

# PREDICAMENT OF THE WORKING DOG

THE CASE FOR PRESERVATION

By DAVID HANCOCK

It is quite possible that another five breeds of British working dogs could be lost to us by the end of this century—the curly-coated retriever, the Sealyham terrier, the Sussex spaniel, the Dandie Dinmont terrier and the Gordon setter.

If so, they will join in extinction some distinguished predecessors—the Smithfield sheepdog, the old English white terrier, the old English water and land spaniels, the Clydesdale

prettier, perhaps, but the terrier men no longer use it, so a traditional English breed has lost its role.

It is inevitable that some breeds are lost in time in any group of animals: we have lost some of our domestic breeds of sheep, cows and hens over the years, just as we have dogs. Some well-established dog breeds are also the inheritors of blood from lost breeds: the English springer spaniel, for example, perpetuates the

consequence of sheer disinterest and the whims of contemporary show-ring enthusiasts, intent only on improving appearance.

In the last 100 years, the Belgians have taken urgent steps to identify and retain their four varieties of the Belgian shepherd dog—the Groenendael, the Laekenois, the Malinois and the Tervueren. We have retained our border collie as one breed, whereas it is really the British shepherd dog, with distinct varieties,



1-4—FOUR OF THE FIVE BRITISH WORKING BREEDS THAT ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION BY THE END OF THE CENTURY: THE SEALYHAM TERRIER; (right) THE SUSSEX SPANIEL; (below, left) THE CURLY-COATED RETRIEVER; (below, right) THE DANDIE DINMONT TERRIER. The Gordon setter is also threatened



(or Paisley) terrier and the English black and tan brokenhaired terrier.

British working breeds have been supplanted over the years by foreign dogs, imported not through dissatisfaction with the traditional domestic breeds but in response to the regular demands of the fickle public for newness, for change; our gundogs, in particular, have been edged out by German shorthaired pointers, Hungarian Vizslas, German Weimaraners and Münsterländers.

It is likely, too, that the regrettable lack of control over British show breeders has contributed to the loss of the traditional type in other working breeds. The smooth fox terrier, originally a renowned hunt terrier, now has a straight narrow front, the head of an ant-eater and a straight, upright shoulder placement—quite undesirable in an "earth terrier"; it is

Norfolk spaniel, the white variety of bull terrier retains some features of the old English white terrier, and the border terrier encompasses the Reedwater and Elterwater terriers. More obscure breeds too, like the Ormskirk heeler, a corgi-like herder, were too few in numbers to retain their identity successfully anyway. The lack of use for certain breeds, as well, has led to their disappearance, like the old fawn shaggy giants of the staghound packs of long ago which used to hunt in the New Forest and on Exmoor and Dartmoor.

This is the inevitable consequence of changing times and happens in all countries. But unless we take care of some of our traditional and much valued working breeds, which are truly part of our British sporting heritage, we are going to lose them forever, not through the march of time but through the sad

now lost, in the Cumberland sheepdog, the Welsh hillman, the old Welsh grey sheepdog and the black and tan sheepdog, within that breed description. The Scots have refound the bearded and the French the Briard, but the English have lost the Smithfield sheepdog, a very similar breed. The old English sheepdog remains, but in the modern form, sadly more as a symbol for paint than as a working breed. The English pointer, a graceful, elegant, yet fine field dog, faces increasing competition from the German shorthaired pointer—although, having seen the latter at the WAGBI working tests at Baschurch, Shropshire, last April, I cannot think why they are preferred to our own. The English, unlike the Irish, the Welsh and the Scottish, have no terrier of that name and seem more apathetic than most over the preservation of traditional working breeds.

The Patterdale terrier, embraced earlier this century by the lakeland terrier, but recently being re-identified as a black wire-haired working terrier, could be making a welcome comeback.

