

# The History of the Shepherd's Dog - part 15

by Carole L Presberg



Some of this and following articles in this series appears on the pages of the author's Border Collie Museum website ([www.BorderCollieMuseum.org](http://www.BorderCollieMuseum.org))

## Part 15: Border Collie Cousins: Southern European herding types and breeds

### Introduction

There are so many different herding breeds on the Continent of Europe, that it has been difficult to know how to divide them up to make articles of handleable size that also make sense geographically, with dogs that might be categorized as collie cousins. In the last issue we covered the Alpine breeds because they seemed to relate in some way that transcended national boundaries. There is no such simple identifying force for the herding dogs of the rest of Europe other than national boundaries. This article will cover the Southern European types and breeds from Portugal, Spain, France and Italy. However, as I said in the previous article, breeds keep coming out of the woodwork, so, although I did not originally intend it, I have had to include several Alpine breeds (or sub-Alpine, from the foothills of the Alps) that got missed before; still, they are from the Southern European countries that are being covered in this article.

As before, I have used size to indicate some possible correlation to the collie breeds. Once again, I do not mean to imply the infusion of working collie bloodlines from Britain, though again it is possible that some hybridisation did occur in both directions in the past. It must be said that Border Collies are showing up in just about every European country, and many farmers/shepherds have a Border Collie in addition to dogs of their local breeds. In some cases, hybridisation is occurring. Many of the dogs covered in these articles are in danger of extinction, and the presence of the Border Collie, which to some extent had been a factor in the demise of some of the old British herding breeds, may just be helping to push some of the endangered European breeds over the edge.

Once again we must come to terms with the words type and breed. In a previous article I defined breed as "a formally recognised group of dogs genetically isolated from other groups of dogs by a breed registry" [1] and type as a group of dogs of similar physical characteristics that have never been genetically isolated in this fashion. Types may not have the benefit of a registry, but they have access to a wider gene pool limited only by geography, and today, not even limited in that way. My definition may be too simplistic for the European herding dogs. I believe

*[Erratum: in the previous article, the last half of the final sentence was inadvertently left off. It should have read: "A gather would be necessary prior to moving to the next pasture."]*

the following definition fits the bill better for European dogs. It comes from Pier Vittorio Molinaro, a researcher and writer in natural science and animal behavior in Italy. I am paraphrasing because his article had to be translated by Google: "A breed is a group of domestic animals...that share an environment and...lifestyle of a cultural group of humans which they help to edit and modify. Even many wild animals, such as swallows and flies, share and modify this environment, but with a different degree of participation." [2] Within breeds, by this definition, there are many types and the concept of "pure bred", which Molinaro calls "one of the most disastrous things that Western culture has produced" [2], only comes in when a registry becomes involved.

In both Great Britain and Ireland, and North and South America, there is no one unifying organisation for all breeds of herding dogs. In Europe there is the Fédération Cynologique Internationale [3] (FCI), an international association of kennel clubs based in Belgium, that sets physical standards for dog breeds. Generally, when enthusiasts of a particular breed have banded together to promote and propagate that breed, they name it, form a club, and begin the process of applying for recognition by the FCI. This process usually includes defining physical characteristics that not only begin to narrow the gene pool, but tend to isolate other dogs of similar types that no longer fit the now limited "standard". Despite my own hesitation to cover breeds recognised by the FCI, some must still be mentioned, if nothing else but for their roots; for the roots of purebred registered breeds are often the same as for non-registered breeds and types.

One more thing we have to address, and that is the difference between herding breeds and livestock guardian breeds. For this, I turn to Carla Cruz, a biologist and animal scientist, who says that livestock guardian breeds possess an "absence of a well-defined predatory behaviour" and that livestock guardian breeds require "a set of innate behaviors incompatible with being a good herding dog." Therefore, in places where I have defined a dog as both a herding dog and a "guardian", this would be "not about predatory behaviour but about territoriality". [7]

### PORTUGAL

#### Portuguese Sheepdog or Cão Da Serra de Aires

The Serra de Aires's supporters trace its origin to the Roman Legions. It gets its name from Monte da Serra de Aires farm in Alentejo, Southern Portugal. It is said that it used to resemble the French Pyrenean Sheepdog (see below), but in the early 20th century it was mixed with Briards, another French breed, by the Count of Castro Guimarães, owner of the aforementioned farm, in order to "improve" the breed. DNA studies show that it is a recent breed. In looks today it is akin to the Bearded Collie and is a medium-sized rough-coated bearded dog.

