



BMDCA Info Series

Working with the BMDCA & BGF for the Welfare of the BMD 2012 #23

Introduction ► Congratulations on being part of the Bernese Mountain Dog community! Making the decision to bring a Berner into one's family is a big one that comes with the joys and responsibilities of conscientious dog ownership. Within the US, Berners and their owners are supported by many interconnected organizations that are dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of our breed. All Berner owners – those who love their companion dogs, breed, show in conformation, and compete in performance events – are served by, can have an impact on, and share in the responsibility of helping these organizations be successful in fulfilling their objectives. Plus, Berners and their owners can benefit greatly from the many services they offer.

Berner-Garde Foundation ► The Berner-Garde Foundation (BGF or Berner-Garde – www.bernergarde.org) was established to collect, maintain, and disseminate information about genetic diseases observed in the Bernese Mountain Dog. BGF is an independent, tax-exempt, not-for-profit organization with its own Board of Directors. Its mission is "... to ensure that all Bernese Mountain Dogs (BMD) have a long and healthy lifespan of twelve-fourteen years." According to the most recent **BMDCA Health Report**, the dogs included in that analysis, on average, lived to be a little less than eight years old.

BGF Health Database ► Information in the Berner-Garde database is publicly available online, free of charge to everyone. It contains information that has been compiled over many years from voluntary submissions received from owners and other public information sources, including the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) and the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF). Puppy buyers, owners, and breeders can use the database for a wide variety of purposes, as can all veterinarians and researchers, especially those who are working to reduce genetic disease in the breed.

Berner-Garde needs your help in continuing to build its database. One of its goals is to connect with every BMD owner so that s/he will understand and undertake the critical commitment of maintaining a simple health record for every BMD ever owned. This commitment consists of entering important health information throughout the life of each dog, including the date and underlying cause(s) of death. Responsible breeders will enter initial litter information in the BGF database. Then they will coach their buyers to maintain these health records after each puppy goes to its forever home.

Entering data into the BGF database is simple and quick. To get started follow these easy steps:

1. Go to <http://www.bernergarde.org> and click on the

Database button, which is on the bottom left of the home page.

2. When on the Berner-Garde Database Welcome Page, find the bar titled "click here to enter the Berner-Garde database" and do so.
3. Find the "Submit Data" button on the left hand side, and click on it. Once on this submissions page you can elect to enter information about yourself, your dog, or your litter, if you are a breeder. There is explanatory information to walk you through the process. There is a help button that will link you to a BGF operator for assistance. Additionally, you can save your personal settings so submitting future data will be even faster and easier.
4. To determine whether your Berner already has a database record, and an assigned BGF number, click on the "Dogs" button, which also can be found in the left hand navigation panel on the BGF Database Welcome Page. Enter your dog's AKC registered name and/or other information listed on the electronic form to see what the query yields. If your dog has not been entered in the Berner-Garde database a number will be issued and a record created after the first data submission. Likewise, an owner record will be created for you during the initial data entry process. As noted in the step above, you can save your personal settings so future updates for you and your Berner will be a snap and can be done directly through the Dog and People detail pages.

If you need assistance at any time, a BGF operator will guide you through the process and is available by email to answer your questions.

In addition to helping create an ever-enriched database for the breeder and scientific communities, there are many Berner-Garde database features and functionalities that you might like to use as an owner. Many of these are described in a companion **Info Sheet – Learning About BMDs Through Berner-Garde**, which can be found on the BMDCA website. Take a minute to familiarize yourself with the tools that are available to you and your veterinarian.



All so striking
but what can
be learned
about each
through the
Berner-Garde
database?

For more information, please visit our website at www.bmdca.org.

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BMD DNA/Tissue Repository ► Finally, as part of its mission to improve the health and longevity of our Berners, the Berner-Garde Foundation and Michigan State University (MSU), with support from the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA), have established a Repository that collects, stores, and maintains DNA and tumor tissue samples from Bernese Mountain Dogs. The goal of the Repository is to facilitate research on serious genetic diseases affecting the breed. The samples collected, along with the health and pedigree information maintained in the Berner-Garde database, will assist researchers who, in the past, have been hampered by the lack of samples, and insufficient medical and pedigree information. All BMD owners can help support this cause. To learn more in general or how to provide samples go to – <http://bernergarde.org/home/repository.aspx> .

