

THICKBRUSH CATAHOULAS

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BREED INFO

History

One theory as to the origins of the breed states that the Catahoula is thought to have descended from "war dogs" (Mastiffs and Greyhounds) brought to Louisiana by Hernando deSoto in the 16th century. Dogs left behind by the explorer's party were interbred by the local natives with their domestic dogs.

The idea that Native Americans bred their dogs with or from red wolves is not supported by recent DNA work. Several recent studies^[1] have looked at the remains of prehistoric dogs from American archaeological sites and each has indicated that the genetics of prehistoric American dogs are similar to European and Asian domestic dogs rather than wild New World canids. In fact, these studies indicate that Native Americans brought several lines (breeds) of already domesticated dogs with them on their journeys from Asia to North America.^[2]

There is a plethora of published sources detailing the domestic dogs found in prehistoric archaeological sites^[3]. Clearly, the red wolf was not the only canid located in the Mississippi River Valley before the arrival of Europeans. There were also foxes and grey wolves as well as various domesticated Native American breeds.^{[4][5][6][7][8]}

In the 1800s, French settlers arrived in Louisiana with their Beauceron. They told of strange looking dogs with haunting glass eyes that were used by the Indians to hunt game in the swamp.^[9] It is thought the Beauceron and Red Wolf/war dog were interbred to produce the Catahoula. The word 'Catahoula' is actually a combination of two Choctaw words 'okhata', meaning lake, and 'hullo', meaning beloved... or a French transformation of the Choctaw Indian word for their own nation, 'Couthaugoula' pronounced 'Coot-ha-oo-goo-la'.^(Don Abney)

Jim Bowie and brother Rezin Bowie, who spent much of their youth in Catahoula Parish are reported to have owned a pair of Catahoulas. It was said that they would sleep with a Catahoula at their feet^{[10][11]} During the early 1900s, Teddy Roosevelt used the Catahoula when hunting. Louisiana Governor Earl K. Long had an interest in the breed and collected them. This interest was recognized by an annual competition known as Uncle Earl's Hog Dog Trials.^[11]

In 1979, Governor Edwin Edwards signed a bill making the Catahoula the official state dog of Louisiana in recognition of their importance in the history of the region. In 2007, the Catahoula was voted to be the school mascot for Centenary College of Louisiana.

Appearance

The breed's size ranges from 20-26" and weighs between 50-90 lbs, with a few individuals larger. Most males average 60-70 lbs in lean working condition and are about 24" tall. As a working dog, Catahoulas have been bred more for temperament and ability than for appearance. As a result, the physical characteristics of the Catahoula are somewhat varied.

Coat

Catahoulas Leopards have a single, short, dense coat in a variety of colors. These dogs are actually solid colored dogs that have been affected by the merle gene which dilutes a normally dark coat. This merle gene combines with solid colors to create merle patterns in patches of white and colored hairs intermingled with patches of solid colors.

Leopards with black coats will appear with patches of blue or gray. Likewise, Leopards with red and brown coats will appear with lighter patches of red or liver. This occurrence is referred to as a Leopard (Merle) colored dog. The merle gene does not normally affect the entire coat of the dog, but dilutes the color only in areas that are randomly selected by the gene. White coats are visually unaffected.

Texture

The texture of a Catahoula Leopard coat can be as varied as the colors and can be painted on coats, slick, coarse, or shaggy, wooly coats.

Coarse coat: This coat is a little longer and fuller than others. They do not require that much maintenance; however, these dogs are not quick to dry when wet. These coats will often display "feathers" seen on the rear legs, tail, and undercarriage.

Slick coat: A slick, painted on coat is so slick and smooth that it appears as if the coat were painted on the dog and not hair at all. The hair is very short and lies very close to the body. These coats dry very rapidly, and because of this, the dog can be cleaned and ready in a matter of minutes and are often referred to as a "Wash n' Wear" coat.

Wooly coat: Wooly, shaggy, and double coats are undesirable and will appear in some litters. At about 3 weeks of age, the coat will be longer and fuller and appear wooly. Most puppies will shed this for a coarse coat; however some will become double-coats. Some coats will maintain a length similar to that of a German shepherd while others will maintain their shaggy appearance.

Colors

Black: These are leopards least affected by the merle gene but will display smaller patches of blue or gray.

Gray: Gray leopards are black where the coat has been diluted to appear gray.

Tri-color: Leopards with three distinct visible colors usually white, black, and gray.

Quad-color: These are Catahoulas with the varying body colorations and trim colors that help to designate the number of colors present on the dogs. Gray Leopards may be considered a Quad-color when White and Tan trim are included. This dog would display Black, Gray, White, usually around the neck, face, feet and tail, and Tan, which may also appear around the face and feet. Most Five colored dogs are actually misnamed Quad-colored dogs^[12]

Patchwork: These Leopards are predominantly white dogs with small amounts of solid and/or merle patches appearing throughout the coat. The colored patches may be black, or brown. Dilution may affect those colored patches and produce gray, blue, red, or liver coloration within them^[13]

"Leopard Dog" Catahoula Leopard Dog with coloring

Eyes

The breed may have "cracked glass" or "marbled glass" eyes (heterochromia) and occurs when both colored and glass portions are present in the same eye. Cracked or marbled eyes are blue or blue-white in color. Catahoulas with two cracked or marble glass eyes are often referred to as having double glass eyes. In some cases a glass eye will have darker colored sections in it and vice versa. Cracked eyes may be half of one color and half of another. They may just have a streak or spot of another color. Gray eyes are usually cracked eyes, made of blue and green, giving them their grayish appearance. The eyes may be of the same color or each of a different color. Eye color can also be brown, green, gray, or amber. No particular eye color is typical of Catahoulas.

