



THE KENNEL CLUB

Health and welfare at the Kennel Club 2020





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Health and welfare at the Kennel Club



A message from Tony Allcock OBE - Chairman of the Kennel Club

2019 was an exceptionally busy and productive year for the Kennel Club. We launched two new health screening schemes and introduced CombiBreed, a new all in one DNA test. We celebrated ten years of working together with the Animal Health Trust, the Kennel Club Charitable Trust donated significant sums of money to help improve canine health and welfare, our Assured Breeder Scheme was given the DEFRA seal of approval and we published scientific findings that showed the long term impact of health screening on reducing disease prevalence.

These achievements are not just the result of the hard work carried out by our enthusiastic and dedicated staff, but are also due to the wonderful contributions from others, including those who kindly donated to the Kennel Club Charitable Trust, our collaborating partners in numerous research and welfare organisations, Breed Health Co-ordinators, judges, observers, veterinary professionals, owners who contributed to research and also all those who form the membership of the Dog Health Group and its sub-groups. Our achievements from last year demonstrate the impact that we all can have by working together for the sole goal of making a difference to the health and welfare of dogs. In 2020 we will continue to strive to positively impact and improve the lives of dogs and we hope you will too.



A message from Nick Blayney - Chairman of the Kennel Club's Dog Health Group

The Dog Health Group oversees and directs the health-related work carried out by the Kennel Club. The group develops strategy on the health and welfare aspects of the Kennel Club's work, co-ordinating and monitoring initiatives via the specialist sub-groups. These sub-groups allow for a dynamic approach on emerging issues, with their diverse external memberships each ensuring that perspective and balance is maintained throughout the Kennel Club's drive towards ever improving canine health and welfare. Actions taken relate to improving breeding practices, resolving issues surrounding genetic diversity, research into dog health, and working towards safeguarding dog showing and canine activities, with these being positive forces for change.

Building collaborations with the veterinary profession, veterinary researchers, dog welfare organisations and breed experts has been key to recent advances in the development of our resources and understanding. Underpinning all current and future work is the integration of robust research and the development and utilisation of the Kennel Club records as a source of health and welfare relevant data. Collection and use of this data allows us to measure, monitor and adapt our guidelines and regulations so that the Kennel Club can play its part and influence others where this is needed, to ensure that the health and welfare of dogs is protected in the future.

2019 health and welfare highlights

Vital scheme launched to improve health of Pugs, Bulldogs and French Bulldogs

Developed by the University of Cambridge and funded by the Kennel Club Charitable Trust, the Respiratory Function Grading Scheme assesses dogs for the presence and severity of a breathing problem known as BOAS (Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome). The scheme is currently available for any Pug, French Bulldog and Bulldog, and has the potential to improve the health and welfare of these breeds for generations to come.

Kennel Club study revealed hip and elbow screening improves long-term dog health

A study carried out by the Kennel Club's health team analysed data from the BVA/KC Hip and Elbow Dysplasia Schemes and found that not only have the proportion of dogs screened for hip and elbow dysplasia increased over time, but that the grades and scores of dogs used for breeding have also been improving too.

CombiBreed – an all-in-one test for multiple genetic disorders

The Kennel Club and Weatherbys launched CombiBreed™ health test packages, which simplifies the process of genetic testing by using a single cheek swab to check a dog's DNA for markers associated with a number of different inherited disorders. Currently DNA testing packages are available for 20 breeds from the Kennel Club.

Assured Breeder Scheme given DEFRA seal of approval

The Kennel Club welcomed the news that DEFRA had issued a note for local authorities in England to make it clear that any member of the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme of at least three years' standing should be awarded a five-star breeding licence valid for three years.

Kennel Club and AHT study revealed powerful long-term impact of DNA testing

Research carried out by scientists at the Kennel Club and the Animal Health Trust revealed that the number of pedigree dogs at risk of often painful and debilitating inherited diseases is being dramatically reduced by responsible breeders. Researchers discovered that approximately ten years after a number of DNA tests became available, the gene mutations that caused the diseases had decreased in each breed by a staggering 90 per cent or more.



Health scheme launched to improve heart health for Cavaliers

A new heart scheme for the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel was launched by the Kennel Club in consultation with Cavalier King Charles Spaniel breed clubs and supported by the Veterinary Cardiovascular Society. This new health scheme has been developed to reduce the prevalence of mitral valve disease, a deadly heart disorder that affects a significant number of Cavaliers in the UK alone.

