Preserving the Future, Enlisting the Past

In August the Native Stock Committee (NSC) submitted the American Kennel Club (AKC) petition to the Board of Directors of the American Lhasa Apso Club. It was unanimously approved and has now been submitted to AKC. If, in the opinion of the AKC Board, the request appears to have merit, AKC will be advised to proceed with a ballot of its membership. It is important to have a complete understanding of what you will be asked to vote on.

The request is:

- Allow the current breeding stock within the Gompa Lhasa Apso Preservation Program, with intact United Kennel Club pedigrees, full AKC registration.

The Breeder Education Conference and the NSC are co-sponsoring a program - Preserving the Future, Enlisting the Past - during National Specialty week in October. What does genetic diversity have to offer the breed? Why is it important to maintain landrace traits? Let Cassandra de la Rosa the program includes a panel of breeders and a Gompa dog available for examination. The event ends with the documentary Tamberine Tenure - The Female for those that haven't seen it. This is the place to get accurate information and have questions answered.

What is a landrace and why is the Lhasa Apso a landrace? The following, penned by Cassandra de la Rosa, Leslie Baumann and Debbie Hoffman was printed in the breed column of the June 2000 issue of the AKC Gazette:

An ancient landrace breed known to have existed as early as 800 AD, the Lhasa Apso is one of the ten closely related modern breeds to the ancestral wolf, according to the study “Genetic Structure of the Purebred Dog” published in Science magazine, May 2004. This hardy mountain canine developed in the heart of the Himalayas with little purported selection. As such, the Lhasa Apso is a significant cultural and spiritual symbol of Tibet, shaped by a combination of the remote, unifying environment and the Tibetan people’s reverence for all living beings, particularly their dogs. In 1942, a British naturalist made a sketch of a small, coasted Tibetan dog and wrote: “Some dogs belong to the race and are much praised by the man for guarding their flocks and herds and hosses, and by the women for petting... For the former purpose the Tibetan Mastiff is used...” The ladies dogs are Poodles or Terriers, many of which are pretty and have long soft hair.

Before the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, it was unusual to find Lhasa Apsoos in monasteries and villages throughout Tibet, faithfully fulfilling their role as a companion and sentinel. A landrace is a recognizable breed of dog that develops according to the dictates of its environment and function rather than purported selection. A landrace will tend to have more variety than a breed purposely fully selected for physical traits. In domesticated dogs, the Border Collie is a landrace. Several varieties developed in the counties along the Scottish-English border depending on what sort of sheep were being worked—shorter or longer or rough-furred sheep. But all the varieties, still exemplified today in the differences between the so-called “show lines” and “working lines,” shared the common traits of having a strong “eye” to control the sheep and the intelligence and stamina to flunk and gather them at a great distance from the shepherd. The Lhasa Apso is another landrace because the mountain environment dictated its overall joints and function, particularly the breed’s weatherproof coat, body shaped for long carrying capacity, courting survival skills and overall hardiness. These traits are consistent a wide variations of size, color and head type existed from town to town and valley to valley. Early British dog fanciers remarked on the variation within the breed, but to Tibetans, the differences were not meaningful. All small, long-haired mate companion dogs were considered to be the same breed, the Apso seng-kyi.

With the Chinese takeover of the government of Tibet in 1959, there has been a spate of genetic “purging” of Tibetans, their culture and history. The Lhasa Apso loses an entire pod of Tibetan life prior to the Chinese invasion, and until recently, semperfido Apsoos were living on their own in the streets of Lhasa and being fed by local residents. In 2002, the Chinese began killing off these dogs and imposing licensing requirements on pets. With below poverty level incomes, the imposition of a licensing fee is beyond most owners’ means. Given the political climate and influx of Han Chinese, it is unlikely that this special breed will continue to survive in its native homeland.

