

The Keeshond Health Matters fund continues to be well supported and despite having heavily subsidised (£782) the eye testing at both clubs Ch shows last year, still has £4590 left in the kitty thanks to your generous donations of £203 throughout the year.

Over 50 Keesies (inc 10 Golden Oldies over the age of 8) took advantage of the 'special offer' and apart from a couple of oldies with cataracts, all had a clear certificate. It was noted however that some dogs showed changes in the lens; these abnormalities are not likely to be inherited in the Keeshond and are not significant to the dog individually or from a breeding point of view. But still it's something that we, as a breed should be aware of and need to look out for. And is certainly a very good reason why, at the very least, all oldies and all youngsters that are to be bred from should have an eye test.

According to the BVA/KC Canine Health Scheme latest data, 81 Keesies have been tested in the past 15 years up to the end of October 2022 - 58 within the past 5 years and 6 in 2022. The average score over 15 years is 11, with the average over the past 5 years now 10; the lowest score being 4, highest 17 and 21 dogs have scores in single figures. On a more concerning note there have been at least 8 dogs with an elbow score of 1 or higher.

The BVA/KC CHS recommends only breeding from dogs that have an elbow grade of 0.

In January the Kennel Club announced the most recent health testing updates to the requirements and recommendations for Assured Breeders, aimed to further improve dog health and responsible breeding. Elbow and hip screening have been agreed to be added as requirements for the Keeshond, as BVA/KC scheme data suggest that dysplasia does occur in this breed. Eye screening has also been accepted as a new test under the Assured Breeders Scheme, but at this stage will be placed as a recommendation as very few dogs have been tested to date, and therefore there are little data to draw conclusions from with respect to the incidence of eye disease at this time.

This should apply to ALL breeders - not just ABS members. No-one can say that they haven't got or never had a problem in their line or their breeding unless they have the data to back it up. If a breeder hasn't had their dogs tested, then they can't say they haven't got or never had a problem - end of. A current list of Keesies who have been scored or have had an eye test can be found on the Keeshond Health Matters web site

The Kennel Club Genetics Centre is continuing to work on finding the genetic variant that causes PHPT in Keeshonds. The existence and use of the DNA test from Cornell for such a long time has made the project quite a bit more challenging. While the test is not perfect, the marker that it detects is probably quite closely linked with the unknown PHPT causal variant and as a result fewer clinically affected dogs are being born, which means that we have fewer robust samples at our disposal for the research. In addition, the genotypes that dogs have for the existing DNA test muddy the waters; we can't be sure how accurate they are. While we have received many DNA samples from Keeshonds over the years, only a small proportion have reported any status with regards to PHPT. We contacted many owners in 2022 to request that they complete an online questionnaire, in an attempt to fill in some of these gaps. We have had 79 responses (of which only 53 completed the full questionnaire) and are in the process of analysing the results and updating sample records.

Recently an updated version of the canine reference genome has been released (called CanFam4), which is better quality and has fewer gaps than the previous version (CanFam3.1). We have therefore had to realign all 200+ of our whole genome sequences against the new reference, which was a monumental effort and took a long time. We will now re-analyse the Keeshond whole genome sequence data to see if there is anything new and interesting that wasn't there in the first round of analysis. We are also still looking at the possibility of using linked markers to develop a test, and we have a couple of promising markers. However, the challenge is to determine if they would be any more accurate for detecting PHPT than the existing DNA test is. We would like to thank the Keeshond community for their continued support and patience. We are also frustrated by the lack of obvious progress but are doing the best we can.

2022 ended up as one of the worse years for puppy registrations for over 40 years, with just 15 litters born, resulting in only 60 puppies – 32 dogs and 28 bitches; with at least a whopping 12 'misses' although I'm 100% sure that 'miss total' in reality is even higher. Contributing to that number were just three unproven males and 6 maiden bitches. Last year there were only 3 bitches having their first litter, 5 having a second litter and an astonishing 5 litters were repeat matings. The same goes for the males. There were only 3 boys being used at stud for the first time and 1 male was siring his 9th litter. All of which will do absolutely zilch to improve our virtually non-existent gene pool.

Apart from there have been more bitches missing for whatever reason; litter sizes have also been smaller. Eleven out of the fifteen litters born (75%) have been five puppies or fewer – or just 4 litters with over 6 puppies; which is as equally worrying as the number of matings which have resulted in no puppies whatsoever. Without a dramatic influx of genetic diversity, used by everyone, we are on a rapid downwards spiral to extinction.

As I wrote in both breed clubs' newsletters last year, part of the problem is that Keeshonds no longer have any large kennels that regularly produce several litters each year. We are all, in the main, what is classed as Hobby Breeders - low volume, but experienced breeders. (Recent figures from the KC suggest 81% of breeders who register puppies only breed 1 litter per year).

There is a huge demand out there for well bred, carefully reared keesie puppies and there is no shame in breeding for what many derogatory call 'the pet market'. There are so many people who have recently lost their keesie or their keesie is getting on and want another. Or just people who are new to dogs in general and think that Keeshonds are the breed for them. A lot of people forget that we were all 'newbies' once and none of us are getting any younger; we should all be encouraging newcomers to the breed who want to learn and begin breeding.

Only having a litter when you want something for yourself is really no longer a viable option if the breed is to continue. We all need to think about having an 'extra' litter and not keep a puppy for ourselves. Some attitudes are going to have to change, whether we like it or not, if the breed is to survive.

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