

# Primitive and Aboriginal Dog Society

## Dear members of the Russian Branch of Primitive Aboriginal Dogs Society!

In the January issue of the R-PADS Newsletter, we would like to offer new materials on aboriginal dogs.

Here are some articles by familiar authors.

There is an article by Sir Terence Clark about his trip to Syria in search of aboriginal Salukis, with numerous pictures showing Salukis in their natural surroundings.

There is another article by B. I. Shiroky who is an expert in Laika breeds. He has dedicated much of energy to this group of breeds, has witnessed the history of the formation of purebred Laikas and has remained passionate about aboriginal dogs. We believe that his views may be very interesting to those who are working with these dogs.

In addition we would like to introduce members of R-PADS who are on the Editorial Board of our Newsletter.

Sincerely yours,  
secretary of the Russian Branch of PADS  
Marina G. Kuzina

## FROM THE BOARD OF EDITORS

Two years have passed since the Russian Branch of the International Society for the Preservation of Primitive Aboriginal Dogs (R-PADS) began its work. At the time of its foundation our goal was to unite people interested in the aboriginal dogs of Russia, regardless of whether they lived in the Russian Federation or beyond Russia's borders. We hope that communication, exchange of information and coordination of efforts to preserve these valuable dogs of our ancestors and to assure their survival for future generations as unchanged and capable dogs as they were in the past. Looking back, we wish to state that our goals have not change. We welcome new members who are interested in the preservation of this unique heritage of Russia - her aboriginal dogs. We remain an informal organization, without any restrictions or requirements. We would like to attract dog breeders and professional scientists. Everyone who is willing to share his experience and knowledge of dogs and who is interested in the unique aboriginal dogs of Russia is welcome.

We would like to mention that our view does not always support the opinions expressed in published articles. Despite this, we avoid corrections to the text of articles, because we believe that diversity of opinions should be acceptable in a group involved with such complex and diverse material and problems. Our dogs are very different and include sheep guarding dogs, sighthounds, laikas and scent hounds. The goal of all of us remains the same and this is the preservation of the unique gene pools of these dogs and the prevention of their conversion into sofa toys retaining only the appearance of their proud ancestors. These dogs deserve respect, because for centuries they assisted people to survive in a harsh environment and shared with them the hardships of "uncivilized" life.

Simultaneously with information about Russian breeds, we publish articles about aboriginal breeds of other countries, former republics of the Soviet Union. Genotypically, these dogs are close to now popular Russian purebreds and their histories have much in common. Besides, for educational purposes, we publish original articles about aboriginal dogs of the other parts of the World, about which in Russian cynological literature there is little reliable information. These articles are sent to us by other members of PADS who are working on their preservation in different corners of the world.

In the process of forming our organization, we went through certain difficulties, such as building the website, delays in sending the Newsletter and other difficulties, but all these problems are solved and we hope to expand the volume of published issues and their range and to enhance communication between our members.

The preservation of aboriginal breeds of dogs cannot be done by single individuals; it takes a collective effort of passionate people. R-PADS is a result of our joint effort and it is our merit. We welcome everyone who is willing to actively participate in our work. Now, the R-PADS Newsletter has an Editorial Board and we offer information about its members in this issue.

Hoping to continue close cooperation in the future.  
Editorial Board of Russian Branch of Society  
for Preservation of Primitive Aboriginal Dogs.

**Vladimir E. BEREGOVY.**

Advisor of PADS, Curator of R-PADS and Member of Editorial Board of R-PADS Newsletter.

In 1960, Vladimir Beregovoy graduated from Perm State University as a biologist. He defended his dissertation in 1964 and was awarded a Degree of Candidate of Sciences in the Institute of Biology, Uralian Branch of Academy of Sciences of the USSR, where he worked as a zoologist. He was teaching at the Kuban State University, Krasnodar. During his work as a zoologist, he traveled in Ural, West Siberia, Volga River region, Kazakhstan and North Caucasus.

In 1979, he immigrated with his family to Vienna, Austria and in 1980 to Oregon, USA. He worked on series of research projects in North Dakota State University and in 1989, he accepted a position of Senior Agriculturist in the Department of Entomology, Oklahoma State University, where he worked until retirement in 2000.

From 1991 to 1996, he imported five West Siberian Laikas, three males and two females, which became the foundation stock of this newly introduced breed in North America. Currently, he is retired and lives with his wife, Emma, and their favorite Laikas on a small, 90-acre farm in Virginia.

Vladimir had different dogs during his life, but his favorite dog was West Siberian Laika named Aliska.

Vladimir published a series of articles in popular magazines and two books «Primitive Breeds-Perfect Dogs,» Don Hoflin Publ. in co-authorship with Jill Moore-Porter; and «Hunting Laika Breeds of Russia,» Crystal Dreams.



**Vladimir Beregovoy with his 17th years old West Siberian Laika Alik.**

**Sir TERENCE Clark.**

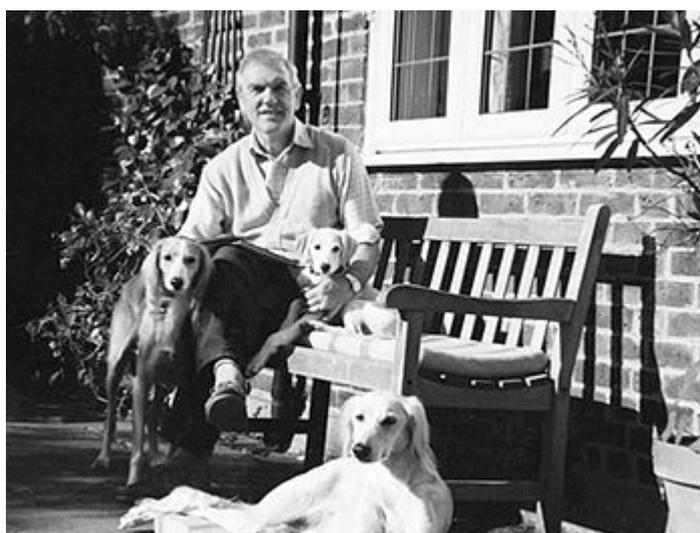
Member of Editorial Board of R-PADS Newsletter

Sir Terence Clark spent most of his career as a British diplomat in the Middle East, where he acquired his first two Salukis. He returned with two Salukis to Britain, where he regularly hunted with them, as Chairman of the Saluki Coursing Club.

In retirement he renewed his study of Russian, which he began to learn [more correct would be "which he had previously studied at university. Together with his study of the language Sir Terence also renewed his interest and contacts with Russia and in winter 2005 visited the All-Russia Sighthounds Competition in Tambov, as well as field trials of Laikas in Moscow.

Sir Terence Clark has co-authored three books about Salukis, as well as many articles about these hounds:

1. The Saluqi: Coursing Hound of the East, edoted by Gail Goodman, published by Midbar Inc, USA, 1995
2. Al-Mansur's Book On Hunting, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, UK, 2001
3. Dogs in Antiquity, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, UK, 2001.



