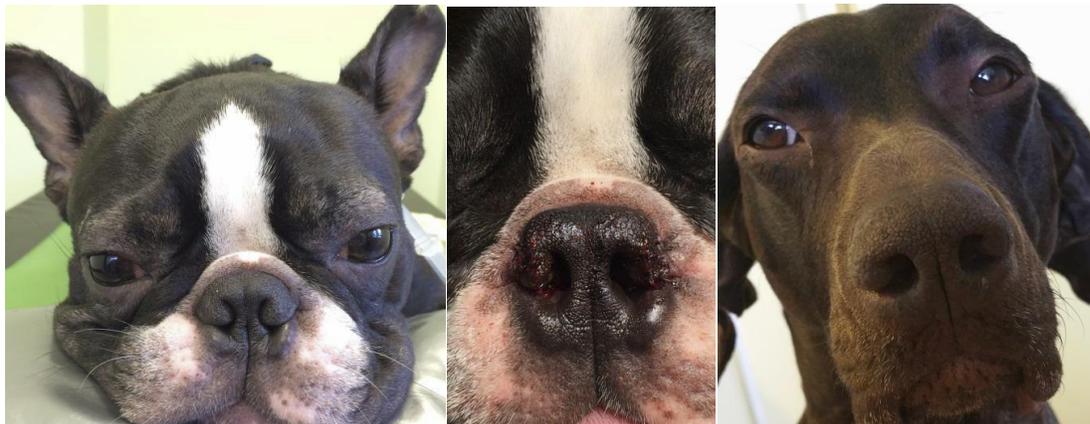


# Open Letter to the SKK and the Swedish Board of Agriculture

It is high time to take a comprehensive approach towards breeding and import of dogs with breathing difficulties. While many brachycephalic breeds are increasing in popularity, there is an unknown number of surgical procedures being carried out, on the respiratory system of these dogs. 519 *(editor's note: now close to 1000)* Swedish veterinarians have signed this petition, the intent of which is to establish collaboration between clinically active veterinarians, the SKK, and the Swedish Board of Agriculture, for the right of brachycephalic breeds to breathe normally without surgery.



This Boston Terrier is one of many brachycephalic breeds in Sweden, having had an operation for his respiratory problems. He underwent surgery as his energy was reduced and he had to exert himself to admit enough air for his oxygen supply. The images show the difference in the openings of the nostrils before (img. 1) and after (img. 2) the procedure. On the before-image they are considerably pinched and provide very limited ability to breathe in sufficient air for the dog's needs. Compare with the German Pointer's innately open nostrils (img. 3). With the help of surgery the Boston Terrier is getting wider nostrils, making it possible for him to breathe in a more normal way.

Several brachycephalic breeds with respiratory problems also have a narrow trachea with an elongated soft palate, which often requires corrective surgery for the animal to be able to oxygenate normally. Furthermore, many brachycephalic breeds have narrow bronchi which is not possible to correct with surgery. Owners of dogs that have undergone surgery of the nose and/or palate report to a very large extent that they have a totally new dog, with unexpectedly great zest for life and energy.

### **Increased Popularity - Decreased Acceptance**

Swedish veterinarians are concerned about the fact that many brachycephalic dogs in Sweden are not able to breathe normally, as a result of breeding for flat faces. The problems are noted among e.g. French and English Bulldogs, and Pugs, but also among Boston Terriers and others<sup>1</sup>, as well as brachycephalic crossbreeds.

The Swedish Kennel Club (SKK) has for a long time worked for healthy breeding of short-nose breeds affected by the so-called brachycephalic syndrome, a condition that involves prolonged suffering with life-long respiratory distress caused by an abnormal respiratory system.

### **Considerable Hidden Statistics**

In veterinary practice, we often see brachycephalic dogs with breathing difficulties. Some of these dogs undergo surgery of nostrils and/or throat to ease the breathing problems. Since these procedures are not covered by insurance and not registered by the breed clubs the number of dogs treated is not known. For the same reasons, as far as we know, there is no collective view of how many are receiving treatment due to stress-induced shortness of breath or chronic stomach problems caused by prolonged dyspnea. We also believe that there is an underreporting of how many brachycephalic dogs being put to death because of breathing difficulties.

We believe that the hidden statistics regarding the number of dogs not having surgery, despite breathing difficulties, is even larger. Low-grade to moderate problems are difficult to detect for a layman as symptoms develop gradually over time. Dogs with breathing noise are described as "loud" and those who are not able to exercise at a normal level are being perceived as quiet, "philosophical" or lazy.

Swedish breeders note on social media that imported dogs and irresponsible breeding account for the majority of bad specimens and the morbidity regarding respiratory organs. If this is the case it is extremely important that we find routines to secure that no imported dogs with respiratory problems are being used in breeding. We also need to find successful strategies for reaching out with this information to the potential buyer of unregistered and unexamined brachycephalic dogs.

