

# Greenstone Labradors

## Are All Colors Created Equally?

by Stacey Green

All colors may have been created equally but in the Labrador Retriever they certainly have not been treated equally. The three colors of the Labrador Retriever are black, yellow and chocolate and while we know there is little difference in their origins we clearly see that black Labradors have had the advantage from the beginning.

The question of which color is the best Labrador comes up from time to time. So we would like to dispel further prejudice regarding the Labrador based on color alone. There is no genetic link between temperament, trainability, ability or intelligence to coat color!

Common myths we hear today are:

- black Labs are better hunters
- yellow Labs are lazy
- chocolate Labs are stubborn, stupid or hyper

It is absurd to think that a puppy's temperament can be determined by the color of the hair and it is almost as silly as to say that blonde headed children are smarter than brown headed children. There is no basis for this thinking. The temperament is determined by genetics and environment. True, genetics determine both temperament as well as color so perhaps people have incorrectly stereotyped Labradors based on the genetics of a certain bloodline. However, when you look at bloodlines within the Labrador breed today it is pretty easy to see that the breed is become more and more split and is very diverse. So much, in fact, that the field trial lines almost look like an entirely different breed than the show lines, not to mention the vast temperament and endurance level differences between the two. For this reason, we strongly encourage everyone looking to bring a Labrador puppy into their family to look for a breeder they trust and work with that breeder to help them find the right 'fit'. It is best to look at the dog as living creature and future family member and not base your decision on color alone.

The AKC Parent Club of the Labrador Retriever states that, *"The Labrador Retriever coat colors are black, yellow and chocolate. Any other color or a combination of colors is a disqualification. A small white spot on the chest is permissible, but not desirable. White hairs from aging or scarring are not to be misinterpreted as brindling. Black - Blacks are all black. A black with brindle markings or a black with tan markings is a disqualification. Yellow - Yellows may range in color from fox-red to light cream, with variations in shading on the ears, back, and under parts of the dog. Chocolate - Chocolates can vary in shade from light to dark chocolate. Chocolate with brindle or tan markings is a disqualification."*

We will discuss the so called silver Labrador only because it is a topic of controversy but not because we at Trinity recognize silver as a color of Labrador. Whether they are a mismark, a diluted chocolate or a mixed breed, we simple state that there is no such thing as a silver Labrador and we do not support the idea of intentionally breeding a Labrador that are clearly outside of the breed standard, whether due to temperament problems, incorrect structure or mismarks – and certainly do not support mixed-breeding.

We are of the strong opinion that a responsible breeder should make every attempt to improve the Labrador breed and any breeder that purposefully seeks to breed for the sole purpose of inflating the sale of their puppies are doing nothing but hurting the Labrador breed in order to make a buck. Dog breeding solely for monetary gain has never resulted in anything good.

## **Labrador Beginnings**

In the late 18th and early 19th Century (before any Kennel Club registration) some breeders tried to interbreed the hunting abilities of different retrieving dogs that met their liking. Other retrievers of the time included curly coats, flat coats and a now extinct Norfolk Retriever. It was said that often the St. John's genes were dominant and the crosses tended to still carry the looks and personality. Eventually the separate breeds became fixed and separated in the Kennel Club registration

## **Labradors in England**

By the 1880's nearly all the true Labrador (St. John's dog) lines had died out in England. A fortuitous meeting of the third Earl of Malmesbury with the sixth Duke of Buccleuch (1831-1914) and twelfth Duke of Home saved Labs from extinction. Buccleuch and Home were visiting a sick Aunt and decided to participate in a waterfowl shoot on the South Coast. There the two men were impressed by what Malmesbury's dogs were capable of doing. These were the same bloodlines as their father's kennels. Malmesbury reported that he had kept the blood lines as pure as he could with the imported dogs from Newfoundland. Malmesbury gave them some of his dogs to carry on the breeding program. The dogs were Ned (born 1882) and Avon (born 1885). Many say that these two dogs are the ancestor of all British Labs and Avon is thought to be the ancestor of chocolates. In 1903 the Labrador Retriever was popular enough to be recognized by the Kennel Club in England.



