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# ***JOURNAL***



*of the International Society for  
Preservation of Primitive  
Aboriginal Dogs*

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***From the Curator...***

***Dear members of PADS and  
readers of our Journal,***

In this 32nd issue we publish two articles. Dr. Anna Laukner, in the first part of her article, writes about history and coat color variation of ancient dog of Germany, the German Spitz. Actually, this is a cluster of breeds, some of which still retain their superb working qualities of being an all purpose farm dog and a life stock herding dog.

Emmanuella Occansey described way of life and variation observed in aboriginal stock of West African dog related to what is known in Europe and USA as Avuvi and Basenji.

Sincerely yours,

*Vladimir Beregovoy*

Curator of PADS, International

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***In This Issue...***

COAT COLOUR IN THE SPITZ..... 4  
AVUVI – ABORIGINAL DOG OF AFRICA..... 20  
PRIMITIVE ABORIGINAL DOGS SOCIETY LIST OF MEMBERS43

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**Coat Colour in the Spitz**

**Dr. Anna Laukner**

**Translation: Gabriele Schröter**

**Part I**

The Spitz is among the most well known and oldest dog breeds in Europe. In former times the Spitz was literally a jack of all trades – today this interesting breed is no longer so much in focus. The first part of this article will deal with the colours there are in the German Spitz and it can take you on an exciting tour of the world of the Spitz.

The Spitz breeds belong to a group of dogs that has been known for many centuries and widespread over large parts of the world. Everybody knows the Spitz, and its guarding qualities are almost proverbial. Until far into the 20th century the Spitz was one of the most popular dog breeds, practically every house and every farm was guarded by such a dog.

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## Origin of the Breed

Exactly because the Spitz has always been such a widespread and ‘ordinary’ dog there are relatively few records about it from early times – especially concerning its coat colour. Looking for such early sources I found, among others, a description in a book called ‘History of the Dog’ (Geschichte der Hunde’) by J.G. Franz dating from the year 1781 (that means roughly 230 years ago). Interestingly the Spitz is here equated with the Shepherd Dog.

“Shepherd Dog, Spitz or Herding Dog as the general ancestor. It is smaller in build than the farmer dog, the big Sighthound (greyhound) or the Great Danes. Head and muzzle are thicker than in the greyhound and less strong than in the Danish dogs, but they are excellently comparable to the Farmer dog. The ears are short and upright. The tail is sometimes bent upward a little, but is also often seen hanging straight down, but the tip of the tail is covered with long hair. The whole of the body, apart from the  
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muzzle is covered with shaggy hair, but also the outer sides of the thighs, the rear of the hind feet under the heels are not covered with it. They usually have a black and brown colour, but they are also bunt mealier, also whitish. The legs are of medium length. Concerning size they are near the fox (...)”

The indicated common origin of the shepherd dogs and the Spitz is interesting (experts today sometimes quarrel whether some breeds are shepherd dogs or a kind of Spitz, the Belgian Schipperke, for instance). Probably both types of dog have common ancestors. The dogs that stayed at the farmstead as guards may have developed into the Spitz. The many shepherd dog breeds that we know today may, on the other hand, have developed from the dogs of this line that were selected for their work with the herd (which, as we know today, is part of the hunting behaviour – only the last sequence, the kill, is missing. That also explains why many shepherd dogs poach, if they are given the opportunity, whereas the Spitz tends to stay  
*To preserve through education.....*

faithful to the house (exceptions prove the rule and the differences also seem to fade since the herding qualities (or non-herding qualities) are no longer cultivated by the breeding.)

It is also interesting to know that until about 50 years ago there was also a ‘herding Spitz’ or ‘Shepherd Spitz’. Here a quotation from a standard work of cynology, the ‘Lexikon der Hundefreunde’ (Encyclopedia of the Dog Friend) by Heinrich Zimmermann from 1933: “Herding Spitz, Shepherd Spitz, one of three varieties of the native herding dogs. The Shepherd Spitz is a medium sized, prick eared stocky looking dog with hair of more than medium length. The ear of the Shepherd Spitz is small, firm prick ear with a truncated tip, the inside and edges well covered with hair. The double coat of the Shepherd Spitz is of more than medium length. They have undercoat, but it changes with the seasons. (...) “Concerning the coat colour of the native herding dogs (divided into three varieties: the sheep poodle,  
*To preserve through education.....*

the Pomeranian herding dog and the herding Spitz) he writes: “Colour: aimed at: wholecoloured, as purely white as possible, but for the sheep poodle and the Shepherd Spitz other colours and grey are allowed.”



**Herding Spitz (Hütespitz)**  
**(historical photograph from**  
**„The lexicon of dog lovers“**  
**(„Das Lexikon der**  
**Hundefreunde“) H.**  
**Zimmermann, 1933)**

