The sable Shepherd - "A museum piece"?

Especially in the southern European countries the sable shepherd is not particularly popular, especially among breeders of the so called Show Lines. I cannot tell you why this is so. Still, I would like to try to get rid of some of the prejudices.

My aim is not to turn every reader of these lines into a passionate fan of sable dogs in half an hour. I want to try to explain, in an understandable way**, why and how to use the hereditary qualities of the sable dog in your breeding program** in a sensible and clever way.

Before getting to the actual point, here is a little theory first.

Under the chapter characteristics of the German Shepherd dog we find the following descriptions of the permitted colors:

Black with red-brown, brown, yellow to bright gray marks. Black uni-color, gray, darkly clouded over, black saddle and mask. Inconspicuous, small, white chest marks, as well as bright colored insides are allowed but not desired. The nose has to be black for dogs of all color variations. Missing mask, bright or even piercing color of the eyes as well as light or whitish marks on the inner sides, bright claws and a red tip of the tail are to be assessed as pigmentation weakness. The under-wool shows a light gray color. The color white is not permitted.

I don’t want to get deeper into the genetic basics of these colors. This can be studied in publications like for example "Schleger".

In this article I will refer to the black and yellows, black and reds or black and browns as black and brown to keep things simple.

The sable color is described differently from different points of view.

All of the following variations are to be considered as "sable", whereby more or less bright cheeks and bright inner marks all count to this "sable".

Sable color

- Gray (Wolf)

- Gray-black

- Black-gray

- Gray-brown

- Gray-yellow

- Gray, darkly cluoded over

- Gray clouded, mask

- Dark gray, mask

- Gray, brown-black clouds

- Gray-brown with black marks on the legs and toes

- Gray, brown marks on the head and legs, mask

- Dark gray, dark line on the middle of the back (Aalstrich)

- Middle gray

- Bright gray

- Pale gray

Up to middle gray all variations are desirable and not to be penalized, except for bright cheeks and pronounced paleness on parts of the legs.

Trying to diversify these color variations will probably lead to many different opinions-as far as the descriptions is concerned. The official, listed variations of the sable color can be found on the German pedigree.

The original color categorization made when the dog is tattooed often seems to be incorrect when you see this dog three years later.

An Example:

The gray-bright yellow dog with a dark line on the middle of the back has turned into a deep dark-gray-brown dog. And vice versa, the dark-gray-brown dog has turned into a gray-yellow dog.

This development, which at first sight is not evident, (seems hard to believe) is not so rare after all.

It is certain, that as a rule of thumb, a sable develops his final color up till the age of three.


Based upon my experiences as a breeder, I believe that one can say that the extend to which the mask or the pigmentation of the outer ear is pronounced or not, can be indicative for the extend of pigmentation the sable dog will have as an adult.

In this correlation, one can ask the question:

When is a dog sable?

As a matter of principal, the sable color of a dog is determined directly after birth. At that very moment, it is defined if a dog is black, black & brown, or sable.


This is what the pups will look like later.


I am often asked where the sable color comes from on an adult black & yellow dog with no solid black saddle.

This is not a sable dog, he just doesn’t have a solid black saddle.

It is a fact however, a gray & yellow dog as a puppy is sometimes hard to distinguish from a black & yellow one that doesn’t have a solid, closed black saddle.

In no way, can we now start correcting the original color of this dog on the pedigree and turn him into a sable dog because he will never be a sable.

Therefore, he will not be able to improve pigmentation either.

This brings up the following question:

Does a sable dog really improve the pigmentation?

One really should not believe that sable dogs can do miracles to the pigmentation, especially in a population where for decades, the black & brown to red or the bright yellow dog was preferred.

This can not be done in one single step or only to a very limited extend.

In certain cases some fast changes can be brought about by a sable dog. More about that later.

Both color variations, black & brown as well as sable, have one thing in common:

When they are multiplied <u>among each other</u> without consideration or target, more or less pronounced color reductions will appear in <u>both cases</u>.