*Buccleuch Avon, born 1885*

## **Labradors Come to America**

In the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the American Sportsman used setters and pointers to hunt large areas and heavy cover. The driven bird shoots of Britain were unusual situations for Americans. The British driven shoots included walking at heel, marking game down and to track and

retrieve it. The British style of hunting was different than the American hunter. The American terrain, size of the hunting areas, cover, different types of land called for a different more demanding kind of dog work. Americans liked to use Springer Spaniels as game finders for upland work. The Chesapeake Bay Retrievers had been developed as water retrieving dogs and recognized by the AKC in 1878. Americans began taking an interest once they realized Labradors were as good as Springer Spaniels for putting up game and as good as a Chesapeake as a water dog - some say better because its coat does not tend to ice up and it repels water well. This dog had the combined skills of two other popular sporting dogs in America making it a very versatile all around sporting dog plus it had an excellent disposition. The breed became popular in America during the 'roaring twenties' and increased after the end of WWII.

While the first Labrador was registered in the AKC in 1917 there were still only 23 Labradors registered in 1927. It wasn't until after a 1928 AKC article in the magazine American Kennel Gazette called "Meet the Labrador Retriever" that they became well known. A black Labrador then made it on the cover of Life Magazine in 1938.

## **Black**

In the 1800's the first Labradors were imported from Newfoundland to England to a few aristocratic British sportsmen. The "Labrador" was first documented under that name in 1839 in England. Black was the first documented color and was the only acceptable color at that time. It was also the commonly preferred color until more recent years, which helped the black Labrador become genetically superior in early breeding programs. During early breeding programs the yellow and chocolate puppies were 'culled' (drowned or put down). Coupled with the fact that black is the dominant color, the black Labrador has had an advantage. Many people today still favor blacks because of their regal appearance and it is common in the world of breeders to hear that the "quality is in the blacks", whether in the field or in the show ring.



*The earliest photograph of the Labrador Retriever, 1856  
Nell, Owned by Earl of Home*

## **Yellow**

Many old treatises and articles on gun dogs make it clear that yellows ("livers" or "goldens", as they were called) were evident before any recorded breeding was the rule. In fact, yellow Labradors were noted in the original St. John's dog from Newfoundland. In the earliest years of the Labrador, yellows were simply 'culled' (drowned or put down). In fact, the anti-yellow sentiment was so strong for so long that, as late as the 1920's, experienced breeders were known to direct the yellow Labradors to the Golden

Retriever ring. At this point, yellow Labs suffered a wide variation of incorrect type and they appeared very houndy, as seen in old pictures of the first yellow Labs. A separate standard was briefly drawn to address this problem, but eventually it was agreed that yellows should simply adhere to the same standard as blacks.

The first yellow Lab, *Ben of Hyde (pictured below)* was recorded. Ben was out of two black dogs, themselves from import stock. Ben produced many yellows when bred to black bitches; if the genetics were the same then as they are today then we would assume that there were many blacks that carried the yellow gene.



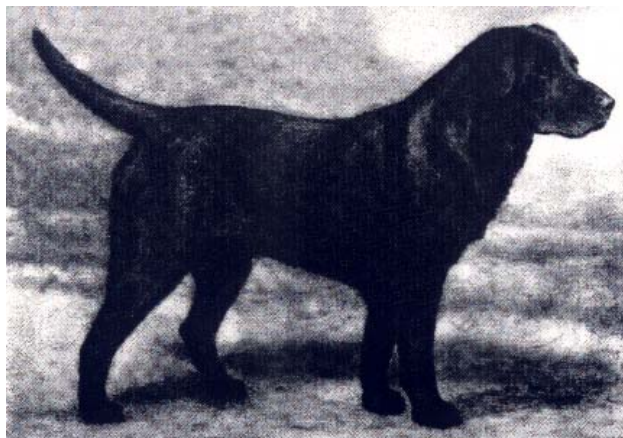
In 1929 a dog named Kinclaven Lowesby was the first yellow Labrador registered in the AKC stud book. He was an imported son of FC Hayler's Defender and registered as the color 'golden'.

