



Photo by Sergey Lavrentev

## Rocky Mountain Cocker Rescue By Jennifer M. Brauns

**R**ocky Mountain Cocker Rescue (RMCR) was founded in February of 2009 by Kathryn Glass who had been involved with another rescue in the Denver area. Doing rescue work had given her firm ideas about how things should be done. She put her ideas to work and started RMCR to rescue and re-home cocker spaniels.

The cocker spaniel is an interesting breed. In the 1940s and 1950s, the breed was very, very popular. People all too often buy or adopt cocker spaniel puppies because they are adorable without any regard for what the breed want or needs to be happy. It is incredibly sad when people bring a dog into their home and then relinquish it because it wasn't a good fit. All puppies grow up to be dogs and "cute" is never a worthy reason to bring a dog into your home. You must be willing to keep that dog forever, which means it had better be compatible with your lifestyle and budget in the first place.

"Cocker spaniels are very special," says John Hansen, Senior Vice President and intake Coordinator for RMCR. "They tend to bond very quickly and while they will bond with multiple family members, they will always have a special favorite. You'll never go to the bathroom alone again," he mused. John would know because he has spent the last 30 years in the presence of these distinguished creatures. He has always had multiple cockers until a few years ago when he had one remaining cocker who was different from all the rest. This one wanted to be the one and only dog. Unfortunately, he had an accident and broke his leg in the back yard. Their veterinarian did surgery to pin the leg back together, but the little guy had an adverse reaction to the anesthesia and did not survive.

John began looking for another cocker and ended up rescuing a pair, one older and one younger. The younger one had lots of issues and was afraid of everything, but the two were bonded together, so he adopted them both. Worried about the tight bond and

the age difference between the two, he felt compelled to adopt another younger cocker so that the little one wouldn't be alone when the older one passed on. John never intended to get as involved with cocker rescue as he has become. "It is a labor of love that is very heart-wrenching. My in-box is filled with agony and despair every day. You can't rescue them all. Some are very adoptable and others are not," John shared.

### Pros of the Breed

Almost all of the people who adopt cockers had one during their childhood. People are very familiar with the dog, they are a loving breed, very people oriented. They thrive on their relationship with their humans, and when relinquished, they suffer greatly. They are very smart dogs and since they were bred to be hunting dogs, they are very interested in what is going on outside. Cockers don't do well in shelters or when left alone in a back yard. They want and need to be with their humans. They are very sweet and loving dogs and make very loyal, devoted companions. Cockers are excellent watchdogs as well.

### Cons of the Breed

Most dog breeds have a predisposition toward certain health problems. Cocker spaniels are prone to cataracts and it is common for them to have skin problems. One that prospective cocker owners should be aware of are little bumps, commonly referred to as warts. Some cockers never develop them, while others can have dozens. Unlike warts on humans, they can't be treated externally. They must be surgically removed if they become a problem. They can grow to be the size of a golf ball and ooze in extreme cases. Many cockers also suffer from ear infections as they don't get much air circulation under their big floppy ears. The ears often become yeasty and infected, although grain-free and especially wheat-free diets can help keep the yeast under control. Cocker spaniel owners need to be very proactive in checking, cleaning and treating ears. If ear infections are neglected, a very expensive ear ablation surgery to remove the ear canal and stitch the ear closed might be required.

Keeping the hair trimmed on the inside of the ears can help to promote better circulation. Cockers are also prone to dental disease and neglected teeth can lead to heart problems. Lastly, this breed can have skeletal issues and often experience cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) tears (like ACL tears in humans). All of this said, most cockers are very healthy.

"Unlike some breeds which do well having a bowl of food to graze on throughout the day, cockers are real chow hounds and can become very overweight. It is important to pick up their food bowl after each meal. Many people really want a lap dog and cockers love nothing more than to be just that, but people often don't understand their need for exercise," John said.

Some people have misconceptions that cockers are snippy, temperamental and are known for submissive peeing. None of these are true.

### Adapting to a New Home

Cockers can be adopted out to any residential situation, including apartments, if the owner is committed to keeping the dog exercised. How social a cocker spaniel is depends on how they were raised and if they have been around children and/or cats. If they were raised with cats and/or children, they tend to do well with them. If they have had a bad experience or no previous exposure to children or cats, they may not do as well. The rescue is very cautious about adopting out to homes with young children as they often tug on ears and tails or otherwise move too fast or play too rough. Young children and dogs should always be supervised to prevent mishaps.

### Amazing Fosters

The bottleneck in any rescue organization is always the number of fosters available to temporarily home and assess dogs while they wait to be adopted. RMCR has 10 active fosters including one incredible woman, Rae Chaffee, who has fostered over 70 cockers so far. She has had up to six foster dogs at once when there was a dire situation, although they try to keep it to two at a time. Our thanks go out to this extraordinary woman. The world needs more people like Rae.

### By the Numbers

As of September 25th, RMCR had already racked up \$22,136 in medical bills for the dogs rescued so far this year. That averages out to \$340.50 per dog. Last year they rescued 152 dogs at an average cost of \$245/dog, and in 2009, they rescued 124 dogs at an average cost of \$105/dog. It only takes a few surgical procedures to spike the numbers substantially and you never know what you'll be facing

when you take a dog in as a rescue. The staff at Pets on Broadway and Clear Creek Animal Hospital has been invaluable to the rescue, offering discounted services which make their work possible.

Most of the dogs that RMCR takes in come from shelters. In addition to dogs from Colorado, they take in a lot of dogs from Kansas and Missouri and some from Utah. They have even taken in dogs from as far away as Florida, Virginia and South Dakota. They try to stick to dogs from this region, but if they can arrange transport via relay, they will take a dog in from elsewhere. Only about 10 percent of incoming dogs come from local shelters. Owner relinquishments due to economic woes are up about 25 percent in the last few years, although compared to some rescues, that number is not as high as you might expect.

### Rescue Needs

In addition to additional more fosters, adopters and donations, RMCR is in need of volunteers to assist with fund raising events. At this point, the rescue operates with adoption fees and donations only, so organizing events is a huge priority. Adoption fees are \$300 for dogs age two and under, \$250 for dogs ages two to nine and \$150 for senior dogs. These fees ensure that each dog is spayed or neutered, microchipped, vaccinated and has had dental cleaning or other medical care if needed.

### Special Dogs

There are two cockers in foster care who are in need of especially loving homes. The first one is Confetti, a five-year-old deaf girl who is a very happy dog. She loves car rides and exploring the outdoors and is fine with other dogs and children once properly adjusted to them. She has been in foster care for a long time and really needs a loving family. Tater is another long-term foster who really needs a forever home. He was crated for extended periods of time and has developed a callous on his rump where the hair will no longer grow. He has a gorgeous face, but is not as pretty as some other dogs. He came into the rescue weighing almost 50 pounds, and is now down to about 40 and needs continued work with diet and exercise to obtain a healthy weight. These two dogs are ready to be loving companions for some lucky family.

For more information on adopting, fostering, donating or volunteering with RMCR, please call 303-617-1939 or visit their website at [www.rockymountaincockerrescue.org](http://www.rockymountaincockerrescue.org). Please help this rescue with their efforts if you can.

**Adoptable Cocker Spaniels** - These and other cockers are looking for forever homes

				
Confetti (deaf) 5-year-old female	Tater 7-year-old male	Sam (no kids please) 1-year-old male	Buddy 1-year-old male	Cocoa 5-year-old female