

# GUARDIANS OF THE NIGHT

## *Romania's Four Ancient Shepherd Breeds*

*From the land of Dracula and werewolf legend — dogs that predate the myths*



*The four Romanian shepherd breeds — Carpathian, Mioritic, Bucovina, and Raven (Corb)*

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Based on the original article by Petra Junehall

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*All photographs courtesy of Petra Junehall and Dagmar Klein*

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## The Land Beyond the Forest — A Personal Perspective

A few years ago, browsing through a copy of Domarbladet — the Swedish Kennel Club's judge magazine — I came across an article by Swedish judge Petra Junehall about four Romanian shepherd breeds I had never heard of, and had certainly never seen at a show. I started reading and did not stop.

I am relatively new as a judge, and these breeds are nowhere near my licensed area. But something about that article stayed with me — not just the dogs themselves, extraordinary as they are, but the feeling of encountering something ancient, something that had survived at the very edge of civilisation for thousands of years, in a landscape most of us know only from gothic fiction.

Romania. Transylvania. The Carpathian Mountains. These are not neutral geographic names. They carry centuries of myth: the land of Dracula, of vampires rising from the earth, of wolves that transform under a full moon. Bram Stoker's Dracula famously arrives at his castle through the Borgo Pass in Transylvania, attended by wolves he commands like servants. In Romanian folklore, the strigoi — the undead — haunted the very mountain passes where these shepherd dogs have patrolled for millennia. And in those same mountains, the vârcolac, the Romanian werewolf, was feared by every village community.

***"In the darkness of the Carpathian night, when wolves circled the flock and the shepherd could not see his hand before his face, one dog could change everything."***

What strikes me — as someone who teaches about systems, function, and quality — is this: the myths and the dogs come from exactly the same place. The folklore of vampires and werewolves grew up in communities that were genuinely, desperately afraid of what lived in the dark outside the firelight. Wolves were not a romantic symbol. They were a real and present danger to the livestock these communities depended on for survival. And the dog that stood between the flock and that darkness was not a pet. It was a partner, a guardian, and in some traditions, a sacred protector.

The black Raven Shepherd (Corb) is perhaps the most striking example. Shepherds in the Carpathian region selectively bred for black-coated dogs precisely because a black dog working at night was invisible to predators — and to human threats. But beyond practicality, Romanian pastoral folk tradition held that a black dog had special power

against evil spirits. The Corb was not just a working dog; it was a ward against the dark forces of the Carpathian night. Is it any wonder that the myths and the dogs grew up side by side?

The Mioritic takes its name from the *Miorița* — one of Romania's most beloved folk ballads, a haunting medieval poem about a shepherd warned by his loyal dog of a coming betrayal and death. It tells you everything about how deeply intertwined the shepherd, the flock, and the dog are in Romanian cultural identity. These dogs are not a modern kennel creation. They are an argument for why people and dogs have lived together for thousands of years.

From a judging perspective, every characteristic of these breeds has been shaped over millennia not by fashion or kennel preference, but by the ruthless selection pressure of predator, climate, and terrain. That wolf-sable colour on the Carpathian is not an aesthetic choice — it is camouflage. That massive bone and heavy coat on the Bucovina is not exaggeration — it is armour against the Bucovinian winter and the brown bear of the Carpathians.

I have never seen any of these breeds in person. Recently I stumbled across Petra's article again — and that was enough to finally make me sit down and write, to bring the fascination into some kind of structured form, for myself and for anyone else who might find these extraordinary dogs as compelling as I do.

— **Viktória**

*FCI Licensed Dog Judge | Iceland, April 2026*

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## The Four Breeds: An Overview

Romania is the country of origin for four distinct FCI-recognised livestock guardian and shepherd breeds. Two belong to FCI Group 1, Section 1 (Sheepdogs with Working Trial) — the Carpathian (FCI 350) and the Mioritic (FCI 349). Two belong to FCI Group 2, Section 2.2 (Mountain type Molossoids) — the Bucovina (FCI 357) and the Raven Shepherd, known as the Corb (FCI 373). All four trace their functional heritage to the Carpathian mountain arc sweeping through Transylvania, Moldavia, Wallachia, and Bucovina — the heartland of Romanian pastoral culture.

