Winter/Spring 2025

International Windsprite Club

Quarterly Newsletter

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The IWC Communications Committee is pleased to bring you the first of our quarterly newsletters for 2025. We hope you enjoy reading updates covering various club and community happenings throughout the first three months of this year, as well as an informative piece about Windsprite dental care and a statement by the IWC Board of Directors about the new genetic testing for the risk variant allele related to copper storage and what it means for our breed.

Remember that this newsletter is not possible without your contributions! Please send thoughts, suggestions, and submissions for the newsletter to Jessa Michie, IWC Committee Chair, or to any other member of the Communications Committee on Facebook Messenger or via email to internationalwindspriteclub@gmail.com!

Special thanks to photographer Carolyn Chow for the use of her photos!

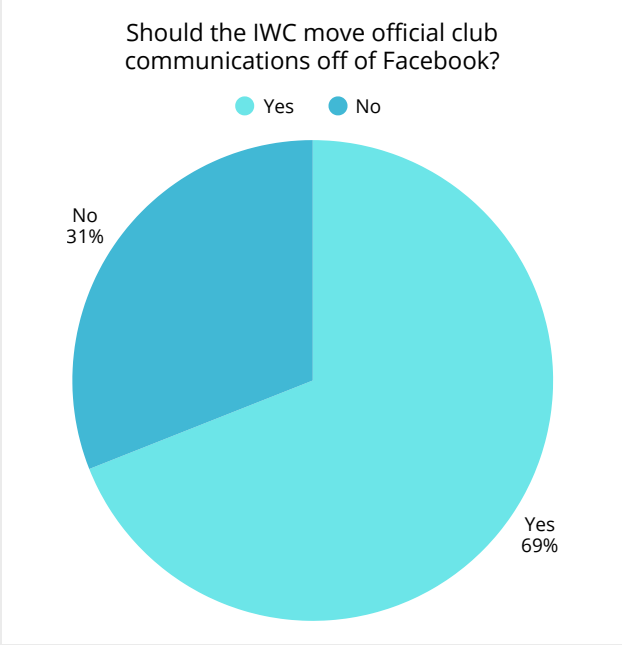
Announcements

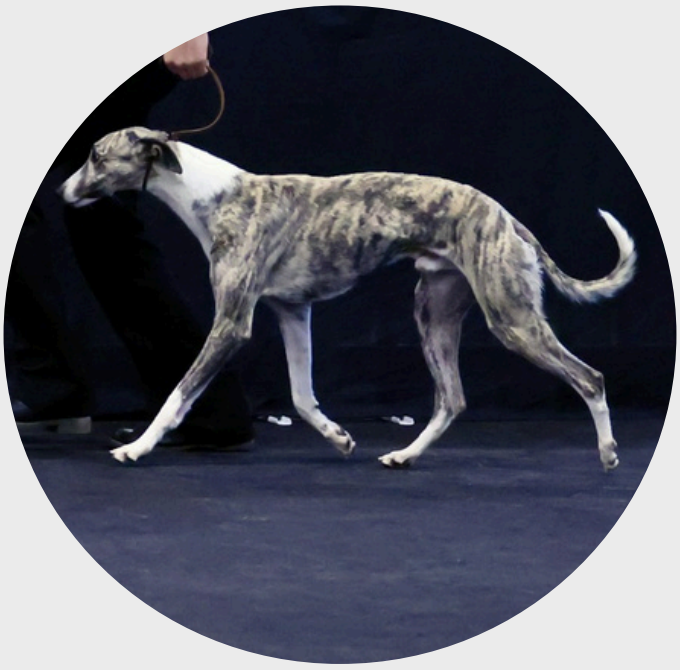
Changes to Official Club Communications

In January, the IWC Board of Directors passed a motion that the Communications Committee be tasked with polling the club members about the use of Facebook for official club communications. The poll was specifically in regards to the future of the private, invitation-only "IWC Members" Facebook group, which is currently used for sharing official club business and updates with members in good standing, in supplement to the use of email communications.

The Membership has expressed a desire to move official communications off of Facebook, with poll results of 69% “Yes” and 31% “No”. The IWC Board and the Communications Committee thank those members who participated in the polling.

Members should stay tuned for more information regarding the changes.





Recognizing Our New Titleholders

The following Windsprites earned new titles at the New England Winter Specialty Show this February!

