

The Chesapeake Bay Retriever Makes a Great Family Pet

They may rank only 40th in popularity, but that's likely because they're not as well recognized. They're bright, affectionate, and athletic, and they're tough and hardy. Many have even won the rare AKC 'dual champion' title, which speaks volumes to this breed.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, or Chessies, are tough, active dogs bred to hunt waterfowl in the icy Chesapeake Bay
- With a love of swimming and physical movement, Chessies require daily activity for stimulation and exercise
- Known for their bright and affectionate personalities and athletic prowess, especially in the water, Chessies are strong, family-oriented dogs that also have minds of their own
- Chessies also enjoy chewing and carrying objects in their mouths, so be sure to provide appropriate toys for doing so
- If you'd like to add a Chessie to your family, check out one of the many Chesapeake Bay Retriever rescue organizations in the U.S.

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published June 5, 2015.

When thinking of retrievers, many Americans think of Labradors and Golden Retrievers, which are the first and third most popular dog breeds in the U.S., respectively.¹ Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, which rank 40th on the list, may not be as well-recognized, but they're just as adored by those who know them.

Known for their bright and affectionate personalities and athletic prowess, especially in the water, Chessies, as they're called, are strong, family-oriented dogs that also have minds of their own. And that's not all. If you want to learn more about this fascinating breed, Paw Nation has compiled 10 intriguing facts.

10 Fun Facts About Chesapeake Bay Retrievers

1. **They date back to 1807** — In 1807, two Newfoundland dogs were aboard a ship that sank off the coast of Maryland. They escaped and survived, and locals bred them with area dogs after seeing them act as effective retrievers. Their offspring marked the beginning of Chesapeake Bay Retrievers.
2. **They're tough and hardy** — Chessies have the toughness of Newfoundlands mixed with the hunting ability of retrievers. They were specifically bred to withstand the harsh Chesapeake Bay winters, and to this day they love water and tend to do well even in ice and cold.
3. **Duck-hunting dogs** — Chessies are said to be the "greatest duck dog in the world." Hunters will tell you that these dogs can fetch hundreds of ducks in a day, even in icy conditions.

4. **First registered in 1878** — The first Chesapeake Bay Retriever was registered with the American Kennel Club in 1878. They're known as the world's toughest retriever.
5. **They're frequent dual champions** — A "dual champion" title is a rare feat, given to dogs that have been awarded AKC's Champion of Record after it has also been awarded Field Champion or Herding Champion. Though rare, many Chessies have managed this feat.
6. **The state dog of Maryland** — The Chesapeake Bay Retriever, named for Maryland's famous bay, was appointed as Maryland's official state dog in 1964.
7. **University of Maryland Baltimore County's mascot** — Maryland is so proud of Chessies' determination and grit that the University of Maryland Baltimore County has a Chessy named True Grit as its mascot. Their athletic teams are also known as the Retrievers.
8. **Chessies went into battle with General George Custer** — U.S. Army cavalry commander General George Armstrong Custer was known to bring Chesapeake Bay Retrievers with him into battle.
9. **President Teddy Roosevelt was a fan** — President Teddy Roosevelt had a Chesapeake Bay Retriever named Sailor Boy, who was a descendent of General Custer's Chessies. Roosevelt said of his dog:

"Much the most individual of the dogs and the one with the strongest character was Sailor Boy, a Chesapeake Bay dog. He had a masterful temperament and a strong sense of both dignity and duty. He would never let the other dogs fight, and he himself never fought unless circumstances imperatively demanded it."

10. **The late Paul Walker was also a fan** — The late actor Paul Walker owned a Chessy named Boone, who he took everywhere with him. The pair got along so well Boone was even cast in a movie. Walker explained:

"My dog Boone travels everywhere with me and when we were casting 'Into the Blue,' he was just sitting in the corner. [Director] John [Stockwell] saw how well-mannered he was and he listened to me so well.

He was against having a dog on set with a wrangler and filming on water. But my dog listens to me so well, so, sure enough, he made him my dog in the movie."

What Else Should You Know About Chesapeake Bay Retrievers?

Chesapeake Bay Retrievers are known for both their strong body and mind. They like to be active and engaged, so expect to spend ample time playing fetch, teaching obedience exercises and taking your dog hiking or swimming. A quick walk around the block will likely not be enough to satisfy this active dog's desire for sport.

Chesapeake Bay Retrievers also enjoy chewing and carrying objects in their mouths, so be sure to provide appropriate toys for doing so. If you don't, your personal belongings may suffer. YourPurebredPuppy.com gives additional honest information about what you can expect if you're planning to add a Chesapeake Bay Retriever to your family:²

"If you want a dog who ...

- *Is the most rugged and powerful of the six retriever breeds*
- *Has a short harsh 'kinky' coat that comes in natural earthtone shades*
- *Loves the great outdoors and thrives on vigorous athletic activities*
- *Is steady-tempered and dependable*
- *Is more serious and more discriminating with strangers than the happy-go-lucky Golden or Labrador Retriever*

A Chesapeake Bay Retriever may be right for you.

If you don't want to deal with ...

- *Vigorous exercise requirements*
- *Rowdiness and exuberant jumping, especially when young*
- *Destructiveness when bored or not exercised enough*
- *Aggression or shyness toward people, when not socialized enough*
- *Strong-willed mind of his own, requiring a confident owner who can take charge*
- *Territorial aggression toward dogs and cats he doesn't know*
- *Mouthiness — carrying and chewing objects, mouthing your hands*

A Chesapeake Bay Retriever may not be right for you."

If you'd like to add a Chessie to your family, check out one of the many Chesapeake Bay Retriever rescue organizations in the U.S., which have dogs of all ages available across the country.

Sources and References

[PawNation, June 13, 2014 \(Archived\)](#)

¹ [American Kennel Club, June 25, 2020](#)

² [Dogster, February 25, 2025](#)
