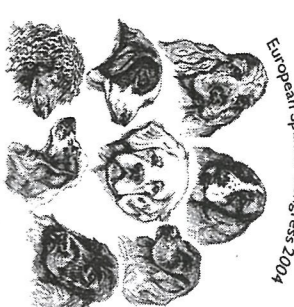


Spaniel enthusiasts meet



United Spaniel Association

THE IDEA of an European Association of spaniel breeds and breed clubs goes back to the late, lamented Dr Esther Rickards and the accolites of the 60s and 70s who foresaw the advantages. That the original constitution, a copy of which is before me as I write, was adopted in 1970 and amended in Strasbourg in 1980 will surprise many readers.

The aim of the council was to 'investigate and deal with all matters of general canine and international interest, more specifically affecting the spaniel breeds'. It was typed-up, remember those things, by none other than that great supporter of the spaniels in Holland Haja van Wessem who was there 24 years later still supporting the principles involved.

For the third time in sixteen years the European Spaniel Congress was held in Britain - this, the 18th., over the WEIKS weekend at the Abhey Hotel in Malvern. Fine Spring weather greeted delegates from Europe and senior representatives of breed clubs in the UK.

Many arrived on the Thursday and Friday in time for gundog day at the show and OUR DOGS, one of the sponsors of the congress along with Putina and Fosse Data Systems, was pleased to host a welcome buffet attended by over 50 people on the Friday evening at the hotel.

With the town's close connections with the composer, it was appropriate that the congress was held in the comfortable Elgar Suite but incongruous that the warm sunshine had to be blocked out of the room for the audio visual presentations.

After the very British welcome from the Malvern Town Crier, congress chairman and USA president Mr Chris Bexon welcomed the delegates and speakers in German and French, first to the dais was OUR DOGS columnist Mrs Peggy Grayson who spoke on the History of the Sporting Spaniel. Dealing with the land spaniels in particular she kept the audience's attention for a solid hour, tracing the setting spaniel from the courts of continental Europe to England to the cocking spaniels of the early 18th century.

With specific reference to the Clumber she outlined the development of the breed from Mansell's breed - a gamekeeper on the Duke of

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Newcastle's Clumber Park estate; the Welsh from the red and white spaniels bred exclusively in South Wales becoming the famous 'starters' in the valleys; the field, she said, was a man-made breed bred specifically for show purposes but which had a common link with the Sussex, Cocker and American Cocker.

The modern cocker owed its development to the Claude Phillips, a founding director of OUR DOGS and Richard Lloyd father of the famous HS 'Lloyd' of Ware' and it was the introduction of spaniel trials 1896 that encouraged the formal split in the breeds. Until then it was quite common for one litter to contain and be registered as various breeds!

Moving to the English Springer she explained the liver Norfolk Spaniel was undoubtedly the foundation of the breed and again breeders would very often have and register Fields and English Springers in the same litter.

The Sussex's past is, said Peggy, less certain, except to say that traces of the breed on the Duke of Norfolk's Arundel Estate can be found and that self selection played a major part in the breed's evolution into a dog of substance to match the terrain on which it was worked.

Dr Cathryn Mellersh PhD then kept the audience quiet for 40 minutes during her complex explanation of the principles of DNA testing for the Inherited Canine Diseases. She had



● OUR DOGS columnist Mrs Peggy Grayson was the first speaker tracing the history of the sporting spaniel

worked on this in the states where the Canine Genome Map is complete and now worked at the Animal Health Trust. She gave examples of how such research had helped to control or point the way forward in breeds such as Miniature Bull Terriers with PLL or Golden Retrievers with MRD.

Pleasures

With time running tight Mark Clifford addressed the congress on the subject of working with sporting spaniels. A KC 'B' panel spaniel field trial judge and FT secretary of the Midland ESS Society he spoke of his experiences training and winning at trials and also as a judge and outlined the pleasures and pitfalls. Using a video taken at the last spaniel championships held in Scotland he commented on the quality of the work at the top level.

