

III. A Comparison of the 1994 and 2000 PBGVCA Health Surveys

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There were inherent differences in the year 1994 and year 2000 health surveys that limit direct comparisons in many ways. The design of the 1994 survey was based upon a somewhat limited knowledge of the spectrum of the health problems known to occur in the Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen breed, coupled with an effort to explore the extent of problems known to occur in other purebred dog breeds. At the time of the 1994 survey, club membership was just under 200 members. Surveys were sent only to PBGVCA members. In the 2000 survey, an attempt was made to contact non-PBGVCA members in addition to the members (about 325) to broaden the perspective of the survey. In the year 2000 survey, we asked questions about a number of diseases that we did not necessarily suspect occurred in the breed. In my opinion, there were few surprises from this list of additional diseases that we did not explore in the year 1994. However, we have certainly come a realistic way from my first introduction to the breed where I was told that the only significant health concerns were “bites and eyes”. We also made some attempt to explore the issue of longevity in the more recent survey since at the time of the 1994 survey there were few geriatric animals to count. The issue of temperament was also superficially explored in the most recent survey. I will attempt to make further comparisons based upon subjects explored in both surveys with final comments addressing findings of interest in the year 2000 survey.

Respondents: In 1994, 78 survey responses were received and 503 dogs were counted. In 2000, 250 responses were received and 640 dogs were counted. In other words, in spite of an increase in respondents of 172, only 137 more dogs were counted. The average number of dogs counted per respondent in 1994 was 6.4 as opposed to a median number of dogs *residing* with respondents of 2.38 in 2000. The apparent lower number of dogs counted per respondent may reflect several things.—1. A greater participation among pet owners, 2. The “time frame” limitation designated in the 2000 survey vs. the totality of dogs owned in the 1994 survey, and 3. Lowered participation among “breeders” owning more than 3 dogs.

Hip dysplasia: The format of the questions concerning hip dysplasia was different in the two surveys. In 1994, we asked how many dogs had been radiographed for hip dysplasia. In 1994, 84 dogs had been radiographed, 17% of the dogs counted. In 2000, the question asked was whether respondents participated in health registries, and if so, which ones. One hundred sixty-one respondents answered Yes to registry participation with 28 percent of them indicating either OFA/hip or PennHip participation. In the disease frequency category in the year 2000, 14 of 640 dogs were reported to be dysplastic. In 1994, 5 animals were reported to be dysplastic (of 84 that were radiographed). However, only 2 of the 5 animals were reported to be lame. Hard conclusions as to the real frequency of hip dysplasia are hard to make as in both surveys, we cannot assume that the dogs radiographed are necessarily representative of the PBGV population as a whole. In fact, it is likely that most PGBVs have not been radiographed, making it probable that we are underestimating the real frequency of hip dysplasia, but perhaps not

the frequency of lameness. In other words, it is very likely that lame PBGVs are being radiographed, but not all dysplastic PBGVs are necessarily lame.

Eye examinations: In the 1994 survey, 147 of 503 dogs had eye examinations performed by a board certified ophthalmologist, 29% of the dogs counted. Less than half of those dogs were submitted to CERF. In 2000, of 161 respondents participating in health registries, 27% participated with the CERF or GDC registries. However, it is hoped that his figure underestimates the eye examination rate, as some respondents, such as myself, have eye examinations performed regularly without necessarily seeking out CERF registry. In both surveys, the most frequent eye anomaly was persistent pupillary membranes. I was surprised at the frequency of ectropion in the 2000 survey (the second most common eye abnormality reported). Unlike the Basset Hound or Bloodhound, this breed should not display a looseness of the lower eyelids, and breeders should certainly strive to select against this trait. The third most common eye abnormality in the 2000 survey was retinal folds, a problem known to be present in the breed since its early introduction to this country. The reported frequency of this problem in 1994 was similar (5 of 147 dogs in 1994 vs. 7 of 630 in 2000). Again, it is possible that particularly in the 2000 survey we are underestimating disease frequency, as we are counting affecteds among the total number of dogs counted vs. affected only among dogs having eye examinations in 1994. In the 2000 survey, 4 cases of glaucoma and 4 cases of lens luxation were reported. It is likely that some of these and possibly all of these dogs had both conditions and may, in effect have been counted twice, once for each condition.

Hearts: In 1994, 6 of 503 dogs were reported to have heart defects. In the 2000 survey, there were 4 dogs with congenital heart defects-- one with patent ductus arteriosus (PDA) and 3 with ventricular septal defects. The listing of 6 dogs with heart murmurs and no diagnosis is not particularly useful as these dogs may be truly normal dogs or dogs with undiagnosed developmental or congenital anomalies. I was surprised to not see pulmonic stenosis cases listed, as I am aware of at least 3 cases having been diagnosed, one of which appeared in the 1994 survey.

