

THE ORIGIN OF THE CASTRO LABOREIRO DOG

His origin still remains in the darkness ... but the presence of many Megalith in the area it's one prove of human presence since ancient times in those places.

All the experts agree that all livestock guardian dogs are originally from Euro-Asia (the beginning of domestication) and they are large and powerful animals, used as predation control method.

The Castro Laboreiro original dispersion zone was all the Laboreiro mountains.

The Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog is an autochthonal Portuguese breed, today can be found at Castro Laboreiro.

Castro Laboreiro is, actually, the parish of Melgaço's counsel, belonging to the district of Viana do Castelo. The characteristics of the Castro Laboreiro mountain dog's not a herding dog, but a protective livestock canine, used against predators like wolf today.

He become what he's, mainly, from the traditional lifestyle, typical of the population of that geographical area. There was seasonal migrations like tranzumansa "mudas" between the "Verandas" or "Brandas" and the "Inverneiras" (stimulated by "mother nature"). People move (to feed the Livestock) between one place in the winter to another place in the summer. These cyclic migrations "mudas", and always to the same places, were undoubtedly due to geographical limitation of the race. Note that was small migrations range areas, a few kms apart, "mini-tranzumansa"- "mudas".

This lifestyle was fundamental to the breed, since it allowed the fixation of phenotypic traces and genetic ones, which evolved and were maintained by the exclusive motive of their good performance as a working dog. In the past, the genetic variability was never unbalanced, because there was sufficient population size. The great number of livestock generated many working posts for the Castro Laboreiro dog, not allowing the presence of other canine breeds.

Another unique characteristic of the Castro Laboreiro dog were the "Vezeiras", the pastoral community system in which the native livestock, in a great number, would move in groups to the pastoral areas, being guarded by one of the owners and a shepherd. Generally the dog from Laboreiro Mountains, protects the livestock on its own, without the presence of the owner or shepherd.

In contrast the " Estrela mountain dog", besides traditionally guarding only sheep and in the presence of the shepherd, also had a large area of migration towards the South - Alentejo - North - Trás -os-Montes - and to the interior of the Spanish "Estremadura", not counting all the different accesses that the "Estrela mountains" have. This vast area accessibility undoubtedly exposed the Estrela Mountain Dog" to genetic influences of other breeds, compared with the "remote and lost" and semi isolated Castro Laboreiro Dog (note that the firth road to Castro Laboreiro village was open in the 40s, so since that time those access was through the mountains and through "old" Roman routine) .

The Castro Laboreiro dog kept to themselves, for a long time, in a relative state of purity:

- Because they always satisfied, in a complete way, the needs of those mountain populations, concerning their way of working and their temperament
- Being a very rustic and perfectly balanced dog, due to its natural physic-behavioral characteristics and its adaptation to the environment.
- By the "Castrejo" lifestyle and the lack of access, due to the geographic isolation and the type of natural reproduction--with practically no human intervention.

The bitch was left alone to "mother nature" exposing them to their natural reproduction instincts (natural reproduction aptitude), a few weeks later, she will get birth her litters (in general big litters, 6-10 pups). The people there only let 2 or 3 pups to the birth, the rest of the litter is eliminated. So the big selection tools were natural tools and luck. They don't use any breeding pro program or scientific tools, as a way to get the breeds as they got with natural selection all over the centuries. There are some cases (wild reproductive behavior) that the "shepherd"/"Castrejo" must follow the bitch (after given their food) to the mountain trying to find some cave or hole in the ground with the litters, because the bitch get birth some ware far from home, because she wants a safe and quiet place for her.

In "old days" the litter father was supposed to be the dominant male from that area (his reproductive territory), which would defend and severely protect, fighting others males sometimes with high aggressive, with killing intention when facing other equivalent reproductive behavior. Some people prefer females, because they stays more time with the livestock, males spend more time out during the year to their natural reproductive behavior. During that time they are not working as Pro Guardian Dog, they are worried with their natural reproduction and stressing season.

This ancient and rustic native breed, the Castro Laboreiro, still maintains the strength and bravery of those born to defend livestock from its natural actual predator, the wolf, as well as to protect its owner's property.

WOLF DOMESTICATION

Both man and wolf are super-predators as well as social animals.

In the beginning both were hunters but in time...

The man, due to his intelligence, domesticated plants (as an agriculturist) and animals (as a shepherd) even without quitting hunting.

Thus, the wolf saw his territory being frequently invaded, having for this reason the necessity to face man threat, since the man was persecuting his "natural food" by hunting and violating his territory to make pasturage for his domestic animals.

