

IDENTIFYING BOUVIERS AT THE POUND

Bouv vs other breeds with which it might be confused

by Pam Green , 2001

When a rescue person is called to the pound or shelter to identify or bail out a dog that might be of that person's adopted breed, there is always the question of whether or not the dog is actually that breed or some other. Dogs that land in the pound are usually very neglected in their grooming and they may not be typically conformed specimens of their breed and they may not have been subjected to the ear and/or tail alterations specified by the standard for the breed. In short it is rare that they look like the photos in the breed books. And for some breeds there are certain others that look extremely similar even when the resemblance to the textbook specimen is perfect. For my breed, the Bouvier, there are several other very similar looking breeds plus more that could be confused with a really off type Bouv.

I'd like to put this together as a chart in which the "standard" or usual appearances are in plain type and the common alternatives are enclosed in parentheses. Truly distinguishing features are marked with an asterisk (*). Please remember that any breed which is supposed to be cropped eared may easily be left uncropped, ie natural eared; but breeds that are supposed to be natural eared will probably never appear cropped. It is still possible that a natural eared breed might appear with one ear mutilated or perhaps surgically trimmed after an injury. If the unfortunate dog has been in a drug dealer's possession, it is possible that ears have been hacked short with a pocket knife to make the dog look fierce. Likewise for tails : docked breeds may appear natural tailed, but natural tailed breeds should not appear docked , though an individual might appear with a tail that has been amputated due to an injury, but amputation will usually leave a tali longer than the customary short dock. For sizes , in all breeds there will be those individuals markedly larger or smaller than the range commonly accepted as correct. For colors , those colors that are mentioned by the standard as forbidden or discouraged probably do occur from time to time. Likewise coat profusion and texture can vary a lot.

BREED	EARS	TAIL	COLORS	SIZE	OTHER
Bouvier des Flandres	Cropped (Natural - hanging or naturally semi-erect)	Docked (Natural)	Black, gray or fawn/buff (near white)	22" to 28" (larger or smaller)	Coat may be clipped, harsh and short.
Giant Schnauzer	Cropped (Natural)	Docked (Natural)	Black, salt and pepper	Similar to Bouvier	May be wire coat.

Black Russian Terrier	Natural - hanging	Docked (Natural)	Black	Larger than Bouvier, medium	Very rare in most of USA
Briard	Cropped or natural	Natural	Any color but white	Similar to Bouvier	Double dewclaws on rear legs.
Old English Sheepdog	Natural - hanging	Docked (Natural)	Gray, grayish with white on head, chest, and feet.	Similar to Bouvier	
Standard Poodle	Natural - hanging	Docked longer than the Bouvier	Any color	22" to 26"	Coat could look like a Bouvier when unclipped and matted.
Otterhound	Natural, very long	Natural, carried high	Black, gray, yellow, reddish	24" to 26"	
Portuguese Water Dog	Natural - hanging	Natural	Black, brown, white	16" to 22"	Like a smaller Bouvier
Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier	Natural - hanging	Docked longer than the Bouvier	Wheaten	About 18", 35 pounds	
Puli	Natural	Natural	Black, gray, white	16" to 19"	Coat corded, controlled mats
Bearded Collie	Natural	Natural	Black, gray, slate, reddish, sand, with white head, chest, and feet	21" to 22"	Coat colors are streaky rather than solid.
Kerry Blue Terrier	Natural	Docked	Dark blue (blue gray)	17" to 20"	
Polish Owezark Nizinny	Natural	Docked	Any color	16" to 20"	European. Rare in USA
Bergamasco	Natural	Natural	Black, gray, nearly white	22" to 24", 70-80 pounds	European, very rare in USA
Bouvier des Ardennes	Natural - erect or semi	Docked	All colors	About 24" and 55	European, very rare in USA

				pounds	
Picardy Shepherd	Natural - erect	Natural	Gray, gray-blue, gray-fawn	24" to 26", 60-70 pounds	European, very harsh coat.
Pyrenean Shepherd	Natural - semi erect	Docked (??)	Gray, silver, white, yellow	16" to 20", 45 pounds	European

In practical terms, the breeds most likely to be confused with the Bouvier are the Giant Schnauzer and the Briard and the Black Russian. I absolutely cannot distinguish a Black Russian from a Bouvier (ie natural eared but docked black Bouvier or larger than average size) ; however in most places in the USA Black Russias are absent or extremely rare. Many Giant Schnauzers are indistinguishable from Bouvier -- much of the difference we see in show dogs is due to clipping styles. The Briard IS distinguishable by the DOUBLE DEWCLAWS on the hind legs; responsible breeders tell me that some individuals might have incomplete double dewclaws but would never have none at all -- which does not exclude possibility that several generations of puppy mill breeding might produce lack of rear dewclaws. For the Old English and the smaller Beardie, the usual pronounced white markings should distinguish them from Bouvier. A Standard Poodle in black or gray if left unclipped and long ungroomed might be mistaken for an ungroomed matted Bouv as the Poodle coat will mat and "cord" readily if left long enough. I suppose I might have also included the Commodore, always white (possibly very dirty) and corded. Otterhounds are fairly rare but might be mistaken for a fawn Bouv, though it does not seem highly likely ; vie versa would perhaps be more likely. I have also listed several smaller breeds that conceivably could be confused with a small bouv, especially the Portugse Water Dog and Kerry Blue. I have also listed some European breeds that should be very rare in the USA, so one should never see these in a pound or shelter. I have however seen what appeared to me to be a Picardy Shepherd = Bergere Picard on an episode of Star Trek Next Generation.

Now if all of us involved in these breeds, or indeed in any breed, were to put up a breed identification Web site, the site should include photos of well groomed dogs of each of the standard coat styles and colors and common ear and tail varieties, but then should also include photos of all sorts of highly neglected ungroomed dogs and of dogs whose general shape is very untypical -- really "horrible misshapen" specimens. We could get valuable help in this endeavor by enlisting aid from professional groomers to take photos of dogs brought in with dreadfully neglected coats.

Ideally we would have such a site for each breed and have the ones for breeds that can be confused linked together. Eventually it would be ideal to have a search engine linked to all these sites in which a pound volunteer could check off various sizes, colors, coat textures, and all

various shapes of ears and tails from a pictorial menu, and then hit the Search button , to receive in return a list of the possible breeds with indications of high , medium, or low probability, and links to each breed's identification web site.

***** late note *****

I suppose I should have included Scottish Deerhound and Irish Wolfhound on the chart. It's 10 pm right now and I'm too damn tired to do it tonight. Guess I overlooked them because they seem to me to not be confinable with Bouv -- so much taller and so much leaner and sighthound figured. but people on the street often ask me if my bouv is a Wolfhound (and I don't mean bones, who did look like he might have a IW granddad, but I mean typically stocky bouvs).

Please DO feel free to foreword or cross-post this to anyone involved in rescue of any of the breeds considered as well as anyone in rescue of any bred whatsoever as it may inspire the to figure out a corresponding chart for their own breed.

Pam Green (530) 756-2997 between 9 am & 7 pm Calif time if you need response urgently, PHONE, don't e-mail -- I am often way, way behind on downloading and reading my e-mail.