

Study reveals secret to Bo Obama's good looks

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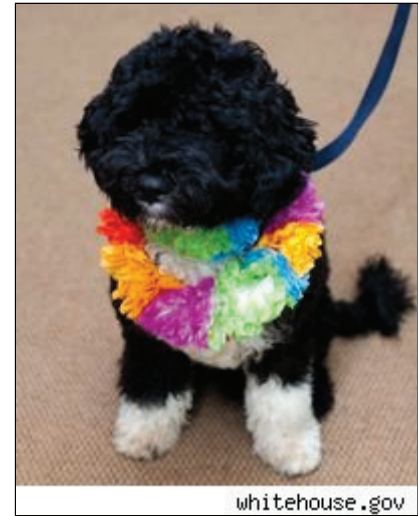
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America is already pretty smitten with the First Pooch, but now scientists have a better understanding of what makes Bo Obama so darn cute. The Portuguese Water Dog has variations in three key genes that give the canine and other dogs like him his curly tuxedo coat as well as his "furnishings," or mustache and large eyebrows. Among the [key findings](#), researchers at the University of Utah discovered that the variant form of a gene called KRT71 determines whether a Portuguese Water Dog will have a wavy or curly coat.

"In just looking at his picture, Bo is curly," says Kevin Chase, a research specialist in biology at the University of Utah. "We don't actually have his DNA. We do have DNA from [the late Massachusetts Senator] Ted Kennedy's Portuguese Water Dog. We would be happy to include Bo's DNA in the future."



Bo Obama has certainly stoked an interest in pet ownership, an industry that is estimated to have risen another five percent this year to \$45.4 billion, according to the [American Pet Products Association](#). Some 71.4 million homes, or 62 percent of U.S. households, now have pets, compared to 52 percent in 1988.

But despite all of Bo's good press, there doesn't appear to have been a run on Portuguese Water Dogs, which are known to be fun but demanding pets that need lots of attention and exercise. In the last decade, the growth in Portuguese Water Dog ownership has risen 44 percent, currently ranking it the 64th most popular breed in the U.S., according to the [American Kennel Club](#).

When Bo arrived at the White House in April, inquiries to the Pacific Northwest Portuguese Water Dog Club about taking home a puppy increased from one every couple of weeks to five or six inquiries a week, says Amanda Ford, a club board member. "That has really tapered off," says Ford, who has three of the breed. "But there is no question that when you walk down the street, people are much more familiar with what kind of dog it is."

The research, meanwhile, is part of a larger National Institutes of Health study designed to make scientists more familiar with how complex diseases, including human diseases, are caused by the interaction of multiple genes.

The broader study established that the combination of various forms of only three genes including KRT71, RSP02, and FGF5 account for seven major coat types in purebred dogs.

"Our understanding of what coat types the dogs will have shows the power of purebred dog genetics in identifying mutations that are causing complex traits and diseases," Chase says. "What we are

really interested in doing is using the information to track down the genetics of disease in dogs. Dogs and humans share a large portion of the same diseases."

Turns out, Portuguese Water Dogs are susceptible to several diseases that are also found in humans, including cancer, irritable bowel disease, and Addison's Disease, a disorder of the adrenal glands, says Chase. "Clearly, the research will give us a clue into what to look at in humans."

Chase adds that no dogs are harmed or kenneled in the research, as blood is simply drawn when the canines go to the vet for a regular visit. "These are all happy, free, well-loved dogs," he says. Judging from the fact that Bo just spent last week vacationing with the Obamas on Martha's Vineyard, the same can probably be said for the First Dog as well.

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