

Why a Cairn is not a Westie – And vice versa!

Part One: Historic Beginnings but Conformational Differences

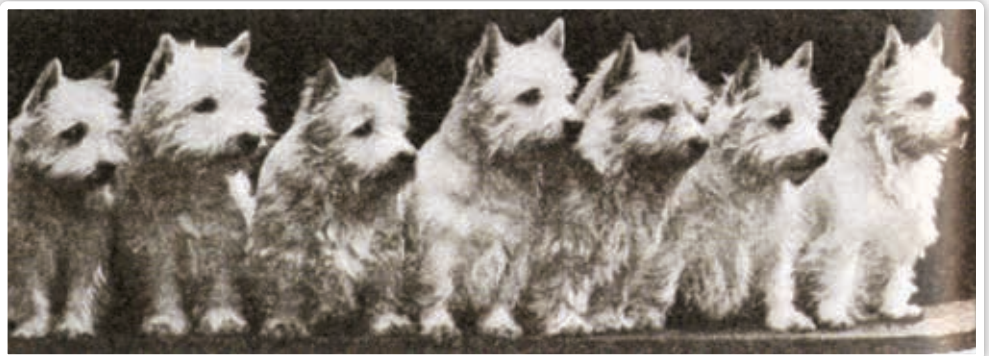
by Pat Joyce

The easiest means to distinguish the Cairn Terrier (Cairn) from the West Highland White Terrier (WHWT) is the simple observation that one breed can only be white and the other can be any color but white. While the two breeds share a history and are generally similar in appearance at superficial glance, there are aspects of physical conformation and marked differences in health concerns that clearly separate these dogs into two distinct breeds. The first part of this work will discuss the conformational details of particular interest to judges and of importance to breeders. The second part to follow will describe the markedly different medical and genetic illnesses that clearly separate these two breeds regardless of their appearance.

Working Terriers from the Highlands

Details of the early origins of the WHWT and Cairn breeds are not well documented. The farms and estates of the Scottish Highlands and Northern England all had small working terriers who were bred to perform certain tasks. Dogs were kept to rid the land and buildings of vermin, and the countryside of predators such as badgers and foxes. Each local area had a Laird or crofter who selected terriers that met his needs and tastes. Dogs were kept when they successfully did their job. As a result of this economic reality, a wealth of terrier breeds was developed in these rural settings and later came to be known as Scottish, Skye, Cairn and WHWT among others.

Legend has it that the WHWT breed was developed in Argyllshire, Scotland in the



Poltalloch dogs of Col. Malcolm and Early Cairn Terriers (Source: Public domain)

late 1800s when Colonel Edward Donald Malcolm, the 16th Laird of Poltalloch, accidentally shot his reddish-brown terrier (presumed to have been a Cairn) while hunting. The story told is that he picked out lighter-colored dogs to breed against each other as they would be easier to see in the field and not be shot by mistake. Supposedly his early dogs were sandy-colored and prick-eared. About the same time, other small white terriers were being bred by George John Douglas Campbell, the 8th Duke of Argyll. It is thought

that these two Scottish Lords knew each other but bred their white dogs independently. It is not clear how much swapping of breeding stock was done. The 10th Duke of Argyll, Nial Campbell, set up the Rosneath Terrier Club in 1904. This was followed by the Poltalloch Terrier Club chaired by Colonel Malcolm. The Kennel Club recognized both terriers in 1908 under the single name of "West Highland White Terrier," a name chosen by Colonel Malcolm himself. The West Highland White Terrier Club of America



Heart-shaped versus oval rib cages
(Source: WHWTCA and CTCA Illustrated Standards)

structure go beyond color and grooming styles. Comparisons between the official US breed standards for WHWT and Cairns will now be described.

Height at the withers in the WHWT is 11 inches for dogs and 10 inches for bitches. This compares to Cairns where the height is 10 inches and 9.5 inches respectively per the 1938 standard.

Proportions in the WHWT are measured from the withers to the root of the tail. WHWT have a slightly shorter body length with the back being approximately 80% of the height. WHWT are close coupled in the loin. With the shorter back, the body of the WHWT has a taller general outline and may show more “air” under the body when not hidden by generous furnishings. Cairn body proportions are measured from prosternum to point of buttocks. The Cairn has a body that should be 50% longer than the height at the withers. Per the US standard, the back is said to be of “medium length” and the body measured at 14.5 to 15 inches long. The Cairn loin is described only as “well coupled.” The Cairn is said to be of “balanced proportions” and neither “too leggy or low.” While not described as having a longer body than a WHWT, the difference in description of proportions would indicate the Cairn is more rectangular, while the WHWT should be more square.

