

WUSB: Report 2016/2017 of the President

The WUSB is a heterogeneous organization. The member clubs have variable histories and needs. While traditional members hardly need support, new member clubs might occasionally appreciate counseling and help.

An institution needs to redefine practically permanently its objectives. The most important criterion is thereby its attractiveness for the members. Are the needs and expectations of the member clubs met? Is there an incentive for new clubs to join the WUSB? Should the WUSB limit itself to its traditional activities that consist practically solely in conducting a successful yearly meeting, or should it engage in new activities? These questions need to be asked explicitly, and the answers need to be derived from the ensuing discussion. But where should these discussions and analyses take place? The meeting of the delegates seems to be too cumbersome for this purpose. It is not a working group, but a body to make decisions and allow for information transfer. As president I have therefore decided to start with a working group "Breeding" to tackle fundamental questions and develop recommendations that will of course be submitted to the delegates when the time is right, and will be voted on by the delegates.

It is understood that the WUSB does not have the power to prescribe policies to the clubs. The WUSB needs to limit itself to sharing experiences, and to providing information and counsel. This is not a problem. Too much regulation is usually counterproductive. And the national clubs insist on their independence. Yet even the simple documentation of the present situation in the various clubs and the development of generally accepted principles, values and criteria is a substantial challenge. The future will tell if such a working group that is for now but an administrative tool for the president will bring about progress. To me it seems to be a worthwhile undertaking since I am convinced that clubs can learn a lot from each other to the benefit of a wonderful breed of dogs.

Overall, I can see a positive development. In many countries, there are more and more initiatives to improve the health of our dogs. I applaud this. Health goes before "type" and standard. We humans as rational beings need to feel unconditionally responsible for the wellbeing of our four-legged friends.

An outstanding person with an international perspective who loved the Saint Bernard from an early age has regretfully left us forever. Our honorary member Ray Horling has died at an old age. As long as his health permitted, he attended almost every WUSB and was not deterred by lengthy travel. Ray was born in the Netherlands and has made a successful carrier in the USA through hard work. And throughout his life he promoted our breed.

In the year covered by this report, the board has met three times. On August 21, 2016 in Lotzwil (Switzerland), on March 11, 2017 in Brussels (Belgium) and one day before the meeting of delegates on June 29, 2017 in Martigny (Switzerland). I hope that the new board will be productive and the initial difficulties are overcome.

I'd like to thank club president Elisabete Ferreira and her coworkers for the successful WUSB 2016 in Portugal.

The 50th anniversary of the WUSB meeting in Martigny promises to be an extraordinary event. The Swiss Club of Saint Bernard Dogs has a lot of logistical work to do. 270 Saints are registered for the show. Even a dog from Canada will be shown. 350 people have signed up for the gathering on Friday night. We hope that the expectations of all participants will be met, and that we will be able to look back on a successful event.

Originally, we wanted to present an anniversary brochure in Martigny. This turned out to be more difficult than expected. The principal problem was the lack of suitable illustrations. If now in Martigny lots of high quality photos are taken, a brochure could be developed after the event. This would have the advantage that the brochure would reflect the actual event, and that the material would be personally meaningful to the participants.

I realize more and more that in spite of abundant literature the perception of the history of our breed is very one-sided. From what point on can we even speak of a breed of Saint Bernard Dogs? Certainly not before the middle of the 19th century when the master butcher Heinrich Schumacher in Bern founded his kennel and devised own pedigrees on stationary of the order of the Great Saint Bernard pass. Who knows for example that the dogs of the Great Saint Bernard receive official pedigrees only since about 1951? Historically, our magnificent dogs existed in Switzerland not only on the Great Saint Bernard pass that gave the breed its name. They could also be found at many other places all over Switzerland. And they were not only used as rescue dogs. Saint Bernards are much more versatile than most of us realize. Their suitability for social work and as therapy dogs has in recent times produced incredible effects. We can be proud of the achievements of our four-legged friends. On the other hand, do we provide enough occupation for our dogs? This is an important and basic question that becomes more and more relevant in evaluations of animal well-being. In the USA, there are working competitions held at dog shows alongside conformation contests. In Europe, we mostly limit ourselves to evaluating appearance. This is from my point of view a chance missed to serve our breed.

Rudolf Thomann, President