



# Breeder Referral



Concerned breeders of Shetland Sheepdogs are striving to breed healthy Shelties and decrease the incidence of heritable diseases in the breed. Hip Dysplasia, eye disease, dermatomytosis (Sheltie Skin Syndrome), von Willebrand's disease (vWD) which is a bleeding disorder, and epilepsy are some of the known health problems of the breed. Although these problems are not common in the breed, the Board of the American Shetland Sheepdog Association recommends that questions about the health of the dog and its relatives be asked when inquiring about the purchasing of a puppy.

Shelties in general are a healthy breed, but the breeders should not take that for granted. They should be aware of the problems and take measures to minimize the incidence of them. There are tests available to determine if the breeding stock is affected by any of the aforementioned problems.

In looking for a new Sheltie puppy, it is suggested that you look at the following health criteria. With any health, temperament, or physical attribute it is important that BOTH PARENTS be considered. Both the sire and the dam should have had their hips checked for normal hip conformation. The breeder should be able to provide copies of an OFA certificate or a PennHip evaluation for each parent. It would be nice to see that the hips had been checked for many generations on both sides (OFA # or PennHip #). If the sire or dam is less than 2 years of age a preliminary OFA radiograph should have been done. PennHip can be done as early as 4 months of age. With these younger sires and dams the test status of the grandparents (their parents) becomes much more important. Both the sire and the dam should have their eyes checked yearly by a Board Certified Ophthalmologist. The first one can be done as young as 8 weeks so there is no excuse for a dog of breeding age not to have been checked at least once. This is most commonly done through a CERF examination. The owners should have copies of the exam that was given to them at the time of the exam. Thyroid screens should be available on all sires and dams. Since it is a disease of middle age, one test at less than 2 years of age is not going to give you much reassurance. Again, the thyroid status of the grandparents can give more information with younger sires and dams. Either a DNA test or blood titer levels can screen for Von Willebrand's disease. This can be done at any age. If the DNA test is used, a dog would not need to have been tested if both his sire and dam were genetically clear, since the offspring of two genetically clear dogs can only be genetically clear, ask for a copy of the DNA clearances for the parents. These are the diseases reputable breeders have a way of screening for in their breeding programs. None of these tests (except the vWD genetic test) necessarily guarantee that your puppy will not develop problems since many factors can be involved. It is important for a puppy buyer to find a breeder that tests for the common diseases and gives a health guarantee with each puppy they sell.

It is very important that you know the right questions to ask of the breeders to help you determine if they are the right breeders for you. Do they show their dogs or compete in obedience or performance events? Dog shows are a breeder showcase where the dog is judged against the breed standard. A lot of champions or working titles on the dogs in their pedigree indicate dogs that are more structurally correct in regard to the breed standard. Working titles also indicate a good temperament and intelligence. The dogs are willing to take direction and work for the owner. Ask what health problems are in the breed and what tests that they run on their breeding stock. Ask what health guarantee they offer. Ask what they do with their puppies while they are growing them out. Do they temperament test their puppies? This type of evaluation helps determine what type of home will be best for the puppy.

Also, expect to answer a lot of questions from the breeder. You may be asked about your background with animals you have owned and what happened to those animals. You may be asked



# Breeder Referral



why you want this particular breed and why one particular sex over another. They may ask if the dog is going to be kept indoors or outdoors and whether you have a fenced yard. You may be asked about your schedule and how long the puppy is going to be left home alone. You may be asked if you have children or other pets.

The breeder has the puppies for the first couple of months of their lives and there is much that can be done with the puppies to help their development. Ask the breeder what care and activities have been done with the puppies. Puppies that are given a lot of attention and are touched and handled, and receive sound and visual stimulation during each day grow up to be well adjusted dogs. The first 16 weeks of a puppy's life are the most crucial. They are an open book during this time period and the things that they experience will imprint during this time period. The things that are done during this period will pretty much make them who they are going to be for life. It is important that the breeder takes the time to work with the puppies to maximize their development and help attain their maximum potential. They are still trainable throughout their lives, but the temperament that they will have is going to be determined during this time period.

Here are some examples of what a breeder can be doing with their puppies: They are handled daily from birth. They are carefully examined and weighed daily during the first week. During the first two weeks their world is dark and silent. They only have their sense of smell and touch. These senses can be stimulated during this period. The military has worked with dogs extensively for over 40 years and has found that mildly stressing puppies during this time produces dogs with superior intelligence and problem solving abilities. Mild stressing consists of taking a puppy in the second week and holding it in different positions each day for about 15 seconds. For instance, old it on its left side, the next day on its right side, then head down and tail up, on its back, etc. Then they are placed on a cold surface for a brief period. Starting on the third week they will have their feet pinched and ears pinched. They may cry out briefly but quickly quiet. These are things that stimulate the brain and help develop neural pathways. Usually puppies' eyes open between the second and third week and they begin to hear.

During the fourth week they can be introduced to different surfaces such as carpeting, linoleum, concrete, grass, etc., trying to expose them to as many different textured surfaces as possible. They are also given a variety of toys that help stimulate them. The puppies can be introduced to a crate with the door removed at about 4 weeks of age. They begin to sleep in it as a group. This helps at the age of six weeks when putting them individually in one at night with the door on it. This really begins the process of housebreaking. At the age of 5-1/2 weeks or so put a collar on the puppy and a couple days later introduce them to a leash and start lead breaking them. Usually by the age of 7 weeks they are lead broke and will walk on a leash. They can be introduced to cats by the time they are six weeks old and also take them for rides in a car. They get to meet different people as well so they are used to meeting strangers.

At 7 weeks the litter can be temperament tested so one can better evaluate their temperaments and decide what type of home environment will be best for them. It helps match puppies with the best type home. A puppy that is a little more docile and quiet may not do as well as a more energetic puppy with a family with children. These are just a couple things a temperament test will reveal. A breeder can provide an owner's guide that answers a lot of questions that you may have. It covers a wide variety of subjects. Your breeder should be a continual resource for information and support for raising your puppy/dog. If they don't know an answer to a question, they will try hard to find one from another breeder who may have had experience with a particular problem. This is a lot of information being given you, but a decision to buy a puppy should be done with a lot of care and consideration. Visit several breeders. Look at their dogs. Do they appear well cared for? How well behaved are they? What type of temperament do they have? The temperament of dogs is generally passed on to the offspring. It should be a long-term relationship and if you do your



# Breeder Referral

---



homework and find the right breeder, it should be a rewarding experience. You can expect to have a sheltie for 12 to 14 years and you want to do it right! Don't be surprised if you may need to be put on a breeder's waiting list for a puppy. An excellent book to read before searching for a puppy/breeder is "How To Raise a Puppy You Can Live With" by Rutherford and Neil from Alpine Publications. This book will give you a lot of insight and understanding of what it takes to raise a puppy and also help you understand what to expect a good breeder to be doing with their puppies while in their care. Another excellent book to read that has a lot of good information also is "The Art Of Raising a Puppy" by the Monks of New Skete from Little, Brown and Company. This book really gives a lot of insight to the different developmental periods that a puppy goes through. The book "Sheltie Talk" by McKinney and Rieseberg also available from Alpine Publications is considered "the bible" by many sheltie fanciers.

For a list of Sheltie breeders in central Indiana, please contact Tom Schultz at [Shownoff@aol.com](mailto:Shownoff@aol.com).