

TURKISH

LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOGS

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THE TURKISH LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOGS

The Turkish Livestock Guardian Dogs

In attempting to reveal the truth about the Turkish livestock guardian dogs, we have to tackle the problem of arguing against some well-established misconceptions. Only then, can we freely celebrate these wonderful dogs.

According to the widely accepted but totally fabricated theory about our dogs, Turkey is the homeland of only one breed of livestock guardian dog. And today this breed is known in the international dog world as the Anatolian Shepherd Dog.

On the other hand, Turkey claims that she has more than one breed of livestock guardian dog, working with flocks in different regions of the country. Different dogs shaped by different terrains and different type of livestock animals have been bred for generations.

The DAD-IS Genetic Animal Diversity Information System (<http://dad.fao.org/>) publishes a long list of domestic animals from horses, donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats to chickens and geese on its web site. On the page that lists the livestock animals of Turkey it states that we have over 20 breeds of cattle, and 10 of sheep and goats. It should come as no surprise, then, that we have more than one breed of livestock guardian dog to protect these animals.

LIVESTOCK SHAPED BY DIFFERENT REGIONS

Anyone who has been to Turkey will confirm the striking diversity of the country. The range of climates and geographical features, and the predators they harbour, mould the livestock and their canine protectors found there.

The north of Turkey has a mountainous geography with lush vegetation surrounded with forests, while central Turkey is more a steppe-like region with rolling treeless hills and sharp climatic differences between summer and winter. The further east you go, the higher the altitude, with colder and longer winters. In the mild Aegean region there seem to be no winter months at all except in the inland areas closer to Central Anatolia. The climate of southern Turkey has much in common with the Aegean; the Toros mountains roll along the northern line of the region and provide perfect high pastures for windling population of nomadic flock herders.



The mountainous, evergreen north



A typical landscape from Central Turkey

LIVESTOCK SHAPED BY DIFFERENT REGIONS

The veterinarian Aziz Öztürk lists the sheep breeds raised in different regions of Turkey in his article on sheep husbandry. We find “Kıvırcık and Sakız” in Aegean and Marmara regions (in the west and northwest); “Akkaraman” in central Turkey; “Karayaka” in the north; “Morkaraman” in the east and “vesi” in the southeast.



Kıvırcık and Sakız from the west and northwest



Akkaraman from Central Anatolia

Morkaraman from Eastern Turkey

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Karayaka from Northern Turkey



Ivesi from South-eastern Turkey

These different regions have developed their own livestock animals with differing characteristics such as size, colour, texture of wool etc. As for the dogs that protect them, we can clearly state that in accordance with the local people's taste these dogs have been bred to work harmoniously with the livestock in the particular region where they are expected to survive. In the mountains where tall trees and bushes predominate, a large dog like the ones you can find in central and eastern Turkey will not function properly. Basically, the northern, western and southern regions have dogs of moderate size that would do well in the well-forested mountains or rocky hills with thick scrub. In Central Anatolia the very hard conditions of the steppes require strongly built dogs. This is the region where the climate and geographical features are very much like Central Asia, from where it is widely thought that a substantial proportion of these dogs were brought into Turkey by the Turkic tribes at least 1000 years ago. These dogs tend to have much heavier bone compared with those from the north, west and south. Long, ruthless winters allow only the fittest and strongest dogs to survive. The quality of the dogs improves in the regions where animal husbandry is the main economy.

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As well as their geographical surroundings, the character of these canine protectors is a determining factor. Traditionally thousands of years of shepherding have taught a simple fact to the shepherds: how to make best use these dogs. They are required to have a certain style of working. They are expected to be loyal and protective of their premises while discriminating in their use of aggression towards people, especially children and women. A dog with an aggressive nature in the village will serve a little purpose. No one would tolerate a dog attacking their neighbour's children. But the very same dogs are expected to be fearless against predators such as wolves and bears. They should be strong enough to fend for themselves, providing life of service and expecting very little in return.

Appearance also matters in a livestock guardian. This is where a group of livestock protectors appears in distinctive physical characteristics which call for different standards. Compared to small to medium sized herding breeds such as Border Collies, Australian Kelpies, Belgian, Dutch and German Shepherd Dogs, livestock guardian dogs have different characteristics to enable them function to the fullest. Herding breeds with semi- or fully pricked ears and coat colours that contrast with the sheep do their job by keeping the livestock on their toes in order to direct them from one place to another. They are expected to be distinct from the herd so that they can stand out, moving the livestock around by agitating them under close supervision of their masters. They run around the flock barking and nipping at their heels. Their pricked ears and contrasting colours mimic those of a predator.

