



RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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## **RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

*Breeder's Education Pack*

*Unit Four – Raising the Litter*

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### Unit Four – Raising the Litter



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## 4 Raising the Litter

### *The First Few Days*

It is important that the bitch and pups are checked regularly in the first few days. First time mothers are especially problematic as they may not settle straight into being a mother. You may need to supervise constantly to ensure the bitch does not trample or lie on her pups, and you want to make sure that all of the pups get a fair chance to suckle.

Probably the easiest way to make sure the pups are doing well is to weigh each pup daily. You will need to have a way of identifying each pup. By weighing you will be able to pick the pups who are struggling and may need extra help to keep up with the rest of the litter. In the first 24 hours it is normal (but not ideal) for some pups to lose a little weight, but after that there should be a definite gain each day, even if it is only a few grams. Pups that stay the same weight over a 24 hour period should immediately be given priority on the teats, and pups that lose weight should be very closely monitored and supplemented if needed.

As a general guide, happy well-fed pups will sleep for most of the day. When they wake, they will move about and make noise for a short time until mum licks and cleans them (stimulating them to go to the toilet), and will then head for a feed. After about 15-20 minutes of feeding they will fall asleep again. Puppies that cry are usually cold, hungry, in pain (such as when a bitch lies on a pup), or have been separated from their mother and littermates - so a happy litter is a quiet one. If your pups seem to be constantly crying something is wrong - check to make sure the bitch has sufficient milk and that the whelping box is suitably warm.

You should also check the bitch each day - inspecting and feeling each of her teats to check for heat, lumps or soreness. All bitches producing milk are at risk of developing 'mastitis' which is a bacterial infection in the teat itself. The affected teat becomes inflamed and hard, and often feels hotter than the other teats. Mastitis can occur suddenly and can be very serious. The milk from the infected teat is

discoloured and thick, and the bitch may go off her food and appear lethargic. If you are concerned that your bitch might be developing mastitis have her checked by a vet immediately.

The bitch should be eating as much good quality food as she can, and drinking plenty of fluids. The food and water bowls should be placed outside the whelping box, so they are easy for the bitch to access. Never place a water bowl inside the whelping box as puppies have been known to drown in them. If she is a good mother you may have to take her out to the toilet on the lead as she might not want to leave her pups.

If you want to supplement her calcium, now is the time to do it. The liquid form (calcium syrup) is the best way to do this as the bitch is able to absorb more of the calcium from the syrup than from powder. The powder can also make her food 'gritty' and she may not eat as well as she needs to as a result.

Although it is an exciting time, and you may have family and friends who want to visit, keep everything quiet and low-key for a few weeks. It can be very stressful for any bitch (but particularly a maiden bitch) to have lots of people looking and touching her pups and this can lead to her becoming increasingly unsettled - something you want to avoid. Bitches can also get very protective of their pups and may behave aggressively to strangers, especially in the first few weeks, so be careful.

## ***Raising your Litter - The First Two Weeks***

During the first two weeks, the pups are totally reliant on their mother for everything. They cannot see or hear fully as their eyes and ears have not yet opened. They are unable to shiver, and so rely on their mother and each other for warmth. They can't even go to the toilet without some stimulation from their mother.

At this stage the biggest risks to survival are cold and hunger. Puppies can dehydrate very quickly as they have no body reserves. They are unable to regulate their own temperature so it is vital that they remain warm and don't 'wander off' from the litter. This is why a whelping box is important as it confines the pups and prevents them from getting away from their littermates.

If a pup becomes chilled, it becomes weak and unable to suckle. If it can't suckle, it becomes dehydrated and its blood sugar levels fall dangerously low. This becomes a vicious cycle and soon the pup becomes weaker and weaker. Early detection and action can easily reverse this spiral, so it is your job to be alert to changes in each pup's behaviour.

If you have a weak pup, the first thing to do is to warm it up. Placing it on a hot water bottle covered with a towel (to prevent burning) is the first step. Whilst you are making the hot warm bottle, put the puppy 'under your jumper' against your skin to use your body heat to keep it warm. Once it feels warmer, the next step is to give it some fluids. Using an eye-dropper or a syringe, place a few drops of warm water, (either on its own or mixed with sugar or honey) in the pup's mouth. When you are doing this make sure the pup is held the same way as it would be when it is feeding off the teat - do not hold the pup like a human baby as the fluid will run down the wrong way and could choke the pup.