The Jack Russell terrier is increasingly popular, despite being perhaps too short-legged and smooth-coated nowadays for the Parson's style. But this was never a distinct breed; a kennel of similar working terriers, bred by Mr J. H. B. Cowley, of Callipers, near King's Langley, in the latter half of the last century has a better claim to this breed-type. Yet these small, tough, industrious hunt terriers have, perhaps with the lakeland terrier, a good claim to be called the English terrier, almost certainly having the blood of the old English white terrier, and, in the case of the lakeland, that of the English black and tan brokenhaired terrier, in their veins.

Our list of traditional working breeds will always be incomplete without an "English terrier" featuring in it.

But the shire breeds are being lost, as well as the national ones. Youatt, writing in 1845, says: "The largest and best breed of Springers is said to be in Sussex, and is much esteemed in the wealds of that county." But, these days, the Sussex spaniel is not seen a great deal in the wealds of that great sporting county, and if Youatt were to be writing about the Sussex spaniel in 2045, he would be unlikely to have much to say.

The Sealyham terrier is still found on the show circuit, but has been so "improved" for the beauty-show demands of that arena as to be quite unfit to work. Captain Edwardes of Sealyham, Pembrokeshire, would turn in his grave if he knew the fate of his "dead-game", bustling, little working breed. There is evidence that the Highlands had a black-and-tan setter at least as early as 1746, and in all probability long before; it does not look as though there will be a Gordon setter working as a gundog in the Highlands in 2046.

Unlike the labrador, the curly-coated retriever has always been a worker rather than a companion dog and was soundly established some considerable time before the labrador. Now, despite the dedication of a small bunch of enthusiasts, the curly is rarely seen as a gundog and features less and less in the show-ring.

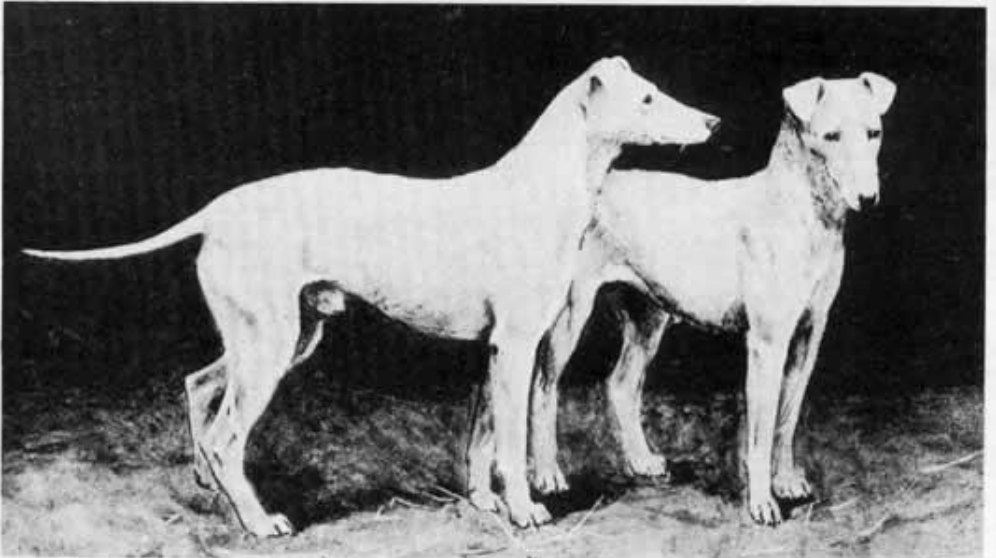
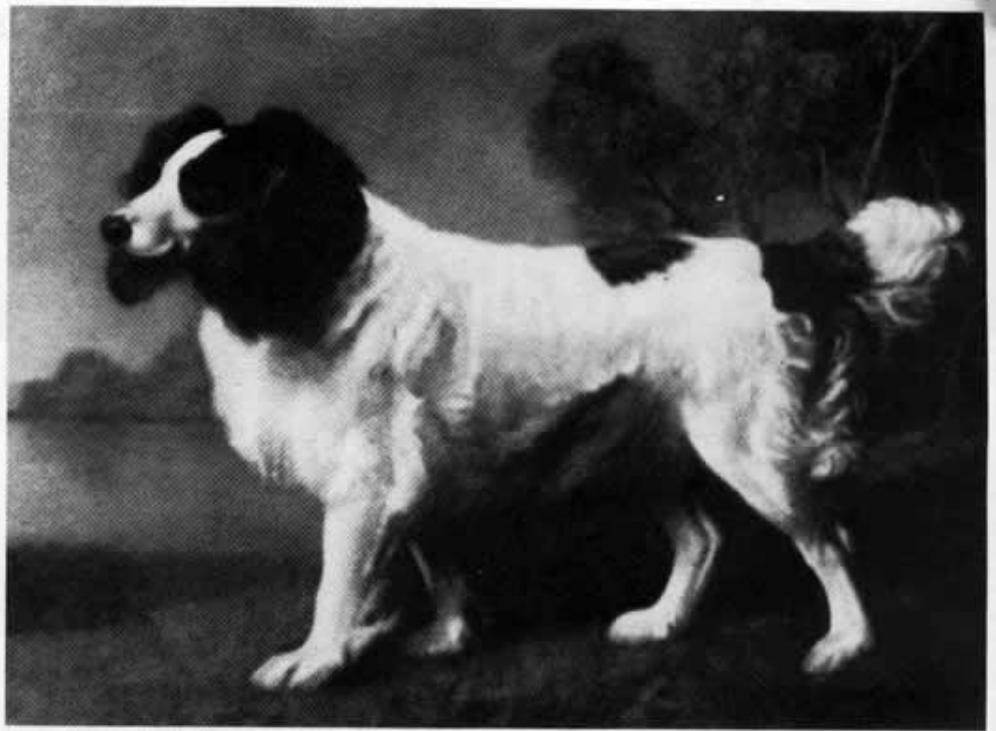
The Dandie Dinmont, too, has become unfashionable. From the start of the 18th century, Dandies have been used to hunt all kinds of ground-vermin on both sides of the English/Scottish border; at the start of the next century it is unlikely that they will be found there at all.

