

Wheaten Health Newsletter Three

December, 2003

Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier Health Notebook

and Beyond

Presented by:

Janet Petros, Immediate Past Health Chair of the SCWT Club of America

Sponsored by:

Wheaten Health Initiative, U.K.

Sunday 26th October 2003

The Wheaten Health Initiative is a small group of people who came together early in 2003 to promote matters relating to the health of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier in the UK. We are proud to have hosted the *first major health seminar* in the UK in the 21st Century, dedicated to the health of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier.

Janet Petros was presenting this Seminar for the 19th time, but for the first time across the Atlantic. About 65 people gathered for the occasion. There were some supporters from the USA, as well as guests from Europe. We were also pleased to welcome guests from another breed just embarking on the journey of mapping the incidence of the unwelcome disease of Renal Dysplasia within their breed.

The Seminar opened by explaining that her method included repeating and returning to the subject in different ways throughout the day. She said that her philosophy of breeding included a responsibility to the dogs *we say* we love. Her definition of the word "love" was "guardianship". Janet is guardian to 6 Wheatens and she shared with us the joy and despair of her guardianship of these dogs, some of who have developed and died of Protein Losing Enteropathy (PLE) and Protein Losing Nephropathy (PLN). Her first Wheaten developed protein-losing disease. This Wheaten, whilst bred in America, was from Irish and English ancestry. Janet stated this as a fact: protein-losing disease is in her line, but it did not start with her. She lives with it, but she does not blame any person or any nationality for its emergence.

Janet acknowledged the help she has received from the Officers and Board of Directors of the SCWTCA of 2000-02. She also acknowledged the help from owners who have lost dogs to PLE/PLN, Renal Dysplasia and Addison's Disease who have asked her questions that have challenged her and that she has sought to answer for all of us.

Janet shared a poem "Wisdom of the Elders" that was about a fast-flowing river. She said that to her the river in this poem represented the health issues within the breed that threaten the Wheaten Terrier to extinction. She went on to offer an analogy of how we deal with these issues; she likened it to ants that co-operate in building bridges and sharing the load to achieve their aims. She said that only when we are focused and working together will we achieve the goal of a healthy, happy Wheaten able to do the job it is bred for: providing companionship and love to its human family.

Janet has sought to educate herself in all aspects of genetics in her efforts to understand the problems that have faced her and her dogs and she has studied and majored in genetics. She considers herself

and others who are seeking answers to these problems (particularly Emily Holden and Carol Carlson, who she described as the original pioneers of Wheaten Health in the US), as “warriors”. She says that the researchers, e.g. r. Meryl Littman and Shelley Vaden, are “Chief Warriors” in the search for answers to the causes and cures of the diseases.

The obligations of a Breeder were listed:

- Set goals for your dogs
- Know which disorders occur in dogs in your line
- Be honest about these disorders
- Develop a “hierarchy of disagreeability” for the various genetic disorders that occur in the breed as a whole, and for those that occur in your own “family”
- The above can be phenotypical – e.g. things you can see, coat, pigment etc or genotypical – things that cannot be seen.
- See breeding as a science and identify your goals, know where you are heading. Within this, keep your goals realistic and understand that you achieve everything within a single generation.

During the course of the day Janet took the seminar through the various research projects in the USA explaining their relevance and importance. She introduced us to the “Wheagle” experiment – the colony of dogs born from Wheaten/Beagle parents in an attempt to monitor and understand heritability.

She explained the symptoms of the illnesses. She described the various tests that exist to diagnose the problems. Janet emphasised the importance of testing and gave an outline of the protocols advised in the US with dogs being tested six monthly up to the age of three and annually thereafter. Ideally, dogs would not be included in a breeding programme until after the age of three.

There was so much packed into this day that it has only been possible to give an outline of some of the information delivered. Personally I found the day to be interesting, informative and inspiring.

The main message I took from the day was the importance of supporting and encouraging honesty and the sharing of information. No one is to blame for the situation and we must resist apportioning blame to any one Country, breeder, ancestry line, dog or bitch. This is a **Wheaten** problem and it can be conquered by Wheaten people acting in unison for the ultimate good of the dogs – our own personalities and egos are insignificant in the fight to overcome these dreadful problems that beset our beautiful dogs.

Reported by Jan Thackray

SILENT AUCTION

Those who attended the Seminar will have seen the display of wonderful Wheaten related items that have been donated for the Silent Auction. Amongst the items were some beautiful needlepoint cushions depicting Wheatens, a Wheaten “Throw”, a lovely Wheaten Soft-Toy (but no-one would give this to a child to play with), a jewellery box, a framed Wheaten print, a framed print of the Dogs of Ireland and many other items.

