

Primitive and Aboriginal Dog Society

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

In the sixth issue of our Newsletter, we present your attention several new articles written by members of R-PADS and our guests.

Article titled «Sable Laika Work» is written by the Manager of Konstantinov Branch of Zhigalovsky Furhusbandry unit, Expert Cynologist of 1st Category Serge Vladimirovich Bogatov. In this article he discussed topics rarely addressed in publications.

Sir Terence Clark is a member of Editorial Board of R-PADS. He presents a very interesting material about aboriginal unique populations of the Saluki. We also present an aboriginal breed, which have never been discussed on pages of the R-PADS Newsletter. This is the Reindeer Herding Laika. Names of authors of the article about this dog, Boris Ivanovich Shiroky and Oleg Borisovich Shiroky, are familiar to you. They wrote about the Kamchatka Sled Dog in the previous issue of Newsletter.

We also include an article describing observations on the character and training of the Russo-European Laika for other than hunting purposes in Europe by Daniela Castellani. The article was translated into English by Alessio Ottogalli.

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

PECULIARITIES OF LAIKAS HUNTING SABLE

S. V. Bogatov,
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Since unmemorable times, sable was and still remains one of symbols of Siberia, its jewel or “soft gold.” These words were used for a reason. Pelts of sable were highly valued in all times. Sable pelts were used to pay “yassak”. People of the north paid by sable skins just like Alaskans paid by gold sand. For Russian “zemleprokhodtsy” (scouts and frontiersmen), measures of success were not only lands and “yassak” peoples, but also the number of sable pelts collected during the trip. Native peoples of Siberia and, at a later time Russian promyshlenniks (frontiersmen and adventurers), invented numerous methods on how to obtain sable. These methods were constantly perfected and information about them was passed from one generation to another. As a result, several unique methods of hunting sable were developed. Hunting with Laika is one of the most perfect and unique means of sable hunting.

Sable hunting with Laika, besides being beautiful and thrilling, is very productive. In some regions a major part of sable skins are obtained using dogs. According to data of A.V. Geits, in Irkutsk Province, in 80th of XX Century, 60-90% of sable skins were obtained using Laikas (Instruction “Hunting Laika, 1985, Irkutsk).

Hunting qualities of Laikas were perfected over many centuries and, as a result, they achieved a very high efficiency. Some became truly virtuosos, capable of finding sable in its den by its several-days-old tracks.

I analyzed work of Laikas of different ages, sex, and in different game habitats and under different weather conditions. As a result, I found two major types of Laikas differing in the method of their work hunting sable.

The first type of Laika works on hot sable tracks, which have a scent and the second type of Laika picks old tracks, which have lost scent.

I call dogs using the first method “flyers.” When these Laikas find fresh tracks, they sharply change their movement. If the dog was trotting, he will switch to galloping and if it was galloping, it will switch to faster galloping. The dog starts a wide circle or makes an acute angle, or he will “fly” in all directions. Hunters would tell: “The dog starts cutting tracks.” In this context, “cutting” is not exactly a correct word. This method is used by many intelligent animals, but the dog is simply looking for the strongest scented track and this is how he determines the exit track of the sable. Then, the dog starts an active chase and often makes shortcuts using scent or seeing loops made by the tracks, which the sable made trying to escape the dog. As a result of his method a “flyer” the sable is finally treed and does not have enough time to hide in his underground or above the ground den.

“Flyers” usually have a wide range of search, are very active and can work singly or in a pack of several dogs.

Laikas using the second method can be named “crawlers.” They also can chase sable using its fresh tracks, but they are also capable of chasing sable using its tracks visually without scent. As hunters say in such cases: “The dog is tracking “lunduk.” Lunduk means old, frozen tracks. This kind of Laikas are distinguished by a more balanced and slow temperament. Their owners often intentionally limit the search range of the dog by leading him on the leash behind a reindeer or a horse until they see sable tracks. If the hunter overlooked the place where the dogs were left, he may spent much time searching them later on.



Another characteristic trait is associated with the style used by a dog working singly or in a well-adjusted pair of dogs. The hustle of several dogs can result in trampling of sable tracks and, because old tracks have no scent, it would be difficult to unravel it. When a pair of Laikas, well adjusted to each other, work together, they watch each other, check every “lunduk” on the path of the hunter and, if one of the dogs finds one, the other joins the pursuit. One dog or several dogs can track the sable to its den, where it is resting (sometimes for several days in the row), or which he recently left, leaving fresh tracks. In the latter, case, dogs chase it further.

With a “crawler” sable are killed in their dens. Therefore, a hunter must have right equipment, such as a trap, a smoking materials, a good hook for pulling the sable out of the tree hole, etc.

Knowledge of the working style of Laikas on sable is very important for actual hunting and for pedigree work. The style of

work of Laika is an inherited trait. Knowledge of this allows matching right mating pairs for obtaining offspring with a certain hunting style with high level of probability.

During hunting, knowledge of these peculiarities of hunting is important. The problem is when hunters, especially the beginners, often attempt to mate “flyer” with a “crawler.” This does not produce a good result.

Many times I saw how a “flyer” found old sable tracks and starts to use his tactics, resulting in trampling the sable’s tracks and, because they have no scent, he cannot find the sable. At the same time another dog, the “crawler,” follows the “flyer” with a hope that he does mean business, because he tries so hard. As a result of such teamwork, the hunter can give his dog a taiga style lesson with a stick. After that, he should take the “flyer” on the leash and send the “crawler” to the fresh, not trampled yet, sable tracks. He can go to drink some tea taking his time until his dog, without any interference, will sort out where the sable has gone.

In habitats with a high sable population and its concentrations in certain regions, hunting with “flyers” is more productive, because fresh tracks are frequent and the slow work of the “crawler” is less efficient. When sable population is sparse and fresh tracks are rare, a “crawler” is necessary.