**Sir Terence Clark with Saluki.**

**Marina G. KUZINA.** Member PADS, Secretary of R-PADS, a member of the Editorial Board and a publisher of R-PADS Newsletter

Marina Georgievna Kuzina graduated from Agricultural Vocational University as an Animal Scientist specializing in cynology.

Working with different working dog breeds, she became involved in studies on sled dogs of the Russian north and at a later time studied aboriginal Laikas in general. In 1998, she began working on projects on preservation of aboriginal Laikas of Russia.

In 2000, she traveled in the Amur River Basin in search of Amur Laikas. Using limited resources, she conducted a survey in the area and obtained data confirming that there is a hope for preservation of aboriginal dogs of the Amur River basin.

Parallel with these activities, Marina Kuzina has been teaching genetics of behavior and breeding methods of better dogs; since 2004, she became an expert cynologist of the Commission on Agricultural Selective Achievements of Russian Federation. Currently, she is working on her Dissertation «Modern State of Breeding of Northern Dogs of Russia and Methods of its Preservation».



**Marina G. Kuzina with  
her Russian European  
Laika Uzon.**

**NEWELL, Gregory and Denise.**

Members of Editorial Board of R-PADS Newsletter.

Gregory Newell has a Bachelor's Degree in political sciences and Master of Arts Degree; he specialized in foreign politics of USA and the former Soviet Union. He has a rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of US Army, Retired.

He obtained his first Samoyed dog in 1970 and since that time he has dedicated to this breed using his dogs for skijoring and sledding sports. Together with his wife, Denise, Gregory runs a small business producing sledding dog harness and other equipment and popularizing dog sledding and helping others to learn to train their sled dogs.

In addition to working activities, Denise enjoys showing their Samoyeds in conformation and bred her first litter of Samoyed puppies in March 2005. She works part-time for the Christmas Valley Parks & Recreation District and is the editor of the town's newspaper, The Desert Whispers.

After retirement, Gregory and Denise moved to a farm in Christmas Valley, Oregon, where besides their 10 Samoyed dogs, they keep a few reindeer from northern Europe. Thus, they created an environment closer to original roots of their favorite dogs.

## OUR NORTHERN DOGS

**B. I. Shiroky**

I am a most happy Mansi,  
Nobody has a Laika like mine!  
Where he runs, he sniffs every bush and looks at  
Every branch! What a wonderful Laika I have!

*(From a song of an old Mansi hunter, recorded by cynologist, M. G. Volkov, in 1937)*

What kind of northern dogs (or Laikas) are known to us, people of the vast northern country of the former USSR? The majority would name the Laika or Siberian Laika, which would not be true in both cases. The Laika is a whole group of breeds and such a breed like the Siberian Laika does not exist at all, which I will explain below.

Dog lovers reading books and expert cynologists confidently list four Laika breeds: the Russo-European Laika, the West Siberian Laika, the Karelo-Finnish Laika and the East Siberian Laika. Someone may add that there are sled-pulling Laikas in the north....

Sometimes things turn ridiculous. A young journalist, who knew about Reindeer Herding Spitzes of our kennel, had heard about them for a long time, but he, finally, titled his interview about them «The Siberian Laika – A Dog for Everyone». Later he explained that if he had written «The Reindeer Herding Spitz», unaccustomed readers would not understand what he was writing about.

This took place in our large northern country, which is proud about everything that is its own! For example, in Japan there are at least seven breeds of Spitz-like (Laika) dogs with international recognition. Clubs of northern dogs, their popularity and periodicals dedicated to them are a common phenomenon in many countries, some of which are even not that far in the north, except our own country!

What happened to our northern dog breeds, how many of them exist, what is their fate and why they are so little known?

Let us define terms with a similar meaning: primitive breed, wolf-like dog, northern prick-eared dog, northern dog, Laika, Spitz, Laika-like dog, Spitz-like dog etc. It is important, because in the literature, they do not mean exactly the same. I should mention first that abroad such breeds of dogs are usually placed in group of Spitz-like dogs and their prototypes. We are gradually becoming accustomed to the international term «Spitz» in its broad meaning, although traditionally «Spitz» is for us a smallish Laika-like European dog.

Of course, Russian explorers of the north, Siberia and Far East could not overlook the dogs, on which the very existence of the people of those vast territories virtually depended. The first Russian travelers («pervoprokhodtsy») were not cynologists, but they left for us their first «cynological» descriptions. For example, the Cossack commander Vladimir Atlassov in his «story» about his travel to Kamchatka, 1697, wrote: «They do not have any cattle, only dogs of average size but very shaggy, with hair up to seven inches» (quoted from Ogloblin, 1891, in Russian).

«Intelligent» dog breeders began paying attention to the dogs of our north only during the last decades of the XVIIIth century, although in our country there was much more written about foreign breeds. The beginning of research on our northern dogs starts from works of known cynologists of their time Prince A. A. Shirisky-Shikhmatov (1890, 1896), who was also a passionate bear hunter, and a remarkable woman hunter M. G. Dmitrieva-Sulima (1892, 1896, 1902, 1911), who was breeding this kind of dogs for 20 years. Due to the publications of these experts, prick-eared dogs of our north got their name «Laika». However, M. G. Dmitrieva-Sulima considered that «Northern Dog» would be the most appropriate name to apply to this numerous group of dogs, which hunters call «Laika» or «Podlaika» (1911). She also admits that the term «northern» would also be not quite precise, because dogs of similar type also occurred in Africa, America and everywhere in Asia. I counted over 100 breeds of dogs, including local breeds, not recognized by leading kennel clubs, which could be added to the group of Spitzes and their prototypes.

M. G. Dmitrieva-Sulima discusses and condemns the term «Siberian Laika», which is quite justified, because «... it is impossible to unite all the varieties of northern dog on the Asian continent of the Russian Empire under the term Siberian Laika (1911).

It would be appropriate to mention that the Americans have developed and breed sled dog named the Siberian Husky and the term Husky can be translated as Laika. However, this breed, in our understanding, does not have any relationship to Siberian dogs as I understand them. The Siberian Husky is a cultivated specialized breed, which American cynologists obtained by selective breeding our sled dogs imported from northeastern parts of Chukotka, the Kolyma River and Kamchatka.

During the Soviet era, leading Laika specialists persistently tried, and it was quite successful, to apply the term Laika only to northern dogs of the taiga zone used most often for hunting with **bark pointing** mammals and birds. They recommended calling dogs used most often for sledding and herding reindeer as «sled dogs», «reindeer driving dogs», «herding dogs», etc., respectively.

I think that it is incorrect in principle and artificial to divide dogs into working, hunting and companion dogs. For example, let us take a popular new breed the Labrador Retriever. What kind of a dog it is? Is it a hunting dog flushing and retrieving game? Or is it a very well proven rescue dog, in other words is it a working breed? Or maybe it is a kind and obedient companion dog, a family dog?

Classification of dogs by their specialization is particularly detrimental, if applied to our aboriginal northern breeds of dogs. They are primitive wild animal-like dogs. They are primitive in the best meaning of this word, closer to their wild ancestors and, subsequently, possessing many advantages, such as well balanced temperament and ability to make independent decisions. It is known that in general primitive breeds of agricultural animals are little specialized and are used for many purposes.



