

Executive Summary

In April 2001, the Dalmatian Club of America Foundation (DCAF) asked Dalmatian owners around the world to fill in a health survey on their dogs. The primary purpose of the survey was to direct research and avenues of inquiry into the health issues that are of greatest concern and prevalence in Dalmatians. At the end of the 12-month survey response duration 255 Dalmatian owners had spent the time to complete surveys for 809 dogs.

The survey results were divided into five main sections: general Dalmatian owner information, general dog information, dog's personality and temperament, specific health-related conditions, and general comments and opinions not covered in the previous sections.

From a statistical point of view the health survey had seven factors, which limited the type and specificity of certain data analysis making it impossible to draw conclusions to all of the questions posed by the Survey Committee, however there are several interesting findings that the survey did uncover. A few examples are:

- Dalmatians used for breeding (male or female) live longer (1.5 years longer) on average than Dalmatians who were not bred; and
- 39% of Dalmatians have skin problems, ranging from allergies to hot spots. The majority of these skin problems (85%) develop in the first five years of a dogs' life.

The final section of this report lists five possible next steps as to what to do with the survey findings i.e. publicizing the results and secondly how the Dalmatian Club of America Foundation can use the survey findings to direct research monies.

Introduction

In April 2001, the Dalmatian Club of America Foundation (DCAF) contracted HDM & Associates to collect, data entry, analyze and summarize the findings from the Dalmatian Club of America Health Survey. The primary purpose of the survey was to direct research and avenues of inquiry into the health issues that are of greatest concern and prevalence in Dalmatians.

Project Background

Dalmatian owners around the world were asked to fill in the health survey by downloading a copy of the survey from the Dalmatian Club of America website <http://www.thedca.org/>. Marketing of the survey was done through this website and the Club's quarterly magazine "The Spotter" <http://www.thespotter.org/>. Respondents were then asked to mail a hard copy the survey to Heather Middleton, the Statistician for data entry and analysis. For 12 months from April 1, 2001 to March 31, 2002 surveys were filled-in and returned to the Statistician. At the end of the 12-month period 255 Dalmatian owners had spent the time to complete surveys for 809 dogs or on average 3.2 dogs per owner/survey respondent. All surveys were entered in a database by the end of May 2002 and three preliminary health survey result reports were produced and provided to the Health & Research Committee between June 10 and September 2, 2002.

Methodology

The health survey was designed to investigate common health problems in Dalmatians. Respondents were asked to complete the survey for any dogs they currently or had previously owned.

The survey was divided into five main sections, each with a specific purpose. The first section focused on general Dalmatian owner information. For example: the number of years respondents had owned Dalmatians; what were their primary interests in owning

Dalmatians; and what were the five health-related conditions respondents felt were most critical for the DCAF to study.

The second section asked for general dog specific information including such questions as: what does the dog eat, where does he sleep, what vaccinations does the dog get on an annual basis, if the dog had been to obedience school, etc.

The third section looked at the personality and temperament of each dog. Survey respondents were asked to rank 14 characteristics about their dog based on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 - never to 10 - always.

The fourth section addressed specific health-related conditions in Dalmatians. Respondents were asked to list the particular disease(s) each of their dog(s) had had and at what age the disease had onset. A 1-page list of disease codes was located at the end of each survey for respondents to use.

The fifth and final section of the survey provided respondents with an area for general comments and opinions, which may not have been covered in the previous four sections.

Survey Limitations

From a statistical point of view the health survey had a few factors, which limited the type and specificity of certain data analysis. The following list summarizes these limitations:

- Four of the personality and temperament questions were double-barreled meaning they asked the respondent to answer two questions at the same time. For example is the dog friendly with strangers *and* guests. The *and* in the middle of the question would cause confusion as the respondents were asked to a) answer is

your dog friendly with strangers *and* b) is your dog friendly with guests?

- The survey asked for the dog's date of birth, which required the statistician to calculate each dog's age based on a mid-point date in the survey's 12-month collection period.
- It was unclear whether the dog owners actually owned the dogs for which they were filling-in surveys or if they were co-owners. As a result specific information about several dogs was incomplete, as co-owners did not know about a dog's vaccination schedule, disease history, personality and temperament, etc.
- The question asking about daily, weekly, and monthly medication your dog receives was answered 60 percent of dog owners for 301 dogs. Unfortunately the responses were unclear as to how often medication was administered to each dog and from what age.
- Two questions asking Dalmatian breeders a) how many deaf puppies were born per litter and b) how many of these puppies were euthanized were absent from the survey and it is felt by the Health Survey Committee that "the fact that few of the respondents own deaf dogs but deafness was listed as a major health concern could be explained by the fact that deaf puppies are commonly euthanized ... prior to eight weeks of age." Therefore, the data in *Figure 6 - Diseases and Health-related Conditions of Owners Responses Compared with Actual Number of Dogs with Those Conditions* should be interpreted with caution.
- Another limiting factor was the poor response rate to the question that was "if dead, what was the cause(s)". Not having sufficient

data for this question meant that analysis on specific illnesses or diseases causing death was not possible. It also meant if a dog had a specific illness or disease the potential life expectancy of that dog could not be estimated. This data would also have been helpful in determining if living conditions, diet, breeding, etc. potentially make a difference in the life expectancy of Dalmatians by cause of death analysis.

- Based on the low response rate on certain questions, thus resulting in a small sample size, it was not possible to analyze or draw conclusions to all of the questions posed by the Survey Committee.