The wolf, seeing his natural quarry disappearing, turned his attention towards the livestock.

However, these two social groups - men and wolves - were similar, as both acted in organized groups following strategies and guided by a leader. Due to the life style likeness, both were in permanent rivalry. The primitive human society was powerless before the lupine society, but the human brain concluded that the best "bio-weapon" against this powerful competitor was the "domesticated wolf" - the dog.

This one would have a body size and an intelligence "similar" to the wolf ; and, due to his social character, easily integrated himself into the "human pack".

The origin of the livestock guarding dogs was the human race necessity of protection against wild predators. The purpose of this kind of dogs isn't kill wolfs (not hunting wolf dogs). The objective to use the Livestock Guardian Dogs is to provoke an interference he in wolf ritual hunting tactics, so the presence of this kind of breeds disturb the wolf natural hunting concentration and strategy.

When comparing similar canine; mass vs weight with wolf vs LGD the wild cousin get always the advantage in power and "weapons". So for me that's the reason that generally the LGD are larger canids (mastiff type) but never giant canids as a way to counterbalance his natural domestic inferiority.

In general the animal activity is inverse to the mass of the animal for ex. a smaller animal should be more active than a bigger animal, by biological limitations. Comparing with dogs in general bigger dogs are more slow dogs in terms of biological function (in giant dogs it's normal to see lethargic behavior canids), but animals and special dogs don't have only biological mass they have also his typical (historical) behavior/typical character associated to their body. So human played with this tools; biological function (less changeable), biological mass/anatomy and behavior/character (more changeable) to create all the actual breeds. The mastiff type dog tend to be naturally less active (more calm) that's good to stay in the pasturage without disturb the livestock activity, those king of dogs are powerfully canids. The pendant ears can contribute to lose some auditive potential and contribute to the growth of the other senses like vision and smell. All good tracking hunting dogs they get the primitive wolf ears transformed to pendant ears to increase the nose power and reducing distraction and improving attention and concentration. So it's possible that those goals were also used for LGD building anatomy to increase the attention, concentration efficaciously. Comparing with herding dogs, those dogs have different body anatomy and behavior because they have different job to do (more active and dynamic canine with hunting behavior/instincts, they need to receive orders by voice so the original erect ears and he don't need to fight predators so they are lighter canids in general.)

The wolf must survive without any human help and protection, but the domestic dog can do the some because he has his ancient "roots" but not as well as the wild cousin. So with human help food and protection they can be more potent/massive canids. The semi-wild dogs or Wolfdogs hybrids are potentially danger canids because they can look like a wolf (similar phenotype), but they don't have his typical behavior (avoid human contact) so they don't fear man, and the probability of human aggression it's a fact.

In case of confrontation the Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog must face his wild ancestor, and so he must have body and spirit (strong constitution and courage) to make predator opposition to protect the human livestock.

Thus the LGD became an indispensable, vigilant protector and defender of human properties and animals, as well as a faithful companion in poverty and wealth.

HISTORICAL NOTES ON CASTRO LABOREIRO

A local tradition says that Castro Laboreiro was founded by St. Rosendo, grandson of Hermenegildo, to whom Afonso III of Leon gave the lands of Lima as a prize for the victory achieved against the Count of Witiza. The population developed around and near the Castle which was raised on a steep hill, almost inaccessible, forming a kind of fort due to its construction.

Castro Laboreiro is a place that has been isolated from everything, since access points to the village were few and difficult. Thus, the Castro Laboreiro dogs were maintained, for a long time, in relative purity, since they satisfied completely those mountain populations, being therefore a well adapted dog, perfectly balanced and little exigent.

Topographically, the region of Castro Laboreiro is surrounded by tall, vast and wild granitic mountains, up to the sky. The land is poor and due to its topography, non-mechanized; thus, the land has to be worked by human labour or with the plough and oxen. Crops are raised only for subsistence and self-consumption; livestock pasturage being the more profitable.

The traditional pasturage followed since ancient times shows a consistent logic between tradition and environment. This system is the result of the articulation and adaptation between the people and the specific conditions of the environment. In the particular case of Castro Laboreiro there is a local characteristic: the one of having two houses denominated as "Brandas" and "Inverneiras".

The "Brandas" are the places occupied by the shepherds from springtime until the end of autumn; they are the higher places of the Sierra, more exposed to the sun, but during wintertime they also are the most "punished" by the snow and cold winds. Besides having his own fields, the shepherd also has the possibility of taking advantage of the enormous fields for his livestock where they can run free, accompanied by all the dogs. These "Brandas" are situated in the two margins of the Laboreiro river.