**Aboriginal Laykas in the Pechora-river region. 1963 years. Photo by Nikolay K. Vereshchagin.**

Therefore, it would be better not to divide our northern dogs into hunting, sledding and reindeer herding dogs. They all are dogs of similar origin and share many common traits in their appearance and psychology. Because they are capable of performing diverse tasks, they are valued by a taiga hunter for their hunting ability and they also guard the home. People living along the sea shore need similar dogs for transportation, but they also use them for hunting; a reindeer breeder needs them for herding reindeer, for hunting and merely as a companion to diversify his secluded way of life.

There are many examples of the successful diverse use of our northern dogs. M. G. Dmitrieva-Sulima (1911) wrote about Laikas that they were «discussed in military circles as dogs for military use and they are used for police service». Referring to accounts of expedition of Stephanovich, she wrote that the Laika of one «Tungus, who lived in Stanovoy Mountain Ridge, delivered written messages and parcels over long distances». And how about dogs used during World War II? How many of them vanished (the majority of them were Siberiandogs), when they destroyed tanks, saved injured, searched for mines and carried people and military loads and

secured communication.

There are more recent examples. The West Siberian Laika named «Belyi» was the best among dogs of many working breeds used in classes of search and rescue dogs in Petropavlovsk–Kamchatsky. One male Kamchatka Sled Dog was equally good. He belonged to the topt Russian woman in dog sledding sport, Elena Panyukhina, who was also a dog breeding instructor. One reindeer driving Spitz of my breeding named «Nik Kinos» belonging to Nina Tranbenkova was also among the best rescue dogs. Another one of my males named «Tony», a Chukotka Sled Dog, whose ancestors were only sled dogs of Chukotka, had the best conformation among hundreds of dogs, which we surveyed in the Far

East. On his fifth year of life, he became for the first time familiar with Transarpathian forests and he showed as good squirrel and marten treeing ability as the specialized hunting breed Laika. Similar examples are countless.

Based on the written above, I conclude that the terms «our northern dogs» and «Laikas» should be considered synonyms. This group includes breeds, each of which can be used in multiple ways; and their classification based on working abilities is of little use. Such a classification inadvertently restricts their use, popularity, and geographic limits of breeding, size of population and subsequently the very chances of survival as breeds. Perhaps, exactly that classification, which was done by our early Laika experts, is more correct. M. G. Dmiutrieva-Sulima (1911), referring to A. A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, classified them by the ethnographic principle and suggested dividing them into two groups as follows.

«The first group includes Laikas: the *Zyryan, Finno-Karelian, Vogul, Cheremis, Ostyak, Tungus, Votyak, Galician, Ostyak, Norvegian, Buryatian and Soyotian*.

The second group includes the *Laplandian and Samoyed Laika*».

Generally, A. A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov thought that «there are as many varieties of Laikas as there are existing tribes of minorities in the north; and these varieties differ from each other and each of them has well established external peculiarities to such an extent that their separation cannot be argued in any way».

It is appropriate to cite Professor N. A. Smirnov (1936): «Little has changed the Laika since the time of domestication which resulted in a weak differentiation into breeds and significant similarity between the breeds.»

As we will show below, differences between the varieties listed above are more significant than differences between two established purebreds: the West Siberian Laika and the Russo-European Laika. Of course, this is true, if no account is taken of differences in the coat color, which is only a result of simple selective breeding.

Besides the 13 breeds of Laikas distinguished by A. A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, Dmitrieva-Sulima in her book «The Laika and Hunting With It» (1911) refers to other researchers and mentions also «the *Kevrolian, Olonets, Kyrghyz, Yakut, Koryak, Orochon, Gilyak, Bashkir, Mongolian, Chukotka, Golds and Yukagir Laikas*; based on the geographic principle, she mentioned the *Tomsk, Vilyui, Berezovo-Surgut, Kolyma, Pechora Laika*, and the *Polar Dog*.»

Thus, in the early XXth century, Laika experts distinguished in Russia over 30 aboriginal breeds of northern type dogs. I should mention that the first Laika experts investigated mainly dogs of European Russian North, while Siberia and Far East were little accessible to them. However, there were many dogs there, too. If dog lovers and breeders of Russia and subsequently of the Soviet Union would be as interested in dogs of their own country as they were interested in fashionable foreign breeds, how many breeds could be created by peoples living in Siberia, the North and Far East and they all would become purebreds in today's Russia! However, this has never happened. «When face to face, it is hard to see the face. Big things are better seen from a distance» as some wise man said. Many of our breeds, which are actually bred systematically to standard, but are still not recognized by leading international registries, are shown in Russia and Ukraine without right of receiving well deserved prizes.

Without discussion of what causes such an abnormal situation, I will show some periods of a later part of history of our northern dogs during the Soviet era. Actually, this was the extermination of Russian aboriginal northern breeds.

A certain peak of attention to aboriginal Laikas occurred during the pre-WWII years and it was done by the Government's workers.

Still in 1925, at the Cynological Meeting of Soyuzokhotcenter, the first standards of the following Laika breeds had been approved: *Zyryan, Karelian, Ostyak, Vogul*, and *Votyak Laika*. More detailed investigation required more precise breed standards. In 1939, the All-Union Cynological Meeting accepted five temporary breed standards as follows: *Finno-Karelian, Karelian, Komi (Zyryan), Hanty (Ostyak) and Mansi (Vogul) Laika*. Then WWII started.

In 1945, I. I. Vakhrushev and M. G. Volkov published a book titled «Hunting Laikas», in which they reported: «At present, the major and most known Laika breeds in the Soviet Union are Laikas of

the hunting group: *Karelian, Komi, Mansi*, and *HuntyLaika*; reindeer herding Laikas: *Nenets Laika*; sled pulling Laikas: *Kamchatka, Kolyma* and *Amur Laika*. Besides these, there are little known varieties of Laikas, such as the *Mongolian Hunting Dog, Yenissey River Sled Dog, Evenk Hunting Dog*, etc. He also offers descriptions of major breeds and also the temporary standard of *the Finno-Karelian Laika*, official standards of the *Karelian Laika, Komi (Zyryan) Laika, Mansi (Vogul) Laika* and *Hunty (Ostyak) Laika*, the draft standard of *the Amur Laika* offered by K. T. Abramov and draft standards of the *Evenk (Lamut)* and of the *Kamchatka Laika* offered by M. G. Volkov.

As we can see, after WWII, there were aboriginal dogs and there were basic tools for pedigree work with them - breed standards. However, starting from 1947, work on these valuable breeds went in a different direction. Research worker of the All-Union Research for Hunting Industry (VNIOZ), E. I. Shereshevsky, offered a new classification of Laikas. This classification was based on a different principle. The formation of new breeds should be done by merging similar local dogs of a large geographic zone. This classification was criticized, but in 1947, it was accepted by the All-Russian Cynological Conference.

In 1949, standards of four breeds of hunting Laikas were approved: the Karelo-Finnish Laika, Russo-European Laika, West Siberian Laika and East Siberian Laika. In 1952, the Cynological Soviet of Glavokhota of the Russian Federation approved permanent breed standards of the first three breeds.