We have societies for the preservation of rural England, to conserve game and protect species of wild birds; wild flowers, too, are protected by an Act of Parliament. Yet each decade, slipping away from us, go our traditional breeds of working dogs, famous, irreplaceable breeds; in come the foreign dogs, rarely better in the field and always, in my opinion, less handsome.

I would like to see the formation of POWDA, the Preservation of Working Dogs Association, charged with overseeing the perpetuation of all our working breeds, launched ideally by an authoritative body such as the British Field Sports Society.

We are too late to save the old English white—although the Germans have recreated the Hovawart, their ancient farm guard-dog. With action now, we could save our own threatened breeds—the Sealyham, the Dandie Dinmont, the Sussex spaniel, the Gordon setter and the curly-coated retriever. Are they any less important than the North Ronaldsay sheep, British Lop pigs, or our other old-fashioned domestic breeds of animals? Perhaps the BFSS could approach the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, then jointly take action, possibly financed by the National Heritage Fund, to preserve these working breeds—all of them truly part of our sporting heritage.

Illustrations: 1-4, Sally Anne Thompson *Animal Photography*; 5 by courtesy of the *Leger Galleries, London*.



5-7—THREE BREEDS THAT ARE ALREADY EXTINCT: (top) THE ENGLISH LAND SPANIEL, IN AN OIL PAINTING BY GEORGE STUBBS; (middle) THE ENGLISH WHITE TERRIER, FROM A SKETCH BY ARTHUR WARDLE IN *MODERN DOGS (TERRIERS)* BY RAWDON LEE (HORACE COX, 1896); (bottom) THE ENGLISH WATER SPANIEL, FROM *THE SPORTSMAN'S CABINET* (1803), BY P. REINAGLE, RA