No weight ranges are described for the WHWT in their 1988 standard. Cairn dogs were described to weigh 14 pounds

and bitches 13 pounds in 1938. WHWT are described as having heavier bone and good substance. Cairns are described as “strongly but not heavily built” and having “good but not too heavy bone.” In the opinion of this breeder judge, WHWT tend to be more solidly built and have more substance than Cairns.

The WHWT standard specifically describes the need for large teeth and complete incisors of both upper and lower jaw. While an occasional missing premolar may be acceptable, the WHWT should be faulted for missing incisors, missing several premolars or having misaligned teeth. Scissor or level bites are acceptable in the WHWT and the breed specific exam includes viewing the front and sides of the mouth. The Cairn oral examination only requires that the front of the mouth be checked for scissor or level bites. Cairn teeth are also described as large.

The WHWT neck is described as muscular, well-set on sloping shoulders, and of a length in proportion to the dog. The shoulders are described as well laid back and well-knit at the backbone. The shoulders of Cairns are only described as sloping and the neck is not mentioned in the breed standard. Chest conformation is another detail where the two breeds differ. The WHWT are specifically described as having “deep and well-arched upper half of ribs,” also known as heart-shaped, that allow the elbows to tuck in alongside the rib cage and provide straight columns in the front legs. The Cairn rib cage is only described as being “well-sprung and deep” which presumes an oval shape. Barrel-shaped or slab-sided ribs are considered faults in Cairns although not listed. It is the opinion of this breeder/terrier judge, that the difference in the rib cage shapes is consistent between the two breeds, and that the WHWT and Cairns could be differentiated by feel of the rib cages alone.

The tails in the WHWT are set high enough on the back so that the spine does not slope down to it. The tail is carried gaily and erect and contains substance.

WHWT and Cairn profiles (Source: WHWTCA and CTCA Illustrated Standards)

(WHWTCA) became a member of the AKC in 1909. The current US standard for the WHWT was last revised and approved in 1988.

Cairn progenitors were found in Scotland for some time before the WHWT. Cairns were known as the “short-haired terrier of Skye” and were championed by Captain Martin MacLeod of Drynock, Isle of Skye, in the early 1800s. The Cairn, as the breed came to be called, was recognized by The Kennel Club in 1910. Cairns were required by The Kennel Club to be kept in a separate registry from the WHWT as of 1912. The Cairn breed was recognized by the AKC in 1913. The Cairn Terrier Club of America (CTCA) was granted membership in AKC in 1917. Until that date, Cairns and WHWT were allowed to be interbred in the US. The current Cairn breed standard was approved by the CTCA in 1938.

Differences in Conformation and Type

Dog breed types should be instantly recognizable from silhouette alone. WHWT and Cairns have generally similar outlines but the difference in conformational

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The WHWT topline is flat and level. The Cairn tail is “set on at back level” and carried gaily per the standard. The Cairn back is described as level and of medium length. Stated faults in the Cairn back and tail include too short or too long backs, tails that are low set, and backs that are not level.

Skin pigmentation is another detail by which the two breeds are different. While not seen in all WHWT, the breed is said to have “black pigmented” skin under the white coat, although the skin could be described more accurately as having a dark cast rather than a solidly black color. Black pigmentation is specifically desired in the ear leather and foot pads. Against the white coat of the WHWT, the skin pigmentation is easy to see inside the erect ears at the tips and in the dark foot pads highly visible from the rear as the dog is gaited away in a down-and-back.

Black pigment of the lip and eye rims are specifically described for WHWT. Skin pigment is not described for the Cairn. No mention is given for the color of the lip rims, eye rims, or foot pads. Dark ears, muzzle, and tail tips are described as desirable markings, but this involves color of the coat rather than the skin under the coat.

Finally the issue of coat color separates the two breeds. WHWT, of course, are famously white, but even then, they may have some shading in the white coat. Wheaten tipping of the ends of the hairs may occur but is to be faulted. WHWT breed standard specifies they need 2 inches of hard outer coat covering the soft white undercoat. Their standard also states that a hard straight coat with a wheaten tinge is preferable to a white coat that is fluffy or soft. WHWT have no darkness of the muzzle, ears, or tail. Cairns are described in the US breed standard as being any color but white.

Dark markings (muzzle, ears, and tail tip) are desired. Cairns have a hard outer coat and a soft undercoat, of which both may have different colors. Cairns are commonly brindled although this detail is not described in the US standard. One Cairn fault listed is presence of white color on the chest, feet, or other parts of the body.

There are well-known and marked differences in the accepted show grooming between Cairns and WHWT. Both breeds should possess coats in excellent condition and groomed to select for hard outer coats. The WHWT standard stresses that grooming is very important and is seldom seen to perfection. In their natural and ungroomed states, both breeds appear amazingly similar with blousy “blown” coats, just in different colors. Both the WHWT and Cairn breeds suffer from occasional puppies born with soft fluffy coats instead of the desired hard, weather- and quarry-resistant coats needed for protection.

