

What is a Pedigree Dog and Which is the Oldest?

The answer is all our domestic dogs owe their lineage to the Wolf so technically it can be argued that there are no true pedigrees save the Wolf itself.

The first "dogs" are thought to have been wolves. They were wild, lean, and worked as a team in a pack to become very successful hunters. A dog and a wolf are the same species of animal and if they mate, they will produce fertile offspring. If a man mates with a bird he could not produce fertile offspring because they are two different species.

Man domesticated wolves by feeding them or by adopting wolf cubs. In return for food and care, the wolves gave their loyalty to their keepers. Man used his canine companions to hunt for food and also to guard his home.

When the domesticated wolves had litters of cubs, there may have been some that were smaller than the rest. In the wild the smaller or weakest of the litter would have been lost by natural selection but Man's intervention helped them to survive. If the smaller wolves mated other small wolves, possibly from the same litter, a new strain of smaller, tamer, more dog-like wolves began.

Before Man's intervention the Wolves would have evolved slightly differently on different continents. There are dingoes in Australia, wild "painted" dogs in Africa, Chihuahuas in South America, etc. But man has changed wild dogs to suit his own purposes.

Man found that his canine friends could be trained to do tasks which were beyond Man's abilities, like herding cattle or sheep. The heading instinct is simply an extension to the pack hunting instinct which certain dogs like collies excelled at. Other dogs were trained to pull carts and sledges and some trained to retrieve fishing nets from the sea or game shot by arrow or spear. So the retrievers were created.

The earliest records of Man working with dogs is believed to be the Nordic variety but undoubtedly Man already had a close bond with his canine companions long before records were kept.

There were no inoculations in those days so weak dogs died of rabies and other dog illnesses. In cold countries, the dogs that survived were the ones with thick coats and in hot climates those with very little cotes survived. As the survivors interbred so certain characteristics became apparent.

Farmers found that small dogs were good at digging and getting into the burrows of foxes, rabbits and rats, and they began picking the smallest dogs of their litters to mate with other small dogs. Thus began the terriers, or "diggers", fierce enough to kill vermin.

Emperor's and important dignitaries' used small dogs as personal bodyguards which they would carry unseen inside their long flowing robes. These small dogs were trained to attack the throat of anyone who came close to their owner. If you have ever wondered at the shape of a Pekinese's face, you will understand they were bred that way on purpose.

As civilization took hold dogs were used less for work but they acquired new roles. Ladies liked small, fancy lapdogs, or long-haired dogs that they could brush. Children liked unaggressive, playful dogs. When the family dog has a litter, one dog is often kept. Six months later, the father dog mates with his daughter that was kept, and another batch of dogs is produced that look like the family favorite.

This is not natural selection; man took it upon himself to select the best-natured dogs to breed with for the purpose of producing dogs for his own design. So what do we mean when we say any animal is a pedigree?

A pedigreed animal is one that has its ancestry recorded. The number of generations required varies from breed to breed, but all pedigreed animals have papers from the registering body that attest to their ancestry.

Sometimes the word purebred is used synonymously with pedigreed, but purebred refers to the animal having a known ancestry, and pedigree refers to the written record of breeding. Not all purebred animals have their lineage in written form.

All pedigree (or purebred) animals share one thing with crossbreeds; they have all at sometime in their lineage been interbred.

About the Author

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