Because yellow is a recessive color and due to their lack of popularity (and killing) in the early years of the foundation of the Labrador, it is believed that the yellow Labradors today have had to do a lot of catching up. Fortunately, breeders have worked very hard for many generations to improve the Labrador type in the yellow Lab.

## **Chocolate**

Like the yellow Lab, during the earlier breeding programs these 'off colors' and were often 'culled' (drowned or put down) until they were finally accepted by the British and the American Kennel Clubs and registered. In 1892 the first two recorded 'liver color' Labradors were born at Buccleuch's kennel but it was not until 1964 that Britain had its first chocolate bench champion, Cookridge Tango.

As a recessive color, chocolate pups would occasionally appear in litters throughout time. Chocolates, like yellows, have also been present all along in the breed and it is believed that chocolates were documented as "liver". Still others believe that perhaps the chocolate color was introduced into Labradors around the turn of the century by crossing with Pointers. However, it is more likely that chocolate was always in the Labrador but since they were rare and quietly culled they were very uncommon.



*Eng. Dual Ch. Banchory Bolo*  
(1915-1927)

Some chocolate Labs are said to trace back to FC Banchory Night Light from the Banchory Kennel. He was a black dog born in 1932 in England. Night Light comes from the line of *Dual Ch. Banchory Bolo* (1915), who appears to have been a carrier of the chocolate gene.

In 1940 the first clearly American bred chocolate Labrador was registered in the AKC as Kennoway's Fudge. This dog was a line breeding of the English dog FC Banchory Night Light descended from *Bucleuch Avon (pictured above)*.

In 1991 Storm's Riptide Star was born. He became the first chocolate Labrador to earn the American National Field Championship title with his win in 1996. NFC-AFC Storm's Riptide Star's pedigree also extends back to *Bucleuch Avon*.

While chocolates had a slow start and are the rarest color of Labradors today, whether show or field, they have increased in popularity and quality over the past couple of decades..

## **Silver and Charcoal**

To say that there is controversy concerning the Silver Labrador is putting it mildly. Breeders of the silvers make all kinds of claims to support the idea that the silver is a “rare” purebred Labradors (and thus, more expensive) and breeders of Labradors (both field and show) do not support this idea for a variety of reasons. There is skepticism about their origins and no major kennel club standard supports a separate listing for such dogs. The breeders of silvers have now resorted to forming their own, separate registry. Labrador breeders appear to be unsure of the necessity of this separate registry but it is clear that the silver breeder’s breeding programs and ideas about breeding practices in no way mimic the practices of the purebred breeders so perhaps this is best for both sides. This will only help separate the silvers out.

It is no secret that in today’s society, just as there has always been many people are breeding mixed breeds of dogs. We see Labradors mixed with many other breeds in order to sell “designer”. Labradoodles are one example. While breeders of Labradors may not like the idea of people mixing Labradors with another breed this has not drawn near as much attention and controversy as the silver Labrador. Perhaps breeders of the purebred Labrador can tolerate the mixes better because they do not make false claims and misrepresent their dogs as purebred Labradors?

Although the breeders of the silver Labradors claim that they have existed as long as blacks, chocolates or yellows, that is simply untrue. The earliest advertisements for silver Labradors date back to the 1950s and until very recently the silver Labradors have not appeared outside of the United States. Oddly enough, the few that have appeared can be traced back to the silver Labs from America. An American-based kennel where silver Labradors initially were reported kept Weimaraners, a breed with not-dissimilar appearance and a silvery-grey color due to the dilution factor, and it is believed by many that the “silvers” appeared as a result of mixed breedings, whether intentional or not. Holders of this theory claim that the silver Labradors have some characteristics of the Weimaraner that are not characteristic in the Labrador. For example, the silver Labrador has no undercoat, longer ears and a lighter eye. The Labrador has a topcoat and an undercoat, shorter ears and a darker eye. This certainly gives one a reason for scepticism but unfortunately there are other reasons for concern. We have tried to research the silver Labrador origins and what we discovered was that the cause for concern is due to their lack of health clearances and their close in-breeding practices. To make matters worse, they hide all of this from the general public so there is really no way to know what they are doing, much less educate the buyer about them. There are people out there that purchase these “rare” Labradors without doing their homework and sadly they will most likely learn the hard way. This is one case that you do NOT get what you pay for.

