

## Belgian Cattle Dog

### Breed Organization

American Bouvier des Flandres Club, Inc.  
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Corinth, VT 05039  
Website: [www.bouvier.org](http://www.bouvier.org)

### Native Country

Belgium

### Other Names

Bouvier des Flandres, Vlaamse Koehond, Flanders Cattle Dog

### Breed Description

**Head and Skull:** The head should appear big, the moustache and beard making it appear even more so, in proportion to the body and height. When handled it should be found to be well chiselled. Well developed and flat, the skull should be slightly broader than it is long. The lines of the under side of the skull and the top should be parallel. The proportion of the length of the skull in relation to the muzzle should be as 3 is to 2. A very slight furrow in the forehead. The stop not very deep, but appearing so, due to the heavy eyebrows. The muzzle broad, strong and bony, rectangular when seen from the front, gradually narrowing towards the nose, but never becoming pointed. The circumference, measured just in front of the eyes, should be approximately equal to the length of the head. Extending the foreface in a slightly convex line towards its tip, the nose should be very well developed, rounded at its edges and always black. Nostrils wide. Cheeks flat and clean. Scissor bite i.e., the upper teeth closely overlapping the lower teeth and set square to the jaws.

**Eyes:** Honest, alert in expression. Neither protruding nor set too deeply. Slightly oval in shape and horizontally placed. As dark as possible in colour in relation to the coat. Light or wild looking eyes to be strongly penalised. Eyelids black, with no sign of loss of pigment. Conjunctiva should never be visible.

**Neck:** Strong, well muscled and thickening slightly towards the shoulders. A little longer than the length of the head, nape strong and arched. No sign of dewlap.

**Forequarters:** Forelegs very strong and absolutely straight. Shoulders relatively long, muscular without heaviness and placed obliquely. Shoulder blade and upper arm of equal length. Elbows set well into body and parallel, never turning in or out. Forearms, seen either from the front or the side, absolutely straight, parallel to each other and perpendicular to the ground. Well muscled and heavy boned. Pasterns strong, fairly short, sloping very slightly.

**Body:** Strong, deep, broad and compact with very little tuck-up. Length from point of shoulder to point of buttock about equal to height at withers. Chest should descend to level of elbows and should not be cylindrical, although the ribs should be well sprung. Croup should continue, as far as possible, the horizontal line of the back and blend imperceptibly with the curve of the rump. Broad but not excessively so in the dog, broader in the bitch. A rising croup, or one which falls away, is a very serious fault.

**Hindquarters:** Hindlegs very strong with pronounced muscle. They should move in the same plane as the forelegs. Thighs broad and well muscled. Hocks well let down. Dew claws should be removed.

**Feet:** Short, round and compact. Toes tight and well arched. Nails black and strong. Pads thick and hard.

**Gait:** Proud, upright bearing. Ambling is permitted.

**Tail:** Docked to 2 - 3 vertebrae. It should continue the normal line of the vertebral column and be carried gaily when moving. Dogs born tailless should not be faulted for this.



**Coat:** Hair coarse to touch, dry and matt. Neither too long nor too short, about 6 cm (2.5 in), unkempt looking but never woolly or curly. On the head it should be shorter and the outside of the ears almost bare, with the inside of the ear protected by fairly long hair. The coat should be particularly thick and "crackly" on the top of the back, gradually becoming shorter as it comes down the legs. It should be always harsh. A flat coat is to be avoided since it denotes lack of undercoat, which should be normally fine and close grained. The upper lip well moustached, the lower carrying a full harsh beard, which gives the forbidding expression so characteristic of the breed. Eyebrows formed of backward sweeping hairs which accentuate the shape of the eyebrows but which never hide the eyes.

**Color:** Usually fawn or grey, often brindled or shaded. Black is also permissible and no colour shall have preference. Light, washed out shades are undesirable.

**Weight and Size:** Ideal weight: Dogs 35 - 40 kg (77 - 88 lb). Bitches 27 - 35 kg (59.5 - 77 lb). Ideal height: Dogs 62 - 68 cm (24.5 - 27 in) Bitches 59 - 65 cm (23 - 25.5 in). In either sex the ideal is midway between the measurements.