Health schemes and breeding resources



Professor Bill Ollier – Chair of the Genetics and Health Screening Sub-group

The Kennel Club has a long history of initiating and supporting health screening,

both via collaborations with organisations such as the British Veterinary Association (BVA/KC/ISDS hip and elbow dysplasia screening schemes), the Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the Animal Health Trust (discovery of multiple disease-causing mutations that form the basis of DNA tests) and the University of Cambridge (BOAS scheme).

The main roles of this sub-group are to advise the Kennel Club on issues surrounding the genetic health

of dog populations and to review data from clinical and DNA screening schemes. Participation in such screening is often high, but it is essential to monitor the longitudinal data to determine whether the desired effect is being achieved and to optimise the impact on the objectives of a decline in welfare impairment.

Recent published research from the Kennel Club has quantified improvements in hip scores and elbow grades and reduction in the prevalence of disease-causing mutations in Kennel Club registered populations. Further monitoring will provide more information on the effectiveness of screening schemes, and this sub-group, which comprises veterinarians and clinical experts, geneticists and epidemiologists both independent of and from the Kennel Club, is well placed to evaluate the performance of current screening schemes and to advise on the focus and direction of research which may result in the screening schemes of the future.

Health screening schemes

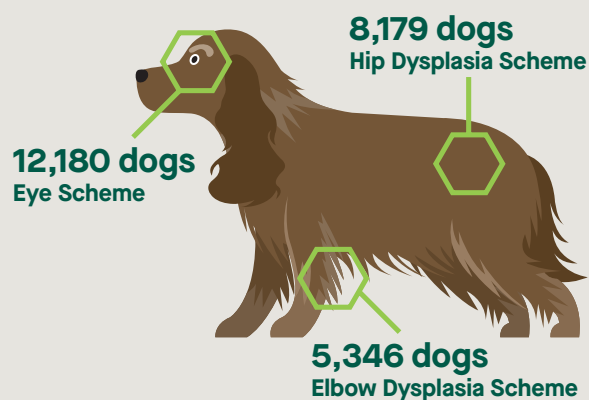
The Kennel Club Heart Scheme assesses Cavalier King Charles Spaniels for mitral valve disease and other potentially significant heart disease. In 2019, 200 dogs were graded under the scheme.

The Kennel Club and University of Cambridge Respiratory Function Grading Scheme assesses Bulldogs, French Bulldogs and Pugs for a breathing problem known as BOAS (Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome). In 2019, 397 dogs were graded under the scheme.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

The BVA/KC Canine Health Schemes help breeders to assess which dogs to use for breeding. In 2019, the schemes evaluated:

- 8,179 dogs under the Hip Dysplasia Scheme
- 5,346 dogs under the Elbow Dysplasia Scheme
- 12,180 dogs under the Eye Scheme





In a heartbeat – the actions the Kennel Club are taking to tackle heart disease

By Gay Robertson

Any dog can get heart disease, not just ‘the usual suspects’, and although it is generally thought to be genetic it can also be caused by an underlying condition like a tick-borne disease or a viral infection. Of course, we all know that inherited heart disease is more prevalent in some breeds, and in some cases it is because affected dogs are bred from, regardless of the consequences, or maybe their breeders were simply unaware that they had heart disease.

For many years, the Veterinary Cardiovascular Society (VCS) have been screening dogs for heart conditions. Responsible breeders and clubs, having become aware of the problem, have been actively promoting heart testing and building up the data but these schemes have not yet reached the many dogs affected by heart disease in the UK. With this in mind, in 2018 the Kennel Club began a new partnership with the VCS and set up a development project, which in 2019 resulted in the launch of an official UK heart scheme for the Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.

Launching a new health scheme is never easy. Firstly to persuade everyone planning to breed a litter that health tests should be undertaken beforehand, and then to decide against the idea of breeding if a problem is discovered. Nor is it easy to further the education of the general public so that they understand that when buying from a breeder, the lack of health testing of the parents should be a signal to walk away.

Types of heart disease are breed-specific and one test does not fit all. For both the Kennel Club and VCS, the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel was a priority breed, due to the prevalence of heart disease in the breed. The Cavalier King Charles Spaniel heart testing protocol is the first step in a larger project that will last for many years, with more breed specific schemes to follow. For hearts, the aim is to have a defined protocol for every breed, to give dogs a grade and to make that information available both to the breeder and to the person buying the puppy, so that they understand the complexity and know what steps the breeder has taken.

Health and welfare of show dogs



Frank Kane –
Chair of the Breed
Standards and
Conformation
Sub-group

Breed standards are the pictures in words that

describe each breed of pedigree dog. These breed standards are owned by the Kennel Club, and all changes to them must be approved and discussed by the Breed Standards and Stud Book Committee. Breed standards prescribe and preserve breed type and lay down the blueprint for a breed, acting as a guide to breeders, dog show exhibitors and judges.