Comparison of WHWT and Cairn per AKC and Illustrated Breed Standards

	WHWT	Cairn
Height at withers	- Dogs 11" and bitches 10"	- Dogs 10" and bitches 9.5" per 1938 standard
Size	- Slightly taller and more “air” under body. - No weights described in 1988 standard.	- Slightly smaller in height and shorter in leg. - Dogs 14 lb and bitches 13 lb per 1938 standard.
Proportion	- Slightly shorter body length (withers to root of tail) than height at withers. - Back approximately 80% of height. - Close-coupled in loin. - Squarer outline.	- Body 50% longer length (prosternum to point of buttocks) than height at withers. - Body measures 14.5" to 15" long. - Loin “strong.” - More rectangular. Not square.
Bone/substance	- “Well boned and having good substance.” - Heavier boned.	- “Good but not too heavy.” - Slightly lighter bone/ smaller.
Ribs	- Ribs specifically described as “well arched upper half of ribs” (heart-shaped).	- Ribs are “well-sprung” and deep.
Skin Pigment	- Skin has black pigment under white coat. - Black pigment desired on ear leather. - Black eye and lip rims. - Black foot pads.	- Skin not described. - Eye rims and lips not described but should be black. - Ear tips dark due to undercoat. - Foot pads dark but color not specified.
Color and coat	- Color may only be white. - Wheaten tipping of hair faulted. - 2" coat length specified per breed standard. - Grooming very important and “seldom seen to perfection.”	- 11 standard and 4 alternate color designations recognized by AKC, plus additional specifications for markings of muzzle and points (ears and tail tip). - No specified coat length. - Presented in full, good coat and furnishings. “Tidied up.”

While WHWT can be registered as only one color, the AKC will accept 11 standard and 4 alternate colors in Cairns. There are 3 accepted descriptions for Cairn markings, and as a 4th choice, the markings need not be specified at all. The difference then is that WHWT come in any color you want as long as it is white, while Cairns could be registered in any of 15 colors with 4 possible markings for a total of 60 unique combinations.

Similar but now different

The WHWT and the Cairn share a common heritage as two of the short-legged working terriers of Scotland. Both these breeds and others were selected

originally to meet the needs of farmers and aristocracy who wanted working dogs to clear the land of quarry and yet still be companions for family and estate. After 100 years of separate breeding we now have a variety of breeds with structural differences that make them unique.

The second part of this article will describe the genomic and health issues of the WHWT and Cairn which will further demonstrate how they are distinctly different breeds at this time.

Sources: The official AKC breed standards for the Cairn and the WHWT, as well as the official Illustrated Standards of the CTCA and the WHWTCA.

All interpretations of any details from the official breed standards are the sole opinions of this author. Illustrated Standards of both breeds are available through the websites of the respective national breed clubs.

My special thanks to Marlene Burford, breeder-judge and member, West Highland Terrier Club of America, for mentoring and review of this article.

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akin to rewarding a dog for undesirable behavior. I can certainly remember a time in my career where I believed that. However, now that I've studied (and continue to study) animal behavior and neurology, I can see from a physical standpoint how an animal's brain isn't wired for the same level of reasoning as ours is and how that prevents them from interpreting these types of food lures and chained behaviors as rewards for undesirable behavior. And in the time that I've understood that, I've raised, trained or retrained literally hundreds of dogs using these techniques with great success.

When your puppies or young dogs are exposed to other dogs behaving in ways that might overstimulate or frighten them (aggressive barking), you can reward them for attention on you—even if (ESPECIALLY if) your dog didn't have a reaction to the other dogs.

If your dog does anything more than looks toward other dogs (or other stimuli that are likely to cause Cairns to bark aggressively), use a food lure on the nose to turn the dog away and then feed in the new position.

These practices will help your dog to consistently stay down in the level 1-2 area of behavior, which keeps physical stress on your dog low and grows the dendrites that support calm, confident dogs that can go to shows and be in the ring as good representatives of the breed.

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COMMITTEE REPORTS

Education Committee

by Dayle Reynolds, Chair

The Education Committee hosted a program on "Myths and Misconceptions in Canine Reproduction," presented by Dr. Greg Burns, DVM, Colorado State University at the CTCA National

Specialty Week in Greeley, CO. The presentation offered the scientific side to the common "beliefs" about breeding.

The Committee again has made the difficult decision to postpone the program for October in Pennsylvania. The feeling was between the uncertainty of where the pandemic was going and the way the membership will be scattered in different hotels, it was just not conducive to holding an informal afternoon Tea Party discussion. Hopefully, 2022 will provide a more receptive atmosphere.