In contrast, livestock guardian dogs are expected to behave like a well-adjusted and accepted member of the herd. If there is no threat they mingle with the stock, showing and receiving complete trust. In order

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to be accepted as a flock member, they also tend to resemble sheep. This is something that shepherds must have discovered thousands of years ago. A dog, well camouflaged in the flock, will also provide good protection by giving very little indication of where the protection is in relation to the sheep. From a distance it is very difficult to spot the dog, and just as difficult to plan an attack. In contrast to herding breeds, with their contrasting colours, sheep protectors are bred to match the colour of their sheep. These colours not only match the sheep, they also match the environment. In Central Anatolia especially, where yellow-coloured terrain goes on forever, you find fawn dogs protecting the flocks from wolves. The breed of sheep also seems to determine how these dogs are supposed to look. Associate Prof. Cafer Tepeli from Selçuk University, Konya, says that Kangal Dogs are the main protectors of the Akkaraman Sheep while Akbaş Dogs generally protect the Kıvırcık sheep. Akkaraman sheep have a very distinctive black face and ears, as Kangal Dogs do. Kıvırcık sheep and Akba Dogs share the same white coat. I also believe that the dogs Evliya Çelebi referred to in his 16th century travel book as the Angora Goat Dog would have been Akbaş Dogs. Because the territory of Angora Goats and Akbaş Dogs matches up geographically it is reasonable to assume that all white Akbaş Dogs and white Angora Goats are associated historically.

In rural life nothing is orderly and predictable, of course. Well-travelled people will also confirm that in the overlapping regions where populations mingle you can find subpopulations of sheep and dogs influenced by these main groups. What is more confusing is that Turkey has a huge population of dogs which are very difficult to classify. You can find these dogs roaming in rural areas as well as in urban settings. They vary greatly in type. By nature they show varying levels of territorial protectiveness so if someone happens to take one on it might make a good watchdog, or it might not. If it doesn't, nobody feels sorry for it

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so they go and find another one. There is no selective breeding for this group of dogs. Most of them are ownerless and in many areas they are part of the feral dog population. Handsome ones might find homes but most only roam the streets and feed from the garbage bins. Ask anyone. They would tell you these dogs are nothing but mongrels. Are they worthless? Definitely not: viewed together, if they all have distinct characteristics and are able to breed true one cannot help questioning why on earth they should be considered the one and same breed.

www.geocities.com/theanatolianshepherddog/quiz.htm

So in a big and immensely diverse country like Turkey, jumping to the wrong conclusion may be understandable when it comes to classifying the livestock guardian dogs, especially by people who have very little experience with dogs or by people who haven't travelled across Turkey with through observation.

THE ANATOLIAN SHEPHERD DOG DILEMMA

The Anatolian Shepherd Dog Dilemma

Unless we look at the whole picture from multiple angles we are sure to make mistakes. There is no point in lumping all Turkish livestock guardian dogs together as the Anatolian Shepherd Dog breeders choose to do. Observing an Anatolian Shepherd Dog ring in an AKC or FCI show will clarify my point. Although they think they solved the problem of the Turkish Dogs by breeding them in all colours it is today obvious to the expert eye that the differences between different breeds of the Turkish livestock guardian dogs are far more than just colours. Most Anatolian Shepherd Dogs seem to match the quasi-standard of the random population of dogs I mentioned above. Being able to produce fawn dogs with black masks seems to substantiate the claim that a Kangal Dog and a fawn Anatolian are just the same breed. This has fooled no one in Turkey so far though. While it is almost impossible to distinguish an Anatolian from an ordinary street dog in Turkey, it is very clear to us that the Turkish livestock guardian dog breeds are clearly distinguishable and warrant their own breed status. If there were any justification for lumping all the Turkish sheep breeds together, then there might be some purpose in saying that all livestock guardian dogs in Turkey represent the same breed. The very existence of the Anatolian Shepherd Dog as a breed is an assertion that the Turks do not know what they are talking about. The opinion of a mere western breed club has presumed to dictate to the world how these dogs should be classified. The Turkish Kennel Club "KIF" is determined to protect these dogs as they are.