The "Inverneiras", traditionally occupied from 15 December to 15 March, are situated in the right margin of the same river.

The extensive pasturage reveals an important control action of the vegetation in the fallow land, contributing to a cleaning action, making easier future use of the land for production of cereals and pasture. Another big advantage of the pasturage is the reduction of fire risk, as well as the dung that animals leave in the land which contributes to the fertilization of those poor lands.

In face of the adverse life conditions, however, emigration for many became imperative.

The massive exodus of men and young people lead to the fact that all that remained for the active population was old men and some very young people.

It's worth emphasizing that the majority of the resident population is composed of women and old people that give the dog all their caresses and affection, and he recompense with vigilance and intervention power, when necessary, and not even hesitating.

CHARACTER OF THE BREED

The Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog with an excellent character, ideal and incorruptible, guardian of people and properties.

He is a very rustic and dynamic dog. He needs a large space to spend some energy - ideal for houses with big grounds or farms.

He "patrols" his territory by instinct, verifying periodically all the places at his guard, making sure that no strangers came in and also to show his presence around.

The standard behavior of this type of canine is to stay with the livestock on their own, in contrast with other breeds that normally stay with the livestock accompanied by the shepherd. His function is to watch and protect. This kind of dogs stays with the livestock alerting and reacting to the approach of other animals and strange people.

Regarding its natural characteristics, we can see that he has genetically strong character/temperament, he is very dominant, brave, extremely dynamic and incorruptible, being a wonderful guardian of livestock, people, and lands. The Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog is a mix of balance, rusticity and determined intelligence.

As a help for the shepherd, this dog goes out with the cattle following them as a "shadow" to the marsh or the upland, coming back with them at noon.

He prefers to rest in high places with a big visual amplitude.

Yet he is very meek, caressing and playful with his owners, and keeps an extraordinary fidelity. This dog also has an excellent character to deal with children of the family, tolerating all the "ill-usage" - pulling the ears, the tail, hugging, etc.

He is always in a good mood, he is patient, playful and very careful with children, always possessing a strong feeling of protection and suspicious towards strangers, be they people or dogs.

He is reserved in nature. If you're not from the house, he becomes suspicious, because you could be an intruder.

He's jealous dog with others dogs when the master is close, special when giving affection. He's not a noisy dog, who barks for everything, when he barks it's something going on.

Suspicious by nature, he doesn't like strangers. He is not an evil dog, but when he is intimidated or defied he becomes an implacable and terrible opponent.

This breed has a dominant and strong character, obliging someone of the family to be the "leader" without hesitating, but not abusively. The master must exercise his authority only when necessary and from the time the dog is a puppy, leading him to do what he wants, without violence but with patience - an easy task, due to his intelligence; there is only some stubbornness, easily surpassed by the master's insistence.

These dogs must respect the master; never be afraid of him.

The master must be an orienting/supervisor/companion; never a dictator.

Most of these behavior characteristics are not easy to observe in quick visit to their solar because as "working dog" he leave with the livestock early in the morning and get back only at the end of the day. So to see this typical behavior it's necessary to go with them to the pasturage areas and spend some time in those places.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BREED

The Castro Laboreiro is a native pastoral Portuguese breed recognized by the Club Português de Canicultura - C.P.C. (Portuguese Kennel Club), with an official standard since 1935, and belonging to the 2º group. This national breed is officially recognized by the F.C.I.

The Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog is a pure mountain breed, a mastiff and wolf-like canine type, and authentic historic-cultural product, "ancient" guardian, due to his fidelity, courage and resistance.

It's a very rustic breed and, for this reason, a very well-adapted one.

It's characterized by a strong and compact head, "dry", not fleshy, with muzzle shorter than skull; lips very well fitted to the maxillary, not being pendent (blobber-lipped); from a side view the skull is longer than the muzzle. It has a soft stop.

An always attentive and penetrating expression that, along with a fulvous fur, gives him an "unfriendly look" - the fearsome expression that should be sufficient to ward off unwelcome visitors to the master's home or property.

The eyes are oblique (not frontal position), elliptic (not round shape), color always brown - more or less dark.

The more light-colored eyes are associated with a more opened coat, denominated by the autochthonous as "mountain color" # , the darker eyes are associated with a darker coat color.

The ears are triangular of an insertion above the average and perfectly parallel to the head; when attentive, he turns ahead it's external front.

