# *PUREBREDS AND PET OVERPOPULATION: THE CASE FOR A BREEDING MORATORIUM*

By Julie E. Miller

At a fund-raising auction last May, Sidwell Friends, a prominent private school in Washington, D.C., auctioned a purebred golden retriever to the highest bidder. Aside from showing the school's poor judgement, the incident manifests a reality that animal shelters across the country are all too familiar with: while people were bidding thousands of dollars on a purebred golden retriever, a nearby animal shelter, the Montgomery County (MD) Humane Society, had *three* golden retrievers available for adoption.

"I wish people would stop to think and be more aware about the purebreds who need homes and die for lack of homes before they rush out to a breeder," says Sharon Kessler, director of the Montgomery County Humane Society. Kessler's comment reflects a deep-rooted frustration felt by all humane workers who care for and euthanize unwanted purebreds while other purebreds are being produced, marketed, and sold.

Despite breeders' contentions, purebreds do end up in shelters. Yet many breeders continue to deny the role they play in the pet overpopulation crisis, deflecting the inherent responsibilities all breeders assume each time they add yet another animal to the swollen pet population.

The HSUS's call for a temporary breeding moratorium (see the March 1993 edition of *Shelter Sense*) inspired some purebred breeders to write prolific, emotional pleas in the nation's editorial pages in defense of their "right" to breed. After all, they insisted, a breeding moratorium would surely cause a purebred shortage, and might even result in the eventual depletion of all companion animals. And then where would the animal-loving public find their pets?

The thousands of shelter employees who are forced to euthanize millions of unwanted animals each year—mixed breeds and purebreds—certainly know where the public can find new companions. What proves a more difficult challenge is countering the misconception that purebreds are not part of the pet overpopulation problem.

Meri Boyles

*A sad-eyed bassett hound, wearing her shelter identification tag, gets some attention from potential adopters.*

## Tracking Purebreds In Shelters

Many professional breeders perpetuate the myth that purebreds are rare, revered, and seldom found in shelters. But as both shelters and breed-rescue groups will attest, "surplus" isn't only synonymous with "mixed breed."

According to HSUS estimates, as many as 25 percent of the estimated 12 million animals who enter shelters each year are purebred. That means that up to 3 million purebred animals enter shelters each year, representing not only dogs registered by the American Kennel Club (AKC)—the largest registry of purebred dogs in the United States— but also animals from other registries and unregisterable purebreds. Despite help from breed-rescue groups, thousands upon thousands of unwanted purebreds must still be euthanized for want of a home. Nevertheless, the misconception that owners of purebreds just don't give them up and that only mixed breeds are surrendered to shelters shields professional breeders from having to take responsibility for their actions.

In 1991, King County (Washington) Animal Control kennel worker Shelby Russel tracked purebreds in the county shelter for four months as that county's spay/neuter ordinance was being considered. Russel found that the lowest percentage of purebreds on a given day was 17 percent and the highest over 50 percent. Shelters in surrounding areas had similar statistics—purebreds averaging 25 to 30 percent of dogs entering the shelters. According

to the Progressive Animal Welfare Society in Lynnwood, Washington, when Russel announced the findings during a taping of a local television show, "a collective groan of disbelief erupted from the (predominantly breeder) audience." In 1990, an estimated 6,000 purebred dogs were euthanized in Seattle-area shelters.

"Almost 40 percent of the dogs at our humane society who need new homes are purebreds," said Mary Eno, representing the Montgomery County Humane Society, in her testimony in support of breeding legislation (now passed). "I have a stack of pedigree papers from dogs and cats given up to the humane society in just the last few months. These animals come from both private breeders and pet stores. Some come from champion lines. One is even a finished champion show dog."

According to Kessler, the shelter tracked the number of incoming purebreds to help get legislation passed. "So many of the pet shops and the fanciers were saying 'they're not our animals' and we showed that they certainly were their animals," she says.

Another way some shelters are educating breeders is by directly contacting the breeders when their animals turn up in their facilities. "One of the things we were hearing with the whole spay/neuter ordinance debate was 'I'm a responsible breeder; my dogs never end up in shelters,' " says Pat Miller, director of operations for the Marin Humane Society in Novato, California. "Well, how many shelters ever contact breeders to tell them that their dogs are in their shelters? So how many breeders know that their animals have ended up in the shelter?"

When the Marin Humane Society traces an incoming purebred to the breeder, it calls the breeder to inform him that his animal is in the shelter. "We see it as two-fold," explains Miller. "Perhaps this is truly a responsible breeder who wants the opportu-

## *PUREBREDS: ONLY A DOG PROBLEM?*

The issue of purebred animals in shelters is largely considered a purebred dog problem. Admittedly, the percentage of purebred cats in shelters doesn't come close to that of purebred dogs. "It is wrong to consider all species and animal breeding the same when discussing animal overpopulation," said the Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) in a recent prepared statement. "Pedigreed cats account for less than 2 percent of the total cat population."

But CFA's contention that "the millions of cats in shelters are not the result of planned pedigreed breeding programs" doesn't tell the whole story.

