

Following publication of an article regarding the Flatcoated Retriever in the May 2017 edition of *The Field* it was felt that the current health status of the breed had been misrepresented, a letter of clarification has therefore been sent to the Editor. The article is accessible on line and has been shared on social media, <http://www.thefield.co.uk/gundogs/flatcoated-retriever-flatcoats-fatal-flaw-39355> so we felt it important to provide more accurate information regarding some of the health related points raised in the article.

Unfortunately, most breeds will be predisposed to certain inherited conditions, the Flatcoated Retriever is not alone in this, however in recent years we have seen evidence that the health and longevity of the breed has improved. The health study referred to in the article has been misquoted and to suggest that 'half of all Flatcoated Retrievers will have contracted cancer by the age of eight' is incorrect; the study by Dr Dobson published in 2009* involved a cohort of 174 dogs and was conducted over 12 years; less than half (42%) of these dogs died from confirmed tumours, at an average age of 9 years however, 35% of dogs died of non-tumour causes at an average age of 12 years. In addition, the Kennel Club Pedigree Breed Health Survey carried out in 2014 demonstrated an increased median longevity for the Flatcoated Retriever at 10 years**

Much work has been carried out by Dr Jane Dobson at Cambridge Veterinary School with regard to investigating Histiocytic Sarcoma (localised and disseminated) which is a type of tumour more frequently seen in the Flatcoated Retriever (malignant histiocytosis is now not the currently used terminology). Reports of this research can be viewed on the health pages of the Flatcoated Retriever Society website, including links to the Cambridge Cause of Death Register.

The article cites glaucoma and epilepsy as conditions that affect the Flatcoated Retriever, however in my experience these conditions are rarely reported in this breed (neither condition was reported by owners in the KC breed survey in 2014) Primary closed angle glaucoma is associated with an abnormality within the eye called goniodysgenesis which is thought to be an inherited condition and as such the Flatcoated Retriever is currently certified for goniodysgenesis under the BVA/KC Eye Scheme (it is important to note that not all dogs affected for goniodysgenesis will go on to develop glaucoma) Careful screening of dogs used in breeding programmes has resulted in excellent eye results for the breed. Eye conditions such as Hereditary Cataract (HC) and Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) are not often diagnosed in the Flatcoated Retriever. In the last 15 years 3385 Flatcoated Retrievers were screened for goniodysgenesis and only 169 were found to be affected.

The Flatcoated Retriever has unique qualities and many owners and breeders are committed to maintaining the breed's health and its dual-purpose attributes. The suggestion within the article that outcrossing to the Labrador Retriever will 'eradicate cancer genes' is, in my opinion, misguided, not only would the breed specific qualities be lost, there are unlikely to be any lines in other breeds that are free from inherited disease. It should be noted that there are a number of inherited conditions seen in the Labrador (including types of cancer) that are not commonly reported in the Flatcoated Retriever.

Further information about Flatcoated Retriever breed health initiatives can be found on the health pages of the Flatcoated Retriever Society website. <http://www.flatcoated-retriever-society.org/health>

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References:

*Dobson J.M., Hoather T., McKinley T.J. & Wood J. Mortality in a Cohort of Flatcoated Retrievers in the UK. *Veterinary and Comparative Oncology*, 7 (2): 115 – 121, 2009

**http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/749332/flat_coated_retriever.pdf