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The Irish Wolfhound in Finland
(Data on causes of death and details on litters born in 1995)

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The Breeding Committee of the Irish Wolfhound Club in Finland collected information among the Finnish breeders in the winter of 1994-95 on the cause of death and respectively at what age their dogs had died. The breeders were encouraged to comment whether the cause of death was a disease or an accident. In the event that a confirmed diagnosis was available (given by a veterinary or possibly a confirmed report by a pathologist), the breeders were instructed to inform us.

The total number of questionnaires addressed to Finnish breeders was 73, which indicates the fact that the sample comprised many ex-breeders, who had given up breeding to date. Only one of the ex-breeders replied, the rest of the replies were supplied by current breeders. However, only 13 breeders bothered to return the questionnaire; that is, the sample was small on the whole. Nevertheless, the three major breeders who have been breeding Irish Wolfhounds in Finland for some ten years returned their questionnaires. Thus, we may consider the collected data to be – to some extent – relevant and in the right direction.

Through our Finnish Club Magazine we requested further information focusing on the Irish Wolfhounds that died of bone cancer in the autumn of 1995. The request yielded information on 17 dogs put down owing to bone cancer. The data included five of the cases already listed in the aforementioned data on the cause of death. Because the request focused on cases of bone cancer, we therefore cannot indicate the percentage of bone cancer in terms of other cancer cases.

We also include some data on mating, whelping and litters of Irish Wolfhounds in Finland. Our aim in recording information into the data is to explain among other things, fertility whelping, mortality rates among puppies and the causes of death among them. To date we have had relevant information on 33 litters, the numbers of Finnish Wolfie litters was 30 in 1995.

We need to take some initial steps to get going so we do not have much to tell yet.

TO SUM UP THE CAUSE OF DEATH DATA

The reported cause of death was a disease or a presumed opinion without any detailed evidence, and some cases of rare diseases: 35 cases.
In this group dogs were aged between 2 months and 8 years of age, however, most of the dogs were either younger than 12 months or older than 6 years of age.

- 5 cases of heart diseases, diagnosed or presumed;
- 7 cases of various diseases: one case of AIHA, two cases of the malfunction of the pancreas, one case of liver infection (the dog was 7 years old), one case of possible heat-stroke, two cases of possible whelping complications;
- 23 cases of "a disease" without any specification.

The cause of death was labelled 'old age', paralysis of the hindquarters, malfunction of the heart due to old age and as its complication diabetes: 17 cases.
This group comprised dogs of at least 8 years of age, the oldest dog was 11 years 8 months old.

Various cancers: bone cancer, internal cancer and leukaemia: 16 cases.
The youngest case of leukaemia was a five month old dog, the oldest case of bone cancer was 8 years 4 months old, but the age group most at risk was that of the 4-6 years old.

- 5 cases of bone cancer;
- 8 cases of internal cancer;
- 3 cases of leukaemia.

Gastric dilatation and volvulus (and of the spleen): 14 cases.
The youngest dog in this group was an 18 months old dog, the oldest dog was 8 years 10 months, but the age group most at risk seemed to be that of the 4-6 years old.

Congenital or probably congenital diseases: 5 cases.
Theses dogs died understandably young, the oldest dog was 2 years and 2 months old.

- 3 cases of portocaval shunt;
- 1 case of the Wobler syndrome;
- 1 case of kidney degeneration.

Virus infections: 5 cases.
This group consists of young dogs, the oldest dog was 18 months of age.

Accidental deaths: 14 cases.
In addition to the cases run over by cars or trains, we regarded such reported cases as intestinal obstructions owing to ropes eaten in the garden etc. as accidents. Young dogs are naturally accident-prone so the oldest dog in this group was two and a half years old.

Dogs put down: 5 cases.
This group was beyond understanding, because the reasons for putting down the dogs were such as the arrival of a (human) baby into the family, difficulties to keep the dog and the like.
The oldest dog in this group was three years old.

