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### Whelping

**By Chris Walkowicz. Beardie Bulletin, Winter 1999, 29/4, p8**

#### The Green Light.

Waiting for the birth of a litter is exciting, thrilling and frightening especially for the new breeder. How will I know what to do? What if something goes wrong? Most dogs, Beardies among them, take things well in paw. Any mother can tell you that, no matter how inexperienced we may be, the instinctive urge to protect, comfort, and cherish our children springs forth at the same time as the babe. The same thing is true of our Beardies, albeit they're even better at it than their human counterparts.

That said, I would NEVER leave any expectant mom alone as the due date nears. Because our lives demand that we work to put dog food in their bowls and other less important things, like doctor appointments or grocery shopping - or being present at our human kids' weddings, graduations and concerts - we have to learn to read the signs of impending labor. Have your vet's number ready in case of emergency and prepare the labor/delivery room at least one week prior to the due date.

First on the list of necessary equipment is a rectal thermometer. I prefer the digital kind, but the old-fashioned type will do. About a week to 10 days before the due date, I begin temping the bitch (both a.m. and p.m.) to determine the normal baseline. Once the temp drops between 1-2 degrees and stays down, labor should begin within 24 hours. Occasionally, there is a false alarm with temp rising again, but because 98 percent of all bitches exhibit a lower temperature, I do not leave the house without the bitch after this occurs. If I absolutely must make a quick jaunt somewhere, I take her with me, all the while watching for other symptoms.

Beardies often show other signs of imminent labor once the temperature lowers. Many shiver as the temp drops. Panting is common. Her distended sides drop and her backbone seems prominent. Refusing food is a good sign that pups will be born within the next day. A few stare into space (or a wall), seemingly looking at something we cannot see. They go through periods of deep sleep, followed by restless pacing then again snoring. Most want to be close to you, trying to sit on your lap, a bit difficult managing



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their bulk when you're bustling around trying to finish last-minute chores and ready the labor room before the action begins.

As a clear discharge increases or the initial water breaks, the bitch will clean herself more frequently. The urge to urinate and defecate increases. If an accident occurs, this isn't the time to correct or scold. Control isn't always possible with the pressure of three to ten pups all waiting to burst out into the brave new world. While some Beardies next and scratch at blankets or newspapers prior to the delivery, most increase the enthusiastic tearing and scrunching as the time nears. It's not unusual for Beardie Mums to grunt or whimper along with contractions which become visible as the birth approaches. A few, particular maidens, actually yelp with the arrival of the first pup. Experienced matrons wait patiently with a look of resignation and acceptance. If hard labor is not productive within one to one-half to two hours, I'm on the phone dialing the vet.

Although it's not unusual for a Beardie to pass the due date, I always have her checked by a veterinarian when that occurs. If the cervix is not open, she (and the pups) are not ready to celebrate their birthday. Once the first pup is born, most Beardies settle quickly and protectively around their babes, knowing instinctively what to do from this point on. All we can do is to offer our assurance, praise, and keep a watchful eye on the proceedings to make sure all progresses normally. Weight the pups, mark down all the particulars and toast the new Mum and her litter.

### The Red Light.

Although most birthings are blessedly normal, a breeder must be prepared for the unusual or even frightening signs of impending danger to the bitch and/or her pups. Like a good scout we should BE PREPARED. Knowing where to obtain emergency assistance is of prime importance. All of these red light signals should be followed by the phrase, "Call your vet."

Primary Inertia. This occurs when nothing happens. The due date arrives, but nothing else does. Although the birthday party may be just a bit belated, it's wise to check whether the cervix is open. This is also true if the temperature drops and stays down, but labor does not begin. Primary inertia is most common with small litters of one or two pups. The bitch may show other signs such as heavy panting, frantic, nesting, signs of discomfort, but no contractions begin. Once the fetal membrane breaks,



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labor should begin within ONE HOUR. If nothing progresses, call your vet. This is an emergency. A Caesarean section may be necessary.

Hard unproductive contractions that last more than 90 minutes might mean an oversized or cattywampus pup could be blocking the way. Veteran midwives are sometimes able to dislodge the fetus, but since it's difficult to fit more than a couple fingers up the birth canal, this is often a job for the veterinarian.

Clear discharge, even weeks prior to due date, is perfectly normal and usually a good sign that you can indeed begin to stock the nursery. Greenish-black coloration prior to the first pup or bright red blood at any time can signal premature placental separation or hemorrhage.

Secondary Inertia. Labor commences and some puppies may even be born, but suddenly, the brakes are applied and all ceases. It's entirely possible that your girl may be done, but if there's the slightest suspicion that even one pup remains, have her examined and possibly even x-rayed to determine whether any fetuses remain. This occurs most often in large litters or with older dams. These aren't the only cases, however, so don't be complacent.

Shock signifies something is horribly wrong. Internal bleeding, a ruptured uterus or other emergency situations can cause shock. Check the refill time of the gums by pressing on them to see whether blood pinks them up again within two seconds. Should a bitch show other signs of depression, weakness or disorientation, you have little time to lose to save the pups and your bitch.

Among your preparations for the Big Event, include a notebook where you can record all signs and symptoms: time labor begins, time of each birth, weight, the bitch's mental and physical state, temperature and so on. If it should be necessary to contact the vet, you'll be armed with the vital information. If not, you can journal the progress of a healthy Mum and pups!

Chris Walkowicz is a long-time BCCA member and breeder, an AKC judge, and a professional writer. Her book "Successful Dog Breeding: The Complete Handbook of Canine Midwifery" won Best Book from the Dog Writers Assn. of America.



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