. Now, let's take a look at some of the claims the Silver breeders make:

1. **DNA testing has proven they are purebred Labradors?** Despite the claims of breeders of silver Labradors, there is currently no scientific data, either published or preliminary, which has mapped any silver gene in Labs. They claim that DNA tests have proven that they breed purebred Labs, however, this is impossible because DNA technology can identify parentage but cannot prove that a dog several generations back was a Labrador.
2. **Silver Labs are purebred Labrador Retrievers and their ancestry is beyond reproach.** The molecular biologist and geneticist Sharon Wagner of *wigwaglabradors.com* wrote an analysis that concluded "*Silver breeders also blatantly lie. They have information on their websites that talk about DNA testing done by the AKC and a researcher at UC Berkley. Both are not true. AKC never did any genetic mapping of silver Labradors nor do they have any plans to do so since they are a registering body only and the Labrador Club of America writes the standard for the breed. Also Dr. Neff at UC Berkley was never looking into whether or not silver Labs were purebred or not which is also a moot point since DNA testing can only prove parentage at this point and is not specific enough to search for breed markers....*"
3. **Silvers are new, just like chocolates** – While silvers are new it is completely false that chocolates are new. This is discussed above under “Chocolate”.
4. **Until 1987 the AKC issued registered papers identifying silver as a color of the Labrador. After breeders who could not produce Silver in their bloodlines began to protest, AKC changed the Silver color to "a shade of chocolate".** Actually, the AKC has never recognized silver as an acceptable color but they did register silvers at one time. The AKC did not anticipate that breeders of purebred Labradors would take advantage of the form. Silvers were registered as "silver" using a convenient option found on old puppy registration application. The boxes on the form were: “Black”, “Yellow”, “Chocolate” and “Other”. Some people would inappropriately check the “Other” box and would fill in silver and the dog was registered as silver. This was nothing more than a mistake on the part of the AKC for including this “Other” option. Basically, had a person filled in “pink” or “purple” or “blue” on that line then the Labrador would have been registered as that color but it in no way validated the color as correct. The AKC fixed the problem, and eliminated the "Other" category.
5. **Breeders of black and yellow Labs saw their market share fall through the floor when chocolates became popular in the Lab marketplace.** While it is probably true that there are puppy mills out there that breed strictly for financial gain, the “breeders” that have a problem with the silver Labradors have not really thought twice about any “market” because these breeders are breeding to improve the purebred Labrador and not to make a buck. It is obvious that the breeder of silvers that made this statement has their mind set on profit.
6. **Literature on Labradors mentions the occasional gray puppy since people first began writing about Labs.** The records concerning purebred Labradors never once mentioned “silver” as a color. They did, however, mention “liver”, which is believed to be referring to chocolate. Any other “literature” that may make mention of a “grey” Labrador does not prove anything. The idea that literary writings provide scientific evidence is laughable. With that theory, what does the great literary work Moby Dick support?

7. **AKC will eventually have to concede to the growing public pressure to make silver a recognized color for Labs in America.** While none of us have a crystal ball, it is ludicrous to claim that the AKC will “eventually recognize” anything. But, as long as we are on the topic, let’s look at what it would take for the AKC to recognize silver.

