

Basenji Club of America

*Illustrated  
Standard*



A REVIEW OF THE  
**BASENJI STANDARD**

Prepared by the BASENJI CLUB OF AMERICA, Inc.

©November, 2012

*(The official 1990 AKC standard is presented in italics)*

*The BCOA presents this Illustrated Standard as an educational tool to promote the better understanding of the Basenji.*

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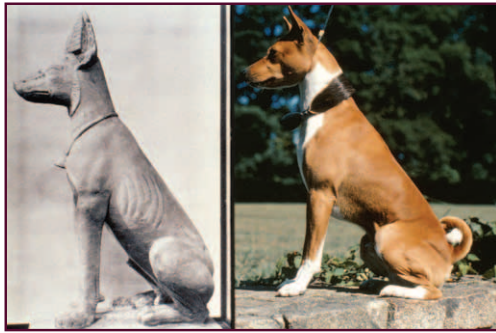
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# INTRODUCTION

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The Basenji, known as the African Barkless Dog, is considered by its devotees as unique to the species. One of the oldest of breeds, Basenji-type dogs are depicted on the tombs of the Pharaohs and date back to as early as 3600 B.C. Small and short haired, with a foxy face, worried-looking wrinkled brow, upright ears and tail curled like a doughnut, the Basenjis' most unusual characteristic is that it does not bark. He is, however, not mute and, although usually quiet, has a repertoire of sounds that range from a pleased throaty crow to a keening wail when he is lonely or unhappy.



This Egyptian statue from 1600 BC of a Basenji-like dog - with its characteristic hunting bell - has been displayed in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Since the Basenji breed was fully developed at the time of the Pharaohs, it could have had its origins much earlier.



The first sightings of Basenjis by Europeans came in the 1870s among the local peoples of the Ubangi-Uele basin in central Africa. They were first and foremost a hunting dog. The natives valued those dogs that excelled in the hunt and

placed considerable emphasis on the dog's intelligence, courage and adaptability. The dogs were products of natural selection with only the most fit and cunning surviving to produce the next generation.

The Basenji is still found in some areas of Africa where they continue to live with natives in remote forests and are extensively used to hunt. Well-balanced, graceful and active, the 16 to 17-inch height allows a functional yet sustainable size in a harsh, subsistence-level environment. Basenjis hunt using both sight and scent and are used to assist beaters in flushing game that is driven into nets strung up against the trees.

Today, Basenjis continue to demonstrate their hunting skills in organized lure coursing trials. Many have won the honor of Best in Field against other sighthound breeds. Their scenting ability has been proven by those dogs that have earned degrees in Tracking. Individual Basenjis have received high honors in many other sanctioned venues making the Basenji an ancient dog with wide-ranging abilities. Training a Basenji is challenging, yet with patience and humor, many owners are rewarded by their dogs doing what is wanted.



# GENERAL APPEARANCE

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*The Basenji is a small, short haired hunting dog from Africa. It is short backed and lightly built, appearing high on the leg compared to its length.*

*The wrinkled head is proudly carried on a well arched neck and the tail is set high and curled. Elegant and graceful, the whole demeanor is one of poise and inquiring alertness. The balanced structure and the smooth musculature enables it to move with ease and agility. The Basenji hunts by both sight and scent.*



## COMMENTS:

**GENERAL APPEARANCE.** The Basenji combines strength and elegance with graceful lines and aristocratic bearing. Gazelle-like grace is the hallmark of the Basenji. The dog is lightly built, but not weedy. The deep brisket carries back to a definite waist. Coarseness of body and heavy bone is to be avoided, as is excessive size. The impression of a dog high on the leg compared to its length cannot be over-emphasized. A dog with ample length of upper arm can have a good depth of brisket and still appear high on the leg. The brisket should come to the elbow and the upper arm should be about the same length as the shoulder blade.

Basenjies are considered sighthounds and several have won Best in Field in open competition with all sighthound breeds. Basenjies are also scenthounds, and several have earned tracking degrees, while others have shown considerable aptitude in gundog field trials. They are a general-purpose breed rather than a highly specialized, selectively-bred classical hunting breed.

**CHARACTERISTICS**--*The Basenji should not bark but is not mute. The wrinkled forehead, tightly curled tail and swift, effortless gait (resembling a racehorse trotting full out) are typical of the breed.*

## COMMENTS

The wrinkled head and tightly curled tail set the Basenji breed apart. The prick ears contribute to the alert appearance.



