



BREEDING

dogs in Sweden

SVENSKA KENNELKLUBBEN

BREEDING DOGS IN SWEDEN

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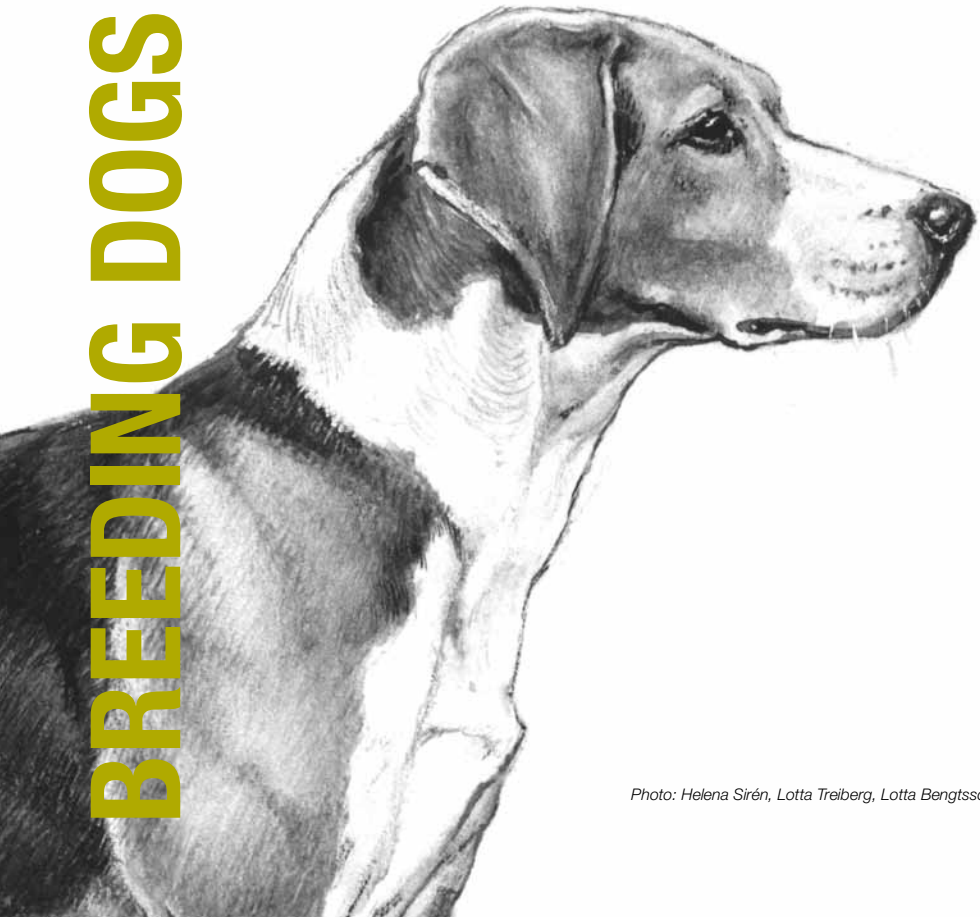


Photo: Helena Sirén, Lotta Treiberg, Lotta Bengtsson



Breeding dogs in Sweden

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Swedish Kennel Club (SKK) owes its existence to the work of breeders and the results of their efforts. Without puppies which grow up to be well-mannered, healthy dogs, all other activities would fall by the wayside. This is why breeding issues are given such prominence within the organisation and why SKK dedicates substantial resources to helping breeders breed dogs in a way which benefits both the individual dog and the development of the various breeds.

SKK Breeding Committee

The basic structure of the SKK is that of a representative union of non-profit clubs with approximately 300,000 individual members. Decision-making is done democratically by various committees. The SKK's Breeding Committee is responsible for all issues related to breeding within the organisation. Its members are made up of breeders with a special interest in these issues, and a number of experts in veterinary

medicine and genetics have been co-opted by the committee. In addition to regular meetings, the Breeding Committee also organises conferences for breeding officials from member clubs and initiates courses in specific subjects. The Breeding Committee is responsible for the project to develop a breed-specific breeding strategy for each breed, described below.

Breeding Officials

The breed clubs affiliated to SKK have delegated responsibility for one or more breeds, and the clubs therefore have their own breeding officials or someone responsible for breeding issues. Their tasks include keeping up-to-date with issues concerning the breed, at the individual as well as the breed level, both from a national and international perspective. The breeding officials provide breeders with information which helps them to set appropriate priorities and to make personal decisions regarding their breeding programme.



SKK Department for Breeding and Health

The SKK central office in Stockholm has a department for breeding and health employing seven persons, including two full-time breeding consultants and a geneticist. The department is responsible for assisting the Breeding Committee and breed clubs in breeding-related issues, for example, managing health programmes, breeding statistics and genetic evaluations. The employees have access to a broad contact network made up of experts in the field of veterinary medicine, genetics, ethology (animal behaviour) and cynology. Moreover, the department plays an important role in SKK's education of breeding officials from the clubs.

