

The Labrador Retriever

The Labrador Retriever is a working dog bred to perform retrieving tasks in any kind of weather or environment. It possesses the physical characteristics and temperament that allow it to adapt to many parts of the world and to a variety of work beyond the shooting field.

Origin and Purpose of the Breed

by Dr. & Mrs. Bernard Ziessow

Recent books written about the Labrador Retriever seem to have one thing in common; one chapter is devoted to the early history of the Labrador Retriever—where did he come from?

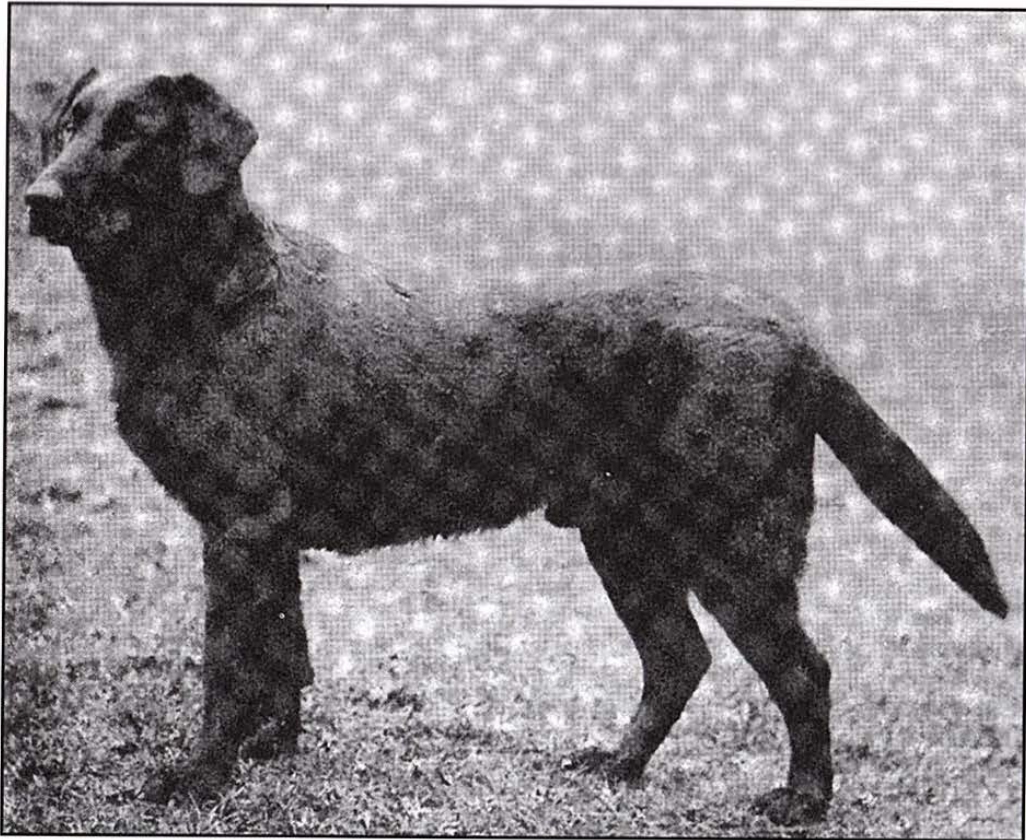
There are many theories pertaining to his origin, however most everyone agrees that Newfoundland (not Labrador) is the “land from whence he came.” Unfortunately, no one really knows how he got there. In 1882 a native of St. John’s saw small water dogs that he described as “*admirably trained as retrievers in fowling and otherwise useful.*” Since game was abundant on the island and a good hunting dog could provide game to supplement the predominantly fish diet, it is believed the early settlers brought or imported good hunting stock from home. While the dogs were used for many purposes, because of their retrieving instinct, swimming ability and weather-resistant coat, their principal occupation soon became a “work mate” to the fisherman.

From the time they were 10 months old, the Lab pups were assigned a permanent position as a member of the crew of one of the off-shore fishing schooners that was used to ply the Newfoundland waters in search for cod. The method employed to catch cod was by trawl or line. On stormy days, many fish broke off the hooks as the trawl was being brought in. The dogs were taught to jump in the cold, icy water and retrieve the fish. On a particularly rough day, a good dog could retrieve as much as 100 pounds of fish.

The Labrador dogs’ highly developed retrieving instinct and willingness to please did not go unnoticed by the English sportsmen. When organized shooting of upland game became popular with the landed gentry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it became the custom to replace pointers and setters with retrievers. In the early days, a retriever was simply known as a “retriever” and the owners freely inter-bred short-coated, long-coated and curly-coated retrievers. Many dogs were imported from Newfoundland and their owners considered them vastly superior to any other breed.

