

Guy's story

A more handsome puppy you couldn't have wanted and I was so chuffed that he was to be mine.

He grew in leaps and bounds into a prince charming as befitted his breed. He acquitted himself well at his first of only 2 shows, how proud was I? Towards the end of the shooting season he was introduced to the shooting field and this was taken all in his stride, so at this young age life for this chap looked rosy.

I should have known it wouldn't last.

At just 8 months old I began to notice that the drinking bowl was always full of slobber and the said chap seemed to spend a lot of time trying to quench his thirst. Also, at this time it was getting difficult to keep weight on him although he was always very fond of his food! (another plus for a vizsla). The problem was that although he would eat his food he would promptly regurgitate (not vomit) the majority of it only to eat it again and at this point by and large keep it down. I put this down to him eating too fast. I introduced a raised bowl for feeding (the water bowl had always been raised) to see if this would help; it didn't. Apart from this problem he was full of life and I put the apparent throat irritation down to maybe a feather from a practice pigeon.

After approximately 10 days the weight really started to drop off and as I'd heard of 'a cousin' being lost to mega oesophagus I thought that this looked like a possibility. Off to the vets we went.

Following a very traumatic day at the vets with them looking specifically for this condition (they had agreed it was a possibility) the conclusion was that he didn't have megaesophagus. Not much help in some ways as their other suggestion was that it might be viral! All we could do was to wait for the lab. results to come back. When they arrived they showed very elevated creatine kinase (CK) levels. This is an enzyme produced during muscle breakdown and it is used as a marker for hereditary muscle disease in humans.

My boy was then dosed up with anti-biotics, anti-emetics and steroids and sent home on observation.

The condition did actually settle down very quickly; by the next day he was a different dog and life went back to normal. Slobber in the water bowl not really noticeable, the stiff back occurring intermittently (a couple of days every 3 weeks or so but never with any pain evident). He continued to be fed from an elevated bowl for the rest of his life. The food was fed soft and often had tinned meat or tripe in with it to make swallowing easier. I'm not sure this made any difference as bonio type biscuits were the easiest for him to eat. The regurgitation still continued but in a much less dramatic fashion and his weight went back to just about normal.

For about a year I had a fairly OK dog and assumed that he just had a sensitive throat.....wrong!

During this time the odd rear gait showed up now and again but this was just for a few seconds at a time most often, and never any evidence of pain involved.

The shooting season started with a very capable retrieving vizsla. This came to an abrupt end due to the birds having their feathers removed during the pickup. This, I believe in retrospect, was due to his declining jaw strength as eventually he couldn't open his mouth very wide at all. The shooting season was cut short for this little dog as later was his life.

Months passed by with no particular change although clearly this wasn't your 'normal' juvenile vizsla although he never lost that sense of humour which is so endearing of our breed (and even more so in the boys, I would say), yes I am biased.

At around the age of 2 years things quite suddenly took a turn for the worse. The gait became much stiffer and going for a run in the field or on the moor was no longer an option, weight dropped off despite my best efforts to feed him. The technique was to sit him with his back between my legs and sort of feed him as if one was feeding a pelican fish, but food couldn't be too runny as this would cause him to choke. The water bowls (I now had 3 on the go all the time to give his kennelmate a chance of clean water) were always full of slobber and bits of food, and were not at all pleasant.

Off we went to the vets again but I had this feeling that things weren't good. They couldn't find anything last time to account would they have any more idea this time?

After the initial comment of 'he is thin and doesn't look at all well', nothing specific could be diagnosed but mega-oesophagus was still a possibility. He went onto a drip with antibiotics and steroids with the option to review the situation in the morning. I was given the option for a referral to a vet school for fluoroscopy and to have his chest opened. This I declined as the prospect of a 2 year old vizsla post this procedure wasn't something I wanted for my dog. So I sat and waited for that phone call to say the battle had been lost; but no, morning came and no phone call.

I phoned the vets. They were astounded by the improvement and said, 'take him home and enjoy him'. This I did immediately and home he came with his drug supply.

With the old spring back in his stride and oddly the stiff gait gone, the following day I packed a picnic for 'himself', his viz. kennel mate and I, and went off to his field to blow away the cobwebs.

A more beautiful summer's day you couldn't have wished for. The dogs obviously enjoyed the sun on their backs and had a good play and dashed in and out of the river (I had a paddle too), and took it turn having a puppy dummy retrieve (he couldn't hold the normal size anymore). This was done with a heavy heart as I really knew that we would be unlikely to do this again and I took many photos to capture the occasion.

We were now entering what turned out to be the last two weeks of his short life. For the first week with injections every two days and being handfed as often as possible anything from sardines to tripe, he did well and even put on a little weight. By the second week he lost his appetite for food and couldn't drink. At the end of that second week and still on treatment he had that haunted look in his eyes and was so thin, and just wanted to sit with his head on my knee.

He'd had enough, so at just past his 2nd birthday he was set free from his suffering.

Guy died in early 2005. His life was not in vain. As a result of his and other vizslas' contribution to the research more and more vets - at local and specialist level - are starting to recognise the clinical signs associated with our breed specific presentation of Polymyositis. With prompt diagnosis and treatment the disease can usually be well controlled.