For the AKC to recognize the silver coloration, the parent club (LRC) would first have to rewrite the standard and vote to accept the silver coloration. This is the current position of the Labrador Retriever Club (which is not likely to change): ***There is no genetic basis for the silver gene in Labradors. The silver color is a disqualification under the Standard for the breed. The LRC does not recognize, accept or condone the sale or advertising of any Labrador as a silver Labrador. The Club opposes the practice of registering silver as chocolate.***

8. **Kennel clubs around the world do not have the political pressure from mercenary and have no problem with registering silver Labradors.** This is completely false. There is not any other purebred registry anywhere in the world that recognizes silver Labradors.

Breeders of quality purebred Labradors have some different theories about where the silver color actually came from. Here are some of those theories:

- They are result of a dog with a genetic mismatch being intentionally bred to another dog with the same mismatch (because these mismatches are rare this results in close inbreeding).
- They are a mixed breed of Labrador and non-Labrador (most likely Weimaraner).
- A spontaneous gene mutation.

Regardless of which of these theories a breeder of purebred Labradors adheres to, it is apparent that breeders of silvers are finding some doors close to them for outside breeding stock of quality Labradors. So, if you want to breed silver Labradors and breeders of quality, purebred Labradors will not allow you to use their dogs what do you do? The answer – apparently it is breed to your own dogs. The result is very close inbreeding. Or are these breeders of silvers doing close inbreeding because silver Labradors do not really exist and if they bred to a purebred they would not get silver?

We searched for a breeder of silver Labradors online that listed any of their pedigrees and found none. So, we contacted five different breeders that advertise silver Labradors to request pedigree information on their dogs and only one responded. This was the response, “We have an agency that can provide you with that information for a fee.” Any reputable breeder of Labradors is not only willing but proud to show you the pedigrees of their dogs and if you don’t believe me just ask. You’ll more than likely get your ear talked off about every dog in the pedigree and how amazing they are/were.

### **This should be a big BUYER BEWARE!**

In an article posted in the Labrador Retriever Club News (LRC, Inc -- the parent club), Francis O Smith DVM PhD states:

***"It is the opinion of the LRC that a silver Labrador is not a purebred Labrador . The pet owning public is being duped into believing that these animals are desirable, purebred, and rare and therefore warrant special notoriety or a premium purchase price."***

Although the silver breeders do an amazing job at hiding their dog’s pedigrees we have discovered this one (below). Here is what their webpage says, “*When you deal with CRIST CULO KENNELS you are dealing with the most experienced producer of Silver Labs in the world that has been breeding and raising Silver Labs longer than any kennel in the world. It is with the utmost pride we can boast not only the best line of Silver Labs in the world, our lines have a proven history second to none in the world*”.

So this was produced by the “most experienced” and “best line of Silver Labs in the world”? That is a scary thought! And the breeder of this puppy charges up to \$1,500 for a puppy.

**Pedigree for Sterling Wisco SN44684804**

Sire Culo's Bob (SN24931506)	Sire Dudly Culo(SE731241)	Sire Toma's Beaver Creek Herschel(SD120097)	Sire Woodstock Brown Bear(SC436993)	
			Dam Napa Jean Of Toma(SD034837)	
		Dam Quejo Culo(SD925157)	Sire Taxi Of The Island City(SC570768)	
	Dam Acera Culo(SM869003-05)	Sire Dudly Culo(SE731241)		Dam Topo Culo(SC868001)
			Dam Spook Culo(SE280159)	Sire Toma's Beaver Creek Herschel(SD120097)
			Dam Quejo Culo(SD925157)	Sire Toma's Beaver Creek Herschel(SD120097)
Dam Acera Culo(SM869003-05)	Sire Dudly Culo(SE731241)	Sire Toma's Beaver Creek Herschel(SD120097)	Sire Woodstock Brown Bear(SC436993)	
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		Dam Quejo Culo(SD925157)	Sire Taxi Of The Island City(SC570768)	
	Dam Spook Culo(SE280159)	Sire Toma's Beaver Creek Herschel(SD120097)		Dam Topo Culo(SC868001)
			Dam Spook Culo(SE280159)	Sire Woodstock Brown Bear(SC436993)
			Dam Quejo Culo(SD925157)	Sire Toma's Beaver Creek Herschel(SD120097)
		Dam Quejo Culo(SD925157)	Dam Topo Culo(SC868001)	