The Herding Spitz is not identical with the German Spitz, but may have common ancestors – this conjecture is substantiated by a photo of the Herding Spitz in this book. Even today there are still many varieties in the old German herding dogs – especially in the Middle German herding dogs, which are bred in black, black and tan (so-called ‘Gelbbacke’ – yellow  
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cheek), remind of the Giant German Spitz. It is also interesting that one variety of the native herding dogs is called Pomeranian herding dog. Pomeranian was one of the first names for the Spitz. Pomeranian Spitz commonly referred to the white Spitz, the black Spitz was called Mannheimer Spitz (Mannheim is a German town located nearby Stuttgart) and for the gray shaded Spitz the name Wolf Spitz established itself (until far into the 20th century only the Giant Spitz and the Small German Spitz were distinguished, both varieties were bred in many colours). Another quote on this from Zimmermann (1933): Lately the Small Spitz is bred in many colours: white, black, brown, orange, wolf grey, steel blue, blue fox and pie-bald.” Zimmermann goes on saying that among the breed characteristics of the Giant Spitz are the colours wolf grey, black, white and other colours (other colours meaning all the other colours not mentioned before, including pie-bald). The White Spitz has also been established from the 18th century on as the favourite  
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of the ‘High Society’ of the time and were to be found even in the royal families (among others Queen Charlotte who was born in Mecklenburg was quite enthusiastic about the white Spitz thus probably paving the way for the spreading of the ‘Pomeranian’ in the UK (the Pomeranians then cannot be compared to today’s toy breed, they rather were Spitz of normal size, mostly white in colour). The working Spitz had more ordinary colours: black, grey and all the other colours and colour patterns that occurred at the time. The Spitz also got its name according to the kind of work he did.: a Spitz that guarded his master’s vineyards was called vineyard Spitz, a carter Spitz accompanied the horse carts, a shipper’s Spitz accompanied river craft, of course, but probably also the boats on the seas (thus an exchange between the German and the Nordic Spitz may have taken place – just as a side note).

Breed experts ascribe certain differences in behaviour to the different colours in the Giant Spitz,  
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by the way. Please read a characterization by Mrs. Marina Arend (Giant Spitz breeder): The black and the grey Giant Spitz are very similar – as mentioned above they were often interbred in former times. The black Spitz is a tiny bit more wary of strangers. Whereas the Wolf Spitz will go and collect a visitor's cuddles once he has his master's 'ok', the black Spitz often seems to be of the opinion 'him I know, he is ok!, him I don't know and I don't want to get to know him either!'. He will often be very reserved and does not want to be touched. He also seems to have a preference for birds – it was he that used to chase the crows out of the vineyards formerly. In many you will find a disposition for herding. With my black bitch 'Dana' I went to a herding competition and was asked several times whether that was a Herding Spitz. Some of Old German Herding Dogs had great similarity with her – in many of these lines there is also herding Spitz. The White Giant Spitz seems different in character to me – a clown, always up for fun. He can  
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be a tyrant in the house if he isn't trained – Witwe Bolte's Spitz – a fun companion for families who will always read from your face what's on and what is wanted, and who will always het his humans to do exactly what he wants by his cheeky, funny ways. Immensely clever he was often to be found in the circus. If you don't teach him he teaches his humans to dance to his tune.”

Spitz fancier Elke Haaß adds: “The differences in character are probably caused more by the different lines of breeding than by colour. Whereas Wolf Spitz and black Spitz were bred together over a length of time and were more active as guards, the white Spitz was often kept as a pet by the nobility. Especially in the Wolf Spitz a certain fierceness was encouraged in breeding. By interbreeding the Anglo-American Keeshond this fierceness was probably obliterated faster in the Wolf Spitz than in the black Giant Spitz that was without Keeshond blood. Besides, today's black Giant Spitz goes back to a single breeding line.  
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Differences in character can also be found in today's Standard (Medium) and Small Spitz of lines bred for plain colour. If, however, you come across plain coloured Spitz from multi-coloured lines there are no longer any character differences that go along with colour. “

Today there are several recognized Spitz breeds going back to the European Spitz described above: First, of course, the German Spitz. It is bred in accordance with one standard that differentiates different varieties according to size and colours: the Wolf Spitz, Giant Spitz, German Standard Spitz, Small German Spitz and German Toy Spitz. They may not be interbred.

The German Spitz has had a register for a long time, its breeding is governed and guided in Germany by the Club for German Spitz e.V. (Verein für Deutsche Spitze e.V.) since 1899 and in Switzerland by the Swiss Club for the Spitz (Schweizerischer Club für Spitze) since 1913.

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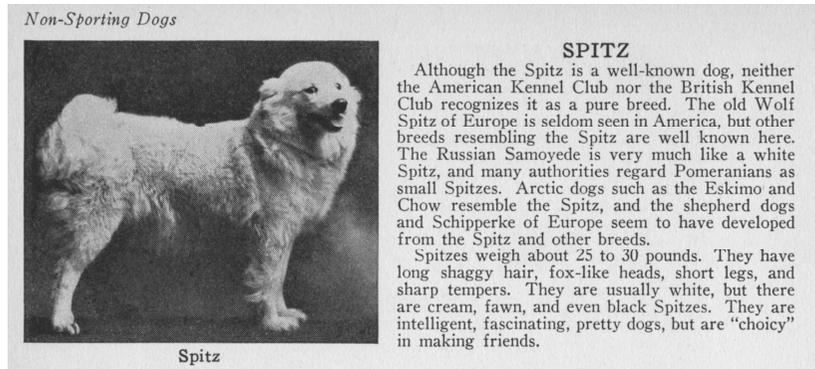
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The Dutch Keeshond is identical with the Wolf Spitz according to the FCI standard of 1998, the Pomeranian as known in English speaking countries is identical with the FCI standard for the German Toy Spitz. A clear distinction can be seen, though, between Keeshonds or Pomeranians from pure American and British breeding as opposed to those of the equivalent German Spitz varieties. Italy has the Volpino Italiano (in size c corresponding to the Small German Spitz but only accepted in white, red and champagne), Japan has the Japan Spitz that is very similar to a clear white German Standard Spitz. The American Eskimo that is bred in the USA in three different sizes, pure white or biscuit cream (a light cream shade) also goes back to the German Spitz. Sporadically American Eskimos have been imported to Germany and have been registered as white Giant Spitz in the register of the Club for German Spitz.