Colonel Hawker, in 1830, referred to the “St. John’s” breed of water dogs as “*by far the best for any kind of shooting. He is generally black and no bigger than a pointer, very fine in legs with short smooth hair and does not carry his tail so much curled.*”

The 3rd Earl of Malmesbury in a letter written to the 6th Duke of Buccleugh said, “*We always call mine Labrador dogs, and I have kept the breed as pure as I could*



Munden Single, a Labrador Retriever from the early 1900s.

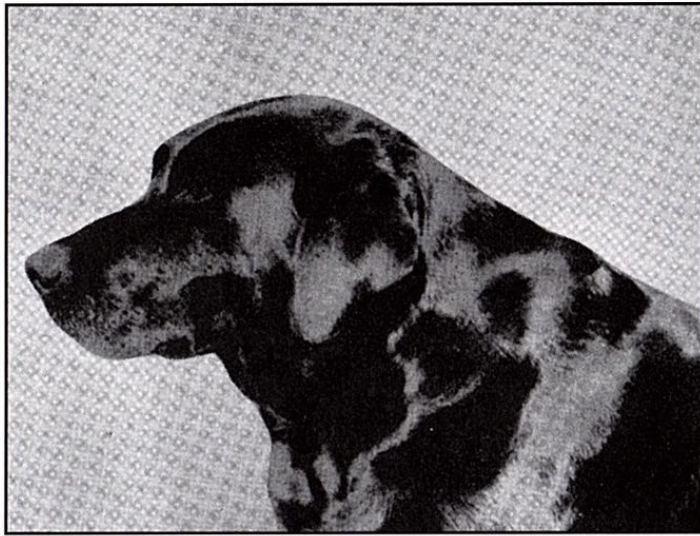
from the first I had . . . the real breed may be known by their having a close coat which turns water off like oil, and, above all, a tail like an otter." Many breeders, realizing the excellent qualities, crossed Labradors with other retrievers. Still, if a Labrador is crossed with some other strain, the Labrador type nearly always predominated and their descendants were most always called Labradors.

"Stonehenge," the respected 19th century sports writer, said:

"Symmetry and Temperament - the symmetry and elegance of this dog are considerable and should be valued highly. The evidences of a good temper must be regarded with great care since his utility depends on his disposition."

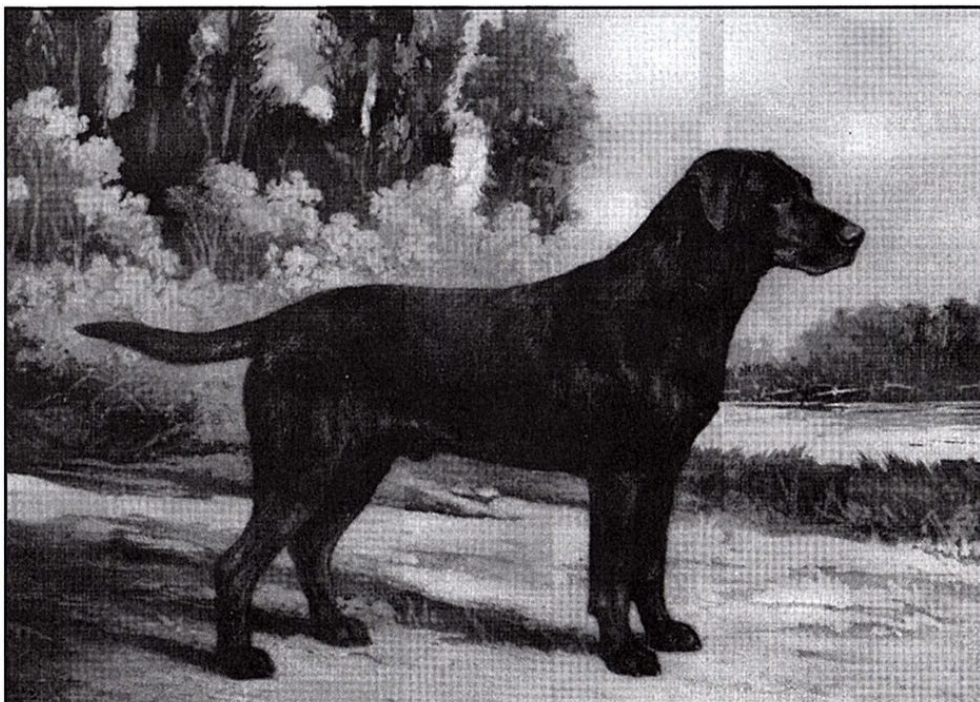
The greatest number of contemporary dogs are descended from the kennel of the Third Earl of Malmesbury. He gave the Sixth Duke of Buccleugh six dogs in 1870. A few years later the Earl of Malmesbury died and his kennel disappeared, but the pure line that he had pursued continued at the Buccleugh kennels. *All Labradors today have lines that go back to those six dogs.*

