

THE SPORTING IRISH WATER SPANIEL CLUB

Registered with the Kennel Club (2056) PATRON: THE LORD DUNLEATH.

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INFORMATION FOR WOULD BE BREEDERS OF IWS

INTRODUCTION

The Sporting Irish Water Spaniel Club (SIWSC) is concerned about the status of the breed and wants to encourage the diversity of the genepool.

The SIWSC has decided to publish these guidelines as it is clear that some new breeders are falling foul of the unwritten "rules" of breeding IWS. It is also clear that to continue its survival the breed as a whole has to encourage both new breeders and new owners. Even amongst long standing members of the IWS community there is a distinct lack of understanding, particularly about health, the value (or otherwise) of health tests and the significant part a small gene pool plays in the underlying health of the IWS.

In 2018, nine of the seventeen litters registered by the Kennel Club were from first time IWS breeders, so it is clear we are already at the point where the breed in the UK is dependent on new breeders.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before you start you should contact your local council and enquire if you need a licence to breed with your bitch. In general anyone breeding 3 or more litters in a year needs to be licenced, however you need to check with your own council as regulations may vary from council to council. This new government regulation comes into force on the 01 October 2019. You may also be liable for income tax on any income from the sale of puppies.

The Irish Water Spaniel has never been a popular breed with roughly 120 registrations a year in the UK. Across the world it is estimated there are only about 300-350 registrations, with the UK and US making up the bulk of these registrations. The worldwide population is estimated to be about 3,000 – 3,500 individuals.

This should act as a warning to anyone wishing to breed IWS that it may be difficult to find suitable homes for any puppies and very careful consideration should be given before deciding to breed. The flip side of this is that the effects of more than 100 years of low numbers has taken its toll on the gene pool and resulted in considerable inbreeding, indeed the average breed coefficient of inbreeding is about 25%, equivalent to the mating of two siblings (where the parents are unrelated). It is well known that high levels of inbreeding lead to inbreeding depression and is almost certainly the primary reason why cancer (particularly in younger dogs), epilepsy and auto-immune diseases occur frequently in the IWS.

Consequently we need to increase the numbers of different dogs being used for breeding but this has to be done carefully to ensure all puppies can be found suitable homes.

Other general considerations as specified by the Kennel Club are:

- Is the bitch fit, healthy and mature enough to mate and does she have a good temperament?
- Can I afford to pay for the recommended health tests for the bitch prior to mating her and, where necessary, for her litter?
- Do I know enough to help the bitch during the whelping, if necessary?
- Can I afford to pay for a caesarean should the dam have difficulty whelping the litter?
- Could I cope with a very large litter of, say, 10 or 12 puppies?
- Do I have sufficient knowledge to rear the litter correctly, including worming, vaccinations and socialisation?
- Have I the time to devote to a litter until the puppies are old enough to go to their new homes, which is usually around eight weeks?
- Am I knowledgeable enough to advise new owners about caring for their puppies, including rearing, diet, training and health problems?

- Would I be able to find good homes for the puppies?
- Am I in a position to take back or re-home any puppies if it becomes necessary?

If you have any questions regarding the points raised **please contact a committee member** to discuss in detail if breeding could be for you.

HEALTH TESTING

There are currently 3 health tests that the IWS community expect to have been carried out on prospective parents these are:

- Hip scoring, to evaluate the degree of hip dysplasia (abnormal development).
- Elbow scoring, to evaluate the degree of elbow dysplasia.
- **Annual** eye examinations.

Hip scoring

This is carried out once from the age of 1 although testing closer to 2 is advisable. X rays are taken by your vet and sent off to be evaluated.

Each hip is “scored” on each of 9 parameters giving a total for each hip of between 0 and 53. The scores from each hip are then added together to give an overall total of between 0 and 106.

The lower the score the lower the level of hip dysplasia.

However, it is very difficult to give guidance on what is an acceptable score as the evaluation does not directly correlate with the underlying genetics of the condition, as hip dysplasia is a complex mixture of genes and environmental factors. The “official” guidance is to use dogs with lower than average hip scores. The median score over the last 5 and 15 years is 11 but that is no guarantee that any off spring will themselves have low hip scores. Indeed, hip scoring is most unsatisfactory for a breed with a small population size as following the official guidelines undoubtedly means not using suitable dogs with the consequent negative impact on the gene pool. High scoring dogs can produce low scoring offspring and vice versa with low scoring dogs.