For all licensed breed shows, the Kennel Club breed standards must be used by judges to assess dogs competing in the shows. It is therefore vital that these breed descriptions avoid features that could be interpreted in a way that would endanger the health and welfare of any dog of any breed. With this in mind, the Breed Standards and Conformation Sub-group ensure that none of our breed standards include phrases that could cause dogs discomfort or pain, or could predispose them to health issues.

The breed standards were extensively reviewed and altered in 2009 and continue to be re-examined and reconsidered on a regular basis. This ongoing review is supported by our Breed Watch programme, which monitors and records any dogs at shows that may be exhibiting physical features that could impact their health and welfare. Judges are regularly educated on the potential impact of these features and guided to penalise dogs with any suggestion of features highlighted by the Breed Watch system. In this way we hope to help eradicate those features and exaggerations in all breeds.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

The Breed Watch web page, a resource to assist judges in monitoring and addressing visible health concerns in dogs exhibiting at shows, was visited over 54,000 times in 2019.

All judges with appointments for category two and three breeds are required to complete a mandatory health monitoring form to enable the Kennel Club to collect data on the visual health of the dogs they have judged. In 2019, 1,264 mandatory judges' health monitoring forms were completed across 43 breeds.



Breed Watch - a resource to monitor health and welfare in the show ring

To help dog show judges prioritise canine health and welfare, the Kennel Club have a number of resources that assist them in identifying, recording and monitoring current and potentially arising issues.

Breed Watch serves as an 'early warning system' to identify points of concern for individual breeds. Its primary purpose is to enable anyone involved in the world of dogs, but in particular dog show judges, to find out about any breed specific conformational issues which may lead to health problems. These conditions are known as a 'point of concern'. Judges are asked to identify and record any points of concern seen during their judging appointments, and to take these into consideration when awarding dogs. It is a mandatory requirement that judges complete their health monitoring form for a number of priority breeds following appointments at championship shows. This is to prevent the introduction of health and welfare concerns that are detrimental to a dog's wellbeing and to maintain high standards of health in the show ring.

All points of concern are assessed quarterly and Breed Health Co-ordinators receive an annual summary to share with their breed community. This is to continually review points of concerns reported by judges and to monitor for any new or emerging health and welfare issues. Each breed's points of concern can be added or amended following a discussion from the Kennel Club Breed Standards & Conformation Sub-group, and approval from the Dog Health Group and Kennel Club Board.

To bring Breed Watch to life, the Kennel Club publishes the Breed Watch Illustrated Guide. This offers detailed illustrations and comprehensive information to demonstrate how exaggerated conformation can affect dog health, helping judges to identify health and welfare issues that should be penalised in the show ring. The guide covers important areas of canine health and welfare, including respiratory issues, muzzle, nose and nostrils, eyes, skin, weight and body condition, tail formation and general conformation and soundness.

Both Breed Watch and the Breed Watch Illustrated Guide help not only judges, but breeders, exhibitors and owners to keep health and welfare in the forefront of their minds, and is part of the Kennel Club's continued commitment to improve health and welfare in these breeds through education.





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Health and dog activities

Dr Jacqueline Boyd - Chair of the Activities Health and Welfare Sub-group



Canine activities such as agility, heelwork to music, working trials and obedience continue to increase in popularity and participation. Consequently, the health and welfare of the canine participants is critical.

For this reason, the Activities Health and Welfare Sub-group (AHWSG) was founded almost ten years ago, with the remit of: reviewing issues with possible health and welfare implications, examining areas suitable for investigation and action, and implementing an evidence-based approach to supporting canine activities in managing and monitoring areas of concern. Membership of the AHWSG consists of representatives from different

activities, permitting a two-way dialogue between their relevant liaison councils/working parties and the sub-group. Other members include veterinary surgeons with particular specialities (currently orthopaedics, ophthalmology and rehabilitation), sports scientists and animal/canine scientists with relevant research, academic and applied expertise. The sub-group reports directly to the Dog Health Group (DHG), ensuring a cohesive and consistent approach, in addition to benefitting from expertise within the DHG. I am extremely proud to chair and be part of the AHWSG, where we are united in ensuring implementation of best-practice for health and welfare, in addition to identifying collaborative research opportunities, some of which have directly resulted in regulation changes, all to make a difference for dogs.

