



IRISH TERRIER CLUB OF AMERICA

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ITCA Health Survey Results

Summarized by Peg Gill

Health survey questionnaires were sent out to ITCA members by committee chair Jeanene MacDonald, and the returns were compiled by Beth Devlin, D.V.M.. The survey was sent to the full membership. Also, a revised version of the survey questionnaire was included in the 1997 Fall *Newsletter*. Approximately 25% of the membership responded. Dr. Devlin's findings were reported to the ITCA Board of Governors last October. This article summarizes the points made in that report.

The survey questionnaire asked members to report on health problems in their Irish Terriers. In the survey returns, there were 160 individual Irish Terriers represented, ranging from neonate to seventeen years of age. The ratio of males to females is not known.

Health conditions showing a greater than expected incidence were: hyperthyroidism (11), cataracts (12), and inappropriate aggression (14). Dr. Devlin wrote that she could not denote which cases of inappropriate aggression might have been dominance fear, redirected; it concerned her because a fair percentage of those dogs are owned by people who know Irish Terriers.

"Temperament needs to be monitored," she wrote. "I worry that the daredevil spark will degenerate into irritability," she wrote.

The (2) dogs that were reported with congenital deafness had histories of airline travel, and neither had been clinically tested. She commented that although only (1) report of latent progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) was reported, this condition is listed in references as genetic in the breed; she also wondered if

Cystinuria (3) has been identified as genetic. Dr. Paula Henthorn at the University of Pennsylvania has identified the gene causing Cystinuria. A genetic test for this disease is available.

The malignancy distribution in our Irish Terriers parallels those for all other breeds.

Digital hyperkeratosis "corny feet" (2) is of concern since this genetic defect that was thought to have been bred out of the American Irish Terriers many years ago. The Club should strongly encourage that parents and siblings of Irish Terriers so affected be removed from all breeding programs.

Dr. Devlin commented that the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has listed the following a prevalent heritable disorders in all breeds: hyperthyroidism, hip dysplasia, and epilepsy. (Fortunately, the latter two are not generally seen in the Irish Terriers.)

The *Network of Animal Health* is developing a database on breed health for AVMA. They track retinal atrophy, autoimmune disorders, heart disease, cataracts, patella luxation, bloat, cancer, and eyelid disorders.

Dr. Devlin reported that many of the survey returns commented on the dogs' overall excellent health and longevity. Her impression is "that the breed is remarkably free of health problems and that breeders deserve a lot of credit for maintaining high standards." (She now wonders if there might be some way to get information from *non-Club* members about the health of their Irish Terriers?)

breeders have successfully bred out the condition -- "or are simply not looking?"

The high incidence of cataracts may be due mostly to the fact that the afflicted Irish Terriers were geriatric, so probably those "cataracts" are nuclear sclerosis of the lens, a normal change in the density of the lens with aging.

There were no reports of overshot or undershot bites, but missing teeth (2) and narrow mandibles (2) were reported. Malocclusions are a common problem, and it seems unusual that there were no reports. It could be more common that the deciduous canines strike the upper gum. Only (2) such cases were listed in the survey. She also was surprised by the incidence of teeth turned sideways.

Jeanene MacDonald, chairman of the Health Committee, was disappointed that only 25% of the membership responded to the survey! She hopes that when the next survey is conducted, more members will participate. "Some of the health problems mentioned may be only the tip of the iceberg, but how do we know without more complete responses?" she lamented.

Now a bit of history from me: Margaret Slater, D.V.M., Ph.D., from Texas A&M, spoke on breed health surveys at the 1997 AKC Canine Health Conference. She indicated that for a true evaluation, the response to a breed's health survey from pet owners, show dog owners, and pet-store puppy owners must reach the 70% to 80% level. She concluded that accuracy in identifying health problems is the key to success of any survey.