

Bearded Collies

March 2010 *AKC Gazette*

The Beat of a Different Bagpiper

In 2009 the Bearded Collie Club of America celebrated its 40th anniversary. After becoming an AKC-recognized breed back in 1977, it's good to see that it only took 30-plus years for brown-colored Beardies to get their due recognition in the show ring. (Of course, there have been a few exceptions prior to this last decade, but with the late Teddy Young at the other end of the lead, it would be hard not to win, even with a brown.) Most breeders have recognized the special beauty of brown-colored Beardies, but it seems that it has taken much longer for judges to appreciate them and for handlers to become willing to take a risk in showing them.

Beardie history tells us that the brown-colored Beardies worked more in the highlands of Scotland, and the blacks in the lowlands. There is speculation that the colors were concentrated in these different locations due to differences in coat type and working styles (which I equate to the dogs thinking differently). Today there are still differences between black and brown Beardies in terms of temperament and behavior.

The most important factor in the choice of a brown-colored Beardie versus a black for today's companion animal comes down to preference, but until you have had a brown Beardie steal your heart, you won't fully understand the connection. They can be stubborn and yet very soft tempered. They always know how to win you over with their eyes that "tone with the coat." (*Of course* their eye color coincides with their coat color—what gentleman would ever be caught not matching?)

The brown colors range from an orangey brown to a dark-greyish chocolate-brown, and the browns generally have a good, harsh topcoat. Like the black-colored Beardies, they are happy and bouncy, but they don't have quite the same vigor or exuberance. They are a bit more sensitive and experience their surroundings a little more deeply.

Unfortunately this sensitivity means a brown Beardie may not be the tireless show dog you are looking for, especially after he's already had several trips into the ring that day. The browns are less likely to do the same exercise requested over and over again with the same level of gusto that black-colored Beardies will have. They will either wilt with boredom or determine that there are more interesting things to do.

Some may say this is a more intelligent approach to life. I say, judges, handlers, and prospective owners be aware: Brown-colored Beardies walk to a slightly different (and yet wonderful) bagpiper. —<I>Gail Miller Bisher, New York, N.Y.;<I>
gailmiller1@mac.com