The statement referring to a gait “...resembling a racehorse trotting full out...” raised a lively discussion for years. In good Basenji gait, the stride should be long, reaching, and ground covering. It appears effortless and can be maintained for great distances. Effortless grace is a better indication of good movement than high speed in the trotting Basenji.

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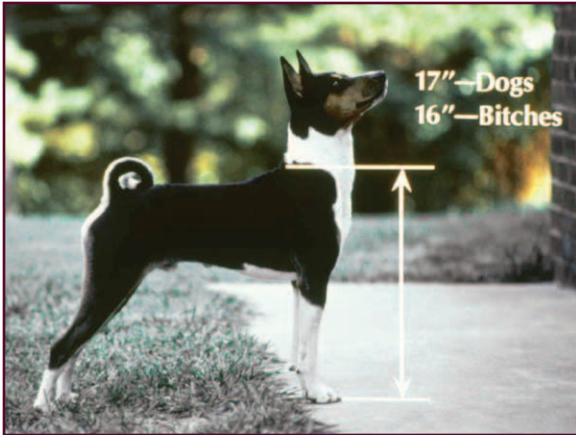
**FAULTS**--*Any departure from the following points must be considered a fault, and the seriousness with which the fault is regarded is to be in exact proportion to its degree.*

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# SIZE, PROPORTION, SUBSTANCE

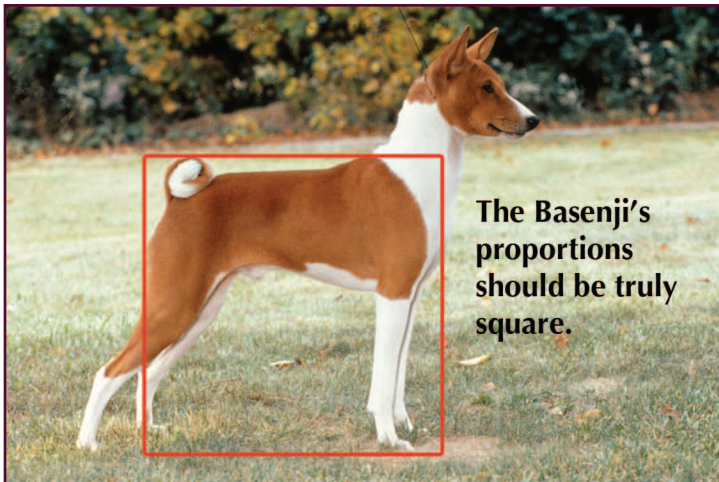
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*Ideal height for dogs is 17 inches and bitches 16 inches. Dogs 17 inches and bitches 16 inches from front of chest to the point of the buttocks. Approximate weight for dogs, 24 pounds, and bitches, 22 pounds. Lightly built within this height to weight ratio.*



## COMMENTS:

The Basenji's proportions should be truly square with the height from the top of the shoulders to the ground being equal to the distance from the front of the chest to the end of the hindquarters.



Long-bodied or short-legged dogs are not desirable, nor are dogs that appear high behind.

When the first Basenjis were brought from Africa, their offspring, benefiting from better diet and care, grew larger than their parents. The height requirement in the original English standard was then raised by one inch, the same height now given in the American standard.

Over the years there has been a tendency for Basenjis to become even larger. Today, dogs two inches over the standard are frequently seen in the ring.

Correct-sized dogs and bitches are even passed over as being too small. The standard has no disqualifications for size, but the optimum heights are those stated.



**SUBSTANCE:** Variations of body substance



- A. Somewhat refined
- B. Moderate
- C. Somewhat heavy



# HEAD

The **HEAD** is proudly carried.

**EYES** - Dark hazel to dark brown, almond shaped, obliquely set and farseeing, rims dark.

**EARS** - Small, erect, and slightly hooded, of fine texture and set well forward on top of the head. The skull is flat, well chiseled and of medium width, tapering toward the eyes. The foreface tapers from eye to muzzle with a perceptible stop. Muzzle shorter than the skull, neither coarse nor snipy, but with rounded cushions. Wrinkles appear upon the forehead when ears are erect, and are fine and profuse.

Side wrinkles are desirable, but should never be exaggerated into dewlap. Wrinkles are most noticeable in puppies and because of lack of shadowing, less noticeable in blacks, tricolors and brindles.