**In the above pedigree there is so much inbreeding it is scary. Spook Culo was bred to Dudly Culo (her full brother) to produce Acera Culo. Acera was then bred to Dudly**

**Culo (her own father) to produce Culo's Bob. And THEN she was bred to Culo's Bob (her own son!). Not many branches in that family tree. None of these dogs appear to have any titles but if they weren't super extraordinary what made them worth breeding back to so many times? Or is this what it takes to produce silvers? And these breeders claim that other breeder cannot produce silvers?! If that is what it takes no thank you.**

**Now, let's compare this pedigree to a purebred. We are using one of our own pedigrees for example and comparison purposes only as there are many equally wonderful pedigrees all throughout the purebred (non-silver) breeding programs, which are easy to find between breeders have nothing at all to hide.**

**Pedigree for Ch. Trinity's Sweet Glory SN90272901**

<i>Sire</i> Ch. Boradors By George (SN62112701)	<i>Sire</i> Ch. Lenches Gallivant	<i>Sire</i> Eng. Ch. Sandylands Gadabout	<i>Sire</i> Eng. Ch. Sandylands My Guy <i>Dam</i> Eng. Ch. Sandylands Bliss	
		<i>Dam</i> Lenches Tip Top	<i>Sire</i> Eng. Ch. Tibblestone The Chorister <i>Dam</i> Lenches Personality	
	<i>Dam</i> Ch. Deer Runs Sweet Carmel Cream	<i>Sire</i> Ch. Hunt Club Hennings Mill Chino	<i>Sire</i> Ch. Hennings Mill Caruso <i>Dam</i> Hennings Mill Country Charm	
			<i>Dam</i> Ch. Boradors Sweet Charity	<i>Sire</i> Boradors The Goblin <i>Dam</i> Boradors Edgewater Harlow
		<i>Sire</i> Multi BISS Am. Ch. Lobuff's Bare Necessities, JH	<i>Sire</i> Ch. Dickendalls Ruffy, SH	<i>Sire</i> Ch. Receiver of Cranspire <i>Dam</i> Ch. Moorwood Jewel
			<i>Dam</i> Second Sight Brandie	<i>Sire</i> Ch. SunFarms Cedarhill Cadet <i>Dam</i> Second Sight Onyx
<i>Dam</i> Trinity's Sweetheart of Mine (	<i>Sire</i> Chablais Rhapsodie En Bleu	<i>Sire</i> Can. Ch. Ranbourne This Buds For You <i>Dam</i> BISS Am. Can. Ch. Chablais Myrtille		
		<i>Dam</i> Ch. Pine Edge Ridge View Snobear	<i>Sire</i> BISS Am. Ch. Hickory Ridge Gustav Mahler <i>Dam</i> Am. Ch. Lone Star Polarbear	

**Perhaps there is a good reason the breeders of silvers typically do not allow the general public to see their pedigrees. Sadly, the people who purchases one of these silver puppies probably will not be aware of what is behind their sweet new puppy. After all, the dogs behind the puppy make up what the puppy will be, not just the parents.**

AKC has public records and if you seriously consider a silver Labrador please contact AKC to learn a little about what you are buying. Please always do your homework before you buy a puppy and remember that this new puppy will be a family member for around 15 years. There are always breeders and puppy mills out there that will use the Labrador, like any other breed, to make a quick buck at the expense of the breed. There is no such thing as a “rare” Labrador and any breeder that advertises this way should be a red flag! It is our opinion that any litter bred for with no regard for the breed standard (which is the blue print for a correct Labrador) is unethical and irresponsible.

We hope that you will understand that there is no “best” color of Labrador but are “best” Labradors. Whether you consider a black, yellow or chocolate for your new family companion we believe you will learn quickly that under the coat is the most lovable dog you will ever meet and the soul of a dog lies deep within the dog and is not determined by the color.