

Tonggreen Sparrow Boy



Tonggreen Sparrow Boy – Photo: Ann Edman Strander

Tonggreen Sparrow Boy

– a strong influencer!

– Ingemar Borelius



Tonggreen Sparrow Boy – Photo: Ann Edman Strander

Few if any other dogs throughout Flatcoat history has played a role like the one Tonggreen Sparrow Boy did play. He won numerous show awards and at least once being BOB at Crufts. He was bred from at least nineteen times and looking at his lengthy list of highly awarded progeny, as well as winners in the subsequent generations, it's quite obvious that he's made a strong mark in Flatcoat history around the world. The following dogs are all sired by him between 1966 and 1974:

Am Ch, Can Ch Yonday Swagman WC, Int UCh, Nord UCh, SE J Ch Gunhills Galant Girl, Gunhills Gus Guy, GB SH Ch Damases Tara, GB Ch Damases Tarquol of Ryshot, Fenhunter Jack, Black Jock of Wyndhamian, Am Ch Black Jet Of Wyndhamian, GB Sh Ch Tonggreen Song Linnet, GB Sh Ch Vbos Velma, Wizardwood Whimbrel FTW, GB Ch Wizardwood Sandpiper JW, GB Ch Heronsflight Sedge FTA, Int UCh, Nord UCh, GB SH Ch, INT & NORD SH CH Wood Man, Wood Sprite, DK Ch Wood Worker, DK Ch, INT Ch Wood Wind, Gaylaing Wood Hazel, Wood Lass, Penmayne Wood Wave FTA, Am Ch, Ch Fenrivers Kalmia.

Among his grandsons and granddaughters there were numerous champions as well and I doubt there is any other dog throughout the modern Flatcoat history with a similar impact on the show Flatcoat, being multiplied 100 – 200 times in the deep pedigrees of most great show winners today.

I must admit I hadn't seen anything like that, the first time I saw his great son Int & Nord Ch, GB Sh Ch, Wood Man at a Swedish show. He had a star quality that was never seen in a Flatcoat in Sweden before and I'm sure he was more or less unbeaten in the ring, at least with a number of wins on group level. He had an absolutely flat and very rich coat, an excellent overall balance, flowing lines, a lovely short back, a short tail and he was truly medium sized not more than 23 inches (58 cm) at the shoulders. He was a workmanlike, racy, square dog with plenty of space



Wood Man

beneath his legs. Although he had a beautifully shaped head his expression wasn't the truly classical one with his obliquely set eyes.

Although being used quite extensively at stud Wood Man produced few dogs of any significant immediate quality, but to me it's no doubt that he and his father had an immense impact on the conformation of the coming generations. His grandson Latchford Snobben was the first Swedish Flatcoat to win continuously at BIG and BIS level. It's quite obvious as well that he and his father played a strong role behind Almanza Larry O'Grady, although the main influence behind came from the early Swedish imports dominated by the "W" lines. Larry won BIS at the great Stockholm International show 1991, being second in the Dog of the Year competition the same year, becoming the backbone of the Almanza Flatcoats.

I remember that one of the old hands in Sweden said that Colin Wells had turned out to be a commercial breeder when selling Wood Man, a role that was anathema among British Flatcoat breeders at that time. But nothing could be more unfair to that great and most concerned old breeder. I'm sure he could benefit from some extra guineas when he retired from his Headkeeper role at Belvoir Castle about that time. But he considered his son Kenstaff Whipster to be a better dog and I'm sure he was a bit doubtful about Wood Man's somewhat untypical character, being very much stamped by his father. He had a somewhat reserved manner - being very much a one man's dog - that I'd never seen in a Flatcoat before.



Kenstaff Whipster and Woodland Wanderer

Photos: the author

By a sheer coincidence we had bought a son of his (Woodlands Wanderer) without knowing that his father was about to be transferred to Sweden at the same time. He was a perfectly friendly, nice and open-minded dog, showing another side of a character, being typical for many descendants of Sparrowboy; a very soft and placid attitude was, in his case, combined with a strong game sense. I still remember my great surprize when he went underneath and picked a strong diving duck, when taken to a shot the very first time. One of his few daughters won the Swedish Flatcoat Championship.

