



To provide a platform for the reception and transmission of information about the health and well-being of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier

NEWSLETTER

No. 10. December 2005



EDITORIAL

The enthusiasm generated since our Seminar on the 27th November has been electric, with pledges of money to start a fund for genetic research here in the UK and promises of more blood for storage at the Animal Health Trust.

Adequate blood storage for future DNA testing is most important to enable the geneticists to carry out the research necessary in the future to locate the mutant gene/s. This is where everyone can help. Next time you have your dog health screened, i.e. blood and urinalysis, ask your vet to take a small amount of extra blood which will then be used for DNA storage. There is no charge at the AHT for storage purposes but your vet will possibly make a charge to take the blood. My vet said that, as it would help the breed, he would waive the consultation fee and all I paid was the postage. WHI have compiled a pack, with the help of the AHT, giving full instructions of the procedure for you and your vet. This can be obtained from Sandra. Full details later in this Newsletter.

The *Watchdog*(UK)* Health Tracker was demonstrated and purchased by several attendees. This can be obtained from Malcolm – see details later in this Newsletter.

Whilst continuing with our education programme one of our main aims will be to raise funds for future DNA testing. A Genetic Research Fund is now being set up here in the UK. The amount needed by the AHT to start a meaningful two year research programme is £68,000. Hopefully grants may be available to help from other sources but a significant amount needs to be provided from people within the breed. Wouldn't it be great to be able to have your dogs and puppies tested and know they were clear of all hereditary diseases! The future looks bright but it needs everyone's help and support – the health of our breed really is in our hands.

Another WHI publication, 'The SCWT Health Handbook', was launched at the seminar. This gives an insight to hereditary and other diseases pertinent to the SCWT. Supplied in loose leaf format this can be added to in the future.

Congratulations to Gwen Howard who won the caption competition. The prize was a basket of doggie goodies beautifully presented and put together by Barbara Bradford. Thanks Barbara.

I would like to thank all of you who attended and brought raffle prizes, the table was bulging, and I hope you all went away feeling as uplifted as I did and looking forward to the future.

A very special thanks to our speakers, Dr. Mellersh and Dr. Allenspach who made the whole day so very informative and interesting. Many thanks also to Dave Sharples of 'Our Dogs' who provided everyone with essentials in the way of pens, notepads etc. together with a copy of the current publication.

As winter is now upon us, when walking your Wheaten in the twilight

or darkness have you thought about a winking light attached to your dog's collar? Some only light up when the dog moves, others can be switched on and off. Should you have an older dog who may be slower getting around, or is possibly a bit deaf, I would suggest one that you can switch on or off as this can still be seen when the dog is still.

My very best wishes to you all for a safe and happy Christmas and success in 2006.



Barbara 0117 9324297
Email – penney@btinternet.com

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE SOFT-COATED WHEATEN TERRIER?

Our Health Seminar entitled "Towards a Brighter Future" took place on Sunday 27th November 2005 at the Sports Connexion. It was attended by approximately 50 people, and not only was it a great success, it was also a leap forward in terms of the future direction of understanding the health problems that affect our breed.

The guest speakers were Dr Cathryn Mellersh, BSc PhD Senior Canine Geneticist at the Animal Health Trust who talked on "Basic Genetics, DNA, Genes and how mutations cause inherited disease in dogs" and Dr Karin Allenspach med. Vet. FVH, DECVIM-CA, lecturer in internal medicine at the Royal Veterinary College who spoke about "PLE and PLN in the SCWT"

Dr Mellersh took the audience through a basic explanation of genetics and gave some astonishing statistics, e.g. there are 2,500,000,000 canine genomes Cathryn referred to them as bases or nucleotides, or letters (A = Adenine, T = Thymine, C = Cytosine and G =Guanine) of DNA; if these letters were written as 'words' (combinations of A, T, C, & G) they would fill approximately 2,000 thick textbooks. She explained how a particular genetic mutation is a random event, something that happens spontaneously in one dog at a particular point in history – nothing causes this and no-one is to blame. She then demonstrated how this one mutant gene is passed through pedigrees without anyone knowing it is there until dogs with a particular defect manifest themselves.

Dr Mellersh spoke about many of the "success stories" currently under development by the AHT such as the identification of the gene/s responsible for copper toxicosis in Bedlingtons and the hereditary eye disease in Staffordshire Bull Terriers. She firmly indicated that what is needed to start research into the gene/s responsible for protein-losing diseases or RD is a bank of DNA information, both from asymptomatic Wheatens and, crucially, from affected dogs and their close family members; Cathryn also pointed out that the more unknown the disease, the more samples are needed.