"While it's absolutely true that far fewer purebred cats are being produced than purebred dogs, and that most people acquire mixed-breed cats," says The HSUS's Marc Paulhus, "it's also true that a larger percentage of purebred cats are born than this figure represents because so many people don't register their pet cats. An awful lot of obviously purebred Siamese and obviously purebred Persians arrive in animal shelters not only without papers but also never having possessed papers because they weren't registered."

Purebred cats, like purebred dogs, are sometimes inflicted with genetic defects acquired through selective breeding. The victims of these health and temperament problems may end up in shelters, turned over by frustrated owners who weren't prepared for the special care required for that breed. "Cats have only more recently been subjected to the kind of intensive inbreeding and selective breeding that has been going on for generations in dogs," writes Dr. Michael Fox in his book *Inhumane Society*. "Hence they have fewer genetic problems, but these are likely to increase as purebred cats gain in popularity." Most disturbing is that genetic freaks like the hairless "Sphynx" cat have been developed, indicating an appalling lack of ethical restraint.

"What's more, 'kitten' mills—or inhumane catteries—which propagate these defects are easier to conceal than are puppy mills because large numbers of caged cats can be kept out of sight and don't bark," says The HSUS's Sally Fekety. Although there are far fewer catteries than puppy mills, cats kept in catteries are often at greater risk for transmissible diseases such as FIP, FIV, and ringworm.

Genetic disorders aren't the only problems facing cats. Whimsical consumer trends can prove life-threatening to cats just as they can to dogs. Today's new demand for exotic hybrid cats, such as the Bengal and the American Lynx, may be tomorrow's shelter nightmare. The rising popularity of these exotic breeds concerns many animal-care and -control experts who understand that exotic animals often have unpredictable behavior and special care needs that pet

nity to fulfill the commitment he made when that puppy was born to be sure that she is cared for throughout her life and in that case we're willing to allow him to fulfill that commitment. If not, maybe we can help educate breeders about the fact that their puppies are ending up in animal shelters."

As controversial breeding-restriction ordinances are debated in local communities throughout the country, shelters are finding that talking about the importance of curtailing breeding just isn't enough. The opposition must be *shown* how their action directly affects the animals they profess to care so much about. Tracking purebreds in shelters is not only important for the shelter's own records, but also serves to counter fanciers' assertions that purebred animals are not part of the community's pet surplus.

### Evaluating Incoming Purebreds

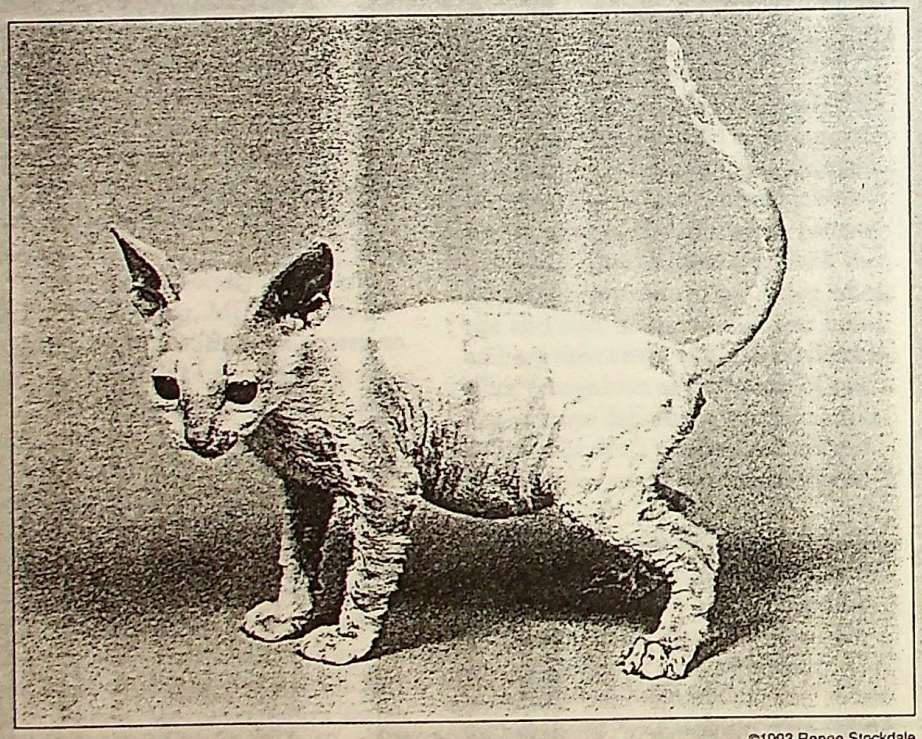
Many groups that oppose breeding restrictions accuse shelters of misidentifying mixed breeds as purebreds. Although many shelters have staff members particularly skilled in identifying purebreds, such accusations make it all the more imperative that shelters educate their staff about breed identification.

