**History of the** **Český Fousek**

The Český Fousek has been called an ancient breed, and in a way, it is, with records tracing back over centuries. But in other ways it’s a new breed, having been finally recognized by the Fédération Cynologique International (FCI) in May 1963. More than simply a database of pedigrees, the background of this bushy-faced hunter is a story of cultures, politics, wars, and resilience. The Český Fousek is both a distinctive breed in its own right and a key contributor to the genetics of other versatile rough coated gun dogs.

The oldest records of a hunting dog generally called “fousci” (bearded/whiskered) are preserved in Karlštejn castle from the time of The Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (1316-1378). The first king of Bohemia, Charles IV, was born in Prague. He was an avid sportsman, and was fluent in several languages including Czech, Latin, French, German, and Italian (There were many dialects at that time). Prague became his capital, as it remained untouched by the plague. His rule was what has been called the Golden Age of Bohemia. There are multiple records from Charles IV where he writes about hunting incidents. For example, when he was hunting for deer with his Czech hunting dogs, he jumped into a pool and the dogs followed him. With a big whimper they immediately got out of the water because it was hot. Thus, the discovery of a hot healing spring, later the spa town of “Karlovy Vary” was established. There is a report of a gift of “Canius Bohemicus” to Margrave Ludwig of Brandenburg, although the exact time frame of that gift is uncertain. Gifts of hunting dogs all over the region were common among nobles, and many of these dogs were exported throughout the central European region. However, it is unlikely these were what we would now call a pointing dog- but were an early ancestor of our breed.

Bohushlav Balbín (1621-1688- Prague) wrote a series of six volumes about the Czech lands published 1679-1687. Chapter 62 describes the Czech hunting dogs and the kennels of the time. The next important work is by Johan Fredrich von Fleming, *Der vollkommene teutsche Jäger,* (1724) where he also describes a Bohemian hunting dog, although no details are provided. Up until this time there was very little specific breed development, and these dogs had a great deal genetic variation.

The Czech lands were under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire, Hapsburgs, Austrian Empire, and then the Austro-Hungarian Empire for about 300 years until the end of WWI. During this time there was a gradual change to Germanization of language for the ruling classes. As a result, these Czech rough coated hunting dogs became called by the German name of Stichelhaar (prickly hair) or later by the name “Hessian Rough-beards” or “Czech Pointers”. By whatever name used, the original stock for these dogs came from what is now the Czech lands.

The earliest real description of a **pointing dog** called a “Fousek” is in a book by the Czech Dr. Hanns von Kadich, *Der stichelhaarige deutsche Vorstehhund*, published 1888. The author includes a number of letters, including one from “one of the oldest and wisest hunters in our country, and it is the only detailed description of the old ‘stichelhärig’ bird dog, as he knew it in the first decades of our century”

The color of the rough-coated pointer, as I see it before me from my childhood days, was a sometimes lighter, sometimes darker ash gray, with innumerous brown spots, sprinkles, dots, and plates throughout. Especially the large brown plates were sprinkled with white hair and thus truly ‘gestichelt’. To the Bohemian and Moravian pheasant hunters who preferably hunted with these dogs this indefinable color was the only right one. In pure stock the coat was always harsh, each hair as spry as glass, the whole body *not* wooly rough. Only the head had pronounced furnishings and thus somewhat longer and softer fur, the reason for also calling the dog “Fousek”, the bearded one. The top of the head and the neck were rather smooth. Rough like a poodle and wooly were only dogs of unknown descent, preferably used for hunting in water and simply called ‘water dogs’.

The description goes on to detail the shape of the head and coat on the body and head. This description would be from very early 1800s or late 1700s. This is only about 75 years after the publication of *Der vollkommene teutsche Jäger*, indicating that it is likely the Bohemian and Moravian “Fousek” were used as pointing dogs since at least the mid- to late 18th century.

Dr. von Kadich’s book has a number of other letters with memories of breeders and hunters dating from the early 1830s with more information about the rough coated pointers giving height and the pedigree of some early dogs with many references to Bohemia and Moravia as well as the use of the name “Fousek”.

The period of rapid breed development came during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Germany, the Stichelhaar became a popular hunting dog and was the basis for the development of the Korthals Griffon. Franz Bontant was a devote of the Stichelhaar and many old studbook records show that the Stichelhaar was instrumental in the eventual development of the Drahthaar. So, we see that those old Czech dogs became the genetic basis for several rough-coated Central European Pointing breeds.

Organized cynological activity ushered in an era for breeding specialized dogs often for national pride. In 1880 the “Association for breeding and training of dogs in the Czech Kingdom” was established in Prague. In 1882, Josef Černý, a Forest-master from Beroun, writes the first accepted Český Fousek breed standard. Soon thereafter dog trials were popular, and the larger, slower, Fousek competed against English pointers and “pointerized” German short-haired pointers that were very popular at that time. Versatility was not considered because the contemporary trials organized were almost entirely field trials. Thus, it is understandable that the Český Fousek subsequently started to be forgotten in the dog trial world.