**Ears:** Set on high, very flexible; in proportion to the head.

**Mouth:** Jaws strong and of equal length. Teeth strong and white with a perfect regular and complete

## History

The Bouvier Des Flandres is also known as the Belgian Cattle Dog or the Vlaamse Koehund, (and sometimes Dirty Beard!). This dog takes its name from its place of origin, the plains of Flanders in Belgium; and the French word "bouvier" means herdsman. However, not much more information exists about its ancestral origins. Some claim it descended from the Schnauzer, while others suggest the breed is a mix of several European herding breeds, the Flemish Cattle Dogs in particular. Although its history is vague, its value as a working dog has never been questioned, whether it be herding, guarding the farm, or cart pulling. Before the Machine Age, the Bouvier was used to drive cattle to market, and later, the strong and capable dog proved its merit on the battlefields of WWI and WWII. The breed is still used for police and protection work. A breed standard was not agreed upon until 1922, and since then the breed has found favour all over the world.

## Behavior

Intelligent and obedient Bouvier Des Flandres looks mean but in reality is calm and gentle. They are excellent at learning and once they learn a command they will remember it their entire lives. Bouvier Des Flandres are known for their loyalty. They require an experienced handler and are often protective of their families. Bouvier Des Flandres do not reach adulthood until they are 2-3 years old.

## Advice

This breed needs peaceful surroundings and exercise to blossom, and require regular brushing.

## Function

Currently the Bouvier serves as a watchdog, guardian, family companion and as a tracking dog. This breed has also been used as a guide for the blind and in search & rescue. It will also succeed in police work, military work, carting, agility, competitive obedience.

## Physical Characteristics - General Canine Information

Many dogs, such as the American Water Spaniel, have had their natural hunting instincts suppressed or altered to suit human needs. Modern dog breeds show more variation in size, appearance, and behavior than any other domestic animal. Within the range of extremes, dogs generally share attributes with their wild ancestors, the wolves. Dogs are predators and scavengers, possessing sharp teeth and strong jaws for attacking, holding, and tearing their food. Although selective breeding has changed the appearance of many breeds, all dogs retain basic traits from their distant ancestors. Like many other predatory mammals, the dog has powerful muscles, fused wristbones, a cardiovascular system that supports both sprinting and endurance, and teeth for catching and tearing. Compared to the bone structure of the human foot, dogs technically walk on their toes.

**Sight:** Like most mammals, dogs are dichromats and have color vision equivalent to red-green color blindness in humans.

Different breeds of dogs have different eye shapes and dimensions, and they also have different retina configurations. Dogs with long noses have a "visual streak" which runs across the width of the retina and gives them a very wide field of excellent vision, while those with short noses have an "area centralis" - a central patch with up to three times the density of nerve endings as the visual streak — giving them detailed sight much more like a human's.

Some breeds, particularly the sighthounds, have a field of vision up to 270° (compared to 180° for humans), although broad-headed breeds with short noses have a much narrower field of vision, as low as 180°.

**Hearing:** Dogs detect sounds as low as the 16 to 20 Hz frequency range (compared to 20 to 70 Hz for humans) and above 45 kHz[22] (compared to 13 to 20 kHz for humans), and in addition have a degree of ear mobility that helps them to rapidly pinpoint the exact location of a sound. Eighteen or more muscles can tilt, rotate and raise or lower a dog's ear. Additionally, a dog can identify a sound's location much faster than a human can, as well as hear sounds up to four times the distance that humans are able to. Those with more natural ear shapes, like those of wild canids like the fox, generally hear better than those with the floppier ears of many domesticated species.

**Smell:** Scent hounds, especially the Bloodhound, are iconic for their keen sense of smell. Dogs have nearly 220 million smell-sensitive cells over an area about the size of a pocket handkerchief (compared to 5 million over an area the size of a postage stamp for humans). Some breeds have been selectively bred for excellence in detecting scents, even compared to their canine brethren. What information a dog actually detects when he is scenting is not perfectly understood; although once a matter of debate, it now seems to be well established that dogs can distinguish two different types of scents when trailing, an air scent from some person or thing that has recently passed by, as well as a ground scent that remains detectable for a much longer period.

The characteristics and behavior of these two types of scent trail would seem, after some thought, to be quite different, the air scent being intermittent but perhaps less obscured by competing scents, whereas the ground scent would be relatively permanent with respect to careful and repetitive search by the dog, but would seem to be much more contaminated with other scents. In any event, it is established by those who train tracking dogs that it is impossible to teach the dog how to track any better than it does naturally; the object instead is to motivate it properly, and teach it to maintain focus on a single track and ignore any others that might otherwise seem of greater interest to an untrained dog. An intensive search for a scent, for instance searching a ship for contraband, can actually be very fatiguing for a dog, and the dog must be motivated to continue this hard work for a long period of time.

