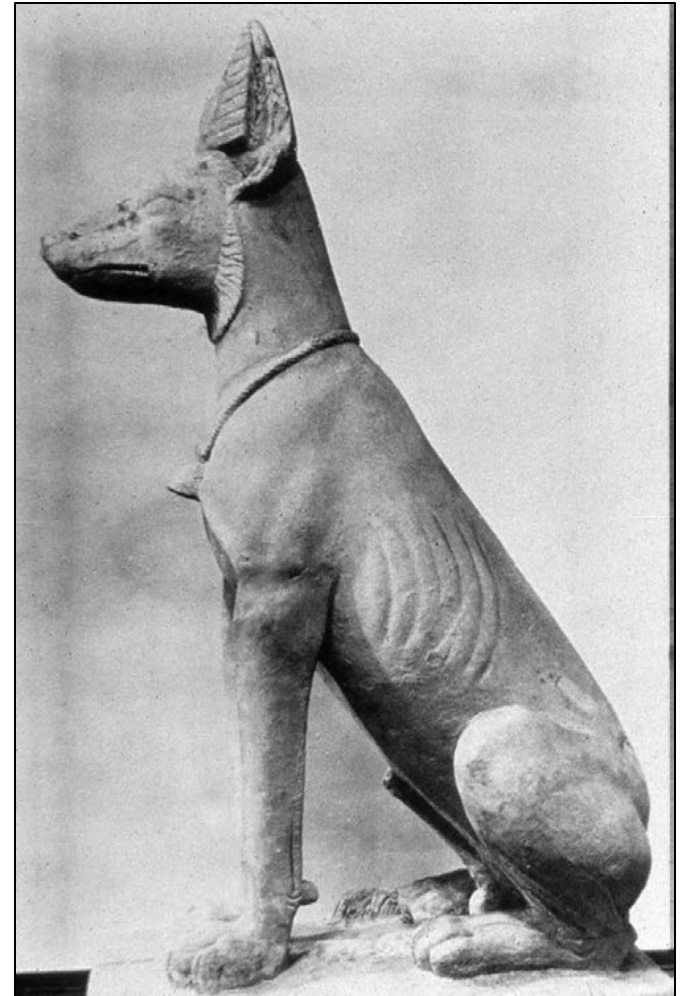


Origin and History of the Basenji

Knowing the origin and history of the Basenji will help you understand your dog's instincts, needs, personality and unique structure and enable you to better care for your pet.

What is a Basenji?

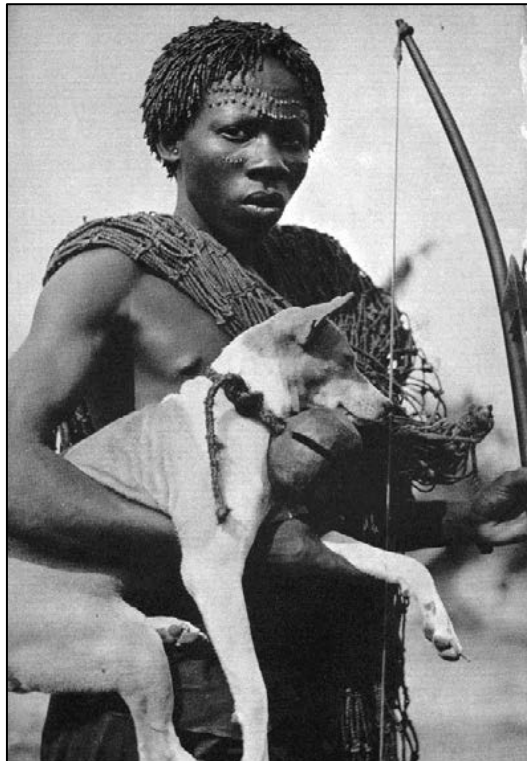
Scientific research has now proven what Basenji fans have long thought: Basenjies are one of the oldest breeds of dogs on this earth. Fans consider the Basenji to be the most beautiful and clever of all breeds. The proud bearing, curly tail, wrinkled brow and sense of humor of the breed is the fan's ideal. Whether hunting or prowling the kitchen, whether proudly posing in the sun or garnering hugs, the Basenji captures the devotion of its owner.