The brightening will be more pronounced in the case when the natural effect of the Mendel Laws will make a heavily frequented dog appear as a brightener, although he doesn't necessarily have to be a clear or bright colored dog himself.

If after the 3rd or 4th generation of sole black & brown breeding, a sensible gray combination is made, or the other way around, if after several generations of purely sable cross-breedings a black & brown combination is made, **no loss of pigmentation** will occur.

People often say that **a well pigmented black & brown animal, who in his turn, has one sable parent, produces a better pigmentation for both the sable as well as for the black & brown offspring.**

Or that: **sable combined with sable always gives a brighter, clearer sable.**

As far as my own personal experience goes, this is basically correct. But the line of succession, cannot be assessed in such a general, overall way. It is not true either that in a population, where 95% is black & yellow, the sable factor will become insignificant in the genetic material. The contrary is true.

Because of the consecutive black & yellow sequence of the breedings, a so called consolidation will occur, i.e. a compression or a condensation of the black & yellow alleles, a certain condition of the gene, which is comparable to a intensive inbreeding involving several generations and thus will have a negative influence on the vitality of the alleles. (here: pigmentation will decrease)

The sable gene cannot loose intensity or brighten in this case because it is not being challenged in these black & yellow combinations.

Therefore the transmission of the pigmentation underlies certain rules, in a similar way as the transmission of long coat. If a homozygous partner in black & brown (if such a dog exists at all) is combined with a homozygous sable partner, the color of the offspring would be in-between the color of the parents. Theoretically, we would find pups with the following colors: Gray-brown, gray-black, gray-brown or gray-black clouded over.

As I indicated before, I do not know of any dog that evidently has dominantly passed on his black & brown color to more than 100 of his offspring, of course in a combination with a sable partner.

Also the dominantly producing sable dog (I personally don't know any) would pass on his color or his color variation "sable" to all of his offspring, including the pups stemming from a black & brown – sable combination.

The dog that dominantly produces sable does have one huge advantage, he is homozygous for shorthair,

this means, he does not produce long coats at all. If a dominantly producing sable dog would be known nowadays, he would certainly present a way to at least restrict the problem with long coats on a short term.

Nobody has to fear now being restricted to the sable color for the rest of his life once he has used a sable animal.

The hereditary transmission of the sable color is dominant, not recessive:

This means, and this is absolutely certain:

Only when at least one of the parents is sable itself, a sable pup can be born.

Only black & brown pups can be born when both parents are black & brown: No matter how many of their ancestors were sable.

If in a litter like this, a sable pup is born, we can be assured that a sable parent was directly involved.

THIS IS 100% CERTAIN!

On the other hand, black & brown pups, or even black pups can be born in a sable – sable combination. This too, isn't so rare at all because the black & brown color as well as the black color is ***recessive***.

Example:

No one who is planning to use a sable male or female for breeding will be condemned to the sable color for the rest of his breeders life. I deliberately say this in such a provoking way, since very often this is the main argument against the use of sable dogs in breeding.

If a black & brown female is bred to a sable male or vice versa, the litter will statistically consist of an average 50 % of sable and 50 % of black & brown pups.

If this same breeder will continue to breed the black & brown dogs from this litter, -maybe because he simply doesn’t like the sable color- and combine them with other black & brown dogs**, the offspring will never be sable again.**

The advantage of the single use of a sable dog is the quick improvement of the pigmentation in comparison to the parental generation.

Unfortunately, I have often observed people taking the wrong path.

The breeder with an extremely bright colored female is thinking about his last chance, **-maybe a sable dog can do the trick-** and this sable dog is expected to cure all of the problems that this breeder has neglected for many, many preceding generations.

His females predominantly have.....

- Bright claws

- No pronounced mask

- Red tip of the tail

- No solid black saddle

- Bright eyes

- Bright lips, bright gums

- Bright cushions underneath the paws, in summer too

- The upper part of the head is missing black

- White hair in the ears

- Bright inner sides

- very often, all these problems are combined in one single female -

And now this breeder thinks,

Abracadabra – a sable male –

and everything will be all right!!

