

# International Policy for Icelandic Sheepdog

## Mentality and working abilities

### Icelandic Sheepdog International Cooperation (ISIC)

#### **To strengthen mentality and herding- and farm- dog qualities**

The behavior (as well as the constitution and appearance) of the Icelandic sheepdog is a result of something that the people on Iceland has formed for a very special purpose. The Icelandic sheepdog is a farm/watch- and herding dog. Thus it must be able to carry out two different main functions. One is to watch the farm where it lives, the other to help collect and move animals i.e. herd in such a way that is necessary in the climate and terrain that Iceland offers.

The genetic preconditions are an important base for how well a dog will succeed to fulfill his master's wishes. The environment, i.e. the conditions under which a puppy grows, then decides how well the dog's capacity will be utilized.

#### **What are farm/watch qualities and what are herding qualities?**

Quite a lot of owners of Icelandic sheepdogs describe both nowadays and earlier in history, how their dogs chase away big birds (ravens and other birds of prey) hares, cats from other farms and other animals that don't belong on the farm. This watch-behavior, which is quite significant in the breed, originates from the farmers need to protect the newborn lambs during lambing season. In order to manage to scare away the intruders the dog often uses its voice, barked, to give more emphasis to its actions. Another watching task for the dog was to drive grazing domestic animals off the grounds, when they happened to choose the crops close to the farm (and then they did so, barking if necessary). This behavior is a result of the Icelandic sheepdog having a watching job to perform, one of its two main tasks. To drive animals away like this must not be confused with herding behavior. Watching is connected to the territory the dog has and for the Icelandic sheepdog that means to keep the farm free of strange animals. The intensity of the guarding is related to how close to "the center of the territory" and how big the territory is. The closer to the houses and the farmyard the more intense is the watching. It is also this guarding behavior the dogs display when strange humans approach the farm, but in a slightly different way. The intensity the dog shows in driving animals off the grounds should not be marked regarding people.

There are some important words in the breed standard... "to be very alert and it welcome enthusiastic visitors without being aggressive" This means that that the Icelandic sheepdog will often meet strange people approaching the farm in full speed and barking. It must not, however, rant and growl threateningly or bite to drive people away. Such behavior is atypical for an Icelandic sheepdog.

There is no obvious connection between a dog chasing domestic animals and a good herding dog. Admittedly a dog must show interest for the animals but it is not enough that it chases them aimlessly, not even if the terrain and the behavior of the sheep should contribute to the dog's success in gathering the animals. A few more genetically conditioned natural abilities a part from chasing animals are required to make it as a good herding dog.

One important factor for success in herding is that the dog must show interest in gathering and driving all animals in a flock. Another factor is the ability to drive the flock or single animals in relation to something, to balance the flock. This can be in relation to the handler, to the farm or the rest of the flock. Concerning these two factors it is essential that the dog can survey the situation. It

must be able to sort out several incoming signals at the same time and evaluate what is the adequate action to a situation. The signals are partly those from the animals that are being herded but also the communication that can be needed between the dog and its handler. Thus it is necessary that the dog is communicable, has the ability to cooperate and is interested in pleasing its owner.

A herding Icelandic sheepdog needs its attention and energy, its courage and its independence when working with sheep. It also should be mentally balanced, communicative (possible to train) and aware of the terrain. Then it can move animals in a way that is time- and energy saving without unnecessary stress for the animals that are being herded. One rash action from a super stressed dog can end up with a farmer losing some of his animals over mountainside or into a rapid rushing river.

## **Mental description Dog**

The Icelandic Sheepdog International Cooperation has decided to use the evaluation methods established by the Swedish Kennelclub -Mental description Dog- when we evaluate the mentality of the Icelandic sheepdog. A mental description gives conditions for a good monitoring of the mentality of dogs. By describing as many dogs as possible mental changes in the breed can be noticed. This is a responsibility that every breeder and dog owner should be aware of.

## **Herding description/test**

A reliable aid to preserve the Icelandic Sheepdogs mental qualities for its hereditary characteristics/working tasks, is to test the hereditary characteristics which the dog has been used for. If we don't take care of it, my typical mental characteristics get lost. Herding abilities/herding shall be seen against the background of how it can be evaluate as practical useful for the farmer/sheep owner (even if the desire/use/opportunities can differ) to be real useful.

Herding qualities is not any static behavior which dogs automatically hereditaries because they are herding dogs. Some of it is possible to train but herding abilities is very much a question of hereditary disposition. Herding is a composed behavior and to be able to express oneself about the dogs usefully herding abilities these have to be tested directly one animals. The necessary qualities that demands for useful herding are: interest for animals/concentration ability and pressure/authority and balance along with the cooperation with the farmer.

## ***Mentality and herding abilities according to the breed standard***

### ***The breed standard describes the dogs' mentality as follow:***

The expression is gentle, intelligent and happy. A confident and lively bearing is typical for this dog. The Icelandic Sheepdog is by nature very alert and will always give visitors an enthusiastic welcome without being aggressive. Hunting instincts are not strong. The Icelandic Sheepdog is cheerful, friendly, inquisitive, playful and unafraid.

### ***The breed standard describes the herding abilities as follow:***

The Icelandic Sheepdog and its method of working adapted to the local terrain, farming methods and the hard struggle for survival of the Icelandic people over the centuries, making it indispensable in the rounding up of livestock on the farms.

The Icelandic Sheepdog is a hardy and agile herding dog which barks, making it extremely useful for herding or driving livestock in the pastures, in the mountains or finding stray sheep.

## **Goals**

Describes the goals in short and long terms

### **Mentality:**

Icelandic Sheepdog International Cooperation's task is to work for the interest of mental descriptions such as the Swedish Kennelclub's - Mental Description Dog- in all countries within the cooperation.

### ***Herding:***

Icelandic Sheepdog International Cooperation's task is to work for the interest of finding a common herding ability descriptions/test to use in all countries within the cooperation.

**Icelandic Sheepdog International Cooperation**

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