Ensuring health and welfare in canine activities

by Dr Jacqueline Boyd

The companionship and pleasure that dogs bring to so many people are wonderful things, and this is something that the Kennel Club recognises and supports. Improving the world for dogs and their people is a key aim of the Kennel Club's work, and one way this is achieved is through the support and application of excellent, evidence-based health and welfare schemes. While many such schemes are of critical importance in dog breeding and are well known and understood, their value in the wider canine world is also important. Indeed, with participation and interest in canine activities such as agility and rally-obedience increasing, ensuring the health and welfare of canine participants is critical.

There has already been some great work done to ensure exactly this, with the Kennel Club and the Kennel Club Charitable Trust supporting recent research conducted at Nottingham Trent University examining jump distance in agility and how this affected canine jumping styles. The outcome of that research culminated in a regulation change with the intent to help mitigate possible health and welfare concerns in dog agility and paved the way for further investigative studies into jump height. Recently, funding has also been awarded to investigate

specific aspects of how dogs negotiate specific pieces of equipment in working trials, with the intention that research outputs can again be directly applied for the benefit of canine participants. What is particularly interesting is the fact that research in one activity or discipline often results in outputs of value that are relevant to other activities and can aid in the evolution of training, competition and regulation amends.

This work continues with the support of the Activities Health and Welfare Sub-group, and with a strong desire to ensure that all work undertaken can directly impact on improving and enhancing canine health and welfare, but with a firm evidence base. The recent partnership developed with Hartpury University, the Kennel Club and Agility Team GB will continue this focus on using scientific research to inform strategy and regulation amends within various activities. Taking a proactive, visible and direct approach to health and welfare is also important, with the introduction of veterinary assessments at prestigious agility events to ensure competitors are prepared for competition with no possible negative impacts on health or welfare. This mirrors the routine veterinary assessments that equine competitors are used to participating in at high profile events and is a visible way to demonstrate the Kennel Club's commitment to ensuring canine health and welfare in all canine activities, even in the excitement of high-performance competition.



Health, breeding and regulations



Julien Barney – Chair of the Assured Breeder Scheme Sub-group

The Assured Breeder Scheme (ABS) was set up over 15 years ago with the goal of improving the quality of dog breeding and giving the puppy buying public the best chance of finding a well-bred, healthy puppy. The ABS Sub-Group was put in place to oversee the scheme

and has a vital role as part of its UKAS Accreditation to act as an independent body to ensure that it remains impartial. This is achieved by having representation from a wide range of stakeholders including breeders, vets, dog rehoming charities, and trading standards officials, in addition to representatives from local authority licensing bodies covering England, Wales and Scotland. We advise the Kennel Club staff on policy and procedure as well as reviewing requests from breed clubs and councils through their Breed Health Co-ordinators, for amendments to the breed specific health recommendations and requirements.

Another element of the sub-group's work is the monitoring and evaluation of the scheme to ensure that it is meeting its performance indicators. We are also responsible for ensuring that the standards of the scheme are maintained and are responsible for taking action where shortfalls occur. The standards of the scheme are robustly enforced and members who fail to meet these standards are routinely removed.

As chair of the sub-group I know that all my fellow committee members are fully committed to ensuring the scheme is a success, in what is a complicated landscape of breeding high quality animals.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

The Assured Breeder Scheme (ABS) helps puppy buyers find breeders who follow good practice. We ensure its members are dedicated to canine health and we inspect every single Assured Breeder.

- The ABS currently has over 3,000 members
- In 2019 Assured Breeders produced over 17,500 puppies
- The Kennel Club carried out inspections on over 800 Assured Breeders



3,000 members



17,500 puppies



Over 800 inspections

Review of changes to breeding regulations in England made in 2018

By Ed Hayes

In October 2018, licensing laws for dog breeders in England changed. The most prominent changes included a reduction in the litter threshold, for which a licence is required, from five or more litters in 12 months, to three or more litters. In addition to the litter threshold, a separate 'business test' now applies, regardless of the number of litters bred. Those deemed to be breeding in the course of a business are also required to obtain a licence.

Risk-based system

Another big change to the regulations was the implementation of a risk-based system. This rewards breeders who demonstrate that they maintain high standards with longer, cheaper licences, and fewer inspections. Breeders who are able to demonstrate that they achieve and maintain high standards are given a five star licence, which is valid for three years. As a result of these changes, membership of the Assured Breeder Scheme can now be used as evidence of maintaining standards. Uniquely, this allows breeders who have either never held, or have not held a council licence for the preceding three years, to obtain a five star council licence straightaway.

Licensing process

Dog breeding licences are issued and enforced by local authorities. After applying for a licence, a breeder's premises will be inspected by the local authority. Members of the Assured Breeder Scheme should be subjected to a lighter touch inspection, as outlined by Government advice. Members of the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme of at least three years standing should be awarded a five star breeding licence valid for three years. ABS members who have less than three years membership, or have had a licence for three years, should receive a four star licence valid for two years.

