

# The Dachshund Breed Council

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## Breed Conference 2009 – Summary Report



More than 80 people attended the Dachshund Breed Council's first Breed Conference at the Kennel Club Building, Stoneleigh on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2009. The day's aims were to explain the changes that had been made to the Breed Standard and their implications for breeders and judges. Additionally, it aimed to explain the Breed Council's Health Plans and the current priorities for the six varieties of the breed.

Ian Seath, Chairman of the Breed Council, welcomed everyone and introduced the day and its focus on health and welfare in Dachshunds.

### **The Revised Breed Standard:**

The first presentation was made by Caroline Kisko, Secretary of the Kennel Club, who spoke about why the KC had initiated changes in Breed Standards and their relationship with improvements in health and welfare. She explained the context of the changes, including the proposals made in the European Convention for the protection of Pet Animals.



Jeff Horswell, Chairman of the Dachshund Club, presented the changes to the Breed Standard. He showed how the breed had changed over the years, from the famous Ch. Jackdaw born in 1886, through to current-day winners. Each of the changes to the Breed Standard was illustrated with photographs of dogs to demonstrate what is and is not required. He emphasised the importance of “stepping back” and seeing the whole dog. Jeff also explained the latest KC regulations and guidance for judges which empowers them to deal with any concerns over health and welfare that they may discover when judging.

Following a coffee break, Lesley Patton, Chairman of the Wirehaired Dachshund Club, organised a hands-on session when everyone had the opportunity to go over a selection of dogs with the aim of identifying their virtues and any features that might need to change to meet the requirements of the revised Breed Standard. Eight teams spent an hour going over their four dogs, watching their movement and preparing a brief presentation on their findings. Lesley asked everyone to focus on describing strengths and not to fall into the trap of “fault judging”. They were also asked to identify one feature of each dog that would make it closer to the revised Breed Standard.



# The Dachshund Breed Council

## **Breed Health Plans:**

The afternoon sessions were introduced by Ian Seath who spoke about the Breed Council's approach to Health and Welfare and current Health Plans. He used data from the Kennel Club's 2004 Health Survey to show how Dachshunds were generally a long-lived breed, with few significant health issues. The average age of death reported in the survey was over eleven years, but worryingly a number of dogs die between four and seven, primarily due to the effects of Inter-vertebral Disc Disease (IVDD).

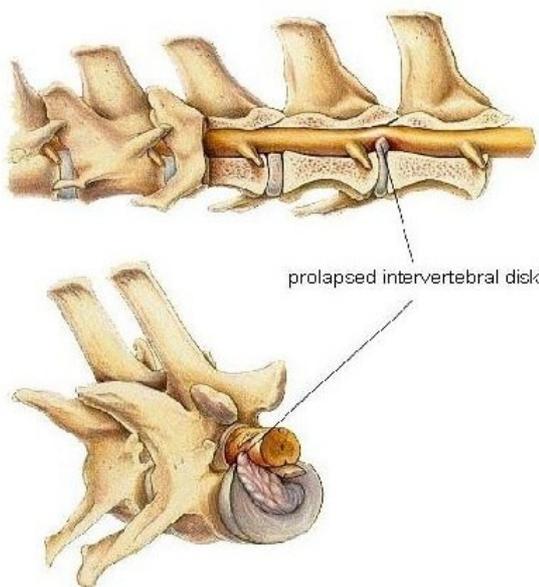
Retinal Degeneration in MLHD and MSHD due to the cord1 mutation is one of the conditions for which a DNA screening test is available. This and IVDD were to be the subject of the afternoon's main presentations where the latest research findings would be discussed.

Two other priority conditions were reported on by Ian Seath: Lafora's Disease in MWHDs and Heart Disease in WHDs. Lafora's is a form of late-onset Epilepsy which is believed to affect around 5% of MWHDs and for which a DNA test is available. The Wire Club is currently in discussions with the Canadians who developed the test, plus UK experts, to set up a UK DNA screening programme.

The Wire Club has recently received a Cardiologist's report following heart testing conducted over four years and this, reassuringly, recommended no need to set up a formal scheme. The low level of defects found did not warrant any more extensive screening.

Ian explained that the Breed Council Health and Welfare Sub-committee was currently developing ideas for a breed-specific health survey, which would include an online health reporting tool. Delegates were asked to complete a "quick and dirty" survey, based on the KC's 2004 one, so that the results could be used to help formulate the proposed new survey. (Conference Survey results will be published later.)

## **Inter-vertebral Disc Disease:**



The presentation on IVDD was made by Bill Oxley, a veterinary surgeon at the Willows Referral Practice in Solihull. Bill explained the causes of IVDD (related to the "dwarf" nature of Dachshunds) and the fact that back problems have been found to have a strongly inherited component. He described the early warning signs and symptoms.

He also explained the state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment available at Willows, which includes MRI and CT Scanners.

Moving on to discuss prevention, Bill presented the latest research findings that shows a strong correlation between the number of calcified discs measured from X-rays taken at 18-24 months and the onset of IVDD later in life. The Danish Dachshund Club has instituted a screening



## The Dachshund Breed Council

programme which is in its early stages, but which allows breeders to select carefully away from dogs with a high likelihood of IVDD.

