

August 2018

Dear Border Terrier owners and breeders,

We wanted to introduce a new health project which we felt may be of interest to the owners and breeders of Border Terriers.

We recently undertook a review of the cases we had seen of dogs coming into our clinics with a particular disease of their gall bladders called a mucocoele. This is where the gall bladder becomes firm and has difficulty emptying and, in many cases, requires surgical removal to effect a cure. Whilst we were reviewing the details of the cases, it became apparent that all of us had seen similar things despite being from different areas of the UK. We found that a large proportion of the cases were Border terriers. Our multi-centre collaboration has helped us understand that our individual experiences were not unique and we were all seeing similar proportions of affected dogs.

We presented the findings from this project at an international veterinary medicine conference last year and have recently had a scientific paper published on the subject. We are therefore keen to work with the owners and breeders of Border terriers to understand more about this condition and ultimately work out how we can reduce the likelihood of any Border terrier suffering from a mucocoele. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of our study was that a large number of the dogs had no clinical signs of their gall bladder disease and fortunately this was identified during investigations for another problem. A recent publication has shown that dealing with gall bladder disease before clinical signs develop significantly improves the outcome in affected dogs.

We are proposing to begin the next stage of our study by gathering as much information about affected Border terriers as we can. In addition to this and for the future benefit of the breed, we are asking owners for pedigree information such that we may determine if there are common ancestors. This latter request we realise may be a difficult thing to contemplate however to put it into context – prior to 2008 there were no Border terriers reported with this condition reported in the literature and we were not aware of an apparent predisposition. We would now routinely expect almost 50% of dogs presenting with a mucocoele to be Border terriers. This marked increase in numbers has prompted us to try to tackle this in the most pro-active way possible, such that we can begin to impact on the incidence of the condition.

The link to the survey is: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/border_terrier_gall_bladder_study
We will be providing periodic updates as to how the data collection is going and outline our progress with the analysis. Please note that whilst we are asking for pedigree information the survey is anonymised and only those working on the project will know anything about the respondents. Information as to who contributed to the study can never be shared. Permission to use the pedigree information is limited to that and nothing more – we will never divulge information about individual dogs or their owners. Any details of dogs, their owners and their vets will be securely stored in compliance with the new GDPR regulations.

We very much hope that we can encourage as many owners of Border terriers as possible to complete the survey so that we can get an idea of the true prevalence in the UK. Once we have this information we can determine the most appropriate next step. This may be the recommendation for a screening programme whereby Border terriers above a certain age are advised to have an ultrasound of their gall bladders to determine whether it is abnormal. It may also provide recommendations for breeding purposes on how to reduce the chances of breeding a dog that is susceptible to mucocoele formation.

We are very much looking forward to working with you all and hope that the outcome of this project is to reduce the number of Border terriers suffering with a mucocoele. Please do not hesitate to contact us on sv-dogs@nottingham.ac.uk if you have any questions or concerns about the survey or its planned output.

With very best wishes

The image shows three handwritten signatures in blue ink. From left to right: a stylized signature, the name 'Fergus Allerton', and the name 'Lorenzo Brunero'.

Mark Dunning, Fergus Allerton and Lorenzo Brunero