

Are Patterdale Terriers a *Real Breed*?

Short Answer: No!

In order for any kind of animal to be a real “pure bred” the first requirement is they must reproduce “true to type” without fail. Whether inbred, linebred or mated with another bloodline within the breed, it must produce the same “*type*” every time.

Patterdales do not meet that test: It’s that simple.

What’s more, examination of an individual’s pedigree must show no “out-crosses” with other breeds—along with flawless reproduction of type for *at least* seven generations.

We know of no Patterdales that meet either of these requirements...
or that even come close to meeting them.

Longer answer: Defining the Patterdale

The answer to the question of why the Patterdale hasn’t become a real breed is quickly found in the reason they exist at all: They were created to be top performers at what’s called “earthwork.” Dogs bred for earthwork are called “earth-dogs.”

The folks who engage in earthwork and who breed earth-dogs care little about the specifics of a pedigree. They want their dogs to be from proven earth-working stock and the primary test for deciding suitability for breeding is some type of earthwork.

There are many breeds that lend themselves to the business of earthwork. In fact, most of the small terriers have been used, (or at least tried,) for that difficult activity. Keep in mind that the word “terrier” is the designation for any of a wide variety of dogs that might go *into* the ground seeking their prey, (usually some type of “*vermin*.”) Different areas have different types of ground (rocky, sandy, clay, etc.), as well as differing types of terrain where the prey is found. The type of ground, (whether easy to dig or difficult,) has a lot to do with the perceived “necessary characteristics” of the dogs that are used for earthwork in that vicinity. This facet of earthwork causes standards and opinions to be quite varied.

All these factors effect the opinions of the folks doing the earthwork *and* the subsequent breeding. Some want dogs to be like “*this*,” others want dogs like “*that*.” And there’s quite a range of characteristics in between. Whether “this” or “that,” in order for breeders to get what they want, selection for brood stock is based on observable *performance* more than any *superficial* traits such as appearance.

Performance as It's Own Standard

Patterdales have come to prominence for the simple reason that their breeders (for the most part) remain true to their standards of performance, (whatever those standards are.)

These amazing little dogs are indeed “designer-bred” dogs. The character of the individual dog reflects how the breeder prefers his earthwork done.

There are many opinions that can all be distilled into two camps regarding the dog’s behavior in the presence of vermin: Some men prefer “barkers” and some prefer “biters.” Regardless of the breeder’s preferences, suitability for breeding is judged on performance more than any other criterion, or indeed all other criteria taken together.

Most breeders of working Patterdales care little about the dogs’ appearance or it’s pedigree as long as their pups grow to perform as hoped.

It’s those differing standards that complicate things.

A Better Term Than "Breed," & Why

Patterdales can therefore be more accurately described as a "designer-mix" classification, a modern term, often given to working animal varieties defined by their unique instincts and actions rather than appearance. Categorization by function is currently all the rage in America. Many breeders have tapped into the distinctly American psychosis of wanting what is perceived as different or *special*. It is the height of vanity but there's no reason why dog breeders shouldn't capitalize on it.

Many designer-mix livestock and working animal groupings fetch handsome prices and some of the people breeding dogs for that market are making good money. As it turns out, the breeders of Patterdale Terriers have unknowingly engaged in establishing a "designer-mix-breed" for quite some time.

Want more proof? Observe how many Patterdales are bred, sold, imported and exported without any pedigree information. Many of these dogs fetch a fine price because their breeders have reputations for producing good "*workers*." One well known breeder usually doesn't offer any pedigree information. Even so, his dogs are actively sought. When his dogs are bred with *other* Patterdales the result is offspring that perform desirably. They're all called Patterdales and are included in pedigrees without argument.

Obvious out-crosses appear in many pedigrees throughout the Patterdale world. Usually just a single dog here or there. (What became of the rest of that out-cross litter?) Those that displayed desirable characteristics *and passed them along* are the only ones that get any mention. The resulting progeny continue to be bred and they're all called Patterdale Terriers. It's always performance that rules these matters.

There is no mention of the failures in pedigrees.

DANGERS OF A SUPERFICIAL "SHOW BREED" STANDARD

Sadly, the "dog show" crowd has taken an interest in the Patterdale Terrier and they've begun setting "standards" based on size, shape and color. Color has never been used to determine working ability and size is always arguable because suitability is based on what is being done with the dog. Nevertheless, the show dog crowd has formed into clubs, declaring that a dog is or is not a Patterdale based on size, shape and color. Pedigrees and performance don't seem to count for much with them. None of this makes them a "breed," which they still are *not*. Saying otherwise can't make it so.

Staying true to *your* standard of performance is a pretty high calling that requires a fairly thick skin for enduring the naysayers and envious "wannabes." Reading pedigrees is a valuable tool for breeders and casually interesting for owners. However, the varying standards of performance are what really keep the Patterdale Terrier from becoming a "real" breed. Until *all* breeders of Patterdale Terriers agree on an industry-wide standard for earth-working there's little likelihood for things to change. For now and the foreseeable future any dog that's *primarily* from Patterdale stock (pedigreed or not)—*and does what Patterdales are supposed to do* (regardless of color, size or shape)— can continue to be counted among the world's foremost "designer-bred" earth-dogs, commonly known as Patterdale Terriers.