Of the Nordic Spitz breeds I would like to mention the breeds that are used as guard or herding

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dogs and have certain things in common with the above mentioned Spitz breeds: Finnish Lapland Dog, Iceland Dog, Swedish Lapland Dog.



**Spitz dogs always came to the USA with German immigrants . There, the white type became prevalent and although cream, fawn and black Spitz dogs have been known according to this breed description out of a historical American dog book. As long ago as 1917, white Spitz dogs have been named „American Eskimo“, today the „American Eskimo“ is an officially recognized breed in the USA. Occasionally „Eskies“ have been imported to Germany and utilized in the breeding with the Giant German Spitz. (Image is taken from „The Book of Dogs“, James Gilchrist Lawson, 1934).**

And, of course, the Eurasier as a relatively young breed must not be omitted. This breed was bred

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some 50 years ago from the Wolf Spitz, Chow Chow and Samoyed as initial breeds. In the Eurasier many more colours are recognized than in the Giant Spitz – this is one of the reasons why the breed is so popular. It has meanwhile overtaken the Giant Spitz and the Wolf Spitz in popularity.

### **Old Spitz Colours**

In the smaller Spitz breeds (Standard, Small and Toy) many colours are accepted today: in addition to black, white, brown and gray shaded there is orange, cream, cream-sable, orange-sable, black and tan and piebald. In the Giant Spitz only three colours are in accordance with the standard: plain white, black and brown. The Wolf Spitz as a separate breed is gray shaded. That has not always been so. .. In old dog books you can find hints that in former times there were generally more colours in the Spitz (see the quotation above). In Ludwig Beckmann's book "History and Description of the Dog Breeds" (1895)

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we find: The coloured (brown, yellow, cream) as well as the spotted Spitz that occurred more frequently in former times have never really been very popular and have more recently almost disappeared. – In contrast the pure black and pure white varieties have been bred ever more frequently since the end of the last century and have developed into constant and defined breeds. – The latest additions are the Toy Spitz and the so-called Silken Spitz as extra breeds going alongside. (...)"

So here we can again find evidence that cream and piebald are original coat colours in the Spitz. The popularity of a coat colour can be considered a fashion – it doesn't reveal anything about whether the colour is typical or a characteristic of pure breeding. In this context I would also like to point out that brown was also frowned upon in 1900, according to Beckmann – today it has long since become a standard colour in the Giant Spitz and breeders try to promote it – that's how fashions change!

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The first standard of 1899 for the German Spitz only allowed white, black and shaded grey as colours for the Spitz and so Richard Strebel wrote in his book 'German Dogs' in 1905: "(...) Finally I would like to point out that there are other colours, too, but they are not recognized at the moment, at least not in the Giant Spitz, like brown, fox red and pale fawn. The first are the product of black, after too much inbreeding, the latter crop up especially in crossbreeding of black and white. Such cross-breeding can sometimes be inevitable when the white ones start to degenerate after too much inbreeding and start becoming albinotic. Then you go back to white afterwards and after some 5 – 6 generations you are back to pure white."

Strebel gives the colours of the Toy Spitz as "pure black, red brown or silver grey without marks, eyes and nose always black, toe nails dark".

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These sources show that there have always been brown, cream coloured, yellowish, reddish and piebald specimens in the Spitz. After it was found out that brown is not a sign of degeneration this colour was also recognized. This is a sensible and welcome step. Meanwhile the different shades from cream to orange (as solid colours as well as sable, that is with darker tips to the hair) as well as piebald are recognized in all size varieties apart from the Giant Spitz. In addition there is black and tan in the smaller varieties.

Read more about breeding for colour in the German Spitz in the next edition.

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## **Avuvi – Aboriginal Dog Of Africa**

**Emmanuelle Occansei**

**Ghana**

Koklo metsoa pu adika soa avu o

(The dog does not worry when  
the chicken runs over to the bones)<sup>1</sup>

The indigenous dog which has become known in North America for the last few years as “Avuvi” is the aboriginal product of the west-African “Dahomey Gap”, i.e. the Sudano-Guinean and Sudanian savanna-covered interval between the Upper Guinean forest mass and the Central African (Lower Guinean, or Congolian) forest mass (see Fig. 1). Although it is always difficult to pinpoint a definite boundary in the

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<sup>1</sup> An Ewe-mina proverb of confidence. It is often said about people who do not feel threatened or insecure by the gifts or performances of others because they know their own strengths and talents. It is also a proverb against needless fights. There are some causes that are worth fighting for and some others that are better to let go. ([www.afriprov.org](http://www.afriprov.org))

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absence of high mountain ranges, different authors define it as extending between various landmarks from the west bank of the Niger river, in Nigeria, through Benin (Weme (or Ouémé) river) and Togo, to the Volta river, in south-east Ghana; some authors include the Accra plains in this definition, justifiably so, considering the typical low rainfall patterns that are also observed in this area.

