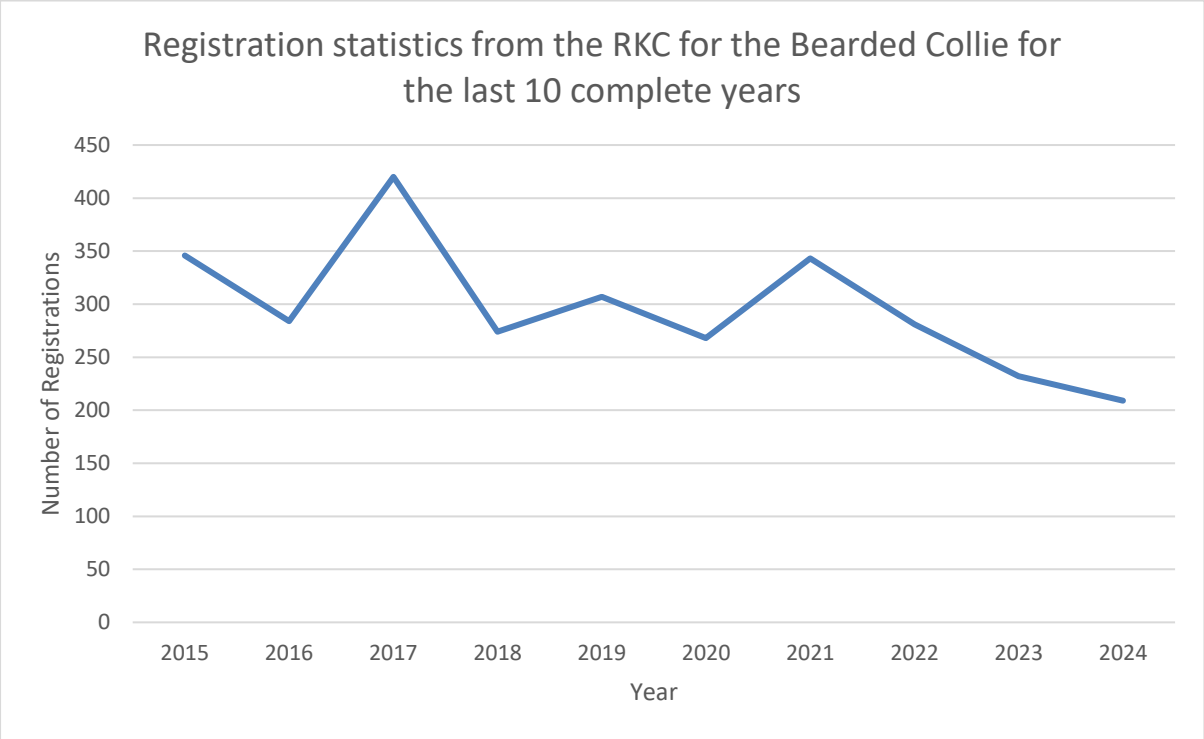
# Bearded Collie Health Survey 2025

This is the eighth year in which we have carried out a yearly health survey. In recent years although showing fluctuations there has been an overall downward trend in registration numbers and sadly this trend is continuing - data from the RKC (Royal Kennel Club, 2023).

| Year | Registration numbers |
|---|---|
| 2015 | 346 |
| 2016 | 284 |
| 2017 | 420 |
| 2018 | 274 |
| 2019 | 307 |
| 2020 | 268 |
| 2021 | 343 |
| 2022 | 281 |
| 2023 | 232 |
| 2024 | 209 |

In 2016 the numbers fell below the 300 mark which meant we were classified as a vulnerable breed by the Royal Kennel Club (RKC) and although the numbers recovered slightly in 2017, in 2018, 2020, 2022, 2023 and 2024 we again fell into the vulnerable breeds category. Last year (2024) saw the lowest figure in registrations in recent times.