I could see a significant change in the overall quality of show dogs among the numerous Sparrow Boy descendants, compared with the dogs I saw when I entered the breed in the early seventies. It's no doubt that he contributed to a rapid change when it came to sharp lines, flowing movements, longer and straighter coats and a refined longer cast head, attributes that enables great show winners. Many descendants of his were no doubt a bit over sized, a bit too long-cast, a bit too placid, a bit less energetic and not always with the constantly wagging tail I saw in the early generations. But I presume a very placid attitude is what the average dog owner looks for in a Flatcoat today; a dog that is fairly easy to keep, that doesn't require that much attention and exercise. The ideal pet and show dog for sure but not always with the capabilities that are needed in an ideal working Retriever!

You might wonder why I present this article on a homepage dedicated to the working Flatcoat fraternity. But no matter if Sparrow Boy had his vices as a worker, no matter if he played his major role in the show world, it's no doubt that he had a tremendous impact on the working Flatcoat lines as well. Amelia Jessel's GB FT Ch Werrion Redwing of Collyers, the second last GB FT Ch, was his granddaughter, being linebred two generations back to Sparrow Boy and his litter mate Tonggreen Starling.



Werrion Redwing of Collyers



O'Flanagan Free-as-air, the greatest winner of all times at Swedish Cold Game Trials was his grandson. But in both cases these dogs were heavily linebred to Waterboy as well, the greatest worker that Colin Wells ever owned.

O'Flanagan Free-As-Air

I believe Sparrow Boy could be compared with Teal of Hawk's Nest, when it comes to impact on the working Flatcoat strains. He added softness, a placid attitude and somewhat reserved manners to unknown people, promoting dogs being fully able to focus on the working scenarios in front of them. The overwhelming, constantly cheering Flatcoat character is a bit of a disorder in a working dog and a capacity to ignore other people and dogs at work is no doubt a plus in any working Retriever.



Wizardwood Sandpiper was a show winner and the most highly merited son of Sparrow Boy. He might have had some FT awards, but his sibling Wizardwood Whimbrel was one of the top performers during the seventies.

Nancy Laughton once said... don't line-breed too close to Teal, you'd get lazy dogs unwilling to work. I saw several examples of that and it was definitely the case with Sparrow Boy as well. But again, the keeper owned dog Bridport of Musk, who played such an important role in the working lines was sired by Heronsflight Justice, being the grandson of Sparrow Boy as well as Teal of Hawks Nest. I saw the litter sister of his (H. Jade) in Sweden who was quite uninterested to run for a dummy. I remember seeing Jasper Carrot, sired by Justice, when picking a pup after him. He didn't seem to be that keen on dummies either, but he sired the last GB FT Ch and many other good workers. So as always, the challenge is to find the right balance between the needed placid, soft and attentive attitude and the strong power needed in a dog that is supposed to face any cover and gallop at a good speed all day.



Damases Tarquol of Ryshot was one of several great show winners being sired by Sparrow Boy. He produced seven CC winners and of those Shargleam Blackcap was no doubt the greatest, winning BIS at Crufts in 1980, as the first Flatcoat ever, and being breed record holder until the recent years.

But it's important for a breeder to be aware of the deep influences of different dogs and not the least the ones having impact on practically all modern dogs. Sparrow Boy was such a dog and you have to judge for yourself if it's been for good or for bad. I don't like to see too much of him in any dog and I must admit that I prefer the classical Flatcoat type that the old breeders looked for. I prefer an active truly medium sized working Retriever, rather under than over 58 cm, being built to gallop all day, with a short back promoting a close quartering of the ground and an active tail communicating to me all day.



Black Jet of Wyndhamian was exported to USA by Ed Atkins in a serious attempt to broaden the genepool. She was sired by Sparrow Boy but the dam came from an unmatched outcross line, the Ponsbourne line, bringing in pure working blood from the thirties

I'm sure Sparrow Boy isn't the only one to blame. But looking through the lines below, written by his most concerned owner, Read Flowers, for the Flatcoated Retriever Society yearbook during the seventies, I'm sure he's one of the reasons why many modern Flatcoats, mainly from show lines, are so reluctant to game and sometimes to retrieving in general.

