

# Erin News

[www.erinhounds.co.uk](http://www.erinhounds.co.uk)



Welcome to the 19th edition of Erin News - find out what has been going on behind the scenes as we head towards homing our 1100th hound.

## Bravo big-hearted little one

**Handed in by his 'owner' in exchange for a bag of cheap dog food and an old collar, little lurcher, Breffni (meaning "brave" in Irish) was emaciated, sad and unhappy.**

Fast forward 18 months and find him comforting humans who are suffering too. He and his owner have undergone the necessary work to become Pets as Therapy volunteers and he does 2 hour visits to Macclesfield Hospital where he meets both staff and patients.

Here's what his owner said after a visit "The patients are advised in advance that Breffni will be coming round and if they don't want to see him, for whatever reason, then we are told that when we get there. The vast majority of patients want to see him, are happy to stroke and pet him, and they like to tell us about their current or past dogs. The patients that saw him today were all very pleased to see him and enjoyed the experience - several of them didn't

want him to go! The nursing staff on the wards were very taken with him and some of them promised to bring some treats for him next week! Breffni himself found all the different hospital smells very interesting! Macclesfield Hospital have welcomed therapy dogs for a while now as they recognise the value to the patients and to the staff. One nurse made a real fuss of him and then said to me "I feel so much better for that". That's the sort of comment that makes all the hard work of getting him registered as a Therapy dog, and myself registered as a volunteer, worthwhile. His visits are not to be for more than 2 hours at a time, otherwise it would be too much for him. He was worn out after today and fell asleep as soon as we got home (although as he sleeps so much anyway, it's hard to tell just how tired it made him!). We will probably limit him to 2/3 visits a week in the future."



Breffni



Therapy dog

## Thank you

We are very grateful for all your kind donations including those from Jo, Yvonne, Celia, Joan, Jenny, Briony, Pam, Ragnar, Erin, Jane and Peter, Pauline and the late and much loved Lily who adopted greyhound Lexie from us and whose daughter, Zoe, kindly organised a wonderful donation in her memory.



Lily & Lexie

Thank you also to all those like Joan, Cate and Carole who have touchingly let us know that they shall remember Erin Hounds in their wills.

The ups and downs are legion in rescue and rehoming but one memorable "up" this year was receipt of a very generous donation from a man called Michael who simply said "We met one of your team last night on our management team night out. He had a lovely 3 legged greyhound with him." Thank you so much, Michael (and Ted!)



# Their memory lives on

In June, Ian, owner of the late Erin Hound, Tigger held a cake sale run by his talented sister and baker, in Tigger's memory, raising £95. He was a very loved and popular hound and his spirit lives on in the dogs whom this fundraiser will help save.



Tigger

# Great Global Greyhound Walk

Thank you very much to all who attended the Great Global Greyhound walk in October in Didsbury and raised £225 for Erin Hounds.



Greyhounds can be accused of being skinny (just jealous) but those on a mission to emulate them at Biddulph Slimming World group kindly donated their clothes rail proceeds to Erin Hounds.

A Christmas card was delivered and the donation collected by greyhounds, Coco ( foreground) and Bluebell. Coco and Bluebell received lots of fuss and admiration for their calmness and beautiful temperaments and were very proud ambassadors for Erin Hounds.



Coco & Bluebell

(Very sadly, Coco, who also featured in an article in Erin News in 2018 due to her sterling work for Therapy Dogs Nationwide, developed lymphoma and passed away in August 2023, leaving her family devastated).

Thank you to Paul who made a donation in memory of the late and much loved Murphy (Bective Mac) and Catherine in memory of gentle lurcher, Ladybird who was adopted in 2012.

Thank you to Blackrose Lexi Designs, a kind lady who sells wonderful quality cards on Etsy and Facebook while raising money for sighthound rescue charities such as Erin Hounds. Check out her work.