Actually a “crawler” can work on any tracks. When the hunter finds tracks, he encourages his dog and under favorable conditions can guarantee a success. Besides, using “crawler” is quite efficient when weather is very frosty. At -25 to -30 degrees C, sable tracks are losing scent in 30-40 minutes. The sable may not be not very far, but “flyers” would be not able to detect it. A “crawler” would be exactly the right choice here. “Flyers” are easier to hunt with, especially for young hunters, who have little experience, because such a dog is heard often and the hunter can walk towards the barking. Often it takes a few hours to find “crawler.” This is particularly bad, if the dog does not bark at the den on the ground in a log and tries to extract the animal on his own. On this occasion there is only one choice: follow the dog’s tracks.

Therefore, I always have dogs with different styles of hunting and use them depending on actual conditions of hunting season.

When choosing a puppy, I also consider it important keep the hunting style in mind. A hunter, having Laikas with a certain hunting style, may pick a puppy with a different hunting style. As a result, the new puppy does not work in harmony with his older dogs. A “crawler” would get lost and not come to the barking of “flyers” because he is busy with unraveling old tracks. A “flyer” would trample old tracks, which the “crawler” would use. Some hunters, who are unaware about different hunting styles of Laikas, shoot the “unfit” dog. This is why in industrial hunting regions many very good promising dogs are killed.

Unfortunately, peculiarities of work of Laikas on sable are insufficiently described in our literature. During 18 years of work in Zhigalovsky District of Irkutsk Province, where 85% of sables is obtained with Laikas, I found that even some experienced hunters could not explain the hunting methods of their Laikas in detail. Therefore, I hope that my conclusions will help hunters correctly evaluate the sable hunting ability of their dogs.



BETWEEN THE DESERT AND THE SOWN

By Sir Terence Clark

Recent visits to Syria and Jordan highlighted some of the differences in the way Saluqis are raised and worked in the contrasting life styles of the settled people on the edge of the desert and the Bedouin.

It was in the spring, a time when I always feel the urge to join my hunting friends in Syria for a few days’ coursing, that I had the chance to undertake a journey that took me from the Syrian Desert to Wadi Rum in Jordan. The weather was all upside down: while Britain was bathed in unseasonably warm sunshine, Syria was buffeted by cold winds and rain. Arriving in Damascus in the early morning after a five-hour delay at Heathrow Airport I was glad that I had had the foresight to pack some winter woollies because events showed that I would have need of all of them before the journey was over. My destination was however further north to where the town of Hama sits on the Orontes River that carves its way like a snake through the reddish and fertile plain between the Ansariya mountains which run down into Lebanon and the great Syrian Desert which stretches eastwards to Palmyra and onwards to the Iraqi border. In Hama and some of the nearby villages live communities of farmers who are normally busy tending to their crops at this time of the year. However I have

friends among them who are easily persuaded to drop everything and take off a few days for indulging in their passion for coursing their Saluqis. But first we had to meet and discuss the arrangements in the newly refurbished reception room of one of the leading families. In the splendid Ottoman style stone house around a courtyard we were entertained to tea and coffee in a room on which no expense had been spared to restore its intricately carved and painted wood-pannelled walls to their former glory. The talk was all of hunting: where we should go, who should go, whose hounds we should take, whether we should camp in the desert in view of the weather, etc. In the end we decided on a series of day trips from Hama with about four hounds and as many hunters.



as some shelter from the predators – hawks and foxes but sadly not from the lampers who come by night and shoot indiscriminately. We had with us only three hounds: Guru, a four-year-old smooth cream dog, Jukha, a two-year-old smooth red bitch and Risha, a ten-month-old smooth black and tan bitch, who was on her first hunt. All were finely drawn, muscular and quite small by western standards and all had their ears cropped.

They were keen to go but with the rain coming steadily down we decided to pause a while for some breakfast. Afterwards the rain eased off and we made a start by walking up a patch of winter wheat. Almost immediately a big brown hare got up so close in front



infuriated the Bedouin who regard this land as their traditional grazing ground. The regeneration has also encouraged wildlife and my companions spoke rapturously of coursing 14 hares there one day, though managing to catch only two as the denser ground cover made it easier for the hares to escape. So we set off in high hopes of some exciting sport with four hounds: a young black and white feathered dog, of which its owner was very proud because of its

of me that I could see the black points on its ears distinctly. I gave the traditional call: “Hai, hai!” and the hounds were slipped. Guru was unsighted and ran off at a tangent but Jukha and the puppy were on to it in a flash and it looked as if it would be a short course but then the hare doubled back onto a track running right across our line of vision. It was a magnificent performance in full view by hare and hounds with the hare eventually making its escape among some boulders. The puppy had acquitted herself particularly well. However the rain set in again relentlessly in a landscape more reminiscent of a damp day on the Scottish moors than of the desert and rather bedraggled we decided to call it a day and repair to a friend’s farmhouse for a hot meal.

The next day was cold but dry and we were up before dawn for the long drive by lorry in the direction of the Euphrates where to encourage the regeneration of the flora the authorities have bulldozed an earthen wall around a vast area of semi-desert in an attempt to keep out the wandering shepherds and their sheep and goats. This policy has been very successful but has



hunting prowess, Qassab, a young feathered black and tan dog with the fierce look of an eagle and two very lean, mean looking smooth grizzles.