CONFORMATION CHAMPION (CH)

- **Tova’s Megan Rapinoe Rocks of Crystal Spirit “Maggie Mae”**
  - *Owned by Pat & Cathy Stogryn and Jean MacKenzie*
- **Blue Mist Bogart & Bacall at Tova “Tigger”** (pictured at right)
  - *Owned by Jean MacKenzie*

Working Windsprites

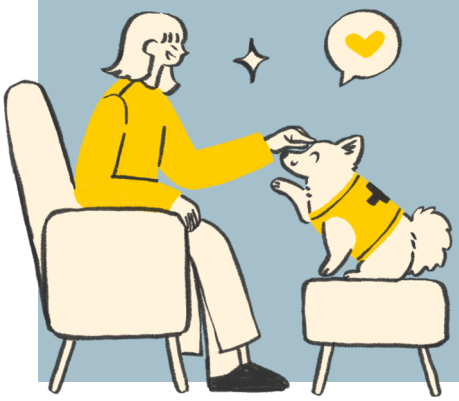
Work is often seen as one of the things that sets us apart from our pets. The lazy, carefree life of a dog is glorified as something we can aspire to in our next life. For Therapy Dogs, that is not necessarily the case! With Therapy Dog Appreciation Day approaching on April 11th, we wanted to recognize some of our hardworking Windsprites!

Donna DeVoist, Wink and Cleo's owner, says: "My favorite part of therapy work is seeing my calm dogs help children get over their fear of dogs."

Above right: Wink Destressing college students. Above left: Wink's mom, Cleo, relaxing while reading with kids.
Left: Wink on the job.

From Sharon McIntyre: "Lark and Tess love their therapy work at our local library. I so enjoy watching children curl up with a sweet dog and a book that they are excited to share. I realized that this was a wonderful way to share my special girls, when my mother became ill and spent some time in a medical facility. Although she was not certified at the time, Tess was allowed to visit, and this really opened my eyes to the incredible benefits of a therapy dog."

Left: Left to right, Tess, Lark, and Briny (still earning her certification).



Windsprites are particularly well suited to therapy work due to their calm demeanor and their openness to new people. In addition, their exemplary handler focus makes it much easier to navigate in environments that can be distracting.

If you're looking to begin therapy work with your Windsprite, read on for some advice from our members!

Laura, Luca's owner says: "Luca is level headed, nonreactive, and sweet. His new friends LOVE how soft his coat is! He mostly prefers high school and college age folks who will get down on the floor with him for belly rubs--he doesn't seem to understand that older folks are not quite so willing to get on the floor with him when he rolls over."

Right: a drawing of Luca that one of his friends completed during a therapy visit

Below: Luca on the job.

Advice from IWC Member Therapy Dog Teams

"I also would recommend Alliance of Therapy Dogs. They were great to work with! The hard part of the therapy dog test is often the part where they have to remain quietly with a stranger while you go out of sight. Both of my girls struggle with this part, but luckily Alliance of Therapy Dogs does not require that!"

-Sharon McIntyre

"If people are considering therapy work, I think the biggest thing is to read your dog and give them a break/shorten the visit if needed. Meeting new people is very tiring!"

-Laura Pollock

Fable's owner, Jessa Michie, says: "Fable is a natural! She took to therapy work immediately, with a seemingly innate sense of what people need from her in the moment. She especially adores working with special education children in our local schools."

Below and right: Fable on the job.

Did you know that February is National Pet Dental Health Month? Some sighthound breeds, such as Greyhounds, are more likely to be prone to dental disease. What about Windsprites? Dogtor Luca provides a veterinary perspective on the issue of canine dentistry, an area of care that can dramatically impact your dogs' comfort and quality of life.

Dogs Have Teeth, Too!
Canine Dental Best Practices

What can I do at home?

As with human beings, the most effective strategy to maintain dental and periodontal health is regular toothbrushing!

Dog friendly toothpaste in a variety of flavors is readily available in retail shops and a regular soft bristled human toothbrush can be used just as easily as a pet-specific option. Bear in mind that there is a learning curve associated with toothbrushing! The vast majority of pets must be taught intentionally to tolerate home dental care, much like trimming their nails or brushing their coats.

Dogs of any age, from young puppies to seniors, can be taught to handle toothbrushing. It is never too late to begin toothbrushing, with the exception of pre-existing oral disease and pain. If a pet already has severe gum recession, sore or bleeding gums, or infected teeth, toothbrushing will not only fail to improve the health of these severely compromised teeth, it will also reinforce to our pet that this activity causes even more oral pain than they already experience. Wait until your pet's mouth is healthy again prior to beginning a toothbrushing habit.

If you would like to consider adjunctive treatments, such as water additives or dental chews, the Veterinary Oral Health Council (VOHC.org) publishes a list of options that have some evidence of reducing plaque or tartar. Keep in mind that these products have to be used as instructed on the label in order to be effective, which typically means daily administration.

Scan the QR code to see the VOCH's list of approved products to support your pet's dental health care!

Beware of "Anesthesia-Free" Dentistry

Simply and bluntly put, dental scaling (removal of tartar, also known as calculus) while awake is useless at best and harmful at worst.

