Health Survey 1992, part 1

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Since I had to retype this material due to scanning difficulties, I have included just the health survey information and commentary. E. Sell. Note: This survey was completely anonymous - no pedigree information was collected.)

This article presents a look at specific health problems and gives some input on their importance to the breed. Columns show the incidence of particular diseases and conditions separated by age and sex. The incidence of diseases in dogs under one and over ten may not be altogether accurate as the ages are of the dog at the time the survey form was completed, so the diseases may have occurred when the Beardie was under one or before it reached ten (umbilical hernias, for example). Unfortunately, not everyone noted, as asked, when the conditions appeared. It is also difficult (impossible?) to analyze the data based upon whether or not the Beardies were spayed/castrated.

I have included those diseases in the survey which were not reported as occurring in Beardies in the survey; it is a good feeling to know what we probably don't have to worry about, and these are represented by blank spaces. The exception is in the sections on eye, heart, urinary tract, liver and spleen problems, and cancer, where only those conditions actually reported are tabulated. The only data included in the tables are taken from the survey forms, not information provided by other means.

To date, there are 331 surveys reporting on 804 Beardies. These came from 41 states, as well as 5 from the UK, 2 from Canada, and 1 from Australia. In general most areas of the USA were fairly well-represented, as well as most, but not all, of the major lines of Beardies: Al 2 AK 3, AZ 4, CA 30, CO 7, CT 5, DC 1, DE 1, FL 11, GA 4, ID 1, IL 39, IN 9, IA 2, KS 2, KY 2, LA 3, ME 1, MD 8, MA 21, MI 15, MN 4, MO 2, MT 6, NE 1, NV 3, NH 3, NJ 15, NM 5, NY 29, NC 8, OH 8, OK 1, OR 5, PA 27, RI 1, SC 1, TX 4, VT 2, VA 7, WA 8, WI 12.

Of the 804 Beardies, 383 were male (117 neutered and 9 unknown) and 383 were female (203 spayed and 10 unknown); 133 were ten years old or more (dogs 62 and bitches 71) and 83 were one year old or less (41 males and 42 females).

Text description of problems preceeds tables.

<u>Bone Problems</u>. The incidence of hip dysplasia in the survey (4.5%) is less than the 10.2% reported by the OFA. However, only 23% of the Beardies in the survey had OFA numbers, many being pets or under two years of age. Of the 36 Beardies with dysplasia, 3 were borderline; 10 mild (2 of these were unilateral); 12 moderate; 2 moderate-severe; 4 severe (1 had hip luxation and another had to have surgery at one year of age); 4 did not report the severity, and one was the result of a car accident which severely damaged his hip at one year of age. The only way the majority of these cases would have been detected was when hip X-rays were submitted for OFA evaluation. One of the Beardies with mild hip dysplasia also had elbow dysplasia (unknown if in one or both elbows).

Osteochondritis dessicans (OCD) is a painful, developmental disease, and of the 4 Beardies with this condition whose age at onset was noted, 3 were 7-8 months and one a year old.

Arthritis is the most common disease in this category. Most suffering from arthritis are 10 years old or more at onset. The youngest reported was six years old. One case was attributed to Lyme disease. A family of elderly Beardies was reported in which 4 of the litter were known to have arthritis of the front legs. As the disease is more often noted in the hind legs, this was somewhat unusual. Thirteen of the dysplastic dogs were reported as having arthritis, including 5 under ten years with arthritis and the dog which also had elbow dysplasia.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a crippling autoimmune disease. I suspect that of the animals reported as having this disease that only actually did; the disease resulted in her death at age four. I believe that the other 4 have simple arthritis.

Panosteitis is a self-limiting inflammatory disease of the long bones. Like OCD< it is more common in large and giant breed dogs, particularly the German Shepherd. The bitch with rheumatoid arthritis also had panosteitis. One of the dogs with cruciate ligament rupture also suffers from arthritis.

Three of the overshot jaws corrected with time, one at 8 months, one at 16 months, and one quite remarkably at 3 years of age. One undershot jaw also self-corrected.

The last two categories contained quite an assortment of conditions. Some were developmental and others acquired. In the

former category one had an incomplete sternum and partial fontanelle (a retained soft spot in the skull), and another had a transitional vertebra (this is a bone in the spine which has characteristics of two of the four distinct vertebral types, or if the last of the lumbar vertebra, has fused to the hip bone). The other was bilateral brachydactylia of the fifth metacarpal bones. Literally, this means short fingered, but the metacarpals are the bones before the three finger bones. The fifth ones are the ones on the outside of the dog's body (in a person the ones leading to the little fingers).