After two hours' walking without so much as a sign of a hare I began to wonder about my friends' stories but then way out on the flank the black and white dog, which had been running loose, got onto a fox, coursed it and killed it on its own. Soon after a hare got up and gave the black and white and the black and tan a long chase with the black and white just snatching it in the end. However the black and tan managed to injure a back leg in the process on the viciously stony ground and had to be retired. We all retired to the lorry with him as we had forgotten



Grizzle bitch

entirely about breakfast and were in urgent need of some sustenance. The respite was short-lived as the hunters were keen to get on. After another long slog over the hard ground in the teeth of a bitterly cold wind we eventually put up another hare which all the hounds coursed, including the black and tan which had made a rapid recovery. By this time we had all had enough and just wanted to escape from the relentless wind. A deserted hovel provided some shelter while kebabs were miraculously produced and grilled over a most welcome fire. We still had the long drive back to Hama ahead of us and decided that the next day would be a rest day.

The next day was however fine and warmer so my friends

took me to see the Saluqis in some of the outlying villages. In no time we must have seen at least twenty hounds, including a beautiful litter of seven plump two-week-old puppies. Six of the puppies were almost black but would be black and tan like their sire and just one was red like their well-nourished dam.

This breeder's hounds were all well feathered and a bit more like the Sarena Kelb type than most of the Saluqis in this area. Yet nearby we visited another breeder who had only smooths of a type that made me

Puppies of red bitch



think of Dobermans – enormously powerful hounds that one or two of my friends disparaged as too heavy for serious coursing. That would have been my reaction too if I had not known the equally powerful grandsire of three of them with which I had coursed some years ago and which had accounted for three foxes and four hares in a morning.

Red bitch



Later we went to see how the hunters decorate their hounds with henna, a green powder made from a dried and pulverised bush which imparts an orange dye to the skin or hair. The Arabs use henna for dyeing their hair or beard and for making patterns on the backs of women's hands at wedding ceremonies. However they also use it traditionally on their hounds' feet not only for decoration but also for toughening the pads and for treating injuries. The powder is first moistened with water and mixed into a paste. It is then applied thickly to the paws one at a time. Each paw is bound up with cloth and encased in plastic sheeting to keep the moisture in. I was astonished that the demonstration hound stood there completely relaxed and simply let it all happen. I was even more surprised to hear that the pads would be kept on for 24 hours, as I am sure my own hounds would have ripped them off within minutes.

All the while we watched the ceremony more and more hounds kept appearing, with a quite a number of puppies among them. I was sorely tempted by a very promising young tricolour

«Dobermans»



feathered bitch, which even had both her ears, but our shortsighted rules would have prevented her registration in the United Kingdom.

There was to be no more relaxation. The next morning we were up again before dawn and on the road for a final day's coursing in another area where cultivation meets the gravel desert. It was fine and pleasantly warm. We had four hounds with us: Qassab, Guru and Risha had been out with us before but we also had a young smooth black and tan dog. We were in luck this time. We quickly put up a hare which all four hounds pursued and after a long chase eventually caught. The hunters went straight on and over the next couple of hours we coursed three more. By then the hounds were tiring and they had provided enough food for the pot. So we relaxed in the warm sunshine and picnicked among the wild flowers that had burst forth after the rain. It was blissful and in many ways not all that unlike many a day's coursing with a few friends that I have enjoyed in England. My next stop was quite different.

Henna ceremony



Amman is only a short flight from Damascus but what a contrast! Whereas Damascus is set in a flat green oasis below Mount Qassioun, Amman sprawls over seven barren hills. My destination was however Wadi Rum, the long sandy valley that weaves through the rugged mountains down to the port of Aqaba on the Red Sea. Here I had arranged to stay with an old friend from among the Bedouin who live there. Although he has moved into a smart new house in the village, he still keeps up many of the traditional ways of the Bedouin, including breeding Saluqis. My home for the next few days was however not his house but a goats hair tent in a magnificent setting at the foot of a steep bluff deep in Wadi Rum, where we would experience the old ways of life.

Powerful hounds



Our companions were my friend's mother, who looked after the livestock, his brother and a couple of their friends. We also had with us La'ban, a six-year-old smooth black and tan dog, Hazza, a smooth cream bitch and Warda, a two-month-old smooth white bitch, which proved the star attraction. La'ban was from the north near the Iraq border and Hazza from towards Sinai: they both had the broad heads and turned back ears of some of the Saluqis in North Africa. Hazza was one month pregnant. Warda was the product of a red and white bitch and a grizzle dog from another village in Wadi Rum. She had almost died as a small puppy when she had banged her head, which swelled up like an egg. My friend took it away from the breeder, syringed away the fluid from the swelling, gave her some antibiotics and she made a quick recovery. She had a lovely nature, was sharp and strong and I would gladly have had her.

Hazza and La'ban outside our tent



Camel train in Wadi Rum

The first major difference from Syria manifested itself when I started to ask questions in Arabic about the Saluqi. At first the Bedouin appeared mystified, until one of them

said: "Oh, you mean Salag!" This was an interesting linguistic puzzle. In Syria you say in everyday speech "Slougui" for the singular and "Slagui" for the plural: whereas in Wadi Rum they say "Salag" with the plural "Sulgan". In

fact both these words are derived from the classical Arabic plurals for “Saluqi”: “Salaq” and “Silqan” or “Sulqan”, though why the Bedouin should use a plural form to denote a single hound is curious. Perhaps even curiuser is the fact that Salaq and Silqan are also plurals of Silq, an old Arabic word for wolf.

Warda and her siblings



Wadi Rum is now a protected area and hunting is not allowed. So my friends could only simulate how they used to hunt and train their Saluqis for hunting in the old days. The first day we went to see a camel train wending its way down the Wadi with Saluqis trotting alongside, just as they would have done in past times. The Saluqis learnt to trot in the shadow of the camels, though if it became too hot for them they might be lucky enough to be carried in panniers on camelback. In this fashion they travelled the length and breadth of the Arab world, where sometimes they might be given away to dignitaries en route or be used for breeding, so that then as now the breed would be constantly spread and renewed far and wide.

