Executive Summary

The Swedish Vallhund Society undertook an online Mortality Survey with the aim to establish a more accurate average age at death for the breed in the UK; to produce an average lifespan as data of this type in the UK is lacking. Results were collected across both pet owners and breeder from within and outside the club to gain a wider cross section of the breed.

Information was collected on a total of 42 deceased dogs with the Average Mean age at death rounded to the closest year at 13 years (12.85) with the most common cause of death being old age (20 out of 42 dogs) followed by cancer (6 out of 42 dogs). This lends credit to the claim that the Swedish Vallhund is a long lived breed.

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Introduction

The Swedish Vallhund Society decided to undertake a Mortality Survey to assess the breeds current Longevity as data of this type in the UK is lacking. The Kennel Club conducted a health survey in 2014 however information on only 4 deceased dogs was submitted. The Finnish Kennel Club has been collecting this data since 1988 to the current date, including 200 dogs at the present time. This gives the Finnish Club a more accurate idea of average age at death in their country, which currently stands at 10 years 5 months.

The Using this collected data the club aims to establish a more accurate average age at death for our breed in the UK. This will allow us to produce an average lifespan. As the breed has a small gene pool breeders must ensure they keep in mind the breed's longevity to avoid shorting lifespans seen in some breeds today. We hope to find the results of this survey will show the breed to be as long lived as previously believed.

Methodology

It was decided to use an online survey due to its ease of use, people could fill it out in minuets and it could be emailed, uploaded to the clubs website and shared on social media. Using an online survey verses a paper one also had the benefit of not costing the society any funding as the survey site used kwiksurveys.com is free to use for all, and there is no postage costs. This also means there is no risk of surveys getting lost in the post.

The designing of the survey itself was kept simple and to the point as long or complicated surveys run the risk of not being completed. It was felt the survey should be able to be filled in for multiple dogs rather than for just one dog. While this meant more work to correlate the results it made it more likely owners would fill it in for all of their deceased dogs rather than just one or two. This is because making it a single dog survey would involve taking up more time to fill them in, for example say an owner had five deceased dogs, submitting five separate surveys would take much longer than submitting just the one. Each survey could be filled in for up to ten dogs. Once this was decided we needed to create the questions for each dog and make sure the dogs would not be confused. We did this by asking only two questions per dog, 'How old they were when they died?' and 'What was the cause of death?' then each question was ladled Dog 1, Dog 2, Dog 3 etc. This prevented confusion and aided in correlating the results. It was decided it was best to allow people to remain anonymous when filling in the survey as this would encourage people to be honest and open when filling it in.
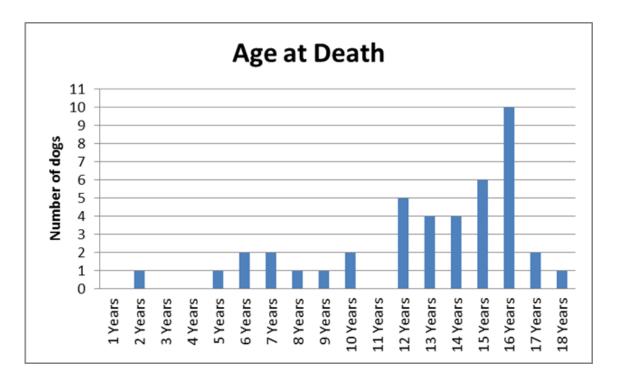
Once constructed a link to the survey was uploaded to the clubs website with members being informed of this as well as to social media via two Facebook groups: Swedish Vallhund Enthusiasts (The Society's Facebook group) and UK Swedish Vallhunds (Open to anyone interested in the breed). This allowed the survey to reach not only club members but all owners active online, even ones outside of those places as people could share and email a link to the survey.