If the pup seems to perk up, place the pup on one of the bitch's back teats and make sure it has a good feed. Sometimes pups look like they are suckling, but they are not really getting much milk. You will have to supervise this puppy, making sure it stays warm and has a feed every few hours until it looks stronger. If the puppy does not respond to the oral fluids, it may need to go to the vet for some fluids to be administered by injection.

During these first two weeks you will need to be checking the pups often, and keeping the whelping box and the bedding clean. Getting into a routine where each of the pups is gently handled, weighed, and inspected each day is best. The early handling is part of the pup's normal learning process. Even though the pups cannot see or hear fully at this stage, they are able to smell and it is thought that a little mild stress (such as being picked up and handled) at this age is useful in helping them cope with things later on in life.

When the pups have reached two weeks of age it is time to worm them all, along with the bitch. Roundworm is a particular problem in young pups as it is passed through the milk to the pups. It is also cycled through the bitch as she cleans the pups and eats their faeces. At this age it is probably easiest to use a liquid wormer for the pups as getting a tablet into their mouths can be quite difficult. Each pup needs to be weighed and dosed according to its weight on the day of worming. The bitch can be given a regular worming tablet.

## ***Raising your Litter - The Third and Fourth Weeks***

From about the 10th day of life, the pups eyes and ears will begin to open. Suddenly they are in a whole new world and they start to explore. Their muscle tone and co-ordination will also be developing and they will start to make their first attempts at walking. By the fourth week the pups are starting to play with each other and the bitch. It is very easy to waste a lot of time just watching them at this age!

The bitch's milk production is at its maximum as the pup's appetite increases. The bitch will probably need to eat more food in these two weeks than at any other time. It is also the time to start introducing solid feed for the pups. Most breeders start with a flat dish of cereal mixed with warm water (or puppy formula), or puppy food that has been soaked in warm water until it is soft and mushy.

When you first introduce the food the pups will usually walk all through it, get it all over themselves before suddenly realising it is for eating. Over a couple of days they will gradually get the idea, and will soon come running when the feed dish is put down. By supplementing the pups with a number of meals per day, it is possible to take some of the pressure off the bitch, especially if she has lost some condition feeding the pups.

Pups at this age spend a lot of the day exploring their world. They will start to escape over the walls of the whelping box and will need to be enclosed in a puppy run. They can also be allowed outside for short periods of time if the weather is fine. This is the age when pups learn what constitutes their bed and what is their toilet. It is important that they are provided with different surfaces so that they instinctively learn to toilet away from their bed.

Puppies also do a lot of exploring with their mouths. They bite and chew each other, the bitch, the bedding and anything else they can get their mouths on. Providing toys of different textures at this age can stimulate this development. It is also possible to encourage chasing behaviour with toys on a rope or string that can be dragged along the ground.

## **Raising your Litter – The Fifth Week Onwards**

As the pups continue to develop, they will become more and more co-ordinated, and their play will start to mature as their characters develop. This period in life is called the 'Socialisation Period'. This is basically the time where they learn all about what is 'normal' in their world. After the socialisation period ends, they will be suspicious of new and novel experiences so it is important to expose them to the things they will experience later in life.

Socialisation is not just about getting them used to other dogs it includes exposure to people, handling, noises, and smells. Pups can be prepared for their racing life by getting them used to being examined and handled, teaching them to walk on a lead, getting them used to travel in the float or car, exposing them to the sounds of the track, they can even be introduced to the starting boxes. You can encourage chasing by playing chasing games. At this age they can have a warm bath (using a puppy-safe shampoo) as long as you make sure they are totally dried off as they are still susceptible to the cold. They can even be introduced to walking on a lead. All of the experiences need to be controlled and made as positive as possible. You do not want a pup to have a bad experience at this time.

The pups will now be on regular meals three or four times a day. You may choose to wean the pups from the bitch, but sudden forced weaning is very stressful for both the bitch and pups. It is far better to let the bitch gradually wean the pups herself – she will probably start to tell them off when they use their needle like teeth on her teats – but the gradual weaning will allow her milk to dry up naturally, rather than leaving her feeling engorged and uncomfortable, and increasing her risks of developing mastitis.

The food that you feed can gradually change from soft and sloppy food to harder food. Any sudden changes in diet will cause the pups to have loose stools, so make sure new foods are introduced slowly over a couple of days. As the pups get older, they can also be given raw bones to chew on, but make sure the bitch is safely locked away if she is likely to become possessive of bones.