The meaning of "intelligence" in general, not only in reference to dogs, is hard to define. Some tests measure problem-solving abilities and others test the ability to learn in comparison to others of the same age. Defining it for dogs is just as difficult. It is likely that dogs do not have the ability to premeditate an action to solve a problem.

**Coat Color:** Domestic dogs often display the remnants of counter-shading, a common natural camouflage pattern. The general theory of countershading is that an animal that is lit from above will appear lighter on its upper half and darker on its lower half where it will usually be in its own shade. This is a pattern that predators can learn to watch for. A countershaded animal will have dark coloring on its upper surfaces and light coloring below. This reduces the general visibility of the animal. One reminder of this pattern is that many breeds will have the occasional "blaze", stripe, or "star" of white fur on their chest or undersides.

**Sprint Metabolism:** Dogs can generate large amounts of energy for a short period of time. A dog's heart and lungs are oversized relative to its body and its normal everyday needs. A dog also has relatively more red blood cells than a human. Most of the time the dog will keep the extra red blood cells stored in its spleen. When the animal enters into a situation where its full metabolism is required, such as play, catching game, or fighting other dogs, the extra cells are released into the bloodstream. The "oversized" heart and lungs will now be running at full capacity, and the animal will have an enhanced ability to engage in aerobic activity. This activity will produce internal heating. Dogs, being covered in fur, are limited in their ability to cool down. After a short time the animal must either cease its athletic activity or risk harming itself from overheating. One can easily observe this pattern of intense activity followed by rest periods in puppies. During the rest phase the spleen collects red blood cells and the animal may pant to cool down.

**Behavior and Intelligence:** Many dogs can be trained to skillfully perform tasks not natural to canines, such as in this dog agility competition. Dogs are valued for their intelligence. This intelligence is expressed differently with different breeds and individuals, however. For example, Border Collies are noted for their ability to learn commands, while other breeds may not be so motivated towards obedience, but instead show their cleverness in devising ways to steal food or escape from a yard. Being highly adaptable animals themselves, dogs have learned to do many jobs as required by humans over the generations.

Dogs are employed in various roles across the globe, proving invaluable assets in areas such as search-and-rescue; law enforcement (including attack dogs, sniffer dogs and tracking dogs); guards for livestock, people or property; herding; Arctic exploration sled-pullers; guiding the blind and acting as a pair of ears for the deaf; assisting with hunting, and a great many other roles which they may be trained to assume. Most dogs rarely have to deal with complex tasks and are unlikely to learn relatively complicated activities (such as opening doors) unaided. Some dogs (such as guide dogs for the visually impaired) are specially trained to recognize and avoid dangerous situations.

For example, the ability to learn quickly could be a sign of intelligence. Conversely it could be interpreted as a sign of a desire to please. In contrast, some dogs who do not learn very quickly may have other talents. An example is breeds that are not particularly interested in pleasing their owners, such as Siberian Huskies. Huskies are often fascinated with the myriad of possibilities for escaping from yards, catching small animals, and often figuring out on their own numerous inventive ways of doing both.

Assistance dogs are also required to be obedient at all times. This means they must learn a tremendous number of commands, understand how to act in a large variety of situations, and recognize threats to their human companion, some of which they might never before have encountered.

Many owners of livestock guardian breeds believe that breeds like the Great Pyrenees or the Kuvasz are not easily trained because their stubborn nature prevents them from seeing the point of such commands as "sit" or "down". Hounds may also suffer from this type of ranking. These dogs are bred to have more of a "pack" mentality with other dogs and less reliance on a master's direct commands. While they may not have the same kind of intelligence as a Border Collie, they were not bred to learn and obey commands quickly, but to think for themselves while trailing game.

**Human Relationships:** Dogs have been used for a wide variety of purposes in human history. Dogs are highly social animals sometimes regarded as the most social animals on earth. This can account for their trainability, playfulness, and ability to fit into human households and social situations. This similarity has earned dogs a unique position in the realm of interspecies relationships despite being one of the most effective and potentially dangerous predators. Dogs and humans at times co-operate in some of the most effective hunting in the animal world; in that context, dogs are superpredators.

