Catahoula Leopard Dog

Louisiana is well on its way to being able to list among its many distinguished attractions an official state dog.

Known by purists as the Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog, the multi-colored canine has successfully cleared three of the five hurdles needed to enter that lofty inner-sanctum of officially designated state species which now includes an official bird, tree, insect, flower and fossil.

House Bill 75 by Rep. C.J. Russo of Donaldsonville has been passed by the House Natural Resources Committee, the full House and the Senate Natural Resources Committee. The bill has yet to pass the full Senate and be signed by the governor.

However, contrary to some news reports, Louisiana will not be the first state to name its own official dog. Following wire stories carried nationally claiming the distinction of being first, several states were quick to point out that they have state dogs.

According to information furnished by Betty Ann Eaves, president of the National Association of Louisiana Catahoulas, Inc., there are about 2,000 purebred Catahoulas in Louisiana today.

Their heritage is traced to Indian dogs found in Louisiana in the 1540s when DeSoto and other Spaniards made their way through the state. The Indian dogs were found around the swamps of Catahoula Lake northeast of Alexandria and had unusual “glass” or white eyes.

The first settlers around Catahoula Lake discovered the dog was used by the Indians for hunting deer and bobcat. For its unique glass eyes it was named Catahoulas, which in the Indian dialect means “beautiful clear water.”

The dogs have also been known as “hog dogs” for their ability to work wild hogs and in Texas the cowboys named them “Leopard Cowdogs” because of their spots and ability to work cows.

The Catahoula is most often spotted with from two to five different colors of black, blue, brown, liver or white with contrasting spots of any or all of these colors.

Also it is believed the “war dogs” brought over by the Spaniards were interbred with the Indian dogs resulting in eyes that can be brown, green or a glass mixture. The most valuable are those with glass eyes, but the eyes can be one glass and one colored eye, and some have dark eyes with glass cracks or spots in them.

The Catahoula is touted as being able to serve a number of functions, those of stock-herding, protection, as a companion or for hunting.

According to information from the National Association of Louisiana the Catahoula is “affectionate, intelligent, and faithful. He is versatile and can be trained for almost anything — from gentle ‘babysitter’ to vicious and steadfast protector.”

“He has the guts and the inbred desire to work the wildest Brahman cows or hogs, but can be used and trusted with the gentlest stock.”

The dogs are still used to work stock in the swamps and coastal marshes and are better adapted to that work than other dogs because they are excellent swimmers and have webbed toes.

The association, however, makes a distinction between the purebred Catahoulas and the dog known as the Catahoula Cur. The association says in its brochure, “The purebred Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Dog is a full Catahoula from parents who both trace their history to the early Catahoulas of Louisiana.

“As such they inherit their natural traits in full proportion and can be expected to develop into an excellent working dog. The Catahoula Cur is a crossbred dog, with one parent a Catahoulas and the other usually a stock or hunting type dog.”

The cur may resemble a true Catahoulas because of the Catahoulas’s strong genetic makeup, but it will not have all of the desirable traits of the purebred and cannot be registered.

The association sponsors field trials and shows and registers purebred Catahoulas with Louisiana bloodlines. The association’s address is P.O. 1041, Denham Springs, 70726.