The Sloughi – Slougui – Arabian Greyhound

The Sloughi is not very well known here in the UK, which is a great shame since it can be a wonderful companion, whether for work, home or show. A Sloughi that has been bred and raised correctly is extremely robust in both health and temperament.
The name - Sloughi or Slougui - when written in Arabic, is the same combination of letters as for Saluki or Saluqi with the slight difference in pronunciation (G or K) probably being due to different dialects of spoken Arabic, whether in the Middle East or in North Africa. As far as anybody can tell (although there is no shortage of alternative meanings!), it probably just means sighthound – rather like Lévrier in French, Greyhound in English (not the breed but the type of hound), Tazi in Persian, Galgo in Spanish, or Borzoi in Russian.

For the Arabs in both North Africa as well as Eastern countries, an ordinary dog (especially the village cur) is unclean and beneath notice and known as "kelb", whereas the Sloughi, like the Saluki, is accepted in close contact with humans and known as "El Hor" (noble or pure).

**Origins and history**

The Sloughi is a sighthound, and has always been selected for its hunting ability, speed and stamina over many hundreds of years or maybe even longer, in areas that could be extremely inhospitable and on difficult terrains. It is not one of those delicate flashy hounds with striking appearance, long floating coats and exaggerated shape and movement that seem so popular in today's show-rings – to my mind, the Sloughi's true beauty lies in its overall moderation (of type, colour, coat and movement) and its amazing functionality in all areas of family life.

Although more than likely from the same origins back in early or even prehistoric times, the North African Sloughi and the Eastern/Middle Eastern Saluki have now certainly diverged over the centuries but not so very much that they could be considered completely unconnected breeds. It seems crazy that they should be described as only Salukis in Egypt and Syria for example, but Sloughis in Tunisia and Libya. I also believe that, through the ages, all the different nomadic Arab tribes would have travelled over huge distances (trading routes, hunting trips, etc), together with their families, horses and hunting hounds - not just in local surrounding areas but also right across the whole of northern Africa and the Middle East. So there would have been exchanges of services and goods (including hounds!) with many of the peoples encountered along the way, probably all of them with slightly different versions of the same sighthound type.

Alongside other breeds or types in what has come to be known as the Oriental Sighthound group, the Sloughi is the one found furthest to the West geographically, i.e. across the Maghreb region of North Africa as far as the Atlantic coast. The Sloughi was also seen in Libya and Egypt until relatively recently and seems to overlap with its cousin the Saluki along the eastern borders of its territory and with its other close cousin the Azawakh along a small part of its southern border. In previous centuries or even millennia, of course, the various nomadic tribes had no notion of frontiers or borders as we know them today and must have traversed many of today's different countries in their travels – on hunting trips in different areas, or along the Silk or Salt Roads, for example. Any barriers to circulation or communication of these nomadic peoples and their animals have mainly been created more recently by other humans - such as borders established between different countries, or the Suez Canal, for example.

There are images of these slender drop-eared sighthounds going right back into pre-history with Neolithic age rock paintings and engravings found in various remote areas across northern Africa.

The Sloughi only really began to be known in France from the middle of the 19th century, because of its existence in the French colonies at that time in Northern Africa. However, curiously enough, the first European attempts at breeding were not in France, but in the Netherlands, where the only coat colour that was recognized seems to have been sand with or without black mask. Unfortunately the Dutch Sloughi appears to have completely
disappeared during World War Two. Germany too was quite late on the Sloughi scene with breeding only seriously commencing in the early 1970s.

**Different types for different environments**

To start with, I consider that today's narrow concept of "breed" is very specific to our "Western" civilisation subsequent to the early 1800s. From what I have been able to glean from reading various books and articles, the different types of sighthound (most of which have been turned into separate individual breeds by our Western world) all seem to have many areas of similarity and appear to have developed from one (or possibly more) ancient root stocks - gradually changing or evolving in different parts of the world to meet local conditions (weather, terrain, game to be hunted, and so on) and forming what we in our Western world now call "breeds" such as Saluki, Sloughi, Azawakh, Afghan, Greyhound, Galgo, Tazi, Borzoi, Magyar Agar, Chart Polski, etc.

People living across Eastern, Middle Eastern and North African countries, on the other hand, and continuing to use their hounds for hunting and coursing game, appear to have bred primarily to type and performance - they were not looking for a static picture postcard of a dog for the show-ring, but a functional hunting hound that would look good, could perform well and catch them their supper. Obviously they would not be mixing true sighthounds with herding or street dogs but on the other hand I don't think they would have been unduly bothered by minor visual aspects of conformation, coat or colour, except maybe in terms of personal preferences, provided a hound had what they themselves considered to be the proper characteristics of a Sloughi.