Kennel Club viewpoint on the licensing changes

Prior to the new regulations coming into force, the Kennel Club repeatedly raised concerns regarding the potential impact of these regulations on low volume, home breeders. Unfortunately, in the period since the introduction of these regulations, many of the concerns we raised have come to pass.



From surveys we have conducted, anecdotal evidence reported and in terms of our registration data, all the evidence suggests these new regulations have deterred home breeders from breeding dogs. This is a tragedy and we know that puppy farmers and importers will step in and meet the resulting shortfall in puppies.

The Kennel Club is continuing to push for changes to the licensing system, both in terms of the regulations and accompanying that the Government controls and how additionally how local authorities are interpreting and enforcing the regulations.



Supporting health and research



Reverend Bill King – Chair of the Charitable Trust

The Kennel Club Charitable Trust was founded in 1987 to ‘make a difference for dogs’ in three key areas:

science, support and welfare.

We work closely with the veterinary schools and relevant university facilities across the United Kingdom to enable the breeding of healthy dogs. In a nutshell, the Trust’s mantra is care and compassion for dogs. Our rescue funding is targeted toward smaller charities who do not have the fundraising resources of the bigger charities.

The trustees comprising of two eminent veterinary surgeons and three dog people have between them a wide range of scientific, business and husbandry skills.

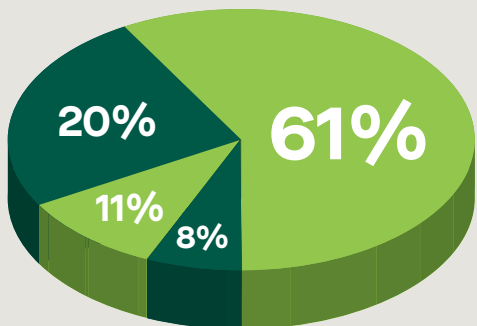
The trustees meet quarterly to discuss new applications and review projects and other work in hand. Supporting them in the field are a team of ambassadors who visit new applicants and report back.

The Trust relies on the generosity of individuals and the Kennel Club who in addition provide the administrative support for the charity. We are deeply grateful to all whose contributions help us to ‘make a difference for dogs’.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

In the past three years (2017-2019), the Kennel Club Charitable Trust has awarded almost £1.5 million in grants, split as follows:

- 61% Science & research
- 20% Rescue & welfare
- 11% Support
- 8% Other, including education





BOAS Research Group - Development of the Respiratory Function Grading Scheme at Queen's Veterinary School Hospital, University of Cambridge

By Jane Ladlow MA VetMB CertVR CertSAS DipECVS

A number of brachycephalic breeds, including Bulldogs, French Bulldogs and Pugs, have a shortened and widened skull and flattening of the muzzle. Unfortunately those traits are sometimes accompanied by changes to the upper respiratory tract that result in Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS). Clinical features of BOAS may include exercise intolerance, snoring, respiratory distress, regurgitation, acute overheating, cyanosis, sleeping disorders, collapse and even death. In 2003, after operating on some Bulldogs with BOAS to remove the excess tissue, I was concerned that my cases were not all responding to the surgery as much as reported in the veterinary literature. Looking back at the cases that were reported in the veterinary journals, the assessment of how the dogs were doing after surgery was made by phoning owners and was somewhat subjective. We started looking for an objective way of measuring a dog's breathing function and concluded that the most practical way to measure breathing in dogs was using a technique called Whole Body Barometric Plethysmography (WBBP).

With WBBP, the dog is placed in a transparent chamber and is monitored whilst breathing naturally for 30 minutes. The chamber measures pressure changes generated by the dog's breathing which are translated into a variety of respiratory parameters. With this technique we proved that breathing function can be

measured in brachycephalic dogs using WBBP and we found objective evidence of improvement after upper airway tract corrective surgery. We also looked at risk factors for developing BOAS, the most important conformational factors in the breeds, and we have ongoing work on the genetic basis of BOAS in the three breeds.

As part of our work with WBBP, we looked at how to improve recognition of the disease when performing a clinical examination and developed a functional grading scheme for some brachycephalic breeds (Bulldogs, French Bulldogs and Pugs) that was based on listening with a stethoscope to dogs before and after a short exercise test. We used the volume of the noise and the different types of breathing noises - high-pitched (stridor) or low-pitched (stertor) - along with breathing effort or distress to classify dogs as grade 0, 1, 2 or 3, where grade 0 dogs had no disease and grade 3 dogs had severe disease. This grading system mirrored the WBBP results closely and we realised that this was a technique that could be used more widely than the WBBP and by vets in general practice. On the basis of this research, in February 2019 the Kennel Club and University of Cambridge launched the Respiratory Function Grading Scheme to help owners understand more about the health of their dogs and provides a way to reduce the risk of breeding dogs with breathing problems.