THE ANATOLIAN SHEPHERD DOG DILEMMA



Anatolians from the 2001 San Diego AKC Show.

THE ANATOLIAN SHEPHERD DOG DILEMMA



Only an ignorant observer, however well-meaning, could mistake these pariah dogs roaming the streets for the breeds described in the next section.

THE LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN DOG BREEDS OF TURKEY

The Livestock Guardian Dog Breeds of Turkey

The Turkish Kennel Club has recognised four livestock guardian dog breeds from different regions of the country: Kangal Dog, Akbaş Dog, Kars Dog and Turkish Mastiff.

The Kangal Dog

The Kangal Dog is the first and most famous livestock guardian breed that springs to mind in Turkey. Ask anyone and they will start bragging about the breed with respect and pride. Kangal Dogs are the dogs which for many people set the benchmark for livestock guardian dog standards. To them the breed is the embodiment of their national link to Central Asia. It is the best-recognised breed of dog in Turkey and it is considered a national treasure. There are many governmental and university breeding facilities to secure the future of the breed. It is mainly native to Central Anatolia. It is also known as Kangal Dog of Sivas, a historic city on the route of the Silk Road and famous for sheep husbandry for centuries. Little is known about its origin but the reason why it is associated with the city of Sivas could be the fact that animal husbandry in this important city and its provincial towns such as Kangal must have involved a large population of good quality dogs in the past. The breed thus got its name after the town of Kangal, Sivas.

Their resemblance to the breed of sheep they protect is striking. The Akkaraman sheep with its characteristic black face and ears seem to require no other breed of dogs than a Kangal Dog. The steppes of Central Anatolia also seems to have shaped these dogs with a perfect physique. A shepherd cannot ask for a better-adapted livestock guardian than a fawn dog with a black mask and black ears, resembling an Akkaraman sheep, in a treeless brown landscape.

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Kangal Dogs breed true to type, confirming a nation's trust and pride in them.

In addition to the advantages of camouflage, the Kangal Dog is a large but active breed. Height at the withers for males is between 75 and 85 cm while it is 65–75 cm for females. A male between 50 and 65 kg and a female between 40 and 55 kg are considered in a good working dog weight. The breed's double coat comes in colours ranging from fawn to steel grey depending on the outer coat's dark coloured tips. A small white spot on the chest and white socks below the knees are acceptable, but the less the better. A black mask is the most well-known characteristic of the breed. That's why it is also known as Karabaş (black head). Contrary to common belief, especially in England, this description is just a name for its colour, like tabby in cats. Accepting it as a breed name in England does not do justice to the identity of the breed, because not all dogs

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with black heads are Kangal Dogs in Turkey. Also in Sivas, “Karabaş” is a common name given to male Kangal Dogs. Today the Kangal Dog holds a very special place in the hearts and minds of Turkish people. In Kangal, Sivas, the district government holds an annual festival for the breed which attracts tourists from all over the world. Also in dog shows organised by the KIF (the Turkish Kennel Club) the classes where Kangal Dogs are entered get the most public attention with the biggest entry.



The Akbaş Dog

The Akbaş Dog is considered to be the Turkish version of the all-white livestock guardian dog tradition. Compared to the heavier-boned dogs of Eastern Turkey Akbaş Dogs possess a lighter and more agile physique. According to the observations made by some western travellers in the past, moderately sized agile white dogs protected the flocks aggressively in western Turkey. As mentioned before, I also believe that this is the dog that Evliya Çelebi refers to as the Angora Goat Dog in his travel books. When the breed caught the attention of an American couple named David and Judith Nelson in the early 1970s they named these dogs “Akbaş” (white head) picking one of the traditional names used for them. Today these remaining white dogs are still traditionally known as

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Akku (white bird) by the villagers in western Turkey. The Akbaş Dog's popularity seems to be increasing in Turkey. Although the immense popularity of the Kangal Dog replaced a lot of working Akbaş Dogs in the regions where they had been bred for centuries, the breed tends to be preferred over larger and heavier-boned Kangal Dogs today as a vigilant estate guardian. The newly founded Akbaş Dog Club of Turkey is developing projects to save the remaining working Akbaş Dogs. The breed seems to have strong followers at home and abroad. According to the Department of Agriculture of America Akbaş Dogs were one of the three most successful livestock guardian breeds in North America, along with Maremma Dogs of Italy and Pyrenean Mountain Dogs of France. One of the strongest characteristics of the breed is the wide range of types accepted by its parent clubs both in North America and Turkey.

