

"Broken Hearts" Update

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Recent articles have emphasized the existence of heart disease in various breeds of dogs (Note 1 and 2). The articles mentioned that heart size on a chest x-ray helps to differentiate a normal from an abnormal heart. In addition, ultrasound is used to characterize the size of specific heart chambers (ie, left ventricle) as well as function. Due to the wide range of size and conformation in dogs, there may be differences in heart size and function between some breeds. These differences have not been well characterized for all breeds. This study was done to try to characterize normality for the Saluki heart by physical examination, electrocardiogram and echocardiogram.

To date we have examined 80 Salukis. Fifty-five dogs were examined once, while the remainder were examined two to five times each. On echocardiograms, many Salukis appear to have larger hearts whose function differs from mixed breed dogs. We are following these dogs to determine whether any develop significant heart disease, or whether their "normal" heart size and function truly differs from other breeds. We have collected the hearts of some of these dogs who have died from a variety of causes. Post mortem studies need to be done on the hearts to confirm that they were indeed normal. We have stored serum samples from the Salukis in our study for future analysis of thyroid hormone or other factors that might contribute to altered cardiac function.

We would like to continue to follow the original dogs to insure their normality. We need to analyze the data collected in our study to characterize the Saluki normals. This takes time and money. We have donated substantial time and effort. We also wish to acknowledge the other dedicated, generous individuals who have either allowed their dogs to participate, or have offered their financial support. Thank you to the following people who have donated the SCOA Humane Purse for their dog's Best of Breed Specialty win: Janet Littel Adams, Beverly Griffith, Margjaritta Hamalainen, Celene Howard and Christine McIntyre.

However, to complete this work, more financial support is essential. This will allow us to share our data with Saluki fanciers and veterinary cardiologists. Completion of this study will increase the knowledge base about our ancient breed and help insure it place in the future.

For more information, contact:

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Note 1: Wilford, C. Big Dogs, Bad hearts. In: Purebred Dogs/American Kennel Club Gazette, Oct 94, p 55-59.

Note 2: Simpson, J. The Heart of the Matter. In: Newsletter for the Society of the Perpetuation of Desert-Bred Salukis, Inc. Winter 1995, p 10-11.