Rescue and welfare

By Anita Tabrett



In 2017, recognising applications for veterinary fees from rescue organisations were increasing, the KCCT committed funds specifically for this area to provide much needed support.

Working in collaboration with PDSA, free veterinary treatment was made available for Kennel Club Breed Rescues, which included amongst others, neutering, flea prevention, worming, vaccinations and general health checks by way of a claim back scheme made it possible for rescue organisations to utilise their own funds for specific projects.

Since the inception of this scheme, the KCCT has awarded a further £290,599 in grants to welfare charities for various initiatives such as: upgrade of kennelling facilities, new roofing, purchase of new vans and kitting out for transport of dogs, and urgent replacement of septic tanks.



Breed Health and Conservation Plans

By Hannah James



The Breed Health & Conservation Plans (BHCP) project was launched in 2016 with the aim to produce evidence-based plans for all of the Kennel Club recognised breeds. Each evidence base and action plan is bespoke to a specific

breed and gives an up-to-date insight into the current knowledge and health status in the breed at this time.

The data incorporated into the plans is sourced from several avenues, such as the Canine Health Schemes, Agria insurance, Breed Watch, breed-specific health schemes, breed health surveys, DNA tests, population analysis and a comprehensive literature review. This data is then reviewed by the breed clubs, Breed Health Co-ordinator and the Kennel Club to establish the top health and welfare priorities in the breed, and how the parties can work together in order to resolve or maintain health

concerns, which is itemised into an agreed action plan. Review meetings are held with the breeds on a regular basis to ensure both sides are aware of advancements made and to monitor existing and emerging conditions. The contents of both the evidence base and the action plan can then be filtered through to breeders to allow them to make informed and balanced decisions when breeding, and have confidence in using information that is most relevant to them.

Since the project's launch, 51 breeds have had their plan delivered, with the aim of covering 90% of the Kennel Club registered population by the end of 2020. Regional drop-in sessions are available this year to ensure breeds have the time to meet and discuss the plans face to face.

If you wish to read your breed's BHCP it is advised to contact your Breed Health Co-ordinator, who will be able to direct you to a published plan or inform you of the expected date when this will be available.



James Robinson / The Kennel Club ©

Kennel Club Genetics Centre

**Dr Cathryn Mellersh –
Head of Canine Genetics**



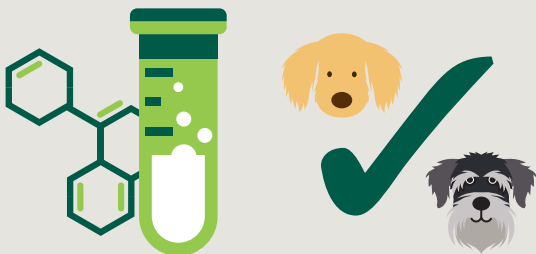
The Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the Animal Health Trust was launched in 2009 and carries out research into inherited canine disease. It aims to create further diagnostic tests which, together with breeding advice, is helping to improve

the health and welfare of generations of dogs. Through the development of essential genetic tests, the centre is assisting responsible breeders to minimise the risk of breeding affected puppies.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Over the last ten years, through the partnership between the Kennel Club and Animal Health Trust:

- 22 DNA tests have been developed for more than 50 breeds of dog.
- Using these, 65,000 dogs have been tested at the Animal Health Trust, which has resulted in more than 164,000 hereditarily clear puppies being born free from debilitating or blinding inherited conditions.



Last year marked ten years since the Kennel Club and the Animal Health Trust formally agreed to work together to improve the lives of dogs. Over this time the partnership has gone on to benefit thousands of dogs, and by working together the two organisations have hugely accelerated research into canine disease. Over the last ten years, the Kennel Club, through the Kennel Club Charitable Trust, has donated nearly £5 million dedicated to canine genetic research with the Animal Health Trust and has committed further funding of £810,000 over the next three years. The last ten years have been incredibly important to dog health and thanks to the partnership with the Kennel Club so many dogs are benefitting from DNA tests that are improving the lives of generations of animals.



The Kennel Club and AHT study reveals powerful long-term impact of DNA tests on dog diseases

In January 2019, scientists at the Kennel Club and the Animal Health Trust published the results of a joint study that revealed that the number of pedigree dogs at risk of often painful and debilitating inherited diseases is being dramatically reduced by responsible breeders.

