

BORDER TERRIER BREED HEALTH ISSUES

The planned meeting between the Border Terrier Breed Health Group (BHG) and representatives of those who had organised the meeting of Border Terrier enthusiasts on February 19th, took place in York last weekend on the afternoon of Sunday 9th April. The meeting had been suggested by Ronnie Irving in an attempt to create a unified position within the breed on two health conditions and to give those involved the opportunity to hand over such data as they were able to, and to express their concerns to the BHG.

The meeting was Chaired by Ronnie Irving and was attended by Professor Steve Dean (Breed Health Co-ordinator (BHC)) and the three members of the BHG elected by the breed clubs Dr Andrew Harbottle, Dr Eddie Houston and Professor Jeff Sampson. Those providing input from those who had been involved in organising the previous meeting were Janet Lee, Michelle Barnet, Linda Coleman, Geraldine Cove-Print, Jan Gale and her husband, Stewart McPherson, and Andrew Mooney.

The main subjects for discussion were the two conditions CECS and Shaking Puppy Syndrome (SPS). The pedigrees of 19 SPS litters were handed over to the Breed Health Group along with information on various aspects of CECS.

The meeting recognised the tremendous amount of work that had been put into the issues particularly by Janet Lee, Jan Gale and Michelle Barnett in both assembling information about the conditions and affected dogs, and also in the carrying out fundraising efforts that had so far collected over £16,000 for use by the Animal Health Trust for work on the two conditions.

The main concerns expressed by those present centred around criticism that the Breed Health Co-ordinator had not been responsive enough to those reporting the conditions in the past and not enough had been done by the Breed Health Group to draw attention to and tackle the conditions. There was a lack of trust that matters would be moved forward, and as to whether the Breed Health Co-ordinator and Breed Health Group would get to grips with the issues. Some believed that this lack of trust would mean a reluctance to report issues to the BHG. The Chairman stressed that we should all concentrate on the future rather than the past, and on unity rather than divisiveness. Clearly the BHC and the BHG would have to work on building back that trust, in the interest of the breed.

The Chairman dismissed suggestions that the BHC should be replaced, and he made it clear that the appointments of the BHC and members of the BHG were matters for the breed clubs and not for individuals.

Those present also put forward a number of very positive suggestions for the future including:

- Creation of a Breed Health Website
- Appointment by each breed club of a liaison person per club to talk to concerned dog owners and provide links between such owners and the BHG.
- Use of funds to sequence further cases of SPS and to include genome sequencing of CECS cases.

- Better future communication of BHG issues.

BREED HEALTH GROUP MEETING

Earlier in the day a meeting of the Border Terrier Breed Health Group itself had taken place at which a number of key issues were agreed. A separate note giving further information on these decisions will be issued shortly but in the meantime here is a summary of the various items discussed:

- Terms of reference for the BHG
- Protocols for people who think their dogs are affected by either CECS or SPS – to advise on exactly what they should do so that the maximum amount of accurate information can be gathered from each case.
- Production of a Questionnaire for owners of CECS sufferers, to facilitate diagnosis and early recording of seizures and the activities surrounding these.
- Forward plans on estimating condition prevalences
- Pedigree analysis and development of firstly closed, then open registers
- Meetings with researchers to get up to date information on progress and clarify future plans.
- Possible acceleration of sequencing projects for both SPS and CECS
- Plans to prepare the breed's supporters for the type of breeding recommendations and/or controls likely if definitive tests can be developed.
- Preparation of fact sheets on each condition for use by breed clubs, owners and the veterinary profession.
- Policies for breed clubs and others to continue the development of fundraising for a Breed Health Fund.
- Ways to improve future communications with breed clubs and others
- Regular meetings with breed club representatives

A more detailed report on the BHG Meeting will be produced in due course.

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