The next day we went out with another Bedouin who brought along Warda’s dam and her grizzle sister and black and tan brother. The Bedouin demonstrated their method of hunting, which is quite different from that practiced in Syria. Here it is all about tracking. The soft sand shows up clearly the tracks of all manner of creatures and as we walked they eagerly pointed out where the hedgehog had gone, where the lizard had slithered and at last where a hare had hopped. Once the hare’s tracks had been located it was then a matter of following it. On this occasion we followed until the tracks disappeared, obliterated by the sand storm that was blowing up. We retreated to a more sheltered spot where my friends released a tame hare for the puppies to chase as part of their training. I was amazed to see how Warda and her sister gave chase immediately; whereas their brother showed not the slightest interest. Twice it was shown the hare but he simply would not run after it.

We also found the back-filled entrance to a Jerboa’s hole. The Bedouin showed how they used to dig Jerboas out to use them for training the Saluqis. The practice was to cover the entrance hole with a headcloth and to stamp or bang on the ground all around. The Jerboa would take fright, come shooting out of its hole and become tangled up in the headcloth. If they caught one, they would tie a stick across its back to prevent it from diving back down its hole and release it for the puppies to chase. On this occasion the Jerboa failed to appear.

Back at our tent one of the old Bedouin described their standard for the Saluqi while running his hands over Hazza, the main points of which were: the muzzle should be long, the jaws strong, the ears floppy and close to the head, the chest should be broad and deep and the tuck up high, the shoulder muscles should be long to carry the legs backwards when galloping, there should be room for three fingers between the shoulder blades and four fingers between the hip bones, the thigh should be well muscled and the tail should come down to the hock. As he finished it was prayer time and as he had been handling a dog, even a Saluqi, he needed to wash his hands. There being no water there, he simply dug down deep into the sand until he reached a moister level and proceeded to “wash” his hands with the slightly damp sand. He said that if the sand were dry, he would simply bang his hands to raise some dust and “rinse” his hands with dust. He agreed that it was acceptable to Muslims to handle Saluqis, because although they were dogs, they were not “najis” (unclean) like common curs. One said that when he was

Warda's dam



Warda



small they used to muzzle the Saluqis to ensure that they did not eat any filth. When I asked if they ever cropped their hounds’ ears as they commonly do in parts of Syria, they said that they might crop the ears of guard dogs, so that they should be more alert, but the Saluqi was not a guard dog, so there was need to crop them.

Back in the village a sad sight greeted us. The feathered sister of Warda's dam appeared with four small, furry puppies pursuing her for a feed. She belonged to my friend. When in season one of the big guard dogs that hung around the village had somehow got into the compound where she lived and mated her. The puppies were therefore only "Luqis" and would not be kept but distributed among the shepherds as guard dogs. She was however a good bitch and would be kept. One of the Bedouin told me in all seriousness that the number of puppies in a litter depended upon the number of ties: there would be one puppy for each tie!



Bedouin explaining the standart.

The question that bothered me was what was the future for these hounds in the new world of conservation and tourism in which they live? Elsewhere I had been told many times that there was no point in raising Saluqis if they could not hunt. The Bedouin here had two answers: first there would always be some hunting and secondly they liked to have them around, much as they have a camel or two in the backyard. They agreed there was a need for controls but the real problem was not with the Bedouin and their Saluqis but with the hunters and their guns. Later I spoke about this to one of the leading Jordanian authorities at a ceremony in Wadi Rum to release ten oryx into the wild. He confirmed that the hunting of mammals was banned

throughout Jordan and of all wildlife in Wadi Rum, but at the same time he admitted that it was difficult to change old habits and to monitor the wilderness.

My general conclusion is therefore that the Saluqi is reasonably safe in Syria, where there are evidently lots of hounds and the hunters have found a niche for them on the margins of the desert and the sown; whereas the hold of the relatively small number of Saluqis among the Bedouin in Jordan is rather more precarious.

REINDEER HERDING DOG (OLENEGONKA)

B. I. Shiroky and O.B. Shiroky
President of Russian Club «Northern Dog»

Our Newsletter describes aboriginal dogs of different groups with different usage. Until now, we did not write about such a unique breed as Reindeer Driving Laika. To better familiarize our readers with this remarkable breed, we present some excerpts from book "Reindeer Driving Spitz"¹ published by Aquarium [footnote 1] in 2004. The book is written by expert cynologist Boris Ivanovich Shiroky and biologist Oleg Borisovich Shiroky. B. I. Shiroky authored breed standard of the Kamchatka Sled Dog published in the previous issue of Newsletter R-PADS. Both authors dedicated many years to research on this exceptionally interesting aboriginal dog. B. I. Shiroky is familiar to our readers from previous issue of the Newsletter.

B. I. Shiroky describes his first experience with this dog, which determined his interest to the breed for years to com.

For the first time, I saw this smallish northern dog in northernmost village with a pretty name Ayanka, in Koryakia. It was over 30 years ago, when I was there doing my geological work.

There was a large, long clearing in larch tree taiga forest, a pretty Airport building, about a dozen potential passengers capable of waiting for days and weeks for rarely visiting planes, and helicopters of geological or other surveys. It was a quiet sunny spring with mosquitoes...