*Note on Group classification: some older references and breed documents describe all four breeds as Group 1. The current FCI standards place the Bucovina and Corb in Group 2, Section 2.2. This matters for entry and class arrangements at FCI shows.*

These are breeds built for *transhumanța*: the ancient seasonal migration of vast flocks between lowland winter pastures and high mountain summer pastures — a practice still alive in Romania today. Moving tens of thousands of animals across hundreds of kilometres, through terrain where wolves, bears, and lynx were constant threats, was a civilisational undertaking. The shepherd's dogs were its most essential component.



*Mioritic and Carpathian together — two of Romania's four ancient shepherd breeds*

What makes these four breeds so remarkable as a group is that they represent four different adaptive solutions to the same challenge. Same climate, same predators,

same terrain — four quite distinct phenotypes, each shaped by the particular pressures of a specific region of the Carpathian arc.



*Historical photograph of the Carpathian Shepherd — the breed's character has remained unchanged for centuries*

### **Temperament, Function, and Reality of Romanian Breeds**

One of the most important aspects to understand about Romanian breeds is the clear gap between perception and reality. They are often seen as “cute teddy bears,” but this is a misconception. These are not typical companion dogs that adapt effortlessly to any household. They require space, structure, and informed ownership. When placed in the right environment and managed correctly, however, they can become exceptionally loyal and stable family dogs.

In a home setting, they can be deeply bonded and gentle within their family unit. Reports consistently highlight that they integrate well with family members, including children, when clear rules and boundaries are established early. However, they are not naturally easy-going with unfamiliar people. Unlike more universally social breeds such as Labradors, Romanian breeds tend to be reserved or cautious with strangers. This is not a fault—it is a direct reflection of their original purpose and must be understood rather than corrected.

Environment and management play a decisive role. Successful ownership examples often include rural settings with significant space, secure fencing, and structured introductions to new people or situations. Controlled exposure—such as separating dogs when unfamiliar visitors arrive—prevents unnecessary stress and reinforces stable behavior. These are not dogs that should be expected to tolerate chaotic or unpredictable environments without preparation.

Ultimately, Romanian breeds demand a shift in mindset—from viewing dogs as companions first, to understanding them as purpose-bred working animals. When this perspective is applied, both ownership and judging become significantly more accurate and responsible.



*The Carpathian Shepherd — in family setting and living with smaller breeds*

## 1. The Carpathian Shepherd — The Wolf Among Dogs

FCI No. 350 | Group 1, Section 1 — Sheepdogs with Working Trial | Definitive recognition: 9 June 2015



*The Carpathian Shepherd Dog — athletic build, the most lupoid of the four Romanian breeds*

The Romanian Carpathian Shepherd (*Ciobănesc Românesc Carpatin*) is perhaps the most immediately striking of the four breeds, because its wolf-sable colouration — fawn base coat with black-tipped guard hairs — gives it an appearance remarkably similar to

a large Carpathian wolf. This is not a coincidence. It is natural selection at work. The FCI standard explicitly calls for a "lupoid" (wolf-like) head type and treats any drift toward a heavier, molossoid appearance as a disqualifying fault — an unusually strong instruction to protect the breed's ancestral character.