At this age you will be kept busy trying to keep the pups area clean. You will need to pick up the faeces three or four times a day as puppies toilet more often than adults. Their bedding will also need changing more often as they are messier.

## **Worming and Vaccination**

Pups are usually wormed at 2, 4, 6 and 8 weeks of age. They need to be weighed and dosed accurately with a product that will kill round- and hook-worms at the minimum. It pays to rotate worm treatments, using different brands (containing different drugs) so that you do not promote resistance to the wormers

At six to eight weeks of age pups are due for their first vaccination. The vaccination given at this age is generally a C3 – distemper, hepatitis, and parvo-virus – the three killer diseases of puppies. The vaccination takes 10-14 days to be effective, so it is important not to assume that the puppies are protected from these diseases the minute they are given the vaccine.

There is a compulsory vaccination that must be given at 12-16 weeks of age, proof of which will need to accompany the Litter Registration Application.

## **Microchipping**

From 1 January 2011, it is a requirement of the Rules of Racing that all Greyhound pups whelped after this date be implanted with a RWWA-supplied microchip, by a RWWA-approved Veterinarian, prior to the Stewards ear branding the litter. A list of RWWA approved veterinarians can be obtained through the RWWA Licensing and Registrations Department or online from the RWWA website at [www.rwwa.com.au](http://www.rwwa.com.au). You must arrange for the entire litter to be microchipped by one of these veterinarians between 6 but no later than 12-weeks of age. It is recommended that this coincides with the pups vaccinations however you may decide to do this separately.

After you send in the Notice of Whelping (Form D) RWWA will issue you a Registration of Litter Form (Form E) which is to be retained by you for presentation to an approved Veterinarian at the time that the vet implants the microchips. RWWA will also send to you at this time the required number of microchips for that litter which you must present to the vet. Following the microchip implantation the vet will complete sections on Form E and return this form to you, which you will retain for presentation to the Stewards at the time of ear branding. You must ensure you have the litter microchipped before the Stewards can carry out the ear branding process.

## **Ear-branding**

Ear branding of the litter by the RWWA Stewards is to occur at or shortly after 12-weeks of age and the Stewards will contact you around then to arrange a suitable time. When the Stewards attend to ear brand your pups, you must hand to the Stewards the Form E which your Approved Veterinarian would have signed. Stewards will then scan each pup to confirm the microchip number and place a corresponding ear brand in one ear. When completed, the Stewards will retain the form as normal.

You will then be issued with an invoice for the litter registration. You should provide evidence that the pups have been vaccinated with a minimum of a C3 vaccine when paying the litter registration invoice. You will then receive each pup's registration papers which will accompany the dog throughout its life. The pups can now be sold if that is your wish. If you are going to sell the pups, it is a good idea to start advertising them well before you want them to go. There are a number of free listings, or you can pay to advertise the litter in one of the greyhound publications.



## **Breeders Reminder Checklist**

- Find a Mentor to help guide you
- Find a Veterinarian you are comfortable with
- Select the Bitch you are going to breed with
- Ensure that either you are the owner of the bitch or have an 'Authority to Register a Service or Litter (Form B)' lodged with RWWA
- Ensure your bitch has been DNA typed
- Select a Suitable Sire for your litter
- Contact the Studmaster to arrange the mating
- Check your bitch daily when she is due to come into season
- Make sure the mating is timed well
- Note the expected Whelp date on your calendar
- Provide proper nutrition, exercise and care for your pregnant bitch
- Prepare the Whelping box well in advance
- Watch your bitch for signs of whelping
- Supervise the birth of the puppies
- Contact your vet if complications occur
- Submit your Notification of Whelping Form to RWWA
- Ensure your pups are kept well fed and warm
- Worm and Vaccinate the puppies
- Make sure weaker pups are given opportunities to feed
- Organise a time for a RWWA-approved vet to microchip the pups
- Await contact from the Stewards to have the pups ear-branded
- Register the Litter with RWWA

## **Further reading**

Care of the Racing and Retired Greyhound (2007) Blythe, Gannon, Craig, Fegan

ABC's of Dog Breeding – Claudia Waller Orlandi PhD

Genetics for Dog Breeders 2nd Ed (2001) by Roy Robinson

Rules of Greyhound Racing – National Rules and Local Rules

Kennel Guidelines for Puppies - Kennel Guidelines

Greyhound Microchipping Leaflet

Greyhound DNA and Microchipping Process

(all available online from the RWWA Website)



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