At the edge of this clearing, which served as airfield for planes, near an old backpack was a small fuzzy male sitting? He had short prick ears and a pleasantly smiling muzzle and lively, expressive eyes

At that time, I was a beginning expert in Laika breeds and I thought, like majority of cultured cynologists did, that only breeds recognized by cynological organizations deserve serious attention. Moscow's "founding fathers" of registered Laika breeds managed to convince dog lovers, including myself, that there other aboriginal dog breeds of the north did not exist, because they could not escape being dissolved among dogs of other breeds

¹ Citation of parts of the book is done according to article 19 of "Law of Russian Federation about copyrights" for scientific and educational purposes by permission of the author.

under conditions of accessibility of every corner of the country. However, a representative of a “non official” breed was sitting in right in front of me wagging his gorgeous tail. In the meantime, there was no more writing about it in articles and books about this dog. Only some Laika breeders mentioned it in publications dedicated to registered Laika breeds. The breed was called the Nenets Laika, the Reindeer Herding Dog, etc.

I was hooked on the West Siberian Laika and, during this time, I had a young gray male named Ayan. My buddy geologist, Boris Slyadnev, gave him to me for the summer. Only after about 20 years I became professionally involved with northern dogs. There were cynologic expeditions, sled dog races, investigations and preparations of official standards of breeds, such as the Kamchatka Sled Dog, the Chukotka Sled Dog, Reindeer Herding Spitz, and kennels with these dogs, rebirth and their recognition. However, at that remote time, I wanted to have a dog from Moscow, where the best West Siberian Laikas were. I wanted a dog, which would serve and faithfully followed the commands. This was because officially published in cynological literature of that time was overwhelming. That male in the Ayanka Airport, was sitting at his place and joyfully looked at me. He impressed me and I still keep it in my memory. I valued his natural harmony and the well-proportioned features of his appearance. He was a small dog, not higher than my knee and, at the same, time he looked truly a northern dog. Besides, he was beautiful and attractive.



Reindeer herding dog. Author - Nikita Hohlov, Russia. Foto provided by the project "Ethno-online"

Now, I am fascinated with natural relationships of that dog with his master, who soon came up. The male was about one year old and his owner was 45-50 years old. I was struck with understanding and mutual attachment of the dog and the man. It was not a relationship between man and the dog serving him. They communicated like equals, like friends and partners in some special business. The master talked something to his dog and the dog “participated in the conversation” by his mimics and body language appropriate to the topic of conversation and even making diverse sounds. When it was tea time, the master started a small bonfire and I saw the dog carrying firewood to the bonfire, and it was not play, but a serious work. They had a tea party like it would be between equal partners. The dog did not look at mouth of his master, but received his pieces of bread and fish and something else. Then the

master said that the place would be unlikely today and had to go to the village. He asked the dog to stay here, where they rested waiting for the plane. Then he walked away never looking back, leaving his dog and the backpack. Something held the master in the village for three days. Our helicopter did not arrive and I took great pleasure watching the dog. The dog was the master here. Most of the time during day and night, he laid curled near the backpack looking like a polar fox resting. Sometimes he left in woods (may be he caught mice there?). When a small buffet-dining room was open, he came to the door and got some treats from people. I also treated my new friend near his “post”. Everything indicated that here, in the north, he was equal and legitimated inhabitant, like humans, and that he was at home.

The reunion between the master and his dog was joyful like between two men. The master did not forget about treats for his buddy. They were talking about something, what happened in the village, and then they flew away with a passing plane.

Then I saw and watched many northern dogs, at shows, field trials, at hunting, in harness, on yards and village streets. They made various impressions on me, but meetings and interactions with Reindeer Herding Dogs, I will call them “Olenegonka” in tundra, with reindeer breeders, in the village or on the road always woke up special warm feelings similar to what I felt, when I met one at the first time.

To me, this dog breed, with its appearance, character and behavior, became a living symbol of the North. That North, which gave me dozens of years of unforgettable true life. It was the North, which accelerating changes, not always to better; it was that North, which increasingly irreversibly runs away from us.

We should mention here, that in XIX Century within range of distribution of Olenegonka existed a bigger variant of this dog, which was also used as a draft dog despite well developed reindeer breeding. Possibly this bigger breed exported to West Europe the modern Samoyed began. Origins of these two types of dogs and their possible isolated breeding under primitive conditions remain open.

Besides this, we are concerned about modern condition of this unique dog of Russian North now named Reindeer Driving Spitz.

In the Russian north, with nomadic reindeer breeders, particularly with Nenets people, this breed remained actually unchanged. During that time, when German, Scandinavian and other western cynologists were creating their own cultural breeds of Spitzes by breeding them to a certain size, coat color, behavior etc., Russian breeders of dogs by some reasons “did not see” dogs of their minorities by a variety of reasons.

Reindeer breeders are like the Olenegonka as Mother Nature had made them. His strong instinct of searching and chasing the animal on one side and a strong instinct of reindeer of looking for safety from all dangers, including the dog, in the herd allowed using Olenegonka for herding reindeer without special training. The smaller size of the dog is also important, because he cannot kill a reindeer.

If these dogs did not become attractive to reindeer breeders of the past, now I would have only “improved” cultured Spitz breeds developed by breeding to a purpose! Ancient reindeer breeders preserved Olenegonka purely inadvertently. They liked their dogs not only because of their reindeer herding ability. These dogs have been always with the nomad, in the herd, at hunting, in the road and with guests...

In XIX Century, other people, such as Nganasans, Entsya, Khanty, Mansi and Dolgans also learned from Nenets people using the Olenegonka. Reindeer-breeding Dolgans obtained their dogs from Nganasans (Tavgians). This is how another name of the breed occurring in literature emerged. A.A. Popov (1936), ethnographer, wrote about Dolgans: “Reindeer herders receive a great assistance from Tavgian reindeer herding dogs. Small, short legged, predominately entirely white dogs resemble polar foxes. Reindeer herding dogs are usually bought from Tavgians and they are priced very high; best of them are traded for two reindeers, one reindeer costs 25-30 rubles.”

