

Views From Breeders Around The World

Aya Lundsten - Geijes, Finland

1. What first attracted you to ISCWT? How many years have you been involved with the breed? Are Wheatens your original breed?

My grandmother, Eva Corander, imported the first ISCWT to Nordic countries from Ireland in 1963, so I've grown up with the breed. Our first wheaten, Geijes Wheaten Crecora, was born in 1966, but she was never able to have a litter. Sometimes I wonder how our wheaten breeding would have gotten started if things had gone differently.

Together with my sister, Mia, we have continued breeding in Kennel Geijes. We also breed Kerry Blue Terriers, but we have divided the breeds between us, one breed per sister. I bred my first litter in 1986. I consider it my calling to preserve the wonderful Irish Wheaten Terrier in the most original form I can.



2. In your opinion which is the best wheaten owned or bred by you?

I have never bred the perfect dog, and I never will. However, I do currently have a wheaten that, in my opinion, moves the way I think a Wheaten should. The dog also has a remarkably good temper. He is not well known, as he is not trained enough for shows – Geijes Doffen. Geijes Kilmore is the dog that put the Irish Wheaten Terrier back on the map here in Finland; a lucky occurrence in my first litter, with an owner who was absolutely incredible.

My interest in shows is very diminished, so I will never be presenting any successful dogs in that respect. But I am happy to show my dogs to judges whose opinions I value.



Geijes Kilmore



Geijes Doffen

3. Other than those you have been personally involved with, which two or three Wheatens would you describe as the best ones you have seen and why?

I will never forget Newkilber The Quiet Man. He was standing on his toes constantly, and I suppose one could call him the love of my youth.



Newkilber The Quiet Man

Holmenocks Honeybee holds a special place in my heart as well. She used to play “the floor is lava”, and jump from one piece of furniture to the next, by way of a flowerpot or two. She was living in Germany when I was staying there. I had the honour of having her join me in Finland later on, but unfortunately she never delivered a litter here.



CIB Geijes Kilmore & CIB Holmenocks Honey Bee BOS & BOB under Gitta Ringwall, Finland 1990

Another special dog is Ballysax Betsy, who started out as an ugly duckling and grew into a very well-formed dog. What these dogs have in common is that they were all what I consider to be the absolutely correct type of Wheaten, which is always a priority for me.



4. What kennel within or outside of the breed has impressed you and why?

My grandmother, Eva Corander (1900-1980), the founder of Kennel Geijes (1943) was of course the first person who told me what the breed should be like, and what traits were not desirable. I also had the good luck of working as a kennel girl when I was a teenager for Margret Möller-Sieber and Gerhard Möller at Kennel Wheaten Rebel's when they were starting their breeding in Germany. At the time, they were absolutely devoted to the correct Irish type of Wheaten, and I learned a great deal. Our views on the breed today are very different. I have met most of the dogs that are the foundation for today's European wheatens.

I have also had the honour of knowing Maureen Holmes of Kennel Holmenocks – initially via letters, and later in person. I will never forget our conversations. We had a special relationship, as she already knew my grandmother and she had been the one who sold her the dogs that lay the

groundwork for our breeding at Kennel Geijes.

Today, I think Louise Borst-Borreman of Kennel Brugh Na Boinne has the most historical knowledge concerning the breed. She has seen many dogs, and is familiar with much of the breeds history. Her knowledge of the wheaten's build is worth its weight in gold. Unfortunately, she is no longer active as a breeder, but in my view that only makes her point of view on the breed even more objective.

It is definitely beneficial to have a sister who is involved with a different breed with the same origin – our discussions on the topic can become very heated!

I'm very eager to ask questions of breeders of other breeds whenever I have the opportunity, and usually they consider me a very curious character for doing so. I enjoy studying pedigrees from other breeds, and learning about different breeding strategies that people have. It's surprising how often people don't seem to have a set strategy or plan at all!

5. If you could incorporate just one dog from the past, into your breeding programme, who would it be and why?

It's impossible to pick just one dog from the past. No single dog should be that important for the breed as a whole; the breed should be built by as many individuals as possible. In the past I have had dogs that I should have used for breeding when I was starting out as a breeder, but that I overlooked at the time because of e.g. their hips, or because they had never been to shows. I now regret that immensely. Today, I use dogs that I personally think should be part of the breed's future, regardless of what others might think. It is impossible to preserve dogs that have gone unused, but it is easy to not breed offspring that follow.

