

Yes to the crossbreeding programme for cavaliers

The Swedish Kennelclub Central Committee has now given the green light to Cavaliersällskapet (the Swedish Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Club) petition for a crossbreeding programme for Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. The aim is to decrease the occurrence of two separate illnesses common to the breed.

The main aim of the project is to increase health within heart and neurology in the cavalier population. Crossbreeding will be done with another breed of good mentality for companionship dogs, a breed of similar size and preferably belonging to another breed group to maximize the genetic variation. Based on these criteria, Cavaliersällskapet has chosen Lhasa Apso, Japanese Spitz and Danish-Swedish farmdog.

Two particular illnesses are relatively common in the cavalier population, the heart disease called myxomatous mitral valve disease (MMVD) and the neurological disease Syringomyelia (SM).

A mandatory heart screening programme with open databases for MMVD in the cavalier was introduced in 2001. There is no equivalent programme for SM but a general requirement for a later breeding debut has given breeders some opportunity to remove dogs with symptoms from breeding. Cavaliersällskapet and the Swedish Kennelclub (SKK) mutually agree on the assessment that the prevalence of MMVD and SM are too big and the genetic variation in the breed is too small, for selective breeding to be fully effective.

- It feels very good after several years of work, to have landed in a very elaborate project plan, that gives hope of healthier cavaliers in the future, says Eva Lejdbrandt, member of the Central Committee and chairman of the Swedish Kennelclub Breeding committee.

Registry in the X-register

The crossbreeding with another breed is done only in the first generation, after which the breeding returns to consist of cavaliers only. The offspring in the first three generations after a crossbreeding programme is started, are registered in the Swedish Kennelclubs X-register. Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), the international kennelunion, does not recognise breeds as pure-bred, unless they have at least three generations of the same breed in their pedigree. The fourth generation can therefore then be registered in the Swedish Kennelclub pedigree register, as any other recognised dog breed.

- A crossbreeding programme is one of the tools that can be used to protect sustainable long-term breeding within our dog breeds. A crossbreeding programme differs from "mixed breeding" in the sense that the objective is not to produce the mixed breed itself, but that they are part of a bigger project – to safeguard the future of cavaliers, says Sofia Malm Persson, Doctor in Agronomy and genetic expert at the Swedish Kennelclub Department of Breeding and Health.

The health requirements of participating dogs will be very strict. To be able to participate in the project, the breeder has to apply to Cavaliersällskapet in good time before the mating.

Unanimity amongst breeders

The crossbreeding programme has been established amongst Cavaliersällskapet's breeders through meetings that have included around 100 breeders. The club holds regular monthly breeders meetings. Unanimity amongst breeders is consistent and large, says Kari Sundqvist, chairman of Cavaliersällskapet. Roughly a dozen breeders have so far registered their interest in participating in the crossbreeding programme and around seventy people have expressed interest in buying and owning one of the puppies.

- The reception of the project has been very positive overall in the cavalier club and our breeders are fantastic and will do anything to make sure the cavalier remains a happy and healthy family dog. 95 percent of breeders are members of the cavalier club and it is truly great to work in an open environment, with big dedication and unity. Everybody wants to move forward, says Kari Sundqvist.

All breed clubs of the three chosen breeds for the crossbreeding programme (Lhasa Apso, Japanese Spitz and Danish-Swedish farmdog) have been contacted and are positive to the project, which is estimated to start already this autumn.