

My story

My name is Tanja Loerup and I'm the proud owner of 2 barbets (and a German longhaired pointer). A wonderful male called Helmuth from 2012 (Majtipans Spicy Chili) and a very sweet and sensitive female called Vera from 2015 (Peliyah de l'Esprit de Bonté).

Helmuth is my first barbet. Early on I saw some signs that worried me. When he played with other dogs, he would run for a few minutes and then go sit or lay down and watch the other dogs play. At that time he was about 1 year old. And that didn't feel normal to me for a young male.

He could also sleep in the living room and suddenly lift his head and start panting.

I tried to rationalize: "It must be because of his hormones...". And I would keep an eye to see, if it stopped as he got older.

When he was 2 years and 4 months old we got a message from his sister's owners that Alma had been heart scanned and the scan showed DCM (dilated cardiomyopathy) (I have the permission to mention Alma in my story☺)

Immediately we went for a heart scan and it showed preliminary DCM. That means that the value, that shows how the heart contracts, was very low. Normally it should be around 37. Helmuth's value showed 16 and if it went below 14-15 he would have to go on heart medicine.

It made sense to me now. And I was relieved that I was not just overreacting.

Every year he goes for a new heart scan to follow the development. And every year I get equally nervous to hear if his condition has gotten worse. Luckily he is still off medicine and I was lucky that his sister has a good vet, who discovered her condition early on, so she gets her medicine and I can keep an eye on my boy.

We do rally-o and he plays a bit with other dogs. He is very good at regulating his capacity himself and as long as I respect his signs, we live an almost normal life.

How the idea for the survey started

Some months ago I heard of incidents with young barbets that had died from sudden heart failure. I got curious (and again, a bit worried). Therefore I asked around in my Barbet network if they knew of dogs with heart problems, and within a few days I had a list of 20 dogs that had died from sudden heart failure or had a heart disease.

Therefore I see a need for a survey to find out how many more affected dogs there are out there.

I would like to find out the extent of heart issues in the breed. Maybe it is normal compared to the number of dogs in the breed, maybe the number is low or maybe there is an incipient tendency? I don't know and that is what this survey should help clarifying,.

I'm doing a private study. That means that no company or breed club has asked me to do the survey. I'm doing it out of personal interest because I see a need. And by academic I mean that I only ask for information, not blood samples or other material.

The survey is divided into 3 chapters.

My intention is that only people with affected dogs will answer. And for that I see 2 situations

1. Either you have a dog with a heart disease diagnosis and you will answer chapter 1.
2. Or you have a dog that has died from sudden heart failure and you will answer chapter 2.

Chapter 3 also concerns those dogs and I ask into other diseases to see if there could be a link between the heart cases and other diseases. That means that it is not an overall health survey but still pointed to the dogs with heart issues. For instance if you have a dog with allergy but a strong, healthy heart, you do not need to answer the survey.

When the survey is finished I will do a report where I gather the findings/results. I expect to do

- a sum up of affected dogs pr. country
- what kind of heart diseases found
- the age of death or diagnosis and
- a list with the names of the affected dogs in the survey (before I make a list, I will write every respondent to ask for their permission to publish the name of their dog and those who accept will be on that list)
- Maybe some more graphs depending on the amount of responses.

I will send the report to the breed clubs, and after that it is up to them, how they would like to use the information in their forthcoming breeding strategies. Or to see if it is a disease their health committees should give more attention and look further into in the future.

Best-case scenario for me would be that the survey is taken seriously, it reaches as many barbet owners as possible, people are supportive and open-minded and in the end I don't get many answers. I see the need to learn more about the extent and pass it on. Hopefully there is nothing to be worried about.