

## PERSBERIG VIR GANSBAAI COURANT

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### PEARLY BEACH BEWAREA – VAN DIE LESSENAAR VAN DIE VOORSITTER, ELRINA VERSFELD

What is an AfriCanis?

Many people consider the homeless stray dogs rescued from townships and informal settlements to be Africanis. However, these unfortunate hounds must not be confused with the “true” AfriCanis. This name is reserved for a special group of southern African dogs that have a common ancestor. They are not considered to be a breed, although the Kennel Union of South Africa has given them the status of an “emerging breed”. Their name is derived from the adjective “African” and the Latin name for dog, *Canis* (referring to the canine “killing” teeth of dogs). Nevertheless, some of the stray dogs of today are bound to share some of the history of this unique canine species. Domestic dogs were introduced to Africa from the Middle East about 7,000 years ago. When the first Europeans (Portuguese and Dutch) arrived in southern Africa, they found dogs living with the resident Khoi, San and Bantu speaking people. From early on, these hounds were considered to be inferior to the dogs from overseas. For the rural southern African people, however, they were an integral part of life. They were used for protection, hunting and companionship. Over the centuries these dogs “bred themselves” without the influence of their owners; they were never bred for their appearance. To this day, therefore, they are robust creatures that are adapted to the natural environmental conditions of Africa. Generally, they are medium-sized with slender bodies, long thin tails, pointed snouts and erect ears. They come in many different colours and colour combinations. In some cases they sport a ridge of hair that grows in the opposite direction from the rest of the fur. The AfriCanis Society in South Africa was established in 1998 to preserve the diversity of this canine species. The society’s objective is to keep these dogs physically and mentally adapted to a place rather than to simply concentrate on preserving one distinctive feature (e.g. the ridge of the Rhodesian Ridgeback, which is also a descendant of the AfriCanis). In its efforts, the society is committed to helping preserve the biodiversity of southern Africa. “Pure” AfriCanis dogs are still found in remote villages of the southern African continent. But perhaps we should stay closer to home and adopt a homeless “Africanis” from a local animal welfare organization, even though it may not be a “true” AfriCanis. We will also be making a valuable contribution to the canine species in South Africa.

Written by Susanne Fuchs

Sources:

Johan Gallant, The Story of the African Dog, University of Natal Press, 2002  
[www.africanis.co.za](http://www.africanis.co.za)

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