**Colour:** Wolf-sable — fawn to sandy-yellow base with black-tipped guard hairs. Entirely white or black-and-white is disqualifying

**Size:** Males 65–73 cm, 32–45 kg. The most athletic and wolf-like in build

**Coat:** Medium length (6–9 cm), harsh outer coat, dense soft undercoat. Soft or woolly coat is a serious fault

**Character:** Calm, dignified, self-assured. Works independently. Deeply loyal to flock. Aloof with strangers — correct and expected



*Carpathian Shepherd at work — guarding the flock in its natural mountain environment*

The Carpathian is the quintessential working livestock guardian of Eastern Europe — not the largest of the four Romanian breeds, but arguably the most balanced and athletic. For judges, the wolf-sable colour, harsh double coat, and long free-striding trot are the non-negotiable type markers. A Carpathian that moves poorly — short choppy strides, weak topline, or rolling gait — is failing the working standard regardless of its cosmetic appearance.



*Carpathian bitch — the breed shows clear sexual dimorphism; females are lighter but retain all correct type characteristics*



*Carpathian Shepherd at work today — transhumanța and active livestock guarding continue in Romania*

***"The wolf-sable Carpathian guarding a flock at dusk is indistinguishable from a wolf — and that is exactly the point."***



*Carpathian Shepherd – beautiful and ancient head and expression*



*Carpathian Shepherd – movements in and out of the showing*

## 2. The Mioritic — The Bear of the Ballads

FCI No. 349 | Group 1, Section 1 — Sheepdogs with Working Trial | Definitive recognition: 9 June 2015



*The Mioritic Shepherd — spectacular coat, bear-like silhouette, calm guardian presence*

The Romanian Mioritic Shepherd (*Ciobănesc Românesc Mioritic*) takes its name from the *Miorița* — arguably Romania's most famous folk poem, a haunting medieval ballad about a shepherd, his flock, and a loyal dog who warns of an impending betrayal. That the breed is named after a poem tells you how deeply embedded in Romanian cultural identity this dog is. The breed has had organised standardisation since at least 1981, with the current FCI standard revised in 2002 and updated in 2022.

**Colour:** White, cream, or grey — all three are equally correct. Do not favour one over another

**Size:** Males minimum 70 cm (ideal 75 cm), 50–70 kg. Dogs below minimum height are disqualified

**Coat:** Long — minimum 10 cm on the body. Slightly wavy to wavy, harsh outer coat. Never soft or silky

**Character:** Calm, stable, deeply protective. Devoted to its family. Reserved but not aggressive with strangers



*Mioritic Shepherd in full coat — the abundant, slightly wavy coat is the breed's most dramatic visual feature*



*Mioritic Shepherd in movement — the effortless, ground-covering trot is the breed's working gait*

The Mioritic's long, abundant coat is its most visually dramatic feature — in full coat, the dog presents a spectacular, bear-like silhouette that is unmistakable. But this coat is also the great challenge for judges: it conceals structure. Correct proportions, straight topline, oblique shoulder, and well-angulated hindquarters can all disappear under 15 cm of waving grey coat. The assessment question must always be: what is the dog underneath?



*Mioritic in the show ring — individual assessment; correct coat presentation and balanced proportions*



*Mioritic show class — the variety within correct type is visible across the three colour forms: white, cream, and grey*



*Mioritic puppies — even at a young age the characteristic long coat begins to form; all three colour variants can appear in a single litter*

### 3. The Bucovina — The Mountain Giant

*FCI No. 357 | Group 2, Section 2.2 — Mountain type Molossoids | Definitive recognition: 29 April 2019*



*The Bucovina Shepherd Dog — the largest of the four Romanian breeds; massive, calm, authoritative*

The Romanian Bucovina Shepherd (*Ciobănesc Românesc de Bucovina*) is the giant of the group — the largest, heaviest, and most massively constructed of Romania's four shepherd breeds. It comes from the Bucovina region, straddling northeastern Romania and present-day Ukraine: dense forests, steep mountains, brutal winters. Unlike the

Carpathian and Mioritic (Group 1 Sheepdogs), the Bucovina is classified in FCI Group 2, Section 2.2 as a Mountain type Molossoid — a classification that reflects its greater mass and command presence.