The research examined the long-term impact of dog breeders using DNA tests to avoid producing puppies affected by inherited conditions. The study specifically examined DNA tests for eight diseases in eight breeds. Researchers discovered that approximately ten years after each DNA test became available, the gene mutations that caused the diseases had decreased in each breed by a staggering 90 per cent or more.

The study examined data for diseases such as progressive rod cone degeneration (prcd-PRA), an irreversible and blinding condition that cannot be treated, spinocerebellar ataxia, a neurological condition that leads to incoordination and loss of balance in puppies, and primary lens luxation, a painful and blinding inherited eye condition.

The breeds analysed in the study were the Labrador Retriever, Parson Russell Terrier, Gordon Setter, Irish Setter, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Miniature Bull Terrier, Cocker Spaniel and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier.

Similar previous studies, that investigated the frequency of disease mutations over time, analysed smaller and more restricted datasets than the current study. This unique study was able to take advantage of the way that the Kennel Club records DNA test results in its registration database.

Currently the Kennel Club records and openly publishes the results of DNA tests for over 70 different inherited diseases, representing approximately 10,000 DNA tested dogs each year. In some cases, the Kennel Club is able to use DNA test results from a registered dog's parents to determine whether the offspring carries the specific mutation associated with a particular disease. This enables a breeder to know a dog's 'hereditary status', a process that is carried out for around 60,000 dogs a year. It is these data that has allowed this newly published research to investigate the previously unseen impact that breeders can have on the health of a breed. This research demonstrated the sizable impact that responsible breeders can have, and have had, not only on the dogs that they breed, but also on the generations of dogs that come after them. It emphasised the importance of continued research into inherited conditions and shows the impact a simple DNA test can have.

Meet the team



Bill Lambert – Head of Health and Welfare

Bill Lambert has worked for the Kennel Club since 2005. He has overall responsibility for its numerous health and welfare initiatives, which include the Breed Health

and Conservation Plans, numerous health schemes that the Kennel Club are involved in, as well as Kennel Club Breed Rescue. Bill is an official Kennel Club spokesperson, and as such represents the Kennel Club both in the media and also on a number of internal and external committees and groups. He is an IEMA approved Lead Auditor, and formulated the process for assessing breeders' premises on behalf of the Kennel Club Assured Breeder Scheme – the Kennel Club is the only body worldwide currently able to provide UKAS certification to dog breeders. Bill is also a recognised authority on the Bull Terrier breed, was former Vice-Chair of the Bull Terrier Club as well as being a volunteer for The Bull Terrier Club (UK) Welfare Trust and has lobbied for changes to the Dangerous Dogs Act since its inception in 1991.



Tom Lewis – Genetics Research Manager

Tom joined the Kennel Club in 2014, having previously spent six years at the Animal Health Trust where his research focused on the genetic analysis of complex

inherited disease and population structure in pedigree dog breeds. His background is in animal science and he gained his PhD investigating multiple aspects of quantitative genetics at the Roslin Institute and Nottingham University. In his current role, Tom continues to use data accumulated by the Kennel Club to research disease and the genetics of populations, which is regularly published in scientific journals. He also manages the Kennel Club's use of disease screening data (e.g. Estimates Breeding Values), advises on all matters relating to genetics and research, and is regularly involved in efforts to translate the science to dog breeders and owners.



Charlotte McNamara - Health and Welfare Development Manager

Charlotte joined the Kennel Club in 2012 and has worked in various health and welfare roles since then. Charlotte manages the health team which involves overseeing

the Breed Health and Conservation Plans, led by Hannah James, Breed Watch and CombiBreed, led by Fern McDonnell, and maintains the Kennel Club's relationship with other organisations such as the Animal Health Trust, the British Veterinary Association, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association, the Veterinary Cardiovascular Society and internally, the Kennel Club Charitable Trust. Charlotte's main focus within her role is developing new screening schemes and tools for breeders. At present this focus is on hearts and neurology. She has lived with dogs of different breeds her whole life and enjoys breeding and showing dogs in her spare time.



Hannah James - Health Research Manager

Hannah joined the Kennel Club in 2016 after graduating from the Royal Veterinary College in BioVeterinary Sciences. Her role at the Kennel Club encompasses

the Breed Health and Conservation Plans; building evidence bases, meeting with breeds to discuss health priorities, and developing action plans to maintain and improve health and welfare across all Kennel Club registered breeds. She liaises with breeds and research bodies in order to streamline research efforts and help breeds in finding the most productive avenue in producing meaningful research. Hannah is the primary Kennel Club contact for Breed Health Co-ordinators, assisting them in sourcing data, sharing health initiatives such as events or research projects with owners of their breed and sourcing a mentor.



