

A 19th Century New Ireland Dog, *Canis familiaris novaehiberniae* Lesson, 1827 and the Status of *Canis hallstromi* Troughton, 1957

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ABSTRACT. Recent literature has usually invoked the name *Canis hallstromi* Troughton, 1957, though with varied taxonomic interpretations, when writing of dogs thought to be unique to New Guinea. The name *Canis familiaris novaehiberniae* was proposed for dogs from the New Guinea region 130 years before Troughton published *Canis hallstromi* but has been overlooked in the recent literature, as has *Canis familiaris papuensis* Ramsay, 1879 from southeastern New Guinea. The taxonomic status of New Guinea dogs remains controversial but if dogs from New Guinea and New Ireland represent a single heterogeneous gene pool, then *C. hallstromi* Troughton and *C. familiaris papuensis* Ramsay would be junior subjective synonyms of *C. familiaris novaehiberniae* Lesson, 1827. Recent studies of New Guinea dogs are weakened by their failure to attend carefully to the history of discovery and nomenclature of these animals.

Introduction

The New Guinea region comprises mainland New Guinea and nearby islands, together with the Bismarck Archipelago (New Ireland and New Britain) and the northwestern Solomon Islands (Bougainville and Buka). European visitors to coastal locations, from as early as 1606, often reported the presence of dogs, their tendency to howl rather than bark, the use of their teeth to make necklaces and the fact that their flesh was eaten (Jukes, 1847; Moresby, 1874–1875; Stevens, 1930; Miklouho-Maclay, 1975). As Europeans commenced exploring inland New Guinea, dogs were commonly reported as village animals and sometimes, particularly at high altitudes above the tree line, as feral or wild-living animals (Morton, 1885; Macgregor, 1892–1893; Murray, 1912; Strong, 1919: 300).

Through the mid- and late 1900s, and the first decade of the 2000s, there have been occasional reports of wild-living dogs from New Guinea, all from high altitudes (Flannery & Seri, 1990; McIntyre *et al.*, 2019). Some authors assert that these wild-living dogs are a unique type that, though at risk of extinction in the wild, survive as a captive population held and bred in the United States of America since the late 1950s (Koler-Matznick *et al.*, 2003, 2007). That interpretation does not acknowledge earlier records of wild-living dogs from low altitudes of mainland New Guinea and from New Britain and the Solomon Islands. Nor does it address the apparent absence of wild-living dogs from low and middle altitude areas that are dominated by rainforest but sparsely populated.¹

The most recent accounts of New Guinea dogs focus on animals either from the USA captive population or from a

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