus Nijhoff

the 1960s, they were as good as extinct on the islands.

CROSSBRED DOGS

In the 1970s, Manuel Curtó Gracia began gathering data and photographs of the perro de presa. He planned to write a book, and interviewed people living on the islands, but had to give up the project. “*There were not any presas; there were none left and no people to breed them.*” The type of dog was not popular, and dog fights had been banned for a long time; nevertheless, elderly people still remembered the general appearance of the old perro de presa: “*a large dog, big head, wide chest, long flews, powerful, bigger than the Majorero cattle driver, brindle coat*” – a molossoid type of dog. In the late 1970s, Curtó Gracia wrote up the first breed points.

Although Curtó Gracia interviewed many people about the perros de presa, it appears that their descriptions were of crossbred dogs from matings among Bull-dogs, Bull Terriers, German Shepherd Dogs, Spanish

Various breed clubs outside Spain and the Canary Islands have been established over the years:

United Perro de Presa Canario Club, founded in 1990 (upgcc.net/home.aspx)

Dogo Canario Club of America, founded in 1997 (dogocanarioclub.us/)

Svenska Dogo Canario Klubben, founded in 2011

Working Dogo Canario Alliance (wdcaonline.com/)

the Spanish inquisition in 1834, during the reign of Queen Isabella II, that contact between Great Britain and the islands resumed.

In the 1760s, historian José de Viera y Clavijo wrote, “*The most common dogs found on the islands were mastiffs, shepherd dogs, hounds, partridge hunting dogs, molosser or mastiff-type dogs, ancient short-legged hunting dogs known as ‘pachones,’ waterdogs, bloodhounds, etc.*” Rabies came to the islands as well. “*In 1764 rabies entered the islands through dogs brought from Spain and it was passed to others in Tenerife.*”



Uncropped ears impart a softer expression. In many countries, ear cropping is forbidden by law. Photo ©Caronna, Wikimedia Commons

In those days “perro de presa” was a collective term on the islands and Spanish mainland for all dogs resembling catch (or holding) dogs. In the 1800s, the perros de presa got a new job: fighting. When dog fights were banned in the 1940s, the popularity of the perro de presa decreased dramatically. By

Mastiffs and local mongrels. Therefore Curtó Gracia is convinced that the modern Perro de Presa Canario is a descendant of dogs that were crossbred after 1975 from Bull Terriers, Bullmastiffs, Bulldogs, Mastiffs, Great Danes, Neapolitan Mastiffs, Staffordshire Bull Terriers and Rhodesian Ridgebacks, in addition to American Pit Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Dogues de Bordeaux, Perros de Ganado Majorero, Spanish Mastiffs and maybe others. Breeds that were used for the reconstruction of the Dogo Canario can still be seen in some heads that resemble the Great Danes or Bull Terriers.

MAJORERO

In 1982, the Club Español del Dogo Canario (clubdogocanario.org) was established in Spain. Saving the breed was of utmost importance, but the club also had to convince the canine world that the Perro de Presa Canario was a breed in its own right. A standard was written, based on the memories and observations of elderly people.

In January 1983, the club was recognized by the Spanish KC (Real Sociedad Canina España, rscce.es) and a second breed club



A Dogo Canario was first entered at a World Show in 2002, in Portugal.

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Two Dogos Canario from France.
The difference in expression
between cropped and uncropped
ears is clear.

Photo ©Chienchiotsavendre



The Dogo Canario at a Russian dog show.
Photo ©Dogodogo



A Dogo Canario head should be “massive,
brachycephalic, compact in appearance and
covered with thick skin.”

Photo ©ReyGladiator, Wikimedia Commons

was founded that same year – Club del Perro de Presa Canario de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (elpresacanario.com/). The breed standard was accepted by the RSCE in December 1989.

The first dogs were registered in Las Palmas (Gran Canaria) shortly after national recognition, and specialty shows were organized in 1986 and 1987, with 140 and 80 dogs entered respectively, from various islands and mainland Spain.

The breed was provisionally recognized by the FCI in 2001 and fully recognized in July 2011. In its brief historical summary, the FCI states, “A molossoid type dog, originating from Tenerife and Gran Canaria (Canary Islands). It is believed to be the result of matings between the ‘majorero’, a prehispanic dog indigenous to these islands, and other molossoids introduced to the Canary Islands. These matings produced an ethnical group of mastiff-type dogs, of moderately large size, brindle or fawn with white marking, with a specific molossoid morphology but yet agile and powerful, having a strong temperament, robust and lively, loyal character. During the XVI and XVII centuries, the number of these dogs increased considerably and numerous references to them in pre-Conquest historical texts, especially in the ‘Cedularios del Cabildo’ (municipal registers), which explain their duties essentially as guard dogs and protectors of cattle.”

INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

In the mid-1970s and early ‘80s, Manuel Curtó Gracia wrote articles about the Canary catch dog for *El Día*, a daily newspaper in Tenerife, *Doggy People* and *Dog World*. An abridged version was published in *El Mundo del Perro*, a well-known dog magazine in Spain. These articles helped dog fanciers understand the origins and development of the Perro de Presa Canario. As a result, interest in the breed grew.

Apart from the Canaries and Spain, the Dogo Canario can now be found in Europe, Russia, the Scandinavian countries and North America. In 2004, I visited Gran Canaria, Tenerife in 2006, and Lanzarote in 2007, hoping to meet some examples of the breed on

the islands. I did not see a single specimen, but in a shop of one of the museums, I found Manuel Martín Bèthencourt’s book *El Presa Canario*, published in 1998 by the Club Español del Presa Canario.

A STABLE TEMPERAMENT IS ESSENTIAL

Dogos Canario that show physical abnormalities or the wrong type are undesirable. Breeding dogs with an unstable temperament can lead to the breed being labeled aggressive, which should be prevented at all costs. Already, their importation and sale has been prohibited in Australia and New Zealand. This is not a breed for everyone. A firm hand and early socialization are essential.

In the FCI standard, much attention is paid to temperament: “Calm appearance; attentive expression. Especially suited to guarding and traditionally used for herding cattle. Balanced temperament and very self-confident. Low and deep bark. Obedient and docile with family members, very devoted to its master, but can be suspicious of strangers. Confident attitude, noble and a little distant. When alert, the stance is firm with a vigilant attitude.”

The words “strong” and “broad,” characteristics of a molossoid type, stand out in the standard. The full text is available on the FCI site:

fci.be/uploaded_files/346g02-en.doc



Lovely Dogo Canario puppies
from the Barnacanbull Kennel, Canary Islands.

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

This article was written from a European (FCI) point of view. It is nearly impossible to mention the exceptions to the standards and rules in other continents and countries, which is why the introduction to New Breeds always starts with information about the FCI.

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