

A Unique Experience – the International Canaan Dog Conference, 2015-04-02



The Conference is over, and although all participants have returned to their homes, whether here in Israel or in various countries around the world, they have been left with the taste of “more!” This special event, celebrating 50 years of recognition of the Canaan Dog as the Israel national breed by the Israel Kennel Club and the FCI, provided new understanding of the breed and its country of origin.

Visitors that arrived from abroad were hosted for their first day in Israel by local dog people, so that they could get a feeling for the country and lifestyle. The conference (held 20-24 March) began with a seminar. The three lecturers presented their topics to an enthusiastic audience that filled the lecture room. The first speaker, Prof. Zeev Trainin, president of the FCI Scientific Commission, spoke on the importance of the primitive dogs, and in particular the Canaan Dog, to the cynological world. Dr. Monika Baar from the University of Groningen, Netherlands, spoke on the development of the human-animal bond, and in particular the development of service dogs; one of her particular fields of study is Prof. Rudolphina Menzel, the founder of the Canaan Dog breed, who was noted for her work with guide dogs for the blind. The final lecture was presented by Myrna Shibolet of Shaar Hagai Kennels, one of the conference organizers and long time breeder and judge, who spoke on “A Biblical Dog in the 21st Century”, and how to live successfully and happily with the Canaan.

The lectures were followed by a panel discussion led by breeders from the US, England, Italy, France and Israel about the future of the breed.



The lectures were received with great enthusiasm by the audience, with many questions.

Following the seminar, overseas visitors travelled to the south, to the location selected for the rest of the event, the Field School at Hatzeva, an agricultural settlement in the desert area of Israel. The intention was for the visitors to be able to see and experience the environment in which the Canaans naturally live. The scenery is beautiful and unique and at this time of year, it is green and full of wildflowers from the rains of winter.

On Saturday, in the early morning, the visitors had an opportunity for guided birdwatching, and then in the late morning, the Canaan Dog Specialty Show, awarding the newly created title of Desert Winner, was held. About 20 dogs

participated, including three entries from abroad, judged by the very experienced and knowledgeable Dr. Agnes Ganami Kertes.

One point of great interest – the Best of Breed winner is a bitch that was free born in the remote desert of the south of Jordan. The cooperation of Israeli and Jordanian dog lovers made it possible to bring her into Israel and to register her. Bat Yarden me Dibaan Jeyni is the first free born dog to become an Israel champion, and at this show received the honor of becoming the first Desert Winner and BOB. Janey is also a working dog, responsible for guarding a herd of sheep, and has had two litters to date, with several of her puppies travelling to other countries to help bring in new bloodlines to the breeding there. Her son from her second litter, Dixon me Shaar Hagai, was the Best Junior in show.

The Best Male and BOS was a Canaan born in Sweden and living in France, Ch. Chanco's Kavah. A great example of the international flavor of the event!

The following day was the highlight of the event. A tour was planned through the southern desert areas where many of the breed founder stock originated, and where it is still possible to find free living dogs and dogs that are working with Bedouin herds. Because of the modernization of the Bedouin life style, many Bedouin do not live in the traditional manner, and do not have dogs now. There is also a great expansion of settlements in these areas, which has destroyed the niche in which the dogs lived in the past. So although it is still possible to find pure free living and Bedouin Canaans, it is becoming very difficult. When planning this tour, there was no way to know if we would be lucky enough to see any dogs at all.

But luck was definitely with us! We were able to see a number of different Bedouin herds accompanied by their dogs, some of which were lovely examples of the breed. Visitors were able to see the conditions in which they live, beautiful and very harsh, and their value as working dogs to the herders, as guardians of the flocks. It is important to note that these dogs have the job of giving warning and keeping predators away but not of being attack dogs. Even when we approached fairly closely, the dogs, although barking a warning, did not try to approach, and were accepting of the fact that their Bedouin master was allowing us to come near.

