

To the Secretary

30<sup>th</sup> August, 2004

██████████  
Jack Russell Terrier Club of QLD

██████████  
QLD 4132

Dear Madam,

Following the recent diagnosis of lens luxation in a Jack Russell Terrier owned by a member of your club, I have received some second hand information that there is a widely held belief that this condition does not occur in your breed.

I am writing to inform you of our experience with the condition in the breed in the hope that you might as a breed club take this information in good faith and act on it where appropriate.

The condition of lens luxation has been recognised throughout the world for many years. The condition is associated with progressive loosening of the lens within the eye over the first 5-6 years of life due to a structural defect in the fibres (called lens zonules) which hold the lens rigidly in place. The condition can cause glaucoma and blindness if unrecognised and/or untreated in time. It commonly occurs in a number of small terrier breeds of which Jack Russell Terriers, Miniature Fox Terriers and Tenterfield Terriers are the most renowned. It is strongly suspected to be a genetic disease in your breed but not yet proven.

We don't see large numbers of JRTs with the condition in southeast QLD. A search of our records reveals that we have diagnosed 8 cases in JRTs in the last two years. Enquiries of a Veterinary Ophthalmology practice known to us in Melbourne reveal diagnosis of 86 cases in JRTs in the last 5 years! We do not know if our numbers reveal a difference in the popularity of the breed between QLD and Victoria or a genetic difference in the lines being bred in the two states. However, although you might not perceive this as a major problem, we have seen the condition in your breed in Queensland nonetheless.

There is currently great interest in looking for the gene which is suspected to cause the condition. In North America the Jack Russell Terrier Club has founded a JRT Research Foundation and is currently funding collaborative research by The University of Missouri USA and the Animal Health Trust UK to specifically look for the gene. One of the problems in researching the condition is that if people pretend it does not exist in their lines despite evidence to the contrary then researchers will miss out on valuable cases where a suspected gene can be looked for to compare it to other dogs which have been known to be non-affected.

I am not aware of the identity of any person who has bred any of the dogs which we have seen with lens luxation and accuse no-one in your club, but I would encourage all of you to get involved in these research studies should you become aware that any JRT coming from lines bred by members of your club has developed this condition. You have a golden opportunity to stop the problem in the breed especially if blood tests can be developed to diagnose the condition, but this will only be possible if there is an open admission of the problem and a willingness to provide information and genetic material especially from affected dogs. Sadly there are a number of historical examples of conditions which cause blindness in other dog breeds where the incidence of the condition is now so high that it seems the condition will never be eradicated from the breed, because of an earlier failure to admit the

problem and stop breeding dogs which either showed or produced offspring which showed the condition.

Your members may be interested in the following websites for further information

<http://www.caninegeneticdiseases.net/GLX/mainGLX.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/welshealth/Articles/Luxation-Glaucoma.htm>

<http://www.jrt-research.com/research/pll.html>

I offer this advice to your club in a spirit of goodwill in the hope that you will not adopt a “not in my backyard” approach towards this devastating, painful and blinding disease.

Yours Sincerely

Mike Bernays  
Animal Eye Services

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