Still looking backward

- by Read Flowers (Fenrivers)

Having reminisced last year about Golden Rod, I thought it might be interesting to provide an owner's view of his son, Ch. Tonggreen Sparrowboy, whose descendants became good winners both on the bench and in the field. He was, of course, bred by Miss Chester Perks, and she drew my attention to him when I went to get my pick-of-litter from the litter by Fenrivers Golden Rod x Tonggreen Swift.

He soon began to win well on the bench but was difficult to train. He showed no great enthusiasm for dummies, had no style, and didn't want to be handled. I took him shooting, hoping that the 'real thing' would start him to retrieve but he had no desire to pick a warm bird. He would walk up to a dead bird, sniff it, and walk away. I tried placing birds in his mouth and he would carry them but lift one on his own - not on your life! I tried the jealousy trick, sending another dog for birds just as he found them, but if other dogs wanted his birds, they were more than welcome. It didn't work!

One day, seeking a bird that had flown away, I sent Golden Rod to hunt the hedge where it was believed to be, and I walked across the field to handle him. I saw the bird lying dead just short of the edge of the field and only a few yards from me. Rod was coming back to me, and fifty yards away, so I tried the jealousy trick once more, sending Sparrowboy forward to find the bird just before Rod reached it. They both reached it together and Sparrowboy was about to turn away when Rod picked up the bird maybe a foot off the ground, and to my surprise dropped it again. Sparrowboy then picked it up and retrieved his first ever warm bird, to great praise. Very luckily, walking back to re-join the guns, I saw another bird lying dead. He made another retrieve, thereafter being little trouble in this department.

He never came to enjoy being handled, though he would stop on the whistle, he would not look at me if he could avoid it, and would stand and sample the wind for minutes.

Eventually he became a useful worker, his forte was hunting in front of the beaters, in sugar-beet and later in the woods. He would hunt closely and never attempted to retrieve a bird unless sent. He won two awards in trials and several C.C.s on the bench but I prefer a happier dog than he was; it makes training so much easier and more enjoyable.

I had a few of his offspring in my kennel for various periods but the one I liked best was Ch. Heronsflight Sedge, bred by Joan Mason, and lining back to Pewcroft Peg on the dam's side.

Sedge had an unlucky start to her life; she got some poison as a youngster and was not fully fit for many months after. When 'right', she was a good looker and managed to win her three tickets. She trained with little trouble and though not sufficiently disciplined for trialling, was an efficient picking-up dog, sensible, fairly steady, quiet and with a good mouth. The best piece of work I saw from her, I think, was once when I was asked to try for a runner in a small bramble wood. I put her in the wind, and she worked the covert down, eventually coming to the ditch on the sunny windward side. She worked this a few yards only, before coming on 'point', when a pheasant flew out. Two yards on, another 'point', another pheasant. Then a rabbit bolted right under her nose. She ignored it, and moved in and picked her runner. A proud moment for me, but no-one else to see it.

On the other hand, there was the time when the pickers-up caught up the shoot in the middle of the drive. Our van stopped on a by-road and the dogs were just unloading with my attention partly on dogs and partly on possible traffic, when 'bang' and a cock fell and ran. Off went Sedge with some zest! It was obviously one of those times when the whistle would be useless, so I kept quiet. She whipped up the cock from under the gun's nose and pausing only to collect another runner on the way back, delivered me two live birds. All the party saw that performance, and I took some ribbing for a week or two. This last masterpiece occurred at a time when Sedge was in-whelp, and discipline consequently slightly relaxed. She was quick to realise that when I was in an 'easy' mood, she could get away with it.

Sedge, was bred twice, to Claverdon Gaff both times and these matings gave me Fenrivers Ling and Fenrivers Nuphar. Ling was a wonderful dog to train and a good looker. He won two CC's and an All Aged Stake before going blind at four years old, when he had to be put down for his own safety. All the family were checked for P.R.A. but thankfully he was a one-off case. Dr. Barnett told me that his eyes did not show the typical signs of hereditary P.R.A. and I bred the second litter Gaff x Sedge, only after getting his approval.