Acquired diseases were a herniated cervical (neck) disk at 12 years of age; a shoulder injury, also in a 12 year old; a jaw tumor; and bone cancer. (ED - I have not copied the rarer deformities here).

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Hip dysplasia	18	18			5	4
Elbow dysplasia	1	1				1
OCD	2	3	1			
Arthritis	28	34			23	25
Rheumatoid arthritis	2	3			1	2
Wobbler syndrome						
Patellar luxation		1				
Eosinophilic panosteitis		5				
Cruciate ligament rupture	2				2	
Overshot jaw	6	11			1	3
Undershot jaw	5	6			2	3
Roached back	2	4				1
Other	5	11				2

<u>Eye Problems.</u> Entropion is an eyelid that turns in and causes irritation of the eye. In 2 of the 2 cases the condition was thought to be a grass allergy, which would not be entropion. Most with cataracts are over ten, although one with bilateral cataracts is only 3, another 5.5, and the third is 9. One had a unilateral cataract at 3.5 yrs; the same owner had another dog also with a unilateral cataract. In general, these cataracts (ED - older onset) are not thought to be hereditary, and happen in all breeds. Juvenile

cataracts on the other hand can be either inherited or caused by some external factor. CERF (the eye registry) does not include Beardies among the breeds with the inherited form (ED note - this has subsequently changed and breeder recommendation from CERF for Beardies with cataracts is NO). Other problems included corneal dystrophy, sudden onset retinal degeneration in older dogs (3), retinal fold, neurosclerosis, blindness from old age or stroke.

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Entropion	1	1			1	
Bilateral cataracts	9	8			7	7
Unilateral cataracts	1	2				2
Juvenile cataracts	8	1				
Uveitis		1			23	23
Other	7	7		1	5	3

Tissue Deformity. Self-explanatory. Some umbilical hernias self-corrected with time, some were fixed surgically, some weren't. Clearly though, all were present at or shortly after birth.

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Umbilical hernia	31	48	1	3	2	5
Inguinal hernia						
Elongated tongue		1				
Cleft palate						
Hydrocephalus						

Skin, Hair, and Mucous Membrane Problems. Beardies are hairy, and as such, more prone than some other breeds to skin and coat problems. 293/804 were reported to have at least one as as many as 16 conditions in this group. Much of the specifics as to cause of skin and coat problems has to be conjecture without extensive testing, and many owners put forward possible causes as to their dog's problem. One thing is clear though, a significant proportion of

our breed have skin and coat problems. One thing which is striking about the results, is that often the longest list of problems went along with hypothyroidism, either alone (32) or with other endocrine/autoimmune problems (25). There also seems to be some correlation with behavioral/temperament problems. If a Beardie has serious skin and coat problems, checking thyroid levels is probably advisable.

Fleas are clearly a major problem although one dog was said to be allergic to all insects, which I presume meant biting insects. Grass caused seasonal allergies in several, manifest as itching mostly, but some dogs also wheeze, sneeze, or reverse sneeze. One dog was allergic to nettles. One was reported as sunburning easily especially on the nose, and as many have pink skin about their noses this is quite a common phenomenon. One dog is allergic to catgut sutures, which isn't uncommon and one of the reasons they aren't used as much now. Finally one dog has eosinophilic folliculitis and furunculitis.

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Hair loss (alopecia)	13	20			2	6
Poor, dry, or thin hair coat	24	45			7	9
Hypersensitivity (hives, urticaria)	12	12			4	5
Pruritis (significant itching)	31	31	2		8	7
Hot spots (severe or recurring)	38	30	1		13	10
Lick granuloma	14	6	1		4	2
Chewing or biting at skin (persistent)	38	27	1		9	4
Depigmentation	18	20			1	4

Dermatitis, nonspecific	**23**	**18**	**1**		**7**	**4**
Mange - demodectic	**2**	**2**				**1**
Mange - sarcoptic	**3**	**8**			**1**	**2**
Mange - other						
Pemphigus	**3**	**2**			**1**	
Allergic skin disease	**24**	**24**			**9**	**8**
Dietary allergy	**24**	**20**		**1**	**4**	**4**
Flea allergy	**73**	**67**			**15**	**15**
Bacterial hypersensitivity	**11**	**8**			**2**	**1**
Atopy (inhalant allergy)	**20**	**19**	**1**		**1**	**4**
Sebaceous adenitis	**3**	**2**			**1**	**2**
Contact allergy	**14**	**14**			**2**	**7**
Other	**3**	**7**			**1**	**1**