The hair is medium size, very dense and resistant (strong); they possess undercoat, but not cotton. The color coat is brindle type - Ebr- allele marks yellow areas with stripes of black, creating a mosaic of light and dark pigmentation. In this kind of color coat many genes are involved and the interactions among them influencing the final phenotype, sometimes very interesting.

In other words, they have a mixed pattern coat color with grey, black and some brown, yellow mixing with a large pattern variety and intensity. The most preferred by the local people's the "mountain color" # it works as an excellent camouflage in the solar mountains and environment as the wolf. Some coat hairs don't have a full and uniform color but two color and others a gradient color all over the hair length.

The Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog are robust, with a strong bone structure and very steady, as all the typical mountain dogs.

The silhouette is rectangular, haughty, imposing and of medium large size.

The teeth are very strong, scissor-bite.

The neck is short, strong and compact, and without curb. It is well attached to the trunk and with a perfect cephalic insertion, permitting the head to have an haughty look.

The chest is in ogive form, high, large and profoundly regular.

The lumbar zone is strong, wide and very brawny. The croup presents as slightly higher than the withers (garrote), with smoothly ascendant top line to the tail, permitting a loose and quick walk.

The tail is stout, well covered with hair, falling down to the hock, when he is quiet; when he is in high spirits, the tail stays in scimitar, surpassing the back line.

The feet are round and may show single or double dew-claws (spurs) in the back feet (not recommended for livestock work).

He has a very typical bark in various tones, similar to wolves.

Bitches show a well-defined femininity, which differentiates them immediately from the males.

He's a middle/large breed not a giant one. HEIGHT should be between 57-71 cm or 23-28" and WEIGHT should be between 30-45 kg or 74-111 lb *

"mountain color" - wild color type, grayish with more and less deep tones, tending to black, brown or reddish hairs.

* These measure above are not official, they are different from the "old" official breed standard. The official CLD are old measures and ridiculous for this type of dog. It's lamentable that actual CLD standard measures are the same since 1935 they are old-fashioned measures (Males 55 to 60 cm Females 52 to 57 cm). But there's another big problem; no one knows how many of these canine breeds were measured in 1935 and it was not made any biometrical study to make those official measures, so it's absurd and inconceivable to use those antique numbers in the XX century as official and for working dogs. They are becoming mini dogs, kennel dogs and city dogs, they are losing their mountain dog body and spirit.

A "FORGOTTEN JEWEL" VERSUS A "DYING BREED"

The Castro Laboreiro mountain dog is an historic-cultural product, "ancient" guardian of animals, of an incontestable fidelity, courage and resistance.

Millenarian and rustic, the endangered dog of Castro Laboreiro mountains still maintains the strength and bravery of those born to defend the cattle from their natural predator, the wolf, as well as to protect its owner's properties.

This breed is a real standard of the Portuguese "Castro" culture in the Laboreiro Mountains.

Many factors have been contributing to the apocalypse of this breed in its own original place:

- the returning of some emigrants, once they bring along other breeds, specially the German Shepherd;
- the improving of approaches to the village and tourism lead to the "transit" of other dogs;
- hunting lead to the increase in some breeds and loss of other breeds, specially the "Podengo";
- poisoning--the death of livestock is always related to the wolf's presence (whether they are killed by wolves or not). The delay of the indemnity payments leads the people to placing poisoned baits, hoping the wolf returns and dies. The dogs - due to their hard working conditions - are tempted by the baits, and die in place of the wolves;
- the decline of the weak agriculture brought a significant reduction of the effective livestock breeders (bovine, ovine, caprine and equine), that were the major occupation of the breed.

Thus, the abandonment of the fields is directly proportional to the lack of working places for the Castro Laboreiro dog, in his original duty.

Besides this, we must add the lack of care of the "Castrejos" in the maintenance of their own breed, once the actual natural reproduction conditions (in the absence of other canine breeds, the Castro Laboreiro dogs reproduced like the wolves - among themselves and with the dominants), also contributed to the collapse of the breed in it's original place.

Some phenotypical defects such as the bad insertions of the ears, the white parts in the chest and feet are not big news. In fact, we already had some specific news about these deficiencies since the 30's and the 60's. The "modern" deficiencies are: the big eyes seeming like "coming out" of the orbits and their yellow-topaz color, the extremely dark fur, the very triangular head and the ridiculous sizes some of these dogs present. (see - singular characteristics page)

The successive "fashions" that make breeders and general people prefer foreign dogs, leads to the abandonment of this Portuguese treasure.