Sometimes it works, but only sometimes.

And it is often these breeders that say:

Sable is supposed to improve pigmentation?? – Nonsense!!

Nobody has ever been able to write the secret formula for good pigmentation. The sensible use of sable dogs certainly is a way.

If we want to improve pigmentation we have to pay attention to the practical hereditary transmission which has to be defined. There are several different alternatives, if we have statistical record of how the animal involved produces.

We have the following alternatives:

To improve or reinforce the pigmentation of a black & yellow dog we can follow two paths.

1. We breed this black & yellow female (with low pigmentation factor) with a sable dog or with a black & brown male with a strong pigmentation with ancestors that demonstrably stem from generations consisting of alternating sable and black & brown combinations.

These dogs are most certain to improve pigmentation

For the hereditary transmission, it is irrelevant whether it is the female or the male that has the sable or the black & brown color. The litter with the sable sire, will presumably consist of sables and well-pigmented black & brown pups. The litter with the black & brown sire will consist of black & brown pups only, of course.

A sable partner, bred purely sable over several generations (either on the paternal side or on the maternal side) will produce a less pronounced pigmentation in his sable offspring as well as in his black & brown offspring.

If we were to breed a black & yellow female (with low pigmentation) with a homozygous sable (AA), i.e. a male that dominantly produces sable, we would get only sable pups in different sable variations. On average, theoretically, 50% of them would be homozygous for sable and 50% would be heterozygous (AB). Since it is our aim to improve the black & yellow color, we could now theoretically combine this sable offspring (heterozygous) with a black & yellow partner. This supposed detour is very troublesome but gives us the advantage of having a wider choice of sable animals available for breeding.

Nowadays, this second way is certainly only a theoretical one, since there is no existing male (at least that I know of) that dominantly produces sable.

The attempt to try to breed a dominantly sable producing dog (homozygous for sable) would be of highest interest to me. If as a result, this dog would not be frequented because the prejudices against the sable color still prevail, this would be a rather frustrating situation, for me too.

The interested breeder will probably ask the question where the purely sable producing dog received his genetic material. In order to determine that, we don’t have to go back in time a long way if the parents are sable and split producers as far as color is concerned. Consequently, only the first possibility comes into question (Illustration NR. 1), whereby 25% of the offspring is homozygous for sable.

Die Vererbung der grauen Farbe:

Folgende Paarungen sind möglich:

1. Vater (spalterbig) Grau in Variationen — Mutter (spalterbig) Grau in Variationen oder schwarzbraun

Kinder:

25 % reinerbig grau wolfsgrau — 50 % spalterbig grau in Variationen — 25 % reinerbig in schwarzbraun untereinander

also 75 % grau

2. Vater (dominant aus der Statistik) Grau (wolfsgrau) — Mutter schwarzbraun

Kinder:

50 % reinerbig grau (wolfsgrau) — 50 % spalterbig grau in Variationen

alle Kinder grau

3. Vater (dominant wolfsgrau) — Mutter (dominant wolfsgrau)

Kinder:

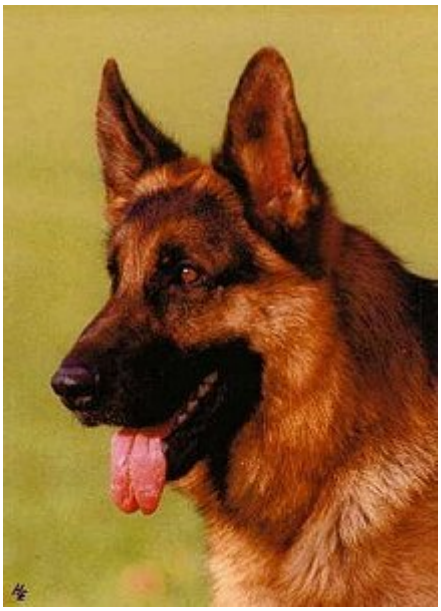
alle 100 %ige reinerbig wolfsgrau dominant

Here is an example from my own experience.

