

Living with a wonderful Beardie with many health problems.

Having seen various articles about problems with Beardies I have decided to share the problems we have had with Lennon in the hope that they may well help others sometime.

Lennon (or Lennie as we prefer to call him) was born on November 28th 1991. We first saw him and fell in love with him in the following March. We had been looking, originally, for a brown beardie, having seen two in Richmond Park the preceding October. The only brown puppy we found was in Cumbria which would have meant picking him up in Birmingham, having not seen him at all, having never done this we decided we would rather meet our new puppy face to face first. Once we met Lennie our minds were made up, he was the perfect puppy and new companion for our ageing Old English Sheepdog.

We brought him home and found him to be all we had expected, easy to train, friendly, loving and playful, he fast became my constant companion, we are inseparable, he is definitely Mum's dog. Our Old English thought he was marvellous and found a new lease of life for the next 18 months.

Lennies' first problem and subsequent operation was that August when he became lame, it was diagnosed as Osteoarthritis, and we were warned at the time it may reoccur in later life. You can rest assured that whenever he is behaving like a 'normal' beardie and racing after a ball and turning fast, he will get problems. It does not cause him too much distress though, he takes Rhus Tox and has a BioFlow collar, both these seem to help and we rarely have to resort to the vet for help.

When he was about 10 months old he started having problems with his bowels, when he had to go, he had to go, fast, and he invariably did not make it out of the door in time, this persevered for a while with no obvious cause diagnosed. Eventually after endless tests he was found to be Pancreatic, (his pancreas does not work), many trials of food later, we found one that was virtually pre digested and with the aid of expensive supplements of pancreas powder have coped with the problem since. He does not have any 'strange' food, very few treats but as long as we keep to the rules he is fine, it does not seem to have affected him unduly. We now have a serious problem as Hill's have recalled all Prescription ID (owing to it's apparent use of Belgium food) and as I write this we do not know what the outcome will be, for the time being Lennie will be living on Fish/Chicken and Rice, which is exciting as his diet gets!

We thought these two were enough problems to be going on with and were completely unprepared for the next one. Exactly three years ago when he was the tender age of four in the space of 6 weeks, Lennie, although eating as normal, lost half his body weight, he lost all his 'sparkle' and just walking became an effort, he had aged in weeks. He had lots of tests at the vets, then an operation to check out all his intestines, he was so ill at this time that we were warned to expect the worse. Eventually, after a further four weeks, he was diagnosed, with the help of the Bristol Veterinary Hospital, with Addison's'

Disease, which is very difficult to diagnose. It is an 'ongoing' problem which will always be with him, he is now on pills, permanently, to control it and there are many drugs he cannot have, we tend to rely on the more alternative remedies as he can cope with them. We were told it would take him 6–12 months to recover, which was about right, he has aged considerably and tires easily, he has relapses and should he pick up anything (eg he picked up a virus from the sea a while back) he becomes seriously ill very quickly. The big achievement was a five mile walk that he managed in Scotland recently, yes he was exhausted for the evening, but we had taken it at his pace and he had enjoyed himself so much. We also have another Old English Sheepdog, (we lost our first one when Lennie was quite young), Sandy is 18 months younger than Lennie and full of life, out on walks she walks twice the distance that Lennie does but will always be back every few moments to check on Lennie and see that her 'mate' is alright.

From my point of view, through choice I will never leave Lennie anywhere without me, several visits to hospital myself meant leaving him and I worried more about leaving him than the operations I was having!! He has to wear on his collar, a message covering both the Pancreatitis and Addisons disease as it would be harmful for him to be given anything should he ever get parted from me.

He is a happy sole, still loves to play ball and plays in the sea and rivers endlessly, he loves to visit our daughter and her Beardie Maisie, they then race up and down the beach together, I notice on these occasions how much slower he is than the younger, fitter Maisie.

We are so lucky to have a wonderful vet who cares, and that the Addisons was diagnosed when it was, it is very difficult to diagnose and sometimes it is too late by the time it is thought of. My vets surgery has seen just Lennie and one other case in 20 years, which indicates that it is rare. It is treatable and as long as you are vigilant and know the dog well, (therefore noticing any changes in him) you can cope with it, we know that Lennie is not likely to live as long as we would like but at least, with treatment, he has already enjoyed three more years of fun than he may have done without the help of the vet.

I am only too pleased to hear from anyone having similar problems, as, from experience, I know that it can be lonely when you seem to have the only dog/child with a particular problem, and cannot find any reference to symptoms in any books.