Although most shelter workers can identify the more popular breeds such as golden retrievers and Dalmatians, identifying the less common breeds often proves a greater challenge. For example, whereas a Great Dane and Chihuahua are usually easy to identify, the purebred Belgian Tervuren could be mistaken for a shepherd mix (a case where the purebred is mistaken for a mixed breed). "Given that most purebreds enter shelters without pedigreed registration papers, shelters should have somebody who is knowledgeable about dog and cat breeds," says Sally Fekety, professional services consultant with The HSUS.

While most shelters have a supply of owners may be unable to cope with.

"We face inordinate problems with cat overpopulation in virtually every community in this country," says The HSUS's Kate Rindy. "The number of cats being born and ending up in shelters is increasing and has been over the last ten years. We need the help of organizations like the CFA because it is in a prime position to influence cat lovers—whether they own purebreds or not. CFA can re-double its efforts to educate cat owners and potential cat owners about the responsibilities of owning a cat. We welcome their assistance."

Many purebred cat breeders argue that a voluntary breeding moratorium shouldn't concern them because fewer purebred cats than purebred dogs are entering shelters. After all, there are only thousands of unwanted purebred cats versus millions of unwanted purebred dogs. "We hear what they are saying," says Fekety, "but do they hear us? A thousand here, a thousand there add up to lots of cats. When we're talking needless deaths, *any* is too many." □





*This ringworm-encrusted Cornish rex kitten, rescued along with 222 other cats from a Michigan cattery, also suffered from a congenital heart defect.*


Photo by Janet Hornreich/HSUS

Concept: Samantha Cannon; Design: Jeanie Naumann

*A shelter employee studies breed characteristics on the Montgomery County Humane Society's identification chart.*

breed identification reference books and charts, some are developing unique and effective methods of educating their staffs about the different purebreds. The Montgomery County Humane Society plans to adorn a hallway with eight panels of educational charts. These charts, which explain important behavioral and physical characteristics and pet-care requirements, are designed to educate both staff and potential adopters about the varying breeds.

The Humane Society of Huron Valley (Ann Arbor, MI) organizes interactive sessions with breed experts to enhance the staff's understanding of the different breeds. "It enables our staff to better identify purebreds," said Linda Reider, editor of the society's Michigan Purebred Dog Rescue Sourcebook, which lists contact names and numbers for purebred rescue in the state of Michigan. "The breed experts sit down with us and go over everything about their breed, including temperament, health characteristics, what it looks like coming into a shelter and what it looks like in a show-ring. It helps us become better adoption counselors because we know more about that breed. We also have a slide show about all the different breeds. I think that breed identification should be a part of the training of everyone who works in a shelter."

Shelters that keep purebred reference books, videos, posters, and other materials on hand and that encourage interactive identification training are not only better prepared to accurately track the purebreds they get into their shelters but also are better equipped to match potential adopters to the pets most suited to their needs.

## The Elusive Purebred Definition

Although many people can identify purebreds, they discover that *defining* purebred proves more difficult. What exactly does "purebred" mean? Ask this question to any number of people and their diverse responses will most likely consist of ambiguous generalities tossed in with the word "papers."

*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines purebred as an animal "bred from members of a recognized breed, strain, or kind without admixture of other blood over many generations." In *The Complete Dog Book,* the AKC defines purebred as "A dog whose sire and dam belong to the same breed, and are themselves of unmixed descent since recognition of the breed." Concise as these definitions appear, simple definitions don't translate so easily in the complex world of purebred breeding.

The AKC maintains that the "American public wants purebred dogs because they know when they acquire a specific breed, they are assured of the size, coat, and temperament qualities an adult member of the breed will possess." What assures them? "The problem is that owning a registered purebred guarantees no such thing," says Kate Rindy, legislative associate for The HSUS.

Too many people don't realize that buying a purebred doesn't guarantee a designer look and a prescribed set of behavioral characteristics. These very "assured" characteristics too often translate into physical and behavioral defects an uninformed owner soon finds himself unprepared to handle. The fact that "purebred" classification isn't some kind of special product warranty is often overlooked by a public reared with retailer promises of product consistency and dependability.

Owning a "papered" purebred actually guarantees little. In fact, in 1991 California found it necessary to pass legislation warning purebred dog buyers that "breed or pedigree registration does not guarantee the quality or health of the dog, and it does not guarantee quality lineage...it does not guarantee the accuracy of the lineage recorded nor that the dog is purebred." To protect purebred pet purchasers from the false notion that registration serves as a "product" guarantee, this legislation requires purebred pet retailers to post the above warning and include it in the bill of sale.

## Purebreds and Public Demand

Although shelter workers may be breed-blind in their care and protection of all animals, the public is not. Despite the overall superior health and temperament of the mixed-breed and the risky genetic problems plaguing so many purebreds, much of the pet-owning public still favors the purebred. "It's not wrong that people want certain characteristics in an animal," says Rindy. What is disturbing is that many are deluded into believing a dog's intrinsic value is synonymous with her pedigree.