Thus, in XIX Century and until 30th of XX Century, the Olenegonka was distributed in the tundra zone and the forest-tundra zone of Europe and West Siberia. Several authors wrote about this, but I will make a reference to M.G. Volkov. In 30th, he was busy with Nenets Laikas: “...these Laikas are distributed mainly in Malaya Zemlya, Bolshaya, Zemlya, and Timan tundra and also in Yamal Peninsula. Eastward, they occur as far as Khanty tundra and westward as far as border of Kola Peninsula, where they coexist with Lopar’s reindeer-herding Laikas, which are little different from dogs of Nenets people. Some people, who keep the Nenets Reindeer-Herding Laika in the forest-tundra zone, use it for hunting”.

Northern peoples bred the Nenets Reindeer-Herding Dog pure. However, traditional methods of breeding based on intuition were effective only in the old time. Then nomads and, especially their dogs were actually without contacts with “civilized” world. When these contacts emerged and grew, the more their dogs were degrading and dissolving among other dogs.

Specialist cynologists of the former Soviet Union, with rare exceptions, did not pay attention to northern dogs. Laika experts mention them only as sketchy remarks, when they were writing about hunting Laikas (Pupyshev, 1936; Ryabov, 1939; Vakhrushev and Vollkov, 1945, and Shereshevsky, 1965 etc.).

The Reindeer-Herding Dog has never had an officially accepted breed standard, although in 30th-50th the breed was studied by the Government.

In the beginning it was within jurisdiction of Narkomzem of RSFSR (not a cynological agency at all). This agency considered the Olenegonka merely as a herding breed, an “agricultural” dog breed, an absolutely necessary tool of reindeer breeders, which helped to increase productivity of his work. In 1948, Soviet of Ministers of the USSR made a decision “About measures on improvement of reindeer breeding in the far northern region”, which recommended to use the Olenegonka in reindeer breeding husbandries as a priority.

In 1936, Nenets I.M. Vanyuta brought to Snezhbinsky Sovkhoz, in Chukotka, two Nenets Olenegonkas. After two years two more similar dogs were brought there.

This is how Olenegonka began “conquering” northeast of Siberia. Because of his working abilities, this dog began his journey from Nenets people to reindeer-keeping Yakuts, Koryaks, Evens, and to Hukchis, who formerly did know Olenegonkas. It was an interesting process and sometimes events developed reached heroic magnitude.

In the third book of almanac “Hunting Horizons” [in Russian], 1997, Vera Vasilyeva, in her article “Forgotten Expedition” wrote that wildlife biologist M.G. Volkov studied Reindeer Herding Laikas of Yamal Peninsula and Belyi Island in 1937 and 1938. There he bought 23 breeding-stock dogs and moved them over 13,000 km by rivers, dry terrain, and by sea to Kamchatka. It was a long and difficult road. The dogs were purchased in spring, 1938 and they arrived to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky by New Year, 1939. While on the way to Kamchatka, he continued research and pedigree work and the life of the kennel on the move was normal, as a result of which total number of dogs doubled. Finally, six dogs got in Chukotka and 23 dogs got in Koryak National Province, Kamchatka. In 1939, Kamchatka Government’s Kennel of Olenegonkas was created.

This is the saga of the “Forgotten Expedition”! I was lucky to have a tea party with Vera Vasilyevna in 90th, in a small community near Moscow, talking about dogs, looking at their pictures and daybooks left by M.G. Volkov. She worried about the fate of the breed, which became as forgotten as that expedition. She could not get an article published from interesting heritage left to her by her husband.

In Yakutia, Olenegonkas were imported from 1940 to 1953. Workers of Yakutian Research Institute of Agriculture, S.B. Pomishin, A.D. Kurilyuk and L.I. Golubev reported it in 1997, in 22nd Issue of “Magadan Reindeer Breeder” [in Russian]. V.P. Rochev brought the first 10 Olenegonkas for foremen of sovkhos “Bulunsky”. This was organized by Yakutian Government. Then, in 1947, kolkhoz “Turvaurgin.” By 1953, Olenegonkas were in Abyisky, Srednekkolyumsky and Zhigansky Districts of Yakutia. At this time, total number of Olenegonkas in Yakutia was 180 dogs belonging to kolkhozes and sovkhos and private owners.

After that, Olenegonkas never were imported in Yakutia and they began to degenerate. By 1970, typical Nenets Laikas were rare even in most remote northern regions of the Republic, where there were no access for other dogs.

Example with Yakutia is quite indicative. Until 60th, the government’s interest in the Olenegonka as a reindeer-herding dog was strong enough. This dog was shown in All-Union Agricultural Show; various instructions and manuals about using this dog for reindeer herding were published.

As I already mentioned above, at that time, there were no kennel clubs of Olenegonka. Kennels of the north bred them without qualified cynologists, but they bred them and this helped to preserve the breed. In Chukotka, the last Olenegonka kennel miraculously survived until 1989.

“Magadan Reindeer Breeder” magazine was writing about Olenegonkas and published four articles about them. The last article was published in 1987 by Zheleznov, “Where are you, friend of reindeer breeders?” [in Russian]. Such a title is a sign of the 60th-80th. Then, Olenegonkas became unnecessary to the Government.

Government authorities wanted to see technical “progress” in the north. Reindeer breeders were supplied with snowmobiles and tractors; the tundra became scared with tracks left by heavy equipment dragged by tractors.

At the same time, there was increasing number of reindeer breeders as a measure of employment of local population. Use of tundra resources became less traditional. Olenegonkas became less needed, because there were enough people to chase reindeer and there were no need to save on hiring herders. Statement “one Olenegonka is better than two-three herders” became not true.

