

## Dogs: Reading

### Man's best friend

It may be hard to believe sometimes that our favourite mutt has wolves for ancestors. They came, thousands of years ago, into villages searching for food and were exploited by people for their own needs. They bred the animals to bring out certain characteristics especially to guard, herd or hunt. The result today is a huge diversity of breeds that include Alsatian police dogs, Collie sheep dogs and Spaniel gun dogs. The Egyptians had a breed of dog called the Saluki and these were mummified in Pyramids, along with the Pharaohs, from around 2100 BC. The ancient Greeks and Romans also developed breeds that include the Greyhound, which can run at over 70 km/h making it the fastest dog in the world.



Dogs fill a variety of roles in human society but for many countries their most important role is that of companion. This is because, like humans, dogs are both highly social and adaptable which allows them to fit into different homes and lifestyles around the world. Whether it's sitting on a scooter in Brazil or at a restaurant in France, or dressing up against the cold in northern Thailand, dogs have a special relationship with us. The following stories from around the world testify to this age-old bond and the special role dogs play in our lives.

### A rocket dog

There's something about Laika that touches the heart. Shot into space and fame on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1957 she died aboard *Sputnik 2* just hours after take off. Soviet officials originally said that she had died painlessly in orbit about a week after the launch. However, a Moscow scientist recently revealed that she died of overheating and stress not long after the mission had started. Despite surviving just a few hours Laika, who was once a stray walking the streets of Moscow, became the first living creature to orbit the Earth. She proved that a living organism could tolerate a long time in weightlessness paving the way for humans in space.

### A loyal dog

Perhaps even more touching is the story of Hachiko, a large hunting dog called an Akita, who was the faithful pet of a professor at Tokyo University. Every afternoon the professor would arrive back at the train station to find his dog waiting patiently on the platform, no doubt wagging his tail, and they would return home together. Unfortunately in May 1925 when Hachiko was only 18 months old, the professor died before he could return home. This did not deter the dog from continuing to go to the station to meet the train for the next ten years before returning home, sad and alone. The statue of Hachiko on Tokyo's Shibuya railway station was erected in honour of his loyalty and devotion to his master.

### A war dog

A parachuting dog may seem very strange but not to a Collie called Rob. Originally a working farm dog, he played a vital role during the Second World War (1939 - 1945). Along with his SAS unit he was parachuted in behind enemy lines where he was trained to watch over and protect the exhausted men as they slept in between carrying out their undercover operations. He made over 20 descents during his time with units in North Africa and Italy.

### **A rescue dog**

Arcón is both the name of a dog and a search-and-rescue method which Arcón's owner, Jaime Parejo, named after him. Since 1999 numerous operations in countries affected by earthquakes, such as Colombia, Turkey, Taiwan and India, have used canine rescue teams from Spain where the method was developed. One of the most famous Arcón rescues took place in Gujarat, India in 2001. Seven days after an earthquake that killed 30,000 people, Spanish dogs located a young man buried alive in the rubble. The rescue happened after the possibility of finding further survivors had been abandoned, and dogs from other countries had already been withdrawn. His rescue was carried out 'live' on TV and news programmes around the world covered the event. Spanish dogs were also used to locate survivors after the Philippines landslide in February 2006. Despite their training and incredible sense of smell, the dogs were unable to sniff out any survivors buried under 30 m of mud.

### **An intelligent dog**

Finally, on a lighter note, we have Bertie who, despite his tiny size, is an indispensable companion to his mistress, Gill. As she cannot hear it is up to Bertie, a miniature Yorkshire Terrier, to wake her up when the alarm clock goes off, to tell her when she has visitors and to alert her if there is an unusual noise. He has been trained to do this since he was a puppy but the dog has developed other instincts. While dozing on Gill's bed in hospital after she had had surgery Bertie suddenly woke up very agitated and started barking at the lady in the opposite bed. Nurses coming to see what the matter was, realized that the patient had stopped breathing. They revived her and, thanks to Bertie's help, saved her life. Bertie was trained by a British charity which has placed over 1,100 dogs with people who have hearing difficulties. Most of the dogs are strays selected from rescue kennels.