

Pariah Dog of the Congo

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The pariah dogs of the Congo belt are generally fawn, yellow, red or white, more rarely variegated. The tail is commonly carried close to the ground; occasionally it is curled up. These dogs usually howl, but do not bark. In villages in which they form a source of meat their condition approaches frequently that of a well fed pig: thus, the Ekoi, Yaunde, Banyangi, Babunda and Achewa of equatorial Africa castrate the males to speed up the fattening process (Kroll, 1929). But among the Bantu and other peoples not keen on their flesh, they are usually starved and neglected. Exceptional in this respect are the dogs of the Batwa of the Congo. The Batwa are hunters and gatherers devoid of domestic animals save dogs

and occasionally a few hens. The dogs are used in packs of three or four in the chase; they are treated better and show considerably higher intelligence than the common pariah dogs of the cultivators (Von Wissmann, 1883, 1890).

The dogs of the Mangbattu and Azande (Nyam-Nyam), true African peoples of the Ubangi-Uele basin, in the Eastern Province of the Congo, are distinguished by a small stature, straight legs, a curled tail, and short smooth coat which is red or yellow in colour with the neck commonly white (Schweinfurth 1918). They have long prick ears, a pointed nose, and well defined stop. Cranially the Azande and Mangbattu dogs have been classed with *C.f. palustris* (Antonius, 1922).

The dogs of the Bongo, closely related to those of the Nyan-Nyam, are slightly larger in size, possibly owing to the influence of pariahs from the Upper Nile. They have fawn coats and long bushy tails carried close to the ground. Schweinfuth (1918) noted the peculiar erectability of the dorsal hair on the Bongo dogs, which is exhibited at the emotion.

While the dog of Congoland is nearly always of the fawn pariah type, in Cameroon and in Lunda and Kioko, Angola, large black dogs do occur; "their origin is undoubtedly Portuguese" (Johnston, 1907). The larger types of northern Congo, on the other hand, may be derived from the Sudan. "Nowhere in Negro Africa or in Upper Egypt is there a trace of the handsome, Eskimo-like, Chow-like dog which is so characteristic a feature in the life of the Berbers and Tuarey of Northern Africa and the Sahara Desert, nor of the primitive greyhound type (slugi), also found in that region." The Ituri pygmies have no domestic animals except – and this is not everywhere – prick eared fox yellow dogs (Johnston, 1902); but they do not use them in the hunt (Werth, 1944). Stuhlmann (1909) noted the very small size of the dogs of the Aka (Akka) and Ituri pygmies.



45. Pariah dog from the Congo (after Brehm)

46. (left) Pariah dog of the Babwende, Congo (after Stanley)



47. Nyam-Nyam dog (after Schweinfurth)



49. Babangi dogs, western equatorial Congo (after Johnston)

The Basenji: a Western Bantu people, and kindred tribes of the lower Congo, have dogs of typical pariah conformation and the size of Fox Terriers (Tudor-Williams, 1946). The height of the back averages 40 cm, and the weight ranges from 8 to 12 kg. These dogs are used by native hunters for beating game. The head is of moderate length, broad between the ears, flat across the top of the clean-cut skull, slightly dished between the orbits, with the stop little defined. Between the eyes and upon the forehead the skin is wrinkled. Their eyes are rather small, fairly deep-set, and coloured hazel or brown; the ears are pointed, placed far apart, and carried stiffly erect, of medium size and open to the front; the muzzle is fairly sharp but not snippy, with level teeth and a black nose. The neck is rather long and well muscled; the body is compact and flexible, with a deep chest, fairly short and level back, and a moderately lifted loin with strong couplings. The legs are fairly long and springy, straight and of good bone, with small narrow feet having well arched toes. The tail is characteristically curled very tightly over the set-on, the tip generally resting to one side. The coat is short and smooth on a remarkably pliant skin; its colour is rich chestnut-red, yellowish brown or black with white legs, underline and collar, the

white extending from the neck to the nasal part of the head and then in a thin median line into the forehead. This colour pattern is frequent in pariah dogs, not only in Africa but also in Asia. Occasionally Basenji dogs are cream-coloured or black and tan.

Normally these dogs do not bark, but they are capable of very nearly all the sounds common to a dog, with the exception of the yap of a terrier and the bay of a hound (Hubbard, 1946, 48). Basenjis have an annual seasonal mating cycle in contrast with semi-annual non-seasonal cycles of other breeds (Fuller and DuBuis).

The Congo basin is the central area of esteem of the dog. In Africa the eating of dog meat had originally a ceremonial character. The custom of sacrificing and eating dogs is mainly found in the area of West African hoe-cultivators, i.e. in the western and central Sudan, Upper Guinea and the Congo basin. Here the dog is regarded as the mythical conveyor of culture, in particular of the fire. In the area of Ambesi, Angola, east and north-east African this custom has survived only sporadically, having been suppressed by more recent waves of culture, more especially of cattle-breeding people. (Frank, 1965).