Red leopard (*aka red merle*) with litter of merle Catahoulas showing wide variety of coat colors

Tail

The tail of the Catahoula may be long and whip-like reaching past the hocks of the back legs or bobtail which is a tail that is one vertebra shorter than full length to only one vertebra in total length. The bobtail is a rare but natural part of the Catahoula Heritage.

Feet

Though most dogs have webbing between the toes, Catahoulas' feet have more prominent webbing which extends almost to the ends of the toes. This foot gives the Catahoula the ability to work marshy areas and gives them great swimming ability.

Temperament

"You must be ready to teach and exercise a Catahoula. If not, he will eat your house. The Catahoula will not let you forget that you own a dog." --Don Abney

Catahoulas are highly intelligent and energetic. They are assertive but not aggressive by nature. They have a need to take charge of their pack whether other dogs or humans. Catahoulas make a very good family dog and are excellent with children. It has been noted that breed individuals have often taken it upon themselves to look after children without any training. A high energy dog, they need a minimum of one hour of exercise a day. They do not tolerate isolation and thrive on interaction. Having a chore or job helps occupy their time. Introducing a Catahoula to another animal should be done in the same manner as with any other dog. According to Don Abney, "Catahoulas are naturally protective of what and whom they think they own. In fact, many owners will say that the Catahoula owns them. Catahoulas have been trained for personal protection, but this breed is a natural alarm dog. He will alert you to anything out of the ordinary."

Hunting

The Catahoula is a common working dog of the region and is seen on farms and ranches across North America. These dogs are outstanding tracking and hunting dogs, commonly used for hunting feral pigs, squirrel, deer, raccoon, mountain lion and black bear. They often track silently and only begin to make their distinctive baying bark, eye to eye with the prey, once it is stopped.

Catahoulas have found their way to the Northern Territory of Australia where they have been found to be a superior hunting dog for pigs by breeders.^[14] They have been introduced in New Zealand as well as Australia, but the number of Catahoulas there is unclear.

Herding

They are used for herding cattle, sheep, chickens, pigs and hogs by a method of antagonizing and intimidation of herd animals as opposed to the method of all day boundary patrol and restricting the animals being herded from entering or leaving the designated area.^[15] The breed is recognized by the United Kennel Club under the "herding dog" breed group.^[16]

Health issues

Deafness

Deafness is one of the major genetic flaws in Catahoulas and associated with individuals that are excessively white in color and deafness attributed to a lack of melanocytes.^[17] A Catahoula that is predominantly white, or a white faced dog with glass eyes, has an 80% chance of being bi-laterally deaf or uni-laterally hearing.^[18]

Hearing in one ear is referred to as "directional deafness." Breeders are not readily willing to allow deaf Catahoulas to leave their premises and will generally euthanize the deaf pups (there are groups setting out to "rescue" said deaf pups). "Uni-lateral, or bi-lateral deafness will NOT be considered as breeding stock." -- Don Abney, breeder, Abita Springs, Louisiana

Hip dysplasia

A concern with many breeds, hip dysplasia is dependent on the gene pool and good breeders. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals determines whether a specific individual is prone to hip dysplasia through radiographs. Catahoulas are no more apt to have this orthopedic problem than other breeds.

The Catahoula lines

There are three versions of the Catahoula Cur:

The Wright line: The Wright Line was the largest line of Catahoulas at 90 to 110 pounds (40 to 50 kg) and were developed by Mr. Preston Wright. This line represented dogs originally produced from Hernando de Soto's dogs.

The Fairbanks line: The Fairbanks line was the next in size at 65 to 75 pounds (30 to 35 kg) and were developed by Mr. Lovie Fairbanks. They were brindle to yellow in color.

The McMillin line: The McMillan line was the smallest in size at 50 to 60 pounds (about 25 kg) and were developed by Mr. T. A. McMillin of Sandy Lake, Louisiana. These were Blue Leopard dogs with glass eyes.

These three lines were crossed back and forth and created the variations of Catahoulas seen today.^[19]

References

- 1 Leonard, et al.: "Ancient DNA Evidence for Old World Origin of New World Dogs", *Science*, 298(5598):1613 - 1616
- 2 *Old Dogs in a New World*, Alaska Science Forum
- 3 Anthropology Program - Hwy 82 Archaeology - Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work
- 4 *World of the Wolf - Canis rufus*
- 5 International Wolf Center *Wolves of the World*
- 6 *Did Carolina Dogs Arrive With Ancient Americans?*
- 7 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gray_Fox
- 8 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_fox
- 9 Abney, Don. *The Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog: a truly versatile working dog*. Wilsonville, OR: Doral Pub, 1996.
- 10 *The Breeds of Dogs: Catahoula Leopard Dog*.
- 11 a b *Cracker Catahoulas*
- 12 Don Abney: *Coats and color description*
- 13 *Abney Catahoulas*
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- 15 *Canis Major: Herding dogs*
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- 17 *2 Gals Farm: Catahoula*
- 18 *Don Abney Catahoulas: Information*
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- 20 Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catahoula_Cur

A majority of this info is from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catahoula_Leopard_Dog