

Searching for the "identity" of the Phu Quoc Dog - Chapter 4: A Warning From a Hundred Years Ago

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News - The Phu Quoc Dog's risk of extinction has been mentioned in a media article about the special ridgebacked breed. The article's author was Mr. Fernand Doceul, a breeder of the Phu Quoc Dog at the end of the 19th century and donated dogs to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris.

Risk of extinction

An article was published in *Le Chenil*, issued on July 30, 1891, stating: "The inhabitants of Phu Quoc Island asserted to me that they are in danger of disappearing and there are only a few left. Because the An Nam (former name of Vietnam during the French colonial period) people brought dogs of common breeds to the island and crossed them with dogs on the island...".

On July 7, 2007 in HCM city, the bells warning about the risk of extinction of the Phu Quoc Dog had been rung again in a conference about the breed: there is only 1% of purebred Phu Quoc Dogs left, the remaining dogs have been admixed with other breeds.

In the beginning of 2011, an american expert from The K9 Training Academy went to Phu Quoc Island to buy four Phu Quoc Dogs to train them for K9 work for a Vietnamese project to exploit precious metals. He searched the island for almost a month, including in Rach Gia, then, disappointedly, concluded: "There are no purebred Phu Quoc Dogs!"

In 2007, a 26 year old man dedicated himself to finding standards by the people for the Phu Quoc Ridgeback. He is Le Van Quoc Hung, who is currently an executive committee member of the Vietnam Kennel Association (VKA).

"I hope to use the folk standard to preserve ancient Phu Quoc Dog's traits in the process of selective breeding and preservation" - Mr. Hung speaks of his work as a gift. His research details a clear picture of the Phu Quoc Dog breed.

The Phu Quoc Dog through the eyes of the people

In ancient Phu Quoc, due to geographical isolation, there were different lines of ridged dogs living on different areas of the island, owing their location to their genetic uniqueness. Dogs in Cua Can, Ba Trai and Dong Ba weighed 12-16 kg (26-35 lbs), small but agile, and good at hunting and chasing small game. Dogs in the north of the island (Rach Vem, Ganh Dau) were often black, large, weighed 16-20 kg (26-44 lbs), some even reached 25-30 kg (55-66 lbs), specializing in large game hunting, often hunting wild boar and deer.

A lot of hunters like uncle Sau like north island dogs because they often hunt large animals in old jungles in Ganh Dau, Cua Can.

The smallest dogs are the dogs of Suoi Tranh - Suoi Da, just "a little bigger than Miniature Pinschers, with a close fur coat that almost looks bald, with dry bamboo-like segmented tails".

Hunter Chin Cua says: "There are dogs so tiny that can't even climb over a fallen log, but they are excellent hunters, always getting something every time".

A pack of hunting dogs often consists of 3-6 dogs, with a pack leader. Dogs in the pack don't have to be large, and dogs small in size make but good trackers are also included in a pack. Hunters often name dogs as Bite, Chase, and Pursue... So that when they encounter prey, they shout: "Bite [it]", "Chase [it]", "Pursue [it]"...

The main hunting style of the Phu Quoc Ridgeback is tracking and chasing over short distances, which is suitable for hunting in the jungle full of trees, shrubs, and thorny plants. Their coat color should help them camouflage in the jungle, so white or spotted dogs are often not chosen due to their bright coats, which can easily be seen by prey.

Phu Quoc Hunters don't select dogs with loose hind dewclaws because they can get stuck while running in the jungle.

Most Phu Quoc Dogs are ground trackers (with shallow central channel between nose and upper lip for scenting prey on the ground), while leading dogs have to be air trackers (with a deep ridge between nose and upper lip, wide nose cavity, scenting in the air/wind even if the prey crossed a river or stream). In the pack both ground and air scenters are put together to ensure effective hunting on a variety of terrains. Their folk scent standards also concentrate on the dog's nose: tight noses are strong, while wet noses are keen.

The leader dog has to meet the ideal set for the bite: whiskers and chin whiskers facing the front, deep eyes, big and even muzzle (bold, willing to bite). These dogs will fight directly, hanging on, and biting the necks of large animals like deer or wild boar.

Phu Quoc hunters also make standards for running such as lanky dogs (deep chest, rear higher than head, lots of stamina running without getting tired), dogs that run and bark (endurance runners, good at tracking). They also like dogs with tight [or compact] ribs, straight [as in not bow-legged] legs (good, light running), straight stifles (springy, launches well), cat feet (light, neat running) and avoid splayed feet [elephant feet; wide and flat] (often step on thorns, crippled).

A Phu Quoc hunter, Mr. Minh Dia, believes hounds with a symmetrical ridge from the shoulder blades to the end of the hips are good hunters that fight well and are successful in every hunt. Dogs with a wide ridge reaching to the waist means the dog is good for hunting large game. Dogs with a ridge shaped like a "money bag" [small at the top, wide at the bottom], ridges shaped like a "rice bag" (rectangular, wide throughout) are "lucky dogs" [as in a bet], and never go home empty handed.

These "lucky dogs" also have a tail like a fishing rod [sickle tail; long and smooth] that sways following the rhythm as the dog walks. The hunters also choose dogs with the tails leaning in the correct direction (males with tails leaning left, females right), if the tail isn't curled to the right side, "throw out the whole dog". Dogs with thick coats are "water heavy" and "afraid of water",

short close coats are "light in water", "unafraid of water". Dogs with flat foreheads live long, while dogs with protruding brows often die early.

Experienced hunters also denied some myths such as black spotted tongues means a dog won't die of a venomous snake bite, because many packs have died due to snake bites while hunting or protecting the owner...

The Danger of Phu-Thai Dogs

The past almost ten years have seen Phu Quoc Dog x German Shepherd, Phu Quoc Dog x Pit Bull, PQD x Chihuahua, and Phu - Thai Dogs (PQD x Thai Ridgeback)... Recently, some people intend to crossbreed Phu Quoc Dogs with Rhodesian Ridgebacks of South Africa, or mixed breeding with Akita Inus - a national Japanese dog!

Mr. Bui Quoc Viet, owner of TrangLe Neapolitan Mastiff kennel famous in North America - a breeder of many beautiful dogs, who have won many championships, said: "We need to eliminate Phu-Thai dogs from preservation breeding and development programs of Phu Quoc Dogs. Our important goal is to selectively breed with an intent of preserving Phu Quoc Dogs as a ridged primitive hound in order to be recognized as a breed by the FCI, not creating a new dog breed to register with the FCI!"

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