The New Zealand Police Dogs

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify characteristics of dogs to be used by the New Zealand Police Section for their dog breeding and selection programs. Only one scientific paper has been published on selecting dogs specifically for police dog work. Currently, no statistical analysis has been conducted on any of the New Zealand Police Dog Section's data.

A questionnaire on all aspects of police dog work was sent to the 120 operational police dog handlers working in New Zealand. The majority of handlers rated their dog high for a number of traits and areas of police dog work but their ideal dog rated very high for the same traits. The handlers ranked from highest to lowest the traits 'prey drive', 'trainability', 'activity', 'obedience', 'playfulness', 'independence' and 'aggressiveness'. This gives an indication of the relative emphasis that should be given to the traits in a selection program. Improved stud selection, better monitored foster homes, more consistency between regions and the training centre and having more dogs for selection are improvements that can be made.

Annual reports from dog trials for the years 1997 to 2000 were analysed by ANOVA to enable the calculation of repeatabilities for each activity. The activities 'heel free', 'retrieve', 'down stay', 'sendaway', 'recall and redirection', 'distance control', 'speak on command', 'track', 'article search', 'passive attack', 'chase and recall', 'chase and attack', and 'control' were measured in all four annual reports. The activity 'search and escort' was measured in 1999 and 2000. The highest repeatability (0.48) was for 'speak on command' and the lowest repeatability (0.03) was 'track'. There were insufficient data to enable the estimation of heritability values.

During the annual trials each activity should be separated into handler performance and dog performance to give an indication of the performance of the dog alone. If the traits

essential for each trial activity were identified and measured when the activity was being tested then a repeatability study on the trait alone could be conducted.

This report identifies several areas where changes in trait definition and the collection of information could be used to improve the efficiency of the police dog breeding program.

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1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Police dog teams have become an essential part of the New Zealand Police force and are popular with the public and the media. There are currently 120 operational general purpose police dog teams around the country. They are used for locating missing people, tracking down lost property, apprehending criminals and for street patrol. The New Zealand Police Dog Training Centre was set up in 1956. The Police Dog Section breeds police dogs and uses dogs donated from the general public and the Guide Dog Services.

The scientific literature on the breeding and selection of police dogs is limited to one paper. In this paper a series of behavioural tests were conducted on puppies from eight weeks to nine months of age to test the predictability value of the tests in identifying the future working ability of the puppies as police dogs (Slabbert and Odendaal, 1999). At present, no research has been conducted on police dogs in New Zealand.

This present study aims to change this by:

- conducting a questionnaire aimed at the police dog handlers
- analysing the annual reports of the current operational police dogs
- analysing the breeding lines of current police dog breeding stock

The major goal of this study is to use the available data to set up a selection and breeding programme to improve the standard of the police dogs bred at the Dog Training Centre in Trentham.