On the basis of this small sample we may infer that the age group most at risk is that of the 4-6 years olds. Having counted the number of living dogs in this sample, we found out that

- 68% of them were under 4 years of age;
- 17 % of them were over 6 years of age, and
- 15 % only were 4-6 years old.

In other words, dogs at the age of 4-6 years were the smallest living group.

DOGS PUT DOWN ON ACCOUNT OF BONE CANCER

We had information on 17 dogs altogether, each dog was diagnosed. The data consist of 12 male dogs and 5 bitches. 12 of these dogs were born and bred in Finland, five of them were imported to Finland. The youngest bitch was 5 years of age and the oldest bitch was 9 years of age. The youngest male dog was three and a half years old and the oldest dog was eight and a half years old.

TO SUM UP THE DATA OF LITTERS BORN IN FINLAND
The number of litters was 33.

Matings:

- 1 case of a reluctant bitch who eventually became pregnant and had puppies;
- 7 x one mating = 21 %;
- 16 x a repeat mating = 48 %;
- 9 x a third mating = 27 %;
- 1 x a forth mating = 4 %.

- the earliest mating: on the 8^{th} day in the fertile period;
- the latest mating: on the 17^{th} day in the fertile period;
- in general the first mating on the 11^{th} day in the fertile period;
- the tie lasted 2-35 minutes, mostly 15 minutes.

Whelping:

- puppies born alive: 6.54 puppies/each litter;
- the smallest size of a litter was 2 puppies in two litters, no stillborn puppies in either of them;
- the biggest size of a litter was 14 puppies, several stillborn puppies in it;
- the greatest number of living puppies was 12, one stillborn puppy in the litter.

Stillborn puppies:

- 18 litters included stillborn puppies (= 54%);
- the highest mortality rate of a litter in percentages was 55 % (a big litter);
- the highest number of stillborn puppies was 6 (less than 55 % of the litter).

Puppies died later / put down:

In 13 litters (= 39 %), 1-2 puppies / each litter.

Causes:

- a premature puppy;
- intestinal volvulus;
- foot injury;
- two puppies were crushed under the dam;
- bloody diarrhoea;
- intestinal obstruction;
- pneumonia;
- portocaval shunt;
- cleft palate;
- dilatation of the oesophagus.

The weights of the puppies:

At birth:

- the smallest survivor was 270 grams;
- the biggest puppy was 900 grams (each puppy in the same litter was of great weight: 1 x 600 grams, 6 x 800grams, 1 x 900 grams);
- the average weight was ca 550 grams, slightly more perhaps.

At the age of 8 week:

- the average weight was 9 – 11.5 kilos.

Help needed in whelping:

- in 36 % of the whelpings, no need for any help;
- in 15 % of the whelpings, a Caesarean was needed (= five litters), all the whelpings started normally, but the rest of the puppies had to be helped in a Caesarean section owing to the total loss of contractions;
- in other whelpings either Calcii Glugonaas or oxytocin or both were needed.

Bite:

- in 21 litters (= 63 %) correct bite;
- in 8 litters, 11 puppies in all were with overshot bite;
- one level bite, which turned normal (at the age of 12 months the bite is still that way);
- three litters with no information at all;
- no reported undershot bite.

Testicles:

- the testicles were OK in 25 litters = 75 %;
- in 8 litters cryptorchidism in the male puppies - 4 litters were closely related to each other;
- a case confirmed by a veterinarian: testicles were OK at the age of 9 weeks, but at the age of 13 weeks the dog was monorchid;
- the percentage of cryptorchidism / male puppies = 16 % - 100 %.

Further information:

- one Siamese twin; one head with two hindquarters;
- one 'Swimmer' who was nearly normal at the age of 4 months;
- a male puppy (living with the breeder) paralysed after the first distemper vaccination, nearly normal at the age of 5 months;
- three prolonged whelpings with respect to the number of puppies / whelping time; however, all the puppies were alive;
- the longest interval between living puppies was 8 hours;
- one slight umbilical hernia;
- in three litters there were puppies with dew claws.

The Irish Wolfhound Club in Finland – The Breeding Committee (1996).