Education

Education of breeding officials and breeders is a priority and major focus of the SKK's activities. The central organisation has compiled extensive material to support the education. The SKK organises yearly courses for breeding officials as well as regular breeding conferences. The investment in education is one stage in the SKK's efforts to quality-assure dog breeding. Knowledgeable and responsible breeders are the best way to achieve dog breeding which benefits the future of the various breeds.

Supervision

The SKK carries out extensive supervision of its members, with the priority on breeders. Almost one hundred kennel consultants carry out approximately 2000 visits a year to kennels throughout the country. In many areas, the consultants work closely with the animal welfare officers employed by the municipalities.

Registration and Breeding Statistics

All breeders who are members of the SKK register their puppies. Approximately 70% of Sweden's total canine population is registered with SKK. The registers are accessible to the public, and anyone can view them on the SKK website through Dog Data (Hunddata) internet service. The register contains pedigree data and results from various competitions, trials and tests, as well as the results of genetic health programmes administered by SKK. This gives buyers the opportunity to obtain a lot of information before purchasing their puppy.

As an additional service to breeders and breed clubs, the SKK website also features the Breeding Records service (Avelsdata) including breeding statistics for both individual dogs and for each breed as a whole. The statistics are based on results from health

programmes, the dog mentality assessment, official competitions, and dog shows, as well as pedigree information. For individual dogs, individual records as well as statistics for littermates, full-sibs and offspring are available. The pedigree and coefficient of inbreeding is shown for each dog. Moreover, the service includes an option to calculate the expected inbreeding coefficient for offspring resulting from a planned mating. The population-wide information provides a general picture of the development and status of a breed as a whole, including statistics on number of registrations, dogs used for breeding, health traits, behaviour traits and average levels of inbreeding by birth year. The Breeding Records service is accessible to everyone and has become extremely popular. The transparency and opportunity to obtain information is relatively unusual from an international kennel club perspective.

Health Programmes

Genetic health programmes are one of the tools used by the SKK to manage hereditary disease. The SKK implemented the use of screening programmes to improve health in Swedish dogs more than 30 years ago. The first programmes concerned hip dysplasia and hereditary eye diseases. More recently, programmes for other heritable conditions,

such as elbow dysplasia, patellar luxation and heart disease have been developed. Health programmes are based on breed-specific needs and have been introduced on request from and in consultation with the breed clubs.

An increasing number of genes underlying health issues in dogs are being revealed by advances in molecular genetics research. The SKK records findings from genetic tests for several gene mutations. The availability of genetic tests makes it possible to accurately determine the genotype of an individual dog with respect to a specific disease, enabling a more subtle management of breeding programmes to decrease the frequency of a particular disease gene without unnecessary reduction of genetic variation.

Besides physical health, SKK has developed programmes with respect to mental health and management of genetic variation. All results of tests carried out on dogs of breeds included in the various programmes are registered with the SKK and the results are accessible to the public through the SKK webpage.

Breed-Specific Breeding Strategies

In 2001, the SKK initiated a project which is quite unique to the canine world. The



task was to create a breed-specific breeding strategy for every breed of dog in Sweden, based on information gathered from a range of sources. Hence, the breeding plan should be tailored to the conditions of the individual breeds and consider all aspects relevant in the breeding goal of each breed, i.e., physical and mental health as well as population structure and genetic variation. The document, known as Rasspecifika Avlsstrategier [breed-specific breeding strategies], or RAS, is the result of the work of the various breed clubs. It contains the history of the breeds, a description of the present situation, and goals and strategies for the future. The idea is that the document should constitute an overall plan for the breed and act as a guideline to breeders. At present, most breed clubs (more than 300 breeds) have developed and submitted a breeding strategy to the SKK. The remaining breeds are those with very small populations in Sweden. The breeding strategies are published on the SKK website as well as on the breed club websites, and thus easy to find for breeders and puppy buyers. The RAS documents are to be evaluated yearly and updated every 5 years.

Breed-Specific Instructions for Show Judges

Soundness and health in dogs must not be compromised due to morphological exaggerations. In 2009, the SKK developed the first edition of the Special Breed-Specific Instructions (BSI) which address exaggerations in pedigree dogs. The BSI aim to identify characteristics at risk for exaggerations and remind the show judge to increase his/her

awareness of those risks. The instructions are the result of an inventory made possible through extensive collaboration between dog show judges, breed clubs, veterinary surgeons and health insurance statistics.

Research

The SKK provides substantial financial support for several research projects. Current projects include, for example, studies of genetic testing for eye diseases in various breeds and assessment of dog behaviour. To enhance research in dogs, SKK supplies researchers with pedigree information as well as records on health and behaviour. Hence, the SKK database offers unique possibilities for epidemiological, behavioural and genetic studies in dogs.

International Collaboration

Canine sports and dog breeding have now become relevant at an international level. Many Swedish breeders export dogs, compete with their dogs abroad and search for breeding stock outside Sweden. We are, therefore, both affected by international events and conditions and hope to use our views, approach and experience to influence others. The SKK is a member of the international kennel club organisation Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI), and is well represented on several committees and working groups. Through its open register policies and accessibility to data, the SKK may serve as a model for the kennel clubs of other countries and the organisation is committed to promoting international collaboration to support the world of dogs.



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