“Perestroika” came to the north in 1985 and it was ambivalent to the dogs. People were leaving and the number of Olenegonkas also declined. A local lore lover, V. Myagkikh, wrote in magazine “Hunting and Hunting Management” [in Russian “Okhota i okhotnichye khozyaistvo”], No.6, 1998: “...in Ayanka, Penzhinsky District, Kamchatka, in 1960, there was a kennel of Reindeer Herding Laikas. It was a very pretty, fuzzy and undemanding dog. However, during Perestroika time, everything went wrong. It became impossible to obtain a purebred Olenegonka Laika even from reindeer breeders.”

We met the author of this article; he knows and values Olenegonkas. However, he had only a mix of this breed, which would soon disappear from face of Earth.

However, at the same time during the Perestroika, in the Soviet Union, a new cynological interest to northern dogs began waking up. It was triggered by a stream of information about dog breeding abroad, about recognized northern dogs, which are known and loved in the rest of the world, except our country. There were newest cynologic publications about Olenegonka Laika (Nosov and Bogoslovskaya, 1991).

The Cynologic Firm named “Kinos” was created for the purpose of preservation and restoration of northern aboriginal dogs. Workers of “Kinos” summarized a 30-year period of observations on dogs of the NE part of the country, investigated old literature and archives, and conducted expeditions for cynological surveys. Finally, in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, they founded a kennel of Reindeer Herding Laikas brought from remaining pockets of these dogs found in Chukotka and Kamchatka.

In 1993, workers of “Kinos” submitted a project of breed Standard of the Reindeer Herding Laika along with other supporting materials for consideration in Russian Cynologic Federation. In 1994, the Pedigree Committee of Federation approved the first official standard of the breed and decided to name it Reindeer Herding Spitz.

Thus, having a major tool for making a purebred, a new breed was born, which is very old, but forgotten by dog lovers.

Now, a major part of dogs bred with registration is in Ukraine. A small kennel remains in Kamchatka and single dogs appeared in Magadan and several of them are in Moscow. In Poland, Greece, France, Israel, and Korea there are one-three dogs in each...

This is the end of the brief history of the Olenegonka and its study.

We should add that in 2004, the Reindeer Driving Spitz was included in the Government's Checklist of agricultural achievements, which will open the door for raising its status as national heritage of Russian Federation.

LAIKA'S CHARACTER IN FUNCTION OF TRAINING

By Daniela Castellani

Translation by Alessio Ottogalli

As a dog-trainer, I've been able to work with numerous dog-breeds using positive-reinforcement techniques, finalized to a correct dog's fitting in the family-pack. In my experience, I can assert that regarding trainability, learning capacity, memorization of an exercise, and tendency to repeat it after verbal or gestual stimulus, much is given by the subject's character.

Character is a sufficiently indefinite term that summarizes some fundamental components: first docility, which is also the malleability of a dog; after that attention, how much and how long a dog can concentrate; and temper, dog's resistance to outdo a determined stress, and then how much the subject is willing to cooperate with the master, a factor quite difficult to quantify. The character also has a genetic base, which is due to breeding, so that a particular breed is inclined to a determined task (e.g., Retriever-retrieving, Border-Collie, flock shepherding, etc.).



Taras following a bear's track in Slovenia

Of course the dog will be able to show his complete potential only if his human "leader" is able, with sensibility and experience, to "read" inside the dog itself, so to work "with" it, and not "against" it.

After this foreword I would like now to write about my experience with the Russian European Laika, a breed that I consider with an enormous potential not yet sufficiently studied and evaluated here in Europe.

As the main part of the primitive breeds the REL, obviously, has developed for the pragmatic task of practical survival hunting in the harsh conditions of the North of Russia, so REL is primarily a hunting dog.

Talking about survival hunting and not sportive hunting, we are already making an important distinction. The dog must not only find and bay the animal, barking without stopping, but it also must be alive the next day to help its master in the hunt. So the bonding between man

and dog must be at a very high level, based on a mutual reliance, respect and, I would like to add, almost love. Both must perfectly know each and others limits, to be able to work for success. And success is not scoring a point, but survival.

The best dog is not only strong, characterized by great endurance, sense of smell, able to value a determined habitat, and understand which type of animal could be found there, courage to face predators, agility to avoid the animal's blows, but, mainly, had to be "bonded" to the master. The dog must not hunt for itself, but rather hunt for the master, the head of the pack, and together with his master.

This is very important to understand the relationship the REL wants and looks for with its human. Furthermore, the great and inborn capacity of body language reading, that enables communication noiselessly, comes from a time when the less noise you made following an animal, or moving in the taiga, the better it was.

In our kennel we have seven Russo-European Lajkas: Devil, 7-year-old male, Taras, 2.5-years-old male (Russian and father/Hungarian mother), his brother Zar and sister Raska, Laikaladies Tsar Buran (Finnish father/Russian import mother), Rahinapesan Kishka (finnish import), and Dana (Devil X Raska). There are also Taz, Dana's brother that we have given to the National Avalanche Rescue team as avalanche and reasearch dog and Darken, also Dana's brother who is with the Ranger service, for big carnivorous research. Taras and Zar are inserted in a collaboration with the Department of Animal Production of the University of Udine within the Interreg Project IIIa «Italy-Slovenia» for monitoring brown bears in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia (North-East of Italy).

The first thing I want to stress is the difference between males and bitches. I think that regarding this breed; it's much easier to train a male than a bitch for functions other than hunting. Bitches are in some way more "wild", and less willing to be confident with unknown people. This is the "rule", but we have also been able to evaluate extremely versatile bitches (e.g., Laikaladies Kiara and Dewojsika who distinguish themselves in agility).

Males are something absolutely incredible. To enable the puppy to reach all of his potential, it is fundamental to create a correct hierarchic relationship. The rules that enable the dog to understand his place within the pack must be explained clearly and with constancy. Having such a "wild" behaviour, communication with them is very easy! Pack body language characters are preserved to an incredibly high and refined level.

