



Flatcoated Retriever Society

AGM Health Report July 2021

Madam Patron, Mr President, Madam Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

Despite a pandemic, 2020 proved to be just as busy for the Health Sub Committee, if not more so as additional challenges were placed on the veterinary and healthcare professions.

Animal Health Trust (AHT) closure

In last year's report it was noted that there were fears that the AHT would go into liquidation, sadly suitable benefactors could not be found and the AHT closed in July 2020.

DNA Sample collection and archive

Cathryn Mellersh and her team formerly at the AHT are now relocated at the KC Canine Genetics Centre at the University of Cambridge.

The archive of FCR DNA stored at the Trust has been preserved and we would like to continue to promote collection and storage of DNA from FCR affected with conditions thought to be hereditary, in preparation for future research. I would encourage in particular collection of DNA from Flatcoats affected with renal dysplasia. Details of the new collection and submission process can be found on the Society website. There is no charge for DNA sample kits for use in clinically affected dogs.

The Genetics Centre has asked if owners of Flatcoated Retrievers whose dog's DNA is already archived, (formerly at the AHT), could update them if there have been any changes in the dog's health so they may keep accurate records. A new Cambridge KCGS update form is now available on the Society website in the health/research section.

Report from Dr Jane Dobson, University of Cambridge

Jane Dobson writes:

Histiocytic Sarcoma research project:

'Our collaborative study on microRNA expression in Histiocytic sarcoma in Flatcoated Retrievers with David Sargan (University of Cambridge) and Anna Hollis & Mike Starkey (Animal Health Trust) ground to a halt with the pandemic lockdown and the sad closure of the AHT. However, happily Anna has moved to Cambridge to head up the Equine Team and we are hoping to finally get the project up and running in the next couple of months. The tumour tissues for the first part of this study have been identified and located from our large archive which was built up over many years through the Tumour Survey which was supported by Flatcoated retriever owners & breeders. We have performed analysis on initial samples which confirm that there appear to be specific microRNAs associated with histiocytic sarcoma; if this is confirmed on further samples, we hope that this will enable earlier diagnosis of the disease and therefore potentially improve treatment

options. We are seeking funding from external sources to complete the analysis of the new samples, which will be performed in conjunction with Cathryn Mellersh and her genetics research group, who have recently also joined Cambridge.

Cause of Death Register:

The revised Cause of Death register (rebuilt in Qualtrics format in June 2018) now has 168 entries for 'main cause of death'. Unfortunately, these results indicate that over 60% of deaths in the breed are tumour related and that histiocytic sarcoma still represents a significant problem. Which supports the need for further research into the underlying (genetic) causes and early detection of the condition. (As described above). Further detail and analysis of the data from the register can be viewed in Jane Dobson's full report available on the Society website health pages.

Breed Health survey

Breed health surveys were previously carried out by the Society in 2006 and 2011, our most recent survey was shared in December 2020 and closed in January 2021 to survey the current health status of Flatcoated Retrievers resident in the UK. We received a higher response to this survey with most participants completing the online version for their dogs. The data is currently being collated and will be compared to that gathered in the previous surveys. An overview of results will be reported in due course, individual responses will remain confidential.

Health webinars

The health seminar day originally planned for July 2020 was postponed and recently delivered in the form of online webinars via the Zoom platform. The recordings from this event and two further webinars will be made available shortly to view again via YouTube, we will promote them once available.

Health testing at Society shows

It has not been possible, due to Covid restrictions, to hold health testing sessions (eye testing and Patellar Luxation assessment) at either Society show this year, we hope to be able to offer both at the April 2022 Championship show. Jane Alexander has kindly offered to carry out PL assessment examinations at her veterinary practice in Buckinghamshire in the interim. Owners should contact Jane directly to make arrangements (contact details can be found on the Society website).

BHCP Review

This project was launched by the Kennel Club in September 2016, with the aim that this resource will aid breeders and breed clubs in making balanced breeding decisions for the future health of the breed. A plan has been developed for the Flatcoated Retriever and has taken a variety of factors into consideration such as known inherited conditions, any conformational concerns and population genetics.

The BHCP review has been led, on behalf of The Kennel Club, by Hannah James (BSc (Hons) BioVeterinary Sciences). Hannah has updated the literature review and evidence base document for the Flatcoated Retriever which lists global, peer reviewed breed specific health data, not just that relating to the UK population. The breed health representatives from the four breed organisations (The Flatcoated Retriever Society, The Flatcoated Retriever Club of Scotland, The Northern England Flatcoated Retriever Association and the Southern Flatcoated Retriever Club)

have had input in the discussion to prioritise and identify health concerns. The most recent action plan following the review process can be found on the Society website health pages.

Sires table for 2020

The table of sires used in 2020 will be published on the website in the near future, there has been a delay in collating information due to the late publication of Kennel Club Breed Record Supplement for the last quarter of 2020.

Group Study report 2020

- 108 dogs have been registered in the 11 years since the Group Study began (2009/2010)
- Over that time 63 have left the study group (deceased/owners decided to leave the study/failed to return questionnaires)
- 25 completed questionnaires were received in 2020, although 36 active participants remain. (If a participant does not return the questionnaire following 3 annual reminders, then the dogs are removed from the Study Group)
- Nine deaths were reported during 2020 (malignancy and Immune mediated Hemolytic Anaemia reported as cause of death in majority of cases)
- Owners of 7 dogs of the first cohort of approx. 40 dogs enlisted in the study 11 years ago are still actively participating.
- The Health Committee has made the decision to close the study group to new participants, we have a large amount of health data from the last 10 years to collate and will work on this over the next 12 months, the Kennel Club health team have offered support in analysing the data. We will continue to collect annual updates from the dogs currently enrolled, thank you once again to all those still actively participating in the Group Study.

Closing comments:

A proposition, made at the 2020 AGM, led to the creation of a Society Officer position for health, the Honorary Health Secretary, the person elected to this position will also be Chair of the Health Sub-Committee. Historically the Society health sub-committee Chairman was also invited by the Kennel Club to carry out the Kennel Club Breed Health Coordinator role and represent all breed organisations (the role I have been doing since taking over from Val Jones in 2015). Going forward I would like to work with the health representatives from all four breed organisations to develop a nomination process for choosing subsequent KC Breed Health Coordinators.

This has been an especially challenging year for me, both personally and professionally (in common with so many others) and I have frequently considered giving up this time consuming and at times difficult role, I have more than once been chastised and criticised for not doing enough to preserve our lovely breed. Admittedly, we do not always have the answers, but we will continue to try and find them, continue to spend time speaking to owners and helping them through difficult times where we can. I know there are many people who do appreciate what we do, and tell us so, thank you. As always, I am grateful to the Health Sub-Committee for their help and support.

Liz Branscombe DipAVN(Surgical) RVN

Hon. Health Secretary and Kennel Club Breed Health Coordinator