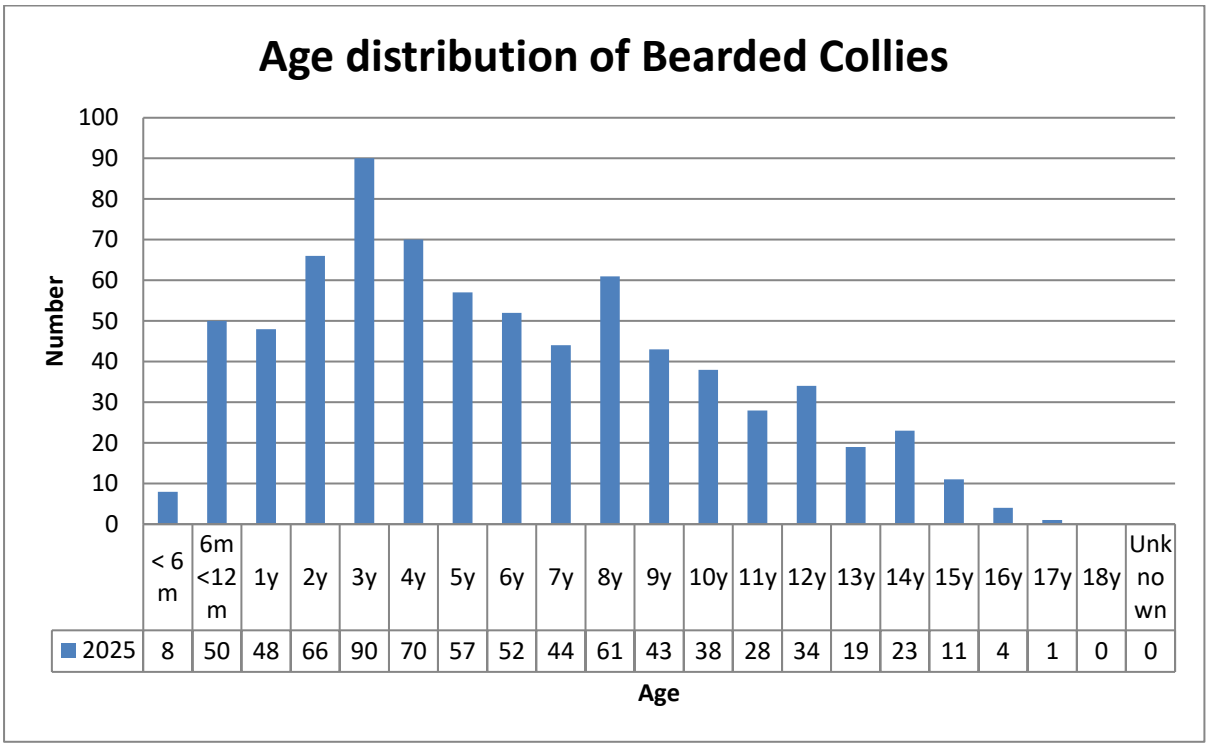



This survey is a follow up to the surveys taken in 2018 through to 2023 and is designed to be repeated on an annual basis so that we can observe trends in health within the breed rather than looking at a single snapshot. To this end a survey was designed that was not too detailed to encourage maximum participation and obtain data on as many dogs as possible to get an accurate picture on the health of the breed. The survey has always been anonymous. A few questions were added in 2019 in response to drawing up the Breed Health and Conservation Plan (BHCP) in conjunction with the RKC and a further question related to dogs with retained testicles was added in 2022. The final survey consisted of eighteen questions with either Yes/No or short answers and was designed to be user-friendly.

Data was received on 747 dogs of which fourteen had died in the year leading up to April 2025. There was a large fall in numbers of dogs in the survey in 2025 but this has been expected given the falling registration numbers especially in recent years.

**Ages**

The age range of Bearded Collies shows a distribution from less than 6 months up to 17 years confirming previous studies which have shown that the Bearded Collie can be a very long-lived breed. (O'Neill et al., 2013)

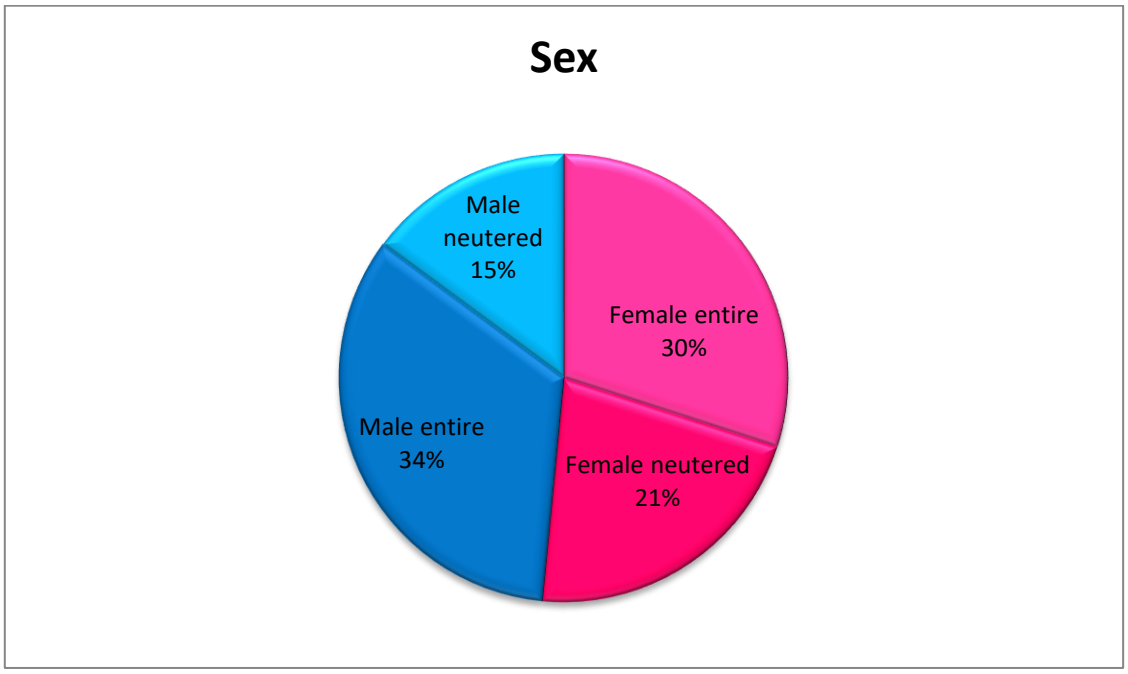



The dogs that had died were distributed in age from a few months to 17 years and died from a variety of different causes which is tabulated below.

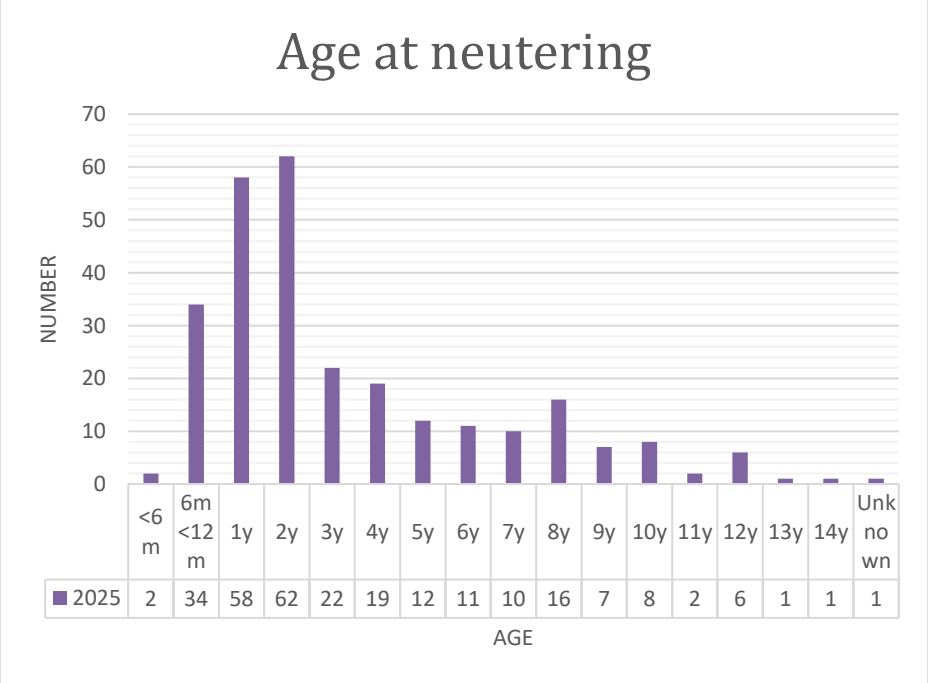
| Age (years) | Sex | Cause of death (as stated by owner) |
|---|---|---|
| 14 | ME | Aggression, personality change and seizures |
| 10 | FE | Internal bleed, mass on heart |
| 10 | ME | Internal bleed, ruptured spleen |
| 15 | FN | Unknown but had Addisons, SLO and Elbow Dysplasia |
| 8 | MN | Haemangiosarcoma |
| 15 | ME | Stroke |
| 10 | FE | Haemangiosarcoma |
| 11 | MN | Nerve sheath tumour |
| 8 | ME | Soft tissue sarcoma |
| 8 | ME | Tumour in spleen spread to liver |
| 4 | FN | Liver disease and kidney disease |
| 8 | ME | Tumour on heart |
| 15 | ME | Unknown but had anaemia |
| 16 | ME | Old age problems including Cushing's disease |

