

Field Spaniel Health Survey

The Field Spaniel Society of America health survey was conducted from November 2002 through March 2003. The raw data from the FSSA health survey was compiled at the University of Missouri, which allowed complete anonymity. Assurance of anonymity probably contributed to the wonderful response. Raw data was returned as Excel™ spreadsheets through which the data was manipulated and looked at in various ways.

- The first report was issued previously in the Winter 2003 Field Spaniel newsletter, beginning on page 35.
- The second report was issued previously in the Spring 2004 Field Spaniel newsletter, beginning on page 36.
- This is the third and final report of the survey results.

Profound thanks goes to all Field Spaniel owners who responded to the survey. It required time and effort, and sometimes heartache as well, but the healthy future of our Field Spaniels counts on you. The following chart is a summary of the compiled data that resulted from the specific disease state portion of the survey.

	General Health Category	Specific Diagnosis	Specifics/Sites	# reported	Categ. Total	Percent of Category	% of total diagnoses	% of total dogs
1	Endocrine Disorders							
		Hypothyroidism		40		90.91%	6.01%	8.97%
		Hyperthyroidism		1		2.27%	0.15%	0.22%
		Other Endocrine	undefined	3		6.82%	0.45%	0.67%
	Total				44	100.00%		9.87%
2	Immune Mediated Diseases							
		Hemolytic Anemia	immune mediated	3		25.00%	0.45%	0.67%
		Other Immune/hematological	undefined	9		75.00%	1.35%	2.02%
	Total				12	100.00%		2.69%
3	Cancers							
		Squamous Cell Carcinoma	nasal cavity	1		2.70%	0.15%	0.22%
		Osteosarcoma	bone	2		5.41%	0.30%	0.45%
		Mast Cell Tumor	skin	1		2.70%	0.15%	0.22%
		Melanoma	skin	1		2.70%	0.15%	0.22%
		Lymphosarcoma	intestinal	1		2.70%	0.15%	0.22%
		Hemangiosarcoma	spleen	2		5.41%	0.30%	0.45%
		Brain	undefined	2		5.41%	0.30%	0.45%
		Adenocarcinoma	mammary	8		21.62%	1.20%	1.79%
		Other	undefined	19		51.35%	2.85%	4.26%
	Total				37	100.00%		8.30%
4	Skin Disorders							
		Atopy	hot spots, etc	18		20.00%	2.70%	4.04%
		Food Allergies		6		6.67%	0.90%	1.35%
		Flea Allergy		11		12.22%	1.65%	2.47%
		Other Dermatological	undefined	55		61.11%	8.26%	12.33%
	Total				90	100.00%		20.18%
5	Gastrointestinal							
		Megaesophagus		2		4.08%	0.30%	0.45%
		Inflammatory Bowel Disease		3		6.12%	0.45%	0.67%
		Chronic Gastritis		1		2.04%	0.15%	0.22%
		Chronic Colitis		1		2.04%	0.15%	0.22%
		Other GI	undefined	42		85.71%	6.31%	9.42%
	Total				49	100.00%		10.99%
6	CardioPulmonary/Hematology							
		Patent Ductus Arteriosus	congenital	2		9.52%	0.30%	0.45%
		Atrial/Ventricular Septal Defect	congenital	1		4.76%	0.15%	0.22%
		Other cardiopulmonary	undefined	17		80.95%	2.55%	3.81%
		Von Willebrand's Disease		1		4.76%	0.15%	0.22%
	Total				21	100.00%		4.71%

	General Health Category	Specific Diagnosis	Specifics/Sites	# reported	Categ. Total	Percent of Category	% of total diagnoses	% of total dogs
7	Urinary System Problems							
		Cystinuria		1		5.26%	0.15%	0.22%
		Kidney (bladder??) Stones		1		5.26%	0.15%	0.22%
		Urinary Incontinance		2		10.53%	0.30%	0.45%
		Other urinary	UTI's??	15		78.95%	2.25%	3.36%
	Total				19	100.00%		4.26%
8	Reproduction							
		Silent Heats		2		2.67%	0.30%	0.45%
		Irregular Heat Cycles		2		2.67%	0.30%	0.45%
		Fetal Reabsorption		2		2.67%	0.30%	0.45%
		Abortion		1		1.33%	0.15%	0.22%
		Failure to Conceive	undefined	4		5.33%	0.60%	0.90%
		False Pregnancy		7		9.33%	1.05%	1.57%
		Pyometra		10		13.33%	1.50%	2.24%
		Infertility	undefined	1		1.33%	0.15%	0.22%
		Eclampsia		1		1.33%	0.15%	0.22%
		Caesarian Section	various reasons	2		2.67%	0.30%	0.45%
		Hypogonadism		1		1.33%	0.15%	0.22%
		Cryptorchidism		3		4.00%	0.45%	0.67%
		Other reproductive problems	undefined	39		52.00%	5.86%	8.74%
	Total				75	100.00%		16.82%
9	Neurological Disorders							
		Cauda Equina Syndrome		1		5.88%	0.15%	0.22%
		Epilepsy	Primary/idiopathic	5		29.41%	0.75%	1.12%
		Seizure Disorder	Not epilepsy	4		23.53%	0.60%	0.90%
		Other neurological conditions	undefined	7		41.18%	1.05%	1.57%
	Total				17	100.00%		3.81%
10	Musculoskeletal Conditions							
		Anterior Cruciate Ligament torn	injury?	3		3.41%	0.45%	0.67%
		Luxating Patellas	unspecific	1		1.14%	0.15%	0.22%
		Hip -- CHD???		27		30.68%	4.05%	6.05%
		Elbow Disorder	undefined	1		1.14%	0.15%	0.22%
		Canine Idiopathic Polymyositis		1		1.14%	0.15%	0.22%
		Arthritis - DJD??	non-specific	17		19.32%	2.55%	3.81%
		Other musculoskeletal	undefined	38		43.18%	5.71%	8.52%
	Total				88	100.00%		19.73%
11	Ophthalmic							
		Retinal Dysplasia		2		2.35%	0.30%	0.45%
		Progressive Retinal Atrophy	undefined	1		1.18%	0.15%	0.22%
		Persistent Pupillary Membrane		5		5.88%	0.75%	1.12%
		KCS (dry eye)		2		2.35%	0.30%	0.45%
		Eye infections, frequent		3		3.53%	0.45%	0.67%
		Ectropion		8		9.41%	1.20%	1.79%
		Entropion		6		7.06%	0.90%	1.35%
		Other eye lid problems	undefined	3		3.53%	0.45%	0.67%
		Cataracts, adult onset		11		12.94%	1.65%	2.47%
		Cataracts, juvenile onset		1		1.18%	0.15%	0.22%
		Other eye defects/disorders	undefined	43		50.59%	6.46%	9.64%
	Total				85	100.00%		19.06%
12	Ear Problems							
		Excessive Ear Wax		15		13.39%	2.25%	3.36%
		Ear Infections		73		65.18%	10.96%	16.37%
		Deafness	onset undefined	1		0.89%	0.15%	0.22%
		Aural Hematoma		1		0.89%	0.15%	0.22%
		Other ear problems	undefined	22		19.64%	3.30%	4.93%
	Total				112	100.00%		25.11%