The Sloughi's type, colour and height all tend to vary not only from country to country, region to region (mountainous, desert, local preferences, etc…) but also in line with whatever species of game that its owners intended to hunt with it (hare, fox, jackal, gazelle, boar, wolf, etc…) as well as gradual changes over the decades or centuries in the flora and fauna of individual regions. Unfortunately for the Sloughi, the three countries where today it is still present in reasonable numbers (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) were forced to adopt certain French laws during their colonization, including one in 1844 which banned all hunting with hounds that hunted by sight (live coursing in other words). This led to the Sloughi being systematically decimated by soldiers and European style hunters (with guns) who were authorized and even encouraged to shoot them on sight. In Morocco today, the Sloughi is still only officially allowed to be used for hunting vermin (such as jackals, foxes and wolves).

Today, in most European countries, we are seeing the appearance in the show-ring of excessive homogeneity and even “hyper-type” in Sloughis which are tending to become very different from the range of types formerly seen among these North African sighthounds, especially in certain breeder “lines” where inbreeding has often been the norm rather than the exception. This is not a good thing for the Sloughi's genetic health and continued existence over time.

In Morocco, Moroccan veterinarian Dr. Yassine Jamali has this to say: "The increasing rarity of the Slougui in Morocco, the resultant inbreeding plus the crossbreeding with galgos points towards an uncertain future in this, the cradle of the breed. Its selection in Europe using morphological criteria based more on appearance than functionality, together with a more balanced but (over) plentiful diet is leading to an increase in stature - somewhat welcome - but also to an overly heavy bone structure and overly fleshy muscle structure, sometimes a thicker skin, a tail often too short, or lacking a ring at the end. However, this is distancing the Slougui from its true purpose - the chase, based on endurance and speed. Judging requirements, (entirely justified) in terms of ear carriage, silhouette, head shape, etc… should also encompass criteria considered as secondary in dog showing although
essential in the choice of Moroccan hunters - skin, coat, neck, tail above all, tissues in general: in particular, the show-ring's "dictatorship of the measuring stick" must cease since it automatically eliminates certain subjects that may be "too big" or "too small" even though they might be excellent hunters and highly appreciated in the country of origin. A male measuring "only" 66 cm can be an excellent stud dog, the same as for a "giant" of 75 cm or more, if in other respects they are harmonious, well-proportioned, in conformity with the empirical criteria of the hunters who use the Slougui. As for inbreeding, this must be the exception rather than the rule, even if it means mating a bitch with a male that has done little winning but is genetically distant, and exchanges of stud dogs and matings need to be encouraged between the different regions of the Maghreb as well as between the Maghreb and Europe."

**Appearance**

As stated in the F.C.I. breed standard, the Sloughi's general appearance is that of a racy and elegant dog, with its bony structure showing visibly through its fine skin and lean muscles. However, despite its apparent slenderness, it is still a tough and active "working" hound that should be able to run all day long on hard and difficult terrain, without being too fine and delicate and therefore prone to injury.

Top-line is appreciably flat and horizontal, with a relatively short back. The loin is lean, wide and slightly arched, leading into a bony and oblique croup with prominent pin bones. Belly is tucked up but less so than in the Greyhound. Chest is not too wide. It is well-developed in depth with the last ribs being fairly long and its lower edge barely reaching the level of the elbow.

The whip tail is slender, bony, without feathering or long hairs: it shows a definite curve at the end and must reach point of hock when passed under a hind leg.

Limbs are lean, as though almost fleshless, with flat bones and tendons showing clearly through the skin. Hocks are close to the ground and angled without abruptness. Shoulders are flat, lean, moderately oblique. Thighs are well let down but fairly flat.

Feet are lean, often with an elongated oval shape (hare foot) in many of the lighter type of Sloughis. Nails are strong and black or very dark in colour.
Head

Without being too heavy in appearance, the head is an elongated wedge shape and slightly more substantial than in the Greyhound or the Saluki with a barely noticeable stop.

Jaws should be strong enough to catch and hold its quarry.

Nose, lips and mucous membranes are black.

Ears are roughly triangular in shape, hanging down flat to the side of the head, starting from the same height as the eyes or slightly above. They should not be too big and rose ears, as in the Greyhound, are not correct.

Eyes are large, dark, well set in their sockets with dark pigmented eyelids. Pale yellow ("bird of prey") eyes are not correct, but amber is acceptable.