### **Six Proposals for Action**

Swedish veterinarians have the following proposals for a healthier breeding of short-nosed breeds. The proposals are meant to be a basis for discussion and collaboration between clinically active veterinarians, the SKK, and the Swedish Board of Agriculture:

1. Reconsider the assessment criteria at dog shows<sup>2</sup> regarding the respiratory system. We feel that it should always be considered a serious matter if an animal has respiratory difficulties. Therefore a show judge needs to identify and disqualify also animals with low-grade to moderate breathing problems. Special attention needs to be paid to stenotic nostrils, a condition which is easy to assess for a judge. An animal with stenotic and pinched nostrils no doubt has difficulties in oxygenating normally and will suffer a life-long respiratory distress.

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<sup>1</sup> Affenpinscher, Boston Terrier, Japanese Chin, King Charles Spaniel, Pekingese, Petit Brabancon, Shih Tzu, Boxer, Mastiff, Griffon

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.skk.se/Global/Dokument/Utstallning/sarskilda-rasspecifika-domaranvisningar-A7.pdf>

2. Health certificate regarding the respiratory system issued before mating for all short-nosed breeds. The veterinarian should assess e.g. presence of narrowed nostrils, compressed face, narrow trachea, constricted noise from throat and/or nose as well as the presence of abdominal breathing for oxygenation. To qualify for breeding, the dog must not show any symptoms whatsoever of respiratory difficulties at the examination and have open nostrils. This examination should be performed prior to every mating in accordance with a predefined protocol. Its exact design should be developed preferably in collaboration between the SKK, the Swedish Board of Agriculture and clinically active veterinarians.

3. More detailed health certificates for puppies and adult dogs for insurance and sales, in which the veterinarian should consider the animal's anatomical condition associated with breathing to a greater extent than what is typically done today. Unfortunately, brachycephalic breeds are often described in terms of "normal for the breed" with more variability than can be considered satisfactory. The purpose of the certificate would be to alert the prospective puppy buyer about potential risk factors for respiratory distress in the future.

4. Dogs that undergo corrective surgery in the respiratory system must not be used for breeding. Castration of these animals has pros and cons. There is a risk that a requirement for surgical castration in conjunction with surgical correction of respiratory problems could imply that the owner, due to cost reasons, would refrain from surgery of the respiratory tract, which would affect the individual dog. We would prefer a reporting system for breeding barriers of these animals, like the Norwegian Kennel Club<sup>3</sup>.

5. Mapping of brachycephalic dogs with breathing difficulties. In an interesting survey in Germany<sup>4</sup> aimed at owners of short-faced dogs undergoing surgery for brachycephalic syndrome, questions are asked regarding the animal's capacity and recuperation after exercise, the presence of noise from the respiratory tract, sleep quality and thermal sensitivity. We see great value in having a similar questionnaire to fill out for the owners of flat-nosed dogs in Sweden, to get an idea of the existence of dogs with more low-grade brachycephalic symptoms. In that way it is possible to map the actual existence of chronic respiratory suffering among Swedish dogs, which are not being treated by veterinarians. We are aware that we will not reach the unregistered flat-nosed dogs, but recognize that the SKK has a special responsibility for those who are registered with the Swedish Kennel Club.

6. **Consumer Information:** We believe there is a need for extensive consumer information about the symptoms of shortness of breath, which the owner of flat-nosed breeds need to pay attention to, and if necessary, to seek veterinary help to reduce the suffering of individuals having respiratory problems. In a British study<sup>5</sup> it was noted, for example, that 60% of the owners had not identified that their dogs had shortness of breath. We have no Swedish numbers, but we believe that Swedish owners of flat-nosed breeds also risk normalizing breathing noise and reduced strength on account of ignorance.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://web2.nkk.no/filestore/NYHETER/Brevomrapportplikt.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=24176279>

<sup>5</sup> PLoS One 2015: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0130741>

We value the long and extensive breeding work of the SKK in this field. As veterinarians we unfortunately see many short-nosed dogs which are not able to breathe normally. Since these breeds increase in popularity the number of affected individuals will surely grow.

Therefore we would like to intensify the collaboration we already have with the SKK via the Swedish Veterinary Association, to together with the Swedish Board of Agriculture work towards healthy breeding and extensive knowledge dissemination prior to puppy purchase and import. Ultimately, breeding of respiratory healthy animals is an animal welfare issue, which is covered by the Swedish Animal Protection Law (Sjvs 2008:105). We are aware of the complexity of this issue, but we think that we can contribute both expertise and great commitment, so that the work can develop further.

We welcome comments to [mk@djursjukhusetsundsvall.se](mailto:mk@djursjukhusetsundsvall.se) on how we together may move forward in this very important issue for animal welfare.

1. Affenpinscher, Boston Terrier, Japanese Chin, King Charles Spaniel, Pekingese, Petit Brabancon, Shih Tzu, Boxer, Mastiff, Griffon
2. <http://www.skk.se/Global/Dokument/Utstallning/sarskilda-rasspecifika-domaranvisningar-A7.pdf>
3. <http://web2.nkk.no/filestore/NYHETER/Brevomrapportplikt.pdf>
4. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=24176279>
5. PLoS One 2015: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0130741>

#### **For The Petition for Healthier Breeding of Brachycephalic Dogs**

**Representing 519 veterinarians ( you may see the signing list online at <http://www.skk.se/PageFiles/40565/Oppet-brev-till-SKK-om-brachycefal-andnod.pdf> )**