

# Spotlight on the Basenji

Reproduced from Basenji Club of America (BCOA), Basenji University, Course # 101 Owner's Guide

Owners will testify to the Basenji's phenomenal intelligence, his inventiveness, his curiosity, and his clownish sense of humor. An independent thinker, the Basenji is charming as well as trying. Reared with affection as well as discipline a Basenji makes a delightful companion. These major personality traits are loved by Basenji enthusiasts but the breed is definitely not for everyone.

He is active and resourceful at play and cozy and comfortable in repose. He will demand attention at times but is not a clinging dog. He will keep good track of what you are up to without constantly requiring your attention.

The silent hunter is not going to bark to frighten off an intruder. They do become alert and interested when friend or stranger approaches the home or if there are odd noises. People acting suspiciously will upset a Basenji. Many Basenjies will try to avoid a suspicious intruder. Some may happily greet an intruder while a few may try to protect their home. Do not count on a Basenji as a traditional guard dog.

The Basenji is immaculate, grooming his coat and paying particular attention to his feet, again, like a cat. He takes such good care of himself that he rarely needs a bath. This is certainly a good thing, as the Basenji does not enjoy getting wet. An occasional brisk rub with a rough towel and a going-over with a soft brush will delight him and will cause his coat to glisten. The Basenji is practically odourless. If there is any scent at all, it is reminiscent of clean, dry grass.

Coming from Africa originally, the Basenji enjoys warmth during very cold weather. He can be outside while he is active. He will hate the rain, avoiding it like the plague, but enjoying a good romp in fresh snow.

An interesting quote found at Basenji Companions on the Internet: "They are not a typical domesticated dog, and it is unfair to expect them to act like what you might expect of a lethargic house dog." Basenjies are not for everyone; it seems people will either find them to be an amusing character, fun and an interesting challenge, or they see them as impossibly disobedient and basically destruction on four legs. With the Basenji there does not seem to be anything in between, people either truly love their qualities or hate the breed because of the same qualities.

<b>Personality Traits</b>	<b>What This Means For You</b>
ACTIVE AND CURIOUS PERSONALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Needs regular exercise</li><li>➤ Is very entertaining</li><li>➤ Active minds are easily bored</li><li>➤ Is into everything</li><li>➤ Isn't good at being home alone with nothing to do</li><li>➤ Can overwhelm small children by jumping on them</li><li>➤ House must be reasonable dog proof at least for a couple of years</li><li>➤ Is in danger of hurting himself if allowed off leash</li></ul>
PROUD, INDEPENDENT AND STUBBORN NATURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Has a strong sense of what he thinks is right and wrong</li><li>➤ Training requires skill not brute force</li><li>➤ Training should start immediately when you get your puppy home</li></ul>

<b>Personality Traits</b>	<b>What This Means For You</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perfectly capable of ignoring your instructions</li> <li>➤ Can be stubborn</li> <li>➤ Can be conveniently “hard of hearing”</li> <li>➤ Rare to find a truly constantly obedient Basenji</li> </ul>
BASICALLY A FRIENDLY DOG BUT CAN BE ALOOF WITH STRANGERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ May or may not like your friends</li> <li>➤ Children must be well behaved</li> <li>➤ Not necessarily a gushy dog</li> <li>➤ Not a good guard dog</li> </ul>
AGILE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Can be great escape artists</li> <li>➤ Raise your puppy so it doesn’t learn how to escape</li> <li>➤ Your fenced yard should have a high fence</li> </ul>
NON-BARKING BUT NOT MUTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Doesn’t bark but has other sounds</li> <li>➤ Basically quiet dog unless he is unhappy</li> <li>➤ Very loud howl or scream when lonely</li> <li>➤ Owners love to hear the yodel greeting of a happy Basenji</li> </ul>
ALL-PURPOSE HOUND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Basenjies were bred to be independent, resourceful and efficient hunters</li> <li>➤ Their keen nose and hunting instinct can lead them into dangerous situations such as the path of a speeding car</li> <li>➤ They are safest in an enclosed area (fenced yard) or on a leash</li> </ul>
PACK MENTALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A single Basenji may not do well left for long periods</li> <li>➤ For working owners, the company of another dog is the next best thing to having you there</li> <li>➤ Basenjies may or may not get along easily with dogs they don’t know, preferring their own pack</li> <li>➤ Early socialisation with other dogs and all sizes of people is essential</li> <li>➤ Clever dogs try to be pack leader so you must be kindly in control from the beginning</li> </ul>
A SMALLISH, MEDIUM SIZED DOG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Actually a great size as they are easy to lift</li> <li>➤ But not fragile like a toy breed</li> <li>➤ A strong dog</li> <li>➤ Doesn’t think he is small at all...a small dog who thinks he is very large indeed</li> <li>➤ Lives into his teens so be prepared for many years of enjoyment and responsibility</li> </ul>
CLEAN, SMOOTH COATED DOG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A wash-and-wear dog, who rarely needs a bath</li> <li>➤ Needs little grooming to stay sparkling clean</li> <li>➤ Sometimes good for people with allergies but Sometimes not</li> <li>➤ You’ll find very little shed hair in your house</li> <li>➤ Usually clean in his habit and with consistency, easily house trained</li> </ul>
SOME ODDIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Being close to their wild roots Basenjies all tend to have their puppies at the same time of the year</li> <li>➤ In the northern hemisphere most puppies are born in October, November, December. In the southern hemisphere most puppies are born June, July, August</li> <li>➤ You may have to wait for awhile for a puppy</li> </ul>