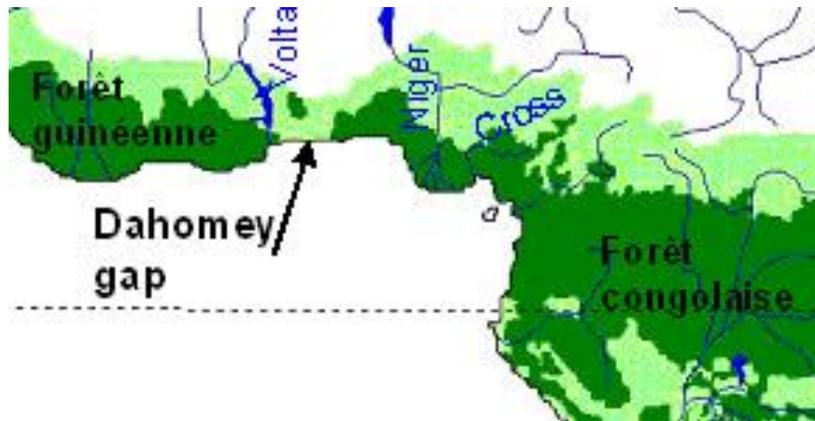


Fig. 1: Location of Dahomey Gap

Considering the long established relationship and interdependency between dog and man, it also

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stands to reason to superimpose on this geographic map a linguistic one, including the Gbe group (see Fig. 2), i.e. the several vernacular languages (including Fon; Mina; and Ewe) in which “avu” means “dog”; the suffix –vi meaning young, avuvi literally means young dog (puppy).

We now have two slightly different sets of boundaries to define the indigenous dog of the Dahomey gap and, although from a strictly linguistic point of view, it doesn't quite make sense to call Avuvi a dog occurring in a region where a different language is spoken (Ga and its variations, on the western –Ghanaian– fringe of the Gap), in view of the now widely documented evolution and adaptation of dogs to their environment, we will however describe as Avuvi all indigenous dogs of the broader geographical/climatic Dahomey gap (see Fig. 3).

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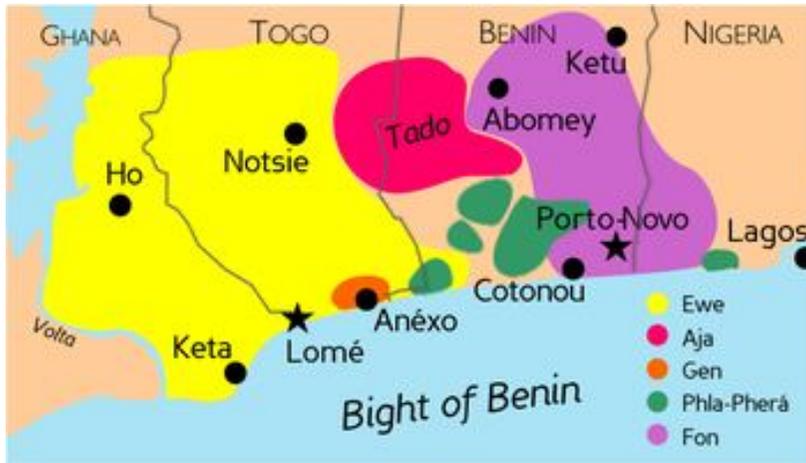


Fig. 2: Area where the Gbe group of languages is spoken

To be perfectly honest, I'm not totally comfortable with the notion of a standard –and the uniformity of appearance it entails, which is far from the truth as far as the Avuvi is concerned–, or of a “breed”, for that matter, because I am afraid that once we write down how the Avuvi looks now (after millennia of migration, settlement, and evolution in the relatively narrowly defined, yet bereft of obvious geographical or topological boundaries, habitat we just described), the temptation can prove strong to consider it set in stone; to discard as irrelevant or, *To preserve through education.....*

worse, telltale signs of mongrelisation, naturally yet less commonly occurring traits; to reduce the indigenous race to a breed and, in fine, to dictate how nature should have been/was meant to be. I strongly believe that the race is nature's expression, through evolution, and a breed is but a sketchy, incomplete and cliché representation of said nature.



Fig. 3: Political map

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**Breed:** (n) a group of usually domesticated animals or plants presumably related by descent from common ancestors and visibly similar in most characters; a number of persons of the same stock  
[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/breed](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/breed)

**Race:** (n) a breeding stock of animals  
[www.merriam-wester.com/dictionary/race](http://www.merriam-wester.com/dictionary/race)

After this somewhat lengthy but, I think, necessary, caveat, I will attempt a description of the Avuvi as I know it, based on more than 35 years of living and wandering in West Africa and, in particular, in Togo and Ghana.

### **General appearance**

Knowing the savanna type of habitat the Avuvi has evolved in since the late Holocene (apparition of the specific climate pattern of the Dahomey Gap,

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around 4500 BP<sup>2</sup>; and the almost concomitant migration of dogs from Asia and North-Eastern Africa<sup>3</sup>), it will not come as a surprise that, when compared to the basenji, the Avuvi is taller than the dense equatorial forest dwelling basenji.

It is an energetic and muscular dog and, though unimpressive in size, is able and willing to defend its territory. Its body is slightly longer than its legs.

Although the topline is usually level, the hindquarters sometimes are slightly higher than the forequarters. Its head and neck are moderately wrinkled, with variations between sub-types, although some looseness of the skin in these regions is present. It is, at heart, a hunting dog, using a combination of sight and scent. An intelligent dog, its wariness of strangers makes it a good guard/alert dog. Unless

<sup>2</sup> See *The Origin of the Dahomey Gap* article, [araf.studiumdigitale.uni-frankfurt.de/index.php/en/research/topics/103](http://araf.studiumdigitale.uni-frankfurt.de/index.php/en/research/topics/103)

<sup>3</sup> A lot remains under-researched about the fauna and flora of West Africa, but it appears that dogs may have reached this area around the time of the aridification of the Dahomey Gap. See *AfriCanis, Indigenous dogs of Southern Africa*, [www.africanis.co.za/history.htm](http://www.africanis.co.za/history.htm)

*To preserve through education.....*

familiarised with farmyard animals and other pets (including cats), it will spontaneously dig for, chase and grab burrowing animals (rats, rabbits, etc.), farmyard animals up to and including goats and lambs and all sorts of poultry, poultry-like and flying birds. It is trainable but independent-minded. Characteristics– The Avuvi does bark fiercely when its territory is breached, but it also communicates between dogs in a same extended area (from compound to compound, for example) and with their human carer with a wide range of modulated sounds that are quite characteristic of the local soundscape.

