

Miss Geraldine Flack would not be offended, I hope, if one referred to her as a novice on the subject of the showing and breeding of dogs. She has never shown a dog in her life and never whelped a litter, yet this determined lady is in the process of carving herself a legendary niche in dogdom. Why? Because Miss Flack has imported the first examples of the Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers.

In the UK, this breed has drawn unto itself an almost mythical identity parallel to the Unicorn. Some years ago stirrings of interest were aroused when one of the weekly dog papers publicly questioned the actual existence of this breed. Though research proved it did indeed exist, no further developments were made.

Miss Flack came to the breed from quite a different route. Having family in Nova Scotia, she had occasionally seen this breed whilst holidaying there. Her interests in sporting dogs was confined to owning a Labrador named Robber (his claim to fame was helping Miss Flack in her garden by fetching the fork and her gloves); he was a working gundog, part trained by Miss Flack herself. He died 11 years ago, and since then Miss Flack has owned a pair of rescued cats named 'one-ey' and 'two-ey'. Both are black and are only differentiated by the fact that 'two-ey' is tailless and rather a bully.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Miss Flack is a physiotherapist by profession and until 10 years ago worked at Guy's hospital. When she found the commuting from Guildford to London was becoming more demanding, she assumed a private practise in Godalming where she currently works; the quality of life being far better.

But what of the Nova Scotia's?

One day, a patient of Miss Flack's chanced to remark that whilst at the hairdressers, she had read an article in a women's magazine by a vet who stated his surprise that no one had ever brought the Nova Scotia to the UK, as it was such a biddable and social breed. Miss Flack's patient wondered what this breed might be like and was impressed when Miss Flack said she had seen the breed in it's native land.

Some time later Miss Flack still had the Nova Scotians on her mind and she too wondered why they had not been brought to the UK. Eventually, she decided to bring some in herself.

She flew over to Ontario and visited a Mrs Stephens whom she knew kept the breed, and purchased two pups, a dog and a bitch. They were four weeks old at the time and Miss Flack had to wait until they were



Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers

If this article were to appear in our April magazine there would be many who would think it a hoax. John Richardson brings us the story of the breed's introduction to the UK. Marc Henrie took the photos.

three months old before they could travel to England, during which time she named them Nigel and Flora. It has to be said they had a less than auspicious start when they did make the journey. The inevitable airline delays affected their departure and when they arrived on English soil all their papers had been lost. On arrival in the UK they were quarantined at Meg Purnell-Carpenter's Overhill Kennels at Pensford just outside Bristol where Miss Flack visited them religiously every Wednesday.

At the age of 10 months they were released and sent off to a village outside Abergavenny in order to commence their gundog training. This

too got off to a slow start. For after six months in quarantine Flora and Nigel were not too sure exactly what a field was for - they sat in the middle until Nigel made a sudden dash.

All seemed to be on an upward plane when Nigel was discovered to be unsuitable for breeding and had to be removed from the outline plans. He is now in a pet home learning agility for his debut in 1990. Flora, however, flourished and is a promising gundog but has yet to find some ducks with which to prove her capabilities at tolling. Being the only one of her breed domiciled amongst Chesapeake Bay Retrievers and Springer Spaniels, she has

Left: Nigel and Flora, the first imports. Sadly, Nigel will not be used in the breeding programme.

quickly absorbed some of their behaviour patterns and has been particularly influenced by a Springer named Fly.

Miss Flack, meanwhile, was realising that importing dogs is not an inexpensive business. With Nigel gone, it was essential another male be found, therefore she wrote to her nephew David, in Nova Scotia to make enquiries. He made a remarkably inspired move by contacting Avery Nickerson, doyen of the breed, who keeps a flourishing kennel of 17 adults under the 'Harbour Lights' affix.

NOVA'S JOURNEY

In January 1989 Miss Flack flew out again to see what Mr. Nickerson had to offer and bought a two and a half year old dog named Duke who was released from quarantine on 31 July. Whilst at Avery Nickerson's, Miss Flack was offered an exciting opportunity to make dramatic strides with numbers in the breed. Mr Nickerson owned a bitch, famous in her own country, and behind almost all the best stock of the last few years, she was Harbour Lights Nova and then aged seven years. Avery suggested he mate her to one of his males and send her over in whelp, on the agreement that after rearing the litter she should return home. In due course she flew out to England and her trip was even more eventful than that of Nigel and Flora. On being taken off the plane, her travelling crate was found to be upside down. She was taken straight to Overhill where she prematurely whelped a litter of seven, two of which were dead at birth with another dying soon afterwards. This left two dog puppies and two bitch puppies which Miss Flack hopes to register with the Lyonhouse affix.

Below: One of the puppies is passed to Miss Flack for inspection.



Above: The first generation born in the UK - quite a handful.

None of the Nova Scotian's will live with Miss Flack as the two cats are rather possessive of their territory, but she is most impressed with the dogs' temperament and particularly their excellent reactions to children from whom they seem to learn very quickly. This means that all the adults and puppies will be placed into homes where Miss Flack can keep watch over them. She is not pressing to form a breed club, feeling it will form itself when it is needed, and when numbers are sufficient. Currently the breed is on the Import Register with the Kennel Club, and Miss Flack hopes they will be accepted into the gundog group.

LITTLE RIVER TOLLER

But what of the breed itself? This is a registered breed in Canada and was developed to work the abundant water fowl and upland bird terrain of western Nova Scotia. Originally titled 'Little River Toller', it is the only Canadian bred dog. It is a compact breed, red in colour, with a bushy tail reminiscent of the fox, and which it uses in water as a rudder to aid swimming. Specimens usually have a white blaze, white markings on feet, tail tip and chest, though it is not essential. As it must retrieve from Canada's icy waters, it has a double coat of medium length with a soft dense undercoat.

Males ideally will measure 20 inches by the age of 18 months and females 19 inches, though an inch in either direction is never penalised. In weight, adult males will be 50 to 56 pounds, bitches 42 to 47 pounds. This is a medium to heavy boned breed, alert and agile. The head is slightly wedge-shaped with a broad skull,

slightly rounded and a scissor bite with full dentition is required. A soft mouth is essential and the jaw must be strong enough to gently carry a bird. Eye colour blends with the coat, and the expression is alert, intelligent and friendly. The ears are dropped, triangular shaped, set high and well back on the head.

BREED HISTORY

Though the breed has been popular in its native country since the 1840's, they were first registered with the Canadian Kennel Club in 1945. In the 1960's, new bloodlines were developed concentrating on spirit, agility, temperament and a desire to retrieve. The breed is proudly considered, by its devotees, to be comparable to any flushing breed and, as one would expect from its name, it is a natural retriever. Since the early 1980's a number of enquiries has led to the breed making inroads into all Canadian provinces and half the states of America. In Europe they are represented in West Germany, France and now, of course, England.

The manner in which the breed works is for the hunter to be well concealed in a 'blind' as close to the water's edge as possible. A small stick is thrown to left and right of the blind and the dog will rapidly retrieve this. Attracted by the flashes of white, the curious water fowl swim up to investigate when the birds are in range, the hunter will shoot.

Miss Flack hopes opportunities for the breed to work will arise and also that showgoers will take up with the breed. She herself does not intend exhibiting regularly, though Flora was at this year's Game Fair and aroused some degree of interest. Miss Flack says she will be content if, after her efforts to get the breed here, she can see dedicated, enthusiastic people making the best use of them. ●