The female West Sebirian Layka, 2005.  
Photo by Marina G. Kuzina.

In early 1970s, work with new purebred Laikas replaced even discussions of aboriginal dogs. For this purpose there were all kinds of propaganda statements saying that aboriginal dogs did not exist any more, that they had become mixed and that they did not deserve to become purebreds, because they were lacking distinct traits etc. In the process, the Russian Hunting Union, being just a hunting organization, did not see dogs of the sea coastal region and reindeer breeders. Those were considered working and reindeer herding dogs, not hunting dogs. Another bureaucratic office (DOSAAF) also quickly «forgot» about these dogs and issued orders insisting that only 10 breeds were working dogs, such as several ovcharkas (sheep guarding dogs), the Black Russian Terrier, the Newfoundland, the Airedale Terrier etc. Amateurs switched their attention to foreign exotic breeds of dogs.

Thus, our aboriginal dogs of the north did not find place in the official cynological troika.

However, there were cynologists, some of them were in provinces, who understood what they were losing and they did not want to say aboriginal dogs goodbye.

In 1958, «Hunting Horizons», magazine, Issue 10, (Okhotnichyi prostory in Russian), published a polemical article or letter of M. G. Volkov who was a wildlife biologist with many years experience. The article was titled «Cry of a Hunting Heart». The title itself speaks much about the subject. He wrote: «...we, Laika experts, are not allowed to give things their own names under threat of disqualification.» Evenkian (Lamut) and Mansi (Vogul) Laikas were shown in the ring of West Siberian Laika. Then, they were saying: «similar to Evenk's Laika», or «similar to Mansi Laika», etc. M. G. Volkov wrote that zoologist and expert cynologist A. K. Abramov refused to judge dogs until there was a revision of the standard of the East Siberian Laika, because he did not want to destroy valuable dogs created by peoples of the Russian Far East. Because of his refusal to accept the trends in official cynology of his time, A. K. Abramov was forced to step aside.

In 1963, V. V. Ryabov who was an author of a book about Evenk's Laika (1939) raised a question about aboriginal breeds again in the magazine «Hunting and Hunting Industry» (Okhota i okhotnichye khozyaistvo in Russian): «...it is time to put invented breed standards to an end, they bothered us long enough; it is time to work seriously on putting together breed standards based on really existing Laika

breeds, the Komi Laika, Mansi Laika, Hanty Laika and Evenk Laika».

Either because it was difficult to go against the official wind created by «the Moscow parents» of new purebreds or because the propaganda was too strong, but in the 1960s the author of this text also thought that the only purebreds were the Russo-European Laika, Karelo-Finnish Laika, West Siberian Laika and East Siberian Laika. I particularly liked the West Siberian Laikas from Moscow.

My Uzon, a son of Ayan 1086, the West Siberian Laika of I. I. Shurupov showed himself versatile at the Kamchatka dog races trials. Other Moscow dogs were also good. I remember an interesting talk with P. F. Tarkhaneev in Sverdlovsk. Other dog experts considered him an oddity for his constant talk about apparently non-existent dogs. Being a beginner dog expert, I memorized the wish of A. P. Masover to keep describing aboriginal dogs of the northeast; he meant we might need it later on.

Yes, our purebred Laika are good, the Russo-European Laika, West Siberian Laika, East Siberian Laika and Karelo-Finnish Laika. They all, except the East Siberian Laika, were recognized internationally. However, why should we sacrifice our aboriginal dogs?!

Now, I think we could run our Laika breeding programs in two directions: to keep aboriginal breeds pure and at the same time, if desired, develop new breeds using the interbreeding of different aboriginal dogs. Unfortunately, only the second direction was chosen.

There is quite an exhaustive description of the origins of our purebred Laikas by A. T. Voilochnikov and S. D. Voilochnikov (1962 and more recent editions). Nevertheless, I wish to focus the attention of readers on certain features of the Soviet period of Laika breeding.



**West Sebirian Layka male, 2005 years. Photo sent by Marina G. Kuzina.**

In the USSR, purebred Laikas were developed in major cynological centers of the country: Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Kirov etc. Thus, the Russo-European Laika was formed mainly in Moscow and Leningrad out of Hanty Laika and other local breeds of West Siberia, Komi, Karelia, Arkhangelsk Province, Kostroma Province, Mary Autonomous Province, etc. To fix a certain type of coat color, close inbreeding was used. Therefore, the Russo-European Laika cannot be identified as any of the original breeds. This is a new breed obtained by interbreeding several breeds, not by the natural merging of aboriginal type dogs as it was often written.

In the 60s-70s, the most popular hunting purebred was the West Siberian Laika. During the 40 years of existence of the breed, from Moscow to different provinces of the country 15,000 puppies with pedigree documents were shipped (Shurupov, 1993). In 1970, at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary Moscow show of hunting dogs, there were 340 West Siberian Laikas shown (Voilochnikov and Voilochnikov, 1992). During these years, at one of such dog shows in Moscow, I worked at the Laika ring. We, dog

show experts, had a hard time to arrange 160 West Siberian Laikas. Their owners considered it very important to know if their dogs would take 137<sup>th</sup> or 138<sup>th</sup> place in the ring.

Losing aboriginal Laikas, hunters and non-hunters bought West Siberian Laikas, especially because they had «papers». «Leaders» of this breed played exactly a role of killers of aboriginal Laika breeds. When West Siberian Laikas got in those rare places, where aboriginal breeds still survived, they replaced them, helping the extermination. Local aboriginal Laikas did not attract the attention of wildlife biologists or expert cynologists. At that not so remote time, nearly everyone was educated in the Moscow school in hunting dogs and knew only about purebred Laikas.

Now, let us trace the origins of the West Siberian Laika, with what kind of breeds it was «mixed». This is primarily the Mansi (Vogul) Laika and Hanty (Ostyak) Laika, Komi (Zyryan) Laika, Uralian Laika, Udmurt Laika, Evenk (Lamut) Laika and Nenets Laika. It also included sled Laikas of the NE part of Russia, (Shurupow, 1993).

The East Siberian Laika is a younger, still not stabilized purebred, but just like our other purebred Laikas, it cannot be considered as a certain aboriginal dog. A conventional idea is that its standard is based on the description of the Amur Laika by I. I. Vakhru[ev (1945).

To the contrary of the introduction to the standard, it is not based on Evenk's Laika. The standard of the East Siberian Laika, as well as the standards of our other purebred Laikas, is based on the seemingly consistent expectation that our Laikas should be increasing in size and better coated in the direction from west to east, according to E. I. Shereshevsky. However, peoples of our north, Siberia and Far East did not know about this consistent array of breeds. Everywhere, and also in the Far East, they had different dogs, some of which were rather small. The standard of the East Siberian Laika and subsequently dog shows favored the biggest and sturdiest, coarse built dogs. This had its impact on their hunting quality. Thus, I was evaluating the work of dogs at hunting contests of Laikas from the Urals, Siberia and the Far East. Big, impressive and rather phlegmatic East Siberian Laika males had the worst results, and smaller lean dogs were the best.

