

# An Expert's Guide to the LHASA APSO

By Juliette Cunliffe



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## CREDITS

All photos by Carol Ann Johnson  
[www.carolannjohnson.com](http://www.carolannjohnson.com)  
and from the Author's archive collection

# INTRODUCTION



As many readers of will perhaps know, I am already a well-established author with over 50 dog books published in hardback, many of them also with editions in different languages. There are several in German and Spanish, and one has even appeared in Russian, so it may come as some surprise that I have decided to publish a series of EBooks. Let me explain why...

I am a Championship Show judge of several breeds and often when officiating abroad people have asked if I have any of my books with me for them to buy. The answer is generally "No" as books are heavy to carry and I rarely keep a stock of them at home. In some countries I know dog lovers simply thirst for books, but they can be difficult to get hold of in countries where canine titles are low on the scale of publisher's priorities.

But in these days of internet technology, most things seem possible, and I hope that through this book, and others that will follow in the series, I am able to share my knowledge with fellow dog lovers throughout the world. In an EBook there is no weight, and therefore no high postage charges, and with no printing fees costs can be kept to a minimum, so it is a 'win win' situation for all of us.

Even in countries where dog books are readily available, often the book you want is not in stock. You can order it, yes, but that takes time and if you are trying to forge ahead with research about the breed you wish to obtain there is great benefit in buying on-line and receiving your book without delay.

This also means that this EBook is a perfect purchase for those who have just acquired their new puppy. Obviously owners should have read as much as possible about a breed before reaching that stage, but they may have just borrowed books from a library and it is essential always to keep breed information readily at hand.

In no way am I suggesting that having an EBook means that you should not also have at least one good hard-back book about your breed. Nothing, in my view, can compare with the feel of a book as you lovingly turn the pages, year after year. But

then I am a book collector, and I realize that not everyone feels the same way as I do. I now live in Nepal and brought almost my entire library over here by air-freight – that's how much I love books!

But compiling an EBook gives an author total control over its content. I have worked with some great publishers over decades, but sometimes they are not 'dog people', so although there is never any issue with verbal content, there can sometimes be differences of opinion as to the photos my books contain. In this respect I am fortunate enough to work with one of the world's most renowned canine photographers, Carol Ann Johnson, whose photos will pack the following pages. Added to these will be a few from my own personal archives, including some extremely rare images you may not have seen before.

Because Lhasa Apsos have been 'my' breed since the mid-1970s I have collected a phenomenal amount of material about them and am privileged to have been given many personal collections, including those of Miss Wild, Lady Freda Valentine, Beryl Prince (née Harding), Daphne Hesketh-Williams, to name but a few. Some of this valuable information and photographic material I include in this EBook, so I hope it will give you, as it does me, great pleasure.

I sometimes wonder what Lady Freda would think now, if she were still alive. She religiously pasted her news cuttings into her precious 'damask pink book' and now, here they are on the internet. Yes, she would believe it, she was a forward thinker and is probably looking down on me now as I write this. I hope so. She was a highly cherished friend of mine in her closing years.

So here I leave you to absorb the pages that follow. At the close of the book you will find a list of some hard copy books that you may like to obtain in the future.

Enjoy!

Juliette Cunliffe - 2011

# A Peep into the Lhasa Apso's History

The Lhasa Apso, although diminutive in size, is considered by its admirers to be a big dog in a small body, which speaks volumes for the breed's character and personality. He is 'Mr Personality Plus', and is certainly a breed with a mind of his own, which makes the Lhasa Apso all the more endearing.

The breed hails from Tibet, the land known as 'The Roof of the World', a mystical country with a barren landscape at high altitude. If they are to survive, inhabitants, both human and canine, must be able to deal with extremes of temperature and fiercely bright light. The Tibetans are a stalwart race, and truly typical Apsos carry many traits similar to those of their original owners.



*Two of the author's Buddhist monk friend, with a couple of her Apsos.*

The Lhasa Apso is said to have existed since 800 BC, but there is no tangible evidence of this as written historical records in Tibet were not kept until around AD 639. Buddhism spread from India into Tibet during the seventh century and in this faith the lion, in its various mythological forms, plays an important part. Indeed the Buddha Manjusri, the god of learning, is believed to travel around as a simple priest with a small dog. This dog, although not an Apso, can instantly be transformed into a lion so that the Buddha can ride on its back.



*Manjusri (Buddha) riding on the back of a small dog, transformed into a lion*

It is the snow lion, though, which is considered the king of animals and it is with this white, mythological beast that the Lhasa Apso is most closely connected. The snow lion is believed to be so powerful that when it roars

seven dragons fall out of the sky.



*Snow Lions painted on the wall of a monastery in Tibet*

Lhasa Apsos have sometimes been said to be sacred animals, but this is not so. They were indeed kept in monasteries, primarily to give a warning bark to the monks if intruders or uninvited guests managed to get past the enormous Tibetan Mastiffs tethered outside. The breed was certainly held in high esteem and was historically never sold but presented only a gift, for Lhasa Apsos are believed to carry the souls of monks who erred in their previous lives. These dogs were also given as tribute gifts for safe passage from Tibet to China, a long journey by caravan which took eight to ten months.

Although Tibetans have always drawn distinction between the 'true' lion and the 'dog' lion, they have never been too clear about the naming of their breeds. Without doubt some crossing took place between the various Tibetan breeds. Even today it is possible to breed together two fully

coated Lhasa Apsos and to produce one or more puppies which look like pure-bred Tibetan Spaniels, a breed with a much shorter-coat and distinct structural differences. This may come as something of a shock, but is clearly a throwback to earlier days.

Interestingly, the Tibetans refer to all long-coated dogs as 'Apsok', which further complicates the issue when trying to research the history of Tibetan breeds.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER BREEDS

The term 'Apsok,' or 'Apsu', is also used to describe the Tibetan Terrier, a longer legged cousin of the Lhasa Apso. It is we in the West who have added 'Lhasa' to the breed's name, although clearly it was necessary to draw some distinction between the various Tibetan breeds for when they first arrived in Britain they presented enormous confusion.



*Tibetan monk with his 'Apsok'*

It is likely that in the distant past the Lhasa Apso descended from European and Asiatic herding dogs, including the Hungarian Puli and Pumi. Certainly the breed has very close connections with two of the Tibetan Breeds, the Tibetan Terrier and Tibetan Spaniel, a close relation of which is the little known Damchi of neighbouring Bhutan.



*Tibetan Terrier*



*Hungarian Puli*



*Tibetan Spaniel*



*Hungarian Pumi*

Another close relation is the Shih Tzu which, because of its outwardly similar appearance, is frequently confused with the Lhasa Apso. This caused trouble between the breeds in the past and even today the uninitiated sometimes confuse the two. The Shih Tzu, however, was actually developed in China, although its roots go back to the Lhasa Apso of Tibet.