



# The Icelandic Sheepdog

The Icelandic Sheepdog is a typical Nordic Spitz, having pricked ears and curled tail. They are Iceland's only native dog that came to the island with the first Viking settlers (AD874-930). They are sensitive, obedient, extremely social and affectionate. The Icelandic Sheepdog loves the whole family, especially children and prefers to be with them all the time—to follow them around everywhere and to sleep at their feet. When properly introduced, they get along well with other animals in the family. The Icelandic Sheepdog Association of America is proud to be a guardian of one of Iceland's national treasures.

## History

There are references to the Icelandic Sheepdog dating from AD900. By the middle ages, the Icelandic Sheepdog had become a sought after export, mostly going to England. The aristocratic and ruling classes there found the dog a favorite as a family pet.

In the 1960s there were fewer than 35 Icelandic Sheepdogs left in Iceland—the result of lack of interest in the ancient breed and several catastrophic population crashes from distemper epidemics. Sir Mark Watson, an Englishman with a love for Iceland, had an interest in the breed and initiated efforts to save them. He moved to Nicosia, California and established a kennel, in part, to breed

Icelandic Sheepdogs. Things didn't go as well as expected and he eventually returned to England with some of his dogs to continue his work.

Sigríður Pétursdóttir, a native Icelander, made it her goal to help save the Icelandic Sheepdog. She traveled to Great Britain where she worked with Mark Watson and other breeders who provided her with invaluable assistance and information.

Working with 14 dogs of the approximately 35 remaining and following protocols learned abroad, she managed to gradually increase the number of Icelandic Sheepdogs. Her goal was not only to save the breed, but to disperse the dogs so that in the event of future population crashes, the

Icelanders would be able to re-import descendants from those dispersed dogs. Though the breed is still not common, it is no longer in danger of extinction.

## Character

The Icelandic Sheepdog is a hardy and agile herding dog which barks, making it extremely useful for herding or driving livestock in the pastures, in the mountains or finding stray sheep. By nature, the Icelandic Sheepdog is very alert and will always give visitors an enthusiastic welcome without being aggressive. They are cheerful, friendly, inquisitive, playful and unafraid. They are extremely clever and trainable, excelling in programs such as obedience, rally, agility, therapy, herding, nosework and fly ball. They simply love working and playing with people and have a never-ending interest in





### *Character (cont)*

pleasing. They have even been used in search and rescue though hunting instincts are not strong.

Although the Icelandic Sheepdog is a wonderful dog, it is not for everyone. They frequently use their voices and have a strong need for human companionship. They don't do well when left alone for long periods of time.

## *Appearance*

Seen from the side while standing, the dog is rectangular, slightly longer than it is high with a moderately long and muscular neck and a strong, level back. The croup is moderately short and wide, slightly sloping. The chest should be well sprung. Forequarters are straight, parallel and strong with normal angulation and oblique, muscular shoulders. Hindquarters are also straight, parallel and strong with normal angulation. Well-developed rear double dewclaws are desirable. The tail is high set, curled over and touching the back. Their gait should display agility and endurance with good driving action that covers the ground effortlessly.

There are two types of coat—long and short—but always double coated, thick and extremely weatherproof. They come in a wide-variety of colors including cream, reddish brown, chocolate brown, grey and black. Their heads feature a strong-built, somewhat domed cranial region; almond-shaped, dark brown eyes with a gentle, intelligent and happy expression; black or dark brown nose and lips, and a well-developed muzzle with complete dentition and scissor bite. The ears are of medium size and erect. They are very mobile, reacting to sound and showing the dog's mood. The ideal size for females is 16.5" at withers, 18" for males. Weight should be in harmony with general appearance. Serious faults include lack of dewclaws, yellow eyes, or round, protruding eyes.

## *Rescue*

The National Icelandic Sheepdog Rescue Alliance (NISRA) has formed as a 501c3 nonprofit to help find loving, forever homes for Icelandic Sheepdogs that have been found as strays, placed in shelters, or turned in by their owners. To find more information, please visit their website at [www.nationalicelandicsheepdogrescuealliance.org](http://www.nationalicelandicsheepdogrescuealliance.org)

## *Spay/Neuter*

Before you consider using your dog as a stud or brood bitch remember that not all dogs should be bred, especially those that have genetic problems, disqualifying faults or poor temperaments. Only those Icelandic Sheepdogs closest to the standard and who pass their recommended health tests should be bred. Breeding is serious commitment and should not be a casual undertaking. A responsible breeder must make sure puppies are placed with loving, capable, and responsible owners. Protect your dog and the future of the breed by spaying or neutering your non-breeding dog. There are many positive benefits associated with spaying or neutering your dog.

***The ISAA asks that you give careful consideration and do your research when looking for a breeder. The approved breeders found on the ISAA's website have made a commitment to follow guidelines set to help preserve the health and welfare of the Icelandic Sheepdog.***

For more information about these dogs or to find out how to become a member of our club, please visit the Icelandic Sheepdog Association of America's website at [www.icelanddogs.com](http://www.icelanddogs.com).

For judges who are interested in receiving our Judges Education materials, please send your request to [isaabod@gmail.com](mailto:isaabod@gmail.com).