The Labrador Retriever was first recognized as a special breed by The Kennel Club (England) on 7 July 1903, and separate breed classes for Labradors were allowed at The Kennel Club Show. On November 3, 1903, Labradors were definitely recognized as a separate breed and on January 3, 1905, they were classified as a sub-variety of retrievers.



Head study of a
Labrador from
about 1920.

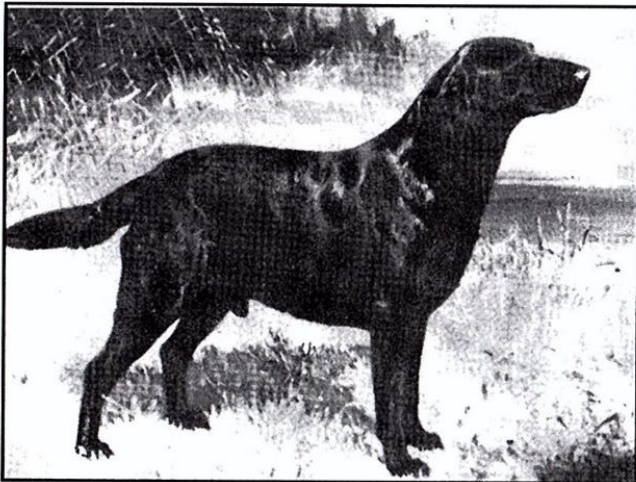
The Labrador Retriever Club (England) was formed on April 5, 1916 to protect the development of the pure bred Labrador. Up until 1916 The Kennel Club permitted dogs of mixed retriever breeding to be registered under whatever breed the owner wished. This situation was obviously not satisfactory and led to problems, particularly in the show ring. The Kennel Club was petitioned to open a separate register for the inter-bred retrievers, thus leaving the way clear for the careful breeding of pure bred Labradors to continue unhindered. A Breed Standard, which remained unaltered until 1950, was drawn up in 1916.



Dual Champion Bramshaw Bob (Great Britain) whelped 12/11/29.

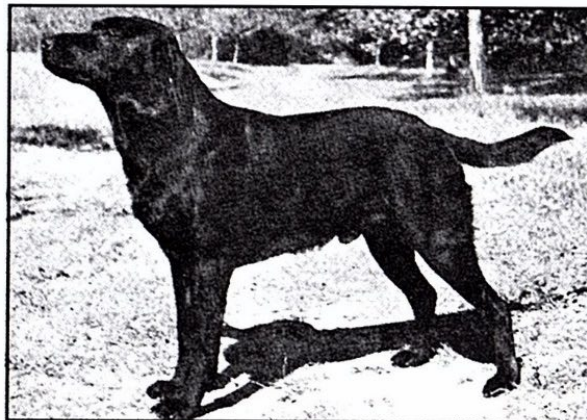
It was not until 1917 that the first Labrador was registered by the American Kennel Club. In 1927, there were only twenty-three retrievers of all kinds (Labradors, Goldens, Flat-coats, Curly-coats and Chesapeakes) registered with the AKC. During the twenties, American sportsmen, attempting to emulate the Scottish sport of pass shooting, brought in young Scottish gamekeepers, purchased guns from the finest London gunsmiths and imported dogs from reputable British kennels. Some wealthy families virtually turned their estates into shooting preserves. It wasn't long before the "shoots" developed into field trials. The first trial licensed by the AKC was held December 21, 1931. The Labrador Retriever Club, Inc. was established that same year and the first Labrador Retriever Club Specialty show was held May 11, 1933.

The working ability and temperament characteristics of the breed continued to fuel its popularity and growth. The Labrador Retriever has been for the past decade the most popular breed registered by the American Kennel Club. As the breed continues to expand, it is vitally important that the character of the Labrador be maintained. A character that includes the physical characteristics described in the Standard, athletic ability, a stable temperament, retrieving desire and willingness to please.



**Dual Champions
of the Past**

**American Champion
and three-time
National Field Trial
Champion Shed of Arden.**



Dual Champion Happy Playboy.