FE = female entire; FN = female neutered; ME = male entire; MN = male neutered

**Distribution of sexes and number of dogs neutered**




Female dogs represented 51.5% of the population and male dogs represented 48.5%. A total of 272 Bearded Collies were neutered representing 36.4% of the total population. This is much lower than the average neutering rate for pet dogs of 68% (PAW report, 2024) which probably reflects the fact that this survey was distributed widely among many people who breed as well as pet owners and therefore includes some of the breeding population. Other factors include the increased knowledge of the fact that not all effects of neutering are positive especially if done when the dog is skeletally immature and the fact that neutering can cause coat changes, which is more evident in a long-coated breed.

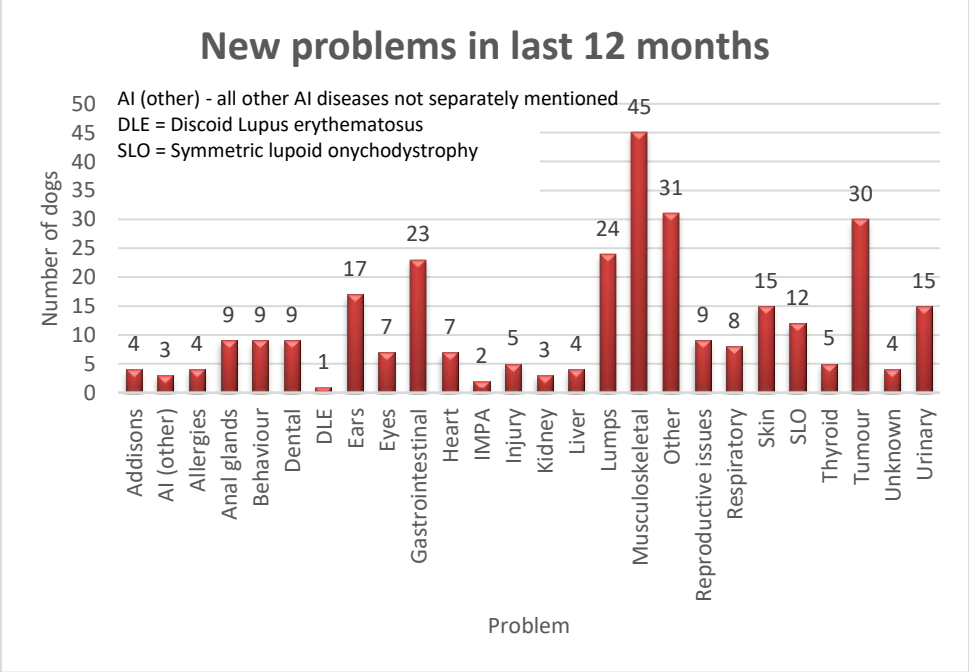


As would be expected in line with most pets neutered, the age of neutering was positively skewed with the vast majority of dogs neutered young, there was one dog where age of neutering was not known.

Thirty-six dogs were neutered under 12 months of age. Recent research published which appears to be very breed specific is showing in some breeds that there is an increase in orthopaedic problems such as hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and cruciate disease in dogs neutered earlier and also certain types of cancer and some behavioural problems. (Hart et al. 2014, Hart et al, 2016 and Zink et al. 2014) Of the dogs neutered under 12 months one dog (2.7%) were diagnosed with hip dysplasia compared to a prevalence of 1.2% for hip dysplasia in the overall population. No dogs neutered under 12 months were diagnosed with elbow dysplasia or cruciate disease. No dogs neutered under 12 months went on to develop autoimmune disease.

There were 272 male dogs in the survey but 6 owners did not answer the question about retained testicles. Of the 266 male dogs where the owner answered this question 56 (21.1%) reported their dog had a retained testicle. Spangenberg (2021) reports a range of 0.8 to 10% incidence of retained testicles in dogs with a higher prevalence in smaller breeds and some purebred dogs. The incidence of cryptorchidism in Bearded Collies would therefore appear higher. Cryptorchidism is an autosomal recessive trait in dogs and to be affected a dog must inherit a gene from both parents but obviously the trait will only be seen in male dogs. This means that female siblings to cryptorchid dogs may be carriers and therefore in an ideal world would not be bred from, but obviously this has to be balanced by further reduction of an already small gene pool. It is therefore important that breeders are aware of this so they can consider it as a factor when making breeding decisions.

