



media *release*

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NEW DNA TEST TO FIGHT DEGENERATIVE NEUROLOGICAL DISEASE IN PARSON RUSSELL TERRIERS

**The Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the AHT
launches DNA test for late onset ataxia**

Scientists from the Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the AHT have successfully identified a genetic mutation which causes a severe progressive disease in Parson Russell Terriers (PRTs).

Late onset ataxia (LOA) affects coordination and balance, making everyday movement and tasks increasingly difficult. The new DNA test can accurately predict the risk of developing the disease in 97-100 per cent of PRTs and will effectively reduce the number of LOA cases in the breed.

Dogs usually develop the disease between six months and one year of age but because there is no cure, sufferers are usually euthanised around two years after onset as their quality of life diminishes.

After testing DNA of over 200 PRTs in total, the AHT's scientists were able to isolate the genetic mutation which causes the disease and establish that LOA is an inherited recessive trait; therefore dogs must have two defective copies of the genetic mutation, one from each parent, to be affected.

The test results will inform dog owners if their dog is clear from, a carrier of, or affected by LOA.

Cathryn Mellersh, Head of Canine Genetics, at the AHT said: "This is great news for PRT breeders as we believe LOA is an emerging condition in the breed and through this test we should be able to cut the disorder 'off at the pass', before the mutation becomes any more widespread.

"Interestingly, our research also suggests that there may be other causes of ataxia in the breed. It is important for breeders to understand that a clear result using the LOA DNA test will not exclude the formal possibility that dogs could still develop a genetically different form of ataxia."

Caroline Kisko, Kennel Club Secretary, said: "LOA is a relatively new but devastating condition and we are delighted that we've been able to work with the Animal Health Trust to develop a DNA test that will give breeders the opportunity to significantly reduce this disease. We will keep working together to develop tools and information for breeders, so that they are able to select dogs that will have healthy puppies."

The AHT would like to thank all the individuals and breed clubs who, within a matter of weeks, raised £5,000 to enable the research into this condition, and consequently develop a DNA test. It also extends its thanks to all the Parson Russell Terriers and their owners who have contributed DNA and information to help us with our research into LOA.

The DNA test for LOA is available from the AHT at the price of £48. Full details are available at www.ahtdnatesting.co.uk.

The Kennel Club continues to work alongside breed clubs and Breed Health Coordinators, in a collaborative effort to improve the health of pedigree dogs. The Kennel Club is happy to accommodate a club's request to add a new DNA test to its lists and would normally need a formal request from the breed's health coordinator or a majority request from the breed clubs. If a breeder has concern about an emerging health condition in their breed they are encouraged to talk to the Breed Health Coordinator who will liaise with the Kennel Club.

Ends

For further information, please contact:

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Additional notes:

- The Animal Health Trust is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk
- The Kennel Club Genetics Centre is led by Dr Cathryn Mellersh and Dr Sarah Blott, two of the AHT's genetics experts. Both have pioneered screening tests to identify a dog's genetic status and minimise the risk of producing affected puppies
- The Kennel Club Charitable Trust has donated over £6.3m since its formation to help fund research into dog diseases and to canine support and welfare charities. Money made by the Kennel Club, through events such as Crufts, goes back into the Kennel Club Charitable Trust and into education and health initiatives to help all dogs.
- The AHT would like to thank all the Breed Clubs and individuals who have contributed financially to this research and to all the Parson Russell Terriers and their owners who have contributed DNA and information to this research.