A fifth of the country's family dogs are registered as purebreds. And according to a recent HSUS survey, over 54% of people who own one dog say

## PET SHOPS ARE REPORTEDLY SELLING MIXED BREEDS

"Retailers Find Success Selling Mixed Breed Pets," reads the subhead of a recent article in the magazine *Pet Age* ["Mix It Up," June 1993]. The idea of selling mixed breeds at a profit while millions of unwanted mixed breeds wait for homes at shelters is one that shelter workers will undoubtedly find hard to stomach. But some pet stores are reportedly doing just that.

Humane organizations have long touted the mixed breed, hoping to find these unwanted companion animals new homes. But few imagined that breeders would actually breed mixes to turn a profit.

The Lambs Pet Shop (Libertyville, IL) sells approximately 400 mixed-breed puppies and 300 mixed-breed kittens each year, many of whom are purpose-bred. "Healthy mixed breed puppies and kittens are so scarce—and the demand is so strong—I had to ask my breeder to deliberately breed large Lab, shepherd, and poodle mixes," contends the pet shop's manager, Marcia Lemme, in the article.

"A healthy mixed breed puppy sells for between $100 and $250 and kittens, which are in huge demand, go for $39," said Steve Maciontek, manager of Animal Kingdom (Chicago, IL).

And where should someone interested in giving a mixed breed a home go to find a companion animal? "Forget shelters," said Maciontek in the article. "They're our competitors and don't want anything to do with us." □

their dog is purebred. What's more, people still pay several hundred dollars for favored breeds, thereby keeping breeding profitable for thousands of breeders and the entire pet industry.

In 1992, the AKC registered a record 1.5 million new dogs, and the Cat Fanciers Association (CFA) registered 73,839 new cats. These figures don't include the countless unregisterable purebreds and purebred mixes produced by backyard breeders or the registerable purebreds whose owners never send in their registration paperwork. "Many people have never bothered to send in their registration forms," reports the AKC. "The AKC for many years registered about half of the dogs actually eligible for registration."

"It is reasonable to expect that other breed registries, such as the United Kennel Club (UKC) and CFA, have similar non-registration statistics," says Fekety.

### The Downside of Public Demand

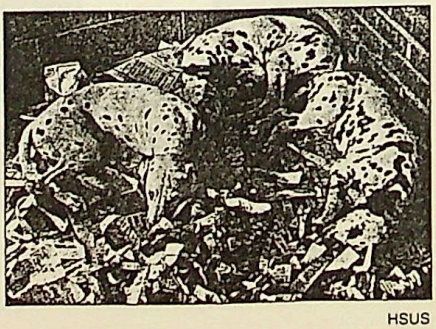
Despite the public's obsession with purebreds, a $700 price tag and cute-as-a-button face isn't enough to keep one out of the shelter. Purebreds—no matter what their cost or appearance—are surrendered to shelters or lost on the streets just as are mixed breeds.

"The reasons people cite when giving up a purebred animal are no different from those for giving up a mixed breed," said one shelter worker, recalling familiar reasons purebreds were surrendered to her shelter: "The usual… 'can't afford to keep him, moving, don't have time, jumps on my wife, we've lost interest, too old, we want a puppy, bad behavior, family break-up, she is pregnant again, fleas, smells, we got new furniture, sheds too much, got too big, too dumb…' "

Purebred animals face additional threats perpetuated by their value and popularity. In an effort to satisfy a hobby, or make more money, or win more show medals, breeders sometimes engage in dangerous breeding practices that threaten the health and welfare of all purebreds. The popular image of the golden retriever happily romping behind the white picket fence belies the real, tragic truth about the lives of many of today's purebreds.

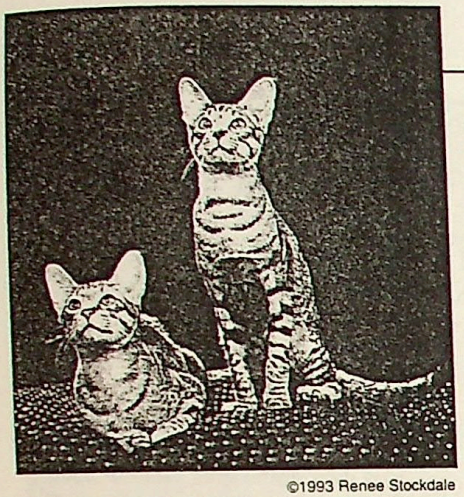
### Puppies for Profit

The pet store industry is one example of how this love for purebreds often results in their demise. Although just one of many sources for impulse acquisitions, pet stores illustrate the tragic consequences of turning companion animals into commodities. Thanks in part to the emergence of



HSUS

*AKC registration figures show that the Dalmatian's popularity is at an all-time high. Three Dalmatians waiting in a local shelter prove that popularity doesn't necessarily translate into permanent homes.*





*Although the purebred cat's role in pet overpopulation doesn't match the purebred dog's, breeders of cats like these Oriental shorthairs nonetheless contribute to pet overpopulation.*

mall pet store chains, shoppers can buy a disposable camera in one store and a new puppy from the shop next door.

