

THE CHALLENGE OF CANADIAN RYE AND OTHER “MEAN SEEDS”

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FIELD EVENTS

Sadly, in recent years, the Springer Spaniel Field Trial world has become more aware of illnesses befalling some of our dogs—sometimes fatally—due to infections attributable to barbed grass awns. These seeds can penetrate a dog’s body through the skin or enter by swallowing or aspiration. Once in a dog’s body, the barbed seed typically migrates, all too frequently leaving a trail of infection. Diagnosis and treatment are sometimes complicated, partly due to the fact that a dog does not always show specific symptoms until seriously ill and partly due to the fact that some veterinarians are unfamiliar with the types of infections these barbed seeds produce which, in turn, leads to delays in diagnosis and treatment. Some instances of these infections have led to the deaths of some fine Springers, the incidence of which seems to have greatly increased in just the past five to eight years.

The common denominator of these “mean seeds” is their barbs, which are analogous to fish hook barbs and which lead to the one-way migrations. Various species of plants entail these barbs, the most prevalent being so-called “Canadian Wild Rye,” “Virginia Rye,” and some varieties of fox-tails.

A common belief in Springer Field Trial circles—not yet substantiated by “hard evidence”—is that the escalation of this “mean seeds problem” in recent years is primarily attributable to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s inclusion of several varieties of the problematic plants on the approved list for CRP lands (as cover plants so as to provide protection for native grasses). Use of CRP lands has been important for decades for the running of

Springer Field Trials or for training purposes; and, far more frequently than years ago, potential trial or training sites have had to



USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Hitchcock, A.S. (rev. A. Chase). 1950. *Manual of the grasses of the United States*. USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 200. Washington, DC.

be discarded because of the discovery of “mean seeds” on the sites. Indeed, sometimes such a discovery occurs at the last minute (as occurred at the 2007 Springer National Open, near Rochester, Minnesota).

Also on the basis of purely anecdotal information, there is a common belief in Springer Field Trial circles that, particularly in the Midwest, various governmental bodies are using mixtures of “CRP approved seeds” for other areas, which may account for some reports about Canadian Rye sprouting on land adjacent to highway rest stops. Practically speaking, all dogs (including pets)

that romp through cover infested with the plants bearing the “mean seeds” are at risk, not merely gun dogs.

So as to organize efforts to mitigate the “mean seeds problem,” the Springer Parent Club in 2007 formed a “Grass Awn Committee,” which is currently concentrating on educational steps. One such step has been the posting of key materials on the Parent Club’s website. Included in the presentation are downloadable (a) articles providing medical information, (b) non-scientific articles focusing on heart-wrenching case studies, and (c) illustrative color photographs of some of the plants that entail the barbed seeds. This presentation is captioned the “Grass Awn Project” and can be brought up on the English Springer Spaniel Field Trial Association’s website (i.e., www.essfta.org).

There are, of course, various ways the AKC could be helpful in terms of mitigating this problem. In particular, the AKC could play an important role in educating the public about the problem, especially in terms of informing all concerned as to some of the available diagnostic and treatment information, as well as in terms of gathering more data relative to the incidence and nature of the problem. Ultimately, the AKC might be helpful in terms of leading a dialog with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the goal being the elimination of the “mean seeds” from the approved list for CRP lands. In all events, the Field Trial and Hunting Test Events Committee is analyzing numerous aspects of this problem, welcomes all input and questions, and will keep the Delegate Body advised of developments. 🐾