

Eduard Karel Korthals and the Wire-haired Pointing Griffon

February 22, 2011, By Ria Hörter, *ARTICLE*, [Breed](#)

If we want to understand the breeding activities of Eduard Karel Korthals (1851-96), we have to imagine that rough-haired gun dogs existed nearly everywhere in 19th-century Europe. It's also important to realize that before 1870, there was no kennel club in Germany.



At that time, there was no uniform definition of rough-haired gun dogs. The people working with these dogs distinguished only two types: those that were useful and those that were not. In France, these rough-haired gun dogs were called *griffon* or *barbet*, in the Netherlands *smousbaarden* or *ruigbaarden*, while in Germany they were known as *stichelhaarige Vorstehunden* (rough-haired pointing dogs).

It is still difficult for German dog fanciers to admit that it was a Dutchman who succeeded in creating a balanced type of dog out of very different types of griffons. Korthals not only created a balanced dog, but a breed that possesses all the abilities a pointing dog should have. In the book *Der vollständige Deutsche Vorstehund Gebrauchshund (The Complete Working German Pointer)*, published in 1888, the author wrote, "We will leave the Griffons and the Water Spaniels unnoticed, otherwise we have to pay attention to the pig as well, because that animal too is trained for hunting poultry." This was the atmosphere in which Eduard Karel Korthals began breeding his ideal type of griffon.

Financial problems

Korthals was born in Amsterdam on November 16, 1851, the son of a wealthy broker and ship owner. As a young boy he moved to the city of Haarlem, where his father owned a country estate, 't Klooster. Eduard's interest in animals and breeding was inherited from his father, who bred cattle as a hobby and introduced the now-famous Lakenvelder breed. It was the only common interest between father and son.

The difference between their hobbies was money; Eduard's hobby – training and breeding gun dogs – did not yield a penny. On the contrary, it cost a lot of money. Young Eduard was not self-supporting and received an allowance from his father of 1,800 guilder a year, which would be about \$25,000 today. Financial problems were the leitmotif in his life; until his death he was dependent on other people for financing his work – first his father, later his friend, Col. Hacke van Mijnden, and finally the German Prince Albrecht zu Solms-Braunfels, in whom he found a kindred spirit.



Ch. Passparout, a Korthals-Griffon belonging to Baron Albert de Gingins d'Eclépens. The Baron was Korthals' successor as chairman of the Griffon-Club, founded in Germany in 1888.

Sometimes it was possible to increase his earnings by training other people's gun dogs, but he never made a fortune.

New approach

In 1874, Korthals bought four griffons from Mr. Amand, a breeder from Amsterdam. Trying to create a stable breed, Korthals had strict requirements in mind for coat, temperament, speed, stature, scenting and hunting abilities. This was a new approach; in those days griffons were known overall as slow dogs, often without sufficient scenting ability. Besides, they varied in appearance and it seemed that "rough-haired pointing dog" was often the only common characteristic. Cooperation with his friend Hacke van Mijnden was of short duration; in 1876, the friendship between the two men broke off. Korthals carried on with five griffons and one *épagneul*.

It is not known exactly when and where Korthals met Prince Albrecht zu Solms. Perhaps it was at the dog show in Amsterdam (1874) or The Hague (1876). At that time, the German prince was already a well known and respected dog fancier and breeder of setters and [Pointers](#) at his kennel Wolfsmühle, in the German city of Braunfels, on the River Lahn. Prince Albrecht invited Korthals to not only put things right in his kennel, but to train his Pointers for the gun. After selling some of his dogs in the Netherlands, Korthals left for Germany, accompanied by five young griffons and a six-year-old Griffon Boulet bitch.

Silesia

His stay with the princely family in Braunfels ended in 1879 when Korthals left for the village of Kunzendorf in Silesia (Poland). We don't know why he chose to live there, but it's possible that his friend Prince Albrecht possessed hunting grounds in the region, the area being ideal for hunting.

In Silesia, Korthals met Mr. R. Winkler, a hunter and gun-dog trainer, and they became lifelong friends. As well as breeding griffons in Silesia, Korthals trained his own and Prince Albrecht's dogs. He felt quite at home in this part of Europe and became one of the founders of the gun-dog society Nimrod. Korthals had organizational skills; in 1874, he was involved in the foundation of the Dutch gun-dog society (also called Nimrod).

Although he arrived in Silesia with five young dogs, Korthals had some breeding difficulties; quite a few puppies in the first litters died. In the end, he owned 14 griffons; nine of them became the cornerstone of the Korthals-Griffon ([Wire-haired Pointing Griffon](#)).

Kennel Ipenwoud

In 1881, Albrecht invited Korthals to leave Silesia and move to the German village of Biebesheim, situated on the River Rhine, where his family owned more hunting grounds. Korthals accepted the invitation, but on the condition that the prince would take care of a house and furniture. The prince agreed and in Biebesheim, Korthals could devote himself to creating his ideal griffon. Today we can hardly imagine such an agreement: a German prince paying for a house and furniture, and it is said that Albrecht shared 50 per cent of the costs of Korthals' breeding. From that day on, Korthals' kennel Iepenwoud, founded in Braunfels, became well known, not only in Germany but abroad.

If you have the impression that Korthals was a peculiar character, living a solitary life and only interested in his own dogs, you are mistaken. Korthals was a high flyer when it came to financing his hobby; he was hospitable to people who shared his passion and ideas and was surely a European *avant la lettre*. Apart from Dutch, he spoke and wrote beautiful German, faultless French and English, and was the author of many incisive articles in various European dog magazines.