My very own male "Flick von Arlett" –himself not being sable- has proven with the appearance of his four progeny groups, to transmit, almost dominantly, his pronounced pigmentation, especially on the head. This ability to bring about a clear improvement of pigmentation even with the most lucid female, can be attributed to his sable ancestry on the maternal side.

Yago v. Wildsteiger Land	Eiko v. Kirschental	Uran v. Wildsteiger Land	Irk v. Arminius
			Palme v. Wildsteiger Land
		Xitta v. Kirschental	Lasso di Val Sole
			Nimi v. Kirschental
	Quina v. Arminius	Xaver v. Arminius	Lasso di Val Sole
			Wilma v.d. Kisselschlucht
		Palme v. Wildsteiger Land	Nick v.d. Wienerau
			Fina v. Badsee
Ursa von Arlett	Joker v. Arlett	Uran v. Wildsteiger Land	Irk v. Arminius
			Palme v. Wildsteiger Land
		Katze v.d. Wienerau	Canto v. Ammerlandeck
			Era v.d. Wienerau
	Medea v. Aducht	Aramis v. Allamo	Quai v.d. Boxhochburg
			Moni v. Haus Eyll
		Wilma v. Patersweg	Igor v. Hylligen-Born
			Gitta v. Patersweg

Due to the fact that this male is black & brown, he (just like any other black & brown male) can only produce sable offspring in combination with a sable female. As long as he combined with black & brown females he can only produce black & brown offspring. Even when bred in to sable ancestors.



So for the breeders who absolutely don’t want to use a sable dog, this is the way to improve the pigmentation of their breed by using a sable female. (or in this case one of her black & brown descendants).

A necessary condition is of course that this sable female stems from proven alternating combinations between black & brown and sable animals.

These are three males sired by Flick out of three females with totally different pigmentation.

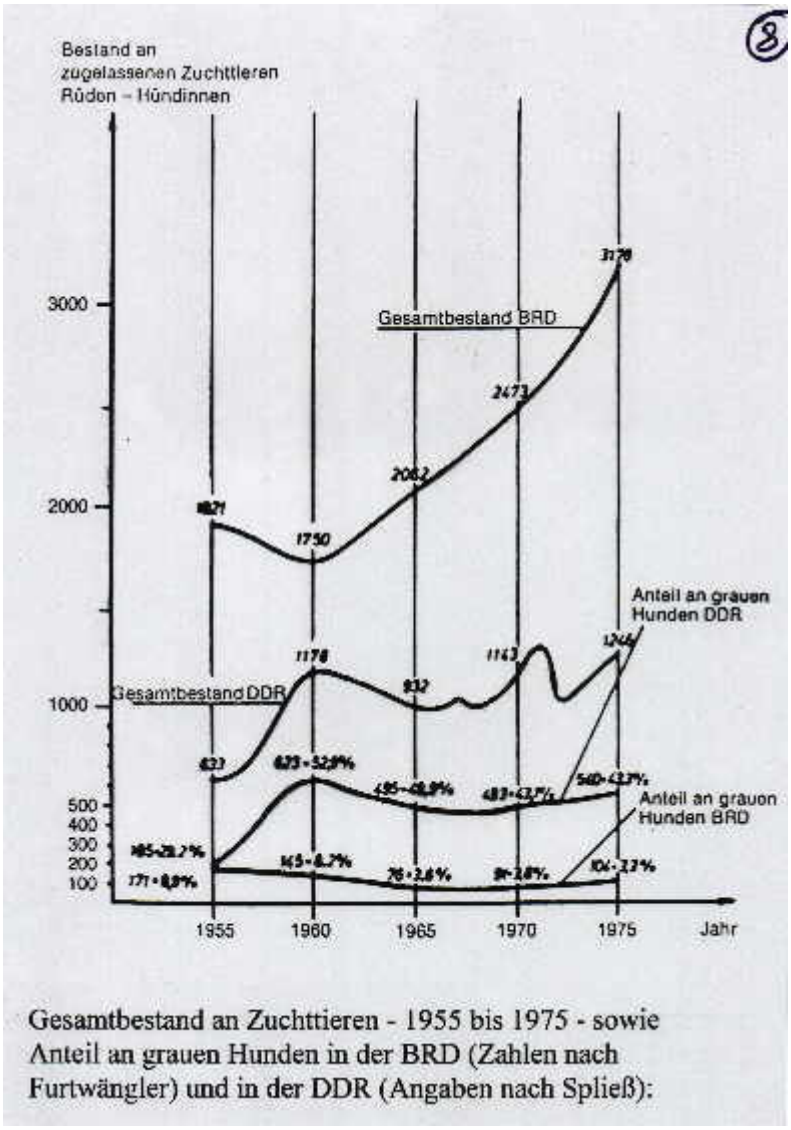
1. The dam was clear.

