

Karelian Bear Dogs: Keeping Wildlife Management Humane

Several months ago I promised you a column about Washington State's Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and their pioneering use of Karelian Bear Dogs (KBD) helping to make wildlife management more humane and effective. I had to postpone that piece because it took longer than expected to get all the ducks in order at the state level and the fundraising website campaign was not ready. Well, all those ducks are lined up properly now so I can proceed.

First, a little background. The first time I did my radio show on this subject was more than five years ago, after local wildlife biologist and trumpeter swan expert, Martha Jordan, told me about these dogs and what was going on with them in our state. She introduced me to WDFW officer/wildlife biologist, Rocky Spencer. You may be familiar with his story and/or you may have seen him doing local TV news interviews regarding wildlife incidents up until his untimely and tragic death in a helicopter accident in 2007.

Rocky loved his work because he loved the animals he was serving. As a carnivore specialist, he was researching mountain lions living on the fringe of the Cascades. At some point he learned about KBDs and how they can be used in wildlife management. He wanted them to be a part of our WDFW's work and he succeeded when he became



Our Animal Friends

by Martha Norwalk

the handler of our state's first wildlife service dog, KBD, Mishka.

As a young pup, Mishka, along with Rocky and Martha joined me in the studio for our first educational and fundraising program. Funds needed to be generated to pay for Mishka, his training and upkeep. A fund was also begun at that time to buy another KBD for a WDFW officer in Wenatchee. Eventually, that did happen and officer Rich Beausoleil and our second KBD, Cash, made the trip across the mountains to join us in the studio. I have been "blown away" impressed with these dogs and their personalities and abilities.

The Karelians belong to the spitz family and take their name from a region on the Russia-Finland border. They are medium-size, weigh 44 to 49 pounds, usually black and white and are friendly to humans but fearless around big game. The breed originated in Finland, where they are used to hunt large animals.

Our state's KBDs have been purchased from the Wind River Bear Institute, founded in 1996, by Montana wildlife biologist, Carrie Hunt. Carrie "got tired of seeing bears die" and began her program of "bear shepherding" using these dogs. For lots more information and photos of these dogs, check out her website at www.beardogs.org.

Typically, nuisance bears are shot by wildlife officers after they lose their natural fear of humans and begin lurking around human environments in search of an easy meal. If they are not killed, they are trapped, tranquilized and moved to a different location. This has proved unsuccessful as these bears either return to their original territory or they die or are killed because they are not welcome in or cannot adapt to the new location.

Carrie uses aversive conditioning techniques to show bears that there really is no such thing as a free lunch. By associating people with discomfort and noise, bears are educated to avoid human contact, eliminating



Mishka, the first Karelian Bear Dog in the Washington State wildlife management program, trees a cougar. Photo by Rocky Spencer

the need for relocation or extermination. According to Hunt, KBDs are an essential part of this process.

So far, our state's two dogs have been wildly successful. Rich and Cash have saved countless animal lives in Eastern Washington and have proven how valuable these dogs are for large game and humans.

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FROM THE HEART OF PEACE

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Wed., May 27, 7pm. Indigo Wellness Center, 3276 Commercial St SE, Salem Contact: Rob (971)241-6930, yogirob11@gmail.com

COLUMBIA GORGE MEDITATION RETREAT

STEVENSON, WA - Rock Creek Center, 710 SW Rock Creek Drive
Friday, May 29th, 7pm, Saturday May 30th 8am-5pm, May 31st 8am-1pm. All are welcome. Registration requested. Partial attendance okay. **This Retreat is FREE and Donations are gratefully accepted.** Camping and motel accommodations nearby. Contact: Charlie & Carol Hopkins (509)493-5209 srby@gorge.net

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To The Editor

Dear Editor:

While I appreciated Martha Norwalk bringing up the puppy mill issue I thought her personal experience was a bit discouraging to anyone wishing to help out needy rescues. Because she had a difficult puppy, which she called her "current dog" does not mean that all rescue dogs and puppies are like that. She wrote she would like to "buy" her next dog without any problems. Sentient beings sometimes come with problems and all the "pure"

breeding and "good" parents in the world do not guarantee that. Why use the word "buy" when getting a dog. At an animal shelter one also pays money for the transaction but we do not use the word "buy" we use "adopt." When we get a dog from a breeder we can also use the word "adopt." These terms are important to make the animal more of a family member to say "adopt" rather than "buy."

Our own full-grown dog, which we found on the streets, was an absolute joy

from the minute she came into our house; rescue dogs are not always a trial. These sweeties know the difficult life you have saved them from and usually give you back the best love that exists on earth in return.

Eileen Weintraub
Seattle, Wash.

Editor's note: Because a response to this letter would be very long, Martha Norwalk will talk about it on one of her upcoming programs. For details, go to www.martha-norwalk.com.

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