Origin and Early History

Cave paintings from as early as 6000 BC in Libya appear to be Basenji-like pariah dogs. The Egyptians had Basenjis as shown by relics from as early as 3000 BC. Their curled tails and prick ears are clear and they appear to be wearing the typical hunting bells still used in Africa in the Egyptian items.

Dr. Schweinfurth travelled in Africa around 1868 and wrote of the domestic animals. Among the different dogs he found and illustrated, there is one which is surely the Basenji. (See illustration) He found dogs that were clearly Basenjis amongst people who were hunters rather than pastoralists.



Asongo—Meno hunter, armed with hunting net and bow and arrows. The Basenji dog, incapable of barking, drives the game toward the men who are hidden near the nets.

Basenjis were found by many explorer/authors with the Pygmies, one of the oldest people and cultures in Africa, in what was then the Belgian Congo and is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over the years Basenji fanciers studied all these sources of information and had determined that Basenjis were a very old breed.

This breed had survived in Africa for those millenniums because they were good hunting dogs and increased the food larder for their owners. The hardest and most successful hunters would be the ones who survived. Since they did not hunt



Photos from Mereuka's Tomb in Egypt

on leash and often hunted away from their hunters, driving game into nets, they had to have inbred skill and the ability to think on their own. The Basenji personality still reflects that heritage with their independence and self-confidence in their ability to make decisions. This makes a breed that is not a pushover and not particularly easily intimidated.

However, the scientific proof came in articles published in the first decade of the 21st Century based on DNA studies of various breeds of dogs put the Basenji as an early offshoot of canine development. Our very independent and intelligent dogs, have survived for many thousands of years by their ability to help man in the hunt. The Basenji is an all-purpose hunting dog that could help out his people in numerous ways.



*Nkisi in Dog Form from
Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Jungle Hunt

Esther Daniels Hoener

Quoted from *Jungles Ahead!* NY, Friendship Press, 1952
The Basenji July 1983 page 13

Njana walked over to the “talking drum” and beat out his message: “Hark! Every man his spear! Every man his spear!”

“Before the dawn...We got to the forest...The hunger for meat has overcome us...In the morning...from the village of Njana, we go on a hunt...”

Eyene, young son of Njana, called the hunting hounds. When he took the collars with the pod-shaped iron bells from the bark wall, the dogs whined in excitement. The barkless Basenji of the central African forest, small, short haired, quick footed, is an ideal hunter in thick underbrush. The dull jangle of the bells is an exhilarating sound to hunting dogs; they too will eat meat on the morrow. Eyene tied the brace of trembling dog with bush vine to the central pole of his mother’s kitchen. The dogs lay down, protesting the hours till dawn.

The dog bells made a pleasant sound as the company filed through the damp underbrush behind the village cocoa garden in the dense growth of the forest. On signal from the leader, who was following animal tracks, the party spread out in a great circle through the forest. Nets were spread, each holding his position as planned. The husky youths took charge of the dogs. The drummer boys scattered behind; they began an excited rhythm. Eyene caught his breath, set his jaw, and beat with all his might.



Photo in Africa 1987

The rhythm broke with the clatter of bells and the youths urged the dog, “Catch Catch!” Excitement mounted as the dogs scurried back and forth, sniffing the ground through the underbrush. A dog zigzagged past.

There was never a doubt as to when a dog routed an animal. Eyene heard the sudden flurry, a frantic scurry, the jangle and clatter of bells. Excited whines from the dogs, a crackling of brush. Then

shouts of encouragement from the youths. A chant went up. Every man stood at attention in a threatening attitude like a line of driver ants, alert, vibrating with readiness. The forest echoed the wild, glad sound. Traditional hunt songs rose above the din but the men holding the nets stood quiet, not speaking a word lest the animal turn from the nets in flight.

Like a flash, an antelope brushed a net. The man nearest quickly thrust his spear in perfect aim. Eyene knew it because he heard the hunter claim in a loud voice, "To me belongs the thigh quarter." He who arrives first when an animal brushes another's net has claim to the choice portion of the meat.

Together they had an average day's catch of four large antelope, three small. The larger animals were strung on poles and borne proudly on the shoulders of the men.