1. **<u>Episodes of new disease requiring veterinary attention in the last 12 months.</u>**



243 dogs (32.5%) were reported to have received veterinary attention for one or more new problems in the last 12 months. A total of 305 problems were reported.
The group of new problems most commonly reported were musculoskeletal conditions as in the 2018-2024 surveys with 45 instances reported. These were broken down as follows:

| Condition | Number of dogs |
|---|---|
| Arthritis | 23 |
| Cruciate disease | 1 |
| Elbow dysplasia | 4 |
| Hip dysplasia | 2 |
| Lameness none specific | 7 |
| Other conditions | 8 |

Other conditions included one case of immune mediated polyarthritis, muscular problems, unspecified stiffness, septic arthritis, and disc disease. Given that 158 dogs are aged 10 years and older (21.1% of the total sample) it is hardly surprising that arthritis is the most common condition reported in this section.

91.3% of the cases of arthritis were diagnosed in older dogs (>8 years of age) 8.7% of cases were in younger dogs which may follow injury or inherited diseases such as elbow and hip dysplasia. Numbers of dogs with elbow dysplasia and hip dysplasia will be monitored in the breed health survey on an ongoing basis as there is a hereditary component to both these diseases. Currently the RKC recommend that breeders showing good practice are required to prioritise genetic diversity, this means avoiding the mating of closely related dogs, trying to avoid sires that have been heavily used and not repeating matings. However, breeders who are showing best practice are encouraged not only to prioritise genetic diversity but also to hip and elbow score and test for collie eye anomaly (CEA). The breed clubs would strongly recommend that all breeders follow Best practice and continue health testing.

**Immune mediated disease**

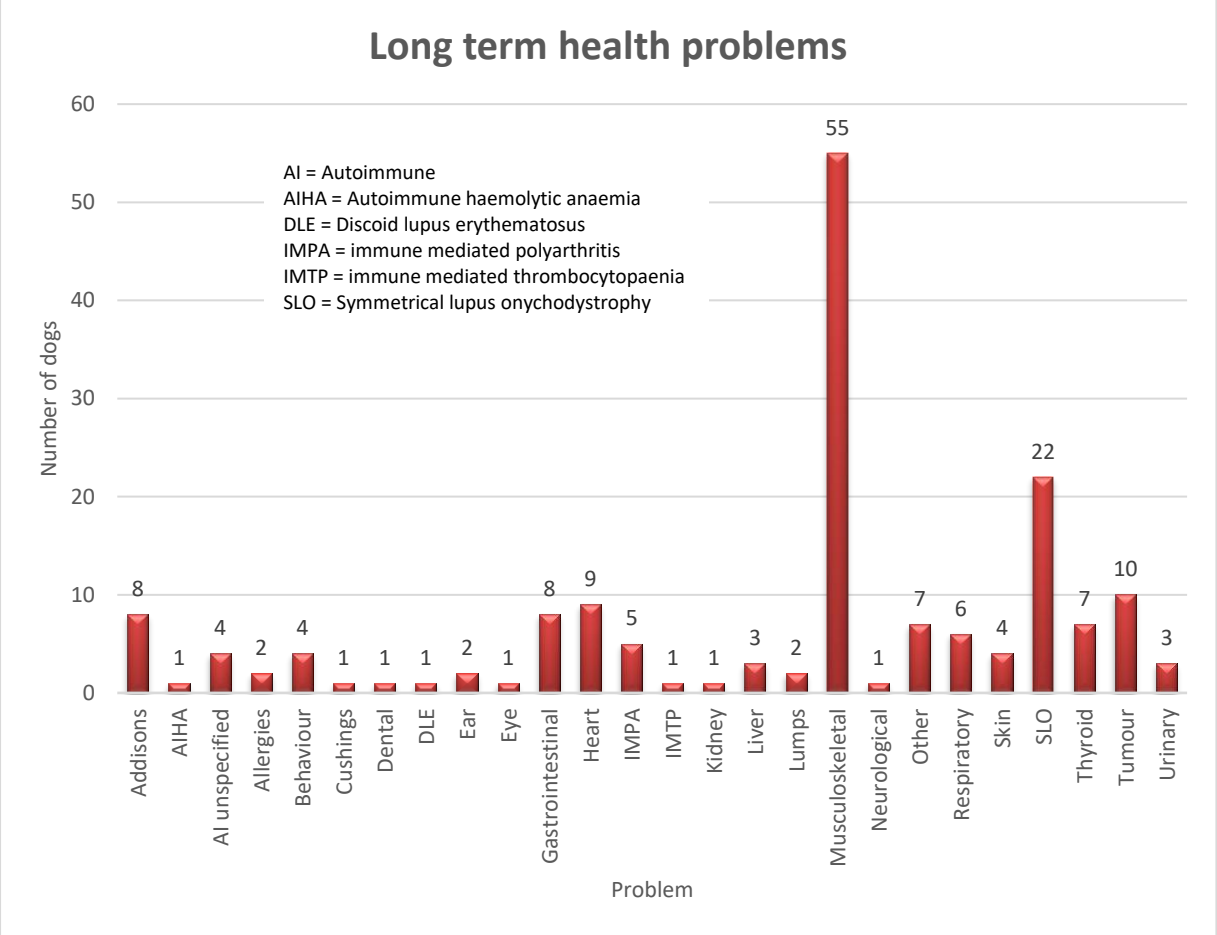
A breakdown of the incidence of immune mediated disease diagnosed in the preceding 12 months is given below.

| Autoimmune disease | Number of cases |
|---|---|
| Addison's | 4 |
| AI unspecified | 3 |
| IMPA | 2 |
| DLE | 1 |
| SLO | 12 |
| Thyroid disease | 5 |
| Total | 27 |

Autoimmune disease represents 8.8% of the new problems with which dogs were taken to visit their veterinary surgeons in the preceding 12 months compared with 6.8% in the 2018 survey, 5.9% in the 2019 survey, 8% in the 2020 survey and 6.5% in the 2021 survey, 10.1% in 2022, 9.5% in 2023 and 9.6% in 2024.

## 2. Bearded Collies with long term health problems

140 dogs (18.7%) were reported to be suffering from one or more long term health problems representing 169 long term problems.




