



INITIAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: WCA 2012 On-Line Health Survey

By Karen Carver, Ph.D.

In January of 2012, the Health Committee of the Weimaraner Club of America (WCA) initiated a web-based health survey of owners of “pure-bred” Weimaraners. The committee began working to construct the survey instrument during the summer of 2011. The instrument was finalized in January 2012 and fielded via a web-based interface between January 11 and May 31, 2012.

The WCA’s 2012 Health Survey was designed to estimate the frequency of diseases in the Weimaraner breed. The committee envisioned that the data produced by the survey would provide breeders with information about health trends in the breed. By observing changes over time in disease frequencies, breeders should be able to make more informed decisions during the execution of their breeding programs. In addition, the accumulated data is intended to provide information to assist in the allocation of research resources through the WCA and the Weimaraner Foundation Fund (WFF).

When the survey closed at the end of May, information on 482 dogs (dog respondents) had been provided by approximately 330 owner respondents. Owner respondents represented both WCA members and non-members. Specifically, over 70% of owner respondents were WCA members; and nearly a quarter reported no affiliation with any club

or organization. Nearly 6% of dogs were registered in foreign countries. Dog shows, hunting, field trials, and obedience events represented the most frequent activities in which dogs engaged; however a wide variety of other activities were also represented. Overall, approximately 94% of dogs were reported by their owners to be in excellent or good health. In general, owners’ impressions of the most serious health concerns facing the breed were borne out by the dog-specific data. Hypertrophic Osteodystrophy (HOD) and other immune-mediated disorders were the most frequently mentioned serious health concern, followed by bloat/gastric torsion. Over 8% of the dogs in the survey had been diagnosed with bloat. Contrary to owners’ impressions, adverse vaccine reactions—hypothesized by some to be associated with HOD—was the most prevalent immune-mediated disorder represented in the dog-specific data. These data also suggested that vaccination for Leptospirosis produced the highest relative number of adverse reactions*. A similar pattern was observed for combination vaccines containing the Leptospirosis component. WCA members were more likely than non-WCA members to use titer results to support decision-making about vaccinations; however, titer usage among WCA members is still low. Other frequently mentioned owner concerns included cancer, orthopedic

issues, gastrointestinal disorders, separation anxiety, and eye problems. Temperament issues were mentioned for a substantial number of dogs—owners indicated that nearly 15% of dogs in the survey experienced significant separation anxiety, and approximately 2.5% exhibited behavior similar to human obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Mast Cell Carcinoma was the most frequently mentioned cancer diagnosed in Weimaraners. It also represented the type of cancer with the highest likelihood of being diagnosed prior to a dog's first birthday.

Approximately half of the dogs represented in the survey were reported to be intact, with nearly 50% of non-intact dogs having been neutered when they were 2 years of age or older. The most significant reproductive issues were pyometra, cesarean sections, and failure to conceive. Uterine inertia accounted for the largest proportion of cesarean sections.

Over one-third of dogs had received some form of hip testing, with 92% being judged good or excellent. While only 24 dogs underwent an OFA cardiac evaluation, test results suggested that nearly 25% of tested dogs had abnormal findings. In addition, nearly 10% of OFA Thyroid tests returned abnormal findings. Distichiasis and Punctate Cataracts were the most frequently cited reasons for negative findings by the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF).

Bloat, gastritis, and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) represented the largest share of gastrointestinal issues. Diagnoses of neurological and/or muscular disorders were largely represented by seizure disorders, Wobbler's Syndrome, Ataxia, and

Degenerative Myelopathy. Skin disorders were mainly comprised of allergic reactions, Demodex mange, alopecia, and persistent staph infection. The primary orthopedic disorder was arthritis, followed by HOD and hip dysplasia.

A small amount of information was collected about coat characteristics. Approximately 10% of dogs showed patches of white on the back of the pasterns; 2% had white on the toes; and approximately 2.5% had a large patch of white on the chest. About 4% of dogs had a patch of white in some other location. Blue coats were prevalent in approximately 3.5% of dogs; Dobe marks were observed in about 1.5% of dogs. Less than 1% of dogs had long coats.

This article has summarized a small portion of the broad array of information produced from this survey. Initial results—in the form of a 57-page PowerPoint document—can be downloaded from the WCA's website. The WCA's Health Committee gratefully acknowledges that this information could not have been produced without the gracious support of the Weimaraner community. The Committee would like to thank all respondents for taking the time to complete the survey.

Karen Carver is a demographer who works in the Washington DC area. She lives in Loudoun County VA with her husband, two teenage children, and the family's first Weimaraner, Felix. Felix is enjoying his new 3-acre fenced yard, and has indicated a renewed determination to finally catch that wily rabbit. Dr. Carver can be contacted at K.Carver@Systemsdev.com.