
HISTORY

A GERMAN SHEPHERD AND A WOLF

As we all know, the pedigreed dog of today is a distant relative of the wolf. Distant? Not when speaking about the Saarlooswolfhond (not Saarloos Wolfhond) because about 75 years ago, wolves were directly involved in a new Dutch breed. It seemed to have been a dream of several dog fanciers in Europe to use wolves to create a new dog breed. The first

that, in his opinion, dogs (i.e., the German Shepherd) had become much too domesticated. He wanted them to be more natural; at the same time, Saarloos tried to create a superior police dog.

RESERVED BUT NOT SHY

His first attempt in 1935 failed because the female wolf, donated by the Rotterdam Zoo, died be-

SAARLOOSWOLFHOND

The Creation of Leendert Saarloos

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

attempts took place in Finland and Sweden, but back in 1898, a certain Mr. Niedener in The Netherlands had succeeded in breeding a litter of eight puppies whose sire was a German Shepherd Dog and dam was a wolf. This breeding was not continued, but set an example to the man who later created the Dutch breed, the Saarlooswolfhond. This man may not have been the first wolf-cross breeder, but he undoubtedly was the most determined.

A JACKAL AND A PINSCHER

Leendert Saarloos, an animal fancier in general and dog fancier in particular, was born in the city of Dordrecht in 1884. All his life he was interested in - some say obsessed by - crossbreeding... for example a rabbit and a hare; a ferret and a polecat. He even tried to breed a jackal to a pinscher. He succeeded, but the dogs were much too aggressive, even after several generations. The philosophy behind his attempts to breed a wolf to a German Shepherd was

fore he could breed her. A second female wolf, of the 'middle European type', was donated, and he named her Fleur van de Kilstoom. The sire of his first litter (1936) was Gerard van Fransenum, Saarloos' own German Shepherd from old Prussian lines, known for their courage and trainability. Unfortunately, all the puppies of the first litter died within a month, but the following year there were puppies again.

After several litters from Fleur and Gerard, Saarloos owned 28 puppies, but only three were kept for breeding. The others were simply liquidated. The temperaments of those half-wolves were reserved, sometimes shy, so Saarloos decided to use Gerard van Fransenum again. Later he used different female wolves, always called Fleur, but in the end it was clear that Saarloos had not succeeded in his attempts to breed a superior police dog. Overall, his dogs were too reserved or shy, with an inbred urge to flee instead of attack.

People who knew more about heredity tried to

In The Netherlands and other European countries, the Saarlooswolfhond is still a rare breed. Only a handful can be seen at championship shows.

The Saarlooswolfhond is not a great lover of dog shows.

HISTORY

continued from page 182



*Leendert Saarloos (1884-1969)
with two 'European Wolfdog' puppies.*

successful. He founded a training college, a club of Wolfhond owners and in 1945 he founded the magazine *De Wolfhond*.

CLOSE WATCH

Meanwhile, German Shepherd fanciers kept close watch on Saarloos' breeding, fearing he would try to have influence on the German Shepherd breed by using his own wolf-dogs. His activities were seen as a serious threat and they sabotaged his attempt to get official recognition for the breed, which he named European Wolfdog. Saarloos carried on alone because he did not like to share his experiences and disappointments with other dog people. Selling a bitch, a contract was made; it was established that the breeder remained owner of the dog and it was forbidden to breed the bitch. Such a contract is against FCI rules. Male dogs were sold after they were castrated. Only a small number of dogs 'escaped' the measurements. As said, Saarloos was a headstrong man and it was only permitted to breed from his dogs in his kennel and under his affix.

A NEW 'WOLF INPUT'

In 1942, Saarloos asked the Dutch Kennel Club for official recognition, but the answer was no. He presented the breed at the Winner Show in Amsterdam, but in 1943 the Dutch KC wrote: The dogs bred by Mr. Saarloos do not possess hereditary characteristics that make them into a separate breed. This happened in the middle of World War II, but Saarloos was not defeated or lost. He carried on, but constant inbreeding produced very small dogs in which one could hardly recognize the wolf anymore. Against his will and in secret some owners bred their dogs. Contrary to Saarloos, they tried to preserve the wolf-like appearance and avoided too much inbreeding. They, in fact,

help him, but Saarloos was a bit stubborn and certainly a loner. He continued breeding, but never used a German Shepherd again, nor any other breed. When he found out that his dogs were not suitable as police dogs, he started breeding dogs for the blind and some of his dogs were rather

maintained the real type of wolf-dog we see today.

Twenty years later, in 1963, Saarloos used a female wolf for the last time, giving the breed new 'wolf input'. And again he tried to gain recognition for the breed, but the Dutch KC said no for the second time - not because of the breed itself, but because Saarloos insisted on being the owner after having sold the dogs, and being the only one who could breed the dogs.