As with new problems the largest category was musculoskeletal disease with 55 reported problems which represents 32.5% of all the long-term health problems. Of the musculoskeletal problems 39 of the 55 dogs (70.9%) were suffering from arthritis, this represents 5.2% of the total number of dogs in the survey.

| Condition | Number of dogs |
|---|---|
| Arthritis | 39 |
| Cruciate disease | 3 |
| Elbow dysplasia | 4 |
| Hip dysplasia | 2 |
| Other | 7 |

It would be expected to have a reasonable incidence of arthritis in a sample where 21.1% of the dogs are over 10 years of age due to simple wear and tear. More worrying are the diseases that have a multifactorial aetiology including hereditary factors as these often affect young dogs and can lead to a lifetime of problems for both the dog and the owner. These include hip dysplasia and elbow dysplasia. In the present survey, hip dysplasia was given as a chronic disease in 2 dogs. Breeders showing best practice should hip score their dogs before breeding. It is recommended that hip scores should be looked at along with other criteria and ideally the dogs chosen for breeding should have a hip score around or ideally below the breed median score which for the Bearded Collie is currently 9 (British Veterinary Association (BVA), 2024). The Royal Kennel Club also now publish estimated breeding values (EBV) for hips in the Bearded Collie and the more complete this data becomes the more useful it will be as an additional tool to aid breeders in choosing dogs from which to breed. There is less data on elbow dysplasia although this has now been added as a test for breeders showing best practice by the RKC. The recommendation is that ideally dogs with a score of 0 should be bred from and certainly not dogs with a score of 2 or 3 (Royal Kennel Club, 2024) In the current survey there were 4 dogs which mentioned elbow disease as a chronic condition.

**Immune mediated disease**

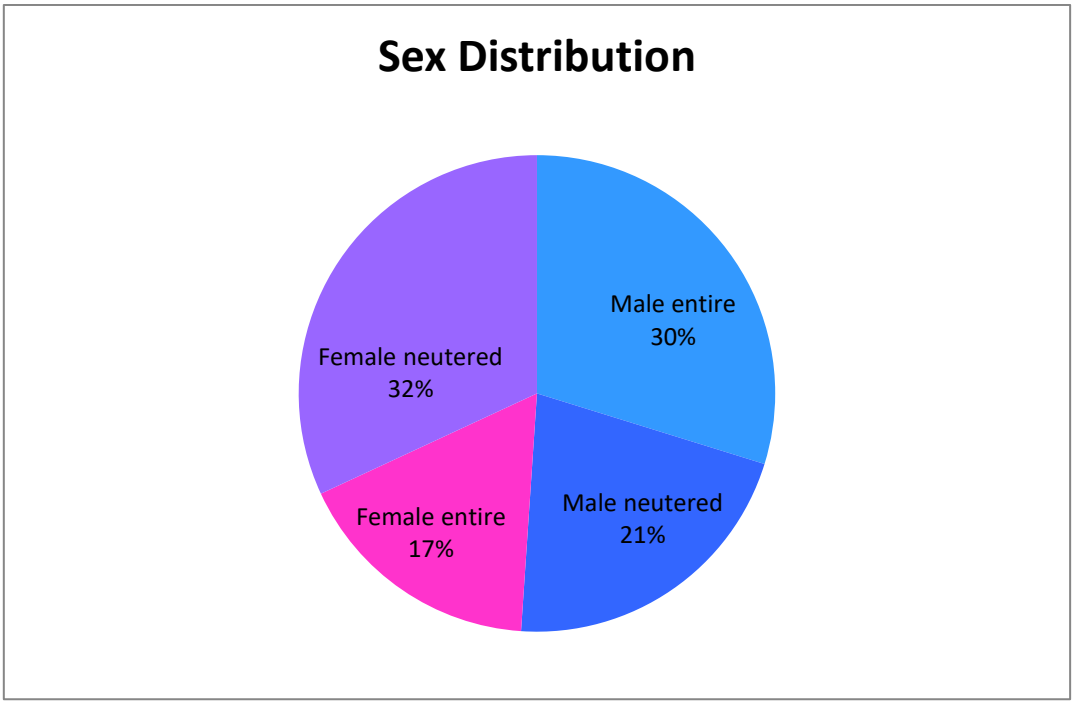
As mentioned previously immune mediated diseases have always been of concern in the breed and in the current survey Symmetrical lupus onychodystrophy (SLO) is the second most common chronic condition. The total number of instances of immune mediated disease in the long-term health problems was 49 which represents 29% of all long-term health problems mentioned. Breakdown of immune mediated disease is as follows:

| Disease | Number of cases |
|---|---|
| Addison's | 8 |
| Autoimmune haemolytic anaemia (AIHA) | 1 |
| AI unspecified | 4 |
| Discoid lupus erythematosus (DLE) | 1 |
| Immune mediated polyarthritis (IMPA) | 5 |
| Immune mediated thrombocytopaenia (IMTP) | 1 |
| SLO | 22 |
| Thyroid disease | 7 |
| Total | 49 |

