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Let's Keep Those Beardies Bouncing! (A discussion of foot and pad care) Linda Leek

Let's start with the Bearded Collie Standard and what it says about feet:

The feet are oval in shape with the soles well padded. The toes are arched and close together, and well covered with hair including between the pads.

And under "Serious faults", it says: *trimmed or sculptured coat*

It would seem that the standard calls for no trimming, but if you don't trim that hair between the pads, it can cause problems. It can mat or become coated in mud, snow or ice, trap pebbles or other debris - all resulting in something akin to a stone in your shoe. If left long enough, it offers less traction, and the dog can slip or slide and potentially pull muscles or cause other musculoskeletal damage. It also offers a good environment for infection. For hygienic and comfort proposes, always trim the hair between the pads to at least even with the pads, or shorter. Watch the hair between the toes too. It can also mat or become coated in the same mud, snow or ice and cause discomfort. These areas should be inspected frequently, usually during grooming sessions, but they may need special attention after known exposure to nasty elements.

Nails

Nails should not break or split easily. If they do, it could be because they are not kept short enough and are suffering from concussive injury. But if the nails are the right length and are still brittle, it would be advisable to have it examined by a vet. In Beardies we often see a condition called symmetrical lupoid onychodystrophy (SLO). This is thought to be an autoimmune disease. The nails separate from the quick containing nerves and blood vessels and eventually all fall off. This can be painful and often bloody, and can happen quickly or take several months. Usually all the nails will be lost. The nails usually grow back misshapen and hard. Subsequent occurrences usually only affect one or two nails. Other autoimmune disease that can affect the nails, or more often the nail beds are pemphigus foliaceus and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). Fungal infection should be ruled out. Adding essential fatty acids to the diet may be helpful in improving nail quality. Dogs whose nails are constantly wet may also become brittle.



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Only cut the sharp, curved, growing end of the nail. Cut a little at a time so that you don't cut the quick. The quick can be hard to identify in dark nails. For these, turn the paw over and look for the thicker section than the growth area of the nail and cut close to it. If your dog has some light and some dark nails - often the case with Beardies - cut the light ones first noting the location of the quick. You can then use this information to estimate the appropriate place to cut dark nails. The more often nails are trimmed the more the quick will recede. In nails that have been left too long, the longer quick may prevent you cutting the nail back as far as you should the first time. Do a little each week or so. Ultimately the goal is that the nails should not touch flat solid surfaces but be long enough to help the dog when running through grass and mud. Do not forget to cut the dew claws. They are less likely to be kept short by contact with the ground and could potentially grow so long they could grow back into the dog's flesh. Dew claws do help dogs gain traction when making tight turns at speed, and so removing them in neonatal puppies, especially those that may have a performance career is not recommended. If your dogs' nails are allowed to grow too long it can have serious implications be intensely painful and may lead to permanent crippling arthritis if allowed to persist. It is always a good idea to have something on hand to stop the bleeding in case you do nick the quick. Special styptic powders are sold, but cornstarch is a good substitute. I use a first aid spray with collagen and bitrex that works great if I clip a nail too short, as well as after tick removal or other small body wounds. It also comes in a gel.

Pads

Pads should be rough enough for traction and tough, but pliable. Even the best conditioned pads can be injured from seemingly innocuous things. Pavements can be too hot in the summer and burn pads or covered with winter salt and ice in the winter. Salt can burn pads and feet too and should be either washed off immediately or the dog should wear booties to protect his/her feet. A dog can step on glass or sharp stones or other objects almost anywhere. Such lacerations may go unnoticed or bleed profusely and look really dramatic. Keep the area clean, and thoroughly rinse foreign material from the cut. Adding chlorhexiderm to the water will help disinfect the wound. You can put boots on to keep debris from the wound and to protect excessive licking by the Beardie (sometimes one of the creams or sprays designed to discourage excessive licking may also be needed), but these rather scary looking injuries usually heal quickly and



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without any problems. In general bandaging and applying creams may prevent the pads from healing by restricting air flow. They contain few superficial blood vessels - after all the pads are designed to cushion and protect the foot. Bleeding is usually far more dramatic from torn nails or on the upper part of the foot unless the cut to the pad is really deep. If your Beardie has a more extensive injury however, antibiotic sprays or creams as well as bandaging and pain killers may be required. This is particularly true if the dog has worn the outer surface off the pads - some Beardies just won't quit no matter how badly they are hurt. It is likely they don't realize the extent of their injury nor feel the pain during the heat of the moment.

When playing in the snow, snow balls or ice can accumulate in the fur between the pads and toes. The best way to rid your dog of these is putting the feet in a warm water bath to melt the ice and snow when you go back inside. Then towel the feet dry.

When introducing a dog to herding, agility or other high speed sport quite often the ground is bare and a dog zipping around can easily cut or wear off a pad. It would be advisable to "toughen" your dogs' pads if you plan to work your dog hard on such ground. This can be done by walking the dog on stone paths or a purpose made cream can be purchased to help toughen the pads. Soaking the feet in an Epsom salt foot baths also may help. There are also cream or wax products that can be purchased to help protect them, prevent cracking from cold or dry conditions, etc.

His feet are essential for virtually everything your Beardie does. Caring from them is relatively quick and simple and should be part of every Beardie's routine.