



WHERE DO DOGS COME FROM?

AND WHY DOES THAT MATTER TO ME?

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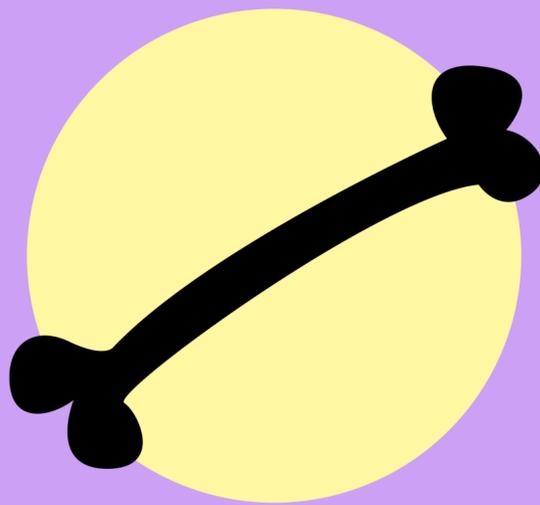
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A LITTLE BACKGROUND...



THE OLDEST DOG FOSSIL

The oldest *undisputed* dog fossil is 14,000 years old, found in Germany.



...OR IS IT?

There is a fossil dating back 32,000 years (found in Belgium) that is also *proposed* to be a dog fossil.



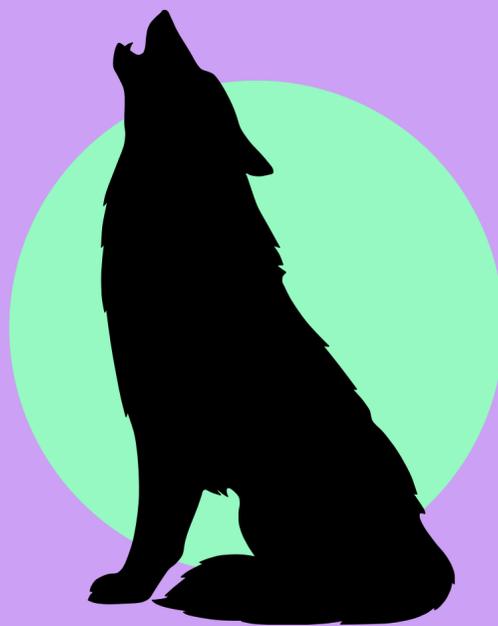
DOG OR WOLF FOSSIL?

Both fossils show the shortened, broader muzzle characteristic of dogs. The undisputed fossil was also found buried with two people.



WOLVES VS DOGS

Wolves (*canis lupus*) and dogs (*canis familiaris* or *canis lupus familiaris*) share a now-extinct common ancestor.



THE ANCESTOR

Like the modern wolf, this ancestor is likely to have lived in familial group structures - NOT the "packs" that we have been led to believe.



BUT WOLVES & DOGS...

... still aren't *totally* separate! Even today they can breed and produce viable offspring - so it is entirely possible to have lines of "wolfdogs"!

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DOMESTICATION

HOW DID WE DOMESTICATE THE EARLY WOLF?

There are two leading theories:

THE CURIOUS WOLF

In pre agricultural society, humans across the world lived in settlements - and the early wolf will have lived quite close to them in some cases. It is speculated that the more confident (or perhaps more desperate) amongst the wolves may have found the food discarded or carelessly guarded by humans beneficial for them - and over time humans found the wolf beneficial - or at least not actively unhelpful; sometimes it's better the enemy you know!

THE STOLEN PUPS

The other common theory is that, in the same era, humans stumbled across or tracked down wolf pups. Perhaps they saw adults hunting, and recognised the potential of the pups as hunting companions and/or settlement guardians. If a whole litter was taken and raised, the likelihood is that most will have been too suspicious of humans to be of benefit - but one in ten may have been that *bit* less nervous, and they were the beginning.

WHAT DO THEORIES TELL US?

