

Health Focus: OFA

The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA: www.offa.org) was founded over 40 years ago. The OFA collates and disseminates information concerning orthopedic and genetic diseases of animals.

When elghund breeders refer to OFA, they typically mean a hip x-ray evaluation. OFA also manages evaluation and databases for elbows, thyroid, and a number of other health related areas. The dogs reported in the normal range include ratings of excellent, good, and fair. Abnormal results are dogs that have been rated as borderline or dysplastic (mild, moderate, severe).

As a breeder sending off an OFA x-ray, it sometimes seems that the process has a touch of randomness to it (at least in terms of guessing the OFA rating). A good x-ray also plays a big role — there are many tales from breeders of the same dog with different rating scores based on different x-rays (sometimes varying between an abnormal and normal reading). OFA uses an average from the readings from 3 radiologists to try to reduce the effect of a single bias.

Ratings aside, a good hip x-ray is an important part of a breeder's toolbox. ALL breeding stock should be x-rayed and breeders need to educate themselves about how to interpret x-rays. The OFA site has quite a bit of information, including pictures and sketches of the basis for the various ratings. A tight joint with nearly complete coverage of the ball by the socket is optimal and is needed to acquire the highest ratings. A dysplastic dog will have

subluxation with a shallow socket that does not cover the ball well. Severe cases will exhibit bone changes in the joint. As technology continues to develop, 3-D radiographic evaluations will become more commonplace with electronic records the norm.

Preliminary x-rays can be done on young dogs, but a dog must be at least 24 months of age to receive an OFA rating. The current hip statistics for elkhounds from OFA are 78.8% normal and 19.6% abnormal. This means that nearly 1 in 5 elkhounds are rated in the borderline or dysplastic category. Keeping in mind that those dog owners taking the time and money for an OFA evaluation are likely to be breeders or those with show/performance dogs, these numbers are something to ponder. It's up to our breeders to keep only dogs with healthy hips (verified by x-ray) in the breeding pool. A comparison between OFA and other ratings such as PennHip is a discussion for another day.

Submitted by Andrea Schokker (Highland)



Contrary to popular myth, dogs favoring the “frog leg” position (like this pregnant mom) are not more prone to hip dysplasia

