

Hopes for the future: Skye's puppies have provided Sarah with 21st century joy.



Fascinating facts!

● American Indian Dogs were called 'song dogs' because of their high-pitched voices, and 'little buffalo dogs' because of their ability to round up buffalo.

● The dogs were used for herding, hunting, pulling travois (simple sledges) and guarding, as well as for babysitting children and keeping the families warm at night; their hair was used to make clothes.

● The women of the tribe were in charge of breeding the dogs.

● American Indian Dogs are quite cat-like; they keep themselves clean and have been known to climb trees.

● Although he cannot prove outright that the animals he has found are pure American Indian Dogs, Kim La Flamme's research suggests that they are the closest remaining relatives; he is part Blackfoot Indian and played with them as a child.

Saving the 'song

With a history stretching back 30,000 years, the existence of the American Indian Dog in the 21st century is thanks to a combination of the breed's incredible survival instincts and the dedication of a few enthusiasts.

Only a tiny percentage of the 200,000 dogs that are believed to have roamed the American plains with their Indian masters remain — there are now less than 300 American Indian Dogs left in the world.

But although there is a strong desire to see one of the oldest domestic dogs grow from strength to strength, current admirers are also keen to prevent them becoming overexposed.

Sarah Harrison of Llandoverly, Carmarthenshire is the owner of the only breeding pair of American Indian Dogs in the UK. Four years ago (see the September 1999 issue of *Your Dog*) she was determined to see the breed survive and grow into the next

millennium. And while this goal has been achieved, she says there is still much to be done to preserve this unique breed.

Something special

Sarah first came across the American Indian Dog when she read a magazine article about Kim La Flamme, an American who, after years of dedication to the breed, had saved it from extinction.

She flew out to the States to meet Kim and her determination and love for these dogs meant he eventually allowed her to have a pup of her own.

Skye became the first American Indian Dog to be imported to the UK in 1995 followed by Highland Storm in February 1996.

Ten years on from her first encounter with this threatened breed, Sarah is still totally in awe of them and regularly marvels at her involvement with a dog that, according to some

experts, is thought to be the 'missing link' in the canine world.

She says: "Even after all these years I only have to look at them both to be reminded of their amazing history and I feel so very lucky to have them. The American Indian Dog has changed very little from how it was thousands of years ago."

Skye and Storm have recently become parents for the third time. The addition of the new litter — five females and one male — now brings the total number of American Indian Dogs in the UK to 22.

American Indian Dogs come in lots of different shades and colours from black, white and golden red to chocolate, tan and silver. The majority of the dogs have amber or grey eyes, but every so often a pup is born with pale blue eyes; these dogs were considered sacred by the Indians.

Sarah is still hopeful that one day she herself will own a sacred dog.

Pic: Iain Bulley



Storm is the proud father of all of Skye's three litters of puppies.



Amazingly agile, American Indian Dogs have even been known to climb trees.



Skye keeps an eye on her litter by the den she dug for them.



American Indian Dogs have a history stretching back 30,000 years, but today there are less than 300 left in the world; Sarah Harrison's breeding programme is helping to maintain, and hopefully increase, numbers.

dogs'

Four years after our initial visit, **Emma Hawkins** catches up on one woman's quest to ensure the survival of an ancient breed.

She says: "I thought I had a blue-eyed pup in the last litter, but at about six weeks the eyes changed to an amber yellow. There is one hopeful in this litter who looks like she might have the sacred blue eyes, but it will be a few more weeks or so before I am absolutely certain. At the moment her eyes are an iridescent blue, similar to the blue of kingfishers and some butterflies."

If the pup turns out to be blue-eyed, it is likely that Sarah will keep her and consider importing another dog from Kim to breed with. Up until now Sarah has never kept any of the puppies from the litters, although she says it is something she could have done easily.

"Every day I look at Skye and Storm and think how fortunate I am to be involved with this incredible breed, so I want all the puppies to have that same experience with their new owners rather than being viewed as a 'spare dog'."

The next step

Sarah is not alone in being fiercely protective of the breed, but what sort of people want to become a guardian of the American Indian Dog?

"A variety of people," explains Sarah. "They come from all sorts of backgrounds, but they are all people who want a dog that is still as nature intended. They have all had dogs before but they often have a desire to do their bit to help the preservation of this beautiful breed."

Sarah's goal four years ago was to see the American Indian Dog into the 21st century, but now that this has been accomplished what's next on her agenda for this extraordinary breed?

"It's a catch-22 situation really," she says. "I want them to become known about but not in the way some of the modern breeds have. When you look at how some breeds have grown in numbers over the years it is actually quite frightening. I want to protect the

American Indian Dog from overexposure. They are not a breed for the show ring and I want nothing to do with The Kennel Club.

"This is the only breed that has not been altered to suit man's requirements, but it wouldn't take long for someone to interfere with them and the resulting dogs would look nothing like they do now. That is something that we cannot allow to happen."

● For a booklet and more information about the American Indian Dog, send a cheque or postal order for £3 (made payable to Sarah Harrison) to Sarah Harrison, Y Neuadd, Pentre-ty-gwyn, Llandovery, Carmarthenshire SA20 0RN.

Update As we went to press Sarah confirmed that the female puppy mentioned in this article did have the hoped for sacred blue eyes.

Guardians of the breed



Colin Hood takes delivery of Sgaith Beag from Sarah Harrison.

Colin Hood became smitten with the American Indian Dog when he met Sarah and Skye on a film set in Scotland. He was determined to have one of Skye's puppies and a few years later managed to track Sarah down shortly after Skye had her second litter.

Sgaith Beag (Little Wing) is Colin's constant companion. Colin works as a sound recorder in films and TV, and Sgaith Beag recently got a starring role in a documentary he was working on called 'Gladiator girl'.

Sarah recalls: "Sgaith Beag was filmed bounding into the gladiatorial arena in slow motion — so one of the pups is already a TV star!"



Dr Kathy Gaskin with Sarah and Kiowa.

Meanwhile Leicester-based Dr Kathy Gaskin is about to welcome a second American Indian Dog into her home. Her first, Kiowa, was also from Skye and Storm's second litter.

Kathy says: "I became interested in the American Indian Dogs partly because of my interest in the native American history and culture.

"Kiowa is fascinating; she moves so delicately and gracefully and is magic to watch. It is amazing to think that this unique breed served a whole culture across North America; a special creature that acts and behaves in ways many of today's specialized breeds don't. Kiowa is very loyal, affectionate and gentle. She has this amazing lineage and I feel extremely privileged."