**NOSE** - Black greatly desired. **TEETH** - Evenly aligned with a scissors bite.



## COMMENTS:



The small, forward inclined prick ears, the fine, profuse wrinkles, and the obliquely set eyes with the correct head shape combine to create an attractive and distinctive head. Wrinkles appear when the ears are erect and pricked forward.



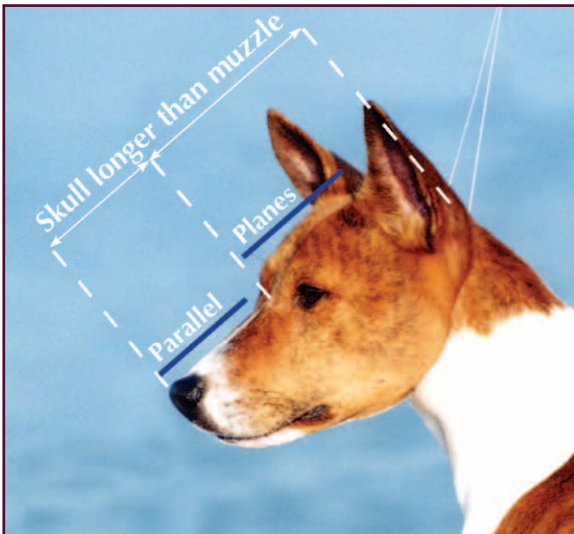
**A female should look feminine and a male should look masculine. Functionally, the structure is the same for both male and female.**

**The smooth transition of the skull into the muzzle can be best illustrated from above. The head is seen as all one piece – the sides of the skull narrowing slightly toward the eyes, the foreface tapering toward the shorter muzzle, the muzzle neither coarse nor snipy.**





The well developed arch over the eye, the brow, gives character to head by influencing width and placement of the eye, and the shape of the muscles that attach to the jaw. Facial contours are subtle but discernible.



In profile, the muzzle continues in a line parallel to that of the flat skull. A domed or peaked skull or a coarse skull or muzzle are undesirable. Length relationship of muzzle to skull is critical. The distance from the back of the head to the stop is greater than that from the slight stop to the tip of the nose.

**EYES.** The far-seeing expression of the eye is dependent on position, shape and angle. The color of the iris is dark, and the eyes should be small without being piercing or button-like. Light eyes or round eyes are undesirable.



**EARS.** The tip of the ear should be nearer to the center of the skull than to the outside base. In addition, the ears are slightly hooded in that the tips are directed more forward than the base. The orifice is to the front, cupped rather than opened flat.

It is the high set of the ears and the pricking forward when alerted that produces the fine wrinkle and quizzical expression so typical of the Basenji. Large and/or low set ears are not desirable.

Examples of ear set



**BASENJI HEADS IN  
FOUR COLORS**



# NECK, TOPLINE, BODY

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**NECK** of good length, well crested and slightly full at the base of the throat. Well set into the shoulders.

**TOPLINE** - Back level.

**BODY** - Balanced with a short back, short coupled and ending in a definite waist. Ribs moderately sprung, deep to the elbows and oval. Slight

forechest in front of the point of the shoulder. Chest of medium width.

**TAIL** is set high on topline, bends acutely forward and lies well curled to either side.



## COMMENTS:

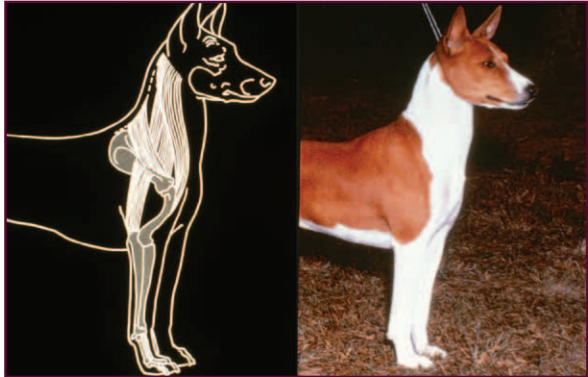


### **NECK.**

The neck of good length provides length to the muscle that extends from the head to the upper arm. It also ensures maximum range of shoulder blade action, and promotes free forward movement of the forelimbs.

The length of neck is increased by a blending into laid back shoulders. A good length of neck, well-crested, allows the dog more mobility and balance as well as enhancing the aristocratic appearance. The throat is clean without loose skin and the base of the neck is slightly full where it blends into the body.