It is appropriate to mention that the West Siberian Laikas are also increasing in size and are getting sturdier as a result of the «improvement» of their standard in favor of bigger size. As a result, they also are losing the agility and maneuverability characteristic of Laikas of the past.

The Karelo-Finnish Laika is still not recognized by leading international registries, perhaps because it is little different from the Finnish Spitz and many breed them both as one breed.

Thus, we had dozens of versatile breeds of aboriginal northern dogs (Laikas), and now we have only four purebreds. It is said that they are pure hunting Laikas, because they all are of the hunting dog breeding. However, even purebred Laikas remain Laikas, northern dogs capable of performing diverse tasks. I already discussed it above and hope that these breeds will prove themselves as versatile.

How about the aboriginal breeds? They no longer exist and will never come back?

One positive part of our «perestroika» is the fact that we opened the cynological foreign world with its northern dogs and that our cynologists developed opinions beyond central cynological organizations and articles about aboriginal dogs began popping up in periodicals.

In 1992, the Kamchatka Laika and the Chukotka Laika became purebreds. The Russian Federation of Working Dog Breeding became free from the oppression of DOSAAF; its former leadership of retired military personnel became replaced by cynologists. They were those people who helped the recognition of new breeds. The breed standards of these Laikas were written by workers of the cynological-scientific and applied enterprise «Kinos» , which had been approved by the Federation and the breeds got their names «the Kamchatka Sled Dog» and «the Chukotka Sled Dog». These breed standards were based on the research of aboriginal dogs of the northeastern parts of the country, including cynological survey of surviving populations of these dogs. Those were very expensive expeditions. A new to us factor emerged, such as «sponsorship» and it brought understanding people into action. Research on dogs was funded by a private company «Goskomsever. There were many other voluntary assistants.

News about recognition of the Kamchatka Sled Laika and the Chukotka Sled Laika was received at the start of the sled dog races «Beringia-92». Dog teams formed of dogs of Kamchatka and Chukotka made up to 2040 km in Kamchatka and Chukotka («Beringia» got into Guinness Book of Records as the longest in the world races of sled dogs). A considerable part of these dogs already passed cynological evaluation and they have been rated as purebreds.

And again, the new names of these breeds declare their narrow specialization by indicating that they are only sled dogs. I already discussed briefly that this is not so. Both the Kamchatka and Chukotka dogs are suitable for diverse services. Their use for traditional methods of transportation would not help the rebirth of these breeds. Methods of pedigree work with aboriginal populations of dogs are still not worked out and the traditional breeding with free mating is no longer efficient. Therefore, the future of

these breeds is still uncertain.

In 1994, the now forgotten reindeer herding Laika became a new purebred. This is formerly the Nenets Laika, the Samoyed Laika and the Tavgian Laika. The Russian Cynological Federation approved the first official standard of this breed offered by «Kinos» under the name «the Reindeer Herding Spitz» (Olenegonka).

The future of the Olenegonka is less doubtful, because they are most interesting, used for diverse works and present in kennels outside their northern range. The question remains how to run pedigree work with this breed in the north, where kennels are sparse and access to imported breeds is wide open? It is clear that local people would not save the breed and it is impossible, and it is also impossible to settle cynologists among them and regular visits to the northern regions are expensive.

It seems everything is done! We have four well-established purebred Laikas and three more purebreds recently designated.



Work laykas on a bear. 2005 years. Photo by Marina G. Kuzina.

Let us look in the works of contemporary specialists. A. P. Voilochnikov and S. D. Voilochnikov (1992) wrote: «...one region, where local Laikas still remain pure, is the Evenkian National District, Krasnoyarsk Territory. The hunting

industry organization of this region took simple measures for preservation of local Laikas.»

I. Shurupov (1993) wrote: «...in 1989 and in 1990 I hunted in the Khanty-Mansi National District twice. Until now, industrial hunters and local people who adhere to the traditional way of life, still have pure Khanty-Mansi Laikas».

S. Uspensky,(1994) wrote: «The amazing sled dogs of Siberia are a wholesome part of the values of Russia, her gene pool of aboriginal breeds of domesticated animals. This treasure has become impoverished because of breeders' lack of attention and unwise experimentation and its loss would be unforgivable. We urgently need action to survey the remaining representatives of this breed, primarily in northern Yakutia, in the lower parts of the Yana River, the Indigirka River, the Alazeya River and the Kolyma River, where these dogs still occur.»

I can add more and more quotations. This kind of information, wishes and recommendations are certainly beneficial. However, who would start the work and where to get the funds?! For example, we did not have enough money to continue the survey beyond Kamchatka and Chukotka and collect information about the Laikas of Koryak and the polar regions.

Therefore, at this time I would not make any recommendations, but will make a few conclusions to summarize the above.

1. Russia had several dozens of aboriginal breeds of northern dogs. Being primitive breeds, they were suitable for use for different services.
2. During the Soviet era, four remarkable Laika breeds had been created. This was done at the expense of nearly all the aboriginal breeds of northern dogs, which could be kept pure.
3. Aboriginal breeds of northern dogs, despite all odds, still exist, as well as peoples, who possess them. Examples of this are the Kamchatka Laika, the Chukotka Laika and the Olenegonka.
4. The value of aboriginal dogs as a part of the national heritage, culture and prestige of Russia is beyond doubt. The preservation of these dogs does not require big investments, if the money is provided to honest, knowledgeable and hard working people.

## OF SALUKIS, ARABIANS AND FALCONS – A SYRIAN DIARY

**By Sir Terence Clark**



**Tayra**

My last foray into Syria, a country I have been visiting off and on for over 40 years, was in the spring of 2002 and I had been keen to go back again. The situation in the Middle East was however discouraging and I kept putting it off until this spring. As the days went by following the booking of my flight the news from the region grew daily worse, so much so that my family and friends tried to dissuade me from going. Long experience of the region told me however that the situation always looked worse on the outside and I knew that once in Syria I would be in the safe hands of old friends. And so it proved to be.

Syria like England had experienced a late rather cold and wet winter and the signs of spring were at first hard to find. Driving from the airport I could see that the distant mountains between Syria and Lebanon, averaging 2,000 m in height, were still draped with a thick covering of snow that fed the Barada River flowing cold and grey through the town as I drove into Damascus. The penetrating wind was cold too and I was glad I had brought some warm clothes. I was travelling with a British Saluki fan and our host, the President of the Syrian Arab Horse Association, soon introduced us to two other members of the group, an old Internet acquaintance from Finland and her Swedish surgeon friend, with whom we would be travelling for the first week of our tour of Syria. Although it was getting late our host insisted on driving us up to the top of Jabal Qassioun, where shivering in the chilling wind we were treated to a panoramic view of Damascus below. From there we drove down into the nearly deserted Old City for a brief introduction to some of the sights that we would explore in greater detail by daylight. Then came an enormous dinner of Syrian specialities, all absolutely delicious and very filling, before we finally collapsed in our beds around 2 am! This frenetic pace proved to be the norm for the next week!



