

The Saluki Health Coordinators Report

This report is a brief review of the activities that have been undertaken since the last report to the AGM in 2017 and in the past year there have been three main areas of focus:

DNA Samples

The collection of Saluki DNA samples is an important investment we need to make for the future of the breed. The Animal Health Trust (AHT) are building a databank of DNA that could be instrumental in helping them to develop DNA tests to help us identify and mitigate inherited/genetic conditions.

We have been fortunate as a breed that we have not had any significant issues in the recent past due to the diligent actions of breeders that have addressed any that have arisen. However, the events of the last year, that I will cover, bring into sharp relief the need for us to invest in this databank.

I won't cover the way in which the donations are used in this report, but I am happy to help anyone understand how a donation can help – and the need to keep helping by updating the AHT on any conditions the donor develops.

At the start of the year we had 62 Saluki samples in the databank that had been gathered over the previous 3-4 years. I set an objective to double that and in the process, raise awareness of the importance of the AHT project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who helped drive this forward – both the individuals who sampled their dog's DNA and also both breed clubs as the Northern Saluki Club and The Saluki Club ran free sampling clinics at their club shows that were very successful.

Unfortunately, I have to say I failed – I did not hit my objective as I only managed to grow the databank by a further 56 samples, but we have taken a big step forward, and I must learn to set more realistic targets!

Hypothyroidism

As I mentioned above, the discovery of a significant incidence of Hypothyroidism in the last year has reinforced the importance of gathering the DNA samples. As a result of the diligence of John and Hilary Davies, whose bitch Sheerzan was diagnosed with Hypothyroidism, a rough map of the current extent of the condition in breed was developed which showed there could be an issue in the breed.

A number of actions were then taken. The first was to undertake some research on the condition to better understand how it was inherited. I also contacted Dr Tom Lewis, a Quantitative Geneticist at The Kennel Club for counsel on a possible mitigation strategy that minimised the impact on diversity, which he helped with. Combined with the research that John and Hilary had done we then created a proposed breeding strategy, or as it has become Voluntary Code, that sets out steps we can take to purge Hypothyroidism whilst preserving genetic diversity. This code is now in the process of being formally adopted by both breed clubs and supported by Saluki Welfare.

A key part of the strategy will be the development of a genetic test to understand the propensity of the dog or bitch to contract the condition, and potentially pass it on, ahead of a mating, or even whilst they are puppies. Samples from five affected dogs were gathered, together with the clinical notes from the vets to help the AHT understand if the condition is truly genetic, rather than acquired. As I write this, that is still being determined, but on the likely basis that it is genetic they will start the process of looking for a test for us. Whilst this may not result on one being finally

developed, a side product will be that we will get a full DNA analysis of the breed which will give useful information for us.

In the meantime, John and Hilary have identified from discussion with Dr Jean Dodds – a noted expert in this condition - that a Full Panel Blood test will give an 18-month advance warning that the condition will develop, and this has been added to the proposed voluntary code.

As I will cover below, I have also been working with The Kennel Club to ensure we have their support in developing a more structured Breed Health Conservation Plan – something that is being piloted with a few breeds at present. Given the incidence of Hypothyroidism is going to be a part of that I wanted to make sure that everything was aligned. I therefore ensured that the voluntary code had the input of Dr Katy Evans, who is running the BHCP, as well as Dr Tom Lewis. That has been achieved, and the plan is that once the code has been approved and run for a short while within the breed clubs it will be considered as an inclusion in the Assured Breed Scheme.

It has also been suggested that the test results from any Full Panel Tests undertaken as a part of the proposed voluntary code could be of great value in wider research. Some genetic analysis was offered by the folk at The Kennel Club once a reasonable number have been gathered. The major issue was where the databank of test results could be set up so that the information could be readily accessible for potential research. Whilst The Kennel Club were unable to help, I now have a preliminary offer from the AHT that I need to follow up once we have the code adopted.

This is still very much “work in progress”, but we have already made great progress thanks to the openness and help of John and Hilary Davies. For me the focus on fixing the problem rather than the blame has been exemplary, and the co-operation in getting things to this point is a good model for the development of the wider Saluki Breed Health Conservation Plan.

The Breed Health Coordinator Symposium

The 2017 Symposium was held at The Kennel Club Building at Stoneleigh and we had a packed agenda. There were a number of useful presentations and discussions, and I would urge you to look at these on The Kennel Club website when they become available, www.thekennelclub.org.uk/health/breed-health-co-ordinators/ , only the 2016 slide sets are there at present.

High spots were a useful presentation on how to critically assess research papers and references, very timely for the analysis of the Hypothyroidism papers, and an introduction into the Breed Health and Conservation Plan programme. Whilst the Kennel Club are still testing the processes with a few clubs, I have secured the breed a place for the programme that will kick off in early 2019.

More detail on the benefits of having a Breed Health and Conservation plan can be found here www.thekennelclub.org.uk/health/breed-health-and-conservation-plans . As we get to the end of this year more detail will be available and hopefully updates can be given via newsletters.

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