

Considering Importing a Dog? – Some Words of Caution!

There are quite a few registered Therapets, or dogs living in the same households as Therapets, that have been imported from abroad. Canine Concern Scotland Trust has always considered this a laudable trait as volunteers have been kind enough to offer good homes to dogs that may have had a bad start in life and come from foreign rescue centres or other underprivileged sources.

However, while it is not a policy of the charity to discourage the import of dogs and to have them registered as Therapets once assessed, it is important to point out that there are health risks attached to importing, and it is strongly advised that if you are considering doing so, you should have a discussion with your own vets first to get their opinion on the pros and cons of importing, particularly if you have a dog from a specific source in mind. Such contact will have the added advantage that, if you then decide to proceed with the import on the basis of their advice, your vets will be geared up on arrival to examine the dog and the accompanying certification and be in a position to carry out any relevant tests.

There has been a surge in importing dogs in recent years. While the great majority of these are legal and carry all the relevant certification of the vets abroad, some paperwork, particularly associated with dogs from Eastern Europe, has been found to be fraudulent. In addition, there is now a large trade in illegal imports, mainly of puppies of fashionable breeds such as French Bulldogs and Boston Terriers – these puppies are often transported immediately after premature weaning, and long before they are old enough to have started, far less completed, vaccination courses.

What are some of these risks? There are a number of diseases, previously unknown in the UK, that are starting to appear.

Some of these are carried by insect or other arthropod vectors – examples are leishmaniosis and ehrlichiosis – the PETS travel scheme formerly minimised that risk by insisting on treatment against these external parasite vectors before coming into or returning to the UK. At the time of writing there is still uncertainty about how the successor of PETS may be managed after 31 December depending on what deal is struck with the EU, or if no deal at all. Apart from carrying these diseases, these vectors themselves may be brought into the country inadvertently and become established with the risk of further spread of the diseases amongst the UK canine population.

Arthropods that have always been resident in this country such as the sheep tick may also evolve to carry these more exotic diseases. An example of such a disease that is capable of being carried by the sheep tick is a form of babesiosis which destroys red blood cells, causing severe anaemia and often death.

There have also been reports of novel worms appearing such as Linguatula which can reside in the nose of the dog and be sneezed out. There is a slight zoonotic risk with this worm as humans can be the intermediate host in its life cycle. Other worms which may appear are the skin worm and the eye worm Thelazia.

Finally, some of these diseases are very slow in developing. Clinical signs of leishmaniosis may take years to appear – perhaps long after an infected dog was imported. It is important to remember that dogs coming from rescue centres may have had a very poor start to life and have become infected when they were much younger.

We do not wish to scare-monger but a cavalier approach to, or lack of awareness of, the risks of importing could have serious implications for your dogs and other people's. Therefore, seeking veterinary advice before considering importing should be a priority, and proper veterinary examination afterwards - of the dog and the certification - if you do decide to proceed, should be considered a must.