Breed registries for sporting dogs arose in this time frame. In 1886 the “Czech registry of dog breeds” was established and listed:

19 pointers

17 English setters

9 Irish setters

17 Gordon setters

2 griffons

81 short-haired pointers

41 coarse-haired pointers– Fouseks

32 smooth-haired dachshunds

4 long-haired dachshunds

30 Hannover blood-hounds

1 English retriever

8 smooth-haired greyhounds

2 borzois

10 foxhounds

Later, this breed registry merged with the Vienna breed registry (Österreichische Hunde Stammbuch- or the ÖHStB). It was still all in the German language.

The “Association for coarse-haired pointers- Český Fousek for the Czech Kingdom with premises in Písek” was organized and founded in 1896 by Ferdinand Sekyrka, a forester, a professor at the forestry school in Písek, and a patriot independent of the nobility. Part of their mission was to preserve and spread the Český Fousek breed. However, this group was quickly dissolved by the Austrian Monarchy because it did not use the German language in its reports.

From its inception in 1883 through 1924, the ÖHStB listed numerous rough-coated pointing dogs that were originally from Czech lands. These dogs proved to have a strong influence on coarse-haired pointers in the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their offspring would later become a resource for re-generation of the Český Fousek. 1912 brought a new club for wirehaired pointers. This club paid 400 crowns for a female named Freya that had just won first prize at an exhibition at Písek. Freya was bred to a “decorated” dog from St. Hypolite, and she had 7 puppies, of which one died. The remainder of the puppies were given to club members and were entered into a strictly controlled breeding program.

World War I was devastating for many sporting breeds and the Český Fousek was no exception, but a few enthusiasts were able to keep some excellent dogs. Breed registrations were discontinued during this time, and unfortunately, dogs that were not officially registered had difficulty entering breeding programs after the war was over. Freya had a sad ending in the course of a rabies epidemic during WW I, likely in 1916. She was taken and was destroyed before her owner, Ferdinand Sekyrka, could get to her. The laboratory report later came back as negative for rabies. In spite of the tragedy, she remained a “Primal Mother” of Český Fousek.

In 1918, the official Czech stud book was divided into a Czech part with the Czech parentage book (CPB) and a German part with the Deutsches Jaghund Stammbuch Hubertus (DJStH). Continuing though WWII with the Reich books (RZB) there was a blending of Czech and German dogs but under different breed names, depending on where they were registered. By 1923, with a new Sportsman’ union, the ČSMU, a new registration was established for Czechoslovakian dogs the Člp. The Czechoslovak Republic became members of the newly formed World Canine Organization, the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI).

František Houska and like-minded Český Fousek enthusiasts formed the Spolek Pro Ohaře Hrubosrsté- Český Fousek (Association for Coarse-haired Pointers- Český Fousek) in 1924. It was now the third breed club, because the ČSMU didn’t keep up breed registry, particularly affecting Český Fousek. This left only a limited number of dogs allowed to be bred and registered. The new organization broke with the typical European model for breeding in that they instituted the new rules that individuals could only enter breeding if they were successful in both exterior exams, through dog shows, as well as working aptitude at trials. This was a seminal point in the history of the Český Fousek and did mean slower expansion of the breeding pool.

Beginning in 1939, the hunting unions were challenged by increasing Nazi influence, especially along border areas. The hunting unions were in dynamic flux as well, but the breeding of good quality Český Fousek continued with František Houska dedicating his whole life to the breed. Complex post-war activities saw many changes in the various hunting unions. Complicated rules were set forth for registering a Český Fousek so that they would be registerable in the FCI. Many dogs were eliminated from breeding because of the breed name that was used during examinations and ability tests. Dr. Joseph Kuhn championed the breed in the FCI application, and finally an incredibly old dog breed was getting recognition as the Czech National Hunting breed. In May 1963 the FCI adopted the breed standard under number FCI 245. After recognition, breeding continued to be carefully controlled with the established lines under the Breeders of Český Fousek club (Klub Chovatelů Českých Fousků - KCHČF) within the Czech Moravian Kennel Union (ČMKU).

The Czech club was renamed in 1958 to its current name and eventually became the parent breed club for Český Fousek but it was still another five years before the breed was accepted in the FCI. The Parent breed club is Currently there are Český Fousek organizations around the world from Czech Republic to New Zealand. In 2018 the first Český Fousek World Cup with dogs from many nations at the Castle in Konopiště, Czech Republic. The breed population remains small an effective breeding population of less than 300.