Environmental risk factors for hip dysplasia include: over eating throughout a dog’s life; over exercise and the wrong kind of exercise before the age of one and how slippery the substrate is in the whelping box.

Elbow scoring

This is similar to hip dysplasia and the x rays can be taken at the same time as those for hip scoring.

The results are a value of 0-3 for each elbow but instead of adding the score of the two elbows together, the elbow with the highest number is the value used. The lower the score the lower the degree of dysplasia.

As with hip dysplasia elbow dysplasia is a complex mix of genetics and environmental factors and again, the value provided is not directly correlated with the underlying genetics.

The “official” guidance is to only use individuals with scores of 0 but this has the same effect on the gene pool as does the advice for hip dysplasia without any guarantee of low scoring offspring.

Annual eye examinations.

These need to be carried out within 12 months of mating and should really be carried out yearly after that. This is because the eyes are being evaluated for a number of conditions some of which could appear at any age. The examinations have to be carried out by specialist veterinary Ophthalmologists, a list can be obtained from the British Veterinary Association web site.

Where breeds do not appear on either of their “schedules” for eye disease the results are not made public although the fact an eye test has been carried out is recorded and made public.

If a condition is found you should ask the vet whether the condition is hereditary, if it is not, then you need not worry. The problem comes when the vet does not know whether the condition is hereditary or not.

Finally, because most eye conditions have a recessive mode of inheritance (meaning a defective gene from each parent has to be inherited) an eye test that is clear is no guarantee that the individual is not a carrier for one or other disease.

Carriers show no signs of the disease but carry a single copy of the defective gene, which means some of the offspring from two “clear” parents can inherit the disease, whilst others will be carriers.

Limitations of health tests

Breeders should not use health test results as some kind of health guarantee, they are nothing of the sort.

We have no tests for the main health problems in IWS and those tests that we do have are severely limited in their usefulness. Both breeders and owners need to understand this.

KENNEL CLUB AGE & OTHER RESTRICTIONS ON BREEDING

Because of their slow maturing nature IWS bitches should not be bred from until 2 years of age, however consideration should be given to wait until they are 3 years of age.

The Kennel Club will not normally accept registrations of puppies whelped after the bitch has reached 8 years of age nor will they accept registrations where the bitch was under one year of age at mating.

There are no age restrictions on males, but if you are bringing on a young male IWS as a gundog, you may find it

beneficial not to use them at stud too early.

The KC will not register puppies where the Dam has already whelped four litters, save in exceptional circumstances. If the Dam has already had two litters by caesarean section the KC will not normally register the puppies although the requirement for a caesarean are generally less likely for IWS.

The KC will not register puppies that are the offspring of any mating between father and daughter, mother and son or brother and sister, save in exceptional circumstances or for scientifically proven welfare reasons and permission has been received.

ENDORSEMENTS

These are restrictions that breeders can place on puppies that they breed. Owners of such dogs need to ensure (and have in writing) from the breeder under what circumstances they will lift the restriction.

Currently the Kennel Club permits the use of two endorsements on registrations – **Progeny Not Eligible for Registration and Export Pedigree Not Allowed**. Neither of these endorsements prevents the dog from being bred from nor sent abroad, but does prevent any litters being registered with the Kennel Club and the dog from being registered by an overseas kennel club.

If puppies are not registered with the Kennel Club their owners will not be able to take place in many KC licensed events such as gundog working tests and Field Trials.

Endorsements can be highly controversial as they can be misused by breeders and unless the endorsements have not been placed correctly (and the KC are very specific about how this is done) there is nothing the owner can do.

Many breeders do not believe it is right to place endorsements on puppies but as always Buyer beware.

FINDING A SUITABLE STUD DOG

The SIWSC will hold a stud dog list, this will be available from the club secretary, and this should help members find suitable stud dogs. Consideration should be given to the number of litters a particular stud dog has already sired to ensure diversity. One of the primary considerations should be to ensure that any prospective parents do not produce puppies with relatively high levels of inbreeding because this will

- a) increase the risk of those puppies inheriting hereditary conditions and
- b) reduce further the genetic diversification in the gene pool.

