



## **Flatcoated Retriever Society**

### **AGM Health Report March 2024**

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

#### **Cancer research at the University of Cambridge**

I have received a report from Dr David Sargan who has a role in comparative genetics as part of the research team at the University of Cambridge with an update on progress of the research to develop a blood test to diagnose Histiocytic Sarcoma (HS) in FCR. This work was started in a collaborative project between the University (Jane Dobson) and the AHT (Anna Hollis and Dr Mike Starkey) in 2019 and made some progress in identifying micro RNA markers for HS. Thankfully, due to the collaborative nature of the research, data was not lost when the AHT closed in 2020. Dr Sargan reports that thanks to a bequest the team has received, the opportunity has now arisen to complete this work and see whether the micro RNAs identified can be used as an early detection system in FCR blood, allowing earlier treatment of the tumour. Dr Sargan's report which outlines more detail of plans for the next stage of work will be made available on the Society website after the AGM. It is likely that further samples will be required from Flatcoats affected with HS, and Dr Sargan says he would like to encourage owners of dogs unfortunate to be afflicted with this tumour to ask their vets to engage with this research. We will share more information as we receive it regarding this call for samples.

#### **Cause of Death Register**

At the time of writing a report from Jane Dobson with an update on entries for 2023 has not been received, this will be published on the Society website when available.

#### **Call for funding from Cathryn Mellersh at the Canine Genetics Centre (CGC)**

I expect you may have seen the recent press and social media coverage about the funding problems that the CGC is facing, Cathryn Mellersh gave an online update about the situation in January. A recording of Cathryn's talk and a list of Q&As can be found on the Genetics Centre website. They are requesting donations from breed clubs and organisations to assist them in making up a funding gap of £345,000 for the 12 month period from April 2024.

Given that we have an archive of Flatcoat DNA at the Centre and the potential for future breed specific research, the health sub-committee felt it important to consider the situation and whether a donation be made from the Society health fund, following discussion, the sub-committee agreed to propose the following course of action subsequently approved by the General Committee:

To make a single pledge of £1500 to the Canine Genetics Centre in support of the maintenance of the DNA archive and cost of providing DNA sample collection kits to owners of Flatcoated Retrievers.

A further message from Cathryn Mellersh to Breed Health Co-ordinators regarding funding for the Canine Genetics Centre at the University of Cambridge was received on 03/02/2024:

1. The University of Cambridge will not request any of the pledged money until sufficient funds have been pledged, or otherwise secured, to keep the Genetics Centre operational until at least the end of June 2024. Clubs are also invited to make their pledges in stages, thus spreading the cost over a longer period, with each separate pledge being contingent on the Genetics Centre remaining in operation.
2. The funds that are being sought currently are to fill an immediate funding gap and a management committee has been formed to develop a longer-term funding strategy. So, while we encourage Breed Clubs, individual members, breeders and dog owners to engage with the work of the Canine Genetics Centre and fundraise to help support our research in the future, we do not intend to make an appeal on this scale again.

At the time of writing this report the fund currently stands at just under £140,000. We will of course continue to monitor the situation and hopefully the CGC will be able to continue its valuable research work, in the event that the Centre cannot continue we will seek assurance that the Flatcoated Retriever DNA archive will be preserved.

### **BVA Eye testing**

Reminder that repeat testing is advised for all Flatcoats and is definitely a requirement in both sire and dam within the year before mating, breed specific requirements are gonioscopy for PLA grading every three years and now regular eye tests. NB The Flatcoated Retriever Society will support the testing of older dogs by offering to subsidise the fee by £20 for gonioscopy examination of members' Flatcoats aged 8 years and over. Please note, regular eye testing is important in all Flatcoats as a health monitoring tool, it is not only limited to dogs that may be used for breeding.

### **Group Study report to December 2023**

- 108 dogs have been enlisted in the 13 years since the Group Study began (2010)
- 21 completed questionnaires were received in 2023 (If a participant does not return the questionnaire following 3 annual reminders, then the dogs are removed from the Study Group)
- Five deaths were reported during 2023 (malignancy reported as cause of death in some cases however these were also older dogs)
- There is one dog of the first cohort of approx. 40 dogs enlisted in the study 13 years ago still doing well.
- The study is now closed to new participants, but we continue to collect annual updates from the dogs currently enrolled. Thank you once again to all those who have engaged with this project and those still actively participating in the Group Study. It is hoped that a detailed analysis of the large amount of data collected from this study group will be undertaken and advice will be sought from The Kennel Club Health team on the best methods to use for this process.

Once again, I would like to thank all owners of Flatcoated Retrievers who have taken time to make contact with the Health Sub-committee during the last year, submit health reports online or complete the Cambridge University Cause of Death register, this information is treated in confidence and where permission is granted, will inform future health strategies.

Thank you too to members of the Health Sub-committee for giving your time and support.