



Drawn on Stone by W^m E. Hitchcock

Drawn from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Esquimaux Dog

Lith. Printed & Col^d by J. T. Bowen, Phil

CANIS FAMILIARIS.—LINN. (VAR. BOREALIS.—DESM.)

ESQUIMAUX DOG.

PLATE CXIII.—MALES.

C. magnitudine C. Terræ Novæ, capite parvo, auribus erectis, cauda comosa, cruribus pedibusque robustioribus, colore cinereo, albo nigroque notato.

CHARACTERS.

About the size of the Newfoundland dog ; head, small ; ears, erect ; tail, bushy ; legs and feet, stout ; general colour gray, varied with white and dark markings.

SYNONYMES.

CANIS FAMILIARIS, var. N. Borealis. Desm., Mamm., p. 194.

ESQUIMAUX DOG. Captain Lyons, Private Journal, pp. 244, 332.

“ “ Parry's Second Voyage, pp. 290, 358.

CANIS FAMILIARIS, var. A. Borealis—ESQUIMAUX DOG. F. B. A., p. 75.

DESCRIPTION.

Head, rather small ; ears, short and pointed ; body, thick and well formed ; eye, of moderate size ; feet, clothed with thick short hair concealing the nails ; tail, bushy, and longest at the end ; hair, long, with thick wool beneath.

COLOUR.

Muzzle, black ; inner portion of ears, blackish ; top of nose, forehead, a space around the eyes, outer edges of ears, cheeks, belly, and legs, whitish ; crown of the head, and back, nearly black ; sides, thinly covered with long black, and some white, hairs ; underneath there is a shorter dense coat of yellowish-gray woolly hair which is partly visible through these long hairs.

The tail, like the back, is clothed with black and white hairs, the latter greatly predominating, especially at the tip.

DIMENSIONS.

	Feet.	Inches
Length from point of nose to root of tail, - - -	4	3
“ “ of tail (vertebræ), - - -	1	2
“ “ including hair, - - -	1	5
Height of ear, inside, - - -	-	3
Width between the eyes, - - -	-	2½
“ “ ears, - - -	-	4½

HABITS.

So much has been written about the admirable qualities of the dog, that it would be quite useless for us to enter upon the subject; we shall also avoid the question of the origin of the various races, which in fact have been so intermixed that it would be an almost Quixotic task to endeavour to trace the genealogy of even the “noblest” of them. Those, however, that have, like the Esquimaux Dog, for centuries retained their general characters, and have not been exposed to any chance of “amalgamation” with other races, exhibit habits as well as forms and colours sufficiently permanent to warrant the naturalist in describing them, and in many cases their history is exceedingly interesting.

The Esquimaux Dogs are most useful animals to the savages of our Arctic regions, and when hitched to a sled many couples together, will travel with their master over the ice and snow at great speed for many miles without much fatigue, or draw heavy burthens to the huts of their owners. When on the coast of Labrador we had the following account of the mode in which these dogs subsist, from a man who had resided in that part of the world for upwards of ten years. During spring and summer they ramble along the shores, where they meet with abundance of dead fish, and in winter they eat the flesh of the seals which are killed and salted in the spring or late in the autumn when these animals return from the north. This man informed us also that when hard pushed he could relish the fare he thus provided for his Dogs just as much as they did themselves. We found several families inhabiting the coast of Labrador, all of whom depended entirely on their Dogs to convey them when visiting their neighbours, and some of whom had packs of at least forty of these animals. On some parts of the coast of Labrador the fish were so abundant during our visit that we could scoop them out of the edge of the water with a pocket-handkerchief: at such times the Esquimaux Dogs catch them, wading in and snapping at them with considerable dexterity as the surf retires; when caught they eat them at once while they are still alive.

We were informed that when these Dogs are on a journey, in winter, should they be overtaken by a severe snow-storm, and thereby prevented from reaching a settlement within the calculated time, and if the provisions intended for them in consequence give out, in their ravenous hunger they devour the driver, and even prey upon one another. Such cases were related to us, as well as others in which, by severe whipping and loud cries the Dogs were forced into a gallop and kept on the full run until some house was reached and the sleigh-driver saved.

These animals are taught to go in harness from the time they are quite young pups, being placed in a team along with well trained Dogs when only two or three months old, to gain experience and learn to obey their master, who wields a whip of twenty or thirty feet length of lash, with a short, heavy handle.

On a man approaching a house where they are kept, these Dogs sally forth with fierce barkings at the intruder, and it requires a bold heart to march up to them, as with their pointed ears and wiry hair they look like a pack of wild wolves. They are in fact very savage and ferocious at times, and require the strictest discipline to keep them in subjection.