The Berner-Garde Foundation continues to do so much for our breed and all who have Berners – pet owners, competitors, and breeders alike – can play a part. Join in building the BG database and Repository. Become a BGF supporter today!

Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA) ►

The BMDCA is recognized as the official national breed club by the American Kennel Club. It was formed in 1968 to bring together BMD owners and breeders from across the country. From its original 33 members, the Club grew slowly, reaching 100 members by 1971. Today the BMDCA is well established and growing steadily with over 1,400 members. In addition, the BMDCA has recognized a large number of regional clubs that allow local owners to more easily participate in events with other Berner enthusiasts at locations close to them.

The BMDCA membership is very diverse. There are many long-time ambassadors of the breed, as well as newcomers, interested in learning and getting involved. Some of these devoted pet owners are breeders, others are active in competition (conformation and performance events), or community services such as therapy dog work. The focal point that unites this diverse group is their *love for the breed*. All too often “pet” owners view dog clubs as only serving “show people,” and nothing could be further from the truth. Like other national breed clubs, the BMDCA exists to protect and advance the well-being and interests of the breed. To fulfill this mandate, the Club focuses extensively on education for all who are interested in Bernese Mountain Dogs. The BMDCA and the regional clubs offer many valuable, easily accessible resources.

Through ongoing surveys over the years, the BMDCA has researched why its members join and remain active in the club. The explanations describing the **value** of membership are many but the most prevalent and significant continue to be:

- desire and ability to protect the breed;
- opportunities to connect with others;
- information/education about the breed.

In addition to the value of membership, the **benefits** of BMDCA membership are many but a brief list includes:

- An annual subscription to *The Alpenhorn*, which is the official bi-monthly publication of the BMDCA and contains a broad collection of articles on diverse topics of interest to the pet owner as well as those who engage in competitions and breeding.
- Eligibility for participation in the **BMDCA Breeder Mentor Program**, designed for responsible BMD owners who want

to become or who are currently novice breeders.

- Eligibility for participation in the **BMDCA On-line Breeder Referral Program** as a BMDCA member/breeder.
- Eligibility to participate on committees, projects, and task forces and become involved in the leadership of the Club.
- Eligibility for BMDCA awards and titles that are unique to the breed and recognized in the Club's **Yearbook**.

But even if you don't become a member of the BMDCA you can still benefit from the Club in many ways, which include:

- Coming to the BMDCA National Specialty, which offers something for every Berner enthusiast and is the home of Berner University (BU). BU educational programs span the gamut from Berner health, history, breeding, rescue, nutrition, performance activities, and more, and are for the newcomer as well as for the experienced owner.
- Keeping abreast of upcoming events sponsored by the BMDCA and regional BMD clubs through our calendar - <http://www.bmdca.org/events/calendar.php>
- Networking and making new acquaintances, many of whom might become life-long friends. While your BMD's breeder should always be a primary source of information, the BMDCA and regional BMD clubs can introduce you to networks and activities that will enrich the experiences that you and your Berner might enjoy.
- Tapping into the vast information found on the BMDCA website, which include educational and health resources, links to the regional BMD clubs, rescue contacts, and more.

The BMDCA needs your help as well. As an all volunteer organization, it is dependent upon the time, talent, creativity, and availability of volunteers to perform its work on behalf of the Club and the breed. While most volunteers are members, all are not. We are in constant need of volunteers for committees, events, and special projects. The skill sets required run the gamut from dog-related expertise to general management know-how. Volunteer assignments can be right-sized to fit the interests and needs of the individual. And, through giving and involvement, it's sometimes amazing the enrichment one receives in return.

Summary ► It is often said that you can't have just one Berner! Related to this “warning,” it is our hope that this wonderful breed will find its way into your heart and create a desire for you to join forces with the Berner community by supporting Berner-Garde and connecting with the BMDCA to collectively help promote the health and welfare of the Bernese Mountain Dog. Every individual can make a difference. To get involved with the BMDCA, please contact our Corresponding Secretary who is listed on the BMDCA website. And, don't forget the resources available through the regional BMD clubs.