Supported by Anne Greaves, he also encouraged minor spaniel breeds to pursue the dual purpose ethic and to try the Show Spaniel Field Day run by the MESSS.

After a quality lunch in the Garden Restaurant we had to forgo the sunshine through the Virginia Creeper-clad windows for the afternoon session!

Speaking on the future of the European Spaniel Council Dr Peter Beyersdorf of Germany outlined the revisions worked on by Brian Shears and asked that the delegates took these to their countries and their committees for careful consideration. He said the exchange of views was important and spoke passionately about the unification of standards and his regret that some countries in the world had placed a greater emphasis on appearance rather than the standards of the countries of origin.

Touching on the difference in working practices with the cocker in European countries he pointed out that France 'no longer wished to be involved with the ESA' - a point quickly refuted by the French delegate Mlle Yvette Chavernac of Lyon who speaking through interpreter Kathy Gorman said this was not quite right as she was there representing France! What they were opposed to were hunting practices with the breed in Switzerland where it is worked on deer and ground game.

There followed a paper collated by Marie Louise Doppelreiter after the last congress in Nürtingen, Germany which dealt with Breeding Rules for Spaniels presented to the congress by Andrea Carrasco of Switzerland. Delegates were asked to review the points raised with their breed club committees in time for the next meeting of minds in Austria.

Reinhold Brechtel of Austria addressed the congress on the very subject of the next congress outlining the new website www.eurospaniel.org - asking that



● Dr Cathryn Mellersh of the AHT who spoke on the principles of DNA testing and the genetic causes of inherited disease

● Andrea Carrasco of Switzerland presented a paper commissioned at the last congress on 'Breeding Rules of Spaniels' collated by Marie Louise Doppelreiter



links to it be made to improve traffic. The plans for the 2007 congress will take the enthusiasts to Laxenburg some 20km south of Vienna and Vöslau. As well as being close to Vienna it was a beautiful country area, said Herr Brechtel.

Concluding the day with a powerpoint presentation was Yvonne Billows, secretary of the ESSC, who with Lesley Bloomfield gave an excellent visual story of the ESS breed since 1931 to the present day. It was a show that could set a standard for other breeds to follow.

Remarkably the time scheduled had slipped away and despite some over-running ESC chairman Chris Bexon rose to his feet to draw the proceedings to a close. The 2010 congress would be hosted by the Czech Republic, a new EU member state, and drawing in the threads of the discussions of the last few days he said that everyone would take away concerns about the frequency of boosters and vaccinations; the implications of the opening up of the eastern borders of Europe to ten new members EU states on the PETS scheme and the movement of dog throughout Europe; the Show Gundog Working Test and the KC and FCI discussions on the cross recognition of member countries' awards in the field.

Superb

The evening saw an enjoyable dinner to cap the congress day and the realisation of over £600 from a raffle and auction of items unique to the spaniel breeds. To complete the weekend the Sunday saw a gundog working test on the Whitfield House estate in nearby Gloucestershire judged by Mark Clifford and Prof Simon Allison in superb sunshine with the overseas' visitors returning to the WEIKS show for best in show judging.

As if to emphasise that the spaniels had been in town a poster in another local hotel, not a stones throw from the Abbey, for a singer Si Nichol featured a guitar and - yes - an English Springer!

● ESSC secretary Mrs Yvonne Billows (left) presented a succinct powerpoint show on the spaniel since 1987 assisted by Lesley Bloomfield



● Mark Clifford who spoke on working with spaniels was assisted by KC Field Trials Manager Mrs Anne Greaves



● Reinhold Brechtel of Austria (right) introduced the ESA website and Austria as the venue for the 2007 congress



● Mrs Gina Bowers (centre) secretary of the United Spaniel Association accepts a token of thanks from President Mr Chris Bexon and Mrs Maria Hunstener of Switzerland



● Dr Peter Beyersdorf (Germany) who addressed the congress on the 'Importance of the European Spaniel Association' accepts a token of thanks from Mrs Gail Hay