Yet the Castro Laboreiro dog is used by Portuguese military forces, such as the marines, doing everything the other military forces do with the German Shepherd.

The contest promoted by the priest Aníbal Rodrigues from Castro Laboreiro parish, has been trying, for a long time, to guide the preservation and improvement, as well as to divulge the excellent characteristics of the Castro Laboreiro mountain dogs. This local contest has been made every 15 August since 1954.

With the increase of criminality and violence, we started having some real "canine fashions" that brought dogs like the German Shepherd, the Boxer, the Doberman and, more recently, the Rottweiler, as guard machines, to defend and attack. These imported breeds sometimes (or most of them) that enter our Portuguese market are of poor quality with enormously expensive prices.

We have to get people interested in using the Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guardian Dog because it is a rare national breed with a reputation known since thousands of years in that job.

Due to the abandonment of this breed by breeders and general Portuguese population, AAC-CCL is proceeding to an information, sensitization and valorization campaign for this noble Portuguese breed.

RAISING AND TRAINING THE CASTRO LABOREIRO

The dog of Castro Laboreiro has a real devotion and passion for his owner and incredible suspicion of strangers - typical characteristics, that make him an undoubtedly faithful guardian of things and people. This strong character and mood, although natural, are also intrinsically related to the way the dog is raised.

The Castro Laboreiro mountain dog (male or female) does not need to be trained to become a good guardian; it's enough if they are raised with no contact, at all, with strangers and inside their own territory, so they can "create" their natural aversion to strangers.

The Castro Laboreiro Livestock Guarding Dog is always self-confident once he knows when the situations need his aggressive intervention or not, not depending on his master's order.

The dog must be raised in a balanced environment, with caresses and respect from his owner.

The formation of his character is of great importance because his instinct is in his blood; so we guide and orient him, not exaggerating anything.

The dog (as a social animal) must feel he "owns" his "pack". His pack (master and family) must be near him and he must also receive a grate deal of attention from them. A well-nourished and caressed dog has no more needs! This way, he will never be tempted by strangers to eat poisoned food or to be taken away.

Space is a fundamental thing and has a great influence in the correct and balanced development of this breed's temperament. The different behavior and temperament between dogs raised in free areas in contact with nature and the others raised in normal kennels is notorious. Kennelled dogs normally become aggressive for no particular reason and sometimes even neurotic.

We must never stimulate the dog's natural agressivity or violence, because this kind of dog can be dangerous and cause irreparable damage. Breeders and the general public tend to make a big mistake, confusing ferocity and courage!

The dominant temperament and the strong feeling of territory is evident in this breed, making the Castro Laboreiro mountain dog one excellent and always careful guard.

The dog attacks when disrespected or provoked in his own territory or even when he feels that his "own" are being threatened. There is no reason why his owners shouldn't take him for a walk, as this gesture improves the dog's socialization.

All the animals have, at least, two natural characteristics:

- the defense of his own territory
- the flight (escape) distance.

We take the territory as the area defended by the dog and the flight distance as the minimum distance that the animal permits for others to approach without reacting. The violation of that flight distance is sufficient for the dog to be aggressive, but we must be aware that this same distance is measured differently (by the dog) depending on who is entering his own territory.

Another important point is the reciprocity of trust between master and dog. The Castro Laboreiro mountain dog is, in part, the reflex of his own master. A stranger in presence of the master is not molested by the dog, once he sees no danger from that person, but in case the master becomes excited or anxious he immediately feels it and changes his attitude towards the visitor -- from tolerant he becomes apprehensive and disturbed. In case the dog doesn't trust the visitor, he may even attack!

For this reason, I believe that trust is the major and more important thing that guides the Castro Laboreiro mountain dog.

Behavior with the master

He never attacks the owner, once he has a total devotion for him, being extremely docile, caressing and even playful. In this relationship to his people, the Castro Laboreiro breed is markedly different from the "Serra da Estrela" and other livestock guardian breeds, which have a very independent temperament. The Castro Laboreiro has a strong feeling of affection and protection towards their owns, specially their master, being capable of feeling jealous of the master's affection for other dogs.

Behavior with other members of the family

Besides being a one master dog, the Castro Laboreiro is very playful and tolerant with children and all the other members of the family. But we can't say he has the power of giving the same dose of intimacy to all the members of the pack.

Behavior with strangers

It his hard, as a stranger, to get this dog to play with you or even to respond your call. He may permit you to pet him but he doesn't show any particular pleasure in your presence.

Behavior in training

This dog has an extraordinary ability and capacity of learning, being, for this reason, a very versatile and balanced dog.