

Dear James,

As requested, I have put together this file of examples of village dogs we have in this part of Northern Congo. Keep in mind that these photos do not represent dogs that I would assume to be “pure”, but are rather intended to offer an idea of the variation in phenotypes expressed. Note that all of these pictures were taken either in the logging town in which I am currently based (Kabo, Republic of Congo) or in nearby villages located along the logging roads. These pictures are not taken in the more remote villages. I would expect the quality of dogs to improve with distance from logging towns (due to a decreased probability of mixing with European dogs and an increased cultural importance of dogs in regions that still rely on subsistence hunting and gathering (rather than the logging industry) as their primary source of protein and revenue).

As mentioned in previous emails, the characteristics of local village dogs that concerned me (indicate potential mixing) include 1) variation on color that I have not seen in the show dog quality basenjis you see in the U.S.; 2) a lot of variation in the degree of tail curl; 3) variation in hair length – with some dogs having a slightly longer coat than the original imports; 4) the presence of two very distinct sizes – taller and slimmer vs. shorter and stockier dogs. I have tried to offer examples of all of this variation below.

I begin my introduction to our “village dogs” below:



My Elsie and her puppies. Note that Elsie found her way into our home when she was abandoned by a pack of feral dogs that live in the forest along the village edge. She is almost entirely black and only has a partial tail curl. Within this pack of dogs, only a few are predominately black like Elsie; color variation and the degree of tail curl among them is great (ranging from the predominately black to predominately white dogs- with reds and browns and pretty much everything in between). Elsie can and does bark. She recently gave birth to a litter of six male puppies. Two of her puppies do not bark and have very pronounced tail curls, despite the fact we know the father of her puppies is a long haired European mutt owned by a French family working for the logging company.



The longer haired dogs. I have been assuming all of these dogs were mixes simply because their coats are thicker than the typical basenji. They are not husky like by any means. Just slightly fuller, softer coats.



Variations on the black and white, black and tan or almost all black (see Elsie above): The white puppy above is still quite young in this picture; ears came up and coat has thinned as it is getting older. This coloration of mostly white occurs in the red dogs too.





The common red dogs. Notice we have everything from the dogs with OK tail curls but no white tip at the end, to those with the white tip and straight tails. Coat color varies from a light red (almost beige) to dark red (see two of the dogs with thicker coats). The degree of white in the coat varies from nearly solid red to predominately white with red patches. I have also tried to represent the size variation - the taller version represented in the top row of pictures. Elsie is a good (though slim) version of the very short dogs.

Finally, we have this color variation, almost grey and tan. I admit I quite like these guys and they are common in some villages. However, I have not seen this color on any of the basenji web sites or in the show dogs. Have you seen it before? I really like the disposition of this female and her puppy too – I have to admit I have considered raising the puppy myself.



Some other general things to keep in mind about these pictures:

- 1) Ears: Note the ears of most dogs around here are heavily attacked by flies. Over time, the tips of the ears begin to drop as the bites become infected and the flesh deteriorates. Eventually, some dogs become nearly earless (I have selected not to send you pictures of dogs in THAT bad of shape). Ear size and shape is thus not well represented in the pictures I have. In general, ears vary in size and shape from well rounded (sometimes huge) and widely set on the head to the almost cat like pointed ears that sit a little higher on the head (e.g. Elsie).
- 2) Because dogs are severely beaten in this area, even dogs with strong tail curls will often carry their tail between their legs (or out a bit straighter if angered). Similarly, when approached by a strange human (like me with a camera), they will often drop their ears a little lower to the side of their heads and crouch in anticipation of the rock or stick it is conditioned to believe will accompany that human. Thus, it is difficult to gauge the physique or posture of dogs in these pictures. To do so, you almost have to see them running with the pack.
- 3) Barking: Yep. A lot of these can and do bark. This is something that I have had a difficult time figuring out. Some of the dogs that look like complete mixes cant (or don't) bark, while some that look pretty good can, and do. I have another basenji mix (not pictured here) that my husband and I adopted several years ago when we were living in the Impfondo area of ROC. She looks much more like Benji than a basenji (long hair and a beard). Yet, she yodels like the best of them and couldn't bark to save her life. In contrast, some of the best hunting dogs in semi-remote villages will bark. I don't know what this means in terms of "purity".