

The following is the first of two excellent articles on color written by Carol Gold, President of the Bearded Collie Club of Canada and Editor of their publication, The Bearded Colleague, in which the articles appeared.

Colours, We have Colours! by Carol Gold

Colour seems to be a constant confusion, puzzlement and delight to Beardie owners and breeders....and judges. So, without diluting the delight, I'm going to try to clear up some of the confusion.

What colours do Beardies come in? To answer this question we have to limit ourselves to the colour at birth, since Beardie coats go through so many changes.

There are four basic Beardie colours—black, blue, brown and fawn. Black is just that—black. Blue can range from very dark smoke to grey or silver at birth. Brown can be chestnut, red, or liver. Fawn is a beige colour, ranging from honey-toned to pink.

All of these colours can come with tan tri-colour markings, on the cheeks, eyebrows, legs and under the tail. These markings are noticeable at birth or shortly thereafter. They can be a deep rich tan or very light, but whichever, they fade very rapidly and by the time the dog is adult, are a yellow colour which blends with the white markings and not readily distinguishable from the white.

Beardies also come predominantly white, with coloured markings, but this is not acceptable according to the Beardie standard, which specifically calls for a coloured dog with white markings. It is an old colour in the breed, though, because old dog books which refer to the breed mention it, though they do say that the coloured dogs were preferred. As far as can be told, there are no physical defects associated with the white colour, and why it was disallowed by the Standard is a mystery. But it was.

Eye rims, lips and noses must be the same colour as the coat and as dark as possible. You'll notice, if you look very closely that blue dogs have blue noses, etc., and fawn dogs have fawn ones. Often, to tell the difference you have to put the blue nose-to-nose with a black under a strong light. The genetic factor that dilutes black to blue and brown to fawn also affects skin pigmentation, so you can't have a blue or fawn Beardie with a true black or true brown nose. We'll get into the genetics next issue.

The Standard requires the eyes to tone with the coat so it would be wrong for a dark slate Beardie to have light eyes, and equally wrong for a light silver one to have dark eyes. Most North American judges need a lot of educating on this point because most working breeds prefer the darkest eyes possible, regardless of coat colour. Black Beardies have eyes in the brown range, blue Beardies have grey-brown eyes, brown Beardies have golden, tea-coloured eyes and fawns have pale yellow-grey eyes. The eye colour changes with the coat...another hard-to-believe feature of our breed.

So far the colours are pretty clear. It's as the Beardie grows that things get confusing. Somewhere between the ages of 8 weeks and 6 months, most Beardies start to fade. The new coat growing in is a lighter colour, and somehow the tips of the hair which were dark, fade out to match. By the time the Beardie is a year old, the blacks and blues can be indistinguishable silvers and the fawns and brown indistinguishable off-whites. Not all dogs fade to that extent, of course, but by a year of age, a Beardie is usually the lightest he will ever be. It's important to realize that the extent to which a Beardie fades has no relation to how dark his coat will eventually be.

Once the fading is complete, you start watching the shoulder area for the new colour that will eventually grow in. It can easily take until the dog is 2 years old before the coat starts to darken. Sometimes it doesn't darken much, other times it goes almost as dark as puppy coat....but never will it come back to the same deep pure colour of puppy coat.

Beardie coat colour keeps changing throughout life, darkening, lightening, changing shade. Often a born black will end up a lighter shade than a born blue or a brown will stick to the sandy shades while a fawn deepens to almost brown. This is where breeding records can get confused and why it is vital that Beardies be described by

Colour, continued....

the colour they were born. Too often, a black-gone-grey is called a blue or a brown-gone-sandy called a fawn---it is impossible for a black to turn blue or brown to turn fawn---they are all separate and distinct colours and genetically different.

Occasionally you get a black that doesn't fade at all. Often these dogs have soft coats, a condition which seems to go with solid black. Brown coats often have their own problem--excessive waviness, although in Canada we have been blessedly free of this.

You'll often hear people tell you, "There must be a black in every mated pair or you'll get colour paleing." Well, the next article on genetics will show you it ain't necessarily so. In fact, there are a great many Beardies around to PROVE it ain't so! But, where you will run the risk of loss of colour and loss of pigment is by mating two Beardies who themselves are pale...permanently, that is, not just in a pale phase. For instance, if you were to mate a black who had gone light grey and stayed there to a brown who had gone light beige and stayed there, you might well expect that the next generation would be more likely to fade and stay faded instead of coming back to a richer colour. And if you mate a black with pink-patched eye rims and nose not coloured fully to another black with the same problem, you will get loss of skin pigment. Strong adult colour--be it strong black, strong slate, strong blue, strong brown or strong fawn--and full skin pigmentation are your best guards against loss of colour in your breeding line. ("Slate" is the word used to describe a black-born Beardedie who has faded to a dark grey.)

In the next issue we'll look at the genetics of colour in Beardies and then I'll try to answer any questions that may arise from these articles or from your own experience with Beardies.

PROTECT PURE BRED DOGS -- BUY FROM A BREEDER!

Advantages of buying from breeders

1. To the Puppy

The puppy will come direct to his new owner from good care and in good health. He should be wormed and innoculated. He will have proper registration. His breeder will have made sure that he is going to a good home before he is sold. In contrast, the puppy which is sent out for resale faces, under the best of circumstances, a long and frightening trip, to arrive in a new and strange place. He may be quickly sold; however, if he is left there a long time his personality may be severely affected.

2. To the Buyer

He will have the advantage of seeing the stock from which the puppy comes and the conditions under which he was raised. He can refer to the breeder for help at any time he feels it necessary. He will be able to obtain background information as well as assistance in grooming methods and general care. He will have the advantage of the breeder's concern for the puppy in placing him.

3. To the Breeder

He has a chance to place his puppy in what he feels is the correct home for the particular dog. He has a chance to see the individual, or individuals, who will have him. If he keeps in touch with his buyers he is able to find out how his stock develops and can evaluate his stock on good points and bad, and may discover hidden serious faults.

4. To the Breed

By the careful placing of puppies, by the breeding of good stock, and by the breeder's full knowledge of his dogs after they have left him, a high level of breed can be maintained. Carelessly placed puppies rarely, if ever, become a credit to the breed as adults.