The Serra de Aires is well adapted to the hot, dry, flat region of Alentejo and Ribatejo in Southern Portugal where it is still used to herd sheep, goats, cattle, horses and pigs. They are intelligent, ready, and loyal workers. Unlike collies, the Serra's coat is not double (it has no undercoat) which can be a disadvantage



A Cão de Serra de Aires [28]

for working in extreme weather. They come in yellow (tan with black leather), chestnut (red or brown), grey (blue), fawn (red dilute, in this case), wolf (agouti or wild pattern), and black, all with tan markings. Their tails are long, but natural bobtails do occur. Owners are discouraged from breeding dogs without tails.

The Serra de Aires is a regional breed. Other areas of Portugal have their own varieties of shepherd dogs, such as the

Cão de Fila de São Miguel (see below), the Cão da Serra da Estrela, the Cão de Castro Laboreiro, and the Rafeiro do Alentejo. These are mostly larger dogs, however, more akin to livestock guardian breeds. The Serra is recognised by the FCI. [4]

#### Terceira Cattle Dog or Barbado da Terceira

The archipelago of the Azores is an Autonomous Region of Portugal located in the North Atlantic more than 900 miles west of Lisbon. Terceira is the second largest island in the archipelago, located toward the northwest.

The Terceira Cattle Dog is a medium-sized, bearded (barbado means bearded) herding dog that may have developed from the Serra de Aires, above, as it is known to have originally come from the Portuguese mainland. It may also be related distantly to other bearded breeds like the Bearded Collie or the Polish Lowland Sheepdog, though this is said of all bearded breeds and should be taken with a grain of salt. It





Joni Johnson

A tiny Smooth-faced Pyrenean Shepherd (remember, they can be as small as fifteen inches) herds sheep in a film at [www.pyreneanshepherds.com](http://www.pyreneanshepherds.com)

is a bearded-type dog). Interestingly, some Smooth-faced dogs also have slight bearding and a slightly shorter rough coat. [17] They are a medium-sized dog between 15 and 20 inches, males slightly larger than females, and the Rough-faced is generally smaller than the Smooth-faced. Most typical colour is fawn (recessive yellow/tan, or sable) [14], with or without a black mask. Brindle, grey, merles, and black, sometimes with white markings, are also seen.

"Its origins lost in the mists of time, the Pyrenean Shepherd has resided in the Pyrenees Mountains of Southern France since time immemorial. Myths abound—that the breed is descended from native Pyrenean bears and foxes; and that this was the original dog of the Cro-Magnon people who painted the cave of Lascaux. What we can know is that bones of small dogs abound in Neolithic sub-fossil deposits, and that sheep and goat herding were so well developed in the Pyrenees that by 6,000 BC, the ecology... had been transformed by overgrazing... Transhumance...has been the mainstay of the economy of the High Pyrenees, and this ancient lifestyle persists even into the twenty-first century. Many Pyr Sheps of excellent type (but with no registered ancestors) still herd sheep every day in the Pyrenees..." [21]

The breed barks and snaps to control the sheep. They can gather and drive flocks over long, steep distances. When sheep are being moved on the flat and through inhabited areas, the shepherd walks before the flock, and the dogs patrol the flanks with trips to front and rear as needed. There is an excellent film at [www.pyreneanshepherds.com](http://www.pyreneanshepherds.com) of two really small Pyrenean Shepherds working in situ. Often there is a Great Pyrenees livestock guardian dog with the flock that does not interfere with the herding dogs. The Pyrenean Shepherd can be found today in all dog sports and search-and-rescue, and unfortunately also in show, where their size is increasing and their coats are becoming longer and heavier. It is recognised by the FCI.