2. The dam had a normal pigmentation.

3. The dam had a very good pigmentation.

These are three examples where the dam has not transmitted her pigmentation. Here you can clearly see how the dam’s pigmentation is being dominated by the sire.

Here, I would like to show you a few statistics in correlation with sable Shepherd Dogs.



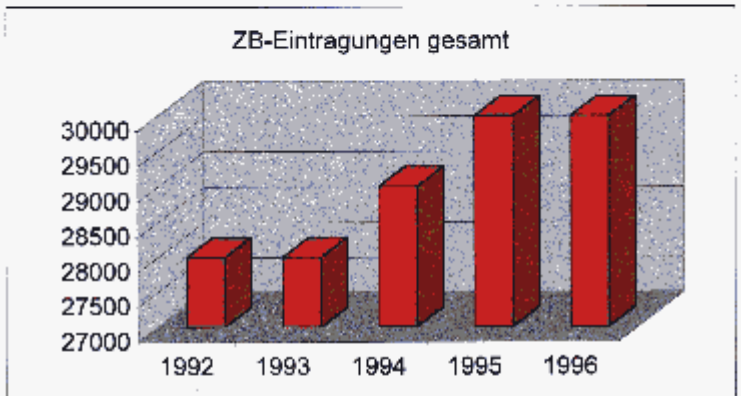
Gesamtbestand an Zuchttieren - 1955 bis 1975 - sowie Anteil an grauen Hunden in der BRD (Zahlen nach Furtwängler) und in der DDR (Angaben nach Spließ):

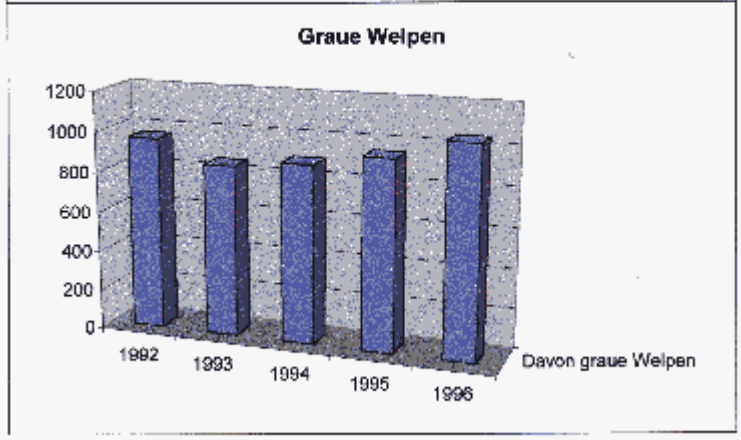
This graph shows us the total number of breeding animals for a period of twenty years as well as the quota of sable dogs. The comparison between the former East- and West Germany is striking.

Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde (SV) e.V.