# Basenji Myth Busting

With Ethel Blair



We hope this article will illustrate the many idiosyncrasies and intelligence of the Basenji. So here we go with some myth busting on Basenjjs.

## Basenji cant bark

**False** - Xrays and post mortems of Basenjjs have shown that the laryngeal ventricle is more shallowly-developed than many other canids. This difference in a Basenji's physiology means that it lacks the capacity to bark like many other canids. However many Basenjjs have been heard to bark. Why is this?

Most Basenjjs who can bark have learnt this from other barking dogs, especially if they have lived close to a barking dog, or they have spent any time in a boarding kennel. Over time a Basenji can become very good at mimicking a bark. No matter how well a Basenji can make bark like sounds, it will always sound different to most other barking breeds, but nevertheless it is a bark.

A Basenji's bark will generally sound like a single, high pitched whoof. And when a Basenji has learned to do a series of barks, then it will contain a pause in between whoofs. Basenjjs are not into rapid fire barking like most canids are capable of doing.

As most Basenji owners know, our beloved breed is not mute, as Basenjjs have been known to come up with the most amazing cacophony of sounds. However I still run into Basenji owners who tell me they have never heard their Basenji Yodel. Do not give up because your Basenji might surprise you one day!! I have a Basenji who did not yodel for 5 years and then he came out with the most amazing Yodel that he directed straight at me, which nearly knock my socks off.



## Basenjjs wont go into water

**False** - We hope that this *At the Beach with Your Basenji* issue of the Baroo illustrates that it is difficult to generalise about what Basenjjs can or cannot do, as in this issue you can see we have quite a few photos of Basenjjs paddling around in water. Thou, I must admit in my experience Basenjjs seem to not like being out in the rain, and walking around in wet grass. Well heck, most of us do not go out in the rain or walk around in wet grass either. So I also share their common sense for keeping dry feet. The photo in this section is Zac a Basenji who loves to play in water.

This myth does come down to each individual Basenji, however I suspect that the majority of Basenjis if exposed to a stream or river would at least tip their toes into the shallow water. Personally I have been with Basenjis who have walked through water up to waist height. One of my current Basenji bitches Poppy swum after a speed board at the Redcliffe Bar and, one of my boys, Zac will always take up an opportunity to play in water. So when I get the hose out, Zac wont be too far away, while the bitch who swum in the water after the speedboat runs away from the hose. And recently I saw another young Basenji girl purposely running through a sprinkler multiple times just for fun.

So next time you are at the beach try and get your Basenji to tip their toes into the surf.

## Basenjis cant be trained

**False** - In my experience I suspect that this myth has to be the biggest one!! The only small element of truth behind this myth is that most Basenjis are harder to train than other canids. This is because Basenjis are naturally quite stubborn and, have been placed on this earth to serve their own purpose.

The reality here is that because a Basenji has a very self-directed personality it can be very difficult to live with a Basenji if they are NOT

trained. It is very important to expose a Basenji to training from when it is young, and to make training a life-long activity with your companion. The most important command one can teach a Basenjis is "sit" and then one can progress from that command to: come, stay, up, down, leave and so forth. The photo in this section is showing a monitor with an image of Anubis a Basenji while she is working on a set of a Hollywood movie. (Image via Facebook) Here is a link to **Anubis** the Basenji who is a movie star!!

