State's dog a working breed; Catahoula 'not couch potato'

By LEAH V. BENNETT

When it comes to owning Louisiana's very own state dog, the National Association of Louisiana Catahoulas suggests folks heed its motto: "Not everyone needs a Catahoula."

Betty Ann Eaves, president of the NALC, is very protective of the thousands of Catahoulas from around the world linked to her not-for-profit agency based in Denham Springs. She won't let them end up in just any home.

"I spend most of my time talking people out of them," said Eaves, who is in touch with owners and breeders across the country, in the Canadian provinices and seven foreign countries. "Just because you want them is not enough. They are working dogs and a working breed needs to be working ... they're not a couch potato dog."

Eaves said all pet owners, not just people seeking Catahoulas, should do their homework and know as much about their animal as possible. This, she explains, makes for a much more pleasant relationship.

From her office in Denham Springs, she sends out packages of information about the dog's standard, what it's bred for and where the breeders of Louisiana Catahoulas are located. Most people who want to

Critters

Louisiana's other residents own them, want the ones with parents born and bred in Louisiana, she said.

The American Kennel Club, which maintains a registry of purebred dogs, does not recognize the Catahoula at this time, Eaves said.

"You should know what you're getting into. People expect us to pump Catahoulas out of here," Eaves said.

The breed, also known as the Louisiana Catahoula Leopard Stockdog is more commonly referred to as a Catahoula Cur. It was declared the state dog in 1979 when then-Gov. Edwin Edwards signed HB75, a bill presented to legislators by members of the NALC.

Records show that there was a "motley-colored dog in the territory as far back as the 1500s," she said.

It got the name cur, which suggests a mean yet cowardly nature, from its work rounding up hogs for farmers, Eaves said. Because the hogs couldn't be herded like

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The state dog: Catahoula cur

- It has a short, dense coat with a mottled, spotted pattern in various shades of brown and black.
- Size ranges from 20 to 26 inches in height. A male weighs 65 to 70 pounds and a female, up to 55 pounds.
- One trait common to the breed is its different eye color, usually with one brown and one violet, blue or "glass" eye.
- Catahoulas are affectionate yet protective.
- Although its precise ancestry is not known, the Catahoula is said to have its roots in the north Louisiana woodlands of Catahoula Parish. Legend describes it as being part wild dog, part leopard and even part hog. However, there's also been records of a Spanish breed brought here by explorer Hernando de Soto in 1539 and a wild breed used by the Natchez and Natchitoches Indians.

"How do you expect it to act if you don't teach them any manners? If you don't do it when they are young, they won't have any."

— Betty Ann Eaves, National Association of Louisiana Catahoulas president