Basenjis Migrate from Africa?

The first Basenji-like dogs that made it from Africa to the Europe were some seen at 1880. They were called Congo Terriers and a standard was prepared. However, from the illustrations, it would appear the dogs were not our ideal Basenji. The first dogs to be exhibited appeared at Crufts in 1895 and were called African Bush Dogs or Congo Terriers. Unfortunately all the earliest imports into England were lost to the affects of distemper for which there were no vaccinations or during the early, uncertain period of vaccinations for distemper protection.

Finally in 1936 Mrs. Olivia Burns successfully imported Basenjis into England and began breeding them. They were a sensation at Crufts in 1937 and it was no time at all before Basenjis were sent from Mrs. Burn to the United States and Canada to begin the American Basenji story.

Additional imports from Africa to England came between 1938 and 1939 before the War Years interrupted the breed's development in England. It was Miss Veronica Tudor-Williams who, unable to participate in the war effort instead made heroic efforts to keep the breed alive in England through those very lean and difficult times.

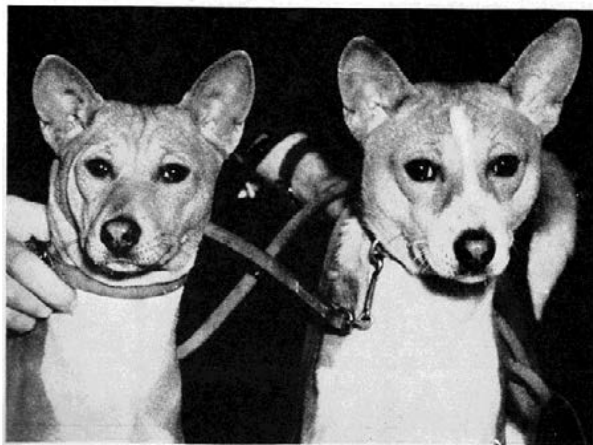


Lady Helen Nutting, President of the Basenji Club of Great Britain, arriving in England with two of her imported dogs.

*1923 Lady Helen Nutting
arriving with dogs from Africa*

Basenjis in America

BERENGARIA BRINGS BARKLESS BUSH DOGS TO U. S.



*Basashi of Blean and Bakuma of Blean
1937 imports from England*

dogs directly from Africa to the United States. The first to arrive was Congo who was a stowaway in the hold of a ship loaded with coffee. The Phemisters took her in and nursed her back to health. Congo was a mostly white girl with patches of brindle color. She became the dam of Phemister's Barrie, CDX who was the first Basenji to obtain an obedience title in 1942. There are no known brindle offspring of Congo.

Additionally in 1941 several Basenjis were included in a shipment of baby gorillas from Africa. Two of this group, Kindu and Kasenyi became important to the breed development both in America and Europe. Kindu won a Group Second when shown in California in 1945. This pair produced Ch. Kingolo who was a sire in the US before being sent to Ireland where he had an influence on the Basenjis in the British Isles. Another son of these two imports was Ch. Philos Blaze of Koko Crater, the first ever championship Best in Show winner in the world.

Basenji fanciers in the US and Canada leaped into the breed with enthusiasm from the earliest opportunity. Two of the first Basenji was Bakuma of Blean and Basashi of Blean in 1937. Interestingly Bakuma was lost sight of and came into the possession of early fanciers Mr. and Mrs. Al Phemister who named him Phemister's Bois. Bois was the pet name of Bakuma. Bois became important in early breeding in America. Bois was the sire of the first American Kennel Club champion, Ch. Phemister's Melengo who completed her title in 1945.

In 1940 Basenjis came from Miss Tudor-Willaims to Toronto where Dr. Richmond showed Kwillo of the Congo to his Canadian championship. Kwillo was the first Basenji champion anywhere in the world.

1941 saw the importation of



Barkless Basenji dogs, mute but fearless, came from Africa with the gorillas, made friends with them. They chased the little apes around, were playfully tossed about.

The popular movie “Goodbye, My Lady” came out in 1950 giving a boost to the breed’s popularity. In the year 1951 a total 151 Basenjis were registered with the American Kennel Club and by 1957 that number was up to 651.

