



# media release

Monday 16 March 2015

## **52 BORDER COLLIES PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT FOR WORLD GLAUCOMA WEEK**

### **Animal Health Trust marks international awareness week with Border Collie Day to help research into canine glaucoma**

An estimated 1,500 dogs each year in the UK alone are affected by primary glaucoma, with the majority of animals having to have both eyes removed. Veterinary charity the Animal Health Trust (AHT), based near Newmarket in Suffolk, has recently launched a six year research study to try to prevent this from happening.

To mark World Glaucoma Week (8 – 14 March) the AHT held a Border Collie Day on Friday 13 March at its site near Newmarket. 52 Border Collies and their owners attended the day - some of whom travelled from as far as Doncaster and South Wales to attend the one-off event - where talks were held to explain more about different research projects currently being conducted by the AHT in the breed, including glaucoma and epilepsy. The owners also contributed to the AHT's glaucoma research, greatly boosting the sample numbers from Border Collies, by allowing eye examinations and DNA samples in the form of cheek swabs to be taken from their dogs.

The new research led by Head of Canine Genetics, Dr. Cathryn Mellersh, (pictured, centre) and veterinary ophthalmologist, James Oliver, supported by generous funding from Dogs Trust, aims to develop DNA tests to identify dogs at risk of developing inherited glaucoma. By removing at risk dogs from the breeding population, the prevalence of glaucoma could be drastically reduced over time.

If successful, the DNA test could benefit a number of popular dog breeds as well as Border Collies including Golden Retrievers, English and Welsh Springer Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels and Basset Hounds.

Dr. Cathryn Mellersh said: "The Border Collie Day was a great success and really helped us to spread awareness of canine inherited glaucoma, which is a problem not enough dog owners are aware of. It's heartbreaking to see dogs go blind and have to have eyes removed due to this sudden and aggressive form of the disease.

"There is a lot of research ahead of us but, with enough support from dog owners and breeders, like those who attended the Border Collie Day, we hope to be able to make a difference and develop a simple DNA test to quickly identify which dogs possess the genetic abnormality responsible for this condition. If we can achieve that, then hopefully, in the future, fewer dogs will suffer from this painful and blinding disease."

James Oliver added: "Most of the breeds we're investigating for glaucoma are on the BVA/KC/ISDS Eye Scheme for hereditary eye diseases which advises screening for goniodysgenesis before breeding. Goniodysgenesis is an abnormality affecting the drainage pathway of the eye and is known to be significantly associated with glaucoma. However, we've learnt that goniodysgenesis can be progressive with age, so screening a young dog may not be conclusive enough. That's why a genetic test would be ideal and would have a much greater impact on reducing the number of dogs affected by glaucoma in the future."

In order to better understand inherited glaucoma the AHT is collecting DNA samples in the form of a cheek swab from dogs diagnosed with glaucoma, dogs diagnosed with goniodysgenesis and dogs over the age of five clear of goniodysgenesis. Geneticists at the AHT hope to make significant steps towards identifying the mutation(s) responsible for goniodysgenesis in different breeds.

Owners of Border Collies, Flatcoated Retrievers, Welsh Springer Spaniels, Cocker Spaniels, American Cocker Spaniels, English Springer Spaniels, Basset Hounds, Golden Retrievers, Leonbergers and Dandie Dinmont Terriers who fit the criteria are able to help the research by consenting to eye examination and submitting DNA samples from their dogs.

For more information on the research and the breeds affected, please visit [www.aht.org.uk/giftofsight](http://www.aht.org.uk/giftofsight)

### **Support the Gift of Sight Appeal**

If you would like to support the AHT's research to fight canine glaucoma you can make a donation to the Gift of Sight Appeal at [www.aht.org.uk/giftofsight](http://www.aht.org.uk/giftofsight) . Please give whatever you can. Your support could help the AHT to find answers sooner and help prevent more dogs from suffering with this painful and blinding disease.

**Ends**

### **For further information, please contact:**

Katherine Lawson, AHT press office, 01638 751 000 ext 1511

### **Additional notes:**

- The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing more than 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](http://www.aht.org.uk)