Once this is in place the AHT will be able to apply to funding bodies for a research grant. She explained how it would be important for any funding organization to see signs of commitment from the Breed in the shape of funds raised by them but it would not necessarily expect a fixed percentage of the total costs. Once a grant was obtained research could begin in earnest. She indicated that the AHT were happy to collaborate with other research agencies in the world but would want an undertaking that any resulting genetic test would be offered in this country at an affordable price so that breeders could use it. Dr Mellersh also confirmed the AHT stance on research is that they are committed to using information from the

DNA of existing dogs rather than the alternative of breeding dogs for study purposes.

In the afternoon session Dr Allenspach gave a very interesting, informative and accessible resume of protein losing diseases, giving definitions and clinical symptoms, together with an explanation of Laboratory findings that indicate that protein is being lost. She explained that diagnosis can now take place with bloods/urinalysis and through using ultrasound and biopsies obtained by endoscopy; **it is no longer necessary to wait for a post mortem for confirmation.**

Dr Allenspach went on to speak about the pANCA (pronounced pee-anka) test - a type of antibody test. This test has previously only been available in Switzerland, but it is also now available at the Royal Veterinary College. She explained that this test may prove to be an early diagnostic/prognostic marker for both PLE and PLN in Wheaten Terriers. The pANCA testing may indicate when, during their lifetimes, dogs become positive for the diseases and when they become affected by them.

Both speakers indicated that they felt that the weight of evidence was compelling for protein-losing diseases to be of a hereditary genetic origin and definitely not confined to the population of one country.

Though there was not time for extensive discussion, Dr Allenspach was open to the thought that other influences might contribute to the expression of disease. High blood pressure (hypertension) is certainly a feature of protein-losing disease and can be the cause of death through the formation of blood clots. Certainly there are indicators in the blood such as cholesterol levels, low albumin, elevated urea & creatinine and elevated urine protein/creatinine ratio that can be used to indicate the presence of protein-losing disease and this is why screening tests are important as they are usually apparent before the dog shows any outward signs of disease.

These exciting presentations provided proof that there are dedicated professionals in the UK more than willing to help us in moving towards correct diagnosis and treatment of hereditary diseases.

Since the Seminar we have been inundated with suggestions for building up finance to fund genetic research and we are considering how we can take this forward, but more than ever, it is now clear that ultimately the goal of unraveling the mysteries of which dogs are affected with the deleterious mutations really is in our hands.

The research cannot commence without sufficient material for the researchers to work on so it is up to all of us to build up the bank of DNA needed by the AHT by submitting samples from our Wheatens.

This is the now single most important thing you can do for the future health of the breed.

If you need help or advice on how to submit samples please do not hesitate to contact any of the Steering Group members who will ensure that you have all the details needed.

We also used this event to launch several educational tools:

- A Health Screening Pack developed with the help of the Animal Health Trust

- The Wheaten Health Handbook – a comprehensive, ongoing guide, to the Hereditary Diseases affecting the Breed with a section on Genetics
- *WatchDog*(UK)* Canine Health Tracker – a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet used for comparing test results against a predetermined range set by the laboratory

In addition WHI launched their “Silent Auction” of Wheaten-related items from both the UK and the USA that will be on their Website and open for bidding throughout February. Visit www.wheaten-health-initiative.co.uk for details and preview, from January 5th 2006 onwards.

WatchDog(UK)* a Canine Health Tracker

The *WatchDog*(UK)* Health Tracker is a customised version of a system first developed in the United States by Anna Marzolino and Janet Petros with the help of Dr. Wendy Beers DVM and Prof. Meryl Littman VMD, DACVM.

The Health Tracker uses a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to compare your dog's test results against a predetermined range set by the laboratory. This means that trends in test results can be easily and continuously monitored and used as an aid to assist early detection of health problems.

Some of the Excel spreadsheet operations have been automated to make them as user friendly as possible.

Other features available on the *WatchDog*(UK)* Health Tracker are as follows:

- The format reflects the AHT tests which have been specifically profiled for the Wheaten Terrier.
- Automatic highlighting of high and low results against the laboratory reference range.
- Comment boxes provide a glossary of medical test terminology and descriptions, which can be printed as part of the test results.
- One touch buttons' give automated page previews.