ANTEIL DER GRAUEN WELPEN AN DEN ZUCHTBUCHEINTRAGUNGEN

	ZB-Eintragungen gesamt	Davon graue Welpen	in %
1992	28000	962	3,44%
1993	28000	854	3,05%
1994	29000	890	3,07%
1995	30000	949	3,16%
1996	30000	1048	3,49%

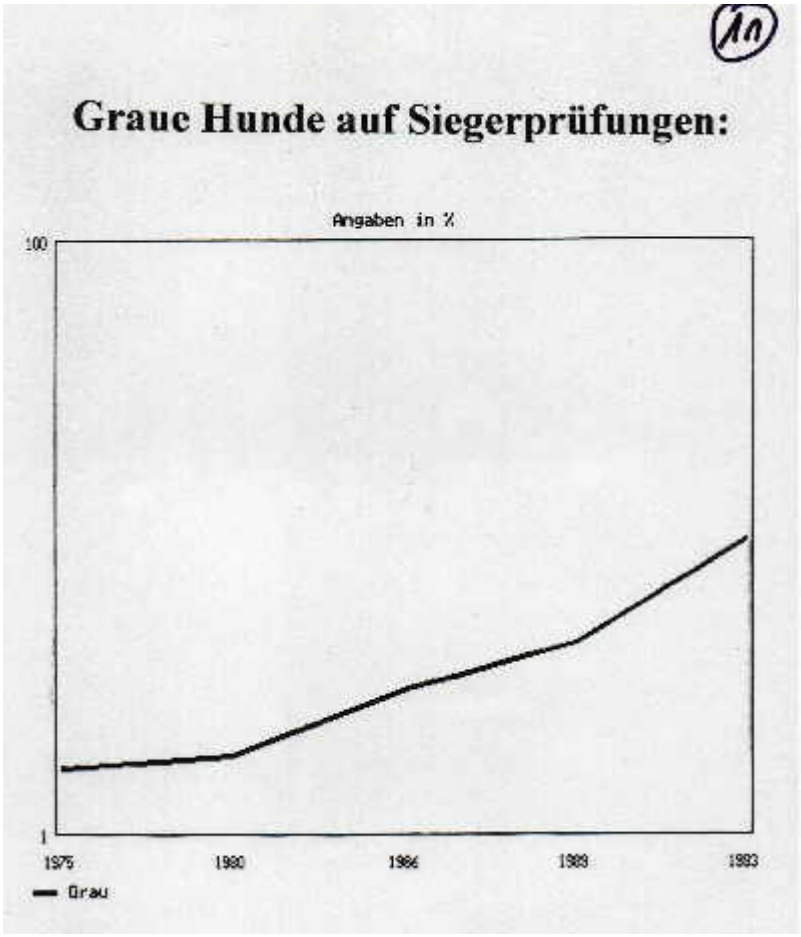




Erstellt von: SV / GS / GO40 Graue Welpen Erstellt am: 17.12.1996

This graph shows the share of sable pups in the total number of dogs registered in the Central Breeding Files (Zuchtbuch) of the last five years. Even if the percentage of sables is slightly increasing, the absolute figures are extremely small. In comparison to 1992 there has been an increase in 1996 of only 80 sable pups. (We have to keep in mind that these numbers have been established using only the distinction of the color gray. The sable varieties have not been taken into consideration but will be corrected in foreseeable time)

This graph shows the number of sable dogs that have been presented at breed surveys during the time span from 1972 until 1992. In my opinion, the large increase from 1990 to 1991 is a result of the opening of the former East German borders. Even at the peak level the number is still below 20%. As an average, the number of sable dogs at breed surveys is at approximately 5%.



This of course is a miscorrelation to the total number of registrations in the Central Breeding File that could theoretically lead to the following thesis:

Sable dogs are more resistant to strain than black & brown dogs.

Which brings us to the next topic of incitement :

There have always been and there will always be discussions about the value or the non-value of the color in correlation to the working qualities.

I think it is basically wrong that sable dogs are more resistant to strain than black & brown dogs.