When he died in 1969, his dream of being the creator of a valuable new breed and super police dog had not come true.

After his death, a Dutch newspaper wrote, "Leendert Saarloos, a legendary kennel owner". Forty dogs from Dordrecht, Rotterdam, and The Hague saluted their creator at his funeral. Saarloos left his dogs and training institute to his wife and daughter.

A NEW START

From the first litter, Saarloos had kept a stud book. Every dog bred by him had a four-generation pedigree. His wife and daughter continued breeding under the same affix, van de Kilstroom.

In the early '70s some well-known fanciers of the breed tried to find a solution for the decline of the breed and succeeded. As a compromise, Saarloos' heirs were invited to join the committee of a newly-formed breed club and in exchange they agreed about the general transfer of the rights of ownership. In 1975, the breed was recognized by the Dutch KC, and in 1977 by the FCI. In honor of its creator, it was named Saarlooswolfhond. The breed standard dates from November 1981



Dam and sire of Saarloos' first litter, Fleur van de Kilstroom and Gerard van Fransenum, a female wolf and a male German Shepherd from old Prussian lines.

HISTORY

continued from page 184



There is a very strong resemblance between the Czechoslovakian Wolfdog and the Saarloos. (Photo: Wikimedia)



Czechoslovakian Wolfdog (Photo: creativearts.com)

and was modified in 1993 and 1999. Saarloos' daughter, Marijke Saarloos, was awarded the "Gouden Speld" (Golden Pin) by the Dutch Kennel Club in 2005.

A new start was made, but fewer than 80 dogs were suitable for breeding. Mother and daughter seemed to be not the easiest persons to deal with; however, since the '80s, the breed and the breed club are in good hands. The breed is more homogeneous and the characteristics of the wolf are back. Dogs that resemble German Shepherds are considered to be atypical. Socialization of a puppy is extremely important because the temperament is complicated, to put it mildly. Typical for this wolf-dog is a wish to live very close to the family. Kennelling is quite impossible, especially when the dog is alone. The wolf in this dog makes it impossible to train him as a guard dog; there is no aggression toward people.

Due to disagreements, there are now two breed clubs in The

Netherlands; both are recognized by the Dutch KC. The present breed standard dates from 1999.

In The Netherlands and other European countries, the Saarlooswolfhond is still a rare breed. Only a handful can be seen at championship shows. The Saarlooswolfhond is not a great lover of dog shows.

Origin: 20th-century Netherlands.

Original purpose: Police dog, guide dog for the blind, then family dog.

Description*: First impression is of a powerful, wolfish coarse-haired dog. Temperament is alert, cautious, affectionate; reserved but independent, not showing nervousness or fear. Build is harmonious with long legs, without being long-legged. The wolf-like head must be in harmony with the body. The broad skull is gradually wedge-shaped toward the eyes. The muzzle should not be pointed; the scissors bite is powerful. The medium-sized, almond-shaped yellow eye is a breed feature. Ears are very mobile, medium-sized, erect and triangular with a rounded tip. They are set on at the level of the eyes. The neck is dry and well-muscled, sometimes with a collar, especially in winter coat. The shoulder blade is sufficiently broad and long. Forelegs are straight and well-muscled. Hind legs: slight cow-hocks are permitted when standing. The body is slightly longer than the height at the withers. The back is straight and strong back with powerful loins; the ribs are normally arched. A too-massive chest disturbs the typical silhouette, which is rank and very wolfish. Forehand is well-hooked with straight legs; rear is powerful and muscular, can be slightly cowhocked. The double coat comes in brown ('forest brown'), wolf-grey, and cream to white. Other colors are not permitted. The breed is a typical persistent trotter, moving lightly and loosely like a wolf. At a relaxed trot, head and neck form an almost horizontal line. A curl in the typical wolf tail is a serious fault. Some other faults are too-round, protruding eyes, ears set on too high or pointed ears and too coarse in bone. Eliminating faults are any form of aggression and a coat color other than those permitted.

Height/weight: 25.5 to 29.5 inches for dogs; 23.5 to 27.5 inches for bitches. Slight deviations upwards are permitted.

Information: www.saarlooswolfhonden.nl (Dutch breed club, in Dutch) and <http://www.avls.nl/> (second breed club, in Dutch). There is a breed club in Belgium (<http://www.saarlooswolfhond.be/>) but not in other European countries. Wolfdogs ry is a website in Finland in Finnish and in English: http://www.wolfdogs.fi/uusi_sivu_5.htm FCI group 1, Sheepdogs and cattle dogs, section 1 Sheepdogs. The FCI added to the standard: The Saarlooswolfdog was not bred with any aim for a particular utilization. He possesses qualities which enable him to be a faithful and reliable companion and house dog.

** There is a very strong resemblance between the Czechoslovakian Wolfdog and the Saarloos; they share the same ancestors, German Shepherd and wolf.*