ESS FOUNDATION’S REPORT
ON PRA TO ENGLISH SPRINGER SPANIEL FANCY

Apr. 17, 2018

Over August 11-13, 2017, the AKC Canine Health Foundation ("CHF") held its bi-annual Parent Clubs Conference in St. Louis, at which time there were a couple of dozen scientists, veterinarians, and others making presentations, primarily on new breakthroughs resulting from canine health research.

Knowing the keen interest on the part of the English Springer Spaniel ("ESS") community in Progressive Retinal Atrophy ("PRA"), Dr. Diane Brown (the CHF CEO) had scheduled a Friday evening round-table session of key researchers, CHF leadership, ESS fanciers in attendance, and others for an intense discussion on PRA and on the present state of scientific knowledge as to this disease.

One of the leading participants in the PRA session on August 11th was Dr. Jerold Bell, a geneticist from Tufts, with whom we have worked in the past and with whom many ESS breeders are familiar. As a prompt follow-up to the PRA session, the ESS Foundation formally engaged Dr. Bell to be a consultant to our Foundation on various aspects of our PRA challenge. In this connection, the ESS Foundation requested Dr. Bell to prepare a written Report, one that would highlight the current state of completed PRA research, as well as set forth his recommendations. The expectation was, and remains, that Dr. Bell’s Report would be extremely helpful to all concerned in our collective focus on defining new research projects relative to PRA in our breed including a formal Request for Proposals ("RFP") from CHF to the scientific community seeking grant applications for new research tailored to PRA involving ESSs.

Dr. Bell accepted the offer of engagement as a consultant; and his Report, dated March 24, 2018, is attached hereto as Exhibit “A.” The ESS Foundation strongly recommends that every ESS breeder and/or fancier carefully study Dr. Bell’s Report.

One of Dr. Bell’s recommendations is for the ESS Foundation and ESSFTA to establish a voluntary data base for clinically verified cordon afflicted ESSs that is open and freely available to the ESS world, so as to assist breeders in making pedigree determinations regarding potential risk of cordon affliction. At its annual meeting in February, 2018, the ESS Foundation’s Board unanimously approved such recommendation, provided an arrangement to administrate the desired voluntary data base could be worked out with CHIC and/or OFA. The latter matter is now being explored; and, at the ESSFTA’s annual meetings later this month in Phoenix, corresponding Parent Club approval of Dr. Bell’s recommendation will be sought, again subject to appropriate CHIC/OFA involvement being worked out.
Dr. Bell also recommends as follows: "Breeding decisions on dogs should NOT be based on the RPGRIP1 mutation results unless they are closely related to clinically afflicted dogs." In this regard, it is well known in the ESS community that some dogs that have tested as genetically affected may have been excluded from a breeding program, but have never in their lifetimes shown any clinical signs of PRA. There are, of course, possible negative consequences to the elimination of some or all such dogs from our breed’s collective gene pool for breeding purposes, as Dr. Bell’s Report sets out. There is, therefore, a critical need for more genetic and/or other research that, hopefully, will lead to new discoveries about the inheritance and expression of PRA. The plan of the ESS Foundation to now explore with CHF possibilities for new research, of course, is the centerpiece of our Foundation’s affirmative efforts to take the next steps to combat PRA.

It is important to note that participation by the fancy in the ESS DNA Bank, and specifically in genetic testing for PRA, has resulted in a decline in the incidence of genetically affected dogs since the test became available. We hope, therefore, that such testing will continue as we, in partnership with CHF, pursue the next steps in PRA research. We hope, further, that breeders will continue to use the existing test as a "tool in the toolbox" as breeding considerations are made. This has always been the point of view expressed with regard to the usefulness of the current genetic test.

Dr. Bell closes his Report with his recommendation that the ESS Foundation seek to work with CHF to go forward with an appropriate RFP to the scientific community to seek research grant proposals. This step has been contemplated ever since last August. Moreover, the ESS Foundation is sending its request to CHF, as is confirmed by the attached copy of the letter it is sending to Dr. Brown at CHF, appended hereto as Exhibit B (w/o enclosures).

As is noted in the letter to go to Dr. Brown, the ESS Foundation is providing her with a “draft RFP” relative to PRA research, which represents our Foundation’s best efforts at articulating the specific needs. Such draft RFP intended to be helpful to CHF in the drafting of its own finalized RFP, one that would also include standard language used by CHF, as well as its own presentation as to the PRA challenge that the ESS world faces. The ultimate CHF RFP may or may not utilize language from our draft RFP, solely in CHF’s discretion. Because it is simply provided to support CHF’s own efforts, a copy of the draft RFP is not attached to this Report. It is not intended to be circulated among potential scientific researchers who may consider submitting a grant proposal to CHF. At the ESSFATA annual meeting or elsewhere, therefore, any fancier may read the draft RFP by requesting to do so of any Foundation officer. Copies will not be circulated and are not to be duplicated. To do so would be stepping out in front of the CHF and could jeopardize the collaborative process. The final RFP will be CHF’s to prepare, release, and circulate.

We will keep the ESS Fancy posted as to developments.

ESS Foundation

By: Nancy Johnson, President

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