

### **When to Breed**

Bitches usually come into season at 7-14 months of age and approximately every 6 months thereafter. The first signs of season are swelling of the vulva and a blood tinged discharge and lasts 21 days. The bitch should not be bred from until at least the second season and it is best to breed early and then stop as soon as possible. Never breed after 6 years of age, and be aware of Kennel Club rules on breeding ages.

### **Time To Mate**

Usually the bitch will not accept the male during the first week of the season and it is usually best to mate her 24hrs after the discharge turns a straw colour which is usually the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> day of the season. It is best to repeat the mating every 36-48 hours to maximise fertility. Alternatively mate when the bitch is first responsive and repeat every 48 hours until the male is rejected. Before mating it is wise to have an exam including general health check, worming, vaccination status and gynaecological exam.

### **Gestation Period**

This lasts 58-68 days with an average of 63 days. Do **NOT** increase the amount of food during pregnancy but ensure the food has good quality protein. Exercise should not be reduced and the bitch should not be allowed to become fat or lazy. During the last two weeks exercise may be reduced to more leisurely walks. If you wish to have the pregnancy confirmed the best stage is at 4-5 weeks to have an ultrasound scan. Over the last two weeks of pregnancy increase protein slightly and it is advisable to give a mineral supplement. Please ask if advice is required.



### **Parasites**

Worm against round and tapeworms before mating and then again with a daily dose of Panacur from day 40 until 2 days after whelping. This minimises transmission of worms from bitch to pups. This is important as worms can be transferred to the puppies across the placenta and in Mum's milk!

### **Pre-Whelping**

Ten days before whelping is due, prepare a large whelping box to get the bitch used to it beforehand. Newspapers make good bedding and the top layers can be changed as they become soiled. The box must be free from draughts. The hair should be gently clipped away from the vulva and teats if necessary.

### **Impending signs of whelping**

A lack of appetite, a drop in body temp of 0.5-1 degree centigrade, restlessness, anxiety, panting and discomfort. The bitch may tear up her bedding and attempt to make her nest. A slight clear mucous discharge may be passed from the vulva within 24hrs of whelping.



## Whelping

Do not fuss otherwise the bitch may become upset. Initially the contractions are quite mild but they become more forceful. The first pup is usually born within 2-3hrs of strong contractions. More pups will follow at intervals of 10 minutes up to 2 hours. The whole litter is usually born within 12 hours. Pups are usually born within a sac which the bitch tears open, if this does not occur you may need to break the sac to help the pup breathe. This is most likely to happen with the first one or two pups of a maiden bitch. The bitch then usually cleans the pup. If the umbilical cord is not broken it can be cut about 1 inch from the pup's body using a clean pair of scissors, it does not need to be tied. The afterbirth can be disposed of. It is advisable not to let the bitch eat all the afterbirths (1 or 2 is fine) as this may make her feel sick.

When whelping is proceeding normally, the bitch should be left alone. Clean and dry the pups only if the bitch does not do it. Do not handle the pups or interfere unnecessarily with the bitch. Offer water to the bitch between pups.

### Signs of possible trouble –

- A green discharge at any stage prior to the first pup
- Continuous strong contractions for >2hrs with no pup presented
- Exhaustion of the bitch
- Longer than 4 hours between puppies
- Part of a pup protruding but not presenting further within 10 minutes

If any of the above signs occur please contact the surgery for advice.

## Post-whelping examination

have your bitch and pups checked at the surgery within 24 hours of birth if possible. Bring the pups in a warm box with a hot water bottle.

### The lactating bitch

The bitch may eat up to 1½ times her normal feed by the 4<sup>th</sup> week post-whelping. Ensure a high protein diet and give a mineral supplement (Collocal-D is ideal). Supplementary feeding may be necessary for a large litter or a bitch with very little milk. Eclampsia is a condition that may occur any time up to 6 weeks post whelping, symptoms include panting, weakness, spasm of limbs and twitching. Treatment is necessary without delay. All vaginal discharges should have ceased by four weeks post whelping.

### Weaning

Weaning should start around the 25<sup>th</sup> day and should take 2 weeks to be complete. During this time the amount of food and fluids for the bitch should be decreased. After 4 weeks offer the pups water on a regular basis. At 4-5 weeks small amounts of complete puppy food can be offered, they should eat willingly. Feed puppies around 5 times a day in small meals.

### Hand rearing

may be necessary for orphans or neglected pups, feed approximately 6 times a day using a puppy replacement milk, such as Welpi. An infra-red lamp may be required to maintain warmth. It is necessary to gently massage under the tail several times a day (cotton wool or bud) to stimulate toileting. Pups eyes usually open at 9-14 days.

Please contact us if unsure about anything or you would like more advice! Remember, having puppies can sometimes involve a number of costs, especially if things go wrong, so always consider if this is the best option for your dog.

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