# Volunteering for the Pet Blood Bank

In the past, we have featured greyhounds who have donated blood but there are other ways to help if you do not have a suitable dog to act as a donor. As well as vets and vet nurses, Pet Blood Bank needs people to help with organisation of donation sessions and fundraising. The volunteers meet and greet the donor animals and their owners, make sure all the relevant paperwork is completed and weigh the dog prior to donation (dogs need to weigh at least 25kg in order to donate). Lots of fuss is made of the dog

and treats given out to ensure that it is a positive experience for everyone! After the dog has given blood, the volunteer offers to take a photograph of the dog proudly wearing their red donor bandana and sends them off with a toy, a bag of treats and various other gifts depending on how many times the dog has donated. It is a busy day but lots of fun and the chance to meet many beautiful dogs and their owners.

(Dogs who donate need to be between

and 1 and 8 years of age and in good health. They all undergo a vet check before going through to donate, and if there are any health concerns or the dog is unhappy with the procedure, they won't donate on that occasion. Demand for blood is currently at an all-time high, and there is a shortage of donors, so why not give it some thought?

To find out more, visit [www.petbloodbankuk.org](http://www.petbloodbankuk.org) ).





# Best foot forward

**It can be easy for owners to underestimate the importance of foot health and looking after your greyhound's feet. At first, they can seem pretty insignificant compared to other aspects of their health – however considering your dog holistically, from the ground up, and in relation to their possible racing history, it is essential.**

The racing Greyhound has been bred selectively for speed; a canine athlete whose hind limbs provide propulsion around the track and their forelimbs dictate the direction of travel.

The paw directly receives the concussive forces of motion - that interaction between the ground and the moving dog. When racing, the interaction between the dog's paw and the track surface is what drives, stops and turns them; the dog's bones, tendons, ligaments, and muscles all take a battering.

The dog's foot is a highly complex structure and one in which even the slightest issue can disrupt the relationship between the soft tissues and bones, influencing the dog's balance and the structural integrity of the whole skeleton.

Frequently however, they also carry the compensatory effect of injury, stiffness, weakness, or conformation issues as the dog moves – so the foot can, not only become the instigator of a change in the dog's gait (the way it moves) but will also ultimately suffer the consequences of a change in the way the dog moves in the form of corns. Greyhounds are particularly prone to corns and other foot issues as a result of both genetics and the concussive forces transferred on impact at speed if they've had a racing history, however corns are also found in whippets, lurchers and occasionally in other breeds.

Most racing greyhounds will have sustained a variety of musculoskeletal injuries that are rarely seen in pet dogs or other working breeds. These issues are a direct result of repetitive running, around a circular or ovoid track in a counterclockwise direction in the UK and Ireland and usually, but the time we see them in rescue, the impact of these injuries has become chronic.

The dog will have subtly adapted its gait, often so slightly that the owner doesn't notice, creating a muscular imbalance, which occurs when the dog adapts how it walks, to compensate. The impact of an adaptive gait on the greyhound foot is sadly well known to many greyhound owners in the form of corns.

Corns develop over time in response to, amongst other factors, differences in loading or weight-bearing as a result of these structural/mechanical changes. Repetitive physical activity in a dog which is structurally imbalanced, changes to gait or weight distribution following injury, coupled with breed specific susceptibility, can result in the insidious development of corns over time.

There appears to be a propensity for corns to occur on the paws of the fore limbs and they are the commonest cause of chronic fore limb lameness in greyhounds which is likely to be related to ground reaction forces acting on those limbs and their weightbearing role. They can occasionally cause hind limb lameness too.

Over the last 10 years, there have been considerable developments in the treatment or alleviation of corns and awareness amongst less greyhound-savvy vets has increased, however this can be isolated with owners getting differing advice on treatment.

## **Conservative management interventions:**

Boots, filing, hulling and softening will all address the symptoms – but not the cause, however if they are undertaken alongside an holistic approach to reduce the muscular imbalance the dog is experiencing elsewhere, they will have a valuable part to play.