#### Picardie Sheepdog or Berger Picard

Another less-known French herding dog is the Berger Picard, named for the region of Picardie in Northeast France. This breed is on the large side of our chosen subject being between 21 and 25 inches at the shoulder, with males generally larger than females. Still, they are considered a medium-sized dog. They are moderately bearded with a harsh, crisp coat, and



Françoise Quinton

A Berger Picard herding sheep



An old woodcut rendition of a French shepherd with his dog shows a medium-sized dog with prick ears that resembles the Berger Picard of today [28]

prick-eared. They come in two colours [14], fawn (recessive yellow, tan or sable) and brindle, both with many variations of shade.

The Berger Picard is one of the oldest French herding breeds, known since the 9th century when it is thought to have been brought to France by the Franks. Folklore abounds, including that the dog was brought during a Celtic invasion of Gaul around 400 BC (or 800 AD, depending on whom you believe) or that it was brought by Asian tribes invading in the Middle Ages. Its genetic relationship to other French breeds (or Dutch and Belgian breeds, since the breed is said to have developed, if not originated, on the French border with Belgium - see the Bouvier des Ardennes, below) is also a matter of conjecture. Whatever its origin, the Picard does share characteristics with other French and continental breeds. The French grazed their livestock in unfenced fields, and it was necessary for the dogs to keep the flocks out of nearby

crops, and move them from pasture to pasture. It is likely that it worked similarly to the Pyrenean Shepherd (above) when working in flat and inhabited areas. It was also required to guard and protect the flock from predators. The Picard works sheep or cattle, but the difference is those that work cattle must be able to

utilise a head-bite to get the respect of the herd.

The Berger Picard became a casualty of the two World Wars when its population was decimated and the breed became nearly extinct; and it remains a rare breed today. Numbers are purposely kept small by conscientious breeders, though this may also limit the gene pool. A number of the world's kennel clubs, including French, British, and American, recognize it and it is registered with the FCI. Picards are shown in dog sports today and have appeared in several films in the last few years, most notably Because of Winn-Dixie. [22]

#### Ardennes Cattle Dog or Bouvier des Ardennes

Ardennes is in the northeast of France on the Belgian border. The Bouvier des Ardennes developed in Belgium, or perhaps Belgium was just the first to propose a "standard", but it is claimed as a breed by both Belgium and France and is called "Franco-Belgian" by the FCI. Perhaps it should have been left for the next article, when the northern European countries, including Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands will be covered, but because we are covering France here, and Ardennes is in France, I decided to include the Bouvier Ardennes in this one. This is a breed that is more similar in looks to the Picard, above, than to its cousin, the



Photo de 1913

A very grainy photo from 1913 shows a Bouvier des Ardennes - note how much it resembled the Picard back then [28]



Martina Aufrecht

A Bouvier des Ardennes today herding sheep at Schäferei Hollenstein farm in Germany



Bouvier des Flandres. Some also claim it is the breed from which the Picard developed (or vice versa), but the truth probably is that they both developed from similar local stock.

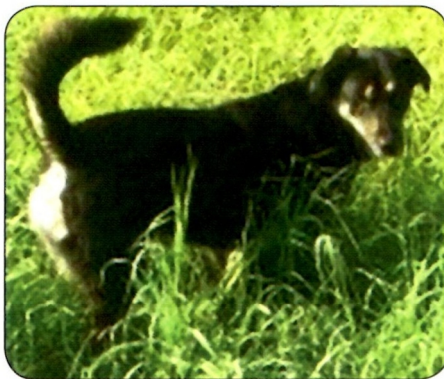
In the past, all cattle-herding dogs in France were called bouvier (bovine- or cattle-herder) and, like many other breeds, each area had its own type. The Ardennes was used by cattle drovers and as farm dogs, which made it a tireless and versatile worker. The Ardennes is a medium sized dog. Males are between 22 and 24 inches at the shoulder, females 20 to 22 inches. It is often called the "other Bouvier" or the "small Bouvier", as the Bouvier des Flandres is both better known and larger. Also, the Ardennes has naturally pricked ears while the Flandres' ears are usually cropped. The Ardennes also has a natural bobbed tail. Its coat is short, harsh, and crisp, the coat of a working dog, with slight bearding around the muzzle and eyebrows, and is "allowed" in all colours except white.

