**Health Statistics 2019-2021**

Not surprisingly, the pandemic brought about delays in the recording of test results on the Kennel Club databases, and also access to them was interrupted. Furthermore, the restrictions placed by the RVC on what procedures could be undertaken by vets caused some disruption in the conduct of BAER test and hip & elbow scoring by veterinary practices. Additionally, the closure of the Animal Health Trust in early 2020 was a matter of great regret and shock to us all, and for a while caused the loss of first class BAER and DNA analytical services, amongst others. Fortunately, those resources and related personnel were subsequently incorporated within other organisations, and the services which we all value continue to be available.

Some health related statistics for the three years 2019 to 2021:

**BAER**

The number of Dalmatians hearing-tested has levelled out in the last 5 years to between 240 to 290 per year, and this represents between 24% and 28% of total registrations. In 2019, 2020, and 2021, the percentage of tested puppies found to be bilaterally deaf was respectively 1.9%, 0.8% and zero. I would urge caution in being over-optimistic with this apparent achievement. During the period from 2004 to 2018, the rolling 5-year average for bilateral deafness was never lower than 3.4% nor higher than 4.1%. Apparently, over the following 3 years we have a continued sharp drop and suddenly arrived at a single-year figure of zero, yet nothing has changed in terms of breeding practices which could be put forward as a possible explanation. It concerns me that there have been 4 cases in recent times where a puppy has been sold with a bilateral hearing test certificate, only for the new owners to discover shortly afterwards that their puppies were in fact bilaterally deaf. Of course, these are only the cases of which I am aware – there may well be more.

Dr Tom Lewis, until recently the Kennel Club’s geneticist, published a peer-reviewed scientific paper in 2020, investigating the trends in deafness in the 8955 UK Dalmatians BAER tested at the AHT between 1992 and early 2019. His conclusions mirrored those which have been collated over the years from all testing centres and more recently based on the KC Scheme database. These were that bilateral deafness had decreased rapidly from about 8% to about 4%. He attributed this to the selection of breeding stock practised by several breeders. But he also expressed the view that further reductions in deafness were unlikely to be achieved, due to the multiplicity of other genetic factors having an effect on hearing. His professional opinion is another reason why the figures reported earlier must be regarded with caution.

***Note:*** *Since this report was compiled, I have been advised of an additional 2 cases where a puppy was sold with a bilaterally-hearing test certificate, which subsequently transpired to be bilaterally deaf.*

**DNA Test for HUU Gene**

The annual number of tested Dalmatians recorded on the KC database has increased by 95 during the years 2019-2021, making a total of 131 since the Scheme came into being in 2015. These are made of of 9 ‘Clear’, 72 ‘Carriers’ and 44 ‘Affected’.

**Hip and Elbow Scoring**

A further 130 Dalmatians were hip-scored during 2019-2021, making a total of 473 in all. There was a significant drop in numbers during 2020, when vets. were only permitted to carry out urgent treatments for much of the year. This was followed, though, with a corresponding surge in 2021, so the annual test rate continues at between 40 and 50 per year. Over the 3 years of this report, scores varied from a low of 2 to a high of 27, with a median score of 9.7

56 Dalmatians were elbow-scored during the 3 years of this report. There were 12 in 2019 (of which all were scored 0), 13 in 2020 (all 0), and 31 in 2021 (29 scored 0, and 2 scored 3). The total number of elbow scores on record is now 156.

**John Stevenson**

**Breed Health Co-ordinator**