When considering home hulling, once the corn is gone, unless physical therapy like massage and functional exercise is undertaken to bring about change and work towards regaining the dog's natural balance, the corn is likely to reappear - sadly often quite quickly.

## **Surgical interventions:**

Digital and superficial digital flexor tenotomy/tendonectomy are surgical procedures that involve cutting or removing part of the digital tendon or tendons under the toe through a small incision causing the toe to flatten and the nail to stick out losing contact with the ground.

Surgery unloads the pad, allowing pressure on the corn to be immediately alleviated. The lameness should resolve, and the corn should grow out and permanently disappear.

Whilst this method has proven highly successful, anything that affects the natural loading of the foot should be approached with care and an understanding of the wider effects on the dog. Pioneered by Mike Guilliard, this procedure is now undergoing clinical study at the University of Liverpool, evaluating the reduction in pain at both 12 weeks and 12 months post-operatively.

Surgical removal of the corn, or hulling by a vet under general anaesthetic, generally results in the short term alleviation of pain; a few dogs may be cured, but most only remain corn-free for a few months. Toe amputation in relation to corns leads to further musculoskeletal imbalance, potentially leading to corns developing on other feet and the fragility of the greyhound's skin also demonstrates potentially extensive complications due to tissue breakdown and healing issues. Any issue that causes a dog to adapt their gait and carry themselves differently will, over time lead to muscular compensation and potentially osteoarthritis in the future.

Ideally we don't want our dogs to get corns in the first place, so it doesn't matter where we start when trying to unpick the jigsaw of muscular imbalance, adaptive gait and uneven weightbearing, we need to be doing everything we can to look after their feet, which includes nail management. If the dog's nails are too long, they can not only become cracked and split, but predispose the Greyhound to 'sprung' or dislocated toes and sesamoid bone injuries by creating undue leverage on the bones and ligaments of the toe when the dog is moving at speed.

Long nails alter the way the dog walks, creating a muscular imbalance and uneven weightbearing, leading to the likely development of corns on the weightbearing toes of the foot taking the additional load.

Nailcare can be a difficult issue and many of our dogs have understandably sensitive feet, don't like them being touched or are downright petrified of having their nails clipped.



I have struggled myself and know how easy it can be to give up as 'they don't like it', but we owe it to these gentle survivors to do our best for them – and where possible, prevent further issues arising that ultimately would lead to more invasive action.

In the past, I have cut my dogs nails, with varying degrees of success and have used a 'pet nail' grinder – and none have given me the confidence to tackle them properly.

I found the action of clipper blades created pressure and discomfort on the nail, and if the dog pulled their foot away, their nail could catch on the blade. My dogs started to associate the snipping noise with imminent discomfort, so whilst I will still use them on occasion, preferring to nibble little slivers off the sides rather than a full cut, they are not my go-to tool of choice.

After considerable research I now use a cordless Dremel and can honestly say, it has been the best thing I have ever bought in terms of dog care – whilst initially it seemed a bit of a beast, more power meant that it rotated considerably faster than the cheap pet versions and could file quicker without heating up, meaning I could take an effective amount of nail away in the shortest amount of time.

My greyhound, Fionn has thick, black nails and originally would not let me near them, so obviously, I didn't force him. In addition to a seven month long recovery from an adder bite and associated surgery, it was not my priority at the time, however this was not the right decision. The quick of a dog's nail, the soft core containing nerves and blood vessels continues to grow as the nail lengthens, so at any one time, there is only so much you can trim off without cutting the quick and causing pain and bleeding.