**Colour:** White base with patches of black, fawn, or brindle. White should predominate

**Size:** Males 68–78 cm, 50–90 kg. The heaviest boned of the four breeds

**Coat:** Medium length (6–9 cm), dense, slightly harsh. Shorter and denser than the Mioritic

**Character:** Exceptionally calm and stable. Dignified, self-possessed. Deep bark is the first line of defence



*Bucovina Shepherd in movement — powerful and purposeful despite the breed's considerable size*

For judges, the message from the FCI standard is explicit: do not fault massiveness. Substance and bone are correct breed characteristics, not excesses. A Bucovina that is light in bone and structure is a far more serious fault than one that is impressively heavy. The deep, powerful bark alone is often enough to turn a wolf — physical confrontation is a last resort for a breed this size.



*Bucovina Shepherd at work — guarding the flock, the role for which this giant was bred*



*A darker-coated Bucovina — the standard permits variation in patch colour from black to fawn, all equally correct*



*Three Bucovina Shepherds together — showing the variation in patch distribution within correct type*

## 4. The Raven Shepherd (Corb) — The Shadow Dog

*FCI No. 373 | Group 2, Section 2.2 — Mountain type Molossoids | Provisional recognition: 17 September 2024 | NOT yet eligible for CACIB*



*The Romanian Raven Shepherd (Corb) — entirely black, the rarest of the four breeds*

The Romanian Raven Shepherd (*Ciobănesc Românesc de Corb*) is the rarest, most recently standardised, and arguably the most mythologically charged of the four breeds. "Corb" means raven in Romanian — capturing both its colour (jet black, throughout) and

its character as a creature of the night. Like the Bucovina, it is classified in FCI Group 2, Section 2.2. Its provisional FCI recognition was updated 17 September 2024, meaning it is not yet eligible for CACIB.

**Colour:** Entirely and uniformly black — coat, skin, nose, lips, eyelids, pads, and nails. No other colour permitted

**Size:** Males 70–80 cm (the tallest upper limit of the four), 45–60 kg. Most agile of the four breeds

**Coat:** Medium length (7–10 cm), dense, moderately harsh outer coat. Black throughout — no tan or white areas

**Character:** Confident, bold, more alert and reactive than the other three. Diffident toward strangers — correct and expected



*Raven Shepherd head — the intense "raven gaze": bold, alert, fully black pigment on every surface*

The Corb was bred for night work. Its black coat made it invisible in darkness — an asset when working against both animal and human threats under cover of night. Romanian pastoral folk tradition held that a black dog had special power against evil spirits. In the same cultural landscape that produced the vampire legend and the

werewolf myth, the black shepherd dog was the community's physical and, some believed, supernatural protector.

***"Black as a raven's wing, invisible in the night, feared by wolves and evil spirits alike — the Corb was Romania's answer to the darkness."***



*Corb in the show ring — the entirely black coat and confident bearing make an unmistakable impression*



*Corb in the show ring — the all-black coat and commanding presence are consistent hallmarks of the breed*



*Corb at a show — the breed's provisional FCI status means international exposure like this is crucial for its future recognition*

## Key Points for Judges

The following principles are grounded in the current FCI breed standards for all four Romanian shepherd breeds. They apply whether you are seeing one of these breeds for the first time or building knowledge ahead of judging them.

### Distinguish by Colour First

The fastest and most reliable identification tool is colour — and colour faults are among the most serious in all four standards:

Colour	Breed	FCI No.	FCI Group
Wolf-sable (fawn + black-tipped guard hairs)	Carpathian	350	Group 1
White, cream, or grey (all equally correct)	Mioritic	349	Group 1
White with black, fawn, or brindle patches	Bucovina	357	Group 2
Entirely and uniformly black	Raven (Corb)	373	Group 2 — Provisional

### Function Always Comes Before Form

From a judging perspective, two factors stand out as critical:

#### *Anatomy (Structure):*

Correct anatomy is not just aesthetic—it is directly tied to health, endurance, and longevity. In large working breeds especially, poor structure significantly reduces functional lifespan. Romanian breeds, being predominantly large and functional, demand a strong emphasis on correct build, movement efficiency, and physical robustness.

