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TELEVISION REVIEW

‘Amazing Dogs’ Review: Up and Down the Canine Family Tree

A three-part documentary series on the Smithsonian Channel takes a detailed look at dog breeds around the world.



Saluki and handler PHOTO: SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL

By Dorothy Rabinowitz

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Despite its suggestive title, “Amazing Dogs” (Sunday, 8 p.m., Smithsonian Channel)—an extraordinarily inclusive series—doesn’t actually expend much of its time on the kind of canines who share our homes, namely the domestic pet kind. This three-part series is largely concerned with the great breadth of the dog family tree, which takes us to breeds around the world, including a terrifying and not terribly well-known one known as the African hunting dog—canines, we’re warned, who are natural killers with pointed teeth perfect for tearing through flesh. They have never lost their inner wildness, the narrator notes, so it’s best never to let your guard down around them in case you were ever mad enough to come close to one of them. Among the large predators on the African plains, these dogs live in marauding mobs of 30, they can take down prey 10 times their size, and they don’t actually resemble any pooch you’re likely to run into on a leash.

Amazing Dogs

Begins Sunday, 8 p.m., Smithsonian Channel

Still, we learn that all domestic dogs, of which there are 500 million world-wide, are part of the canine family tree, which comprises 36 species. Chapter one introduces a couple of adorable puppies, two weeks old, the kind anyone would

want to smother with kisses—but not for long, these being jackal pups. To bring the canine family connection home, we're reminded that wolves share 98.8% of their DNA with domestic dogs.

Family connections aside, the series profits from its focus on little-known breeds—the Bankhar, for instance, the guard dog of Mongolian nomads for thousands of years. More familiar: the Saluki, one of the fastest dogs on the planet, shown racing around the sands of the Arabian Peninsula in episode 1—a picture complete with extraordinarily detailed data on this dog's design. No small achievement.

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