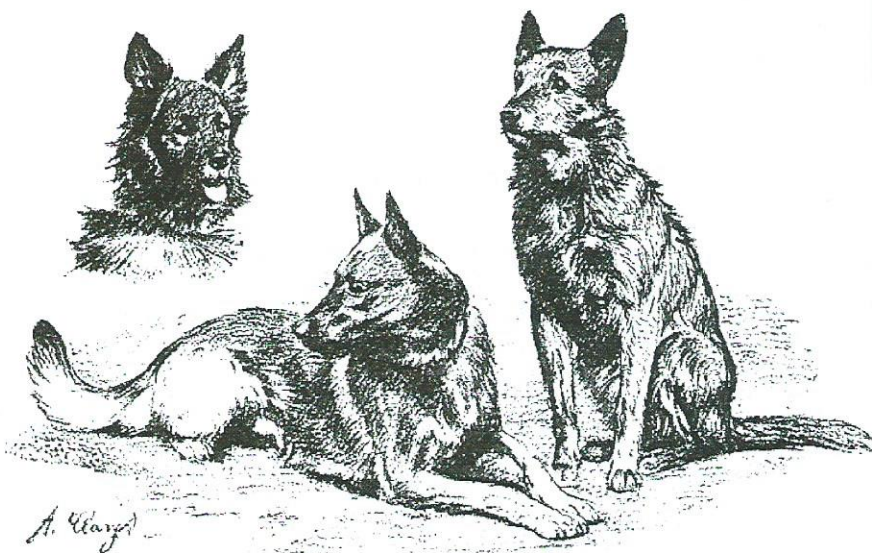




An introduction to varieties of the Belgian Shepherd Dog and its origins

Dogs Queensland Exclusive

Feature breed written by Jody Hafey and Kathryn Winton



There are four varieties of Belgian Shepherd Dog, but the main differences between them is their coat colour and its length. Each has been named after the area which was instrumental to its development:

- The Groenendael featuring a long black coat from the village of Groenendael, south east of Brussels
- The Tervueren displaying a long fawn or grey coat from the small village of Tervuren within Brussels
- The Malinois featuring a short fawn coat from the city of Malines, situated between Brussels and Antwerp
- The Laekenois showing a wire fawn coat from Laeken, a suburb of Brussels

The origins of today's Belgian Shepherd Dog takes us back to six foundation dogs, 'Vos I' and 'Lise', a pale rough coated dog and a brindle short coated bitch.

'Vos I' (Vos de Laeken) was a pale, fawn, rough haired dog, purchased by Adrien Janssens in 1855. Mr Janssens was a shepherd from the suburb of Laeken. Vos I was bred to 'Lise' (Lise de Laeken) who was a short haired brindle brown bitch. Vos I was used over several of his descendants and produced a good foundation not only for the Belgian Shepherd Dogs of today, but the Dutch Shepherd and the Bouvier des Flandres (this line was noted for its homogeneity of type in both grey and fawn, rough and short haired dogs).

Other descendants of Vos I were also used as foundation dogs for various kennels. 'Diane', a brindle-grey short coat, was mated with 'Samlo', a brindle-fawn dog and together they produced 'Tomy LOB 138'.

Tomy was an exceptional guard dog, described visually to possess a 'fawn short coat with black overlay, ideal confirmation and an explicit black mask'. Tomy was used to sire many litters and, in the city of Malines in November 1899, the year 'Tjop LOSH 6132' was born. Tjop became the first Malinois champion in Belgium and possibly the most influential Malinois sire of the early twentieth century.

Two long coated blacks: Picard d'Uccle and Petite

'Picard d'Uccle' and 'Petite' were both long haired black dogs owned by Nicolas Rose. Mr Rose owned the restaurant and café Chateau de Groenendael, south-east of Brussels. Their first known litter was born in 1893, which produced a dog by the name of 'Duc de Groenendael'. Duc was used over the fawn long coated 'Miss' and, in 1896, produced the first Tervueren champion, 'Milsart'.



Picard d'uccle and Duc de Groenendael - Drawing by A. Clarys (1896)



Two long coated fawns: Tom and Poes

'Tom' and 'Poes' were owned by Mr M. Corbeel who was a brewer from the town of Tervuren. Mr Corbeel is the oldest known breeder of the long coated blackened fawn dogs.

In approximately 1895, Mr Corbeel bred his two long coated blackened fawn dogs and they produced the bitch 'Miss'. Miss, as stated previously, was bred to Duc de Groenendael to produce Milsart and also to Piccard d'Uccle. From this mating came Dax, the first Groenendael champion in Belgium.

From that point, a rare breed was established with an appealing physical appearance, which was both intelligent and elegant with a personality found in no other breed. The fame of this breed grew over time and it became popular with foreigners, especially the French and the Americans. Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, the place names of the towns and villages were being used to describe the different varieties of Belgian Shepherd Dogs. This was a way of honouring the kennels in Belgium who were most closely associated with the varieties.

Mr Louis Huyghebaert, from the Heide kennel, a judge and author, was instrumental in the early breeding of the Malinois and the Bouvier. He led a club based in the city of Malines which helped promote and make popular the Malinois, the short coated fawn variety. As Nicolas Rose's kennel was named after his restaurant and café Chateau de Groenendael, it only seemed fitting this long coated black variety was called Groenendael.