First stud book

Korthals started his first stud book in 1872. For 16 years – until 1888 – he registered matings, litters, the names of the puppies, dogs bought and sold and even the names of the people who bought dogs from his kennel. This first stud book is now in the archives of the Dutch Korthals-Griffon Club.

In 1886, he published an article in the German magazine *Unser Hund (Our Dog)*, stating he had succeeded in breeding a stable type of griffon with the necessary hunting abilities. In 1887, the first breed standard was established,

as usual in those days in a protocol, signed by 16 griffon breeders. One of these breeders was an old friend... Albrecht, Prince zu Solms. Long before 1886, however, Korthals was already convinced that he had succeeded in breeding the dog he wanted. He wrote, "Four generations of males are as like as two peas in a pod." It's no surprise that Korthals achieved these "two peas in a pod" through in-breeding, line breeding and very careful selection. In our society it would be unacceptable, but in Korthals' days, it was fully accepted that dogs not complying with the requirements were put down. Korthals bred about 600 pups; only 62 deserved a place in his stud book.

Eight "patriarchs"



Eduard Karel Korthals, photographed in Beibesheim (Germany) with 'Falka,' 'Partout,' 'Nitouche' and 'Batta.' Falka is not known in the breed's history; some of the dogs in this group are offspring of Nitouche. This breed group won first prize at the Flora Exhibition in Berlin (1890); Korthals was awarded the Golden Kaiser Medal.

Thanks to the extensive annotations in his stud book, we can trace Korthals' breeding in broad outlines. Eight animals, chosen by Korthals himself, are known today as the ancestors of the [Korthals-Griffon](#): four dogs ('Janus,' 'Hector,' 'Satan' and 'Banco') and four bitches ('Vesta,' 'Donna,' 'Mouche' and 'Junon').

Korthals described Janus as a barbet and the other seven seemed to differ considerably in appearance; they were of different sizes, colours and coats. None of

these eight dogs was bred by Korthals; the majority had been bought from hunters and foresters. Seven of the eight were of unknown ancestry. So Korthals could not use pedigrees or pictures, but had to trust his eyes and experience.

The Griffon-Club was founded in the German city of Mainz in 1888. In 1889 it was decided at the AGM that only dogs that had a pedigree showing those eight 'patriarchs' on both sides could be regarded as purebred [Korthals-Griffon](#). They began organizing field trials and publishing an official stud book.

Top performance

It was absolutely an outstanding accomplishment to breed a stable type in [Griffons](#) in a relatively short time. Korthals selected very carefully from French, Belgian and German pointing dogs and you have to remember that he had no access to pedigrees or information about Mendelian inheritance. Ideas about genetics and gene pools were still unknown.

The term “wire-haired” (in German, *Drahthaarig*) was invented by Korthals and his opinion about wire-haired dogs was: “A stable rough-haired gun-dog breed with a short wire-haired coat does not exist. In my opinion all rough-haired dogs belonging to the pointing dogs are identical as in aptitude as well in ancestry.”

In 1878, Korthals was present with three dogs at the show in Frankfurt. They were entered as “*Griffon à poil rude*” (Rough-haired Griffon). In the same class were “German Rough-haired Pointers.” Korthals tried to convince the Germans that the French name “Griffon” belonged not to a typical French breed, but to a dog that had the same ancestry as the rough-haired German pointers.

“Griffon” sounds French

Of course Korthals suffered misfortune and opponents, especially in Germany, where he was accused of using English [Pointers](#) in his breeding. He wrote a letter to a French and German dog magazine, strongly refuting the accusations, because his aim had always been to breed pure Griffons. The real reason for the opposition was that the Germans initially did not want to recognize Korthals’ Griffons as a separate breed. The reason is understandable but political: “Griffon” sounds French and recognition was a touchy subject after the Franco-German war of 1870. And above all there was the stubborn but successful breeder who was originally Dutch. The disagreement between the German Club-Stichelhaar (1892) and the Griffon-Club (1888) exercised many minds at the turn of the century.

The stud book, published by the Griffon-Club for many years, was entitled *Stammbuch für Draht-haarige Vorstehhunde (Studbook for Wire-haired Pointing Dogs)*. It was obvious to Korthals that the wire-haired pointing dogs and the Griffon belonged together.

This idea was not always shared by other dog fanciers. The Dutch dog writer Seegers wrote in his *Honden-Rassen (Dog Breeds)* in 1914: “Korthals’ ideal picture was an international dog breed, the Germans on the other hand wanted a national breed and that’s why the Club-Stichelhaar drew the line so narrow.”

Today the Germans take a clement view; in 1997, Gerd Bottler wrote in his book *Deutsch-Drahthaar Heute (German Wire-haired Pointer Today)*: “Korthals was really the first consistent breeder of Wire-haired Pointing Dogs.”

The German dog writer Richard Strebel wrote in 1904-05: “In Germany the Griffons became popular by the breeding of Mr. Korthals (originally Dutch) from Biebesheim.” Popular is not exactly the word. Today about 100 puppies a year are registered in the German stud book. In 1996, Heinrich Uhde wrote that “The [Korthals-Griffon](#) is also known outside Germany, but the breed is relatively rare.”

Eduard Karel Korthals died in Biebesheim in 1896.

A breeder/exhibitor/judge and retired bookseller and publisher, Ria Hörter is a contributing editor of De Hondenwereld, the national dog magazine of Holland.

Originally published in the January 2005 issue of Dogs in Canada. [Subscribe now](#) and never miss an issue.

Photos and Illustration courtesy Ria Hörter.

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