	General Health Category	Specific Diagnosis	Specifics/Sites	# reported	Categ. Total	Percent of Category	% of total diagnoses	% of total dogs
13	Drug Reactions							
		Vaccine reactions	undefined	6		35.29%	0.90%	1.35%
		General anesthesia problems	undefined	3		17.65%	0.45%	0.67%
		Other drug reactions	undefined	8		47.06%	1.20%	1.79%
	Total				17	100.00%		3.81%
	TOTAL CONDITIONS REPORTED				666			

What conclusions can be reached?

First, and perhaps the most heartening is that many owners and breeders **will** cooperate in sharing information about their dogs' health issues. Did everyone respond? Of course not: 184 individuals sent back the medical data forms on 446 individual Field Spaniels. But the response was infinitely larger than the preceding survey conducted nearly a decade earlier, which resulted in data reported for about a dozen Field Spaniels. The dog owning public is more and more aware that certain diseases can be screened for prior to breeding and many want proof of such screening prior to purchase. Breeders in greater numbers are letting down the barricade of fear about open dialogue. Our breed has an incredibly small gene pool, and all of our dogs are equally likely to carry similar recessive genes. Progress in identifying these problems will accelerate as a larger portion of dogs are included in the database.

Second, we can see certain VERY general trends. Ear problems, for example, account for 25% of recorded conditions. While frustrating and of concern, it is the general nature of drooping, hairy spaniel ears to be prone to problems. Thus, it is heartening to know that 25% of the conditions are in the category of non-life threatening, treatable, and unlikely to be greatly improved by genetic testing.

Third, while other categories seem to be large, as Reproduction, Musculoskeletal, and Endocrine, until we can compare these to other breeds, we don't know if our Field Spaniels are in front of or behind the curve. And since this is our first survey resulting in significant response, it is impossible to know the direction these totals are taking - in other words, are the problems getting better or worse. Of course, regardless that a condition is less a problem than in other breeds, we all want to continue to reduce incidence!

Fourth, the biggest stumbling blocks to clear conclusions is the huge "Other" listing in most of the categories. As these were likely used when participants didn't know the specific medical diagnosis, it unfortunately confounds deductions. As an example, look at the results for Cardiopulmonary. The results show 4.26% of total reported conditions are cardiopulmonary; yet a whopping 81% of those conditions are undefined. If those in that 81% group were mainly old age, degenerative or infectious conditions such as Congestive Heart Failure or AV Valvular Insufficiency due to streptococcal infection, then cardiopulmonary genetic testing would probably not lower incidence. On the other hand, should they turn out to be Sub-aortic Stenosis, Tetralogy of Fallot, collapsing trachea or other genetically-based heart/lung conditions, then a strong push for pre-breeding cardiac evaluations would be likely to reduce incidence providing breeders act upon the results of those evaluations.

Final conclusions

The big conclusion is that those of us that love Field Spaniels have just learned enough to realize we need to know a lot more. But we can see where we need to improve and focus in future surveys. The entire discipline of DNA identification and genetic testing is expanding with amazing speed. The modern puppy buying public as well as concerned breeders want to be a part of this new technology for creating and owning healthier dogs. We can design better surveys and do improved data evaluation. We can get better ideas from other rare breeds. But the breed needs more of its fanciers to participate. A firm and unwavering commitment from the FSSA to support identification, reporting and testing for genetic disorders would help bring more folks along. As one of the rarer breeds with a narrow gene pool, we are much more capable of making genetic progress with these methods. The FSSA board, health committee, and membership should make a pledge today to further health progress through knowledge. Then tomorrow we can be proud of our part in creating healthier dogs as well as establishing the Field Spaniel as a leading example for other breeds to follow.

Thank you to Bonnie Wilcox DVM for her review and write-up of this data.