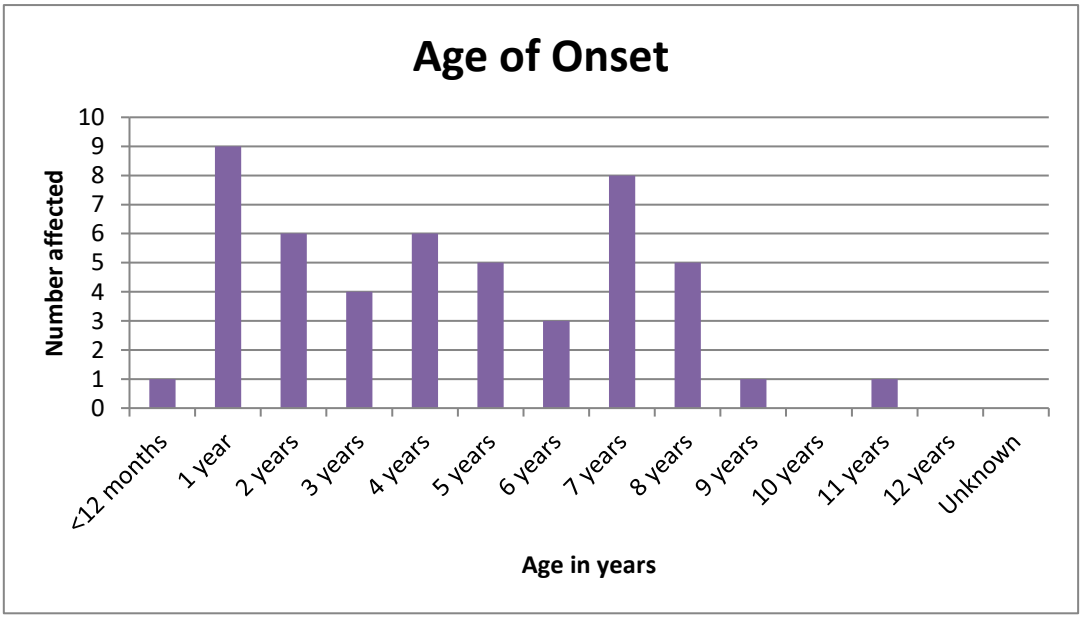
Within the survey the total number of dogs affected with immune mediated diseases was 47 (Two dogs had more than one immune mediated disease.)which represents 6.3% of the total dogs in the survey, this compares with a total of 4 (7.3%) in 2024, 71 (5.9%) in 2023, 65 (6.8%) in 2022, 67 (5.6%) in 2021, 68 (5.3%) in 2020, 57 (4.9%) in 2019 and 61 (5.4%) in 2018. This number is generally less than has been reported in other surveys (Kershaw, Wilkins and Mc

Bride, 2015, and Kennel Club, 2014) but may reflect that we had a large sample number and owners of healthy dogs were encouraged to enter data. The sex distribution of these dogs was 51% male and 49% female with a breakdown as follows:

| Sex of dog | Number affected |
|---|---|
| Male entire | 14 |
| Male neutered | 10 |
| Female entire | 8 |
| Female neutered | 15 |




Age of onset of immune mediated disease for these dogs was as follows:



Age of onset can be very young which is the reason for concern, along with their life-threatening nature of some diseases, the need for ongoing treatment in most cases and the unclear mode of inheritance and their likely multifactorial aetiology. There have been advances in the understanding of autoimmune disease in 2019 with research into SLO and Addison's disease from Liza Gershony at the University of California and research funded by the JBLC into Addison's disease by Brian Catchpole at the Royal Veterinary College. Both have advanced our knowledge of these diseases but they are multifactorial diseases and we do not at present have any commercial tests available to identify genetically susceptible animals.

**Dogs on long term medication**

83 dogs (11.1%) were reported to be on long term medication with one or more drug, this figure is slightly reduced from figures in previous surveys. Data was not collected in this survey on the drugs used.

**Jaw problems**

As part of the BHCP information was collected on dogs which had jaw problems, 46 dogs (6.2%) were reported as having one or more problems with their jaw compared with 3.3% in 2019, 4% in 2020, 3.9% in 2021, 2.5% in 2022, 2.6% in 2023 and 3.2% in 2024. The breakdown of these problems was as follows:

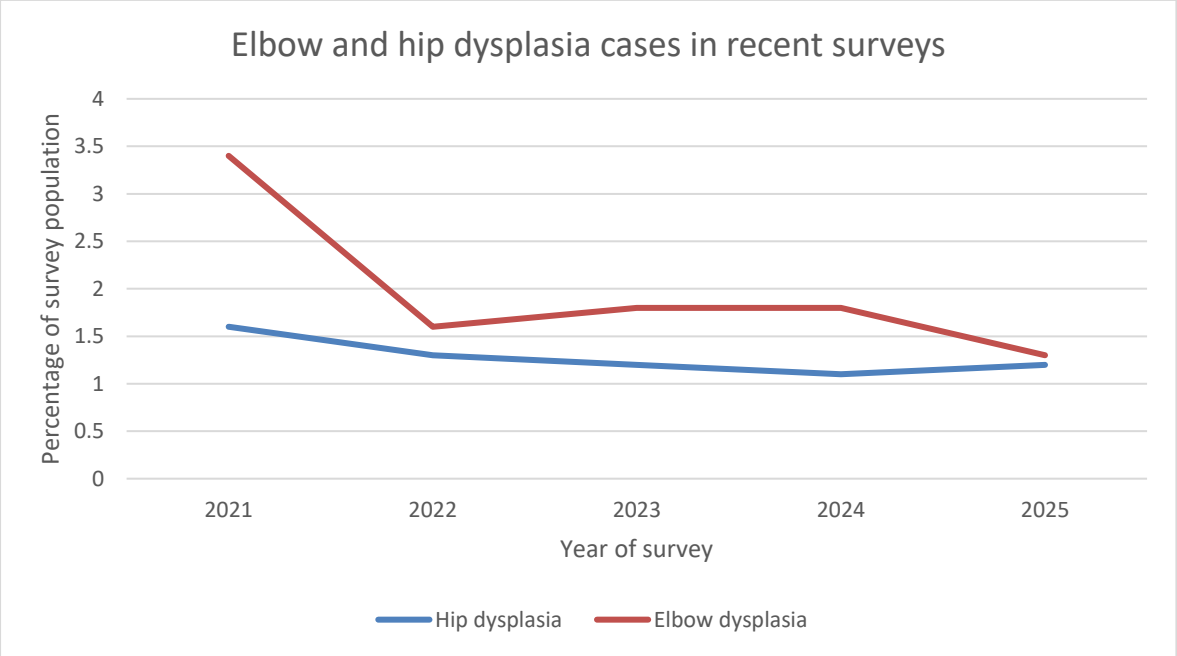
| Problem | Number of dogs affected |
|---|---|
| Level bite | 2 |
| Narrow jaw | 10 |
| Other | 2 |
| Overshot | 10 |
| Teeth impacting | 8 |
| Undershot | 12 |
| Unknown | 2 |
| Wry Jaw | 2 |

There is often a genetic component to malocclusions but trauma can be another occasional cause. The only ways of dealing with this at present are not to breed from parents with jaw problems and not to repeat matings which have produced jaw problems. Of the 46 affected dogs, 13 (28.2% required veterinary attention to resolve the situation, the rest either resolved without intervention or the dogs were able to live with the condition.