The fact that many of these puppies were acquired from puppy mills and thus are more susceptible to physical and behavioral disorders is just one of many problems facing pet shop purebreds and their new owners. Whereas the shelter carefully screens potential adopters to help ensure their animals find good homes and don't end up back in a shelter, most pet stores and too many sloppy breeders concern themselves only with the customer's ability to pay for the animal and get it out the door. These stores and irresponsible breeders don't educate buyers about breed-specific care and training nor do they recommend spaying and neutering. Many even lure customers into making the purchase by explaining how they can recoup the expense by breeding the animals.

## Genetic Defects

Sadly, pet overpopulation isn't the only tragedy brought on by irresponsible breeding. Purebred dog and cat breeds are susceptible to more than 200 physical or psychological defects created by inbreeding, overbreeding, and careless breeding. Epileptic poodles, deaf Dalmatians, respiratory-impaired Persian cats, and blind Shar-peis are only a few of the purebreds with disorders that their unprepared owners must contend with.

"Physical and temperamental infirmities make dogs inconvenient to their owners," writes author Larry Shook in *The Puppy Report,* which examines the tragedy behind selective breeding. "And in every city in America there are dog jails where the occupants have been incarcerated for that very crime—the crime of inconvenience."

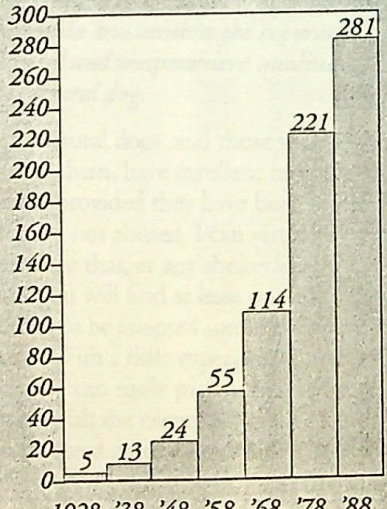
Breed standards may create or exaggerate, not minimize, genetic problems in many breeds, including the cocker spaniel. "The AKC claims that its standards describe 'the ideal dog of each recognized breed,' " explain Joan Dunayer and Eric Dunayer, VMD ("Purebred Dogs: Looks That Kill," Fund For Animals) "In reality, breed standards rob dogs of natural well being. The cocker spaniel's long, floppy ears also contrast with the natural dog. Tightly covered, the ear canals hold moisture and warmth, in which bacteria flourish."

Cockers also suffer from temperament problems. "Their formerly sweet nature has been overtaken by a notoriously unpleasant temperament," writes Shook. " 'Cockers are considered the number one biter in the nation,' says Washington State University's Terry Ryan [a canine behavior expert]."

Prospective pet owners looking to research particular breeds will discover that the glossy purebred reference guides that adorn bookstore shelves and pet store racks discuss in great detail the many positive attributes of the breed. What they tend to leave out are the breed-specific problems of most concern to a new owner—physical disorders such as hip dysplasia, kidney disease, and eye abnormalities that require costly veterinary attention; temperamental conditions that may only be partially alleviated through behavior modification; and the time-consuming grooming requirements, specific training methods, and housing needs particular to the breed. The uninformed purebred purchaser who is later confronted with a host of health and temperament problems is that much more likely to drop off his two-year old purebred at the local shelter.

Improperly bred purebreds aren't limited to pet stores and puppy mills.

*Number of Genetic Disorders or Genetic Susceptibilities to Disease Recognized in the Dog 1928–1988*




*From Patterson, et al. 1989. The Canine Genetic Disease Information System, Section of Veterinary Medical Genetics. School of Veterinary Medicine. University of Pennsylvania*

From the *Journal of Small Animal Practice,* Volume 30, pages 127-39, 1989. Reprinted with permission of the British Veterinary Association.

# *IN PRAISE OF THE NATURAL DOG*

By Michael W. Fox, D. Sc., Ph.D., B. Vet. Med., MRCVS., HSUS vice president, Farm Animals and Bioethics. *Adapted and condensed from "In Praise of the Natural Dog," which appeared in the Fall 1993 edition of* HSUS News.

Long before anyone ever conceived of purebred dogs, "natural" dogs lived in close association with humans. Today, natural dogs still live throughout the world, looking surprisingly similar to their distant cousins in other lands. Researchers have concluded that the natural dog represents—in both appearance and behavior—canine characteristics as they exist free from genetic manipulation by humans.

The French call mixed-breed dogs bastards, suggesting inferiority and illegitimacy; Americans call them mongrels or mutts. With increased understanding, people would show natural dogs the respect and compassion they deserve, and would speak of them with admiration rather than contempt.

While the origin of natural dogs remains a mystery, their worldwide presence and shared characteristics make them a class of their own, distinct from the specific breeds that have arisen from selective breeding. Unlike breeds such as the toy poodle, basset hound, and Great Dane, the natural dog is a product of natural selection rather than human manipulation.

Village dogs in the Andes, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere show the natural dog's typical form: body weight of 40 to 70 pounds; short, smooth coat varying in color from grayish brown, tan, or red to piebald, brindled, or entirely white; long, strong, and graceful limbs; deep chest and narrow waist; almond-shaped eyes ranging from gold to deep copper; ears either erect and pointed or slightly folded (never heavily pendulous like a cocker spaniel's); and long tail, curved slightly upward.