Conference delegates were very interested in these findings and it was agreed that the Breed Council should investigate, with Bill's practice, the options for a similar programme in the UK.

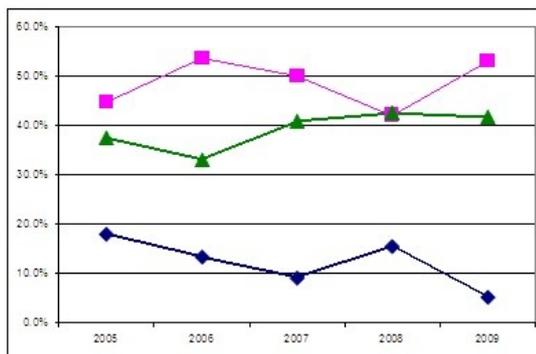
### **Cord1 Retinal Degeneration:**

The final health presentations were made by Dr. Cathryn Mellersh of the Animal Health Trust who has been instrumental in the development of the DNA test for cord1 PRA, and Keiko Miyadera, a PhD student who has been investigating the reasons for variation in age of onset of PRA in Dachshunds.

Cathryn reminded us about DNA – what it is, what it does, and how mutations in DNA cause inherited disease. She explained how a mutation progresses through a pedigree and how it can be tracked down.

The number of MLHDs being tested has levelled out to around 200 per year (2007-2009) and MSHDs has remained at a level of around 270 per year over the same period. In total, 1366 MLHDs and 815 MSHDs have been tested since 2005, although MSHD testing only started in 2007. Responsible Dachshund breeders have therefore invested over £100,000 in testing for the cord1 mutation since 2005.

### MLHDs

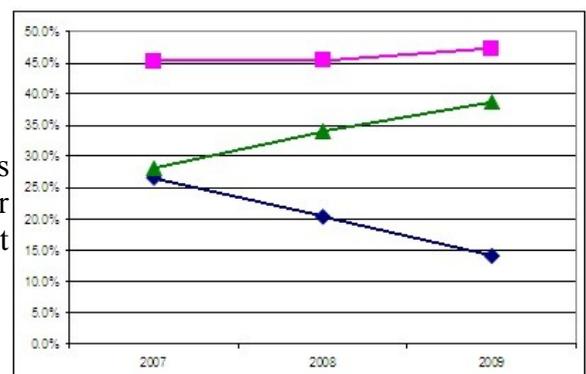


Carriers Clears Affecteds

In MLHDs the percentage of cord1 “affected” dogs has dropped from 18% to 5% between 2005 and 2009. Approx. 40% of MLHDs are now “Clear” of the mutation.

In MSHDs, the percentage of cord1 “affected” dogs has dropped from 26% in 2007 to 14% in 2009. The number of “Clear” dogs has increased from 28% to 38% in that same period.

### MSHDs



Carriers Clears Affecteds

In both MLHDs and MSHDs not all dogs that have two copies of the cord1 mutation (“Affected” dogs) develop sight problems at the same age and some dogs don't develop clinical symptoms until middle to late age, and in some others, visual problems could be unnoticed by the owner within the dog's lifetime. This suggests some additional factors are impacting on what would be expected for early onset PRA.

## The Dachshund Breed Council

Keiko Miyadera's presentation described her search for a genetic modifier and she has now identified an extra single locus that determines early onset PRA in cord1 "Affected" dogs. It is now believed that cord1 "Affected" dogs undergo retinal degeneration that could result in late-onset PRA in which blindness becomes apparent at any mid to late age, up to 15 years old. Dogs that have the second mutation as well as being cord1 "Affected" will develop early-onset PRA. A DNA test for this second mutation is not yet available.

Keiko reminded us that breeding strategies to reduce the prevalence of cord1 mutations in the breed will reduce the occurrence of PRA (in either late or early-onset forms). The recommendation is still to use at least one "Clear" parent and to have regular clinical eye checks done on dogs' eyes.

Ian Seath closed the Conference with an announcement from the Breed Council's Education Subcommittee that a Mentoring Scheme was being launched to provide one-to-one support for aspiring judges and others interested in the breed. Further details will be published later, or anyone interested can contact the Scheme's Co-ordinator: Lovaine Coxon.

### **Feedback:**

65 people completed Feedback Forms and gave us their reactions to the day. Overwhelmingly, the reaction was positive and we learnt plenty of things to help us design and plan future events. Comments included:

- *Excellent conference, well presented, informative*
- *Should be replicated in all regions ASAP*
- *Of all the seminars and education events I have ever attended this one is par excellence. Many thanks*

We know we need to run more seminars on the revised Breed Standard and how to judge Dachshunds and individual Clubs are already planning these for 2010. Copies of the Conference Handout covering the revised Breed Standard will be available at these other Club Seminars. Events focussed purely on health topics merit time to themselves, particularly when there is new research information available that may affect breeding strategies.

The KC Building at Stoneleigh is a superb facility, with excellent kitchen and audio-visual equipment. However, with another event in the adjacent meeting room, it was rather hard to hear some of the speakers. It was also difficult to keep the room at a comfortable temperature.

We filmed the event and will be producing a DVD, for sale to those who couldn't attend, and for those who want an electronic record of the day.

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