The Survey went live on March 23rd and data was collected on April 3rd due to the large response in such a short period. The survey will remain open to allow more data to be collected on a yearly basis. The data was entered into a spreadsheet program creating a table for both age at death and causes of death. Using the data collected an average age at death was calculated for all dogs as well as average age of death per cause of death. Charts were also made to help display the data.
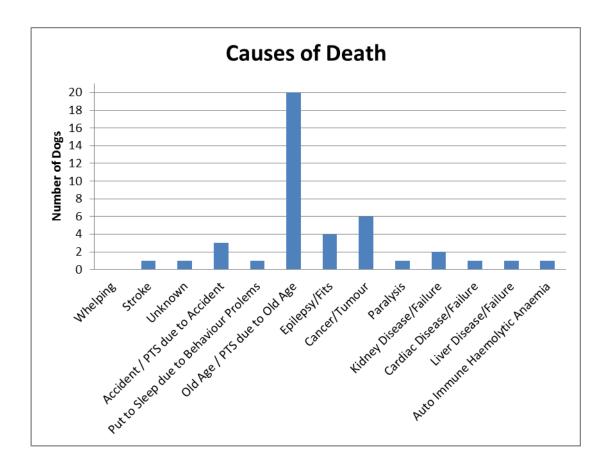
Results

Age at Death

Information was collected on a total of 42 deceased dogs, with an age at death ranging from 2 years up to 18 years with 76% of dogs living past the age of 10 years. The Average **Mean** age at death rounded to the closest year is 13 years (12.85), **Mode** is 16 years and **Median** is 14 years. The graph below displays the age at death for all 42 dogs.

Causes of Death

The causes of deaths were also recorded for all but one of the 42 dogs; and included 17 health related deaths, 20 deathsdue to old age. Deaths unrelated to health problems were also recorded in the form of 3 accidental deaths and 1 being put to sleep due to behavioral problems. No death were recoded due to whelping problems. On the next page is a graph showing all causes of deaths and the amound of dogs recorded.

Below is a chart showing the **Adverage Mean** age at death per cause of death.

Cause of death	number of dogs	Mean Adverage Age
Accident / PTS due to Accident	3	10 Years
Put to Sleep due to Behaviour Prolems	1	2 Years
Old Age / PTS due to Old Age	20	15 Years (15.25)
Whelping	0	0
Epilepsy/Fits	4	12 Years (11.75)
Cancer/Tumour	6	10 Years (10.17)
Paralysis	1	14 Years
Kidney Disease/Failure	2	15 Years
Cardiac Disease/Failure	1	10 Years
Liver Disease/Failure	1	12 Years
Auto Immune Haemolytic Anaemia	1	7 Years
Stroke	1	6 Years
Unknown	1	16 Years

Discussion and conclusions

According to the Kennel Clubs 2014 Health survey the average lifespan for all purebred dogs was 10 years old, so an average 13 years for our breed is currently higher than that across all breeds. This backs up the common thought that the Vallhund is a long lived breed.

Many believe that deaths due to things such as accidents, whelping problems and putting to sleep for behaviour should not be included in calculating a breed's longevity, although currently if these dogs are removed it makes little to no difference to the final results as the Average Mean age at death for just the dogs who died as a result of old age or a health problem is still 13 years (13.36) as the ages of these 4 removed dogs were 2, 8, 6 and 16 years.

The most common cause of death reported by far was old age with a mean average age of 15 for this category. Something that is encouraging to find. This is in line with the Finnish Kennel Clubs statistics the second most common cause of death after old age is cancer. This is something that should be considered by breeders as the breed continues into the future to avoid the cancer rates in the breed reaching higher levels.

The survey was a success and completed its objective. The longevity of the breed should be updated each year as more data is added to keep it current and accurate. To meet this future aim it has been decided the survey will be left open indefinitely.

Appendices

http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media/782751/pbhs_2014_infographic.jpg

Cause of death	Average life span	Total
Accident	6 years 2 months	21
Age (natural or euthanasia)	14 years 6 months	48
Congenital defect or malformation of a puppy	0 years 1 months	1
Damage done by large carnivores	1 years 11 months	1
Dead without diagnosis of illness	6 years 11 months	1
Endocrine disease	9 years 10 months	3
Euthanasia due to behavioral problems	7 years 6 months	3
Euthanasia, non-diagnosed	10 years 6 months	8
Heart disease	11 years 2 months	12
Immunological disease	5 years 1 months	2
Jecur or digestive disease	9 years 9 months	9
Lost	1 years 11 months	1
Neurological disorder	0 years 8 months	1
Other unspecified disease	9 years 8 months	8
Respiratory disease	10 years 11 months	2
Skeletal or articular disease	9 years 5 months	2
Skin or ear disease	1 years 6 months	1
Spinal disease	7 years 6 months	6
Tumor, cancer	10 years 5 months	42
Urinary disorder	10 years 0 months	3
Cause of death not specified	9 years 10 months	27
Altogether	10 years 5 months	202

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