

# SNAPSHOTS



## GREYHOUND COUNTRY

Greyhounds launch a sudden attack after spotting the target, running like arrows off the string. PHOTOS BY HUO YAN / CHINA DAILY



A breed of greyhound from Australia.

Using dogs to catch rabbits is a tradition in Pucheng county, Shaanxi province. The sport has seen ups and downs in recent decades, but a new push is on to revive and promote the activity

By ZHANG LEI

In his Guanzhong dialect, “dog commander” Pan Zhengxing from Pucheng county, in Northwest China’s Shaanxi province, describes his fondness for greyhounds as a hobby.

Pan is 68 but looks much younger, and he attributes his youthfulness to his dogs.

Pan, who has eight greyhounds, said they take up most of the yard at his home.

With their sharp faces, long ears and tall and thin physique, they are swift and good at hunting.

Greyhounds chasing rabbits is a traditional activity in Pucheng.

Wu Zhengjun, a dog lover who runs a pet store in Pucheng, is not only a master of breeding greyhounds but also has a thorough knowledge of the dogs.

Legend has it that greyhounds were introduced to Pucheng from the western regions during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24). By the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), emperors Li Yuan and Li Shimin treated them as hunting companions. In the Song Dynasty (960-1279), they started to be bred by local people, and chasing rabbits became a local sport.

Liu Shenglong, 55, is an expert on catching rabbits.

But he said the rabbits are getting smarter and local greyhounds can now barely catch them.

In the 1970s, Russian greyhounds were introduced to the area, replacing the local breeds. Then, at the beginning of this century, a breed from Australia was brought in. Dogs from the

Australian breed can run at more than 60 kilometers per hour but don’t have the same stamina.

As for the rabbits, catching them is an exquisite art.

By convention, no matter whose greyhound catches the rabbit, the person who picks it up gets the trophy.

But picking up the rabbits is also a delicate operation.

Liu has a hand tool called a “spear sickle” — a polished iron hook set on a wooden bar. It serves to frighten the rabbit.

When the greyhound starts to chase the rabbit, the dog owner chooses a point near the roadside and, when the rabbit gets close, throws the sickle and hits the rabbit on the head, allowing the dog to rush in and catch it.

Rabbit chasing is usually done in January and February.

Greyhounds were quite popular in the region in the 1980s, and some breeds could sell for up to 100,000 yuan (\$15,747) each.

Fu Chengcheng, who is in his 50s, specializes in breeding them.

He said his family has relied on breeding greyhounds for three generations, but fewer people buy the dogs these days and they typically sell for less than 10,000 yuan each.

So can this tradition be kept alive?

Local officials say they are waiting for the Shaanxi provincial government to list the sport as a provincial intangible cultural heritage. They have also stepped up efforts to support and protect the sport, as well as giving subsidies to dog trainers.



A drawing depicts how greyhounds catch rabbits, usually in January and February.



No matter whose greyhound catches the rabbit, the person who picks it up gets the trophy.



By beating the wheat straw, dog owners scare the rabbits out of their hiding place.