**Khattaf**

But we were all impatient to see some Salukis and the next day our host whisked us off to see his own hounds temporarily housed in kennels on a building site just outside Damascus. The sun shone though the wind was still chill as we were greeted by the sight of two very friendly smooth tricolour two-year-old siblings, a dog called Ghazaal (Gazelle) and a bitch called Tayra (Bird), originally from Hama, north of Damascus. They were typical of so many hounds that we were to see later in and around Hama and Aleppo, small by British standards, light, athletic and with cropped ears. The bitch had only one ear cropped, which we were told was customary, but as we saw later this was by no means a general rule and the cropping, which is very common in this area, varied considerably between the sexes from just the tips on some to virtually no ears on others and some even had their

ears intact. No one really knows why they do it and all sorts of reasons are given: for beauty, for speed, for alertness, for protection against damage, for identification, etc. Both these hounds were remarkably relaxed as with the assistance of the Swedish surgeon I began collecting hair samples and taking mouth swabs for an international project to study the mtDNA and DNA of these hounds. This calm reaction to the somewhat intrusive handling to which the hounds were subjected was a notable feature of all those that I saw on our trip and speaks volumes for their stable temperament. The calm was soon interrupted by the appearance of a bouncy 5-month-old puppy, a black-masked smooth red dog called Khattaf (Snatcher),



**Kangal puppies**

destined for Finland. He too came from a well-known breeder in Hama where we would soon be heading. The scene was completed by about half a dozen boisterous 2-month-old Turkish Kangal or Karabash puppies frolicking in their kennels. These huge guard dogs have a reputation for ferocity and I have had occasion before to be wary of them but as puppies they were delightful to handle and to take DNA samples from. We were to see their huge sire later on near Hama and there was no question of taking a mouth swab from him!

The next day we visited the Syrian Arab Horse Association, which was a great hive of activity as preparations are being made for the conference of the World Arab Horse Organisation (WAHO) to be held in Damascus on 10-15 September 2006. This Association was founded only in December 2002 by a group of devotees to preserve Syria's great equine legacy and to raise the standard of breeding. It has been enormously successful and Syria has now established a well-regulated Arabian horse-breeding regime that has become big business, as we were to see as we went round some of the huge stud farms. The Association has recently established a Saluki Section with its own registry and similar objectives to those for the Arabians. At the Association's headquarters some splendid Bedouin horse dealers came in and they were fascinated to see a copy of Saluki International that I had with me. They were struck most by the quantity of hair on the Salukis portrayed there, as this is a featured more remarkable by its absence from most Salukis in Syria. They were also trappers of falcons and pressed us to come and have lunch at their farm on the edge of the desert but time did not permit.

Dewlap pigeon



Two fawn puppies



It was time to be off on the drive north towards Hama. Our first stop was for lunch on a farm outside the town where we were treated to a series of surprises. Our host welcomed us in his traditional robes with coffee and tea on the floor of his Majlis (reception room). How I wished I had the suppleness of the locals who squatted or rose from the floor with such ease and grace! It was already 4.00 and lunch was served immediately, a great Mansaf consisting of two whole sheep on mounds of steaming rice. Being an old hand at eating this kind of meal I teased my British colleague

with the delicacy of a whole sheep's tongue, which is customarily called 'the poet's tongue' and is offered to someone who is loquacious, but he fell unusually silent at the offer! After lunch we were shown first the great lion-headed Kangal, sire of the puppies in Damascus, and a much lighter possibly crossbred Kangal bitch that had something of the Saluki about it. Then there were the pigeons, gorgeously decorated with necklaces of coloured beads. These were of a sub variety of a dewlap breed known as Musawwad (blackened) and have the characteristic of flying straight up high in the air and zooming down again. The necklaces were made by the shaikh's daughter who attached them by means of passing a thread on a needle from the ear socket and under the skin of one side of the neck. Finally came a parade of Arabians from the shaikh's stable. They looked magnificent but the light was fading fast under a leaden sky and we still had to reach Hama.

After some heavy overnight rain the next morning, a Friday and the local weekend, was bright and fresh as we drove to Hama's horse racetrack, where we went to see Tayra, a 5-year-old smooth red bitch with black guard hairs, who was the dam of the puppy Khattaf. She had with her Khattaf's two siblings, a smooth red bitch and a smooth white dog with almost orange ears. They raced around in the sunshine but soon became engrossed in the remains of a Mansaf that someone had deposited on some waste ground nearby. They looked so cute it was difficult to prise my companions away



Dog in a colorful coat

from them, but we had to move on to see an old friend of mine, with whom I hunted many times. On his farm outside Hama he still maintains a line of Great Danes he has had for years, with a new litter of puppies born the day before our arrival. He also had two beautiful feathered fawn puppies, a bitch and a dog with a fine white blaze. The Swedish surgeon fell in love immediately with the dog and the owner with typical Arab generosity gave it to her as a present. What none of us realised at the time was that the puppy was probably already sick and a few days later despite heroic efforts by its new owner and a vet in Damascus it died, probably of parvo. It was



Jinah

now approaching midday and the hunters were coming back from their weekend's coursing. As we arrived at one house a small car pulled up out of which came an incredible number of men and hounds, some of which had been in the boot. Suddenly there were hounds bounding about everywhere glad to stretch their legs again. It had been a meagre hunt, with only one hare to show for it, as a heavy squall had cut short the proceedings. Among the hounds were a black and tan dog in a colourful coat and Jinah (Wing), a powerful smooth cream dog, who had sired the sick puppy, and he was lined up to provide another swab.

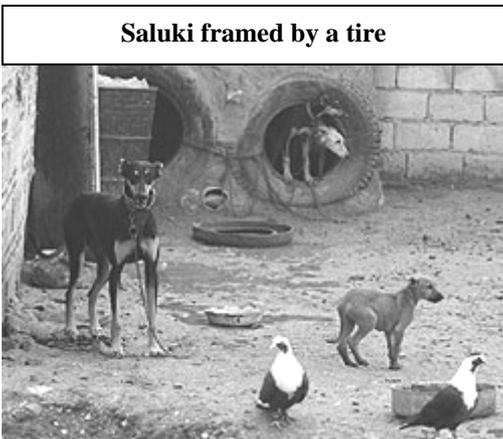
On we went to another house where we saw three nice bitches and another puppy, including this young black and tan with a beautiful beaded collar, made by gypsies, though they are also made by the inmates of Hama prison. My farmer friend invited us all to lunch in Hama in sight of the famous Roman water wheels that once lifted water from the Orontes into a network of aqueducts serving the town. Suddenly in came another old friend who is a mine of information on

Salukis. With no hesitation he rattled off the 3-generation pedigree of the puppy Khattaf and laid plans for us to go visiting other breeders on our way north the next day to Aleppo. But my day was not yet done. While the others rested I went with our host first to visit the Majlis of the Barazi clan in the old town, where I met a number of old friends in the imposing setting of this traditional Ottoman style house that has been superbly restored and furnished. It was by then about 9.30 on a cold wet night and we still had to go to dinner at a stud farm 25 km from Hama. We followed a slippery muddy cross-country route to the farm where our host received us in a Bedouin tent – with heating! Here we tucked into another Mansaf while the talk went on all around about horses and Salukis. I explained how we coursed in Britain - the totally foreign concept to them of coursing for points instead of kills was quite difficult to put across in Arabic - while they talked about the origin of the word Saqlawi, which is the most common strain of Arabians here. I wondered whether it came from Saqlawa a town in Iraq on the Euphrates but they said it meant polished or glossy, referring to the horses' flanks after grooming. Col. Dickson refers in 'The Arabs of the Desert' to a strain of Salukis called Saqlawi coming from Samarra in Iraq but if there is any connection with the horses it is now lost.