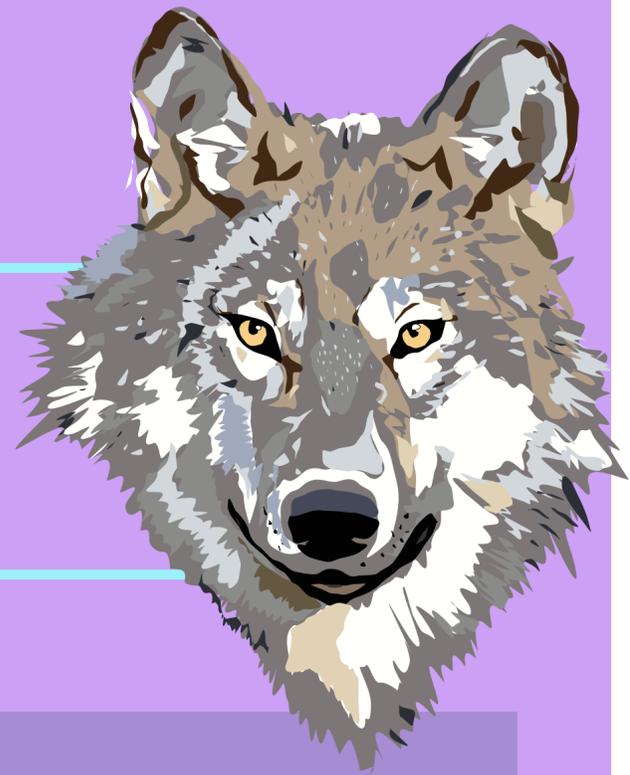
The domestication of the early wolf happened so long ago that we really can't say for certain how it happened - but whatever theory you think most likely, from then there will have been a small number of wolves amongst human settlements, in what would become a mutually beneficial relationship. Perhaps other settlements then witnessed this and followed suit; perhaps it happened spontaneously across the world at a similar time. We can never know, but what we *do* know is that at some point the early human and early wolf looked at each other - and recognised that the other could help them survive.





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EVOLUTION



HOW DID WOLVES START TO BECOME OUR BEST FRIEND?

In pre agricultural society, those wolves who stayed near human settlements had to have several key differences from the wolves who lived further away. They had to be bold and adventurous. Wolves that were more nervous or avoidant simply wouldn't have survived - or been permitted to stay near, if they were of no benefit whatsoever. These wolves then bred with other, similar wolves (perhaps from other settlements) to produce pups that were more and more confident.

BENEFIT TO WOLVES

The wolves that were less fearful of humans (whether genetically or through being raised by them) had a better chance of surviving, simply by having access to easier food and shelter. These wolves then had a better chance of reproducing, and their pups in turn had a better chance of surviving through to adulthood.

BENEFIT TO HUMANS

Humans would have been aware of the hunting and guarding potential of wolves - and were able to harness that and have more success in catching prey and defending their settlements.

THE WOLF BECOMES THE EARLY DOG

We have discussed how the wolves who lived in and around human settlements began to change in terms of their temperament - becoming more confident and exploratory; in short, becoming more sociable with humans - but we haven't yet discussed the physical changes.

Dogs (even early dogs) and wolves have distinct physical differences, including smaller skulls; shorter muzzles; smaller teeth; and variation in coat colour. It's hard to imagine early humans breeding specifically for this - so how did it happen?

An experiment in the 1950s by Dmitri Belyaev, gives us some insight into this. Belyaev selectively bred silver foxes for tameness, to make them easier to handle and more likely to breed at the fur farms. As a *byproduct* of breeding the tamest individuals, they began to exhibit the same traits differentiating wolves from dogs - including the smaller skulls and different coat colours! So it seems these genes are somehow linked to the "tameability" factor.

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WHAT DID DOGS DO FOR US?

PURPOSE OF EARLY DOGS

For most of the history of dogs, they were only kept around as long as they were useful. There simply wasn't enough resources to go around and to waste on something that wasn't of use!

Dogs were bred for the benefit of humans - and they were bred for a purpose, not for looks. Early dogs were bred for the general purpose of accompanying and assisting humans in hunting, and for guarding settlements and individual humans from other humans (meaning they had to be able to differentiate *friend* from *foe* and apply that to a different species!) and other animals - possibly even including wolves!



MORE SPECIFIC JOBS & ROLES FOR DOGS

As humans began to move away from hunting/gathering and toward agriculture, our dogs came with us and were bred more specifically for different roles, including:

- Hunting companions
- Tracking & retrieving wounded prey
- Transport of humans & goods
- Protection of humans, settlements & goods
- Livestock guardians & workers

Can you spot your dog's original purpose amongst these roles?

Over time we also *begin* to see dogs bred solely for pets / companionship - at this time these were a symbol of status and wealth, as it showed you had the resources to waste on a "useless" animal.

The agricultural era is where dietary differences begin with early dogs and wolves; dogs were offered less meat (as it became less available / more valuable) and more grains and starchy foods. They had to adapt to tolerate it - or they won't have survived long!

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DEVELOPMENT OF DOG TYPES

WHY DO THEY ALL LOOK DIFFERENT?

