

# Kennel Club must revise standards

Sir, It has taken far too long, but the collective sickness of showing dogs has at last been exposed as a force for disease and deformity ("BBC scraps coverage of Crufts over breeding standards fears", Dec 13).

The BBC, for decades giving gushing coverage to Crufts, the high temple of dog show fever, is to be thanked for coming to its senses, first to focus attention on the damage being done to pedigree dogs in its documentary in August, now by withdrawing from screening four successive nights of barking barminess.

Heading the list of breeds most genetically damaged is the Clumber spaniel. How so? The breed standard, the Kennel Club's description, in 2008 specifies a Clumber of double the weight given in the standard of 1908. Over those 100 years, four changes in the standard have each raised the size of the breed to match the dogs in the show ring. Hereditary defects have accompanied growth in size. They can be tolerated in the show ring — not in the field.

While the Kennel Club now complains that it is actively doing something, it is doing so too late, and only in fear of its reputation. It conveniently ignores its century-long collusion with the show interests from which it derives much of its income, to exaggerate breeds and disregard their real needs. It certainly does not deserve the greater powers that it is seeking.

Today's Kennel Club standard for the Clumber, Britain's grandest and

perhaps its oldest breed of working spaniel, calls "ideal" a weight of 80lb (36kg), while other worthless descriptions are also defined and in turn rewarded by show judges. Those of us who work this breed as gundogs have restored it to a model owing nothing to the Kennel Club standard, a type harking back to Victorian times when the breed was widely employed and respected in the field. We have done so despite the Kennel Club's regulatory role, not because of it. Improvements to physique have been matched by those to soundness, vigour, temperament and performance. Demand from sportsmen for true work-bred specimens has mirrored this progress.

If the Kennel Club is serious about reversing its behaviour and committing to improvement in dogs — so far we have heard only words — the redevelopment of the working Clumber over the past 30 years is a case worthy of study.

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