The Useless: *The calculus you see above the gumline is actually causing a lot less problems than calculus below the gumline. You cannot effectively clean or examine below the gumline or on the backside of the teeth on an awake pet. While the teeth may look whiter, the effect is cosmetic only.*

The Mildly Harmful: *Scaling the teeth of any species causes roughening of the enamel. A rougher enamel will collect more plaque and calculus than smooth enamel does. This is why your dentist polishes your teeth after a cleaning! This cannot be performed effectively in awake pets.*

The Significantly Harmful*: Ultrasonic, mechanized scalers actually produce significant heat when applied to teeth. Teeth can be damaged or devitalized (read: killed) from this excessive heat! This is why veterinary ultrasonic scalers require a very specific technique and continuous water cooling and an abundance of care.*

What type of dental care can a veterinarian provide?

Your veterinarian will almost certainly recommend an anesthetized oral health treatment at some point in your pet's life. This may include:

- Anesthesia so all areas of the mouth can be examined and treated without anxiety or pain
- Radiographs of teeth to evaluate the tooth roots and jaw bone
- Removal of plaque and calculus (tartar) above and below the gumline
- Additional treatment of any teeth with special needs - root planing, application of topical products to the teeth or gums, or surgical extractions

Why might my veterinarian recommend tooth extraction?

I frequently tell clients that pulling teeth is like pulling teeth. It is no fun for anyone involved! However, there are times when extraction is required to restore or maintain a healthy, comfortable mouth for your pet. Your vet may recommend extraction if the following are present:

- a devitalized (dead) tooth or badly fractured tooth, if a root canal is not pursued
- damaged or infected periodontium (the gums, ligaments, and/or bone surrounding the tooth)
- interference with another tooth or oral structure (e.g. pinching a lip or poking the palate)

Anyone who has had a toothache can attest that oral pain can be excruciating. Extracting painful teeth can make a world of difference in a dog's quality of life. A typical adult dog has 42 teeth. Even with a few less teeth, their life will be significantly improved by removing the source of oral pain.

With just a little bit of help from you, your Windsprite can maintain a healthy mouth of pearly whites for his or her entire life! Don't forget this vital part of your pup's care.

FUN FACT

Many dogs with no teeth have ZERO "doggy breath!" While fresher breath shouldn't be a major deciding factor, you WILL absolutely notice an improvement in breath odor when dental disease has been properly treated.

Have you got questions about the health, care, and keeping of the Windsprite breed?

Dogtor Luca takes requests!

Please contact a member of the IWC Communications Committee to make suggestions for future articles!

IWC Board Statement on Frequency of ATP7B Risk Variant, Impacts on Breeding Choices & Copper Associated Hepatopathy in the Breed

As of Dec 10, 2024, Atp7B and/or Atp7A genotype data has been submitted for 113 IWC registered Windsprites. For Atp7B the genotype frequencies reported to-date are 19% NN, 58% NM, and 23% MM. The variant risk allele frequency is 52% meaning that 52% of the alleles in this tested population are the risk allele. Atp7B data from 115 European Windsprites tested through Feragen are not drastically different (the variant risk allele frequency in that population is 54%). For Atp7A (the gene that has the 'attenuating variant') the genotype frequencies reported to-date are (for females), 23% NN, 68% NM, and 9% MM and for the males who have only one copy of this X-linked gene, 67% N and 33% M.

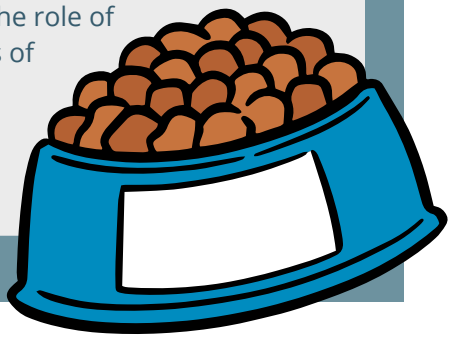
Atp7B Variant Allele and the Risk of Copper-Associated Hepatopathy

As IWC board members, we are concerned about the high frequency of this Atp7B risk variant in the breed. The allele frequency of Atp7B has very likely been high in Windsprites since the early days of Windsprites. Although ~23% of Windsprites have two copies of the risk variant and 58% have one copy, there are no indications that copper-associated hepatopathy (CAH, pathologic copper accumulation in the liver over time) is prevalent in the breed. A definitive diagnosis is not trivial and requires an invasive and costly liver biopsy. Two Windsprites to-date have been diagnosed formally with CAH by a liver biopsy after notice of abnormal high liver enzyme values with routine bloodwork. Late stage/untreated CAH results in liver dysfunction with symptoms that can include (for example) jaundice, weight loss, lethargy, excessive thirst, fluid accumulation in the abdomen, neurological problems, and diagnostic abnormal blood test results. It is not at all apparent that Windsprites are experiencing liver dysfunction in significant numbers despite the high numbers of Atp7B MM individuals. However, the board will task the newly formed IWC Health Committee with inclusion of information on general liver health when regularly collecting data on the overall health of the breed.