Captain LYON gives an interesting account of the Esquimaux Dog, part of which we shall here lay before you: "A walrus is frequently drawn along by three or four of these Dogs, and seals are sometimes carried home in the same manner, though I have in some instances seen a Dog bring home the greater part of a seal in panniers placed across his back. The latter mode of conveyance is often used in summer, and the Dogs also carry skins or furniture overland to the sledges when their masters are going on any expedition. It might be supposed that in so cold a climate these animals had peculiar periods of gestation, like the wild creatures; but on the contrary, they bear young at every season of the year, the pups seldom exceeding five at a litter. Cold has very little effect on them; for, although the dogs at the huts slept within the snow passages, mine at the ships had no shelter, but lay alongside, with the thermometer at 42° and 44° (below zero!) and with as little concern as if the weather had been mild. I found by several experiments, that three of my dogs could draw me on a sledge weighing 100 pounds at the rate of one mile in six minutes; and as a proof of the strength of a well-grown Dog, my leader drew 196 pounds singly, and to the same distance, in eight minutes. At another time, seven of my Dogs ran a mile in four minutes, drawing a heavy sledge full of men. Afterwards, in carrying stores to the Fury, one mile distant, nine Dogs drew 1611 pounds in the space of nine minutes. My sledge was on runners neither shod nor iced; but had the runners been iced, at least 40 pounds might have been added for each Dog,"

Captain LYON had eleven of these Dogs, which he says "were large and even majestic looking animals; and an old one, of peculiar sagacity, was placed at their head by having a longer trace, so as to lead them through the safest and driest places." "The leader was instant in obeying the voice of the driver, who never beat, but repeatedly called to him by name. When the Dogs slackened their pace, the sight of a seal or a bird was sufficient to put them instantly to their full speed; and even though none of these might be seen on the ice, the cry of 'a seal!'—'a bear!'—'a bird!' &c., was enough to give play to the legs and voices of the whole pack. It was a beautiful sight to observe the two sledges racing at full speed to the same object, the Dogs and men in full cry, and the vehicles splashing through the holes of water with the velocity and spirit of rival stage-coaches. There is something of the spirit of professed whips in these wild races; for the young men delight in passing each other's sledge, and jockeying the hinder one by crossing the path. In passing on different routes the right hand is yielded, and should an inexperienced driver endeavour to take the left, he would have some difficulty in persuading his team to do so. The only unpleasant circumstance attending these races is, that a poor dog is sometimes entangled and thrown down, when the sledge, with perhaps a heavy load, is unavoidably drawn over his body.

"The driver sits on the fore part of the vehicle, from whence he jumps, when requisite, to pull it clear of any impediments which may lie in the way; and he also guides it by pressing either foot on the ice. The voice and long whip answer all the purposes of reins, and the Dogs can be made to turn a corner as dexterously as horses, though not in such an orderly manner, since they are constantly fighting; and I do not recollect to have seen one receive a flogging without instantly wreaking his passion on the ears of his neighbours. The cries of the men are not more melodious than those of the animals; and their wild looks and gestures, when animated, give them an appearance of devils driving wolves before them. Our Dogs had eaten nothing for forty-eight hours, and could not have gone over less than seventy miles of ground; yet they returned to all appearance as fresh and active as when they first set out."

These Dogs curl the tail over the hip in the manner of house dogs generally.

Our drawing was made from a fine living Dog in the Zoological Garden at London. Some have since been brought to New York alive by the ships fitted out and sent to the polar seas in search of the unfortunate Sir JOHN FRANKLIN and his party by Mr. HENRY GRINNELL, of that city.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This animal, as the name imports, is the constant companion of the Esquimaux, but extends much beyond the range of that tribe of Indians, since it is found not only at Labrador, but among various tribes of northern Indians, and was observed by travellers in the Arctic regions to the extreme north; we are unacquainted with its western limits.

GENERAL REMARKS.

We have been induced, in our account of American animals, to give figures and descriptions of this peculiar variety of Dog, inasmuch as it appears to have been a permanent variety for ages, and is one of the most useful animals to the Indians residing in the polar regions. Whether it be an original native Dog, or derive its origin from the wolf, is a subject which we will not here discuss, farther than to state, in opposition to the views of Dr. RICHARDSON, that our figures do not represent these animals as very closely allied to the wolf; on the contrary, their look of intelligence would indicate that they possess sagacity and aptitude for the service of man, equal at least to that of many favourite breeds of Dog. The fact also of their breeding at all seasons of the year, their manner of placing the tail in sport, and their general habits, give evidence of their being true Dogs and not wolves, the only difference between them and some other varieties consisting in their having erect pointed ears, which are peculiar to the Dogs of savage nations, and not altogether absent in some of our common breeds, as we have witnessed in the shepherd's Dog of Europe and some cur Dogs in America, erect ears of a similar character.



Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1854. "Canis familiaris (var. Borealis), Esquimaux Dog [Pl. CXIII, males]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 3, 57–61. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322380>.

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