

Ask the fancy

The "Ask The Fancy" question was presented as an overview to the state of health of our breed. It was a multi-part inquiry. In this issue we addressed the question in a limited way. First, an expert, Dr. Mary Dee Sist, a veterinarian involved directly with surveying different aspects of the state of the breed such as heart and thyroid, and an over twenty-year owner/breeder of the Saluki, recounts her view of what basic testing should be done. Another Saluki owner/breeder and a professional pharmacist, Cathy Chapman, recounts her personal problem with seizures and one of her Salukis. Lastly, I did a small amount of research and published the following accounts of when well-known Salukis died, from the earliest known imports through the 1950s. I was interested to ascertain actual numbers since Saluki fanciers have always recounted that the breed lived a long time. So what was a long time to them?

Because of the restraints of space we have divided the responses between issues. I feel that an ongoing discussion of these issues is the best way to handle the topic. So, next issue we will have a new "Ask The Fancy" subject, but we will also publish the replies we received to the current question in the next issue.

I have been a veterinarian for 26 years and have a high percentage of breeder clients in my small animal practice. I have been owned by Salukis since 1974. Over the past decade, I have been involved in several Saluki-specific research endeavors.

In response to The Classic Saluki Reader's Survey I feel that the health of the Saluki into middle age is the most important factor in considering breeding for both the sire and the dam. Many of the more serious health conditions, including autoimmune, allergic, skin and heart conditions, do not become apparent until middle age or even later. Therefore, I don't personally like to see a young dog bred in most situations. I prefer to see physically fit bitches, that have had no health problems, bred after five years of age and males even twice that age used. The health of relatives should also be considered.

If there is any history or family history of health conditions then some screening tests might be useful.

- If there has been any history of rear end lameness without documented injury, then OFA certifying that the dog is free of hip dysplasia is good.
- If there has been any history of eye problems then CERF registering the dog as free of any eye problems is indicated.
- If there is any history of heart conditions, then a full cardiac exam by a board-certified cardiologist is warranted. If there is a heart murmur, then an ultrasonic exam, including a Doppler exam to determine the significance of the heart murmur, is needed.
- If any relatives have had thyroid conditions, then having a thyroid panel run on your dog's blood is certainly indicated.

Other than the OFA certification for hip dysplasia, these need to be repeated every year or two, since conditions can change as they age.

I do, however, feel that a full physical exam by a veterinarian to look for any abnormalities is the basic screening that should be done

yearly. A complete blood count and chemistry profile, as well as urinalysis, can be run to rule out or diagnose medical conditions possibly before the onset of any clinical signs. But breed variations must be taken into account when interpreting the results. My research has shown that Salukis are similar to Greyhounds in that they have high-packed cell volumes and low white cell and platelet counts normally. These can be misdiagnosed as polycythemia (which is too many red blood cells) or a viral infection (which can lower the white cell count) or autoimmune thrombocytopenia (which is too few platelets). They also tend to have lower thyroid values, especially T4. Testing for thyroid autoantibodies can also indicate if the dog is going to develop autoimmune thyroiditis years before the thyroid hormone levels decrease or there is an onset of any clinical signs.

A pre-breeding exam should include a reproductive soundness physical exam for both the female and male. If there has been any history of problems, then a Brucellosis blood test and vaginal cytology and culture for the female, and sperm count and prostate exam and culture for the male, should be done.

With the quality of the diets fed, the scope of veterinary care, and the protective nature of our current vaccines, I do feel that Salukis should live to a ripe age of 13 to 15 years. I feel fortunate that many of the Salukis participating in the CBC and thyroid and heart "normal" studies have lived to this age without having serious health problems. I find the incidence of cancer in the aged population of concern, but more work needs to be done to determine if this is true

of other breeds and is a function of advanced age or just a problem in Salukis.

