

CLASSIFICATION: DOGS and CANINES

The dictionary indicates that foxes, wolves, and jackals all belong to the same family as dogs, i.e., the canine family. However, NBS class 17-5.4 is not for “canines” or the “dog family.” It is for domestic dogs.

In 2005 there was an NBS award written for foxes, and another for wolves. In both cases the sponsor placed them under the classification for mammals specialized to foxes, and mammals specialized to wolves. This was perfectly appropriate, since neither foxes nor wolves are the same as dogs.

NBS classes have evolved to correspond to the way button collectors use and group their buttons, but it has made many changes over time. Here is an example. There is a large variety of domestic dog buttons available. When the class for dogs originated, it did not spill over into other related mammals. There were plenty of dog buttons to work with. There are also many wolf and fox buttons; however, since specific classes for these do not exist, these 2 animals are classed as specializations of mammals.

Cat buttons are less common than dog buttons. Notably, both wild and domestic cats are found, so two separate classes for cats emerged, *Cats (domestic)* and *Cats (wild)*. Competitors may specify which is the desired focus in an award.

The current classification of Animals includes two distinct “families” of animals. All types of horses belong in the *Horse family* class, but so do ponies, zebras, donkeys, mules and miniature horses and ponies. Since Sporting was a popular pastime of old, the wild boar appears on the faces of many antique picture buttons. Domestic pigs as button subjects are less common. They both fit nicely into the *Swine family* class. Because of this family designation, awards for these classes should include different examples of the family members in order to represent the class property.

When writing an award, it is critical to spell out exactly which critters you want to include and then choose the appropriate class/classes accordingly. The “non-family classes” should include only the one designated subject, e.g., dogs. Since the current class 17-5.4 is for just dogs (domestic), not the dog family, that class includes only domestic dogs, nothing else. To include all canine critters, you need to use a broader class to write an award, like this: “*Mammals specialized to the canine family*”. The award then expands to include dogs, wolves, jackals, foxes, dingos, etc.

Conversely, if only one specific member of an animal family is the intended focus, a specialization may be written to target that. “*Horse family specialized to donkeys and mules only*” lays it out clearly.

The classification is very flexible once you learn to use it. You may always start with a broader class and then specialize (narrow it down) to exactly what you want.

Our classification system works because it is a flexible system that evolves to continually improve. Because this question was raised on ButtonBytes, the term domestic was added to the class for dogs. Since 2006 the NBS classification reads *Dogs (domestic)*. This should eliminate confusion, which is the goal of the Classification Committee.



Western Regional Button Association sincerely appreciates this article by Barbara Barrans.

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