I think that the higher number of sable animals in the working sector – I would prefer to call it sporting sector- perhaps has the following reason:

For those in the working dog area, the color is basically not a selection criteria. The selection of the dog –if the color was to play a role at all- was usually based upon the following philosophy:

If the well-known dog-owner John Smith and the also well-known Jack Brown have both been very successful with a sable dog, this will bring about a spiral movement.

If these dogs really have the potential to become high performance working dogs (– this has to be fixed in their pedigree over several generations –) then these animals will be increasingly used for breeding. The breeder as well as the buyer of the pup will of course prefer the sable pups that have a strong resemblance to their sire.

A similar movement was brought about by Bodo and Bernd vom Lierberg. These dogs were well-known VA's (conformation) that have produced a number of high performance working dogs.

The fact that the color doesn’t have an influence on the number of points that can be won on working dog trials, has certainly contributed to the lack of prejudices against sables among breeders of working dogs.

From my experience I can add a few remarks about qualities that **could** possibly be related to the sable color.

I want to stress that these are not statements that have generally been proven to be valid nor have they been scientifically researched or examined. (as far as my knowledge goes)

I have been breeding actively since the year 1978 among others with sable dogs. My basic selection criteria for my pups absolutely exclude the color (the choice between sable or black & brown)

When deciding which pups from a litter to keep, I prefer pups with the following qualities in the following order of priority:

Selection criteria

- High vitality

- Good playing drive

- Temperament

- Good Shepherd Dog expression

- Strength and substance

- Harmonious movement

- Good transmission over the back

- Color?????? Or rather: pigmentation

Those peculiarities that I have noticed in over twenty years of breeding experience and that **could eventually** be related to the sable color, start at the birth.

At this point, I would like to encourage the readers to exchange experiences if they coincide with mine.

Once again, I must stress that I am referring to my own personal experiences only made with dogs from my own personal breeding stock.

Peculiarities seen with sable pups as opposed to black & brown pups:

The weight at birth is usually on average a little higher than the black & brown pups.

Clearly higher vitality.

Lower mortality during the first ten days.

Higher weight when tattooed.

Less heat sensitivity for pups as well as for the adult dogs on shows as well as on working dog trials.

Lower susceptibility for rashes.

I have never observed bright claws.

More often black spots on or below the tongue.

I have never observed bright lips or gums. White hair in the ears is extremely rare.

Almost all sable females and many black & browns stemming from sables, additionally feed their pups out of their own stomach (throwing up food) in a rather pronounced way.

Now a few other points where I have not observed any difference between the colors –again, only from my experience-

No difference in:

- Duration of life span

- Susceptibility for disease

- Working ability

- Resistance to strain

<u>To come to an end, here is a popular way to seemingly improve the color and Pigmentation in a way that is less time consuming</u>

Again and again one can observe that a few, but very "clever" breeders have their own way of improving pigmentation by using achievements of the chemical industry in a refined way.

I have to admit that it is not always easy to recognize these manipulations at first sight. Apparently there are a few true "experts" in this sector too.

The personal disappointment is that these breeders obviously do not recognize their own "Dead End Street" and apart from that, seem to have forgotten (or maybe suppressed) the true color of their dogs when selecting a breeding partner.

These manipulations sometimes do not just implicate a single animal. When a highly frequented stud dog is involved, it is a big irresponsibility and a great long term damage to the whole race.

Perhaps these breeders should consider using a breeders natural means of improving pigmentation.

Wouldn’t it be a great pity if the sable German Shepherd would wither away in the second age of it’s existence to become a "Museum piece"?

The "sable" Shepherd deserves acceptance!

.....not only for his qualities as an improver of pigmentation!

Color diversity means genetic diversity!

genetic diversity means vitality and fitness!

I am interested in opinions, questions, comments, experiences and so on about this topic and maybe some other lovers of the sable color are interested too.

Please write your comments in the guestbook or send an e-mail to vandorssen@arlett.de