<https://www.facebook.com/AnubisTheBarklessDog/>

And here is photo by Marina Sergeeva with her dancing Basenji **Shani** from Saint Petersburg, Russia.



This is a photo of Marina Sergeeva and Shani doing one of their routines.

## Basenjis have low intelligence among their canine counterparts

**False** - This myth has been propagated for a long time in articles on the internet and television and has labelled the Basenjis as being one of the most unintelligent dogs.

Many of these studies have used measurement scales to test intelligence in dogs that are obedience focused, which I suspect are more weighted towards dogs that fetch and aim to please their owners and hence do not really capture the broader dimensions of canine intelligence. The following list is taken from the Book, "The Intelligence of Dogs" by Stanley Coren. The results below were generated by over 200 professional dog obedience judges, who ranked 110 dog breeds on the basis of their intelligence.

### **Rank Breed**

1. Border Collies
2. Poodle
3. German Shepherd
4. Golden Retriever
5. Doberman Pincher
6. Shetland Sheepdog
7. Labrador Retriever
8. Papillon
9. Rottweiler
10. Australian Cattle Dog
11. Pembroke Welsh Corgi
12. Miniature Schnauzer

### **At the low end of the intelligence rankings are:**

106. Borzoi
107. Chow Chow
108. Bull dog
109. Basenji
110. Afghan Hound

Well at least the Basenji did not rate as number 110!! The book goes on to say, "depending upon your life style, it may be more difficult to live with a more intelligent dog, rather than a less intelligent dog...and continues to say how an intelligent dog can use bad behaviour to manipulate its owner..." So here lies some of the reason why Basenjis can drive their owners mad and, also why Basenjis around 12-24 months of age are surrendered to our Basenji adoption programme.

I recall a story that happened about 20 years ago. I was called to a home by a lady who owned two Basenjis. Her husband had returned home after about 4 years absence and in that time she had acquired the Basenjis. The lady was seeking help regarding the Basenjis because her husband wanted his wife to rehome the dogs. When I asked him what his expectations of a dog was, he described a dog that was very obedient, and which had a lot more respect for him. He told me that generally the dogs would not listen to him, and the male Basenji was hunting down his clothes and purposely peeing on them. The lady didn't give up her Basenjis, however I never heard what happened to the husband. I must admit on driving home I was secretly smirking picturing this image of the Basenji peeing on his clothes. In talking to

many people over the years the self-directedness and independence of the Basenji breed can really turn people off who are not use to this.

The Basenji is a dog that naturally occurred in the wild and has only one purpose and that is to serve its own purpose. Dogs like these are generally expert problem solvers, manipulators and very self-directed. If we continue to measure the Basenji's intelligent using measurement dimensions than primarily focus testing on a dogs ability to stand and drop for 15 minutes, or roundup some sheep, then the world is never going to learn that the Basenji is a super smart canine.

While this is not an advertisement for Dognition (<https://www.dognition.com/>), this system is one example of measuring canine intelligence by using broader dimensions – empathy, communication, cunning, memory, and reasoning.

## Basenjis do not smell

**False** - All animals have smell, even a Basenji. However the difference is that a Basenji does not have the regular “doggy” smell. Most owners of regular dogs will need to wash their dogs often to remove the smell. Most people who own Basenjis would not wash them very often. Of course if you are exhibiting your Basenjis then that would be an exception to this practice.

The low odour of the Basenji also makes them an excellent hunting dog. In many cases when a Basenji is hunting an animal it will rub itself in the faeces of the animal it is hunting to take on its odour to avoid detection on the wind.

In my experience the smell of a Basenji is almost sweet, earthy and has some similarity to the smell of a horse. However, I suspect that describing a smell is a very personal thing (Refer to Spotlight on the Basenji article, Page 19 re: comment on the Basenji smell). Now go and have a sniff of your Basenji(s) and try to describe the smell.

## Basenjis are not loving

**False** - A number of times over the years I have had visitors to the house and individual Basenjis have acted quite aloof by just completely ignoring the stranger in the room. This response would generally bring comments like, “he is unfriendly”, or “are Basenjis affectionate?” In one case a Basenji person had visited and they were quite disappointed that one of my boys, Akua did not come over to them for about 20 minutes. My response to this was, just ignore him and he will come over and then you will not be able to get rid of him. And that was exactly what happened.

These traits of aloofness and standoffishness are typical, original traits of the Basenji bred, which to some degree has been modified by breeding in western countries, however one can still find many Basenjis with these traits.

People who have an image that dogs need to be highly demonstrative with their affections may not like the Basenji.