

Pulik

History of the Puli, Part I

Our standard describes the ideal Puli. Knowing the land and people it came from and job it was developed to do can help you understand the reasoning behind the specifics of the standard. Unfortunately, two very good books by successful breeders that discuss these points, "This Is the Puli" by Leslie Benis and "The Complete Puli" by the late Sylvia C. Owen, are out of print and very hard to come by, and the Puli's history and function are tightly interwoven. That's why I'd like to share our marvelous breed's beginnings with you.

Researchers believe the Puli was domesticated about 2,000 years before any of the four basic canine families. Most of them agree the nomadic Magyar tribes brought the Puli with them when they migrated from the Russian steppes at the foot of the Ural Mountains to the Carpathian Basin surrounded by the ²alpine peaks of Hungary about 1,100 years ago.

The Magyars expected the dog to perform a specific task in a very specific way compatible with the speed and temperament of the shepherd and his household. The costume and way of life of the people who live on the Hungarian plains and Asian prairies have not changed much for thousands of years. Neither has their faithful companion, the Puli.

Many shepherds were interviewed before the first standard was written. Their needs in a dog were analyzed, checked, rechecked and put into words by highly reputable veterinarians. The functions demanded by the shepherds dictated the specifications of the standard.

The shepherds paid attention to

the size, proportion and color of a good herder, having learned the structural requirements for speed and endurance. In addition, the dog had to be loud and vocal, forceful enough to work flocks of 300 to 400 sheep, and able to work closely with its master. In today's show ring, a Puli is expected to display a quiet and laid-back manner, which it has the intelligence and temperament to learn, if correctly trained.

A Hungarian sheep dog club began a registry in the early 1930s. Its efforts to popularize the Hungarian herding breeds helped the breeds survive the devastation of World War II and its aftermath. The Puli became the most popular breed in Hungary because of its inherent characteristics — playfulness, intelligence and the ability to win everyone's heart — traits that are very evident in today's Puli.

The downside of popularity was the encouragement of breeding different sizes, a large "police Puli," a smaller "apartment Puli" and the traditional herding size of about 17 inches. The situation was a nightmare to postwar breeders who tried to get the Puli back to the original standard.

The Communist regime saw the sport of dogs as an "aristocratic" luxury and did all they could to make things difficult, but a small show was held in 1948 to see what breeding stock had survived, and a new Hungarian breed club began work in 1950. A new 30-page illustrated standard printed in 1960 gave breeders a base for their breeding programs and listed 17 disqualifications to encourage the elimination of faults and unwanted qualities.

The AKC lost contact with this club until the early '60s. A new concern was that Pulik would be bred only for profit, at the cost of quality. An agreement was reached whereby a Puli could only be exported with the club's consent, which would be given only if a panel of expert breed judges qualified the dog. The dog's pedigree would receive a stamp of approval, and only a Puli with such a stamp could be exported.

Herding C

PULIK

Continued

The ability to import new bloodlines gave the Puli in the United States new life and hope. In May I will discuss the breed's early history in America. — *Patricia B. Giancaterino, 154 Mitchell Ave., Runnemede, NJ 08096; pulidog@aol.com* ♦

Shetland Sheepdogs

There's concern about the increasing teeth problems in Shelties from many lines and breeding programs. Judith Kelsey, a judge who's been breeding Shelties for decades, knows what judges see in the ring. She hopes to make fanciers and judges more aware of incorrect dentition.

The Tooth Fairy

I shouldn't have become a judge. I have beautiful teeth. Never had braces, pulled teeth, caps, bridges or whatever else dentists do. I don't have much else that's so perfect, and after I realized I was pretty much in the minority, I was proud of it.

The fact that my Shelties also had perfect teeth should also have been a matter of great pride, but I didn't know it. For years I went merrily along, checking puppies' teeth, then forgetting about them. If there was no problem when they were puppies, why should I worry about it later? I figured everybody else was doing the same thing, as it was never a topic of concern around the doggie campfires.

Then I made the mistake of becoming a judge, and I had to check the teeth on other people's dogs. Our standard calls for full, straight dentition with a scissors bite. If I hadn't become a judge, I probably would never know the extent of the problems beginning to plague our breed. I began to see very odd things — worse than just a missing premolar or two — such as wry mouths, undershot or overshot bites, canines coming in backwards, premolars someone thought were miss-

the outside of the
inch above the other teeth, some of which pointed backward.

I had judged a Sheltie with a canine tooth that was perfectly aligned but was seated conspicuously behind the top canine, not locked as it's supposed to be — yet everything else in the mouth was lined up! That's a big tooth to have out of place by one whole width and still have everything else on that side be OK!

At the same show I saw a Sheltie whose first bottom premolar stuck out to the side, parallel to the floor, and zoomed straight outside the lip. When the dog was first lined up in the class for arm-band numbers and initial inspection, I thought it was so cute that the lip had gotten stuck up on the tooth while the dog was playing with a fuzzy toy, as some of my puppies sometimes do. It was stuck up on that tooth all right. The lip couldn't cover the tooth because the tooth was horizontal, protruding like a handle. It was a "show" dog, arguably breeding stock. What a scary thought!

If you think I'm making this up because I have such a vivid imagination, you're wrong: I couldn't dream up some of the combinations I'm seeing in the show ring, and I wouldn't wish them on my worst enemy. The most disappointing thing is that seeing so many mouth problems at one show means the breeders are probably breeding either to their own dogs or to each other's dogs. Voila! A whole ring of these mouths!

Then you see Mr. Stud's beautiful photo in a magazine. You call. If you remember to ask about his teeth, you may get an honest answer. But maybe the owner never checked or doesn't know what a perfect mouth looks like. A favorite answer is, "I've never had a problem with it."

Teeth are becoming one of the most prevalent genetic problems in our breed, and we don't need a tes-