

A whiter shade of pale...  
or white is not white!

by Eva-Maria Krämer

Again and again experienced breeders and judges who have been in the breed for decades assumed a possible outcross to another breed - namely Samoyed - could be responsible for the extreme change of type in the Rough Collie. I remember an article of a breeder in the 1970ies where she humourously writes about life with the Sami and the difference to her Collies. I myself know British Collie breeders that owned or own Samoyeds.

What has changed in the Rough Collie?

The dogs are more squarely built. The head lost the desired elegant wedgeshape, the stop is deeper, the skulls are deeper and wider, the eyes are no longer obliquely set - and very distinct which was never seen in the breed before is abundance of coat on top of the skull which is even accentuated by brushing it up. Angulations are straighter. Bad tails always occurred in the breed. High held tails are normal behaviour in males. But never had a Collie in relaxed atmosphere his tail laid on his back. I see this often in family pets and not at shows, however I can see it in puppy pictures which are posted even by experienced breeders. Faults occurring is normal, but to accept them as normal is tragic. Obviously there has been distinct selection for the "new" type which gave much more attractive puppies, coats increased and possibly temperament was influenced as well which the breed was in need of. Line breeding and selection installed the changes in the breed.

All in all I can very well imagine such a Sami x Collie cross. But I never understood why in future generations no white dogs would turn up.

The riddle solved

Dr. Anna Laukner explained this during a lecture on coat colours. I will not bother you with genetic details. That you better read in her book: Die Genetik der Fellfarben beim Hund which will soon be available in English.

White Samoyeds are not white!

Samoyeds, White Swiss Shepherds, white poodles or spitz are not extreme piebald but have extremely light phaeomelanin, which is the yellow pigmentation within the hair. I remember that years ago in Samis and Kuvasz a silvery white coat was highly desired and dogs with a yellow shade in the white were not popular. It turned out however that this was not good for the breeds and "biscuit" was allowed in the Samoyed standard.

This means that such dogs cannot have white or piebald puppies with coloured dogs, but the coat colour lightens up a bit from hardly to recognise in the F1 to clearly light colouring when selected for. This was confirmed by a Samoyed breeder where I saw a mix between Alaskan Malamute and Samoyed. The dog looked like a Malamute in colour, he was a bit smaller and had a softer coat. She told me that Sami-Mixes always look like the non-Sami parent.

I can very well imagine that such an "accident" was either a secret act or the breeder whiped his forehead when typical Collie puppies were born... been lucky... Genetic testing was not even thought of at the time.

About 25 years ago I saw newborn Collie puppies which all had a lilac shade in their coats which I had never seen before. And many of us will remember the "creme cakes" - fawn coloured Collies which we do not see as often today. The lightening of the phaeomelanin does of course not work on black and so cannot have any influence on tricolours and blues.

Years ago a genetic test would have been interesting, but meanwhile a cross is probably no longer to prove.

If such a cross would ever have taken place it would not really be a bad thing, maybe even welcome with today's knowledge about genetic diversity. It might not have been necessary however to accept or even aim at the foreign features that occurred more clearly in following generations.