Bitch in a beaded collar

With my head spinning with all the sights and talk of the day it was after midnight before I finally got to bed.



Saluki framed by a tire

It was raining hard in the morning when my old hunter friends came to collect us to go to the nearby village of Sawran but then the sun came out as we began a tour of the breeders. We went first to another old friend in whose yard there was a mud-brick kennel with a tyre making a round door through which some young hounds were peering. Within seconds there were hounds running around in all directions while a type of black and white tumbler pigeon, called a shaksharli, which is probably not found in the West, fluttered about. There was a particularly strong smooth cream male puppy that was soon afterwards snapped up by the agent of a Saudi Prince from Riyadh who seemed to follow in our footsteps. We heard later that in the various places we went he bought about a dozen young hounds

for what by any standards was a huge sum of money.

We moved on to the neighbouring small town of Khan Shaikhoon to which access had been enormously improved since my last visit by an asphalted road. The downside was however that where one of the principal breeders could previously let his hounds run safely on open ground, the new road cut right through it. The danger to the hounds was illustrated as a youth on a motorbike came down the road chased by one of the loose Salukis. The breeder had as always a wide selection of hounds including a striking feathered red grizzle youngster that did a prodigious jump over the yard wall to join the other Salukis running loose outside. There was also a nice smooth red puppy that later ended up in the back of my Hama friends' car as a gift. While there one of the Hama breeders explained his breeding practice in familiar terms. He never inbred as experience showed that the offspring of such unions were never as efficient as the parents. He preferred to take his bitch to a good male when she was about two years old. He explained what constituted a good Saluki – an efficient hunter with a long muzzle, a wide and deep chest, strong thighs, straight long legs on small tight feet and a whippy tail. He started hunting with the bitches when they were 10-11 months old but held the males back until they were a year or even 18 months. Asked about ear cropping he said that he usually did this with a knife when the puppies were 1-2 months old but had no logical explanation for what is such a widespread custom. He confirmed that the hounds were not trained to retrieve alive: indeed it could hardly be otherwise as it is normal to release several hounds at a time and they all want a piece of any action.

On we went to see some more breeders, one with a handsome cream dog that was lethargic and obviously sick but beyond our ability to help. It is uncommon to see sick animals but as they neither vaccinate nor inoculate as a general rule, when a hound is sick it either recovers or succumbs. At the next house we were shown a kind of trophy board with pairs of ears of the hares caught over the season displayed on the grill over a window. After seeing some very nice hounds, including a very handsome feathered tricolour bitch we were all entertained to tea, the ladies in our group being shunted off into the women's quarters where they had a hilarious time trying to communicate in sign language. We could have gone on to see more



Red grizzle



Trophy board

breeders but our spirits were flagging and we had a long drive ahead to Aleppo. On our arrival there was no respite however as we were immediately summoned at 3.00 to lunch by one of the major businessmen and horse breeders in a beautifully converted khan in the old city. To the accompaniment of music on the qanun (zither) by a tinkling fountain we were regaled with delicious Syrian specialities while arrangements were discussed for us to see Salukis the next day. Although it was by now dark we had first to make a diversion to the stables to see just a small selection of some superb Arabians mainly of the Saglawi strain before we could rest and digest the impressions of a very crowded day.

The next morning was beautiful and we drove to a small town called Zirbeh some 20 km northwest of Aleppo. From there a dirt road took us out to a small farmstead where a feathered cream Saluki popped out of a beehive-shaped kennel to greet us. There were about half a dozen other hounds either dozing in the sun or running in the fields, one of them retrieving to us a tortoise it had found, and their breeder was clearly a keen hunter. He brought out a carpet and some cushions and over tea we talked about his breeding philosophy. He also said that he never



inbred but preferred to go out for the most efficient partner, dog or bitch that was capable of catching 3, 4 or 5 hares in a day. I asked what he did when the hounds lost their efficiency and whether he culled them. He was quite offended by the question and said that he never culled the old or the young as it was against the teaching of Islam. So I asked why there were no old hounds around. He replied that he sometimes had hounds that lived to at least 10 years and they simply carried on at the farm until they died. His practice was to raise puppies on milk and eggs until they were 7 months old when they switched to a diet of pitta bread and olive oil. They looked in fine condition on it and he promised we could see them run the next morning.



**Beehive shaped kennel**

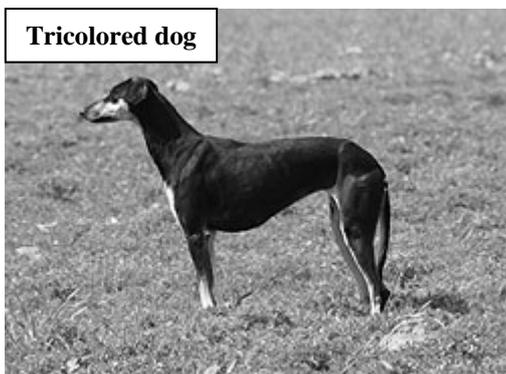
Syrian dishes that kept us fully occupied until about 6.00 and then it was only with great difficulty that we managed to fend off a pressing invitation from our host to a gala dinner starting at 10.00!

Our Scandinavian companions were returning to Damascus and I had planned to set off early the next morning back to Zirbeh in a minibus to collect the hunters and their hounds for a morning's coursing. My colleague and I were joined by a Bedouin guide and a son of the horse breeder. The minibus was late and by the time we arrived at the farmstead we found that all but the farmer and one Saluki had already gone. Then a young lad on a motorbike appeared and took the remaining cream dog on a lead to try and catch up with the others while we followed behind in the minibus, picking up three more Salukis on the way. We soon turned off the tarmac and drove along a dirt road for some miles until the minibus driver refused to go any further. We had been joined by another man on a motorbike and with the hounds running loose my colleague and I rode pillion to the hunting ground while the others cut across country. Soon we reached a suitable area of rocky outcrops between fields of sprouting winter wheat and olive trees and began walking up. At first three hounds were on slip leads while the fourth ran ahead searching for signs of hares. Signs there were aplenty but in the space of two hours we did not put up a single hare. We had to get back then to Aleppo and returned on the motorbikes to where we had left the minibus – it had vanished! We waited and waited but in the end we had to send one of the lads on a motorbike to find the driver - in a café in the town! We were supposed to go on a tour round Syria with the minibus but decided the driver was too uncooperative, so we dumped him and hired a self-drive car.

