

Dogs *not* in Canada

by Ria Hörter

THE CANADIAN KENNEL CLUB RECOGNIZES 164 BREEDS, BUT THERE ARE HUNDREDS MORE WORLD-WIDE, SOME OF THEM RARELY SEEN OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN.

Jämthund – Swedish Elkhound

ELKS, PTARMIGANS AND CAPERCAILLIES

Jämtland is a district in the middle of Sweden, situated at the Swedish-Norwegian border. The area is about 50,000 square kilometres and the capital is the city of Östersund. It's a mountainous area with mountains up to 1,762 metres; 50 per cent of this district is covered with woods. In the summer as well as in the winter, Jämtland is a popular holiday resort, an excellent area for fishing, hunting and skiing. As far as hunting is concerned, there are still elk, ptarmigan and capercaillies.

Being an independent republic in the Viking age, Jämtland became the scene of battles between the Swedish and Danish/Norwegian kingdoms in the 16th and 17th centuries. Between 1563 and 1677, the area was 13 times the subject of arguments, but in the end Sweden conquered Jämtland and they tried to make the area as Swedish as possible. The local language, *Jamska*, which is very similar to Norwegian, became forbidden, but the language survived and now most Jämtlanders are bilingual.

Reading about the history of Jämtland and about important local people in the past, there is no chance of missing Aksel Lindström. We will meet him in the story of the Jämthund.

NORDIC SPITZ FAMILY

The Jämthund is a member of the large Nordic Spitz family. One can find these types of dogs in the arctic regions of the world, such as the Scandinavian countries, Russia, Alaska and Canada. They are extremely well adapted to the circumstances and the severe climate, having dense and water-resistant coats. The heads are wedge-shaped, they have oval eyes, a flexible, enduring gait and you won't find a dog that is exaggerated. At first sight, the members of this family look pretty much the same, but looking closer there are differences in construction, size and breed-related details. Most of the differences have a link with the breed's original purpose.



ILLUSTRATION: JOHN FRASER

Origin: Prehistoric times, when northern Sweden was colonized from the west (Norwegian coast) and from the east (Finland). For ages it was considered the same breed as the Gråhund, recognized as a separate breed in 1946.

Original purpose: Hunting dog on bear, lynx and wolf, now on elk, ptarmigan and capercaillie. Also companion dog and guard dog.

Description: The tallest and largest hunting Spitz. The body is rectangular, clean-cut, strong, substantial but also agile. It must not give the impression of being long. The head is clean-cut and longish and proportionally broad between the ears. The muzzle from stop to nose is slightly shorter than from stop to occiput. The slightly oval brown eyes have a keen but calm expression. The high-set ears must be perfectly erect, pointed and sensitive in use. The neck is long and powerful. The topline is straight and slightly sloping from withers to croup. The chest has good depth and the ribs are well sprung. The high-set tail is of medium length and even in thickness, carried curled but not tightly twisted over or close on the back. The strongly boned forearm is straight; stifles are well angulated. The topcoat lies rather close but not flat. The soft, short undercoat is preferably cream coloured. The colour of the topcoat is light and dark grey. Characteristic markings on the sides of the muzzle, cheeks, throat, chest, belly, legs and under the tail are light grey or cream coloured. Severe faults are a thin build, square body shape, flat feet and insufficient rear angulation. Aggression or extreme shyness, hanging ears and lack of the characteristic markings are eliminating faults.

Height/weight: Dogs 57 to 65 centimetres (22-1/2 to 25-1/2 inches); bitches 52 to 60 centimetres (20-1/2 to 24 inches). Ideal height is 61 and 56 centimetres (24 and 22 inches). Weight of approximately 23 kilograms (51 pounds) for dogs and 20 kilograms (44 pounds) for bitches is not mentioned in the standard.

Information: www.alghundklubben.com and www.skk.se

The Nordic Spitz family can be divided into three groups: sled dogs (such as the Siberian Husky and Alaskan Malamute), hunting dogs (such as the Finnish Spitz and Buhund) and

herding dogs (Finnish Lapphund and Iceland Sheepdog). The Jämthund is the largest and tallest hunting Spitz in this family; however, he has been used as a sled dog as well. Hunting bear and lynx was his specialty in the past; nowadays he is mainly used for hunting elk.

JÄMTHUND OR GRÅHUND

Very little is known about the early history of the Jämthund. We do know that this type of dog is as old as the colonization of northern Sweden by hunters. It took a long time before the Jämthund got its own breed standard, mainly because the Gråhund (“grey dog”) and the Jämthund were considered to be the same breed. There is also little difference between the Jämthund and the Norwegian Elkhound and it is assumed that they share the same ancestors in their early history.

Around 1900, the Jämthund or Gråhund was still present in rural Jämtland and for a little boy named Aksel Lindström, this breed was the best you could think of. In 1929, Aksel returned home from a trip to Alaska, where he had been trained to work with sled dogs. Trying to buy a dog of his own, Aksel was appalled to discover that his favourite breed had almost disappeared. Only hunters – who set little store by pedigrees and valued only hunting ability – owned a small number of these dogs. However, many of them had already been bred to other, similar dogs. Then Aksel wrote an article about the old Jämthund for the local paper (the article was picked up by the national press in Stockholm). Aksel received letters from all over the country, but the most important reaction came from Count Björn von Rosen, a well-known dog fancier and a diplomat. Together they contacted the Swedish Spitz Dog Club in 1942 and succeeded in convincing this club that the old Jämthund had to be saved. The club decided that a breed standard should be written and that the Jämthund should be recognized by the Swedish Kennel Club.

BLACK TIPS

Writing the standard caused problems; the biggest question concerned the correct size. It took several years before this was resolved, but on November 21, 1946, the Gråhund and Jämthund were officially considered to be two different breeds. Another problem was the black tips on the long outer coat, according to some people the inheritance of cross-breeding. But Aksel



Lindström’s opinion was that those black tips were one of the breed’s main characteristics.

The first breed standard dates from 1946 and the first *Jämthundenklubben* was founded in 1952. Since April 1, 1961, the breed has been classified in the *Svenska Älghundklubben* (Swedish Elkhound Club), which includes nine Elkhound breeds. The present standard dates from March 2003.

The Jämthund is rare outside its homeland, but rather popular in Sweden. Of course it’s a suitable dog for hunters, but also for people who love country life. The Jämthund can be used as a companion or a guard dog. He is kind and friendly to children, but can be bossy or even dominant toward other dogs.

STORELIEN

If you were a tourist in the village of Storelien (Jämtland) in the winters of the ’30s, you could easily have met Aksel Lindström. As a souvenir, tourists could have their picture taken with Aksel and his sled and dogs. Later, in 1938-39, he travelled to Finland, to serve as a volunteer in the Finnish Winter War against Russia. Although Jämthunds are not sled dogs, they pulled his sled under difficult conditions – the temperature during this trip was -40°.