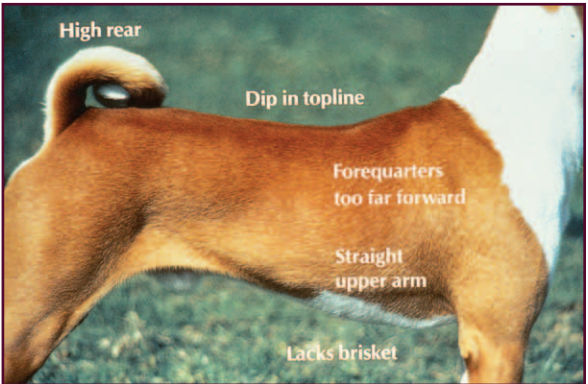
Note that a full white collar can give the impression of a longer neck.



Ewe necks and necks that meet the withers abruptly without a smooth transition are undesirable.

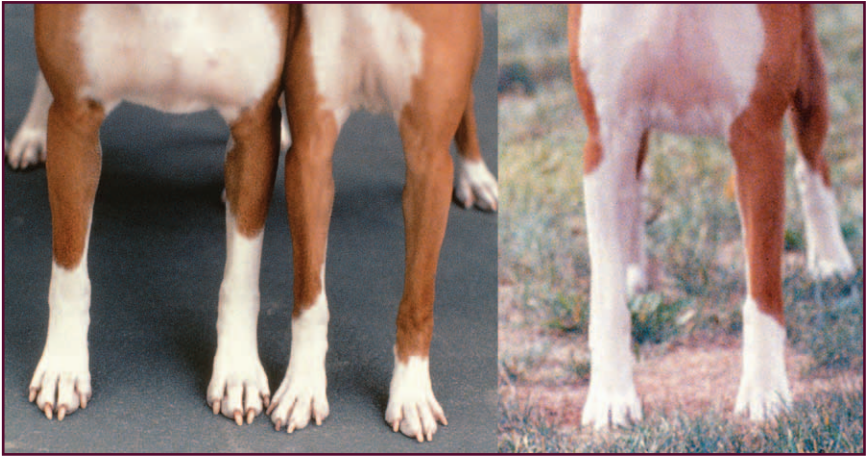
**TOPLINE.**

The Basenji should have a level back. Dogs that are naturally high in the rear are often made to appear to have level toplines by stacking the hind legs far out behind or very wide. Toplines should not roach or dip. The specimen in the photo above has forequarters set too far forward with a short, vertical upper arm. It also lacks depth of brisket and is too long in loin.



**BODY.**

Proper chest development contributes to proper movement. In the picture below, the dog on the left is too wide, the dog in the middle is too narrow and the dog on the right is correct.

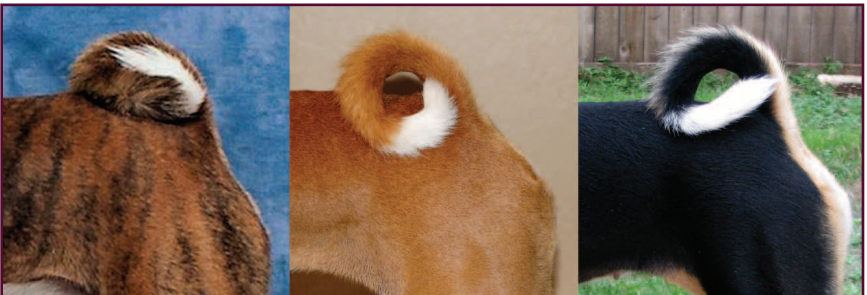


We emphasize that the Basenji should measure square. Dogs with long backs or long bodies or short legs, all of which create a long rectangular proportion, are not typical of the breed.

**TAIL.**

The tail should be set high on the croup curled to one side or the other. The set is more important than the tightness of curl as the set is essential for correct rear assembly.

[Examples of acceptable tail sets.]