Generations of rigorous natural selection, ensuring survival of the fittest, underlie the natural dog's adaptiveness. The natural dog's haunches are well muscled, for speed. The front paws are extremely flexible, giving a catlike dexterity. The front dew claws can be used, like thumbs, to hold and manipulate objects. An extremely intelligent, alert, and agile animal, with superbly developed senses, the natural dog combines the best qualities seen in various dog breeds. Possessing what geneticists call hybrid vigor, the natural dog is generally healthier than purebreds, who represent a far less varied gene pool.

Natural dog look-alikes can be found from Detroit to Delhi, Rio to Rome. Those looking for good canine companions should visit their local animal shelters. Natural dogs, and those who resemble them, have excellent temperaments, provided they have been socialized and not abused. I can virtually guarantee that, at any shelter at any time, you will find at least one such dog waiting to be adopted into a loving home. With a little experience or advice, you can easily pick out an adult or puppy with the exemplary traits of the mixed-breed natural dog. □

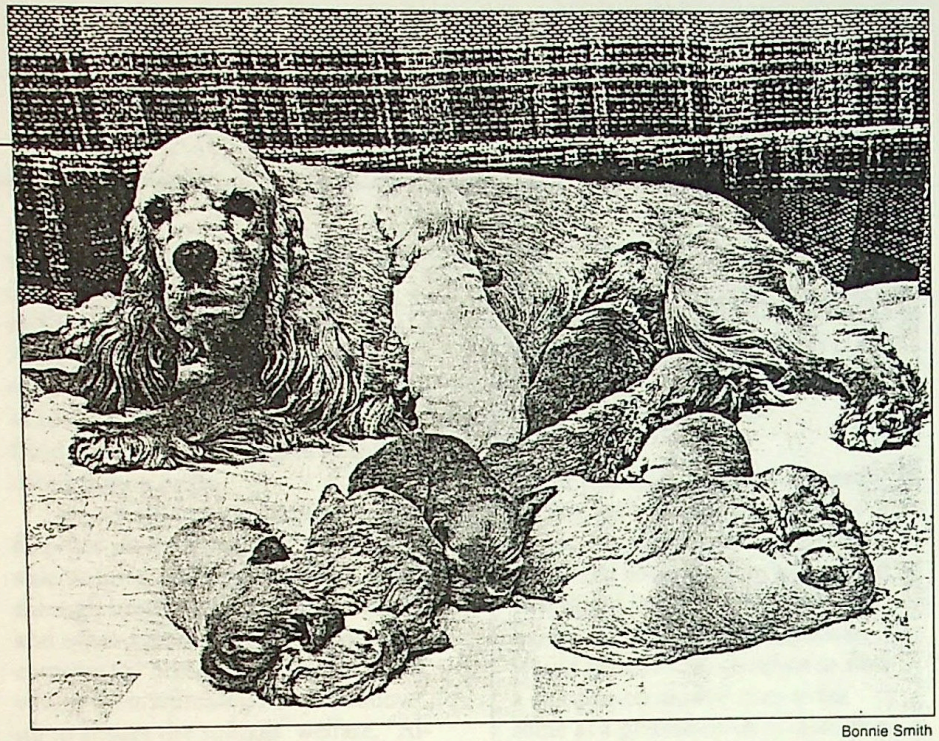
Dr. Michael Fox

*Dr. Michael Fox's own dog, Tanza (shown here during a training session), was brought to the United States from Tanzania and exhibits the superior physical and temperament qualities of the natural dog.*

Many hobbyists breed dogs and cats possessing known genetic defects, passing more defects on to each ensuing generation. "I suspect the deterioration in quality of pet owners' dogs may be a consequence of the increased number of dog shows," reports Adopt-A-Collie Association member Barbara Dutton Brill in the March 1991 issue of *Dog World.* "Some owner/exhibitors breed every dog in the backyard, regardless of quality, selecting their best to take to the shows and selling the others as pets to finance their costs." And show breeders reject spaying and neutering when alteration is cause for show disqualification.

Most purebred buyers are interested

in getting a companion, not a medal winner. Yet show and commercial breeders continue to engage in "show-quality" breeding to produce dogs and cats with artificially contrived features known to win in the ring. Although these purebreds may look good for the hour they are on display, many possess exaggerated physical and behavioral characteristics—such as unnaturally long, easily matted hair—that the average purebred pet owner finds too difficult to deal with. Unfortunately, show-ring medals don't mean much in shelter cages.



Bonnie Smith

*Cocker spaniels suffer from a host of physical and behavioral disorders. Sadly, shelters are seeing an increasing number of these purebreds enter their facilities.*

### The Tragedy of Trends

The tragic fate of "past-their-prime" greyhounds and the plight of pit bulls and rottweilers have reached epidemic proportions; their stories splash across the nation's newspapers. But they are not the only purebreds who suffer from their own popularity. Other purebreds, overbred to meet a rising but short-lived demand, also face greater risks of abandonment and genetic health and temperament problems induced by frantic mass-production.