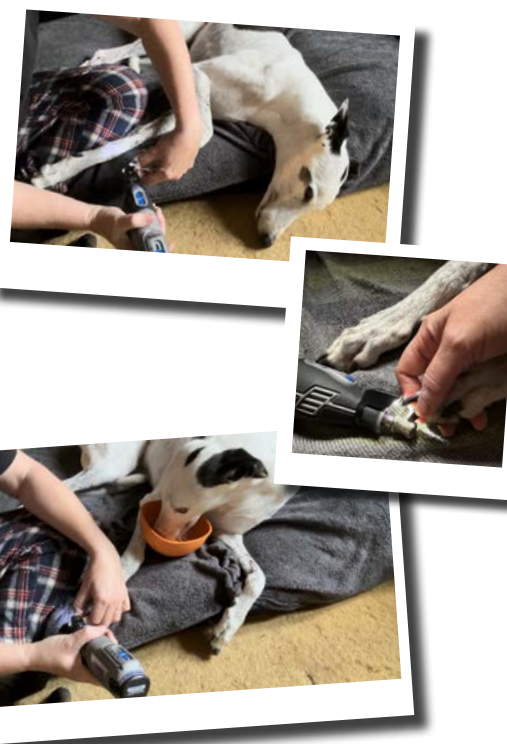
Once your dog's nails are too long, it's a far longer, slower process to cut them a little at a time to allowing for the quick to recede.

A useful tip if your dog's nails aren't black is to shine a light behind the nail that enables you to see the blood vessels and the quick and use a pen to draw a line 2 mm past the end, you can then use this to guide your cut.

Ideally, your dog nails should be clear of the ground when they are standing square and on hard ground, and remember to give the dewclaws attention too, they can easily curl into the skin if allowed to get too long – your dog will use them for stability when running and turning so they are an essential part of their anatomy and should not be removed.

We are nowhere near getting Fionn's nails to clear the ground, but I am now persisting every few days, so that the process becomes a normal activity for him, and an obligatory lick matt usually sweetens the deal. This activity is non-negotiable now, and although he is still not keen, holding his nail tightly to prevent too much vibration, approaching the activity slowly, at his pace, even if that means only a couple of nails at a time, we are getting there, and he is so much more tolerant and relaxed. Fionn is showing signs of lameness from a historic muscular injury that was never fully treated at the track. He is carrying more weight, unevenly on his front legs and is therefore susceptible to corns, so I am managing his feet and nails, he has greyhound-specific boots to help with the rough surfaces he hates, and regular massage to rebalance his musculoskeletal system and keep him as comfortable as possible.

In addition to working on keeping his nails short, I check his feet for abrasions, foreign bodies, broken nails, and moisturise and check his pads regularly for signs of corns. He doesn't have a long coat, but for anyone with a saluki lurcher or other longer-haired breed, keeping the hair from underneath and in between the pads is really important to help with grip and prevent slipping (another potential cause of muscular injury, leading to imbalance).



It saddens me that something so small, yet insidiously damaging to a Greyhound's quality of life has been overlooked in the past, in many cases in favour of expensive and traumatic screening and amputation before other avenues have been explored. Thankfully more vets and owners are becoming corn-savvy and are able to have purposeful conversations with their vets, backed by up-to-date knowledge that can genuinely help their dogs.

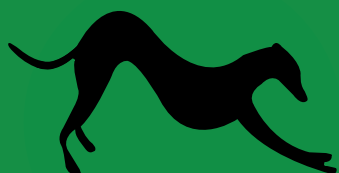
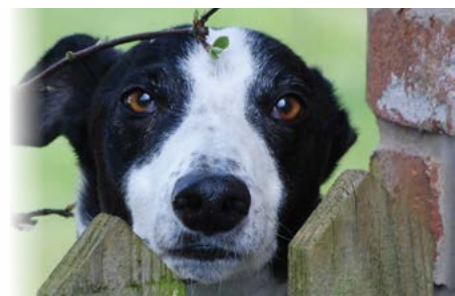
If you are worried about your dog's feet and the management of their nails, I am more than happy to talk to you about your dog's muscular health and help you to get started with nailcare - if you're within a short distance of me, give me a shout and I'll come and help you to get started with your dog.

**You can find all my details here**  
[www.moorlandcanine.com](http://www.moorlandcanine.com)

**Sarah Hancox**

## As ever, the hounds have the final say...

**Help us become companions not commodities,  
through adopting and fostering.**



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