

ATAXIA IN THE ITALIAN SPINONE

Introduction

Over the last few years, a new neurological disease has been recognized in the Italian Spinone breed in the UK. These dogs have been seen by a variety of veterinary surgeons, and recently have been examined by specialist neurologists.

The neurological signs have all been seen in young dogs. The signs indicate that there is a disease of the cerebellum. This is the part of the brain that provides the "fine tuning" to movement and control of gait. Thus affected dogs have exaggerated movements as seen by a high stepping gait, a general ataxia or wobbly gait. Other signs of brain disease, such as seizures, behavioral change, weakness or paralysis of the cranial nerves are not seen. The neurological findings are quite characteristic of cerebellar disease.

We have now had the chance to perform autopsy reexaminations on several affected Spinones. In the earlier cases the pathological findings were not considered to be definitive. However, a recent case has revealed positive findings and we are in the process of examining an affected littermate. We are also reviewing the previous cases.

There are many diseases that can affect the cerebellum but there are relatively few that occur in young dogs. Definitive diagnosis of the current problem requires examination of brain tissue. Thus we generally require an autopsy examination. However, it is immensely valuable to rule out other brain conditions by spinal fluid examination and brain scanning.

Where do we need to go from here?

- Locating the brain tissue from the previously examined cases is a priority.
- Identifying all dogs previously identified as having this disease, confirming the diagnosis as far as possible, and providing the pedigree to the geneticist.
- If possible, performing autopsy examinations on any Spinone that dies of another cause in the first year of life. This will provide us with an age matched normal brain with which to compare the findings.

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What should owners and breeders do if they feel they can help?

Contact Dr. Simon Wheeler via Mrs. Pat Wilkinson. I can then recommend an appropriate course of action. There are several neurologists in the UK who would be prepared to examine suspect cases, but we must co-ordinate the effort. It is most important that the dogs are examined by a specialist in neurology.

What benefits may occur?

With appropriate characterization of the disease, and genetic studies and advice it may be possible to eliminate this condition from the breed.

Dr. Simon J. Wheeler BVSc PhD DECVN MRCVS
RCVS Specialist in Veterinary Neurology
Senior Lecture In Neurology

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