# FOREQUARTERS

*Shoulders moderately laid back. Shoulder blade and upper arm of approximately equal length. Elbows tucked firmly against brisket. Legs straight with clean, fine bone, long forearm, and well-defined sinews. Pasterns of good length, strong and flexible.*

**FEET** - *Small, oval, and compact with thick pads and well arched toes. Dewclaws are usually removed.*

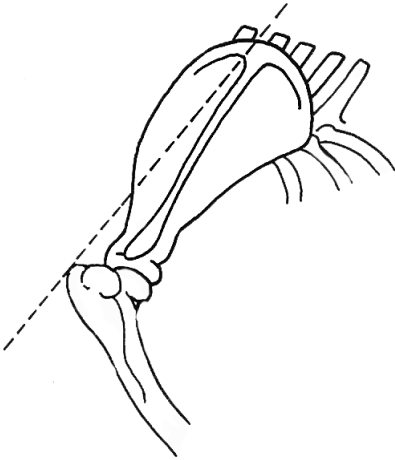


## COMMENTS:

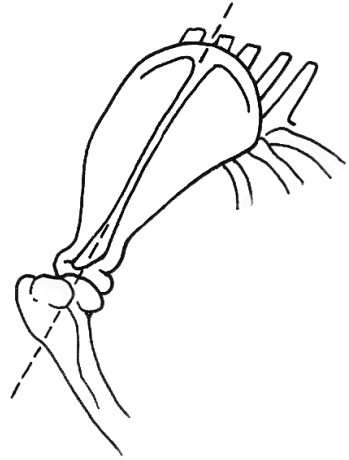
A shoulder angle of about 30 degrees from the vertical can be considered moderately laid back. The upper arm should be long, and about the same length as the shoulder blade, and the elbow should be set approximately under the tip of the shoulder blade as shown here.



## Determining Correct Shoulder Angle in the Basenji



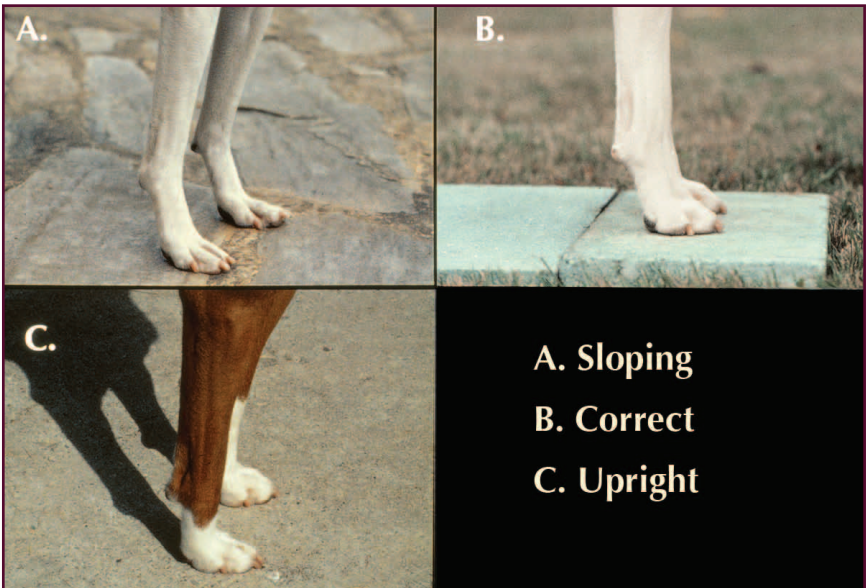
*Common method used. Does not identify the precise angle.*



*Precise method to measure the correct angle of the shoulder by using the spine of the shoulder blade down to joint of the upper arm.*

**FEET.** Pasterns should not be weak and sloping, nor rigidly upright nor knuckled over.

### PASTERNS



**A. Sloping**  
**B. Correct**  
**C. Upright**

In these photos of good feet also note how thick the pads are. An oval, rather than a cat foot, is required.



Flat or splayed feet should be heavily penalized. The Basenji is a hound and thin, open feet are subject to recurrent lameness.



**FLAT, SPLAYED FEET**

# HINDQUARTERS

*Medium width, strong and muscular, hocks well let down and turned neither in nor out, with long second thighs and moderately bent stifles. **Feet:** Same as in "Forequarters."*

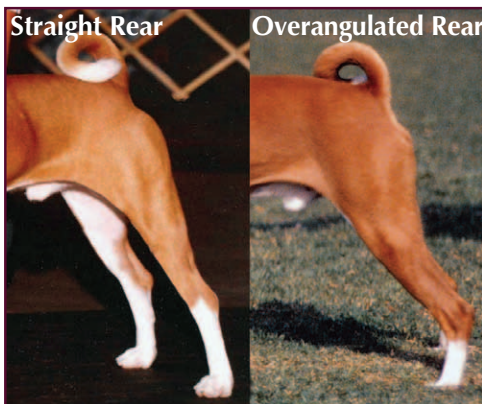


## COMMENTS:

The key to the appreciation of correct Basenji hindquarters is the requirement for moderate angulation.