Meningitis: In 1994, an attempt was made to count meningitis cases based upon pre-questioning as to the clinical signs and diagnostic procedures performed. Based upon these preparatory questions, we counted 6 animals with confirmed meningitis and 10 with suspected meningitis for a percentage affected of 3.1. In 2000, we made no effort to prequalify the questions. Fifteen cases of aseptic meningitis were reported and 2 cases of septic meningitis. In addition, 24 cases of juvenile pain syndrome were reported. Whether some of these animals were later confirmed with meningitis is unclear. Again, if we group the septic meningitis cases with the aseptic cases (15 plus 2) we get a percentage of about 3 percent.

Seizures and epilepsy: In 1994, 11 dogs were reported with seizures with one of the 11 dogs diagnosed with hydrocephalus. In 2000, 21 dogs were reported to be epileptic, with 5 dogs affected with non-epileptic seizures. This would appear to be a near doubling of the seizure rate from 2.16% of the dogs counted to 4.0 percent. This apparent increase in the seizure frequency rate is cause for concern in my opinion. Certainly we would like to

avoid the high prevalence of seizures and epilepsy seen in breeds such as Cocker Spaniels and Irish Setters.

Hydrocephalus: In 1994, 4 cases of hydrocephalus (one with seizures) were counted and in 2000, one case was reported.

Skin: It is very difficult to compare the frequency of skin problems in the two surveys as I suspect that there may be a great deal of overlap in skin cases in year 2000 survey. In other words, it would be very likely that dogs reported with flea allergy, may also have inhaled or food allergies. Questions about demodectic mange were not asked in 1994. In the 2000 survey, 2 cases were reported. Overall, the frequency of this condition appears to be low. Certainly, allergies represent the most prevalent skin conditions.

Cryptorchidism: Nineteen cases of cryptorchidism were reported in the 1994 survey and 13 were reported in the 2000 survey. I find the frequency in the 2000 survey surprisingly low, but would be pleased if there is a genuine improvement in the frequency of this trait.

Patellar Luxation: Five cases of patellar luxation were reported in 1994 and 15 in the year 2000. Similar to the reports of seizures, this appears to be a significant increase in frequency, although still not rampant. However, the frequency of hip dysplasia and of patellar luxation were similar in 2000, so we should perhaps be placing as much emphasis on this condition as on hip dysplasia. However, since luxating patellas may be diagnosed on physical examination without the aid of radiographs, we are probably not underestimating the extent of the disease to the same degree. Thirteen of the 15 reported cases of patellar luxation were lateral as opposed to medial. This implies a greater similarity to the disease as seen in Basset Hounds vs. the toy breeds. Certainly breeding stock should be palpated for the condition., as not all dogs with luxating patellas are lame.

General observations on the year 2000 survey: Umbilical hernias were the most frequent birth defects/puppy problem reported. Autoimmune hemolytic anemia was the most frequent blood disorder with 3 cases counted. The frequency of recurrent ear infections (56) was surprisingly high. I also was very interested in the report of two cases of congenital deafness. Because the link noted in other breeds between piebald and white coloring and deafness, I have wondered if this condition might at some time be seen in our breed. Geriatric deafness does not particularly concern me because it is often the most long-lived dogs that develop this. Unilateral deafness cannot be detected without specialized testing. Were the two cases of congenital deafness or a fluke, or do we have unilaterally deaf dogs that may later produce affected offspring? I would also be most interested in learning what the coloring in the affected dogs was. Were they predominantly white dogs, or were they typical in their coloring?

I did not find the frequency of Caesarian sections or of pyometra to be particularly surprising. We would really need more specific information to determine whether the frequency of these reproductive conditions is high enough for concern, particularly when compared to other breeds of similar size. Undershot dentition was the most common dental abnormality as seen in 1994. The frequency appears to be similar.

In summary, it would appear that the high level of concern among respondents for “neck pain syndrome”, epilepsy, and eye problems is justified. While meningitis cases appear to be somewhat stable in frequency, the increased reporting of epilepsy is of great concern. We should also keep in mind that our most frequent hereditary problem is persistent pupillary membranes, but because of the high frequency, the trait will be difficult to eliminate entirely. While a concern about glaucoma is justified because of the serious effect on quality of life, the frequency of this trait is still fortunately low when looking at the population statistics. An increased level of concern and attention toward patellar conformation is also justified. It is somewhat surprising that while the concern about hypothyroidism is relatively high among respondents, that so few respondents are participating in routine thyroid screening.