If dogs were primarily bred for their jobs - why don't they all look and act the same apart from that?

There are several factors that go into this:

- type of work the dog is doing
- geographical location
- genetic byproducts of selected traits - like Belyaev's foxes!

FOR EXAMPLE...



Dogs in Siberia bred to pull sleds as part of a group had to be highly sociable with other dogs; to have thick, warm coats; and to want to run and pull for miles and miles.



If you put that same dog in Egypt and asked it to hunt with you, it would likely collapse of heatstroke before it took ten steps! The hunting dogs there had short coats, light coloured fur (the better to resist the heat), strong prey drives, and the ability to relax when not needed or in the hottest parts of the day.



And if you put those hunting dogs in the British highlands to work your livestock in the mud and rain, it would be aghast - and more likely to kill the sheep than round them up. There you need a weather resistant coat and the drive to work with humans even when they are miles away.

HOW DID WE GET ALL THESE DIFFERENT DOGS?

Breeding for specific roles is a lot easier than you might think!

Although our understanding of genes and how traits are passed down is very new, we didn't *need* it to create the variety of dogs we had even in the agricultural era.

Like the more confident wolves were more likely to survive and reproduce, dogs were actively bred for the desired traits. If you wanted more dogs that would guard your sheep, you wouldn't breed your calm dog with your neighbour's wild sheep killer! Dogs that exhibited *observable*, desirable traits were bred together to produce "types" of dogs suitable for different work in different locations.

This also doesn't mean that humans were blind to how their dogs looked. Certain people in certain areas may have favoured a particular look for the work their dog did - or held beliefs that *this aspect* or *that aspect* had an impact on the dog's ability to work. Pups that didn't fit in unfortunately wouldn't have been kept around.



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THE MODERN DOG

THE 19TH CENTURY

In 1859, the first dog breed show was held. This meant that a variety of dogs were compared against each other to see which dog was the best example of that breed. The Kennel Club was established in the UK in 1873 - the oldest recognised kennel club in the world - which aimed to offer guidance and rules for dog breed shows, as well as monitoring pedigrees.

The 19th century also saw positive movement in the UK towards keeping dogs as pets - Victorian writing and art shows pet ownership as *morally valuable*, particularly when children are given or raised alongside dogs.

AND WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

There are over 400 breeds recognised! It is estimated that 900 million dogs live in the world - around 700 million of which are free roaming (feral or village) dogs!

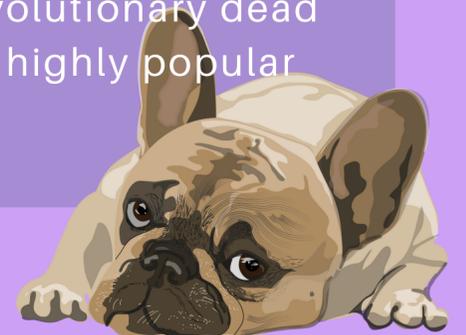
The PDSA (2021) estimates that we have 9.6 million dogs here in the UK - that's not including any free roaming dogs!

Dogs have never been more popular, and yet the modern world is so very *hard* for our four legged best friends - there can be no mistaking that.

The vast majority of dog breeds have hundreds, if not *thousands*, of years being bred specifically for certain behaviours and characteristics - which are often in conflict with the needs of the modern world. Most of the issues that we see are due to these genetic drives either not being met or expressing themselves in undesirable way. Consider the collie compelled to chase cars or the husky that pulls on lead and howls when separated from family.

There are also poor breeding practises, in which dogs with temperaments unsuitable for the modern world are bred - meaning those genes (resulting in nervous and even outright aggressive dogs) are passed on.

Through human selection we also have several breeds who simply would not & could not exist without human involvement. Take for example the French Bulldog, which has been bred to extremes with significant health problems and often the *inability to breed* naturally. It is an evolutionary dead end - and yet it is a highly popular breed of dog.



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WHAT CAN WE DO FOR OUR DOGS?



LEARN...

Learn the history of your dog's breed or breed makeup. Look into what they were bred for, and how long they've been bred for that job.



CONSIDER...

Consider why your dog's breed history may influence their behaviour and their perception of the world.



UNDERSTAND...

Understand what your dog is genetically programmed to want to do - and give them outlets for those needs!



PROVIDE...

Provide your dog with the exercise and social opportunities that these wonderful creatures desire. Make the most of your time together.



TRY...

Try new experiences with your dog! Whether that's day trips, camping, trick training or dog sports - we owe it to them to make them as happy as they can be.

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And if you need any more help in the future, get in touch with us at:

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