A straight rear with high hocks will generally have restricted rear motion. The rear leg cannot reach under the body far enough or have full extension in the follow-through.

Over-angulated hindquarters overpower the front, resulting in crabbing, pounding or other examples of movement imbalance.





Maximum propulsion without increasing angulation is achieved by ensuring that the rear portion of the pelvis is long to provide ample attachment for muscles that extend downward and draw the hind leg rearward. This length creates the appearance of a shelf behind the high set tail. The hocks should be well let down for endurance. Beware of long hocks and short second thighs.

Viewed from behind, the column of bones from hip to pad should be straight. The hocks should neither turn out nor in. Moving, the hind legs track directly behind those of the front, converging toward the center of gravity as speed increases. Single tracking is common at high speed.



# COAT AND COLOR

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*Coat short and fine. Skin very pliant. **Colors** -- Chestnut red; pure black, tricolor (pure black and chestnut red); or brindle (black stripes on chestnut red); all with white feet, chest, and tail tip. White legs, blaze, and collars are optional.*



*The amount of white should never predominate over the primary color. Colors and markings should be rich, clear, and well defined, with a distinct line of demarcation between the black and red of tricolors and the stripes on brindles.*



## COMMENTS:

The skin texture is very important. It should be thin and elastic, yet strong. Coarse skin cannot produce the fine profuse wrinkles characteristic of the breed, while skin lacking in strength tears easily while the dog is working in heavy cover.



The texture of the skin should be tested gently by simple stroking. The hair itself is silky but often somewhat stiff. This hard surface collects little dirt.

**RED/WHITE.** The red color should be bright and rich, sometimes with an orange cast, sometimes ranging more toward chestnut. Areas of clear white or clear color are greatly desired. The standard does not call for ticking or mixing of coat colors or sables.

However, a few black hairs on the back side of the ears or the inside of the curl of the tail (shown on the right) indicates the dog probably carries the genetic factor to produce tri-color offspring and such markings should not be penalized.



**Black hair developing a mask** (as pictured on the right) **on the faces of the reds or tris is not desirable.**



**BLACK/WHITE.** On the blacks the color is a pure, glossy, jet black with distinct demarcation between the black and the white. White or red hairs interspersed with the black creating a grizzled effect is not pleasing. The judge must look more closely to evaluate forehead wrinkle on the black and white, tri-colored or brindle Basenjis.

**BLACK/TAN/WHITE.** The coat of the tri-color is as glossy and dark as the black and white, with the addition of tan. From the standpoint of most breeders, tan markings are desired above the eyes (pips), on the muzzle, cheeks, inside the ears, legs, back of thighs, breeching, vent, underside of the tail, and the lower outside portion of the legs between the white and black. The brindle-pointed tri-colored basenji may have black stripes in the areas of red and should not be penalized.



**BRINDLE/WHITE.**

*Brindle-pointed striping visible on cheeks*

The brindle should have a good rich chestnut base color with strong black stripes over it. The colors should remain fairly distinct to avoid a muddy, grizzled or sable effect. Such effects are incorrect on any of the allowed colors.



**FOUR STANDARD COLORS  
OF THE BASENJI**



# GAIT

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*Swift, tireless trot. Stride is long, smooth, effortless and the topline remains level.*



*Coming and going, the straight column of bones from shoulder joint to foot and from hip joint to pad remains unbroken, converging toward the centerline under the body. The faster the trot, the greater the convergence.*



## COMMENTS:

There should be no bounce to the shoulders, and the topline should remain level. Dogs should not appear to trot downhill. In the Basenji, the reach should be efficient with good shoulder rotation and elbow extension.



The rear leg should reach well under the body while the follow-through of the driving leg should extend an equal distance behind. Excessive action, or high, or hackney action is inefficient and fatiguing.

Exaggerated kick, which offers no additional propulsion should be avoided. In Basenji gait, overall balance and timing are of primary importance.

# TEMPERAMENT

*An intelligent, independent, but affectionate and alert breed. Can be aloof with strangers.*



## COMMENTS:

For uncounted thousands of years the Basenji survived as a hunting dog. Great importance must have been given to intelligence and adaptability for the dog often worked out of sight of the hunters. At times the Basenji can still be quite independent and aloof. It is alert and careful with strangers, open and calm with friends, loving and solicitous with children.



