

Neurological problem in the Stabyhoun

What is known?

In April 2009 there was a report about a puppy that deviated from normal behavior. Several puppies in that litter had the same abnormality and had to be euthanized. Following this, a few previous problem litters came forward, and all too soon, came new reports of other occurrences. In total, this problem has been seen in 5 different litters in Holland.

Research so far, has yielded s nothing concrete, but it seems to be a neurological problem.

Symptoms?

If this occurs in the puppies, they begin to show signs at 5 to 6 weeks old of compulsive behavior. Behavior that is increasingly repeated, hardly stopping. The pup remains "stuck" in a particular movement pattern: running circles around their axis or the furniture, walking constantly backwards, or back and forth.

The cycle of movement can be interrupted by stopping the pup physically (for example, picking up), but once he is put down again, he picks up where he left off or starts another movement pattern. Affected puppies have an excessive urge to move and cannot independently eat their food. They will lose weight significantly. Later, they scream (presumably) in pain. A remedy is not known, so the puppies should be euthanized.

What is the cause?

When searching for common lines among the sufferers, we came up with a number of similar parents in all pedigrees of the respective litters that emerged on both sides of the pedigree. The oldest of these "couples" were born as far back as 1985 and 1986 and have together produced more than 800 descendants!

This would be a wide spread problem within the breed.

The cause could be a mutation that has been revealed only because there is close inbreeding that now takes place.

Recognition

An important point is that the recognition of the disease has all come from the new puppy owners. It seems that the symptoms are missed by the breeders or downplayed if they do notice it. Afterwards, when explicitly asked, all breeders did seem to know that they have indeed noticed the symptoms. At litter examinations, the inventory takers even noticed no abnormalities. Now, they are all aware of the problem and its symptoms, including having seen examples through movies.

Research

No cause has yet been found as to where, why or when the abnormal behavior occurs. There are 6 animals for who have been offered for autopsy, both in the Netherlands and Canada and Finland. There is no clear answer that came from these autopsies.

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Utrecht University would like to help the Stabyhoun Associations to search for the answers. The goal is to learn more about this condition, and stop further spread of this disease.

Plan of action

What does Utrecht do?

They perform an autopsy to see if there are abnormalities appearing in the brains. They do blood tests on the sick dogs, but if possible also in the healthy littermates. Often the breeders will do a DNA profile. The cooperation of the relevant breeders is, therefore, very desirable. Perhaps by doing this, a test may be developed that can be used, for example, in the same way a test for the SCID for the Wetterhoun is utilized. Utrecht University wants to use veterinary students in this study. For suffering animals, there is no charge for the blood draw in Utrecht.

A disadvantage is that in the short term, answers are not expected. It may be longer than one year before there are results.

What does the Breeders Advisory Committee recommend?

The BAC checks the genealogy and passes the data to the University of Utrecht. This would help to determine if it is a hereditary condition. In the meantime, possible carriers are tight restricted in their ability to breed, if allowed at all.