Although companies can safely reproduce a trendy gadget by the million, breeders who meet public demand by churning out litter after litter of purebreds endanger the health of the dam, threaten the physical integrity of the breed, and turn life into a whimsical commodity. These purebreds increasingly suffer from severe congenital defects inherent in mass-produced, carelessly bred animals.

The AKC reports the following ten breeds of dogs as the most popular: cocker spaniel, Labrador retriever, poodle, golden retriever, German shepherd, Chow Chow, rottweiler, beagle, dachshund, and Shetland sheepdog. The top ten breeds are also among the most plentiful in shelters.

The fate of the Chow Chow illustrates the dark side of popularity. In the 1980s, the Chow enjoyed unprecedented popularity and was among the pet store industry's top sellers. As puppies, they resembled plush little teddy bears. People couldn't wait to get a Chow puppy. Now these same people can't wait to dispose of their adult Chows in shelters. What happened? "Most people just didn't realize that the walking teddy bears would grow up to be large, powerful, heavy-coated dogs with a unique personality and special training needs," said Vicki Rodenberg, chair of the national Chow Chow Club's Welfare Committee. "They didn't find out until much too late that they weren't suited for this unusual breed. When the honeymoon was over and the wind-up toys turned into dogs, people got rid of them."

As the '80s progressed, Chows seemed more popular in shelters than they were to the public. Writes AKC's John Mandeville (AKC Gazette, April, 1993), "This [1992] was the fourth year in a row Chows declined, certain evidence the fad boom in Chows has been broken."

Dalmatians are just one more example of the underlying tragedy of public demand. Over the last two years, largely due to the re-release of Disney's *101 Dalmatians,* the spotted canines have experienced rising popularity. "In 1992, the Dalmatian cemented its claim to the title of America's fad breed," writes Mandeville. According to AKC's 1992 registration statistics, Dalmatian registrations increased by 28.8 percent last year. "Dalmatian litter registrations, in percentage terms, were the fastest increasing of any of the top-ranked breeds in 1992."

Overbreeding to meet a rising demand multiplies inherent genetic problems, to which the Dalmatian—predisposed to deafness, blindness, and an aggressive temperament—is not immune. "As more and more dogs are

bred merely to satisfy the market, their genetic stability is quickly eroded," writes syndicated columnist and animal behaviorist Gary Wilkes. What will happen when the latest "fad" ends?

### Breeders Face the Limelight

As ordinances to reduce breeding are debated across the country, citizens and their representatives find they can no longer dismiss the pet overpopulation dilemma as an "animal-control problem." They are digging below this shallow interpretation and scrutinizing the role breeders play in perpetuating the crisis. Breeders, finding themselves the center of unwelcome attention, struggle to defend their breeding practices by blaming each other and denying their own contribution to the problem. This "it's not me, it's the other guy" mentality underlies a broader attempt to persuade the public that professional breeders and excess purebreds are not part of the crisis.

"The problems are not coming from responsible breeders," said Wayne Cavanaugh, vice president for communications for the AKC. "What we have in America is not too many dogs, there are just not enough responsible owners."

Animal-protection advocates know that attributing pet overpopulation to a lack of responsible owners is like attributing the federal deficit to a lack of responsible taxpayers. Nevertheless, reputable breeders *are* justified in their attempt to shed the catch-all "breeder" label that claims puppy mills, backyard breeders, and for-profit breeders. Although no one who brings a new puppy or kitten—purebred or mixed breed—into the world can claim immunity from the crisis, certain distinctions among breeders can and should be made.

It should be noted, however, that while professional breeders strive to distinguish themselves from puppy mills and backyard breeders, the AKC and the UKC rarely make such distinctions. These clubs register dogs from all types of breeders, from conscientious fanciers to dilapidated puppy mills.

Large-scale commercial breeding facilities produce purebreds as a profitable business, selling puppies or kittens through breed magazines, pet stores, and other avenues. Generally speaking, commercial breeders neither care whom their animals go to nor follow up to ensure the animals' welfare. "Although some regulated commercial breeders maintain clean and orderly facilities, these may simply be clean puppy mills," says HSUS Investigator Mike Winikoff. "Cleanliness, while important, does not eliminate the inherent inhumaneness of these establishments."

Puppy mills have received much notoriety over the years. These commercial breeders produce puppies in great quantity as often as they can in order to turn a profit on these "commodities." Puppies are typically kept in inadequate physical facilities, provided with minimal, substandard sanitation and nutrition, and so left susceptible to a wide range of physical and behavioral disorders and genetic problems. Purebreds confiscated from illegal puppy mills may burden a shelter with hundreds of sick and unadoptable animals.

Calculated separately, each so-called "backyard" breeder churns out far fewer animals than puppy mills. But when considered as a whole, backyard breeders are the single greatest threat to the welfare of the nation's companion animals. Backyard breeders—ordinary people who intentionally breed their pets or unintentionally allow them to have litters—continuously produce a

## *AKC Develops Purebred Puppy Referral Service*

For potential adopters, the problem isn't *finding* an animal to adopt, it's *choosing* from the many unwanted animals—both purebred and mixed breeds—who need homes. So the idea that a person would need to call a hotline to find a companion animal may strike some as a preposterous notion. But the AKC recently established such a hotline.