#### *Temperament (True to Function):*

Perhaps even more important is temperament. These breeds are still actively used for their original working purposes in Romania, particularly livestock guarding. Therefore, their character must reflect independence, awareness, and the ability to assess situations. They are not bred to be universally sociable, and expecting them to behave as such in the show ring can be misleading. Well-trained individuals can adapt to show environments, but this is a result of training—not a change in inherent temperament.

There is also a notable distinction between show dogs and working dogs within the breed population. While some are successfully trained to perform calmly and confidently in show environments, many dogs in their country of origin remain strictly working animals. These individuals may present with stronger guarding instincts and less tolerance for the artificial conditions of a show ring. This divergence should be respected when evaluating the breed as a whole.

All four FCI standards align with this and tie structural characteristics explicitly to working function. The assessment question should always be: could this dog actually do the job it was bred to do?

- Can it cover mountain terrain all night at the trot without tiring? — check shoulder angulation, topline, hindquarter drive
- Can it survive a Carpathian winter? — check coat density and texture; the undercoat is not optional
- Can it physically deter or engage a wolf or bear? — check size, bone, and condition
- Can it work independently without human direction? — check temperament; aloofness from strangers is correct and expected

## Temperament Is Non-Negotiable

In livestock guardian breeds, temperament is primary, not secondary. The FCI standards for all four Romanian breeds explicitly disqualify both unprovoked aggression AND extreme shyness or fearfulness. The correct temperament is calm confidence: watchful, not reactive; aware, not nervous; protective, not aggressive without cause. A dog that cannot be examined due to true fear or uncontrolled aggression should be excused.

## The Coat Challenge

Three of the four breeds carry substantial coats that can conceal structural faults. Feel underneath the coat for shoulder angulation, topline quality, and muscle condition. A spectacular presentation of coat does not compensate for structural deficiencies. Never award a Mioritic, Bucovina, or Carpathian on coat alone.

## Corb — Special Considerations

The Corb holds provisional FCI recognition (updated 17 September 2024) and is NOT eligible for CACIB. When judging this breed:

- Expect small entry numbers — compare each dog to the standard, not to each other
- Black colour integrity is the primary type indicator: tan points or significant white markings are disqualifying
- Its temperament is more alert and reactive than the other three — this is correct and breed-typical
- It is the tallest breed by upper limit (80 cm for males) but more lightly built than the Bucovina

## Quick Comparison — Four Breeds at a Glance

Feature	Carpathian	Mioritic	Bucovina	Raven (Corb)
FCI No.	350	349	357	373
FCI Group	Group 1	Group 1	Group 2	Group 2 (Prov.)
Colour	Wolf-sable	White/grey/cream	White + patches	All black
Height (males)	65–73 cm	70+ cm (min.)	68–78 cm	70–80 cm
Weight (males)	32–45 kg	50–70 kg	50–90 kg	45–60 kg
Coat length	6–9 cm	min. 10 cm	6–9 cm	7–10 cm
Build	Athletic, lupoid	Large, spectacular	Massive, heaviest	Tall, agile
Temperament	Calm, dignified	Calm, devoted	Extremely stable	Alert, reactive
CACIB eligible	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

## Why These Breeds Matter



*Mioritic and Carpathian together — a reminder that these are two distinct breeds, not variants of one type*

Romania's four shepherd breeds are not well known on the international show circuit. They are rare outside their country of origin and frequently encountered by judges who have little background in their history or purpose.

But they represent something genuinely irreplaceable: one of the last intact traditions of working livestock guardian dogs in Europe, still practised in the field, still shaped by the same selection pressures that created them thousands of years ago. The wolves in the Carpathians are real. The bears are real. Transhumanța still happens. These dogs are still working.