1957 saw the beginning of the career of Am. Can. Ch. Dainty Dancer of Glenairley who became the first multiple Best in Show winner and she did it in both countries for a total of seven Bests in Show.

Meanwhile back in England two more African imports arrived in 1959. Miss Tudor-Williams, Michael Hughes-Hall and Col. John Rybot went to Africa and returned with Fula of the Congo and M’Binza of Laughing Brook, “Tiger”. Fula became very important to the breed and Tiger was the first brindle and white Basenji to come to England.



Promotional photo from the movie Good Bye My lady



The four standard Basenji colors

About Colors

Tiger went back to live with Michael Hughes-Hall in South Africa where he became a champion. Unfortunately he did not produce any brindle offspring so the color variation seemed to be lost.

All the early successful Basenji imports from Africa had been red and white. In 1947 the first tri-colors outside of Africa were born in a litter bred by Miss Tudor-Williams from two red and white Basenjis. One of them came to the United States where he became Am. Ch. Black Idol of the Congo. The first Hound Group winner was a niece of Black Idol, Am. Ch. Black Mist of the Congo in 1952.

In 1959 Marlise Kennels imported a black and white from Liberia but the American Kennel Club would not register the bitch as their stud book for Basenjis was closed. Khajah’s Black Fula Challenge was the first black and white to be registered with the American Kennel Club in 1964. He was genetically a recessive coloring and recessive black tend not to have pure black color, instead there is some admixture of red in the black. Back in Africa, particularly in the south of Africa, where there was lively activity with Basenjis

early on, and in Liberia, where missionaries and workers at the Firestone rubber plantations took an interest in the breed, breeders produced the first pure black and white Basenjis to be exported. Mrs. Elspet Ford developed a line of black and whites from the female Miliku, brought from Liberia to Rhodesia. The breedings in South Africa were crosses between English, American and African native dogs. Dogs were exported to and from Gwen Stanich in the United States during the 1960's. This is the source of the first pure black and whites in the United States. These dogs were registered with the American Kennel Club based on their South African registrations. When Mrs. Elspet Ford returned to England in 1965, she brought South African Ch. Taysenji Tazhu with her. He was the sire of the first black and white champion made up outside of Africa, Mirrie Cardew's Eng. Ch. Taysenji Yoko who completed his title in 1969. Additionally Liberian import to the U.S., Kiki of Cryon, was used combined with English lines to develop another source of the pure black and white color.

The brindle and white color once thought lost, was re-introduced when Jon Curby organized two additional trips to Africa in 1987 and 1988. The groups returned with reds, tri-colors and brindles. The top winning Basenji ever at AKC shows comes down from these brindle imports. The brindle and white male, Am/Can Ch Zindika's Johnny Come Greatly JC, born in 1995, has won the BCOA National Specialty 4 times and a total of 59 all-breed Bests in Show.



Johnny is Top BIS Winner.

And More Foundation Stock?

Those additional imports were added to the gene pool because the American Kennel Club was convinced by the Basenji Club of America that our breed should increase its foundation. Fourteen dogs were registered in 1990 from those two trips. It was believed at that time those dogs would be the final imports.

In 2008, the Basenji Club of America petitioned AKC again and the Stud Book was opened for an additional five year period. In 2009 ten additional dogs imported from Africa were registered. In 2010 three additional dogs are being considered for registration. 2010 also saw an additional trip to Africa and we hope to see those in the steps to registration soon.

Were these latest groups of dogs from Africa brought just to bring the brindle color? Absolutely not! The original foundation stock of Basenjis was about a dozen. This is not a healthy number to found a closed breed of any animals. It is genetically weak. While, bringing dogs simply to increase numbers is not useful, bringing typical specimens and using them to strengthen the breed makes a great deal of sense. The objective of these intrepid souls who spent their own time and money was to improve the potential for good health in the breed by increasing the gene pool available for breeders.



Avongara Elly: 1990 Registered Foundation Stock



If this brief summary has just wet your appetite for Basenji history, visit the Basenji University Course #103, “Basenji Timeline” where there is a great deal more Basenji information to be found.

2010 Meringa River, Democratic Republic of the Congo