Gordon Setter Breed Health Report 2017

**PRA**

Testing for rcd-4 is to progressing well,with clears continuing to outnumber carriers, as the figures below show

Please read the separate PRA update. Regarding the new form,currently there are still only two known UK cases. Now we have more than one form in the breed it is important that breeders advertise health information correctly. Stating ‘PRA rcd-4 clear’ is fine if that’s the case but no one can state that their stock is ‘PRA free’ and ‘will not go blind from PRA’ so please be careful.

Clinical eye tests are a very useful way of monitoring eye health within the breed and breeders are encouraged to do this prior to breeding and to have a current [within a year] eye certificate at the time of breeding. For group testing at shows usually there is a reduced cost and the BVA offer a lower price for dogs over 8 yrs being tested.

**AHT Genome Project**

Gordons were one of the first breeds to sign up to this. The breed sample has been sequenced and is now back at the AHT to be analysed. This is taking some time as if each letter of dna was 1mm,it would stretch from John O Groats to Lands End and back again!

**Breed Health and Conservation Plans**

This is an initiative launched by the Kennel Club to help breeds identify any problems they may have or identify conditions which may warrant further research. Breed information will be taken from health surveys,KC/BVA health schemes,insurance data,breed watch , judges health monitoring forms and any breed research studies. It will be a holistic view looking at known inherited conditions,complex conditions [multi gene or environmental factors],conformational concerns and population genetics. Breed clubs will be consulted at each stage and face to face meetings will be arranged between Dr Katy Evans from the KC who is heading up this project and breed health reps. The first breeds have just been completed and Gordons will be in Round 2 which will begin anytime now and will complete October 2018.

**Health Report Forms**

I launched these this year to try and make it easier for people to report health conditions. They are available from me and from breed club websites. Afew were taken at shows but as yet non have been returned! I’m not surprised by this as people are concerned about reporting health conditions as they think this information will be circulated amongst committees. It won’t,the idea is the forms remain confidential unless someone wants to discuss it publicly. I do understand that people feel if they report a problem and it becomes public,they feel other breeders may point the finger,hold it against them in the show ring or not want to use their stud dog. It is sad this is the case and I don’t think there is anything I can say to change this view. I would love to see a time when breeders feel confident in reporting conditions and we can openly discuss them and help one another . When conditions are reported people always want to know what information is available,if it is known in the breed etc but sadly this is often where I get stuck as data is not forthcoming. Anyway the forms are there and hopefully in time owners will get used to them…

**Reported Conditions**

One condition which has been raised by concerned breeders is heart issues. There have been two confirmed cases of Dilated Cardiomyopathy [DCM] and other cases of sudden and/or young deaths. This is obviously a concern so a decision has been made by the breed clubs to investigate further. Again breeders were reluctant to name dogs involved so I approached Nottingham University who work with a number of breeds and have a great team of clinical vets,research students and geneticists available to help.

The idea is we will start with a heart survey conducted by the universityi so all information goes to them. No breed person,including myself will have access to the raw data [names] so I really hope this will encourage people to participate in the survey. Depending what the survey shows,it may be a case of no further action is required but if there is further investigation required then the university will have the data and expertise to help us.

I certainly know of older Gordons who have had heart conditions but this is not an unusual finding in the older dog. However,dogs dying of a heart condition at a younger age or young dogs/puppies dying is a worry. Historically there has been anecdotal evidence of heart disease in the breed so this may be a situation which hasn’t actually changed but without finding out,we don’t know that.

I met a cardiologist recently and I asked him what he knew about Gordons. He said he had tested afew [pre breeding checks] and hadn’t found a problem. This is positive news and I’m also very pleased that some breeders have chosen to do this themselves. Breed clubs in America have been heart testing for about the last 10 years, they do so for pre breeding checks and do not have a problem with heart conditions so again this information all helps.

I am still in the planning and discussion stage for the survey so please look out for more information coming through from the breed websites and facebook pages as this project progresses. One a step at a time,firstly we will try to get relevant information and then we go from there. I keep going back to the health mantra I use,’it’s not what we think,or what we believe,it’s what we **know’.**

**Summary**

I have been very busy on health matters this year and have been talking to quite a lot of breeders and owners wanting to discuss health which is good. I attended a very positive KC Health Co ordinators Symposium which this year was open to anyone interested in pedigree dog health. I was pleased that the BGSC health rep,Sonja Upton Lovett could attend and we also met a vet there who is now a Gordon owner!

On the downside I have also realised that for some,breed health is just not something they are interested in. I am a veterinary nurse,my parents are vets so I think I was born having an interest in health but I do appreciate that not everyone feels that strongly about it. The KC are coming out with more health initiatives all the time and I don’t know if people are finding it all too much? I wonder if some thought after Pedigree Dogs Exposed,we’d talk about health for a couple of years and then it would all go away again? I ,as with all the other Breed Health Co ordinators are committed to monitoring and where necessary improving breed health. Generally I think Gordons are a healthy breed but that doesn’t mean we should become complacent.

In my role as Breed Health Co Ordinator I have a job to do and this includes;

Providing a central point of contact between the Breed and the KC for all matters concerning health.

Provide advice,help and support to owners/breeders on health matters affecting their dogs

Provide accurate,reliable and consistent information to breeders/owners and the general public in order to educate and raise awareness about health issues that affect or could affect the breed.

Liase with Breed Clubs/Councils to inform,update and consult with them over the breed’s health to enable a co ordinated approach to breed health matters.

Research,compile and publish information and updates on all health matters affecting the breed,via Breed Club/councils websites,newsletters,yearbooks and any other relevant publications.

Receive,record and monitor input from owners/breeders concerning reported cases of illness/disease and cause of death,in order to keep abreast of current health issues affecting the breed and be alerted as early as possible to any significant new issues that may be emerging.

Compile annual health reports on behalf of breed clubs/councils for submission to the KC with their annual returns and provide additional interim health reports to the Breed Clubs as and when necessary

Communicate and liase with professional associations and institutes [such as the BVA,AHT etc]

Keep abreast of developments in canine research,legislation,disease knowledge,both within the UK and worldwide.

Attend meetings,health related seminars,conferences etc as and when necessary.

As my job title says,co ordination is the main part of my job. It is not upto me to make decisions but I have to give everyone the information required to make informed decisions on health matters. I am the go between of the breed clubs,the members and Gordon owners ,the KC and other third parties. I bring information and questions to the committee table and then I send information back out to owners and breeders.

I am here to help with breed health overall but a part of this job I really enjoy is helping individual owners. This may be a case of decoding what the vet has said to them and discussing treatment options given to them or discussing how to live with and manage a dog with a particular condition. I feel useful when I am able to help and support an owner during a health issue with their dog and this is where I can really put my veterinary nursing qualification and years of experience of being a dog owner to good use!

Thankyou to everyone who continues to support me in this challenging role.

Kathryne Wrigley RVN Gordon Setter Breed Health Co Ordinator October 2017