Endocrine Problems. **Of the hypothyroid dogs not on treatment, one was just diagnosed and one was considered marginal. Hypothyroidism was reported in several generations of some families, and in litters of others. Age at diagnosis varied between one and twelve years. At least one bitch became hypothyroid when she weaned her litter, or at least that is when it was diagnosed. No doubt the stress of raising a litter was contributing to the symptoms she showed. One owner noted that her hypothyroid dog developed tartar extremely quickly. I've noticed the same phenomenon, and sticky saliva in my Addisonian/hypothyroid. Seven of the Addisonian dogs had also been diagnosed as hypothyroid. I suspect more of them have a hypothyroid problem. I also feel that the numbers of Addisonians I have heard about over the last few years, on three continents, the disease is underreported in the survey. The one case of Cushing's disease was iatrogenic, produced by prednisone (corticosteroid) therapy. At least two of the cases of pancreatitis were fatal. Although not always the case, pancreatitis has been associated with obesity and the intake of a fatty meal, another**

reason Beardies should stay lean. One dog was described as having parathyroid disease, but whether hyper or hypo is not known.

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Hypothyroidism	22	33		1	4	5
Hypothyroid on treatment	21	28		1	4	3
Addison's (hypoadrenocorticism)	6	11				1
Cushing's (hyperadrenocorticism)		1				1
Pancreatitis		6				3
Diabetes						
Hypoparathyroidism						
Other	1				1	

<u>Heart Problems.</u> Heart failure is not common and was attributed to various conditions - chronic respiratory problems, viral, enlargement of the heart, and a heart attack. Patent ductus arteriosus is a congenital defect, quite easily detected and repaired surgically. Five in the other category had low heart rates. This isn't bad in and of itself, but does occur with hypothyroidism. Three had unspecified murmurs, 1 having both slow heart rate and a murmur. Another had an enlarged heart, and one had pericardial effusion (fluid in the sack around the heart). Another was related to Addison's disease. When dogs with this disease die acutely it is a result of heart failure due to increased potassium levels in the blood.

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Heart failure	4	2			3	1
Patent ductus arteriosus	1					
Other	5	7				3

Muscle Problems. **Seven had both muscle trembling and weakness. The majority were attributed to old age often with hip dysplasia. Others were Addisonians who were not being balanced with their medical therapy. This is quite common, as dosing a dog with pills doesn't equal the fine tuning of the body to meet the stresses of life, and when the dog is feeling stress, even if we aren't aware that it is, it may react by trembling and/or hiding. For other dogs in this category, stress was given as the cause of the symptoms. It might be wise to test the adrenal function of these dogs with an ACTH stimulation test, as they may be Addisonian. One dog's weakness was attributed to Lyme disease. The debate is still ongoing in the veterinary community as to whether or not dogs get Lyme disease, no matter what their Lyme titers. Myositis is thought to be an autoimmune disease. In the other category one had muscular degeneration and one had a weak urinary sphincter for which phenylpropanolamine had been prescribed.**

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Trembling	4	9			1	4
Weakness	8	7			2	3
Myositis (eosinophilic)		1				
Myopathy						
Myasthenia gravis						
Other	2	1				

Cancer. **No kind of cancer seems to predominate in this category, although cancer is probably the leading cause of death in those not dying accidentally. One of the skin cancers was a basosquamous carcinoma which was removed and has not recurred. One splenic cancer was metatastatic from a primary heart tumor. One mammary tumor had metastisized to the jaw. One mast cell tumor was reported on the ribs. Of the others, two were nasal, two of the throat and tonsils, and one of the thyroid. One was a fibrosarcoma, and another was metatastatic with unknown primary site.**

Problem	Total #		#< 1 Yr		#>10 Yr	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Skin	2					1
Bone	2	1			2	1
Liver	2	1				
Spleen	1	1				
Heart	1					
Mammary		6				6
Mast cell	2	1			1	
Testicular	1				1	
Uterine		1				
Bladder	2				2	
Lung		3				3
Other	5	6			5	6

Injuries. **Injuries were quite common; 20 total in males and 26 in females. They were of all sorts; in the home; in cars; hit by cars; livestock related, etc.**