## Inherited diseases

There are potentially many diseases which have a genetic component but Bearded Collie breeders showing the best practice should test for Hip dysplasia (HD), Elbow Dysplasia (ED) and Collie eye anomaly (CEA). The Bearded Collie Club have also subsidised eye examination in older dogs at our Open Show periodically to monitor for other potential hereditary eye diseases that could be emerging. The prevalence of these diseases was as follows when owners were asked the direct question of whether their dog suffered from them:

| Disease | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hip dysplasia | 9(1.2%) | 13 (1.1%) | 14 (1.2%) | 13 (1.4%) | 20 (1.7%) |
| Elbow dysplasia | 10 (1.3%) | 21 (1.8%) | 22 (1.8% | 15 (1.6%) | 41 (3.4%) |
| CEA | 3 (0.4%) | 7 (0.6%) | 3 (0.25%) | 3 (0.3%) | 3 (0.3%) |

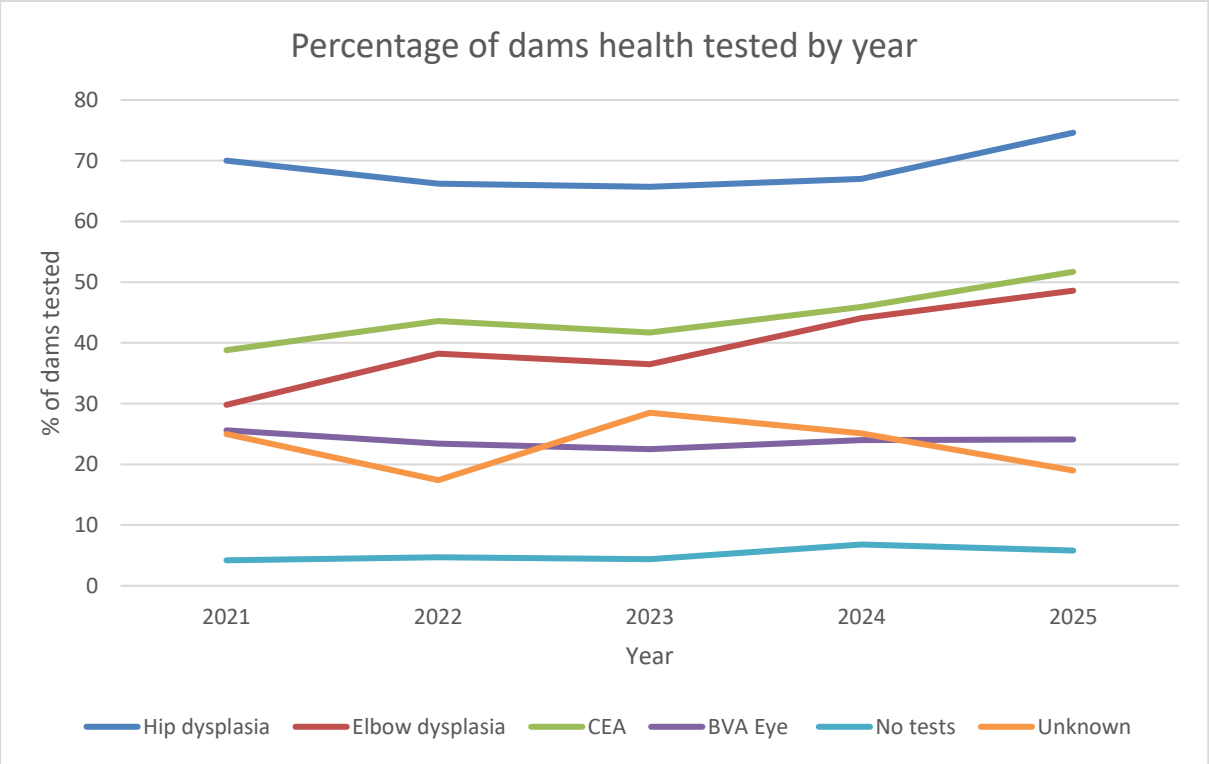



HD and ED are multifactorial diseases which although they have a genetic component can be affected by other factors. The Bearded Collie was one of the early breeds to embrace the British Veterinary Association (BVA) / Royal Kennel Club (RKC) Hip Dysplasia Scheme. In the fifteen-year summary published in 2022, 1287 Bearded Collies had been screened in the last 15 years (RKC). The BVA/RKC scheme for elbow dysplasia was introduced later and breeders have started screening dogs when their hips are done and this, and clinical disease found have indicated presence of the disease in the breed. The 3 dogs with CEA are puzzling as there was

only ever one reported case of CEA in the breed in the UK but could indicate carriers of CEA or possibly non-RKC registered Bearded Collies or foreign dogs although we asked only UK KC registered dogs to complete the survey.