Ling left me with a daughter, a liver bitch bred by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Forster from Windgather Delia of Wizardwood and named Wizardwood Brown Owl. She was a well balanced one, with particularly good bone and feet: She took a long time to become useful at work being in temperament something like Sparrowboy. I recall one particular problem I had with her. Having taught her to 'sit' at a distance by that command, a whistle and raised hand, in due course I prepared to teach her to handle sideways and back. She soon learned to go left and right as directed but appeared to be completely unable to move back from me. The more I insisted the more she would cower down, and she was obviously very scared. I was obliged to give up this exercise until we had both recovered from our disagreement.



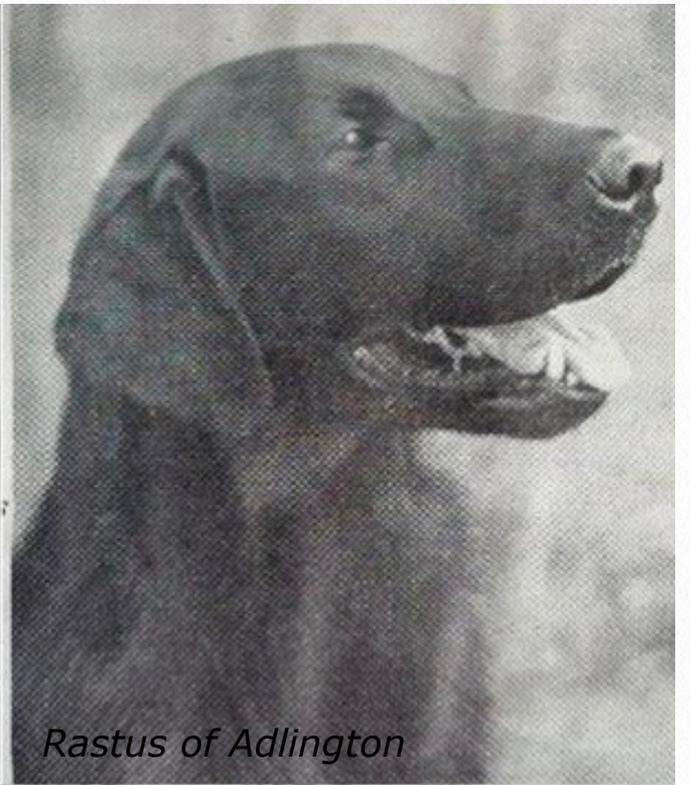
Wizardwood Brown Owl with her owner

Thinking about the problem several days later, the penny dropped with a clang that really shook me. Of course, it was rank bad handling that had caused her such confusion. I was trying to 'push her back' with my raised hand, and the command 'get back' which sounded like 'sit back' to the dog. Fresh from the kennel and in a happy mood, I put her at sit, threw a dummy and backed off a few yards. The command was 'back, fetch it". It worked, and we were over that barrier.

To help in future handling, I like to feed my pups for a few days by hand, having meat cut small, and throwing it on short grass. I find they soon watch my hands and look for a titbit in the direction the hand indicates. One pretty bright pup learned the first evening to go left and right and I threw a couple of pieces over his head to go 'back' for, later thinking I had been a fool to complicate the first lesson and resolving to stick to left and right for a few more evenings, until he was fool proof at that. The very next night, in the middle of training, someone called me on the telephone. I didn't quite hear what was said and raised my hand to request a repeat, upon which the pup whipped round and looked back from me. Fortunately, I had a piece of meat ready to throw, so he was not disappointed. Again, I had misjudged a dog's ability, but it's generally best to train one step at a time and get it right before moving on.



Kala Rat of Adlington



Rastus of Adlington



Pewcroft Plug

Sparrow Boy had six lines back to the interbred Pewcroft Plague mainly via the litter mates Pewcroft Plug and Pitch, going back to the Adlington dogs on the sires side. I presume that his beautiful head was strongly influenced by the Adlington dogs.