Our dogs are not subjected to the rigors of hunting for their food or the harshness of desert life where survival of the fittest might have determined who could reproduce. Our criteria for the selection of individuals to produce the next generation are often not based on the soundness of body and mind that once was required. The future of our special breed is in our own hands.

MaryDee Sist, DVM

Collection

by Sue Ann Pietros

Normally, I don't respond to the "Ask the fancy" questions, but I think the issue of: "How old is old" deserves some comment from an historical view. In order to do this I have included some statements from past, well-known, Saluki people as to the age of death and conditions of their dogs.

1943, AKC Gazette. "It is with regret that I report the death of my first Saluki on April 26. Amherstia Nazarat O'Redledge, bred by the Hon. Florence Amherst, London, England was whelped March 5, 1929 (ed. note: more than 14 years). She was a daughter of Amherstia Nesiba and Amherstia Shahshah and was descended from the Syrian desert strain of H.H. Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, a son of King Huessin of Mecca ..."

September 1943, AKC Gazette. "Dog World (ed. note: England) has made reference to the longevity and sprightliness of the Saluki even at the ages of 12, 13, or 14 years. The late Amherstia Nazarat O'Redledge, the doyenne of my kennel, retained her buoyancy until very late in life.

At her death, she was more than 14 years old ..."

AKC Gazette. "It is with regret that I report the death of Ch. Hadji on October 15. Bred by Mrs. S.Y. L'Hommedieu Jr., he was whelped August 3, 1934. A handsome dog with a beautiful disposition, he was the sire of seven champions ..." (Ed. note: 8/3/34 - 10/15/45, 11 years, 2 months.)

AKC Gazette. Ch. Halmah Ab-Ah succumbed to a heart attack. Whelped Aug 3, 1934 (ed. note: yes the same date as her spouse, Hadji). A member of the much-pictured octette, of which six attained championships, she was the daughter of Redledge Abu Ben Adam and Amherstia Roayla Ahwa O'Redledge. She was the dam of ten champions ... Halmah was a beautiful specimen with a fine disposition." (Ed. note: 8/3/34 - 6/27/46, 11 years, 11 months.)

AKC Gazette. "... Saronia Kelb died at the age of 12 years and was champion at Crufts the year before his death."

AKC Gazette letter to Mr. Aldrich, 1940, from Major C.S. Jarvis. "Actually, although I have had a good many Salukis, I'm afraid I do not know much about the types. They are to be found among the Bedouin all over Arabia, Trans-Jordan, Syria, and Iraq, and you will probably find certain types that have more or less been established by Europeans recently ... My best dog came from Iraq ... He died as most Salukis do in the East. That is to say, he was amazingly fit in every way to the age of thirteen. He had all his teeth, his hearing, and eyesight as good as ever, his coat was like a six-month-old, and the only sign of age was that he crumpled right up - his brain went, his eyesight, hearing, and every sense. He would eat if you put his

nose on the food, but he had quite ceased to exist as a dog. I had him put away after I was convinced it was a permanent state. On the whole it is a better way to go out than one experiences with other breeds. European dogs disintegrate with old age as humans do, but the average Saluki doesn't. I showed my Saluki to an English vet when he was 12 years old and the vet put him at four! ... "

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Mrs. Parkhouse's Ch. Sara of Shammar died from a growth ...

Miss A. Thompson lost her bitch puppy ZenKeri Silver Gazelle from a rare liver complaint ...

Mrs. Angel lost Mazuri Erizada from a growth at nearly ten years ...

Mr. O. Wilmot's eight-year-old Roguey (son of his famous Kharif Zobaa) (ed. note: a most famous coursing dog in the 1940s) collapsed and died while he was walking along holding Mr. Wilmot's hand in his mouth."

Next issue we will publish more health information, details on registries such as OFA, and discussions of specific health problems experienced by owners.

Ask the fancy, next time . . .

Part one: What specific health problems have your Salukis experienced? (names can be withheld)

Part two: What do you think of the AKC breed standard? Should it be changed, or stay the same?