

More than a dog's chance: TN focuses on native breeds

A Prathap



**TOP
DOGS**

Some of the native breeds found in TN

RAJAPALAYAM

Also known as Poligar hound, these dogs were companions of royalty. Heavier boned than most sighthounds, they have a strong sense of smell. Bred by Nayakar dynasty, legend has it that once four Rajapalayam dogs protected their master from a tiger in Virudhunagar forest



KOMBAI

Also known as Indian bear hound, they are one of the most ancient guard dog breeds. Earlier found across south India, a pure breed Kombai is a rare find now. It is considered superior to Rajapalayam

SIPPIPARAI/CHIPPIPARA



A type of a sighthound, Sippiparai is said to be a descendent of Saluki. This breed needs no veterinary care but a lot of exercise. It is mainly used for hunting wild boar, deer and hare as it is sturdy and can cope with harsh weather; was a symbol of the rulers of Madurai

KANNI

They are the silent ones. Found in Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Virudhunagar and Tirunelveli districts. Once upon a time it was a practice to gift these dogs to the groom, hence they got the name Kanni, which means virgin



Oppili.P@timesgroup.com

After nearly 20 years, native dogs such as Kanni and Kombai are having their day. They are being raised in the Tamil Nadu animal husbandry department's canine breeding unit in Saidapet.

The only facility in the state, set up in the 1980s, to breed and sell native dogs, helped in the thriving of indigenous breeds but faced problems due to inbreeding along the way.

"Till 1990 the unit was breeding Kanni, Kombai, Sippiparai and Rajapalayam dog breeds, all of which are native to Tamil Nadu, besides a few pedigree breeds," said an official at the animal husbandry department. The department was unable to get a pure breed after 1990, Kan-

ni and Kombai breeding at the unit had to be discontinued." Recently officials decided to focus on breeding only native dog species again. Director of the animal husbandry department

T Abraham told TOI that the move will help protect the native breeds.

"Pedigree breeds at the unit such as Dalmatian, Labrador, Rottweiler and Doberman will be given for adoption soon," he said. A month ago the unit head along with a couple of veterinarians went to Madurai and bought three two-month-old Rajapalayam puppies from a private breeder. Another nine puppies — five Rajapalayam, three Kanni and one Sippiparai — have been bought from different breeders in Virudhunagar district. All these puppies, which are little over a month-old, were brought to the unit in the city on Monday. "Breeder of Kombai species has also been identified and the puppies are expected to be acquired in about a fortnight," said Abraham.

To keep the dogs healthy, the unit has created a fenced play

Indigenous species are better suited to the country's conditions and are easy to maintain when compared to exotic ones

area spread over 5,500 sqft. "Every day around 7.30am the dogs will be released into the play area for an hour to ensure adequate activity," said Abraham.

In the 33 years of its operation, the unit has sold nearly 5,000 puppies to the public. "On an average 150 puppies were bred in the unit and sold," he said. Plans are also afoot to add a couple of more Indian breeds such as Rampur hound and Mudhol hound.

All the native male hounds are priced at ₹1,500 and females at ₹1,250. At present totally the unit houses 24 native dog breeds including 17 puppies.

At a time when the government has banned import of foreign breed of dogs, the revival in interest of indigenous species is natural. Dog breeders say the indigenous species are better acclimatised to the country's weather conditions and are relatively low-maintenance when compared to exotic ones.

