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Position of Blackhawk LRC on color of Labrador Retrievers

This Position Statement represents THE OPINION of the Blackhawk Labrador Retriever Club.

The coat colors for Labrador Retrievers as officially recognized by the Standards for all major registries throughout the world are Black, Chocolate and Yellow. [UKC, AKC, FCI, CKC, KC and FCM are of major importance to this position statement].

The BLRC supports the UKC Standard that Labrador Retrievers are only Black, Yellow or Chocolate in coat color.

The history of coat color in Labradors as described by noted expert Labrador Historian Jack Vanderwyk:

The first written reference to the breed was in 1814 ("Instructions to Young Sportsmen" by Colonel Peter Hawker),¹ the first painting of the breed was a black Labrador in 1823 ("Cora. A Labrador Bitch" by Edwin Landseer), and the first photograph also of a black Labrador in 1856 (the Earl of Home's dog "Neil", described both as a Labrador and a St. Johns dog). By 1870 the name Labrador Retriever became common in England.

The Black color is the foundation of the breed with yellow and chocolate colors traced to their origins in black ancestors and carried genetically by the blacks.

Yellow and chocolate pups would occasionally appear (although often culled), until finally gaining acceptance in the 20th century.

The first recognized yellow Labrador was Ben of Hyde, born in 1899, (Ben of Hyde, kennel of Major C.J. Radclyffe).

In the years from 1921 to 1930 the Labrador population was more than doubled in the United Kingdom, compared to the previous decade. 1,178 working, showing or reproducing Labradors were registered in the database: 963 of them were black, 212 of them were yellow, and 3 of them were chocolates.

So we see the first registered chocolates before 1930. Chocolate Labradors had been well established in the early 20th century at the kennels of the Earl of Feversham, and Lady Ward of Chiltonfoliat. The chocolate Labrador emerged in numbers in the 1930s. Jack Vanderwyk traces the origins of all Chocolate Labradors listed on the LabradorNet database (some 34,000 Labrador dogs of all shades) to eight original bloodlines. The bloodlines as traced by Vanderwyk each lead back to three black Labradors in the 1880s—Bucleuch Avon (m), and his sire and dam, Malmesbury Tramp (m), and Malmesbury June (f). Morningtown Tobla is also named as an important intermediary, and according to the studbook of Bucleuch Kennels, the chocolates in that kennel came through FTW Peter of Faskally (1908).

Cited with permission of Jack Vanderwyk

The breed was recognized by The Kennel Club in 1903. The first American Kennel Club (AKC) registration was in 1917. The UKC recognized the Labrador Retriever in 1947. The FCI recognized the Labrador Retriever in 1954.





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Some fanciers today are knowingly producing dogs which are not of the 3 colors recognized by the Standard. **UKC has stated unequivocally that dogs not meeting the Standard for color MUST be disqualified at UKC Licensed events. BLRC supports this UKC position.**

These 'dilute fanciers' allege that the gene responsible for these colors, the recessive 'd' gene at the D or dilution locus, has historically been present in the Labrador population in general. However, there is no definitive proof of this allegation.

Whereas the black, chocolate and yellow coat colors have been documented from the beginning of the breed, there are no documented instances of dilute-coat-colored dogs in the history of the breed UNTIL their emanation from one group of dogs in the USA after the Second World War.

All dogs identified as dilute-coat-color can be traced via their registry pedigrees to a common group of ancestors in the USA.

No registered Labrador has been identified with DNA results publically listed at the OFA who carries the 'dilute recessive' gene who has NOT been pedigree traced to the identified group of USA ancestors.

Since all 'dilute gene carriers' descend from one group of ancestors and no 'dilute gene carriers' have yet been identified by DNA test results who are from the general population of Labradors from England, France, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, or from other parts of North America, the traditional breeders of Labrador Retrievers speculate about the origin of the 'dilute' gene. **The BLRC supports this speculative viewpoint and does NOT believe that the historical record of the Labrador Retriever supports the claim that the 'dilute' gene has historically been present in the Labrador population in general.**

The BLRC further agrees that the 'dilute gene' is probably not a result of a mutation within the breed or else it would be much more widespread than simply within the one bloodline of descendants from one group and only in the USA.

A remaining plausible explanation for the presence of the 'dilute' gene in this subset of dog is that it was introduced from outside the Labrador breed.

Traditional breeders of Labrador Retrievers whose registered dogs who have been tested as DD or Normal at the D Locus maintain that the burden of proof for the 'dilute carriers and dilute coat colored dogs' to be recognized as purebred Labradors lies with the fanciers who own and breed these non-Standard dogs. **BLRC agrees with this position and encourages ALL owners of Labrador Retrievers to DNA test their dogs for the D Locus status and to post those results at the OFA.**

BLRC stands ready to work with all owners from both points of view to undertake DNA research to find a definitive answer for this question.