Numbers of dams of dogs screened in recent years as stated by owner are as follows:

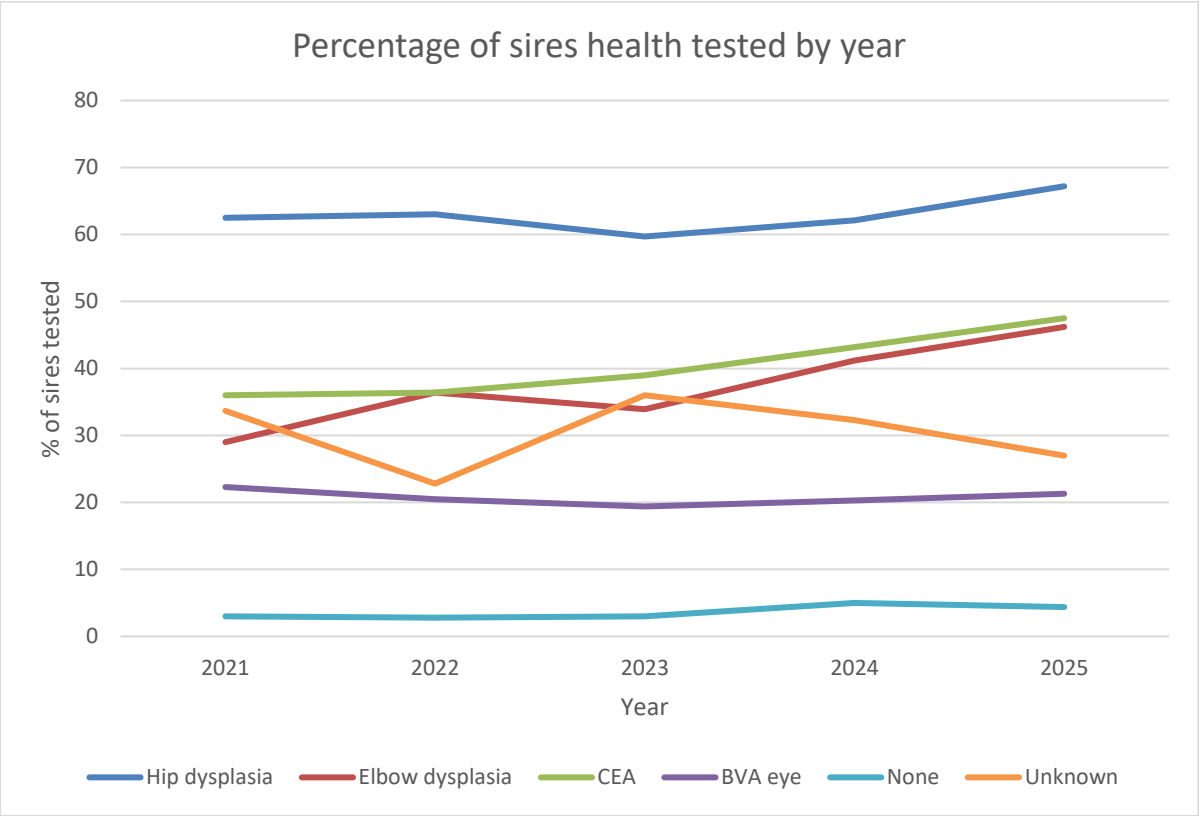
| Screening test carried out | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hip dysplasia | 557 (74.6%) | 769 (67%) | 795 (65.7%) | 636 (66.2%) | 833 (70%) |
| Elbow dysplasia | 363 (48.6%) | 506 (44.1%) | 442 (36.5%) | 367 (38.2%) | 355 (29.8%) |
| CEA | 386 (51.7%) | 526 (45.9%) | 504 (41.7%) | 419 (43.6%) | 461 (38.8%) |
| BVA eye examination | 180 (24.1%) | 275 (24%) | 272 (22.5%) | 225 (23.4%) | 304 (25.6%) |
| No tests | 43 (5.8%) | 78 (6.8%) | 53 (4.4%) | 45 (4.7%) | 50 (4.2%) |
| Unknown | 142 (19.0%) | 288 (25.1%) | 345 (28.5%) | 167 (17.4%) | 298 (25%) |




It was good to see an increase in the percentage of dams tested in all tests in 2025. There are still a number of dams that are not tested but I would encourage all potential owners to question their breeder about health tests as the more people that are aware of the need for health testing the better.

Numbers of sires of dogs screened in recent years as stated by owner are as follows:

| Screening test carried out | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hip dysplasia | 502 (67.2%) | 713 (62.2%) | 722 (59.7%) | 605 (63%) | 743 (62.5%) |
| Elbow dysplasia | 345 (46.2%) | 473 (41.2%) | 410 (33.9%) | 349 (36.4%) | 345 (29%) |
| CEA | 355 (47.5%) | 495 (43.2%) | 472 (39%) | 396 (41.2%) | 428 (36%) |
| BVA eye examination | 159 (21.3%) | 233 (20.3%) | 235 (19.4%) | 197 (20.5%) | 265 (22.3%) |
| No tests | 33 (4.4%) | 57 (5%) | 36 (3%) | 27 (2.8%) | 36 (3%) |
| Unknown | 202 (27.0%) | 370 (32.3%) | 436 (36%) | 219 (22.8%) | 401 (33.7%) |




It is good to also see an increase in the percentage of sires health tested. It should be remembered that potentially a sire will have many more progeny than a dam and therefore not health testing a sire who is to be used is inexcusable.

Unknown health tests may be because the dog is a rescue and they are unknown or could be because the dog is older and the owner is unaware of the tests done or could simply be because they cannot find this information. Eye examinations in veteran dogs are useful to monitor the breed for any emerging diseases such as reports of dogs abroad with progressive retinal atrophy (PRA). Many breeders have carried out eye tests from the early days of the BVA/RKC scheme and I have had sight of documentation of dogs tested from the 1970s.

## Summary

This is the eighth attempt to collect data on an ongoing basis by yearly health surveys in the breed. The general feedback was the survey was easy and quick to complete. The ease with which the survey could be completed did mean there was a compromise in the amount of data collected. In general, although the breed has some health problems in line with many other pure-bred dogs, Bearded Collies are a long-lived breed and many of the diseases seen were associated with age. This should not lead to complacency though as dwindling registration numbers leads to a reduction in the number of dogs available for breeding and the danger of loss of genetic diversity especially if many dogs are bred to popular sires. We also still have the problem that we do not know how to prevent the breeding of dogs with immune mediated disease and all we can do at present is not to breed from any dogs exhibiting these diseases or repeat matings that have produced offspring with these diseases. There has been ongoing research both into Addison's disease and SLO at the University of California and they have published a number of papers on the subject some of which are listed in the references below.

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