Today, in the USA, there exists a unique group of Lhasa Apsoes known within the family as the Gompa dogs. Gompa is the Tibetan word for a monastery’s main meditation hall. These Lhasa Apsoes are direct descendants of the Lhasa Apsoos from the Drepung monastery in Tibet, where, in 1944, Lama Gyen Yeshe was gifted his first Lhasa Apso by a High Reincarnate Lama. In the 1980s, nine Lhasa Apsoes bred by the late Lama Gyen Yeshe or sired by one of his dogs were brought into Canada. Breed together for a number of generations and successfully registered with the United Kennel Club (UKC). In 2000, the remaining descendents entered the United States as part of a successful rescue. Since then, organized efforts have been made to maintain the dogs and preserve the line.

The Gompa Lhasa Apso Preservation Program (GLAPP), a 501(c)3 organization, is a small population genetics management program perpetuating the genetic lineage of the Gompa Lhasa Apso. For over nine years, the breeding program has been under the supervision of Debbie Hoffman, an AKC Registereed Breeder of nearly 30 years, with 100+ AKC Champions to her credit. Not having undergone selection to a written standard, this unique gene pool represents the Lhasa Apso as it developed as a landrace. GLAPP’s internal database contains records of all dogs being used to perpetuate this genetic lineage and includes DNA Profiling, DNA Parentage Verification and microchip identification. Dogs born within the Preservation Program continue to be registered with UKC.

The current GLAPP breeding stock - 12 Apsos - represents at least 4 generations of breeding... From the original western imports, strictly within the lineage. This has not produced any detrimental genetic problems not already found in the general population of Lhasa Apsoes nor in any greater number of occurrences than in the overall population.

Information and documentation extending back to 1982 is available in the Registry section of the GLAPP website: www.GompaLhasaApsos.com. There is a timeline providing links to documentation from various sources and letters following the early years of this lineage in the western hemisphere. Tables providing detailed information, particularly on the current breeding stock, including photographs, DNA profiles, microchip numbers and pedigrees extending back into each dog’s region of origin ancestors. The Foundation Stock Service® created by AKC as a recordkeeping service, traditionally used by rare breeds working towards full AKC recognition. Recently, AKC allowed the American Tibetan Mastiff Association use of AKC FSS®. The purpose of recording a Lhasa Apso with AKC FSS® is because it or one of its recent ancestors was directly imported from the region of origin without a full three-generation pedigree from an AKC recognized registry, therefore not eligible for registration with AKC.

The NSC Procedures for AKC FSS® Recognition and AKC FSS® Liter Recordation were developed with the help of the American Tibetan Mastiff Association, the Society for the Preservation of the Desert-bred Saluki and the Empire Club of America. To be eligible for consideration, the Lhasa Apso must be considered purebred with ancestry traceable to the region of origin. All Lhasa Apsoes in any generation to be recorded by AKC FSS® must go through the same Critique Process. The owner must submit to the NSC, Registrar position approved by ALAC’s Board of Directors a completed AKC FSS® Recognition Application, color photographs, copies of import export documentation, DNA profile, microchip identification, pedigrees, if available; copies of any registration certificates and pertinent background documentation useful in proving the dog is a purebred Lhasa Apso. The owner will be assigned a Critique Case Number - ICON. The owner will be informed of scheduled dates and locations at which the Lhasa Apso may be presented for critiquing by a panel of three pre-qualified Critique Judges. Upon receipt of three Judges Critique Forms, the judging dog to be a purebred Lhasa Apso. The NSC Registrar will forward the AKC FSS® Application, photograph, supporting documents and a letter certifying that the Lhasa Apso was born to be a purebred Lhasa Apso.

It is extremely rare to be able to expand your breeds gene pool and increase viability with individuals developed in their original environment and/or recent descendants. The NSC very much appreciates you taking the time and interest to consider this matter.

Native Stock Committee
Debbie Hoffman - Chair
Vickie Kuhlmann - Arlene Miller - Cassandra de la Rosa
Leslie Baumann - Magie Evans - Lynette Clooney

Established by ALAC in 2008, the Native Stock Committee’s (NSC) objectives are:

Inform the membership about the request to introduce region of origin stock through a series of presentations.
Put into place methods for the introduction of region of origin stock through AKC approved protocols.
Educate the membership about benefits for the breed, including genetic diversity and landrace characteristics.
Organize Critique Processes, including a list of qualified Critique Judges.
Amplify trips to the Himalayan Plateau in search of region of origin stock.