The AKC has a new purebred dog hotline that directs callers to breeders in their areas. This is how it works: The caller calls the 900 number (99 cents a minute) and tells the AKC customer service operator what kind of dog he wants and where he lives. The customer service operator provides the caller with the name and phone number of a breeder referral representative who works with dog clubs and breeders near the caller. The breeder referral representative then gives the caller a list of breeders in his community. The hotline does not guarantee a quality dog; it merely serves as a convenient reference service.

Shelters and rescue organizations are working around the clock to find homes for the already unwanted purebreds in their care. As any shelter employee knows, AKC referral hotline callers can find a new companion animal waiting for them at their local shelters—and there are more than just a few to choose from. □

flow of unwanted purebreds and mixed-breed companion animals. Unfortunately, by their very definition, these breeders are the most difficult to pinpoint.

"Somebody goes and buys a purebred, they take her home, and consider breeding her, too," explains one shelter volunteer. "And before they ever get around to finding a match for their bitch, the dog gets out and gets pregnant. They get a litter of purebred mixes which of course they dump at the shelter."

"Many of the mixes surrendered to shelters are 'one generation away' from a purebred," says Rindy. These second generation purebred mixes often appear to be purebreds, possessing the same physical appearance and temperament of the dominant parent. How does one classify the offspring of a purebred golden retriever and a purebred yellow Lab? "Because so many purebreds are not registered and because tracing lineage often proves futile, accurate classification of these second generation purebred look-alikes is difficult," says Fekety.

"In my experience, half of the litter [from a backyard breeder] will be sold through newspapers, a fourth of the litter will be given to friends, and a fourth will end up in a shelter," writes Dr. Dennis F. Cloud in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (JAVMA) (March 15, 1993). As shelter workers can attest, many of these purebreds and "second generation" purebred mixes sold through newspapers or given to friends eventually end up in local shelters, too.

Unlike commercial and backyard breeders, most professional breeders rank the health and welfare of their animals above any potential profit. However, many of these breed fanciers engage in "show quality" breeding practices that invariably produce offspring who fail to meet rigid breed standards for successful showing. They selectively breed their animals until they produce a purebred with the right show-ring "look," selling the rest of the litters through breed publications, newspapers, or word of mouth. Although these purebreds may have originated from reputable breeders, such distinctions cease to matter once these purebreds enter shelters.

"The HSUS has always known of and respected the goals of those truly conscientious breeders, who not only care about their own animals, but also about the offspring they sell, their chosen breed, and animal welfare in general," says HSUS President Paul G. Irwin. "The reality, though, is that there are also many more breeders out there who don't show the same concern for the welfare of their animals. We're asking the most caring breeders and fanciers to move beyond their own quiet example and support meaningful efforts to end the deadly pet surplus."

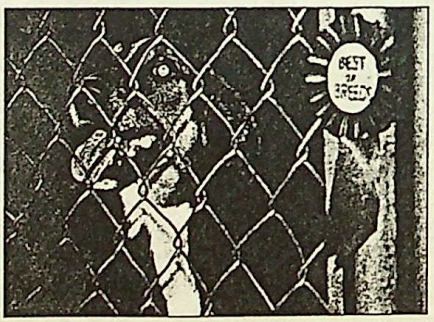
### Acknowledging Responsibility

Although many breeders staunchly oppose a temporary breeding moratorium, many conscientious breeders and fanciers are voicing their support for stricter breeding legislation. They know that breeders cannot guarantee that their purebreds will not join the masses of unwanted companion animals and that each ensuing generation of purebreds moves further and further from the original breeder's control.

These concerned breeders have joined forces with animal-protection advocates to educate the public about pet-care issues and the importance of spaying and neutering in reducing pet overpopulation. Some breeders work with their local shelters to educate shelter workers on vital breed-specific identification and care issues. Still others have joined forces to help purebred dogs surrendered either directly into their care or into local shelters. But while the education and animal-care services provided by many breeders and fanciers can help humane societies in their efforts, it is only by restricting *all* breeding—including so-called professional breeding—that these efforts will be fully realized.

"Although The HSUS commends the efforts of conscientious breeders, at this time we believe there can be no exception," says Rindy. "At a time when there are already so many healthy animals—both purebreds and mixed breed—at shelters waiting for a good home, it is imperative that people control the breeding of their animals. This is why we have called for a voluntary one-year moratorium."

*October's issue will discuss how breed-rescue efforts work, analyze the costs and benefits of shelter/breed-rescue alliances, and examine the diverse opinions humane organizations hold about breed-rescue tactics and philosophies.* □




Lois McAloon, McHenry County Animal Control

*Shelter personnel are breed-blind in the ways they care for animals, but one shelter couldn't help but show its preference for the all-American mixed breed.*