This particular version is designed specifically for use with the Animal Health Trust testing, but this can be adjusted to display the formats for different laboratories.

You will need to have Microsoft Excel on your computer
Full technical support is available

All for a minimum donation of £5.00 (cheques payable to WHI)

Orders to: Malcolm Jeffries, 31 Storforth Lane, Chesterfield,
Derbyshire S41 0PP.

For further details Tel: 01246 554742 email : malcalone@aol.com

The Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier HEALTH HANDBOOK

On the whole Soft-Coated Wheatens are healthy and robust dogs but they do have genetic predispositions to certain diseases and owners need to be aware of these.

We hope this handbook, now incorporating our previous publication 'Medical Terms', will help you to understand these known hereditary diseases.

At a later date other medical conditions which, as far as we are aware, are not hereditary but have occasionally been known to affect the SCWT, will be added to this handbook. It is hoped to have the first of these additions available by the end of January 2006.

Copies available @ £5.50 inc. p&p from Sandra Jeffries

Genetic Research Fund

The first cheque has been received to commence this fund with further pledges of more to come. WHI has also pledged £1000.00. It is fantastic to be able to report this great start, but as already mentioned the amount needed for research is colossal.

We have a great future in front of us and fund raising will be to the fore, so any ideas you have, or time you can give to help make the bank balance rise, will be most welcome.

To progress with our education programme however we must stress the importance of keeping donations balanced.



Breed Specific Health Services available at the ANIMAL HEALTH TRUST

This booklet gives full information for SCWT owners and their vets about Blood and Urine Testing at the Animal Health Trust. This publication does cost WHI £2.50 to produce so donations for this would be much appreciated.

Please contact Sandra Jeffries for a copy
Email: sananmalc@aol.com

MONTGOMERY HEALTH FORUM TAPES

A set of five audio tapes covering the talks by Dr. Wendy Beers DVM, Dr. Meryl Littman VMD, DACVIM, Dr. Shelly Vaden DVM, DACVIM and Dr. David Williams, with a Panel Discussion, is available on loan to those of you who would like to learn more about the hereditary health problems that can affect the breed. There is also a book to accompany these tapes.

Please contact WHI to arrange collection.

PEDIGREE DATA – For Sale

There are over 23,000 Wheatens of global ancestry at present in the WHI database.

This data is compatible with the **Anim-All** computer software programme purchased separately from John Grierson 01204 300349
www.griersoft.com

All this data could be yours for just £75

All proceeds go to the WHI Health Fund to continue our education programme

Data is restricted to pedigree information only

This is a must for breeders. Having this data to hand can aid breeding decisions, particularly with regard to health issues

For further details please contact :
Sandra Jeffries on 01246 554742
Email : sananmalc@aol.com

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP Member Benefits

Impartial, informed and sympathetic advice and assistance on health issues from the WHI team.

Should you ever find yourself facing a serious health problem, or any problem, with your Wheaten, there are experienced, caring, people at the end of a telephone who will share their knowledge with you, and who will do their utmost to ensure that you have all the information you need to make informed decisions.

Plus regular Newsletters dedicated to health matters.

- *Do you care about the health of your dog?*
- *Do you want to belong to a group dedicated to resolving issues about your dog's health?*
- *Do you want to share your knowledge and experience with others?*

If you answer YES to all questions - then join us!

Contact :
Malcolm Jeffries 01246 554742 E-mail : Sananmalc@aol.com

There is no membership fee, but any donation will be appreciated to help with administration costs.

(Please make cheques payable to WHI)

Contacting us:

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We would be grateful if all of those contacting us for more information can provide an electronic address (if possible) for future contact and dissemination of information

Happy Christmas to you and all Wheatens everywhere

*"He is so shaggy, people are amazed when he gets up and suddenly realize they have been talking to the wrong end."
Elizabeth Jones*

STOP PRESS

CELEBRATIONS

We will be celebrating our
3rd Birthday in February 2006



Following our successful Seminar we have received several offers of financial donations to set up a Genetics Research Fund. As we are committed to ensuring that we build on the foundations we have laid during our first three years, we invite you to help us celebrate our Birthday by joining us in discussing a way forward with this project.

We will be holding a meeting in February at a central location, actual date and venue to be announced in the New Year. For your invitation to be part of the future of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier, email us at : wheatenhealth@hotmail.com