That connection — between the ancient landscape, the enduring pastoral tradition, the folk myths of Transylvania, and the dogs that stand at the edge of the firelight against the dark — is what makes encountering these breeds such an extraordinary experience, even on the page.

As judges, our role is to be good stewards of that heritage: to reward dogs that could do the work their ancestors did, to distinguish between the four breeds with confidence and knowledge, and to send a message to Romanian breeders that the international community recognises and values what they have preserved.

***"Every great livestock guardian breed is a letter written by shepherds to the future. These four breeds are Romania's letters — and they deserve to be read."***

— Viktoría

FCI Licensed Dog Judge | Iceland, April 2026

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## References and Acknowledgements

### Primary Source

This article is based on and inspired by:

Junehall, Petra. "Romanian Shepherd Breeds." *Domarbladet* No. 1, 2016. Svenska Kennelklubben (Swedish Kennel Club).

All photographs used in this article are provided by Petra Junehall and Dagmar Klein and are reproduced with their permission and acknowledgement.

The original article remains the work of Petra Junehall. This article represents a personal expansion and interpretation of the material she presented.

Additional insights are based on input from Dagmar Klein, international judge from Romania and owner of Carpathian Shepherd Dogs

### FCI Breed Standards

[1] FCI Standard No. 349 — Ciobănesc Românesc Mioritic (Romanian Mioritic Shepherd Dog). Asociația Chinologică Română (ACR) / FCI. Provisional acceptance 6 July 2005; definitive acceptance 9 June 2015. Group 1, Section 1. [www.fci.be](http://www.fci.be)

[2] FCI Standard No. 350 — Ciobănesc Românesc Carpatin (Romanian Carpathian Shepherd Dog). ACR / FCI. First written standard 1934. Provisional acceptance 6 July 2005; definitive acceptance 9 June 2015. Group 1, Section 1. [www.fci.be](http://www.fci.be)

[3] FCI Standard No. 357 — Ciobănesc Românesc de Bucovina (Romanian Bucovina Shepherd Dog). ACR / FCI. Provisional acceptance 26 March 2009; definitive acceptance 29 April 2019. Group 2, Section 2.2 (Mountain type Molossoids). [www.fci.be](http://www.fci.be)

[4] FCI Standard No. 373 — Ciobănesc Românesc de Corb (Romanian Raven Shepherd Dog). ACR / FCI. Recognised on provisional basis as of 17 September 2024. Group 2, Section 2.2. Not yet eligible for CACIB. [www.fci.be](http://www.fci.be)

### Background and Cultural Sources

- [5]** Asociația Chinologică Română (ACR) — Romanian Kennel Club. [www.ach.ro](http://www.ach.ro). Primary standard-setting body for all four Romanian shepherd breeds.
- [6]** Transhumanța: traditional Romanian seasonal livestock migration, documented as a continuous cultural practice and recognised by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage.
- [7]** Stoker, Bram. Dracula. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897. Set primarily in Transylvania and the Carpathian Mountains; draws on Eastern European folklore including Romanian tradition.
- [8]** Vârcolac (werewolf) and strigoi (undead) in Romanian folklore: documented in 19th–20th century ethnographic literature on Romanian rural and pastoral communities.
- [9]** Miorița (The Little Ewe): Romanian folk ballad, medieval oral tradition. Collected and published by Vasile Alecsandri, 1850. Central to Romanian national literary canon.
- [10]** The selective preservation of black-coated shepherd dogs for night-working purposes, and the folk belief that black dogs offered protection against evil, are referenced in Romanian ethnographic sources on Carpathian pastoral traditions and in ACR breed history materials for the Corb.

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*This document is written for personal interest and does not constitute an official breed document. The primary FCI breed standards remain the authoritative reference for all judging purposes and should always be consulted directly at [www.fci.be](http://www.fci.be).*