Faults– This being a description of naturally occurring Avuvis, and not a breed standard, the fact that a specific trait is not mentioned below does not mean its occurrence is aberrant. It may just be that it is rare, or that the author has never witnessed it yet. We have to stress that aboriginal dogs are a vastly under-researched topic so far and much of the knowledge

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gathered is a one-person endeavour, and necessarily incomplete.



**Fig.4: Adult cream Avuvi with thick coat, Baatsona, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

### **Size, proportion, substance**

Dogs in the Dahomey Gap are not bred for conformation. Although owners worldwide are proud

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of a good-looking animal, I am not aware of any breeding program aiming at specific physical attributes. Dogs have to be resilient first and good hunters<sup>4</sup> or alert dogs second. Nature and the general dearth or non-affordability of veterinary services take care of the first criterion, and hunters will usually favour lines of proven performers over puppies of untested ancestry. They will also get rid of any dogs attacking farmyard animals or stealing eggs and chicks. This is very important since by and large, dogs, children and farmyard animals are allowed to roam in the village and even in towns and cities. An aggressive or stubborn dog is just too much of a risk to people's livelihoods.

There seems to be basically two sub-types in the Avuvi; one is taller, and more powerful, with a bigger head that tends to show more wrinkling; the other is shorter-backed (more or less fitting in a square), the

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<sup>4</sup> On hunting with dogs in modern-day Accra suburbs, see [www.animal-kind.org/hunting.html](http://www.animal-kind.org/hunting.html)

*To preserve through education.....*

head is also shorter with smaller jaws. Again, due to the lack of emphasis put on physical homogeneity, the two types can and will occur in the same litter and variations between the extremes are commonplace. The measurements supplied are an average for dogs kept in Western-style houses. Height: dogs: 20in; bitches: 18in. Length: dogs: 21in; bitches: 19in from front of chest to point of buttocks. Approximate weight for dogs, 30 lb; bitches, 25 lb. In less affluent urban surroundings, where dogs are fed protein-poor leftovers, and are given limited opportunity to supplement it on garbage heaps (where protein-rich organic material is scarce anyway), they unsurprisingly tend to be quite smaller and much leaner; village dogs, though, are able to catch small animals or to scavenge on dead ones and, if used for hunting, are even deliberately fed a more appropriate diet by their owner.

*To preserve through education.....*



**Fig. 5: 4-month old brindle Avuvi, Nungua, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

### **Head**

The head is carried slightly above the backline, although the dog is able to stand to attention with an erect head. Eyes– Hazel to dark brown are the most common, but citrine yellow and blue do occur. Rims are dark. Ears–small, either erect or floppy; very mobile; typically, a dog on its guard/wary of its surroundings will keep its ears close to the skull, while a playful or curious/confident dog will hold them

*To preserve through education.....*

erect. The proportion of subjects with floppy-only ears is not negligible. Skull– flat, medium width, tapering towards the eyes; bitches' skulls narrower than dogs'. Muzzle– shorter than skull, but less markedly so for the bigger/stronger sub-type. Wrinkles may or may not appear on the forehead when the ears are erect. Same for side wrinkles. Nose– Usually black or very dark.



**Fig.6: Young (approx.6-months old) cream, sand and brown Avuvis, Baatsona, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

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### **Neck, topline, body**

Neck– a strong neck of good length, usually held as an extension of spine, with slightly loose skin making folds in some subjects. Topline– level from back of skull to hip, hindquarters sometimes appearing slightly higher than forequarters. Body– balanced, chest and ribcage wider in bigger/stronger sub-type; fluid overall slenderness otherwise. Tail– slightly lower set than the basenji, mostly medium length, bending back to lightly brush the spine; can be naturally shorter to almost non-existent.

### **Legs**

Forequarters– Legs straight with clean bone and well-defined sinews, pasterns strong and flexible and well-coordinated enough to grab and turn, which makes it quite deft. Hindquarters– Strong and muscular, sometimes slightly longer than forequarters.

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**Fig. 7: Young (approx. 3-4 months old) male red and white with partial black mask Avuvi, Lashibi, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

### **Coat and color**

Coat usually short and fine, but variations exist (thicker, longer coats or even curly with fringed tail); the reason is under-researched and we don't know at this point whether it's a sign of foreign influences. Skin very pliant. Color– Deep mahogany with or

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without black overlay - black mask may occur; light brown to light sand; black; black and white; tricolor; brindle; cream; White feet and tail tip optional. White may predominate.

### **Gait**

A brisk trot is typical of the shorter sub-type; the rangier sub-type shows a longer, smoother stride.

### **Function**

Avuvis are not traditionally pets. The various Dahomey Gap tribes, like in most less affluent regions of the world, typically don't keep pets. A dog has to be perceived as earning its keep and, as far as Avuvis are concerned, there are two functions they are expected to fulfill their purpose: as guard dogs; and as hunting dogs.