The rough coated fawn variety, the Laekenois, was named after Adrian Janssen's kennel, based in Laeken and the long coated fawns and greys were named after Tervueren in honour of Mr Corbeel and his kennels.

A brief history of the working breed

In the late 1800s the Belgian Shepherd Dog was used as a 'moveable fence', moving flocks of sheep and herds of cattle from one pasture to another while protecting the stock as it grazed.

In 1897, dressage trials were developed to assess the three main characteristics a shepherding dog should possess: intelligence, obedience and loyalty. These trials used individual exercises, testing the dogs' ability to leap over high and long obstacles as well as swimming.

They were then combined with protection and they evolved into the field trials known as Belgian Ring Sport.

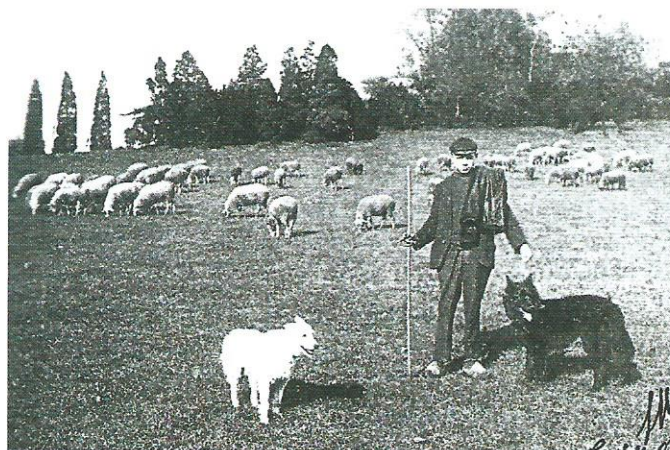
The first trial was held in 1903 in Malines and was won by M. van Opdebeek and his Malinois, 'Cora van't Optewel'. Cora was the dam of 'CH. Tjop LOSH 6132'.

Police dog trials became very popular in Europe prior to the first world war. Belgian Shepherd Dog owners and trainers were very active within these trials and over four consecutive years, the Groenendael, 'Jules de Moulin' and his trainer M. Tedesco won the World Champion Title.

In 1899, a police dog unit was set up in the city of Ghent. They started with three dogs as a trial and was so successful that they increased the number to ten before the year was up. They found them to be an impressive and formidable weapon. Other cities also set up police dog departments, but in the end only the city of Brussels department persevered for around twenty years.

During World War One (between 1914 through to 1918) the Belgian Shepherd Dog was used as a messenger dog, Red Cross dog, ambulance cart dog and light machine-gun cart dog.

Field trials continued throughout the years with the introduction of tracking and Belgian Shepherds Dogs continued to excel within these trials. The breed continues to be of use today with the RAAF Air Force and police services using Belgian Malinois as reliable service dogs.



An old postcard - In the park of Laeken



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The breed in Australia today

The first Belgian Shepherd Dogs were imported to Australia in 1974. The breed is widely known today for being excellent family dogs, with a natural affinity for children. They are very loyal and loving, they display exemplary levels of willingness to please and their high intelligence makes them a breeze to train.

They are the dog of choice for overseas dog sports such as obedience, agility and other disciplines. Sadly, in Australia, the major stakeholders of the breed are not active in dog sports so there are limited examples of the breed being campaigned and thus, keeping the breeds' superior working abilities secret to those in the know.

In Australia today we see Belgian Shepherd Dogs competing at top levels of Obedience, Agility, Herding, Dancing with Dogs, Jumping and other disciplines. Many owners, however, like to keep their faithful dogs at home just as beloved family pets. This breed's non-smell coat, and seasonal coat shedding lends itself to a dog being allowed to stay indoors with their family rather than relegated to the back yard. The breed also thrives on human contact.

The breed in Australia is considered to be very healthy, with a naturally structured square body shape with a good history of ethical breeders that have upheld health testing practices of all breeding stock for many generations of dogs.

This means that hip and elbow health across the gene pools is considerably better on average than many other breeds, and will continue as healthy as long as breeders of today and in the future maintain vigilant health testing regimes. Eye tests are undertaken by the most ethical breeders for their breeding stock, with yearly examinations necessary to confirm eye health in the breeding gene pool.

There are no other tests or DNA checks currently available for any other conditions at this time. Epilepsy is the biggest problem that could potentially be alleviated by scientific discoveries enabling DNA testing of breeding stock. Belgian Shepherd Dog breeders continue to live in hope of DNA tests for this.

Interested in owning a Belgian Shepherd Dog?

Please contact the Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld Inc for further information and a list of breeders that currently undertake steps to health test their breeding stock.

Got a Belgian Shepherd Dog or interested in becoming involved

in the premier breed club for the breed in Australia? Please contact the Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld Inc for membership inquiries.

Belgian Shepherd Dog rescue

The Belgian Shepherd Dog Club of Qld Inc runs a rescue service for the breed in need. If you are interested in adopting, fostering, re-training or rehabilitating dogs in need, the club would love to hear from you.

Reference sources: (Vanbutsele, 2014) (Comstock, 2004)
(<http://www.yourpurebredpuppy.com/reviews/belgianshepherds.html>) (<http://www.bsdcq.com/>)

Photo source extracted from Jean-Marie Vanbutsele's book 'The Belgian Shepherd Dog 125 Years of Illustrated History' 2014

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