The high point of the day was when we were driving past a dump near a Bedouin village, Hura. This was a place where the carcasses of dead sheep were thrown, and there were vultures circling overhead. A male Canaan was spotted and we stopped to try and get closer. The dog tried to lead our group leader away, and when we approached closer, a bitch came out of a thick stand of thistle bushes and began to bark



at us. We could immediately see that she was nursing. She also tried to distract us, but we were able to find her puppies, 4 females of about six weeks of age, hidden under a thistle bush on a thick layer of old sheep skins. The puppies were self confident and unafraid, and had obviously never had contact with people before, and were fat and completely clean of parasites. Both parents, who stood at a watchful distance, but were unable to cope with this group of more than 20 people, were also in excellent physical condition.

Finding free born puppies, and at an age when they can still be approached, is a very rare occurrence. This was a thrilling experience, and one of the puppies has come home with us to bring in a new bloodline in the future.

The day ended with a visit to one of the most scenic desert areas, the Great Crater, and a chance to watch the sun set over the rocky colorful hills.

The last day of the conference ended with a drive along the Dead Sea and a visit to Jerusalem. No trip to Israel is complete without seeing the sights of the holy city.

Although few of the participants, from abroad and from Israel, had ever met personally before, a wonderful spirit was felt throughout all the formal activities and the mutual meals, and evening discussions. Many new friendships have been forged, and our hope is that this will be a positive push for continuing to build up the Canaan breed, and for understanding a biblical dog living in the modern world. Visitors who have become friends have also promised to visit again soon.



Dardar



We are always looking for new desert born Canaan Dogs to add to the gene pool of the breed, but they are becoming harder and harder to find. Civilization has invaded their niche in nature, and the Bedouin, for whom they held great value as protectors of the herds, are now settling in villages where they have no need for dogs. But we still can occasionally find Canaans in isolated areas.

Israel hosted the International Canaan Dog Conference in March 2015, and on the agenda was a trip to the southern desert to try and see Canaans in their natural environment, and working with the Bedouin and their herds. It is impossible to know in advance if there will be success in seeing dogs – it is possible to travel around for days and see none. But hopes were high!

And indeed, we were in luck. Throughout the morning, we saw a number of Bedouin herds out to pasture – at this time of year even the desert is green and there is plenty of grazing – and all were accompanied by dogs,

some of them really beautiful examples of the breed.

As we were getting to the end of our planned route, we passed a small Bedouin village, Hura. Outside the village was a garbage dump, and this was the spot that dead sheep were discarded. There were some vultures circling above, so it was obvious that there was food here, so maybe we would see some dogs.

As we slowed down, we spotted a black and white Canaan male. The bus stopped, and one of our team, Eytan, got down and started to approach the dog. The dog didn't bark or threaten, but seemed to be trying to lure this invading human away from the spot where we had stopped. Eytan instead went back in the direction from which the dog had come, and as he neared a thicket of thistle bushes, a female Canaan, brown and white, jumped out of the bushes, barked, and tried to lead him away. It was clear that this bitch was nursing a litter.

After some searching, on the edge of the very smelly dump, well hidden under a thicket of thistles, and comfortably ensconced on a layer of old sheep skins, we found the litter – four puppies about six weeks old, all females and all brown and white like their mother.

The puppies were calm as they looked at these odd beings invading their territory, as the worried parents watched from a distance, unable to cope with so many strangers. There were no signs of fear – obviously these pups had nev-



er seen people before and certainly had never had any experience of abuse or mistreatment. When we approached and stretched out a hand, the puppies one by one approached. They had no objection to being picked up and cuddled by our group, and were very plump, healthy, and completely free of ticks or fleas. The parents were also in excellent condition, very well fed from the carcasses, even though belonging to and cared for by no one.

It has been very rare over the years to find puppies in the desert. The dens are usually very well hidden and a distance away, but in this case the food supply was so good in this spot that the litter was accessible. And this was a

unique opportunity for our visitors from abroad to really see the life of free living Canaans!

