



The Sky is Falling

Jim Engel February 2026.

In the era prior to the Internet and routine middle class European travel there was a propensity to idealize their breeding practice and selection, to believe that the various breeds in their nations of origin maintained proficiency in their founding purpose and that structure and stride were guided accordingly. It was taken for granted that the grotesque fashion driven appearance was an American aberration, that these Europeans took their dogs much more seriously. They in turn were quite helpful, tended to be proactive in projecting and validating this mythology. Little did we know.

Such were my expectations as I embarked on my first European tour with Eric Houttuin in the spring of 1984. At that time Dutch annual Bouvier des Flandres registrations were running just shy of ten thousand a year and at the club match in Hilversum, the Dutch confirmation specialty, there were four or five hundred entries in six concurrent rings, a literal six ring circus. But last year, in 2024, there were only two hundred Dutch Bouviers registered in the entire year. Thus strange as it may seem forty years ago there were two to three times as many entries in a single dog show as are currently registered in an entire year. This decline is worldwide in scope, impacting most breeds and has prevailed for a quarter of a century. The purebred sky is indeed falling.

Bouvier des Flandres by Year				
	Holland	Belgium	France	USA
1970	1575	211	226	348
1975	9082	680	483	834
1980	5939	895	758	1389
1983	9564	1201	730	1903
1984	9939	981	781	1827
1990	3786	837	718	1748
1995	2609	1185	559	1875
2000	1348	683	574	1211
2005	734	848	455	851
2010	592	317	375	621
2015	366	250	288	
2020	330			
2024	200	*140	144	*120

The AKC ceased publishing registration statistics in 2011. The Belgians did the same in 2019.

* Statistical projections.

Click here for complete data:

[Bouvier Annual Registrations](#)

In 1985 there were 1860 American registrations and when I served as confirmation judge at the robust and prosperous Southern California Club match there were numerous entries in all classes. When I judged for the Michigan club a few months later similar prosperity prevailed. Southern California and the Detroit area, including adjacent Ontario, were hotbeds of activity.

Although the AKC ceased publication of registration statistics in 2011 because it had become so humiliating and embarrassing and since in 2024 the Bouvier des Flandres ranked 101 among the breeds, as opposed to about fifty in the 1980s, current annual registrations can be projected at approximately 120. (The table to the left presents this data with a five year cycle.)

Thus current yearly registrations are 200 for the Dutch, about 140 for the Belgians, 144 for the French and approximately 120 in America for a total

of a little over 600. This is so far below minimum viable population—critical mass—that the breed verges on trivialization if not outright extinction. Although the Bouvier is in particularly steep decline and peril this is but one manifestation of the general purebred collapse prevailing since the mid-1990s.

Breed evolution and stability in terms of physique and character are of necessity guided by a few elite and senior breeders such as Chastel or Semler. In order for such long term programs to prosper a certain minimum of ongoing activity is necessary, but we have done little more

than tread water for several generations. We are thus in imminent danger of going under.

The Southern California and other regional clubs totter on the brink of extinction and there were a paltry four entries at the supposedly prestigious Westminster Kennel Club show in New York. The North American working club, NAWBA, crashed and burned at the advent of the 21st century and by 2015 was long since dead in the water with no publications or events in many years.

Causative factors in this decline are complex and convoluted. The predominant proximate cause was the ongoing worldwide purebred collapse in which the historically protective heritage breeds such as the Doberman Pinscher and German Shepherd were especially hard hit.

Additionally there were several festering Bouvier specific issues. In particular the increasingly long, soft and profuse coat with flowing beards has rendered maintenance for both the effete show dogs and family companions an ongoing burden and expense. The originating working stock coats were rougher and shorter; who can imagine these rural herdsman loading their guardian dogs in the wagon for a routine Saturday morning town trip for a three hour grooming session?

Another very serious factor was the European bans on ear cropping and tail docking which have had devastating consequences for breeds such as the Doberman Pincher and the Bouvier des Flanders.

While there is a residual base of serious working stock, particularly in the Netherlands, the breed as a whole has become soft and lethargic. On a more positive note a small but resolute cadre of French ring competitors has emerged, but the numbers are small.

In the spring of 1993, almost a decade after my original tour with Eric, with doubt and concern in my mind, I resolved to once more return to Europe with new eyes. These are my commentaries:

[Premonitions of a Traveler](#)

Although some of the issues and concerns in this thirty year old report may seem obscure or irrelevant I have presented the complete original text to more fully project the prevailing aura of the era.

As difficult as it is to comprehend and accept the heartbreaking reality is that in view of all of this it is most difficult to conceive of a way forward, to see how the breed can endure as any sort of viable working dog.

Jim Engel Marengo February, 2026

[Conacts & References](#)

[Bouvier Annual Registrations](#)

[Bouvier Breeders List](#)

[Angel's Lair Bouvier](#)

[Angel's Lair All Breed](#)

[Schutzhund America](#)

[The Police Dog: Evolution, History and Service](#)