



THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC —THOUGHTS GOING FORWARD

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Little did we know towards the end of last year, when we were all looking forward to seeing in the New Year, that 2020 would plunge us into a situation that maybe only a handful of people in our lifetime had ever encountered before. Whilst severe epidemics are not uncommon, we are fighting something for which we, at the time of writing, have no known cure. This has left people frightened and confused and the way forward hasn't been clear for us. Challenging and scary times.

I believe this is Mother Nature saying 'ENOUGH'. The human race is systematically destroying the habitat in which it lives. We are never going to outsmart nature; we may have amongst us brilliant people who will find a cure for Covid-19, but there will always be something else waiting for the right time to strike, unless we learn the lesson.

This is the time for a massive wake up call and for us to start trying to right the wrongs. Look at how many things have improved without us! We can all hear the birds singing, the waters are running clearer, the air is fresher – the planet is repairing itself, because we are in lockdown. That says it all.

I hope the lessons are well learnt from this, priorities put back in place and we can learn to live in harmony with nature and each other.

In the scheme of things, all matters dog related pale into insignificance. However, for many of us dogs aren't just a hobby, they are a way of life. A deep love for our own certain breeds, a desire to breed on to strive for better and also a way of existence. The question was asked recently on social media about whether people missed dog showing and whether they would go back to it when the time was right. Many people answered that they didn't necessarily miss dog showing itself, they missed the social side – meeting up with friends, enjoying the atmosphere of a show and talking about dogs. Of course, many wanted to get back to actually showing their dogs, to bring out puppies that had been hidden from view or to take their dogs out in Veteran for the first time but mainly it was about the social side and missing seeing friends.

Here in the UK, the way forward is still far from clear. We are

just starting to witness a downturn in the pandemic and the commencement of slight easing in the lockdown measures. For some this is welcome news, for others a relaxation of the lockdown fills them with fear and trepidation. Only time will tell if there will be a second, more serious wave of this awful virus. We have, as a nation, been trying hard to obey the rules but there are always people who think "it'll never happen to me, I'll be fine" and carry on regardless.

One thing is certain, life will not be the same on the other side of this pandemic and this can't be a bad thing. How it will affect the dog world will remain to be seen. Whether dog shows will survive is unknown – so many factors to be taken into account: health and welfare of people in general; the actual logistics of running shows; whether or not showing contractors survive. From a breeding point of view, how easy will it be to find good homes for giant breed puppies? Will some of the good breeders who consistently produce quality hounds, decide now is the time to stop breeding? If demand for puppies is down, one glimmer of hope is that this may drive out the puppy farmers.

The after effects of the current situation will need careful monitoring so that committees can formulate plans for the future to ensure the continuation of their breed. It will be important for the different arms of the breed (health group, rescue trust, breed bodies) to liaise and report on emerging trends, e.g. participation levels in the various health schemes; whether the number of hounds entering rescue is on the increase; whether registration numbers are falling significantly whether membership numbers are dropping off in the breed clubs. It is only armed with information from a combination of breed organisations that we can hope to protect the breed we love.

In an ideal world, we will come back from this better people with renewed priorities and a desire to prevent this happening again. Of course, from our perspective we want our hobby to survive, although realise that this may take a different form to the dog world we currently know. I certainly hope we can look back on this experience and know that we learnt the lesson.