

Norwich Terriers, 08-20

Title: Responsible breeders and the pandemic-driven demand for puppies

It seems that when the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns began in March, lots of people decided it was a good time to adopt a dog or buy a puppy. Rescue organizations saw an unprecedented number of foster applications — a three to four-fold increase according to some reports. Breeders of purebred dogs are likely seeing a staggering increase in inquiries too. For those breeders seeking to make a personal profit, this is good news. For responsible hobby breeders dismayed by the commercial exploitation of our Norwich terriers, it is not!

Norwich terriers are increasingly popular, but based on the emails and phone calls I've been getting from people who want a puppy this excess pandemic-driven demand isn't a good thing. Many are mass emails, presumably to everybody listed in the Norwich Terrier Club of America online directory of club member-breeders. Many of the people inquiring have never seen a Norwich terrier — they've read about them and decided this is the perfect dog for them. More time at home means more time to bond with and train a new puppy, but what happens post-pandemic? On the other hand, for some people who were planning to adopt a dog before the pandemic, this could be an ideal time to take that step.

More than ever, breeders need to ask potential puppy buyers lots of questions. In addition to the usual questions (e.g., Have you owned a dog before? What kind?), ask potential puppy buyers what they know about caring for a wire coat? Coat care is important and time-consuming. Norwich terriers require regular grooming. Learning to hand-strip, or finding a groomer who will hand-strip, is an important consideration in choosing this breed. I'm dismayed by the number of people who want a Norwich terrier and know nothing about hand-stripping. The "affectionate, alert, curious" Norwich terrier pictured on the AKC website isn't the best dog for everybody.

Norwich terriers can be hard to find, and their scarcity has been reflected in the price for some time. They have small litters – three to four on average. According to AKC registration statistics, litter size has remained small at an average of 2.7 puppies registered per litter for the past decade. The number of registered litters declined during the period 2010-2014, but has been fairly stable since then, with a median of 207 litters registered per year, 2015-2019. The supply has not changed, but the demand has increased.

The supply-demand model is a fundamental concept of economics. The law of supply and demand predicts that the price of a good will move toward the point that equalizes the quantity supplied and quantity demanded. If quantity exceeds demand, sellers lower prices to sell surplus. If the quantity demanded increases beyond the supply, there is a shortage and sellers raise prices to make more money. So, with the excess pandemic-driven demand for puppies and a stable supply, we have a shortage of puppies that breeders motivated by personal profit are taking advantage of by raising the price they charge for puppies.

The founders of the Norwich Terrier Club of America guarded against commercial exploitation of the breed in writing the Code of Ethics, a document approved by vote of the Club's membership in 2010 and signed by all members agreeing to abide by basic principles. The COE goes so far as to list "breeding for personal profit or commercial exploitation of the breed" as grounds for disciplinary action. Raising prices to take advantage of an uptick in demand for puppies is harmful to our breed. The profit potential entices unscrupulous people to breed Norwich terriers to the detriment of the breed. Some will remember, in years past, when "faux Norwich" (typically Norwich-Cairn mixes) were sold at high prices to unsuspecting buyers.

The breeder motivated by personal profit will eventually fail. In his book, *The New Art of Breeding Better Dogs*, Kyle Onstott wrote, "The successful breeder of dogs breeds dogs not for the money to be made, but for the love of dogs ... undertaken merely for the money to be made from it, either will fail that unworthy purpose or will degenerate into merely turning out great numbers of dogs without regard to their merits or the betterment of their breed." His words, written in 1946, remain true today.

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