

# THE INTERNATIONAL BORZOI CONGRESS

THE INTERNATIONAL Borzoi Council Congress was held in conjunction with the Centenary championship show of the Borzoi Club in Kenilworth. There were a variety of speakers over the three days on topics closely related to Borzois, such as the situation in Russia today, and also on more general terms, *writes Desirée Scott*.

On the veterinary side Dr Peter Bedford from the Eye Department at the Royal Veterinary College spoke on inherited ophthalmic complaints which we in Borzois fortunately do not have as a major problems at the moment. Both he and Dr Malcolm Willis reinforced that we should be constantly wary of any genetic problem, and should one occur the only way to eradicate it arises when only a handful of dogs are affected, and that is by not using these dogs in breeding programmes.

Homoeopathy and chiropractic in the dog were also discussed, and there seems to be an increasing number of vets interested in the holistic approach to dog health.

Miss Murphy came over from Ireland, bringing a rather skinny dog with her. In fact he was a skeleton that she used in her most informative discussion on movement. The Borzoi shares some characteristics with her own breed, the Irish Wolfhound, both moving with the double suspension gallop. This way of movement is so described because there are two points during a cycle of motion when all four of the dog's paws are off the ground, when the dog is fully extended and then when all the legs are collected together. One of the most important points was that if a dog has good angu-

lation this will lead to good muscle. The importance of good side movement was emphasised.

Side movement occurred again in Dr Jim Sillar's talk on the Russian way of judging shows. There are only three classes for the breed, puppy (that is 10 to 18 months), young dog, and a class encompassing all the ones aged three to ten years. Each class takes about half a day to judge, and the dogs are walked around and around for hours. This way it is impossible to disguise any conformation faults by skilful handling when the dog was stationary.

## Registration

At the moment there is no central registration body in the same way that we have the Kennel Club. Each Borzoi is registered by one of the hunting clubs, or the kennel club that has jurisdiction over one city. There is a great emphasis on the hunting ability of the hounds, a dog cannot become a champion unless it has a hunting diploma, and it must also be scored on its pedigree and the quality of its offspring.

The title is awarded in a way most like the Seiger system in Germany, with only the best bitch and best dog at the annual show winning the title champion. If there is no hound that has enough points from pedigree, offspring, hunting and conformation to enter the elite class from which the champion is chosen, then there are no champion titles awarded that year.

Dr Sillars also presented some papers that he had translated from Russian, and

which are available as an illustrated booklet. One of the most interesting pictures was of the cousin of the last Tzar of Russia, Grand Duke Nicholas, whose Borzois are on the end of all our pedigrees.

A small group of Borzoi Club members have just returned from a visit to Russia, where they became the first westerners to visit the Grand Duke's estate since the revolution, but this visit is discussed in more detail elsewhere on this page. Richard Duckworth's talk about this visit was most inspiring.

Both Dr Sillars and Ursula Trueb discussed the early history of the Borzoi, Ms Trueb going far far back in the history of the dog to the original sighthound, a dog that looked more like an Ibizan Hound with its prick ears and ringed tail. These dogs were crossed with drop eared mountain dogs, part by design and partly due to the natural result of a dog finding a bitch in season. She demonstrated on a map of North Africa and Europe the Tartar migrations that brought these ancestors of the Borzoi to Russia. The Borzoi was developed as the hunting dog of the landowners, but became associated with the aristocracy after the land reforms of 1861. The serfs on the estates were freed, and this left the less wealthy landowners with insufficient income to support the kennels of hounds.

At the conclusion of the meeting it was decided that we would meet again in three years time for the next congress, which is to be held in Canada. The texts of this year's talks are to be published in the newsletter of the International Borzoi Council, next year. □