

Culling

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Culling raises more emotion than any other aspect of the breeding of dogs. We realise that there are many arguments for and against this step. However we feel that there are situations where culling is to be recommended. Firstly, by using the word "cull" we mean to euthanase the whelp (puppy) and we are not using it in its correct form which is to pick, select, choose or remove from the flock (litter). Secondly we understand that certain people will have conscientious objections to having a puppy euthanased and it must be clearly understood that we do not stand in the way of such religious convictions. However the reason the puppy is culled is to strengthen the breed by removing unsuitable specimens from the gene pool. In many cases they would not have survived in nature e.g. they have a severe congenital defect such as a cleft palate. Most people can understand this situation as, after all, the puppy cannot even suckle; however you could pull it through, and it could contribute its weakness to succeeding generations through the gene pool.

As an alternative to culling you could ensure that the puppy is sterilised and it no longer participates in the gene pool. This method is often indefinite, as you may lose direct control over the dog. One could also place a breeder's restriction on this puppy (or with-hold the registration certificate) but this will only avoid registered progeny. Further one can arrange for the purchaser not to breed, which method carries obvious deficiencies.

Immediately after whelping is completed you must determine whether culling will take place. Consider first the size of the litter and the bitch's capacity for coping with it. An inexperienced dam (and this is particularly true of a first litter) just cannot cope with a large litter and eight is regarded as a maximum number with six also being a favoured unit. You get good mothers and bad mothers, just as some have an excellent milk supply while others do not. At the end of the day the preferred maximum litter size is determined by the individual capacity of the bitch as well as your ability to supplement feeding immediately the bitch fails to cope; there are excellent brands of young puppy food available.

An inadequate bitch with too many pups will invariably crush a few of them. She may also, for reasons known only to her (which we only determine in retrospect), reject one or two of her pups. In other words circumstances often reduce excessive litters and it is just one of those inevitable things that the dam inadvertently wipes out the best puppies.

Item 1.10 in the Code of Ethics calls for a breeders' restriction and/or sterilisation for minor defects whereas we recommend you euthanase those showing signs of serious congenital defects. It is when we get into the area of "cosmetic" faults that we strike obvious resistance to culling. However we list common faults graded in terms of seriousness:- faulty structures (cleft palate, malformed head, missing ribs, faulty legs, dwarfism, defective eyes), dermoid sinus, under/overshot jaw, "grey ghost", kinky tail, missing ridge, missing or multi crowns, short ridge, too much black in the hair, excessive white, and too large. Obviously if one must cull then one culls the most seriously defective first.

Very often you must seek the vet's advice when determining whether a serious defect exists or not. It is a good idea to have the vet check out the dam and her litter as soon as you think she has finished whelping, firstly to ensure that she has actually finished, secondly to ensure that she is in acceptable condition and thirdly to determine that the pups are healthy and without defect. You will be dealing with your vet in any event when it comes to euthanasing any pup. Some vets are not prepared to euthanase in all instances; for example, if they are of the opinion that a missing ridge or too much white is not a satisfactory reason they might very well decline your request.

Certain problems may also arise while the pups are growing. The older the pup is the more difficult to cull. But bitches do reject puppies, some pups just don't grow, they show signs of kidney failure and they get pneumonia, so maintain contact with your vet and consult your committee whenever in doubt or if you need assistance of any type.

Warning: try to arrange not to take the pups to the vet's consulting rooms; let him/her see them in your vehicle or, better still, arrange a house call.