With regards to the role of the Atp7B risk allele in CAH, several points should be noted. In Labrador Retrievers, the presence of the Atp7B risk allele was associated with increased liver copper levels while the variant in Atp7A was associated with lower liver copper levels (Fieten et al. 2016). Fieten et al. 2016 found that these two variants together only explained 12.5% of the genetic variation in liver copper levels hence the designation of Atp7B as a "risk" allele and not a "causative" allele such as the mutant allele that causes MDR1. There are other factors (including diet, see below) involved in determining whether a dog will in fact develop CAH. A recent study at Michigan State (Langlois et al. 2022) that studied 90 Labrador Retrievers did also conclude that the Atp7B variant contributed to CAH. However, 47% of the CAH dogs in the study did not have an Atp7B risk allele, and 25% of the dogs without CAH did have the variant risk allele. In summary, there are risk variants in other (unknown) genes that contribute to this disease, at least in Labs, and the environment also likely plays a significant role.

Diet and Copper-Associated Hepatopathy

In addition to the contribution of genetics to CAH, much research has focused on the role of diet in the accumulation of excess copper in dog livers. In a 2018 study of 546 dogs of various breeds, a significant increase in liver copper levels was noted in samples collected between 1982 and 2015 (Strickland et al. 2018) and coincides with changes made to the type and amount of copper added to commercial dog foods.



These changes are speculated to be one of the main drivers of the increased CAH/CT cases seen today across breeds (Center et al. 2021). In "Copper hepatopathy and dietary management" published online by the Riney Canine Health Center at the Cornell University of Veterinary Medicine, ~1.8 mg/1000 kcal of copper is recommended for adult dogs and ~3.1 mg/1000 kcal for growing puppies.

IWC Board Recommendations

The Atp7B risk allele has been found in significant numbers across many breeds (Haywood et al. 2023). Given the high frequency of the Atp7B variant in Windsprites along with the absence of data to-date demonstrating that it is contributing significantly towards CAH in the breed, the board at this point in time is recommending that (in general) breeders not prioritize Atp7B genotype information when making breeding decisions. The board recommends that breeders take care to not breed Atp7B MM x Atp7B MM dogs. Removal of all MM dogs from the breeding pool would constrict the genetic diversity of the breed and could easily backfire and inadvertently cause another untested, and more serious 'disease' allele to become more abundant.

If you have not yet had your Windsprite tested for Atp7A and Atp7B we urge you to consider doing so. Knowledge regarding the Atp7B genotype of intact males will be useful for those with MM females in their breeding programs. And conversely knowledge regarding the Atp7B genotype of your breeding female should affect your choice of a sire if she is MM. Importantly, knowing whether your Windsprite has this risk variant will help guide you and your veterinarian with regards to the scheduling of regular bloodwork to to monitor basic liver function.

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IWC Renews Partnership with GenSol

The International Windsprite Club has renewed their partnership with GenSol Diagnostics, a canine genetic testing company. If you need to test a Windsprite for a specific gene without running a full, detailed panel, GenSol is a great option. With the renewal of this partnership, IWC members in good standing receive 20% off of their first GenSol order, with no minimum. The exclusive discount code has been emailed to current members by club president, Donna DeVoist. Free first-class shipping is also included on domestic orders of $50 or more within the United States.

Community Corner

Recent Regional Meetups

In the Midwest and the Southeast, there have been two recent regional meetups with small, but enthusiastic attendance! In each case, current Windsprite owners were outnumbered by curious prospective future owners, excited to meet the breed in person. These events have been wonderful bonding experiences for the growing communities in the regions, as well as serving as excellent opportunities for ambassadorship. The dogs had a fantastic time as well, of course!

Three generations of Wisconsin Windsprites run together at the Midwest Windsprites meetup in Central WI on March 9th.

Windsprites gathered from three different states at the Southern Sprites meetup near Atlanta, GA on March 22nd.

You can stay tuned for more upcoming informal community events, such as the Play Day being held in North Carolina in early April, by joining the **Friends of the International Windsprite Club**, **Midwest Windsprites**, and **Southern Sprites: Windsprites of the Southeast** Facebook groups.

Upcoming IWC Shows

The premium is available now for the Mid-Atlantic Spring Specialty show, which will be held May 16-18th. Due to growing entries, the Agility competition has been moved from Saturday to Friday, along with the opportunities for puppy runs and qualifying to race typically available that day. See the Upcoming Events page on Windsprites.org for more details about our 2025 specialty shows, including yet-to-be-announced information about the New England Fall Specialty, which usually takes place in October.

Please note that the New York Summer Specialty Show, previously held in July, has been rescheduled to September 12th-14th. Agility will be held on Friday at the New York show as well.