A co-efficiency of inbreeding with the relevant stud dog should be carried out to ensure that close breeding is avoided. (You can talk to a member of the SIWSC committee to get help with that)

It is advisable to contact a prospective stud owner well in advance if you are thinking about breeding with your bitch as arrangements on timing will need to be made. Once the stud owner has agreed to the mating with your bitch, you will need to advise the stud owner on when you think your bitch will next come into season. This will ensure that the stud dog would be available. If the stud dog owner lives some distance away from you, you may be advised to talk to your Vet to establish the hormone levels of your bitch and the best time for conception. This could save you repeated long distance travel.

No stud owner will thank you for ringing up a few days before you think your bitch is ready to be mated. Make all arrangements well in advance in particular regarding potential mating dates and the stud fee.

Using a stud dog will normally incur a stud fee. Discussions regarding the stud fee should be part of the negotiations with the stud dog owner. The stud fee is often the price of a puppy the breeder is going to charge, payable after the mating or a free puppy if the stud owner desires one. Other stud dog owners may have a fixed price. You should ask if the stud dog owner has a preference of a bitch or dog puppy and also agree what happens if there are not sufficient puppies of the requested sex. For example, this could occur if the stud dog owner wants a bitch puppy and you also want to keep a bitch puppy, but your bitch only whelped one bitch puppy. Well before mating it should be determined what happens about the stud fee.

The KC recommends that a stud dog contract should be taken out when a dog is used at stud.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT FINDING HOMES FOR PUPPIES

Potential breeders need to think carefully about how they might find homes for the puppies. Litters can be at times large with as many as 7 to 11 puppies, sometimes even more.

As we all know from our own experience IWS puppies are very energetic and require careful training. They are not suited to every home.

It is advised that breeders vet potential owners carefully to avoid one or more of the puppies having to be rehomed later down the line.

Puppies must be at least 8 weeks old before they can leave the breeder and all puppies must be, by law since 06 April 2016, microchipped before they go to their new home. **It is the new puppy owner's responsibility to transfer the**

puppy's microchip to their own address as this will not happen automatically. The breeder will give the details to the new owners including the individual microchip number and how to register the address.

It is advisable for breeders to stay in regular contact with the new puppy owners, certainly for the first few years to ensure that all is well and that the owners' circumstances have not changed.

Breeders can draw up a contract for new puppy owners and give them as much information about the breed as possible. They should always offer to take a puppy/dog back in the first instance rather than letting the dog go to a rehoming centre. In some instances breeders have taken dogs back years down the line and rehomed them successfully.

The SIWSC will advertise puppies on their website providing health testing is done, for its club members and also offer a free first year SIWSC club membership to new puppy owners. Breeders can contact the membership co-ordinator for the relevant forms.

The following is guidance from the Kennel Club about finding good homes for your puppies:

- Find out if the people who want to buy the puppy have done their "homework" on their chosen breed.
- Try to meet the whole family, including any children, if possible.
- Ask potential owners if they already have any other dogs / pets.
- Find out whether the dog is wanted purely as a pet, or whether they may be interested in breeding at a later stage. You may have placed endorsements on the puppy's registration certificate and these will need to be explained to the new owner before or at the date of sale.
- Advertise on the Kennel Club's "Find a Puppy Service"
- Do not mislead people regarding the dog's characteristics and the care it requires (particularly of the coat).
- Find out how much time they spend at home. It is not necessarily a bad thing if they are out all day, provided they can take the dog to work with them.
- Find out more about where they live, for example do they have a fenced garden? Some breeders like to conduct a home check before selling a puppy (you could always ask for photographs if it is not possible for you to visit the house in person).
- Finally, if you are not sure that the home is right for the puppy, then do not sell it.

INFORMATION FOR OWNERS

Breeders should supply a "puppy pack" to new owners providing all of the information relevant to new owners. The list below taken from the Kennel Club, are the sorts of things that should be included in a puppy pack.

- **Socialisation advice & chart**
- **Exercise advice**
- **Training advice**
- **Feeding advice & puppy's diet information**
- **Grooming advice**
- **Worming advice & puppy's worming record**
- **Immunisation advice, including advice specific to your puppy**
- **Information on features and characteristics of the breed**
- **Contract of sale**

KENNEL CLUB REGISTRATION

Breeders must register their puppies and should encourage new owners to transfer the registration document into their own names.