

The Barbet's name, pronounced "bar-bay," derives from its signature chin whiskers, as "barbé" is the French word for beard. Today the breed is a medium-sized water dog of moderate proportions, found in colors ranging from solid black to solid white and a variety of colors in between, including fawns, browns, reds and greys. He'll carry a woolly, curly coat that offers protection against the elements, in particular the frigid waters that may be found during a winter hunt.



Ch. BarbuGaulois ChocoVan is owned by Michel Raymond of Quebec, Canada, who was instrumental in getting the breed recognized in that country and who also bred the first Canadian BIS Barbet, Ch. BarbuGaulois Darwin. Photo courtesy of Judy Descutner.

In spite of its ancient heritage, the Barbet today is a relatively rare breed around the world. Recognized by the FCI and the kennel clubs in Finland, Canada and France, the breed is not officially on the books at the Kennel Club in Great Britain or the American Kennel Club. Although the United Kennel Club in the U.S. has recognized them for more than a decade, even today there are fewer than 90 Barbets in America.

Michelle Steffen of Wisconsin founded the original breed club in America in the 1990s. As with many developing breeds, fanciers have formed numerous Barbet clubs over the years. Today the AKC-affiliated club has only a few members who are interested in actively breeding and showing. Judy Descutner, who belonged to the original club and is now secretary of both the AKC-affiliated parent club and that of the UKC, worked with the health committee of Club Barbet Canada to get the breed enrolled in the Canine Health Information Center. CHIC is the canine health database that is jointly sponsored by the AKC Canine Health Foundation and the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals.