

UMLANI BREEDER

"If our youngsters are any like
their ancestors, we've got it
right!"



Umlani Chobe Nuin-Tara Moremi

A heavy, slightly sweet scent hangs in the air. Next to my rondavel, two Crested Barbets are engrossed in their melodious duet. It is not easy to spot the singers in the bushes, but they cannot be ignored: male and female of these colourful, starling-sized birds have their own stanzas that complement each other to form the "Song of the Barbets" - the male intones the song and animates the female to the answering stanza that fits exactly into the gap. Barbets are not at all rare here in the Umlani Bushcamp, which belongs to the private Timbavati Reserve and lies to the west of the Kruger Park. In its green lushness and bird abundance, Umlani reminds me of the ancient wisdom of the Khoi-San people, who were once the masters here before they were increasingly displaced by the invading whites and the black Bantus: "Even the biggest bird has to come down from the sky to find a branch to sleep on," says Bamuthi in Laurens van der Post's classic "A Story like the Wind" - the book that has become something of a "bible" for owners and breeders of the Southern African Rhodesian Ridgeback dog. The author Laurens van der Post, for many years advisor to the British Crown on African affairs and close friend of the royal family, should know: He grew up on his parents' South African farm under the care of a San nanny, imbibed their language and culture with his mother's milk, so to speak, and learned as a young boy not only how to handle a rifle and a bush knife, but also his own male Ridgeback, "Hintza".

Not yet was I a breeder of Rhodesian Ridgebacks - not even an owner. But the African virus had long since taken me over - already back then, when I was there at Umlani Bushcamp for the first time and took the practical exam of my training for the "Basic Game Ranch Management and Ranger Guide Course". Unforgettable how I grew into close contact with animals and plants and was able to learn the art of finding my way in the bush and living in the rhythm of nature and the seasons from the rangers. Since then, the longing for Africa has never left me and also took on a very concrete form: one with four paws, so to speak, a muscular, elegant body with a concise ridge on the back and a head with two dark eyes looking intelligently, attentively and unafraid into the world. The Rhodesian Ridgeback, the legendary "Lion Dog" of the Khoi-San. The colonial masters also discovered this special dog, which - unlike the dogs they had imported from Europe - was adapted to the African climate. Over the next few years, pioneer breeders cross-bred European breeds to achieve a more pleasing appearance for the "ugly, jackal-like dogs" and used them as guards for their farms and families and as companions to hunt lions and leopards, buffalos, rhinos and other big game.

Of course, our story, the story of the Umlani ridgebacks, did not play out quite so simply. Everything, so it seems, was much more complicated! That evening in the bush camp, while listening



Umlani Djuma Daymani ya Makololo



Gomoimba Bantu



Shangani Tefle Ilanga



Stefani with puppies of her F-litter (copyright M. Bossard)



Makololo Chanda Nandipa ya Umlani



Umlani Hwevera Analia Nyanjera

to the Crested Barbets singing their duets, sipping my drink and thinking of the big birds of Bamuthi that must come down from the sky to roost, I remembered that I had actually become the proud owner of a Rhodesian Ridgeback for the past ten days! Bantu was his name and he was waiting for me in Yurophu, in Europe. Still blind and deaf, he was probably sucking on the teats of his mother Ambra right then at the German Kennel Gomoimba, making my departure from Africa a little easier than before: only two more months and I could pick up the wheat-coloured puppy - my very own first Ridgeback!

OUR STORY

And so here comes our story, the story of the Umlani-Ridgebacks. It began in a beautiful old Jugendstil house on the shores of Lake Zurich, where I grew up with my sister in the loving care of my parents. Like so many little girls, Jessica and I were "dog crazy". But my parents' job and our everyday life were anything but "dog-friendly". Being part of the post-war cultural theatre scene around the Zurich Schauspielhaus, my parents had little time for their daughters' fancy wishes. But our father made up for that a bit by giving us girls book vouchers for Christmas. One of the very first books we bought was about dog breeds and we choose - today we would say virtually - the dog of our dreams: it had to be big, sporty and a hunting dog, even though at that time I didn't really know what a hunting dog actually was. But the childhood dream became reality just a few years later: I shared my life with the English Springer Spaniel female Giada della Sibua. The intelligent, gentle Giada was my first dog ever and shaped my image of a dog - my dog! - for a long time.

My husband Daniel grew up with dogs, and when we met in 1998, he soon expressed the wish to have a dog as an additional family member. Unfortunately, my professional situation did not allow this at that time -



Sarula Thaba Nchu ya Umlani

even then we were firmly convinced that a dog should never be a "stop-gap", such as currently in Corona times, but needs a lot of time and attention from its humans. Fortunately, the situation changed just one year later: I was now working independently and was able to manage my own time. One day, my husband and I were leafing longingly once again through the well-used dog book of my childhood. We came across a photo that I immediately recognised as one of my favourites from the past: There, behind a white paddock fence on a green pasture, were two elegant, wheat-coloured dogs that matched my image of a hunting dog, - gazing majestically over their "estate". Two Rhodesian Ridgebacks.

GREEN PASTURE, WHITE FENCES - THE SET-UP

The next day, my husband happened to meet an old acquaintance, and as luck would have it, she was accompanied by a beautiful young female Ridgeback. Subsequently, Gomoimba Aisha came to visit us quite often and it finally became very clear to us: We wanted a dog like this, a Rhodesian Ridgeback!

I called the then president of the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club Switzerland. At that time, there were hardly any websites and homepages where one could have familiarised oneself with breeders and kennels. François-Charles Otth immediately sent me a copy of a list of breeders, written on a typewriter - today this is hard to imagine! Howev-

er, there were only a few names on the list - the Rhodesian Ridgeback was definitely still one of the rarer breeds in this country then! But before I even started to call the names on the list, Aisha's owner called me: She had contacted the breeder of her dog and he was planning his second litter. It was a repeat of the one from which Aisha came. The breeder was happy to reserve a male for us. How lucky we were! At that time, in 1999, the waiting lists of all breeders were very long and there were not many breeders anyway. We were even given first choice!

In February 2000 we were allowed to pick up Gomoimba Bantu in Germany, "The little Swiss", his breeder's nickname since our first visit a few weeks previously. We were overjoyed, enjoyed life with the little one - and did not even think about showing or breeding with him. Only after some time did we realise that Bantu had a very interesting pedigree. He developed into a great male who had everything you could wish for in a Ridgeback: a correct, balanced build, a faultless ridge, an expressive, imposing head and an RR-typical, wonderful temperament - he was the perfect gentleman all his life. In autumn, the Rhodesian Ridgeback Club Switzerland organised a club show. We were curious and took part - our first show. Little did we know that many more would follow. Bantu was placed in the junior class. Only a few weeks later we took part in our first international show - in Lausanne. One of the many shows that unfortunately no longer exists. Bantu won the youth class. One year later our male passed the breeding approval test in the RRCS - the be-



Shangani Tefle Ilanga, Bayoola's Anga Sharifa, Gomoimba Bantu

ginning of a successful career as a stud dog. Bantu has spread his wonderful heritage all over Europe and lives on in his many descendants.

In the meantime, I had read just about everything there was to read about the Rhodesian Ridgeback breed. And, quietly at first, then louder and louder and no longer able to be ignored, the longing for a second Ridgeback awoke. My husband was on board and we agreed: it had to be a bitch and we also wanted to start breeding.

Just before the end of 2002 we were able to pick up our Shangani Tefle Ilanga in the south of France. Ilanga means "sun" in the Zulu language - and that is exactly what she was: a sunshine! Her pedigree included such old African lines like Sarula, Umutcha and Chucklenook. Sadly, our wish to breed with Ilanga did not come true - but for more than twelve years she was

the most wonderful companion you can imagine: a great personality and the boss of our pack with the incorruptible instinct of a true African Ridgeback.

From Bantu's last litter we got to choose a female in 2005. Our choice was Bayoola's Anga Sharifa, and with her we subsequently had our A and B litters. Sharifa had a lot from her sire and on her mother's side she came from the French Kennel de Teufelsort. We kept Sharifa in a "co-ownership" with good friends, but she spent a lot of time with us and was perfectly integrated into the pack.

OUR KENNEL TODAY

At the moment four Rhodesian Ridgebacks live with us: Nandipa is the granddaughter of our male Bantu from the Makololo Kennel (until 2008 in the VDH, since then in the SKG), a kennel with which we have had a close friendship for many years. She is a rather small bitch with a beautiful head and winning expression and a very big heart - her courage sometimes almost borders on daring, and even as a little puppy she always knew exactly what she wanted - and how to get it. We gave her the name Nandipa in memory of a "big beast", the elephant Nandipa, whom we were lucky to observe in Botswana - in the Okavango Delta - and who had also a big personality. "Nandipa" means "the gift" in Setswana and our Nandipa is a very big gift! Nandipa's daughter Moremi from our C-litter is our "princess": Athletic like her father, the Danish male Ökensandens Poma Von Yesekani and one hundred and fifty percent reliable, she is an enthusiastic and very talented mantrailer and an important support of the pack. And - typical Ridgeback! - she has the character of an African mimosa: don't raise your voice in her presence



Umlani Chobe Nuin-Tara Moremi

without a reason - you can be sure of a reproachful look. Since July 2020, Moremi's daughter from the H-litter Hwevera Analia Nyanjera has also been part of the Umlani pack and is currently learning from her mother and grandmother what a good Ridgeback should be like. And from the father - which is rather unusual, as the male dog rarely shares the same kennel as the dam. For the last five years, we have had a male dog again: Sarula Thaba Nchu ya Umlani is Nyanjera's daddy. In November 2015, a long-cherished dream came true and I flew - after a long, complicated paper war - to Linda Costa in Australia and took the barely three-month-old Thaba Nchu, a son of Sarula Penya and Sarula Lupani Biko, back with me to his new Swiss home.

When I listened to the song of the Crested Barbets in Umlani at the turn of the millennium and thought about the dogs of the Khoi-San, while our first Ridgeback Bantu in the German whelping box was only a few days old, the idea of our own Umlani Kennel was still in the far distant future. At least the outline of a Rhodesian Ridgeback the way I imagined was already visible on the horizon - as a shadow silhouette, so to speak. We had come to Umlani to celebrate the turn of the millennium and to set off into a new millennium. There, amidst the great herds of elephants that came to the water holes day after day, surrounded by the magnificent African landscape that we loved so much and in which we felt so small and yet so much belonging, we really understood what Hemingway meant when he wrote: "Africa is not a destination - it's a disease."

And already then I knew somehow that our dogs, our Rhodesian Ridgebacks, if we were ever be lucky enough to breed them, would have to carry the kennel name UMLANI, which means "a place to

rest" in the Zulu language. In 2004 we registered the name with the FCI.

NOT QUANTITY, BUT QUALITY

Our first litter was born in 2008. Today, thirteen years later, we are planning our ninth litter. Compared to other kennels, those aren't that many litters. But one thing is clear to us: it is not the number that makes the difference, but the individual dogs - it is not the quantity that counts, but the quality. We breed out of passion for the breed and feel committed to the goals that the pioneer breeders in southern Africa set themselves at the beginning of the 20th century: To breed healthy, strong and athletic Ridgebacks, dogs that do not tend to extremes in any way, but are balanced in all their characteristics and manifestations, "sound", as the pioneer breeders called it. If they are also beautiful, i.e. if they correspond to the ideal of FCI standard no. 146 - all the better, then we are completely happy. Founder dog of our kennel is our first male, Int. Ch/C.I.B. Gomoimba Bantu. As father and grandfather of our first two breeding bitches Sharifa and Nandipa he is represented in all of Umlani's offspring.

THE IDEAL RIDGEBACK...

Umlanis should above all be healthy and "sound". Fashionable trends - e.g. more and more angulations and exaggerated movements - cannot be our breeding goal, even if one sees such tendencies more and more at present and they are clearly overrated by all breed judges at shows. This contradicts the standard, which strives for an agile dog with a lot of soundness, a dog that is in itself balanced and must be able to run evenly and steadily with great endurance - and this also on rough, natural ground and for many hours. Just as the Ridgeback was expected to do in his African home in the bush and savannah, i.e. on uneven,



M. Bossard with Umlani Bhekabantu Badrani Baha

parched ground or through thorn thickets and undergrowth.

If our youngest are like their ancestors, then we have done it right. Then we have succeeded in preserving the best of the breed for the present and hopefully for the future.

In Switzerland, every dog has to pass a breeding test. This assesses temperament and appearance, and the dog must pass a series of x-ray evaluations and the breed-typical genetic tests. Our breeding dogs have of course passed these tests and are free of HD, ED and OCD as well as heart disease. The Rhodesian Ridgeback was originally bred to guard his people and their belongings and to defend the farm in the wild Bushveld; moreover, he was taken along to hunt big cats such as lion and leopard, but also other fierce big game. This protective and territorial behaviour as well as the innate hunting instinct still form the heritage of the breed today - without these breed-shaping characteristics, the Rhodesian Ridgeback would no longer be the original dog. Knowing this and meeting the needs and requirements of these special dogs as a dog owner is an indispensable prerequisite for every Ridgeback owner. With regular training and adapted occupation, the Rhodesian Ridgeback becomes a wonderful companion even in today's society and under living conditions that no longer correspond to pioneer Africa.

... AND THE IDEAL HUMAN

Whether there is an "ideal human" for the "ideal Ridgeback" remains to be seen. But it is certainly important to proceed with the necessary pru-

dence and care when putting together such a team for life. Fortunately, we always have a lot of puppy enquiries and are in the comfortable position of being able to choose the most suitable people and circumstances for our puppies. Most of the time you can get an approximate picture after the first contacts - especially if you also have some experience and knowledge of people. We are looking for people with whom the dog can be a full member of the family. Whether the dogs will be shown or will later go into breeding is only of secondary importance to us - what is important is that the dog fits into its family and can lead a species-appropriate, dog-appropriate life there.

With its suitability for sporting and hunting activities, the Ridgeback is suitable for active people who like to be out and about in nature. He is suitable for mantrailing, tracking, agility, bike-joring, dogscooter and as a horse-riding companion, and in recent years he has also been used more and more as a hunting companion, especially in Germany, where he is valued less as not so much a specialist but rather as a reliable all-rounder. Our task is to find out what our dog likes to do most and with many Ridgebacks this is clearly nose work - in whatever form. Both Bantu and Il-anga have passed tracking exams, Thaba Nchu, Moremi and Nyanjera are talented mantrailers. For Nandipa, whose small size makes her a good candidate for it, there is no better activity than agility. Even today, at almost twelve years old, she is still enthusiastic about it and would consider it an unfair punishment if we left her at home for reasons of age - of course, the jumps are somewhat lower than they used to be and we now leave

out some obstacles altogether, but for Nandipa, being there and taking part is still everything.

HOW DO OUR PUPPIES GROW UP?

Our puppies are born in the "heart" of our home, so to speak: in the middle of our living space and in the company of all the other dogs. In this way, they are exposed to sounds and other environmental stimuli from the very beginning and are optimally prepared for their future family life. In the large whelping box they can go on their first discovery tours - and in between find security and strength with mummy. From the age of four weeks, they have direct access to the garden: Here they will find different ground structures that invite them to run and dig, as well as toys and learning obstacles in various designs. Playing means learning for life - we put great importance on a varied and balanced early imprinting, which gives the puppies the tools for their later everyday life in a family and their environment, house and garden. From the age of seven weeks, we take them on first trips by car - in the nearby for-

est or at the stables and in the fields, new worlds are waiting to be discovered and "taken in" by the young dogs. All our puppies have loved frolicking in the sand of the indoor riding arena so far!

THE GREATEST JOY FOR A BREEDER...

... is a happy dog and his equally happy human. Staying in touch with our puppy owners is important and valuable to me and I am happy about every single one of them. Of course, I am also always there to share my knowledge and experience with our puppy owners - whether it is about keeping, feeding, training or education. Nothing makes me happier as a breeder than a phone call or a visit from a happy Ridgeback owner who tells me his Umlani is the best and most beautiful dog in the world. Whether this refers to a success in the show ring or on the dog field - or "just" a report about a particularly beautiful, happy moment in the life of dog and human - it doesn't matter. The essential thing is that dog and human have found each other!



Umlani Bushcamp copyright Umlani Bushcamp

INFO

Name **Stefani Westphal**
Country **Switzerland**
Affix **Umlani Rhodesian Ridgeback**
www **www.umlani.ch**