

features

PETS

Cosmetic surgery

Ear cropping
and tail docking
not allowed under
new P.E.I. animal
welfare act

Under P.E.I.'s new animal welfare act, it is illegal to carry out cosmetic surgery, operations performed solely to change the appearance of an animal and not for reasons of health.

The new act prohibits tail docking in dogs, horses, and cattle; ear cropping in dogs and tail nicking and setting for horses. This confirms the policy of the P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, approved in 2010.

Dr. Alice
Crook

Animal Talk



PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY DIANE YKELENSTAM

"Peanut" (Ykelenstam's Parti Girl Friday) appears with natural tail and ears, today and at 10 weeks. Peanut is a chocolate parti color miniature Schnauzer. Bred and born in Mermaid P.E.I., who now lives in British Columbia.

At a glance

Fast facts

- ◆ Some dogs have naturally short tails (e.g., Australian shepherd) but many short tails you see were docked within a few days of birth.
- ◆ To find out, go to <http://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/>

What does this mean for pet owners? If you have a boxer, cocker spaniel, or a Yorkshire terrier with a short tail, you may be surprised to learn that your dog was not born that way. These are only three of the many breeds in which all or part of the tail has traditionally been amputated when the pup is a few days old in a practice known as tail docking. Local anesthetic may or may not be used. Tail docking can cause infection and chronic pain, the latter because extra nerve cells may grow in the stump of the tail or neuroma.

In some breeds like Doberman pinscher, Great Dane, Boston terrier, part of the ears has been traditionally cut off so that they stand erect (ear cropping), generally between 9 and 12 weeks of age. Such surgery requires general anesthetic and much after-care. The ears will be painful and there may be infection. Splints and taping are required, with regular bandage changes for many weeks until the ears stand erect. Ear cropping can have a long term affect on the dog's behaviour because all this painful handling occurs at a sensitive time for socialization.

Happy endings

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN
BY MELANIE BENNETT

Ben, a one-year-old Newfoundland dog was adopted in August 2015 from the P.E.I. Humane Society by Melanie Bennett. "I picked up Ben on a Friday morning and fell head-over-heels in love. Ben is so gentle and quiet with our boys, and has with a wonderful personality," she says.

Why were these procedures done? Ear cropping and tail docking were done in some working breeds with the idea of preventing injury or for ease of handling-but these reasons are no longer relevant. And this was often inconsistent-consider hunting dogs. We are used to seeing many breeds of spaniel with docked tails, but imagine how odd it would be to see a docked tail in a Labrador retriever or a setter.

Ear cropping and tail docking



PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN BY SIGNE ANDERSEN

"Sally" (Hoyanta Black Lorelai), a standard poodle with a natural tail. If you are looking for a puppy of a breed in which the tail is traditionally docked, confirm with the breeder ahead of time that you do not want this done.

have long been illegal in many European Union and Commonwealth countries, and national veterinary associations have worked to discourage these procedures. Ear cropping and tail docking are now illegal in all Atlantic provinces, and similar changes are gradually taking place in other parts of Canada. This does not prohibit surgery performed by a veterinarian that is required for a medical reason, such as tail injury.

Why do these practices persist in North America? It is largely because many (but not all) breed clubs are resistant to change, and breed standards reflect this. In countries where the procedures are banned, breed clubs have accepted this and people in those countries are used to seeing dogs with natural ears and tails.

Basically, it comes down to

tradition, and fewer and fewer people, including veterinarians, support subjecting an animal to painful and unnecessary surgery for the sake of tradition.

Next Month in Animal Talk: Dollars and sense of animal ownership.

Dr. Alice Crook is the coordinator of the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College, one of the member groups of the PEI Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI), which also includes the PEI Humane Society, SpayAid PEI, Cat Action Team, PEI Veterinary Medical Association, PEI Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and 4-H. Animal Talk is a monthly column by CAWI, the goal of which is to improve the welfare of owned and unowned companion animals on PEI. See also gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI. Readers are invited to send questions related to the well-being of owned and unowned companion animals to askcawi@gmail.com.