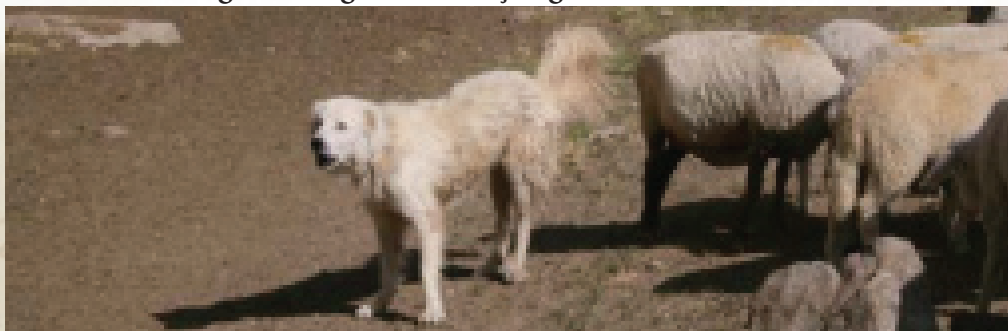


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This both keeps the gene pool healthy and ensures that for every working condition there is an Akbaş Dog to function to the fullest. The breed comes in one colour with three different coat types: short, moderate and long. The physical characteristics seen in the breed also call for three different types in the breed: sight hound, moderate and mastiff. The first suggests a sleeker dog with a sight hound-like light bones and a strong tuck-up while the latter ones suggest dogs with heavier bone and larger sizes. A male of average build is between 70 and 75 cm at the withers whereas the average size for a female is between 68 and 70 cm. Akbaş Dogs are not as large as Kangal Dogs and should not be bred in extreme sizes.



Average working male Akbaş dogs are around 70-75 cm



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The Turkish Mastiff

This is the most recently recognised Turkish breed. It has brought about some arguments amongst the Turkish fanciers though the breed's unique place is also acknowledged by all. Some seem to feel uncomfortable with the use of the term mastiff as they believe it refers to some possible crossings with western mastiff breeds. The breed is also known as the Aksaray Dog or Central Anatolian Shepherd Dog. The Turkish Mastiff seems to have lost most of its old function for livestock protection today. It is widely used for illegal dog fighting and estate protection. Breeding larger and more aggressive dogs has been detrimental to the breed and today the Turkish Mastiff needs a rigorous breeding programme to breed the old strong and healthy dogs of the past. Skeletal and behavioural problems seem to be crippling the breed today.

Although it comes in every colour, in the recent years the Kangal Dog's



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popularity has led the ambitious and ignorant breeders to breed Kangal lookalikes in mastiff sizes. While they are marketing these large dogs as Kangal Dogs the two breeds are being destroyed by greed and ignorance. To the uninitiated it has become increasingly difficult to tell two breeds apart. Thanks to the brave steps the Turkish Kennel Club has taken to separate the two breeds in Turkish dog shows these two impressive Turkish breeds are shown in different rings today. It is hoped to save the Kangal Dog from crossbreeding and educate the public about this degenerating trend.



The Turkish Mastiff is a large dog with a shorter coat in various colours such as brindle, pinto, fawn with black mask and various combinations of black, white and brown. The fawn dogs with black masks seem to be on the increase due to the place Kangal Dogs possess in the nation's heart.

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The main differences between the two breeds are the head and body types. The Turkish Mastiff tends to have a heavier head with a well-domed skull and an evident stop. The muzzle is shorter with loose skin reminiscent of typical mastiff looks. While Kangal Dogs have a characteristic athletic profile with a curly tail Turkish Mastiffs have a heavier boned body and much less curl on the tail. The most important temperamental difference is the Kangal Dog being less inclined to attack humans while it is more common for Turkish Mastiffs as guard and fighting dogs.



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The Kars Dog

Although there is often some mention about this breed of dog internationally, little research has been done so far. The name was given by the American breeder, David Nelson, upon his field observations in the 1980s. He observed these dogs in north eastern Turkey and classified them as the Turkish version of the Caucasian Shepherd Dog of Russia. The breed has not achieved a wide national recognition yet, unlike Kangal and Akbaş Dogs, though it is listed among the Turkish livestock guardian dog breeds by the Turkish Kennel Club. The breed shows great variety in type. It comes in various colours and long coat as in the Caucasian Dog.

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