Coat

The coat is always short and fine, in the following colours:

- Sand - all shades from palest cream to fawn, with or without black mask
- Brindle (with or without black mask) - base from pale sand to dark brown with heavy or light black brindling.
- Black mantle (with sand or brindle points) - black can be extensive or not, but there should always be traces of the paler colour on the points.
- Overlay (many sand colour pups are born with overlay but this generally fades or even disappears entirely by the time of adulthood)

There must always be good overall pigmentation of skin, with black or very dark eyelids, mucous membranes and nails, no matter what the base colour is.

Dilute colours such as blue or chocolate (even though they exist in the countries of origin, and have probably always done so), pure white (albino) are disqualifying faults under the internationally accepted FCI standard. White patches are considered to be a fault although, provided they are not extensive, not as serious as a fault in conformation or temperament.
**Height**

The FCI gives the following measurements of height to the shoulder in the English version of its breed standard for the Sloughi:

- **Dogs**: 26-29 inches (66-72 cm)
- **Bitches**: 24-27 inches (61-68 cm)

As recently as the 1964 FCI breed standard, the height shown for either dogs or bitches was 55-75 cm.

I am told that there are still "giant" Sloughis to be found in Algeria which in some cases are known to reach 80 cm (apparently used rather like Borzois, for example, in the final stages of a boar hunt). Again, it seems to be a case of different types for different game and different environments.

**Temperament**

The Sloughi is naturally aloof, slightly reserved, nostalgic…. with eyes that often seem to be fixed on the open spaces of the desert that it has left behind somewhere in the past. However, it can switch in an instant to become the instinctive hunter/chaser that it has always been, capable of catching and bringing down its quarry with a single bite. Although it enjoys its home comforts (preferably the best sofa or its owner's bed!!), it also needs good daily exercise and mental stimulation, plus the freedom from time to time for a good run or chase. It is faithful to its human family (including children) and their friends, never forgetting someone that it has got to know.
Activities – Countries of Origin (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia)

Hunting

My personal experience of hunting with sloughis is only around the Meknes area, although I believe there are far more interesting hunting opportunities elsewhere in Morocco, such as further south in the Saharan desert regions, where the sloughis also appear to remain closer to the older traditional ideal, i.e. a "desert" type of sloughi rather than the slightly bigger and heavier "mountain" type.

These desert or steppe type sighthounds have existed for hundreds if not thousands of years, used to hunt game for the pot such as gazelle, hare, oryx, etc. Unfortunately for the Sloughi, France imposed French law on their colonies, including a law prohibiting the use of sighthounds to course live game in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. The only legal quarry for Sloughis since that time is therefore vermin (fox, jackal, wolf) although it is obviously not feasible to stop the chase if a hare or rabbit should happen to take to its feet in front of hunting sloughis.

In order to be allowed to hunt in Morocco, a Sloughi must have a hunting licence which is usually issued at a local "moussem" (gathering) organised to assess the sighthounds used by hunters and decide whether they are purebred sloughis or crossed with something else. Only if they are judged to be true Sloughis will they be authorised to hunt.
**Activities – Most European Countries**

**Lure-coursing**

The Sloughi has always been an efficient and active sighthound, selected over the centuries of its existence for the qualities of speed, stamina, keenness and, of course, prey-drive. Since it is not allowed to hunt (or rather course) any more in most European countries, the closest alternative activity today is lure-coursing, at which it generally excels.

Unfortunately most lure-coursing events now seem to be designed more for smaller or sprinter breeds such as Whippets or Greyhounds, and are far too short for true distance runners like Sloughis.

**Racing**

It also performs well on the race-track although this form of sprinting or fast galloping on an oval track tends, over time, to produce Sloughis with the somewhat bulkier muscle mass of a sprinter as opposed to the flat muscles of a marathon runner.

In the same way as for lure-coursing, race-track events for Sloughis are generally too short in course length to demonstrate the Sloughi's true ability to run at fast speeds over long distances.

Track racing also does not really show this sighthound's supreme speed, agility, stamina and versatility in action.

(And yes I do know that the third hound is a Saluki!!)
Conclusion

There is a lot more than can be said or written about the Sloughi, but for it to have a future here in the UK, outside of the very small and cliquey dog show community, it would be good to see it becoming more popular as a family or working companion.

Anybody who would like to learn more about the Sloughi across Europe is very welcome to browse my website www.sloughi-europe.net containing many articles, photos and links about the Sloughi in Europe and elsewhere.

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www.sloughi-europe.net