Anita Tabrett - Welfare Relationship Manager

Anita joined the Kennel Club in 1999 as a part-time member of the Petlog team and was promoted to Petlog Business Manager in 2001 where she remained until

2015. Her current role involves building and maintaining solid working relationships between the Kennel Club, its registered breed rescue organisations and the welfare sector in general, whilst utilising the knowledge and skills she has gained to develop new initiatives to support breed rescue, assist the trustees of the Kennel Club Charitable Trust and benefit all who work in the world of 'making a difference for dogs'.



Fern McDonnell – Health and Research Co-ordinator

Fern graduated from the Royal Veterinary College with a degree in BioVeterinary Sciences and joined the Kennel Club in 2018. As the Health

and Research Co-ordinator, Fern coordinates and administers Kennel Club health related projects and initiatives, which include Breed Watch, Kennel Club health schemes, DNA testing, student canine health education and health screening and testing events. Out of work, Fern spends her free time trying to tire out her Wire Haired Fox Terrier and three Cocker Spaniels.



Nick Sutton – Science Communication Advisor

Nick has a background in a diverse range of scientific disciplines including zoology, psychology and medical toxicology. He joined the Kennel Club in 2012 and

currently develops health information for a number of different audiences, including dog owners, puppy buyers and breeders. Nick transforms potentially complex health information into content that is clear, concise and easily understood, and communicates this via newsletters, leaflets, social media, press releases and articles for the Kennel Club website.



Poppy Ryan - Health and Welfare Assistant

In 2017 Poppy graduated from the University of Reading with a degree in Biological Sciences. Having spent time working in rescue centres and

veterinary clinics since graduating, she is aware of how important it is to monitor and improve the breeding of dogs. Poppy joined the Health and Welfare team at the Kennel Club in 2019 to help make a positive difference to canine welfare. Her role involves supporting customer health enquiries and providing administrative assistance towards research areas of the health and welfare department. In her free time Poppy enjoys walking and training her two Havanese, Archie and Lily.

Composition of the Dog Health Group and its sub-groups

DOG HEALTH GROUP

Dr Nick Blayney (Chair)
Mr Julien Barney
Dr Jacqueline Boyd
Mr Kevin Clifford
Ms Adrienne Conroy
Prof. Shelia Crispin
Ms Daniella Dos Santos
Mr Hector Heathcote
Prof. Mike Herrtage
Mr Bill Lambert
Dr Tom Lewis
Miss Charlotte McNamara
Dr Cathryn Mellersh
Mrs Gil Simpson

BREED STANDARDS & CONFORMATION SUB-GROUP

Mr Frank Kane (Chair)
Mrs Meg Purnell-Carpenter
Prof Sheila Crispin
Mr Hector Heathcote
Prof Mike Herrtage
Dr Ron James
Mr Bill Lambert
Miss Charlotte McNamara
Mr Robin Newhouse
Mr Ian Seath

GENETICS AND HEALTH SCREENING SUB-GROUP

Prof Bill Ollier (Chair)
Prof David Brodbelt
Dr Jerry Davies
Prof Steve Dean
Prof Gary England
Miss Hannah James
Dr Ron James
Dr Tom Lewis
Dr Cathryn Mellersh

ASSURED BREEDER SCHEME SUB-GROUP

Mr Julien Barney (Chair)
Mr Anthony Buckwell
Miss Annette Conn
Miss Catherine Dobbie
Ms Jacquie Easton
Ms Sharon Edwards
Mr Andrew Gillon
Ms Marisa Heath
Miss Hannah James
Miss Harriet Lester
Mrs Zoe Phillips
Mrs Alison Skipper
Miss Liz Wharton
Mrs Sussie Wiles

ACTIVITIES, HEALTH AND WELFARE SUB-GROUP

Dr Jacqueline Boyd (Chair)
Ms Constanza Alvarez
Mr Steve Croxford
Mr Gary Doyle
Mr Barry Gilbert
Mr John Houlton
Mr Iain MacDonald
Miss Charlotte McNamara
Mr Paul Mcpherson
Mrs Carole Patrick
Mrs Gina Pink
Ms Jane Prince
Ms Rachel Mowbray
Dr Alison Wills



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Useful links

The Kennel Club

thekennelclub.org.uk

BVA/KC Canine Health Schemes

bva.co.uk/Canine-Health-Schemes

RFG Scheme

thekennelclub.org.uk/rfgs

The Kennel Club Heart Scheme for Cavalier King Charles Spaniels

thekennelclub.org.uk/heartscheme