As we have seen, many herding dogs were thought to be on the verge of extinction when they were "discovered" by someone—in the Ardennes case someone doing cattle research—and an association was formed to "rescue" the breed. Rescue, as we have seen, has always meant the development of a physical standard, the breeding of a uniform type, and eventually, recognition by the FCI. The Ardennes as a breed is fortunate that its rescuers seemed to have understood that diversity is the real hedge against extinction and that herding ability is more important than looks to a working dog. The Ardennes is still used as a working sheep and cattle dog in France, Belgium, and Germany, perhaps despite its recognition by the FCI. [23]

#### Savoyard Shepherd Dog or Berger du Savoie

This breed does not belong here. It is an Alpine breed from Savoy in the southeast of France, and should have been included in the previous article. Nevertheless, I did say that dogs were coming out of the woodwork and we'd have to revisit areas again some time. Since it's from the south of France, albeit the Alps region, it might as well be included here. It is described as a guardian/mastiff/molosser-type[6] but more resembles the other Alpine breeds. It is a medium-sized dog, used as a herder and guardian, is an endangered breed, is one of the less-known French herding breeds, and is not registered with the FCI.

There is little information available on this breed. It is an old type that was once widely used on dairy farms throughout Savoy, but not elsewhere. It herds sheep, cattle, and goats, and guards the herds and homestead. It was also used to pull carts and sleds to transport milk. The Berger de Savoie is about 21 inches at the shoulder and has a smooth or moderate rough coat. Like other Alpine breeds it comes in merle (blue, slate, or red), but also comes in sable, black-and-tan and tricolour.



A black and tan Savoyard (photo Francis Vandersteen of Groupe Milouchouchou [www.milouchouchou.com](http://www.milouchouchou.com))



A sable Savoyard (photo 'Vos Chiens' courtesy Jeanne Joy Hartnagle-Taylor, [stockdogsavvy.wordpress.com](http://stockdogsavvy.wordpress.com))

Today its numbers are few, and in 2002 farmers and veterinarians came together to form the Société du Berger de Savoie to develop a standard (uh-oh) and help the breed recover. [24]

#### ITALY

#### Italian Shepherd or Cane Paratore Italiano



A black Cane Paratore with his flock

In Southern Italy, transhumance had been from the Tavoliere delle Puglie, a plain in the north of Southern Italy, to the Apennines pastures. The Apennines are a mountain range or chain of mountain ranges running the length of the peninsula of Italy. Transhumant flocks traveled grassy tracks similar to the drove roads of Scotland and Wales, that allowed

the flocks to rest and graze during a journey that took as many as fifteen days. These treks were accompanied by a small to medium-sized herding dog, the Cane Paratore Italiano, also called "the dog of the moor".

The Paratore is an ancient race of herding dog that is traced to the wolf by advocates, and indeed, this type has a lupine look about it. It comes in wolf (agouti or wild pattern) with a black mask, grey brindle, leopard (merle), black, sable, and tan. The Paratore has a hard, medium rough coat and is sometimes bearded, with a thick undercoat. The ears are erect or semi-erect. They have exceptional toughness, agility, stamina and strength. It is very diverse in looks and it is said that bitches in heat sometimes will mate with wolves and this is considered a "spontaneous restoration of blood lines"[25]. The connection to the wild may be a fact, as these dogs mature earlier than most of our modern breeds, are fiercely protective of their young, and have a proven immune system. The Paratore works similarly to the Oropa that we talked about in the previous article.

Most of the transhumance in Italy today is in the north, so the Paratore is not well known and is endangered. [25]

#### Valchiusella Shepherd Dog or Pastore della Valchiusella



A Valchiusella (photo by Pier Vittorio Molinaro, courtesy of [www.Valchiusella.org](http://www.Valchiusella.org))

Another breed that might have been covered in the article on Alpine breeds, the Pastore della Valchiusella comes from an area in the foothills of the Alps. It is a natural breed, one that has not been spoiled by human intervention. Pier Molinaro believes that "The history of this breed is the same [as] that of the hundred[s] of local herd[ing] (and merle) dog breeds scattered from the Pyrenees [mountains] to [the] Caucasus, and probably no different from the history of British curs and collies: unknown in details but clear in selection and isolation mechanisms, like the history of local languages and ethnic populations." [2] The farmers in the area maintain continuous breeding lines among small circles of relatives, friends, and neighbours. Crosses between different lines are mostly made