I believe shows have become much too important, and it has led to some dogs being used too often – show ribbons are no guarantee that a dog will be good for breeding. After nearly 50 years with the breed, I think I can claim to have gathered enough knowledge to be able to make good choices regarding combinations.

What is most important is using as many different individuals as possible to ensure a healthy gene pool. It is also what makes it so exciting and rewarding to be a breeder.

6. Who has been your greatest mentor in the breed?

A combination of the breeders I mentioned in question 4. I'm grateful and I feel privileged at having had the opportunity to get to know these people. In Finland, the first 20 years of breeding were, for me, a constant struggle for the existence of the Irish Wheaten Terrier. I was not supported by the club or by other breeders, in fact I feel the opposite was more true. Today, there is a handful of breeders in Finland who are striving towards the right goals, and I am very happy for that. In Sweden I have been lucky to know breeders who have given me support and help through the years. But even there, many breeders have not had the tenacity to stick to a steady type.

7. Since you began in Wheatens have you seen many changes within the breed? If yes please explain.

There has been a dizzying amount of changes, for better or ill. When Eva Corander bred her first litter in 1965, the first thick-coated wheaten in Finland was already born in 1971. The thick-coated dog was a result of a combination of two Irish dogs where the sire had a thick coat. Judges were immediately fond of this new type, and so began the fight for the Irish Wheaten Terrier. My grandmother's anger at how this trend changed the breed in our country never abated, and I believe I inherited that same anger.

Towards the end of the 80's and beginning of the 90's, a show might feature 15-30 Wheatens, of which only 2-4 might have an Irish coat. Few judges were interested in ranking the Irish types highly, and the result is easy to guess. This trend continued all the way until the 21st century, when a change suddenly started occurring. Even the breeders that had earlier dismissed my breeding as questionable began buying and breeding the correct type of Wheaten. It is an easy shortcut to take, to pick the fruit of what others have worked to achieve. Today, most breeders are producing dogs with all possible kinds of coat-types, although I am not sure what one wants to achieve with that. What I consider the worst consequence of all this is that a single breeder, participating in a breeder class in a show,

can show dogs of very different types, and still place well.

One can see more dogs with the correct type of coat at shows these days, but unfortunately breeders are still not sticking to a strict type, so the following generation can once again look completely different.

Unfortunately, I don't think this diversity is due to a love of the breed, but rather for a better chance at success in shows. But compared to the 1980's, when less than a litter per year of Irish Wheatens was being registered in Finland, I consider myself to have succeeded in having made sure the correct type Wheaten survives in Finland.

8. Do you believe the quality has improved or declined since you first became involved?

Breeding today is completely different from what it has been before. Back in the day, it was a long process to gain the trust of a breeder, and there were quarantines hindering import and export of dogs. It took a lot of effort, and planning for the future with the material that was available.

The modern world and social media has affected the dog world as well. People are importing, exporting and travelling all over with their dogs, and everyone has access to dogs from all over the world. We think we know people when we read their webpages, or become Facebook friends.

The bright side is that we get to see a lot more dogs (at least in pictures) without having to travel. But can we trust everything we see? Before, inbreeding was all too common within countries, and as restrictions have been lifted, that has become less of a problem.

Unfortunately, that has only been true for a few generations, because breeders have not thought about the future. It is unnerving to see how, suddenly, there is inbreeding going on within whole continents instead of countries, when the same dogs are being used over and over.

9. What in your opinion is the greatest hurdle that is now facing the breed?

I think breeders need to start taking more responsibility. We cannot sell entire litters to different breeders all over the world. We have to work on our own, and build our own lines so that this wonderful breed will persist in the future. We should not be breeding for shows, because that will corner us quickly and diminish our choices. We can't simply be breeding successful showdogs, and we have to have the courage to do what others do not. It will take time, but the result will be the success of the breed.

10. What needs to be done to protect the breed into the future?

Ireland has to also start taking responsibility, and make sure that dogs with disqualifying attributes according to the official breed standard are not able to win prizes in shows. This should be the rule for all FCI countries and it should be followed by all certified judges. In my opinion, at least in Finland, it is not currently the case. As long as incorrect individuals are being rewarded in shows, the breed will not develop in the right direction.