Observing the mother with the puppies at 30 days of old, we give ourselves an idea of the character of each puppy. The mother, as will a real wolf, teaches the puppies two most important rules: 1) to measure the bite's strength; and 2) to regulate activity and rest periods. This will enable the puppies to relate with other dogs correctly, and not to develop hyperkinetic behaviours.

Mother's punishments to violent puppies are always very ritualized: terrifying if you don't know these dogs, but absolutely innocuous. The first thing I've learned from a Russo-European Laika mother is that punishment must be absolutely painless, but extremely "scenographic" so to impress correctly the mind of the puppy.

The relatively small number of puppies per litter allows the mother to follow each puppy "intelligently", not as other breeds with 14 puppies per litter, something absolutely absurd and impossible in nature. The mother indicates when to wean the pups, by starting to regurgitate the food.

The REL is a very precocious dog, and this is why imprinting with manhood and with different situations must be done as soon as possible.

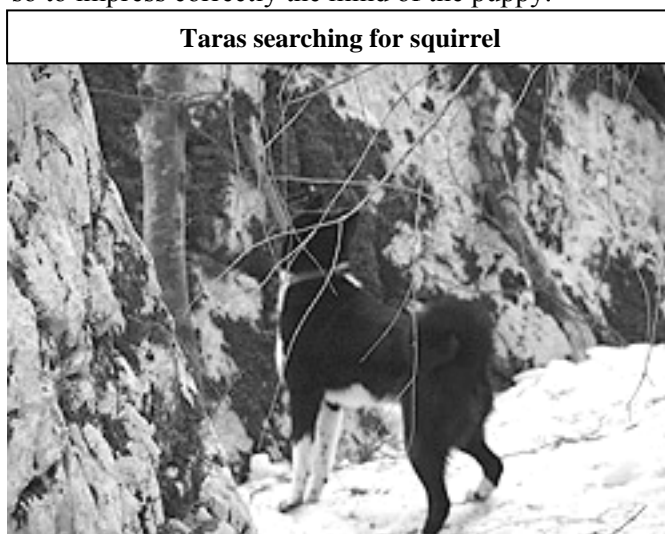
As soon as the puppy has been chosen, I suggest creating immediately a strong relationship with it. The dog will have to respect and trust us totally: so no violent behaviour. For example, it will see us eat and it will eat always after us (Alpha always eats first), walk through the door of the house behind us (the door is the entrance of the den), it will have to walk without pulling the leash (Alpha decides where to go). The first exercise to be done is the eye-to-eye contact. With a delicacy in your hand, positioned between your eyes and the pup's eyes, you'll give the "look at me" command. When your eyes meet the pup's eyes you'll immediately give him the delicacy. Soon the pup will understand that we want, and will obtain his attention. And that he will have a nice treat. I have noticed that with Russo-European Laikas this exercise is really easy. They are born to have a leader, and violence is not necessary; frankness and authority will make us their leader without great shouting, etc. Fig 5 The eye-to-eye exercise.

There's controversy about where to have the pup sleep the first night in its new home. In nature, a pup left alone in the dark, without his family, is a dead pup. Why should our pup undertake such an experience, soon after having left his mother and family? We can allow it to sleep with us. Sleeping peacefully with us, it won't have other stimulus, and in the morning we'll be quick taking the pup outside, and it will soon learn the first hygienic rules. And think about this: how much sense of security we will be able to give to the pup, sharing with it the "den"? It is an extraordinary experience, for the man or woman itself. However, at the age of 5 months we have to divide the pup, as the mother would do, first with the male and then with females. These are very important passages. Following these easy rules we will have set the pup up for success for whatever activity we have chosen for it.

Devil, our oldest male, was brought to us at the age of 9 months, we knew nothing about his past, and we only knew that he had a strong aggressiveness towards other animals, but in a short time I taught him different things: obedience, agility, tracking, to find hidden objects, etc.

The most surprising thing of all is the happiness with which REL are related with work and their human. They are never subdued to the master.

Russo-European Laikas won't stand abuse. They don't have the capacity to withstand continuous mistakes by the owner. This could take them to mental closure, but never to aggressiveness towards humans. Zar, who is



Taras searching for squirrel

used in bear-tracking, helps old people through pet-therapy, especially people with Alzheimer, with total dedication. I have never seen a Russo-European Laika aggressive towards man. With kids they're absolutely reliable. My son, Nicola, has grown up with Laikas, and above all stereotypical views, I've always been confident with them beside him.

**The rescue team ranger:
Marco Terroni and Taz**



Whatever activity we will want our REL to do, we'll have to use his instinct. Human search can be an absolutely perfect job for a REL. The capacity to "search" for the smell in the air, typical of northern hunting breeds, is an excellent characteristic for searching for lost people, and for an avalanche dog. Taz, even though still very young, is showing this.

The work sessions must always be done with enthusiasm and happiness, the dog must be glad to work for his master. Some subjects get boring very soon. If they have understood what their master wants, and don't like to repeat the exercise in eternity, so the work sessions should be short and interesting. The most important thing is to show enthusiasm to the dog every time the exercise is done correctly. And some dogs like applause too! For example, when kids come to my farm-house to learn how to work with animals, Devil wants a real standing ovation for his agility exercises!

So I think that the REL, is a great dog that keeps us, modern humans, in touch with our hunting past. And, due to his non specialization, is able to carry out different jobs.

First: great hunting auxiliary. This is his most natural function, and his most suitable prey is the wild-boar, a species in great expansion here in Italy. Second: monitoring and study of different species of mammals. Third: dispersal research.

We have the duty to preserve this outstanding breed, that has been given to us by the Russian wind from the taiga region, as strong as the survival means it has been forged by.

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