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## HISTORY

### PRIMITIVE HOUNDS OF EGYPT

Italy is situated in southern Europe, between Spain in the west, the coast of Croatia in the east and Austria in the north. About 60 million people live in this country which has been described many times as 'the boot of Europe'. It is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea and the Adriatic Sea, and a popular holiday country, not only for its shores, but for the numerous Greek and Roman monuments that can be found all over the country.

Italy is the native country of 10 recognized dog breeds. The most popular are the Bracco Italiano, the

He was very fond of these dogs and it is said that he took some to bed at night. We knew it already: even cruel dictators can be dog lovers.

### LACONIAN HOUND

The Greek philosopher Xenophon (about 430 to 354 BC) has written about the now-extinct Laconian Hound, known for its speed and intelligence. Apart from its pricked ears, the Laconian Hound more or less resembles the Segugio.

If left to the Gauls, the Segugio would have been extinct now, but thanks to the Romans the

# SEGUGIO ITALIANO

“Italian Hound”

*text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER*

Mastino Napoletano and the Spinone Italiano. Less known is the Segugio Italiano (Italian Hound), a cousin of the Sabueso Español, the Spanish Hound. No doubt the Segugio is an ancient breed. It is generally assumed that its history goes back to the hounds brought to Europe by Phoenician merchants, who lived along the coast of present Lebanon. Their dogs probably descend from the primitive hounds of Egypt.

### SEGUSIANS

The early history of the Segugio is more or less the same as that of the Sabueso. The so-called Celtic dogs are supposed to be its earliest ancestors; its name originally meant 'Celt'. As told in the story about the Sabueso, in early times several types of hounds developed in the southern part of Europe. Through the ages they evolved into various dog breeds.

Although it's an Italian hound today, the Segugio developed in ancient Gaul - now France - where it was bred by a tribe known as the Segusians. They lived in the area between the French rivers Saône and Rhône before the time that the Romans conquered most of Europe. After the Roman conquest, the hound of the Segusians was transported - like many other trophies - to Italy where it was refined and improved. Evidence shows that the Roman Emperor Caligula (12-41 AD) owned a pack of 'Segugi'.

breed survived. During the Italian Renaissance, when there was a growing interest in beauty - not only in art but also in breeding horses, dogs, etc. - the Segugio gained popularity and was used for different jobs in different areas. Being a rather big dog, he possesses a kind of refinement that was much appreciated in that time. The hunt of the Italian nobility included horses, trumpeters, beaters in livery and.... a pack of Segugios. The 16th-century Italian writer and poet Erasmo di Valvasone tried to rename the dog 'Bergamo Hound' without success.

In the museums of Naples and the Vatican, visitors can admire beautiful statues of Diana, the goddess of hunting, flanked by dogs of the same type and stature as the present Segugio. In the Castle of Borsò d'Este (northern Italy) is a painting that shows the ideal type of the present Segugio.

After the 19th century, big hunting parties slowly disappeared and the breed faced a period of neglect. People no longer insisted on a purebred Segugio, but were satisfied with 'just a dog for hunting'. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, the breed again gained popularity. Around 1905, dog fancier Angelo Vecchio, the author of the book *Il Cane* and an authority on Italian breeds, did research on the Segugio, tracing its decline during the Middle Ages to its resurgence of popularity during the Renaissance. Another well-known dog fancier, Ferruccio

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Faelli, helped the breed onto the right path again.

## PELO RASO AND PELO FORTE

Originally bred to hunt in large packs – of sometimes hundreds of hounds - the Segugio later became adapted to being used in smaller groups or even on its own. The large packs gave tongue with an eerie, mournful tone. Angelo Vecchio described it as "seemed to be expressing sympathy with the fleeing game". In recent times, the Segugio has developed into a family dog. Plenty of exercise is an utter condition of ownership and the countryside is a good place for him to live.

There are two coat varieties in this breed: smooth-haired (Segugio a pelo raso) and rough-haired (Segugio a pelo forte).



*Segugio Italiano a pelo raso & a pelo forte  
Because of differences in coat and colour, it is sometimes difficult  
to believe you're looking at the same breed.  
(Photo: Alice van Kempen)*

Because of differences in coat and color, it is sometimes difficult to believe you're looking at the same breed. A local variety, the Segugio Maremmano, also comes in two coats: short-haired and rough-haired. They are not recognized in Italy yet, but the Italian Kennel Club (ENCI) is thinking about giving it a separate breed standard. The breed club - Società Italiana Pro Segugio - was founded in 1920 on the initiative of Carlo De Maddalena, also the first president.

The breed is present in the U.S.A. and in Canada, but there is no breed club. Information in Italy: [www.prosegugio.it](http://www.prosegugio.it) (breed club, in Italian) and [www.encl.it](http://www.encl.it) (Italian Kennel Club, in Italian and English).



*Segugio Italiano - A group winner in its homeland of Italy*



*There are two coat varieties in this breed: smooth-haired (Segugio a pelo raso) and rough-haired (Segugio a pelo forte). Head study of a 'a pelo forte'.  
(Photo Alice van Kempen)*

**Origin:** Ancient Egypt, Roman Gaul (France) and Renaissance Italy.

**Original Purpose:** Hunting in large packs, later in smaller groups or singly. Today the Segugio hunts rabbits and wild boar.

**Description:** Strong, elegant dog of medium proportions, with a square body and of robust construction. Well-balanced with well-developed bones, good muscles and no trace of fat. Seen from above the shape of the skull and the muzzle are divergent; the upper profile is slightly convex. The nose is sufficiently large, and mobile and the nostrils are well-opened. The almond-shaped eyes are large, dark ochre with a soft expression. The drop ears are triangular, flat and very wide. The neck has the shape of a truncated cone. The skin is fine, close-fitting and without folds or a dewlap. The straight topline descends harmoniously toward the croup. The ribs are not greatly sprung, but slightly convex and the chest is of moderate width. Belly is very lean, though not greatly tucked up. Tail set on high, thin at the base, the extremity touching or almost reaching the point of the hock. The length of the shoulder blades is a third of the height at the withers; the shoulder muscles are long and lean. The length of the hind legs is about 93 percent of the height at the withers. The forefeet are oval (hare foot); the presence of some white is not a fault. Hind feet are less oval than the front feet. Smooth or rough, the coat is dense and close. Permissible colors are solid fawn, and black-and-tan. White on the body is not desirable. The black-and-tan may show a white star on the chest, in that case it is considered a tri-color. The Segugio gallops when hunting. The temperament is mild but vivacious, independent, sometimes stubborn.

**Height at the withers:** males from 20.5 to 23 inches; bitches from 19.5 to 22 inches. There is a tolerance of about .75 inches for excellent dogs.

**Weight:** from 40 to 60 pounds

**F.C.I. Classification:** Group 6 Scenthounds and related breeds. Section 1.2: medium sized breeds. With working trial.