We had intended to continue the auction on our Website, announcing the results at LKA but several WHI members have encountered problems with their computers over recent months, with our Web Master, Carole Barnes-Davies being the most recent to succumb. The Web Site has not been updated as a result and consequently, the launch of the on-line silent auction has been affected.

For those who have already placed bids at our Seminar please accept our apologies and as soon as the problem is corrected we will inform everyone.

SPREAD THE WORD

There are so many Wheaten owners out there who would love to have the opportunity to bid. This is where **YOU** can help.

Please spread the word about the Web Site amongst as many people as you can – if you are sending Christmas cards to your puppy owners, or Wheaten owners who are no longer in touch with the Dog Show scene, why not tell them about the auction and give them our web site address? Ask them to spread the word to any Wheaten owners they may know. The auction has now been extended into the New Year and we will announce the closing date for bids as soon as our technical difficulties are sorted out. In the meantime, if you log on and find that there have been no changes since the launch of the Site, please do try again on another day, as we are working flat out to counter the technical problems and to have the site up and running as it should be.

All proceeds from the auction will be used to further the aims of Wheaten Health Initiative.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We've had a roller-coaster time since our inaugural meeting at which we decided to form the Wheaten Health Initiative at the beginning of this year, culminating in the really successful Seminar.

We know that our decision to form WHI was met with suspicion by many people. We know that our motives have been questioned in some quarters, and we expected this – but we wish that those who are claiming there are ulterior motives to our actions would speak to us face to face so that we could answer them personally.

We trust that those of you who decided to suspend judgment and attended our Seminar to see at first hand what we were doing, now feel more confident in our aims. We are disappointed that not everyone in the breed was given the opportunity to attend this Seminar, but this was beyond our control, as sadly we were denied access to the membership of the whole Club via the Summer Bulletin.

Our primary concern remains that the Health of the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier should be right up there at the forefront of everyone's thinking. We believe that information should be easily accessible and that breeders should be encouraged to openly discuss the important issues that affect all of us who live with Wheatens. We feel that people should be aware of the importance of testing, not just once, but throughout the lives of their dogs.

We want to encourage openness. Our vision is that in time breeders will feel comfortable with sharing information about the health of their dogs with others, knowing that they will receive support, rather than condemnation or suspicion. We believe that no-one should feel ashamed of breeding dogs that develop problems if they can put their hand on their heart and say that everything they did was from informed decisions based on the best possible information available. This is important, because secrets, whispering and half-truths are not helpful.

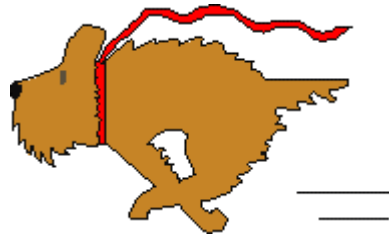
So, in answer to our question, “Where do we go from here?” we say this: We will continue to advocate education for everyone within the breed by giving them access to as much up to date information as we can. In addition, we will encourage the sharing of health results, because such information is no good to the breed as a whole when it is contained in confidential files – we want to consign this approach to the past by promoting an atmosphere of openness and support within the Wheaten community.

We have taken the initiative, now we want you to take the lead.

ANOTHER “FIRST”

A W.H.I informal get together for those interested in finding out more about the Heska ERD urine test for PLN, and those wishing to have their Wheatens tested, was held on Saturday, 6th December, at the Fire Station, Waltham Abbey, Essex. Carole, Lynn and Ian, Ann-Marie, Barbara P, and Maria were in attendance to demonstrate the equipment used in the testing procedure and answer questions. 11 urine specimens were tested and each owner was involved in the preparation of their own test.

All breeding carries associated risks. In the future DNA testing may provide the answers but this unfortunately will not be for some time to come. At present it is often only when something goes wrong that we have the opportunity to learn from it, providing of course, that owners and breeders are willing to share that information. However, we can now do something positive to aid the early diagnosis of PLN by repeating this simple, easy test according to the recommendations of the SCWTC of America.



(The hardest part is collecting the specimen. First catch your dog . . . !)

Our sincere thanks to Lesley and Martin Gray, and Karen Francis, for their most welcome hospitality, and for those of you who joined us to make the day successful.

Reported by Barbara Penney

And finally

We are always willing to listen to your thoughts and ideas. We have an open door, so please, come and talk to us.

Hit this link to mail us at Wheatenhealth@hotmail.com