

## Statement from Dr Jane Dobson, University of Cambridge regarding the Flatcoated Retriever Cause of Death Register

For the past 25 years we have worked with owners and breeders of Flatcoated Retrievers to document and study the incidence of cancer in the breed. The tumour survey that we started in 1990, has been crucial to our work with the Breed in providing tissue and blood samples, which we are still working with, and pedigree information. We feel this study has now run its course and will close at the end of 2015.

The “Health Study” of 174 dogs\*, published in 2009, showed that approximately 40% of dogs die from cancer, at an average age of 9 years, with the predominant form of cancer being histiocytic sarcoma, supporting the findings of the tumour survey. However, 35% of dogs in this same study died of non-tumour causes including heart disease, musculoskeletal problems and old age at an average age of 12 years. It is increasingly apparent that we can learn much about genetic predispositions underlying disease by documenting illnesses that breeds are NOT affected by as those that they are.

Health issues associated with Pedigree dogs have been very much in the headlines in recent years with a number of epidemiological studies conducted and published to examine such health issues nationally and internationally. A number of different methodologies have been used including studies of insurance company data-bases and owner-based questionnaires. These retrospective studies (i.e. based on historical information) suffer a number of limitations such as owner compliance, bias through non-random sampling of the population at risk, and accuracy of owner-reported cause of death.

We would like to continue our work with the Flatcoated Retriever breed towards a goal of elucidating the cause of cancer in the breed and ultimately reducing its incidence. To this end, in conjunction with the Breed Health Sub-committee, we have set up an on line, web-based, register for recording the cause of death when dogs die. We believe that this is a completely novel approach to “Health” monitoring within a Pedigree Dog breed, because it is PROSPECTIVE and data entry limited to drop down menus (no free text), it does not suffer some of the limitations of other studies as outlined above. However, the quality of the information that will emerge from this Register is entirely dependent upon owners and breeders of Flatcoated retrievers being prepared to enter the details of their dogs after death.

This is NOT a Cancer Registry but a potentially powerful means of monitoring the health of the breed as a whole that may shed light on new or emerging problems and show trends in health issues. However, this ambitious project will only succeed if the majority of Flatcoat owners embrace the idea and contribute information if and when a dog dies.

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

August 2015