One of the puppies came home with me, and has very easily and quickly adjusted to modern comforts. Her name is Dardar – the Hebrew name for the thistle thicket that was her first home. We hope she will grow up to introduce another new bloodline to the breed.



From Desert to Desert Winner

For anyone who wants to really understand what a Canaan Dog is, the story of Janey (Isr.Ch. Bat Yarden me Dibaan Jeyni) is a perfect example.

Janey was born in the southern desert of Jordan, in an area where there is little population and the conditions are very harsh. She and her brother Jimmy were caught by a villager from the tiny village Dibaan, whose intention was to raise them as guard dogs.

Plans changed, and the villager decided that he no longer wanted the dogs, and brought the two pups, about seven months old, to the veterinarian in Amman with the request that he put them to sleep.

The vet could not agree. These were healthy and strong youngsters and he saw no reason to put them down. He refused and offered to take them and find them a new home.

Matt, an American Peace Corps worker living in Amman offered them a foster home until they could be adopted. He was not able to keep them himself, as his wife was due to arrive soon with their old dog, but he was happy to care for them until she arrived. He asked the vet what kind of dogs they are – “Canaan Dogs”, was the answer.

Matt took them home and told his wife about his new roommates. She had heard of the breed “Canaan Dog” and after searching the internet, found the American breed club, and notified them that there were two young Canaans in Jordan looking for a home. The breed club immediately got in touch with Myrna Shibolet of Shaar Hagai Kennels in Israel.

Always interested in the possibility of finding dogs from new bloodlines to introduce into the gene pool, Myrna immediately got in touch with Matt by email and Skype. She would love to take the two dogs, if there was a way to get them to Israel. No problem, was Matt’s response. He would be happy to keep them, vaccinate them, take care of the necessary documents, and then to drive them to Israel.

About two months later, after the long drive from Amman to near Jerusalem, Janey and Jimmy arrived at Shaar Hagai Kennels. They were happy, outgoing, curious, and had no problems adjusting to a new home. From their behavior, one would never imagine that these were puppies that had been born in the desert, and gone through such changes in their short lifetime.

Jimmy was rehomed with a family that had had Canaans for many years, and Janey stayed at Shaar Hagai. She

impressed everyone she met with her stable and sweet temperament. As Canaans are considered a breed in development by the FCI, and free born dogs that have fulfilled various criteria can be registered in the Stud Book Annex, Janey was also able to start a show career. She loved going to shows, loved the attention and showing off, and she became the first free born desert dog to become an Israel Champion.

Janey has been the mother of two litters, one of eight puppies and the second of ten puppies, extraordinarily large for a Canaan – obviously living in civilization has been good for her. She is an extremely devoted mother, willing to take care of her puppies, play with them, and teach them indefinitely – she was quite unhappy when all her pups finally went off to their new homes. Several of her pups have travelled abroad to add new bloodlines to the Canaan breeding there.

Since her last litter, Janey has started a new career. A friend living on a kibbutz had a small herd of sheep, and was looking for a dog that would be a good guard dog, to prevent theft and damages from predators, but he needed a dog that would not be aggressive to the residents and their children who enjoyed coming to see the sheep. Janey is ideal for the job. She loves the sheep and treats the lambs with the care she took with her own puppies, is friendly and outgoing to visitors during normal hours, and is a serious guard dog at other times, protecting her flock from all dangers.

Since Janey does love dog shows, it was decided to bring her to the Specialty Show of the International Canaan Dog Conference, 20-24 March, 2015. In addition to the usual titles, the winner of this show was to be awarded a new title for Canaans only, Desert Winner. Janey showed with her usual bounce and enthusiasm, and achieved the title of Best of Breed and Desert Winner.

So in this tail of “rags to riches”, the little desert born puppy becomes a princess, Desert Winner 2015. But after the excitement, she also has returned to her serious job as a guardian of sheep and friend to the kibbutz children.