The loyalty and devotion that dogs demonstrate as part of their natural instincts as pack animals closely mimics the human idea of love and friendship, leading many dog owners to view their pets as full-fledged family members. Conversely, dogs seem to view their human companions as members of their pack, and make few, if any, distinctions between their owners and fellow dogs. Dogs fill a variety of roles in human society and are often trained as working dogs. For dogs that do not have traditional jobs, a wide range of dog sports provide the opportunity to exhibit their natural skills. In many countries, the most common and perhaps most important role of dogs is as companions.

Dogs have lived and worked with humans in so many roles that their loyalty has earned them the unique sobriquet "man's best friend".

**Dog Communication:** Laughter might not be confined or unique to humans, despite Aristotle's observation that "only the human animal laughs". The differences between chimpanzee and human laughter may be the result of adaptations that have evolved to enable human speech. However, some behavioral psychologists argue that self-awareness of one's situation, or the ability to identify with somebody else's predicament, are prerequisites for laughter, so animals are not really laughing in the same way that humans do. The dog-laugh sounds similar to a normal pant. However by analyzing the pant using a spectrograph, this pant varies with bursts of frequencies, resulting in a laugh. When this recorded dog-laugh vocalization is played to dogs in a shelter setting, it can initiate play, promote pro-social behavior, and decrease stress levels. In a study by Simonet, Versteeg, and Storie, one hundred and twenty subject dogs residing in a mid-size county animal shelter were observed. Dogs ranging from 4 months to 10 years of age were compared with and without exposure to a dog-laugh recording. The stress behaviors measured included panting, growling, salivating, pacing, barking, cowering, lunging, play-bows, sitting, orienting and lying down. The study resulted in positive findings. Exposure to the dog laughing recording resulted in the following:

significantly reduced stress behaviors, increased tail wagging and the display of a play-face when playing was initiated, and more frequent pro-social behavior such as approaching and lip licking. This research suggests exposure to dog-laugh vocalizations can calm and possibly increase shelter adoptions.

**Reproduction:** In domestic dogs, sexual maturity (puberty) begins to happen around age 6 to 12 months for both males and females, although this can be delayed until up to two years old for some large breeds. Adolescence for most domestic dogs is around 12 to 15 months, beyond which they are for the most part more adult than puppy. As with other domesticated species, domestication has selectively bred for higher libido and earlier and more frequent breeding cycles in dogs, than in their wild ancestors. Dogs remain reproductively active until old age.

Most female dogs have their first estrous cycle between 6 and 12 months, although some larger breeds delay until as late as 2 years. Females experience estrous cycles biannually, during which her body prepares for pregnancy, and at the peak she will come into estrus, during which time she will be mentally and physically receptive to copulation.

Dogs bear their litters roughly 56 to 72 days after fertilization, although the length of gestation can vary. An average litter consists of about six puppies, though this number may vary widely based on the breed of dog. Toy dogs generally produce from one to four puppies in each litter, while much larger breeds may average as many as 12 pups in each litter.

**Spaying and Neutering:** Neutering (spaying females and castrating males) refers to the sterilization of animals, usually by removal of the male's testicles or the female's ovaries and uterus, in order to eliminate the ability to procreate, and reduce sex drive. Neutering has also been known to reduce aggression in male dogs, but has been shown to occasionally increase aggression in female dogs. Animal control agencies in the United States and the ASPCA advise that dogs not intended for further breeding should be neutered so that they do not have undesired puppies.

Because of the overpopulation of dogs in some countries, puppies born to strays or as the result of accidental breedings often end up being killed in animal shelters. Neutering can also decrease the risk of hormone-driven diseases such as mammary cancer, as well as undesired hormone-driven behaviors. However, certain medical problems are more likely after neutering, such as urinary incontinence in females and prostate cancer in males. The hormonal changes involved with sterilization are likely to somewhat change the animal's personality, however, and some object to neutering as the sterilization could be carried out without the excision of organs.

It is not essential for a female dog to either experience a heat cycle or have puppies before spaying, and likewise, a male dog does not need the experience of mating before castration. Female cats and dogs are seven times more likely to develop mammary tumors if they are not spayed before their first heat cycle. The high dietary estrogen content of the average commercial pet food as well as the estrogenic activity of topical pesticides may be contributing factors in the development of mammary cancer, especially when these exogenous sources are added to those normal estrogens produced by the body. Dog food containing soybeans or soybean fractions have been found to contain phytoestrogens in levels that could have biological effects when ingested longterm. Gender-preservative surgeries such as vasectomy and tubal ligation are possible, but do not appear to be popular due to the continuation of gender-specific behaviors and disease risks.

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