We dropped in at another farmstead on the way back that was positively alive with Salukis of all ages all milling about among the poultry as children fed them scraps from the kitchen. My colleague was so taken by one grizzle puppy that he refused to part with it until I told him that the owner was asking \$1000 for it! We circled back to Aleppo via the ruins of the magnificent church of St. Simeon Stylites, who in the 5th century is reputed to have sat for 40 years on a column from where he dispensed benedictions to pilgrims. We were then very late for a grand lunch arranged at the house of the horse breeder we had met yesterday. The table groaned with an amazing array of



**Walking**



**Tricolored dog**

The Bedouin guide kept proclaiming that he could take me to see a gypsy encampment where there were at least 50 Salukis and we could go hunting that afternoon. So without pausing for lunch I set off with the guide and the horse breeder's son north in the direction of the Turkish border. Eventually we arrived in a small Turkoman village where the Bedouin, who had been bellowing in my ear all the way about the gypsies and the hunting, stopped to make some enquiries. These were all Turkomans and it was interesting to hear them refer to their hounds in Turkish as Tazi, while they said Saluqi to us in Arabic. They said that everyone was already out hunting, but there were one or two Salukis remaining that we could see. A very

small 5-month old almost black smooth bitch was produced and the young son was so enchanted that after a great

deal of haggling he bought it and popped it into the boot of my car. We resumed the road north and came to another village, where it was the same story: all the hounds were away except for a tall grizzle dog that was injured and an older hound that some children had found wandering about. By then I was beginning to think that the Bedouin was given to exaggeration and decided to turn back but he insisted on going into one more village where suddenly a lad appeared on a motorbike with two hounds running beside him from the hunt. These smooth hounds were coal black and were in terrific condition. A tractor then pulled up and produced a brown hare weighing about 6 kg, which they had just caught. With the sun beginning to go down more hunters started drifting in bringing with them an array of impressive hounds. The young son kept asking my advice on them and I pointed out a couple that looked particularly good but their owners were not interested in parting with them. However a young man said he had two at his house and we went to see them: one was a very pretty black and tan feathered bitch, with both ears, and the other a smooth bluish-grey grizzle bitch, a colour that is very common in Syria. They were siblings and about 14 months old. My young friend went into another haggle and as I was getting impatient struck a deal.

The question then was how to carry three people, all my camera gear and three hounds in my small Renault Clio. No problem, said the very large Bedouin, the hounds go in the boot! Well, we tried but the siblings, who filled the boot anyway, were not going to have the puppy with them, so it ended up in the back with the Bedouin. But again, the temperament of these hounds was quite amazing in the way they took all this drama as well as my DNA tests with complete equanimity and made not a sound or were sick on the drive back to Aleppo. I heard later that the young lad had gone back to the village the next day and bought the two hounds that I had pointed out as well as another one, so that he had a foundation of 6 Salukis for the kennels he intended to establish on his father's stud farm.



**Yard with hounds and chickens**



**Hound and hare**

Today they still breed Arabians but times have changed and they are now settled farmers who hunt on motorbikes and the only falcons they have are those they trap occasionally for sale to the Gulf. I was a bit concerned that we might not see any Salukis but the shaikh assured me that the next day we would go hunting with them. We should get some rest first.

On bright clear morning we made our way over to the shaikh's Majlis for the hunt. A couple of tribesmen were there already with two very athletic smooth hounds with cropped ears, a bluish-grey grizzle and a cream. Then two men drove up on a motorbike with the pillion rider holding a sack from which a Saluki's head peeped out - a superbly built cream dog with a slight touch of feathering and hennaed feet. Henna is traditionally applied to protect the feet and to make them look good. This was our team. They piled into a little pickup and we drove behind in the Clio some way from Qamishli near to one of the great archaeological



**With two young beach**

mounds that dot the landscape here, where they had caught three hares a few days before. Although we walked up for a couple of hours we had no luck this time and we had to get back to Qamishli, where the shaikh had arranged another huge Mansaf for us and some of the tribal elders.

The next morning we travelled south, turning off the road at Tell Braq to see the huge mound where archaeologists from the British Museum excavated in 1987 a complete skeleton of a Saluki. It brought back memories for me as I had last been there in 1992 when I had gone hunting with Salukis in the vicinity. We continued on through Deir az-Zor towards Palmyra, but turned off at about halfway to take the road to the desert castle at Qasr al-Hair al-Sharqi. What a dramatic change since I had last been there over a decade ago! Now there was an asphalted road where there had been only a track and a huge parking area and a village where there had been only desert. In the interval a lot of work has been done on the archaeology of the site. The British archaeologist Professor Creswell had established in his great work 'Early Muslim Architecture' in 1958 that the vast walled enclosure, measuring 5 km by 2 km (3 by 1 ½ miles), behind the castle was once a game preserve, something like a deer park, of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham in the 8th century. More recent as yet unpublished research by the French archaeological student Chloe Capel suggests that the still standing walls enclosed rather recreational gardens. Whatever the case it is well established that the Umayyads hunted extensively in the surrounding desert with Salukis, as the contemporaneous murals at Qusayr 'Amra now in Jordan clearly show. It is sad that the gazelle that were prolific here within living memory have become extinct.



**Cream dog with hennaed feet**

sat in a dugout while scouring the skies for falcons. There were not many falcons these days, he said, but if he caught one or two in prime condition he could earn big money by selling them to the Gulf shaikhs.

Back in Damascus at last I still had one more stud farm to visit where there were some Salukis for me to test. Although situated near the airport the farm was surrounded by tall trees and was a sea of tranquillity. Here I found a pretty little black and tan feathered bitch in whelp and close to delivery and her mate a feathered red dog.



**Falcon trap**

We reached Palmyra in time to enjoy the sunset across the vast archaeological site and rose early the next day to capture it at its best in the early morning light before pushing on towards Damascus again. A break at the wayside Bagdad Café had a bonus in that the young owner was also a falcon trapper. He showed us the skilfully made snares with which he trapped the passenger falcons, i e those on their first migration in the autumn. He had various methods: a small cage shaped like an upturned colander in which he would put a small bird or a rodent to attract the falcon, which would stoop on it and become caught up in the fine nylon running nooses festooning it; or a kind of harness again festooned with running nooses which he slipped over the back of a tethered pigeon, controlled by him as he



**Qasr al-Hair al-Sharqi**

Both were originally from Hama. They both lacked attention and I managed to arrange some comfort for them so that the expected puppies would have a better chance of survival. The horse breeders who are developing an interest in Salukis now need guidance from the Association on how to raise them in conditions as good as those of their Arabians. Fortunately the Association has the determination to preserve the Saluki as part of Syria's national heritage. Today there is clearly no lack of Salukis with the traditional hunters and breeders but the pressures of modern life are making an impact, especially on the hare

population, and it is well that the Association is taking steps to ensure the survival of the Saluki, which is important not only for the successor generations there but also for the long-term future of the Saluki in the West.

All questions, suggestions and comments will be accepted with gratitude. E-mail them or send them as snail mail to: Marina G. Kuzina mail box 12, Moscow, 115407 RUSSIA

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