Although rather unimpressive in size, the Avuvi is a good alarm dog. It will bark fiercely at strangers and unexpected, potentially threatening, situations. This will usually be enough to deter intruders, bearing in mind that people locally are often wary or afraid of

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dogs. If not, an Avuvi bite is not something to look forward to: although their jaws are proportionate to their small-to-medium sized body, they can apply surprising force. Unfortunately, I do not know of any experiment or commercial Avuvi-training program which would allow observing their specific behavior, and drawing definite conclusions as to their abilities. My limited experience is that some will make up the "advance notice" team, roaming around the property and barking at people approaching the perimeter, while others will be firmly guarding the house doors and only barking at people actually entering the property and preventing them from accessing the house.

Like most free-roaming, traditional village dogs, Avuvis are scavengers, as were their forebears since dog first became man's companion animal. They feed off the garbage heaps and, quite often, feces. In the Dahomey Gap, they are usually not fed "dog food", but left to fend for themselves or given table

*To preserve through education.....*

scraps, which are rich in starch and low on animal proteins. They complement their food intake with scavenging and hunting by themselves. They are extremely proficient ratters, and are also good at snatching birds on take-off after they've flushed them. Their preys of choice are all sorts of mouse-to-rat-like animals, and doves, pigeons, and bigger, slower birds.



**Fig. 8: Bitch and puppy, Baatsona, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

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**Fig. 9: Young (approx. 1-year old) male Avuvi, Baatsona, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

Because dogs in the Dahomey Gap are allowed to roam around freely, as are fowls, goats, sheep, and other farmyard animals, they can't be allowed to consider these animals as preys, and will either be chained (rarely in a village setting; more often in urban areas) or culled when they display an indiscriminating behavior towards animals (farmyard animals vs. game).

*To preserve through education.....*



**Fig. 10: Red adult male (4+ years), red and white 4-5 month old male and female Avuvis, Akuse, Eastern Region, Ghana**



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**Fig. 11: Variegated sand (brown hairs with white tips), blueish-eyed 4-month old male Avuvi, Baatsona, Greater Accra Region, Ghana**

Avuvis hunt using a combination of scent and sight. They will dig the ground for rat-like animals, including the much sought after grasscutter (*Thryonomys swinderianus*; also called cane rat, or bush meat; a delicacy in the region, fetching high prices on the markets, at roadsides and in restaurants, fresh or smoked). Different types of birds are also flushed by Avuvis and either snatched on their way up, or shot when the dog teams up with a human hunter.

Hunting with Avuvis is practiced in teams. In the Dahomey Gap, it is not uncommon to see a party of 2 men and 2 dogs hunting for rodents/rabbits around villages and even in the suburbs of big cities, where the ratio of buildings to empty lots is still relatively low. Larger parties of up to 15 dogs (and as many humans) are not unheard of, but fairly rare. Empirical evidence points at 2-5 dogs and as many

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humans for a typical party. Avuvis dig, flush, start, and fetch. Small deer is also hunted with packs of Avuvis: the dogs start them, circle them, disorientate them, and the pack leader will grab the neck and shake it to break it. Bigger deer is started, and then driven towards the human hunter. Finally, Avuvis also help locate snared game in the high grass. I haven't heard of any specific training for hunting dogs. It appears that they are mostly selected among the offspring of good performers.

Again, the aboriginal dog of the Dahomey Gap is one of the numerous under-researched topics in this region of the world, and to the best of my knowledge, no large scale surveys or programs have been done to do more than scratch at the surface of this fascinating topic. It would be very interesting to be able to make a survey of the uses, training and selection of Avuvis; to test their abilities for possible non-traditional uses; and to scientifically assess their strengths and weaknesses  
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as compared with Western selected breeds. The latter are being imported as status dogs while, at the same time, local people don't recognize as Avuvis individuals who are well fed, well cared for and trained. They will ask whether your beautiful dog is a German Shepherd or any breed name that sounds sophisticated to their ears. A share of the 'status' thirsty population could be educated to understand that a well cared, well trained Avuvi is as good as a Western dog, if not better considering it's much better adapted to the terrain and the climate.

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## Primitive Aboriginal Dogs Society LIST OF MEMBERS

<b>Alessio Ottogalli</b> Italy <a href="mailto:alessio.ottogalli@gmail.com">alessio.ottogalli@gmail.com</a>	<b>Russo-European Laika</b> Interests: translations from Russian language <a href="http://www.bearlajkit.com">www.bearlajkit.com</a>
<b>Amelia Price</b> USA <a href="mailto:arprice@optonline.net">arprice@optonline.net</a>	<b>Laikas, Samoyed</b>
<b>Andrew D. Poyarkov</b> Russia <a href="mailto:poyarkov@yandex.ru">poyarkov@yandex.ru</a>	<b>Hounds</b>
<b>Andrey V. Kovalenko</b> Kazakhstan <a href="mailto:akoval@nursat.kz">akoval@nursat.kz</a>	<b>Borzoi, Laikas</b> Institute of Zoology, Republic of Kazakhstan Zoology, ornithology, falconry, cynology, aboriginal and hunting dogs.
<b>Anna Frumina</b> USA <a href="mailto:Afru@yandex.ru">Afru@yandex.ru</a>	<b>Central Asian Ovcharka</b>
<b>Anna K. Mikhalskaya</b> Russia <a href="mailto:zvanka@yandex.ru">zvanka@yandex.ru</a>	<b>Hounds</b>
<b>Anna S. Plakhova</b> Kazakhstan <a href="mailto:elchor@nursat.kz">elchor@nursat.kz</a>	<b>Tazi</b> Military Institute, Republic Kazakhstan. Veterinary medicine, dogs, inheritance of coat color.

