

Vizsla Origins

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A thousand years ago the MAGYARS occupied the land that is now known as Hungary. These people were hunters accompanied by various breeds of dogs, among them a "yellow dog" used for hunting. This information, however flattering, needs thorough research. This has been made very difficult through the many wars that destroyed the country and often the work of the dedicated people who attempted to separate legend from facts.

This writer, too, regrets not being on the position to elaborate on the early history of the Vizsla due to a lack of available literature. That there was a "yellow dog" is an undeniable fact. It is also known that during the Turkish occupation of Hungary, which lasted over 150 years, the Vizsla was crossed with the dogs of the Turks. On the other hand, the Magyars were supposed to come from that part of Asia Minor, which became, and partially still is, the land of the Turks. In this respect the aforementioned crossing could have been regarded as a sort of "line breeding" in the very broad sense of the word. At any rate the name VIZSLA is Turkish in origin; meaning, "seek."

It has also been reported that the "yellow dog" was crossed with the "Erdélyi Kopó" (the coonhound of Transylvania, a part of Hungary until 1918). Looking at the KOPÓ today, the report may leave some doubt in one's mind. The KOPÓ is black and tan, and black is supposed to be a dominant trait in breeding. Further crossings must have taken place during the three centuries of Austrian occupation which followed the Turks. It is remarkable, however, that the "yellow dog" did not spread over to Austria, in fact, it became almost extinct by the end of World War I. About this time a handful of dedicated people decided to give the "yellow dog" yet another chance for survival.

The following part of this article deals with the history of the modern Vizsla. The data, although not documented, is factual and more complete than any existing publication known to the writer.

In 1920, Dr. Polgár and Captain Bába initiated a movement to save the Vizsla from extinction. Their effort gained support and in 1924 the *Országos Vizsla Club* was founded. This date marks the beginning of the history of the modern Vizsla. Earlier history is irrelevant for none of the Vizslák were registered prior to this event.

The founders of the Club began by searching out and registering a dozen or so Vizslák with the most desirable characteristics. Most of these dogs were owned by the founders and their immediate friends. It must be stated positively that the Vizsla has nothing to do with either the Weimaraner or the German Shorthaired Pointer; it is a breed of its own.

Next an initial standard was worked out and efforts were made to establish a strain and type. For this purpose the Club provided a stud dog, Ch. Ripp II, donated to the Club by General Mesterházy. Two other most popular stud were Mr. Popovits' "Witti", the sire of the legendary "Betyár", and Mr. Vicenti's "Treff". Among the very first bitches we find Mt. Szentgyörgyi's "Kaposi Maresa" and "Frici Laura" and the "liver colored" bitch of Dr. Kunstl.

This writer's father, one of the founders, was in charge of the registration and, in part, the breeding and training program. Ch. Ripp II was trained and kept also by him. At the outset every Vizsla had to be shown to be approved for registration. These Vizslák were by no means befitting the present requirements of the standard but chosen to achieve that goal. Only through a very tightly controlled breeding program was it possible to eliminate the white chest and pasterns, the color variations, short muzzle, hare foot, and so on. (The original color was lacking the reddish tint and was considerably lighter than present coloring. The white markings and light eyes seem to be a widespread problem of American breeders.)

For the record it is deemed appropriate to present the American Vizsla enthusiast with a complete list of the original founders and the offices held by them. As a matter of interest the writer attempts to include also their dogs owned during the early years, the forebearers of *all* the modern Vizslák we are privileged and proud to own today.

President: Dr. Kálman Polgár. It was his dream to form a Club and to restore the breed. He was primarily responsible for alerting his friends and others to the necessity of immediate action. He owned "Kati," National Champion.

Honorary President: Count László Esterházi. Without his patronage, moral, and financial support the Club could not have been realized.

Treasurer: Mr. Petöcz. He owned one dog, name presently unknown.

Registrar: József Stiffit (Say). Also in charge of stud book and of the stud dog Ch Ripp II. Owned 3 females: Joli, Csöre and Kati II. The latter was sold to King Alexander of Serbia. Italian Queen Umberto's offer to purchase "Csöre" was rejected.

Geneologists: Prof. Balázs Ötvös. Published a book in which the standard and other matters of interest were published. Prof. Endre Félix. His books on training and hunting with Vizslák became the blueprint to all future publications (the writer owns two of his books). Prof. Felix maintained training sites and sold his bitch "Csitt" to the above named Queen of Italy in 1932.

National Judge: Dr. Elemér Márkus. An expert par excellence, a veterinarian by profession.

Supplies: Dr. János Wirker. Another financial supporter of the Club, a pharmacist. Also owner of dogcare supplies, medical and nutritional.

Founder-Member: Captain Károly Bába. Next to Dr Polgár, he was most influential in forming the Club. Consulted by József Stiffit (Say), published book on training, breeding and care of the Vizsla. He owned the legendary Betyár.

Some of the other supporters of the Club were: Mr. Antal Hajek, a forester. He owned "Dóra" and Tip." Mr. Béla Nyáry, he owned "Lurko." Mr. Antal Báden, his dog's name presently unknown. Lastly, the world renown hunter and geneologist [sic] Dr. Kálmán Kittenberger with his famous "Szikri" and "Szidi."

There were a few more people and their dogs not mentioned in this article but the list of the founders is accurate. This handful of people were responsible for making a dream come true. Their dedication and know-how was reflected by the performance of those legendary Vizslák in the field, in obedience trials, and in the show ring. This performance was a true manifestation of the success of controlled breeding and training methods in accordance with the true purpose and characteristics of the Vizsla.

This writer grew up with these Vizslák and the people herein mentioned, most of them close friends. The year, 1924, has long been forgotten. The founders of the Országos Vizsla Club are all gone but one –the writer's father. He is the last of the masters- the real Vizsla expert. I am his only apprentice.

Géza Frank Say