When meeting strangers, Basenjies prefer to make the first overtures and should not be approached from behind.

Although not high strung, the Basenji is an alert, active, curious dog. Judges should not expect it to stand motionless for long periods of time.

# SUMMATION

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The Basenji is a multi-purpose dog which has survived thousands of years of intense natural selection because of its intelligence and adaptability. It is balanced and light footed, yet strong and enduring. It is elegant yet substantial. Ever proud and alert, it is a dog that can look its master in the eye, a dog that can bring pride to breeder, owner and judge alike. Older than a museum relic, the Basenji is the personification of natural beauty.



# ADDENDUM - Native Basenjis

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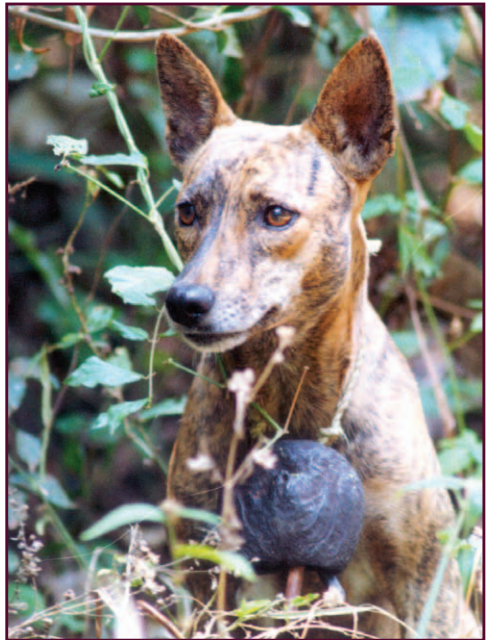
The Basenji Club of America, Inc. is fortunate to be able to incorporate native Basenji stock into its gene pool. These last pages are here to illustrate the BCOA Native Stock Program.

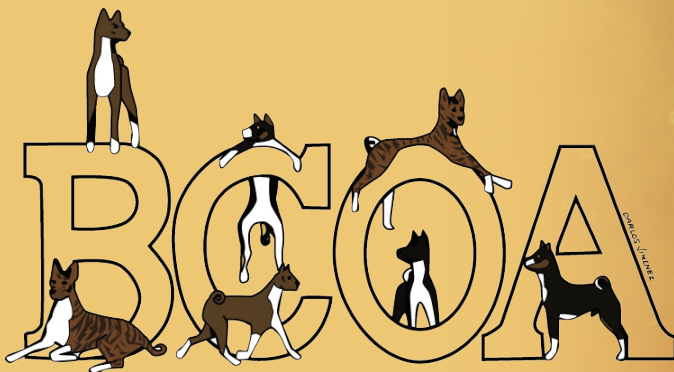
In the late 1980s Basenjis were imported from Africa, and in 1990 the Club requested the American Kennel Club open the Studbook to accept these dogs. Again, in 2008, BCOA received permission to re-open the AKC Studbook to allow the BCOA to continue adding carefully selected African imports throughout the next several years for breeding programs.

These dogs live in much harsher conditions than their domestic counterparts. Diet and environment may hamper their development to some degree. A looser tail curl or a longer loin is more likely seen in the native dogs. Basenjis in Africa are not the product of careful selection as is the case in this country. They survive the elements of their surroundings because they are the strongest and hardiest.



**Importers have visited several areas in the Congo Basin to search for Basenjis. Between 2009 and 2012, nineteen native Basenjis were added as Foundation stock to the AKC Studbook. The search will continue through 2018.**





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## REFERENCES:

### Photos courtesy of:

American Kennel Club, Inc.

Many thanks to owners and other photographers who provided additional pictures for the Illustrated Standard.

### INTERNET SOURCES:

**BASENJI CLUB OF AMERICA, INC.**

[www.basenji.org](http://www.basenji.org)

**THE BASENJI UNIVERSITY**

[www.basenji.org/BasenjiU/niversityIndex.html](http://www.basenji.org/BasenjiU/niversityIndex.html)

### LITERATURE

*BASENJIS, The Barkless Dog*, Veronica Tudor-Williams

*THE BASENJI, Out of Africa to You*, Susan Coe

*The Basenji Stacked and Moving*, Robert Cole

*The Complete Basenji*, Elspet Ford

A complete list of literature is available through the Basenji University.