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<b>Arianna Spada</b> Italy <a href="mailto:arianna.spada@gmail.com">arianna.spada@gmail.com</a>	<b>Russo-European Laika</b> Zoologist <a href="http://www.bearlajkit.com">www.bearlajkit.com</a>
<b>Borislav Momchilov Kralev</b> Bulgaria <a href="mailto:kralevborko@yahoo.com">kralevborko@yahoo.com</a>	<b>Laikas and other primitive and aboriginal dogs</b>
<b>Brad Anderson</b> USA <a href="mailto:BradA1878@mindspring.com">BradA1878@mindspring.com</a>	<b>Hunting Laikas of Russia and Nihon Ken</b>
<b>Brandy Parsons</b> USA <a href="mailto:parsons_brandy@yahoo.com">parsons_brandy@yahoo.com</a>	<b>Sleddogs, Siberian Husky, Lajki</b>
<b>Cat Urbigkit</b> USA <a href="mailto:catu2@mac.com">catu2@mac.com</a>	<b>Sheep guarding dogs</b>
<b>Christina Pippin</b> USA <a href="mailto:christina.pippin@navy.mil">christina.pippin@navy.mil</a>	<b>Saluki</b>
<b>The Chukotka Sleddog Association of Canada</b> <a href="http://www.chukotkasleddogscanada.org/">http://www.chukotkasleddogscanada.org/</a>	<b>Dog sledding and sleddogs of Chukotka</b>
<b>Debbie Premus</b> USA <a href="mailto:SibeMusher@aol.com">SibeMusher@aol.com</a>	<b>Siberian Husky (original/working type), Chukotka Sled Dog and Kamchatka Sled Dog</b>
<b>Denize Newell</b> USA <a href="mailto:deni@expeditionsamoyeds.org">deni@expeditionsamoyeds.org</a>	<b>Samoyeds, Alaskan Malamutes, and Siberian Husky breeds</b> Samoyed Club of America, Northern California Samoyed Fanciers, Bay Area Siberian Husky Club, Northern California Alaskan

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	Malamute Association. I've been an executive secretary for 20 years. My experience includes writing and editing professional documents, planning large meetings and events, etc.
<b>Dmitriy E. Dubrovsky</b> Russia <a href="mailto:dubrovsky@pacc.ru">dubrovsky@pacc.ru</a>	<b>Samoyed</b> Hiking, hunting, dogs
<b>Don and Mary Cranford</b> USA <a href="mailto:thecranfords@cox-internet.com">thecranfords@cox-internet.com</a>	<b>West Siberian Laika</b>
<b>Dr. Anna Laukner</b> Germany <a href="mailto:dr.laukner@gmx.de">dr.laukner@gmx.de</a>	<b>German Spitz</b> Coat color of dogs and its genetics.
<b>Dr. Gertrude W. Hinsch</b> USA <a href="mailto:ghinsch@tampabay.rr.com">ghinsch@tampabay.rr.com</a>	<b>Saluki</b>
<b>Eugene Zelenik</b> USA <a href="mailto:EZelenyk@yahoo.com">EZelenyk@yahoo.com</a>	<b>Central Asian Ovcharka</b>
<b>Franco Milani</b> Italy <a href="mailto:milani.franco@gmail.com">milani.franco@gmail.com</a>	<b>Laikas (WEL)</b>
<b>Gregory Alan Newell</b> USA <a href="mailto:gnewell@samoyed.org">gnewell@samoyed.org</a>	<b>Samoyed</b> Editing English Language documents.
<b>Gunilla Jansson</b> Sweden <a href="mailto:mapptass@privat.ufors.se">mapptass@privat.ufors.se</a>	<b>Dogs in general and aboriginal dogs</b>
<b>Gwen Ross</b> USA <a href="mailto:Cgr-37@hotmail.com">Cgr-37@hotmail.com</a>	<b>Dog sledding and Chukotka Sled Dogs</b>

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<b>Ingvild Espielen</b> Norwegian <a href="mailto:ingvild.espielen@oya.vgs.no">ingvild.espielen@oya.vgs.no</a>	<b>Samoyed, taygan, norwegian aboriginal dogs</b> Preservation of the original type of the Samoyed since 1910
<b>Inkeri and Petri Kangasvuo</b> Finland <a href="mailto:samans@saunalahti.fi">samans@saunalahti.fi</a> <a href="mailto:petri.kangasvuo@pp.inet.fi">petri.kangasvuo@pp.inet.fi</a>	<b>Sleddogs, Siberian Husky</b>
<b>Irina M. Shlykova</b> Leningrad province Russia <a href="mailto:shlykova@gmail.com">shlykova@gmail.com</a>	<b>Borzoi</b> Dog kennel «The Russian Wind», Preservation of the Old Russian type of the Borzoi. Breeding for open field coursing ability
<b>Jennifer Aimee lloyd</b> USA <a href="mailto:lloydjena@gmail.com">lloydjena@gmail.com</a>	<b>Eastern sighthounds</b>
<b>Jutta Rübesam</b> Germany <a href="mailto:Saika.ruebesam@freenet.de">Saika.ruebesam@freenet.de</a>	<b>Afghan Hounds, Saluki, Tazi</b>
<b>Ken Mac Rury</b> Canada <a href="mailto:kenmacrury@gmail.com">kenmacrury@gmail.com</a>	<b>Inuit Dog</b>
<b>Konstantin N. Plakhov</b> Kazakhstan <a href="mailto:elchor@nursat.kz">elchor@nursat.kz</a>	<b>Tazi</b> Hunting Dog Kennel, Institute of Zoology, Republic of Kazakhstan. Teriology, zoogeography, ethology, preservation of wild animals and wildlife biology.

