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# Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever

A highly intelligent and good-natured companion

**T**he Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, or "tollers" as they are affectionately known, are the smallest of the retrievers. They are often mistaken for a small golden retriever but the toller is more active, both physically and mentally. They are intelligent, alert, high energy dogs and they get their name for their ability to lure waterfowl within gunshot range.

## History

The Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever is thought to be the product of cross breeding between a European decoy dog, farm collies, setters, retriever dogs and spaniels. Originally bred in Yarmouth county, located at the southern Tip of Nova Scotia, the dog originated because hunters wanted a dog who would attract birds, as well as retrieve them.

Originally known as the Little River Duck Dogs, the breed was officially recognized by the Canadian Kennel Club in 1915.

Tolling means to lure and these dogs were first used by European hunters to lure ducks to shore. The hunter would stay hidden behind bushes and would send the dog out to play near the water, usually by tossing a stick to be retrieved. The dogs would wag





their tails, with the white tail tip drawing the attention of the ducks. As the ducks came to shore the hunters would shoot the duck and then dogs would be sent to retrieve the dead or wounded game.

The breed is not just a hunting/retrieving

dog, the toller excels in obedience, agility, fly ball, doggy dancing, dock diving and tracking. Their keen sense of smell, intelligence, working drive and small size make them perfect as service, drug detection and search and rescue dogs.

#### **Appearance**

According to the breed standard, a toller should be athletic, well-muscled, compact, medium boned and powerful. Their build enables them to run around tirelessly, leaping and retrieving with

## Fact file

**Appearance:** Athletic, well-muscled, compact, medium boned and powerful. The coat is a shade of orange or red, with lighter feathering on the underside of the tail, pantaloons and body. They have small white markings on the feet, chest, tail tip and sometimes the face, which gives them a fox like appearance

**Lifespan:** Tollers usually live between 12-14 years

**Temperament:** Highly energetic, intelligent and playful

**Suitability:** They are excellent family pets and get on well with other dogs and animals, but they do have a high prey drive and may chase cats and other small animals, if they are not introduced at a young age. Their reaction to strangers vary from reserved to curious, but often includes some initial caution. They generally reserve true enthusiasm for their family and special people.





their tail always wagging. Known as the Peter Pan dogs of the gundog group, because they never grow up, they are happiest when they have a job to do and you cannot throw a ball just once for a toller. Everything they do is done with gusto. They possess a water repelling double coat that is medium in length making them suitable to retrieve in icy waters. The coat colour is any shade of orange/red, with lighter feathering on the underside of the tail, pantaloons and body. They usually have small white markings on the feet, chest, tail tip and sometimes the face, which gives them a fox like appearance. Considered a wash and wear breed, they require brushing once a week to keep their feathered coats free of mats and tangles and they shed their coats twice a year.

#### Temperament

Tollers are happiest in an active household. They are devoted family companions who need to be included in family life as they treasure interaction with people. They are excellent family pets and get on well with other dogs and animals, but they do have a

high prey drive and may chase cats and other small animals, if they are not introduced at a young age. Their reactions to strangers vary from reserved to curious, but often includes some initial caution. They generally reserve true enthusiasm for their family and special people. They bark when there is danger, but they are not a guard dog.

Even a Toller who is "just a pet" MUST have basic obedience training and the chance to use their brains. They require

## Health

Tollers have an average lifespan of 12-14 years. Health issues for the breed are the same as for other retrievers, namely, Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) and canine hip dysplasia. They are also predisposed to immune mediated rheumatic disease, steroid responsive meningitis and thyroid problems. The gene pool for the breed is small.



# Tolling Retriever

calm consistent and clear directions from their owners and they respond well to play, praise and food rewards. This high-energy dog needs a lot of physical exercise and they love retrieving games. Training sessions should be kept short, upbeat and challenging as the breed can get bored and will put their own interpretation on repetitive tasks. They like to do things their way. They are an intelligent and a sometimes-manipulative breed, who recognize and take advantage of weakness in authority, they will often test the rules to see what they can get away with and if you are not careful, you will find that the ruler of your house has 4 legs and is red. They don't have a mean bone in their bodies, but they are opportunistic. If you aren't in charge, they will be, so it is important to establish rules, be consistent and prevent the dog from getting bored. Tollers have a sense of humour and when they are not playing they are content to lay down and be quiet.

Many Tollers have a penetrating scream which they produce to indicate excitement, usually to water, a toy or a ball and eagerness, rather than a constant behavior, but it can be annoying. To the uninitiated, this can sound like the dog is being fed into a wood chipper; it's high pitched, frantic and loud. Not all Tollers scream, but many do.

The demand for puppies far exceeds supply and it is not uncommon to have to wait over 12 months for a puppy. A good breeder will welcome questions about temperament and breed characteristics and will be more interested in placing the puppies in the right home. They will have also completed all the health clearances necessary to screen out health problems as much as possible.

Once you welcome a toller into your life, there is no turning back, with toller owners often saying, they are just like potato chips, you can't stop at one.

## Contacts

*For more information, please contact  
Special thanks to Sandi Gee for providing  
this detailed information about the breed.*

*Images courtesy of 7 to 1 Photography  
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