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<b>Lada V. Ponomareva</b> Russia	<b>Borzoy, Oriental hounds</b>
<b>Lane Bellman</b> USA <a href="mailto:lanebell.1@juno.com">lanebell.1@juno.com</a>	<b>Saluki, Taigan</b>
<b>Linda Wroth</b> USA <a href="mailto:lwroth@ix.netcom.com">lwroth@ix.netcom.com</a>	<b>Akita and other Japan breeds</b>
<b>Marco Venier</b> Italy <a href="mailto:mgvenier@gmail.com">mgvenier@gmail.com</a>	<b>Russian European Laika and other Laikas</b> Zoologist <a href="http://www.bearlajkit.com">www.bearlajkit.com</a>
<b>Marina G. Kuzina</b> Russia, Moscow <a href="mailto:logoveg@mail.ru">logoveg@mail.ru</a>	<b>Northern aboriginal dogs</b> Secretary of PADS; Russian Agricultural External State University, Genetics Department, Moscow province. Preservation of aboriginal dogs of the north, dog behavior, population genetics, phenetics and biometry
<b>Ms. Heather Fener</b> CIIA <a href="mailto:hfener@aol.com">hfener@aol.com</a>	<b>Aboriginal Dogs of Europe and India</b>
<b>Rajashree Khalap</b> India <a href="mailto:rajashree.khalap@gmail.com">rajashree.khalap@gmail.com</a>	<b>Aboriginal dogs of India</b> Geneticist
<b>Sabine van Wel</b> Germany <a href="mailto:yakutianhusky@gmx.com">yakutianhusky@gmx.com</a>	<b>Yakut laika, Samoyed</b>

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<b>Sarah de Monchy</b> The Netherlands <a href="mailto:s.monchy@planet.nl">s.monchy@planet.nl</a>	<b>Samoyed</b> Dutch club of Samoyeds. Aboriginal Samoyeds
<b>Shiri Hoshen</b> USA <a href="mailto:shoshen@earthlink.net">shoshen@earthlink.net</a>	<b>Saluki</b>
<b>Sir Terence Clark</b> UK <a href="mailto:Sirterenceclark@aol.com">Sirterenceclark@aol.com</a>	<b>Saluki, Tazi, Taigan, Afgan (bakhmul)</b>
<b>Stephen Bodio</b> USA <a href="mailto:ebodio@gilanet.com">ebodio@gilanet.com</a>	<b>Tazi, Taigan, Laikas</b>
<b>Sue Hamilton</b> USA <a href="mailto:qimmiq@snet.net">qimmiq@snet.net</a>	<b>Inuit Sled Dog</b> Editor/Publisher, <i>The Fan Hitch</i> , Journal of the Inuit Sled Dog International <a href="http://homepage.mac.com/pu/ggiq/">http://homepage.mac.com/pu/ggiq/</a>
<b>Tatjana S. Dubinina</b> Russia <a href="mailto:dubininm@mail.ru">dubininm@mail.ru</a>	<b>Taigan</b>
<b>Tatyana V. Desyatova</b> Russia <a href="mailto:irklaika@gmail.com">irklaika@gmail.com</a>	<b>East-Siberian Laika</b> Secretary of PADS
<b>Tyrone Brown</b> USA <a href="mailto:Treedog41@yahoo.com">Treedog41@yahoo.com</a>	<b>Aboriginal hunting dogs</b>
<b>Vadim D. Rechkin</b> Russia <a href="mailto:rechkinvd@rambler.ru">rechkinvd@rambler.ru</a>	<b>Laikas</b>
<b>Vitaly (Zaur) Bagiev</b> Russia <a href="mailto:abagiev@gmail.com">abagiev@gmail.com</a>	<b>Caucasian Mountain Dog</b>

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<b>Vladimir E. Beregovoy</b> USA <a href="mailto:aliska@hughes.net">aliska@hughes.net</a>	<b>West-Seberian Laika and Saluki</b> Curator PADS, Retired Zoologist, English-Russian and Russian-English translation, Newsletter PADS, West Siberian Laika, Saluki, Tazy and aboriginal dogs of the world.
<b>Werner Roeder</b> Germany <a href="mailto:dr-roeder@gmx.de">dr-roeder@gmx.de</a>	<b>Azavak</b>
<b>William Fantozzi</b> USA <a href="mailto:Bill@karelianbeardog.us">Bill@karelianbeardog.us</a>	<b>Karelian Bear Dog, Laikas</b>

**PADS, Interntional Website**<http://new.pads.ru>**PADS Curator:**

Vladimir Beregovoy  
1507 Mountain Valley Road  
Buchanan, VA 24066, USA  
[aliska@hughes.net](mailto:aliska@hughes.net)

**PADS, International Editorial Board**

Marina Georgievna Kuzina  
P.O. Box 12  
Moscow, 115407 Russia  
+10-(499)-618-6370  
[logoveg@mail.ru](mailto:logoveg@mail.ru)

Desyatova Tatyana  
[chaga10@mail.ru](mailto:chaga10@mail.ru)

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Moscow, 115407 Russia

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