

The Phenomena of Vizwhizzes!!!

What on earth is a Vizwhizz I can hear people asking! Some new agility activity? A new way of gundog training? Something the Kennel Club are introducing to evidence our show dogs are truly dual purpose?

Sorry folks - it's none of these, but a phenomena developed through the social networking of Facebook, which is gaining momentum across the UK with new groups springing up wherever there is a gap in the area.

The purpose of a Vizwhizz is primarily to enable owners of the Hungarian Vizsla and Hungarian Wirehaired Vizsla to get together on a monthly basis to walk together in a sociable and fun setting, and to enjoy their dogs playing and zooming about. I think we all know our "gingers" recognise others, and play and run like no other breed seems to, and they certainly appear to enjoy these social gatherings as much as their owners!

The Vizwhizzes are an ideal opportunity for people to share stories, photographs and seek advice about their dogs. Often people considering buying an HV or HWV who have no previous experience of the breeds are encouraged to come and meet the dogs and owners to talk about the care needs of these lively breeds, and what they can expect. Many of the people who attend also show and/or work their dogs or compete in agility, and this can encourage pet owners to consider dipping their toes into other activities.

The London and Surrey Vizwhizz, of which I am a member, started in November 2011 as one of the Vizwhizz groups set up on Facebook. It was specifically aimed at people living in the south of the UK, but others were welcome to come along if they were in the area. Other "honorary" vizslas were also welcomed - and other include Labradors, Great Dane, Jack Russell, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Miniature Dachsund, West Highland White, Dalmatians - you name it and they have probably attended!

The L&S Vizwhizz quickly became a safe, friendly group where people could meet in reality, not just through the medium of Facebook, and the popularity of the group has snowballed so much that we are delighted that we now have an international on-line following from the USA, Argentina, all parts of Europe, Scandinavia, Ireland and Australia. Our current membership is 906, and grows daily.

Soon after the group was set up, its founder, Lucy Barrett, realised that this could become a forum not just for fun walks and information sharing and support, but also with a more serious side too. She involved two of her friends, Angie Foot and myself as co-conspirators, and early in 2012 we decided that any monies collected through donations or other fund-raising activities such as raffles, should be donated to Vizsla Rescue Groups, primarily the 2 UK HV Breed rescue groups (the Hungarian Vizsla

Society and the Hungarian Vizsla Welfare Charity), although other groups and individual dogs have also benefitted greatly from the money entrusted to us by our supporters.

The idea of doing online auctions via our Facebook page was borne, and in 2012 evolved so that we now add “guest” charities to our core beneficiaries, which usually changes at each auction. These guest charities have included Vizsla Rescue charities in the USA, Cyprus, Hungary, and other international more “generic” dog rescue groups nominated by our followers, K9 Search Dogs in Devon, and individual “hardship” cases (HVs and HWVs).

We are hugely indebted to all the companies and individuals who donate items so generously, and to all of our followers who compete to win their cherished items!!! It's impossible to tell at the beginning what will spark an international bidding war, but there is always *something* people from both sides of the pond and from the Southern hemisphere decide is the definite “must-have” and the bidding becomes frantic - interspersed with hysterically funny banter as they try to out-bid each other, in different time zones, and occasionally, different currencies and languages!

In 2012 we also decided to try and provide a broader range of activities for members, and introduced 2 taster days of gundog training with the respected ‘A’ Panel HPR Field Trial judge and trainer, Tony Russell, which were really good fun as well as instructive, and which proved to be highly popular so that 2 more sessions were offered in 2013.



In March 2013, our Vizwhizz developed an international flavour and we were thrilled that we had members and supporters who flew in from the USA, Germany, Ireland, Hungary, and Scotland - and others drove miles from all over the UK and Eire. Despite the torrential rain on the Epsom Downs, it was a really enjoyable day with catering provided by our skilled baker Rosemary Frost of the Tavasza affix. It is humbling that this group now has very special meaning to so many international friends, and we are so grateful for their support, kindness, humour, and most of all, the trust placed in us by all our members and supporters.

In the summer of 2013 the fund-raising took a serious and personal turn for us when



our founder and leader's beloved dog, Otty, developed Polymyositis at the rare older age of 7. The veterinary bills soared, so Angie and I cobbled together an on-line auction to raise much-needed extra funding. We were overwhelmed by people's response and I am delighted to report that he is doing really well - still zooming with all his friends - largely due to the incredible nursing, love and care given by his devoted mum, Lucy.

Lucy has used this dreadful experience to publicise this distressing disease and increase awareness amongst Vizsla owners, and reduce the secrecy surrounding

this disease. Naturally we have now included Polymyositis Research into our core



beneficiary group for fund-raising.

This year, besides our monthly Vizwhizzes, and the auctions, we have our Banking Business Manager, Kelly Purvor, with her team of colleagues, doing the London to Brighton bike ride in aid of the L&S Vizwhizz group.

To date we have been able to donate approximately £45k to rescue groups/charities and hardship cases in the UK, USA, Hungary, Germany and Holland. The majority of those supported have a direct link to vizsla causes, but a few are more generic in nature, or are helping dogs in general, such as the search and rescue work done by K9 Rescue.

The Vizwhizz phenomena also led to my friend, Felicity Butters (Flixraign Gundogs) extending her usual annual 'puppy owner' Vizwhizz and barbeque to include other groups from all over the UK. This annual Scottish Megawhizz has grown steadily over the last few years, and is now based on the beautiful Carmichael Estate near Biggar in Lanarkshire, where there is a weekend of fun and laughter with a pub meal and quiz the night before, a piper who leads the gathered masses off on the walk through the gorgeous estate, and an exceptional barbeque provided by the Carmichael family and staff from their own farm produce, including lamb and venison.



This year the Scottish Megawhizz took on an international flavour, as besides folk who travelled from the south-east, south-west, north-east, north-west, Wales and all over Scotland, friends came by sea and air from Holland, the USA, Canada and Germany. It was an amazing weekend of laughter, late nights, good food and drink - additional hospitality was provided by our Dutch friends who even brought a keg of specialist (strong) ale!!! Rumour has it SOME folk didn't roll into bed until 4.00 am..... And a definite highlight was a beautiful rendition of Nancy Simmons'

incredibly moving song 'Vizsla - Tails of Budapest' by the very talented Verity Griffiths



and Philippa Scott on ukulele and guitar. Not a dry eye in the pub!

Suppliers of dog merchandise (and some human things too!) took stalls in the marquee, and after the barbecue, an auction was held (managed by a professional auctioneer), to raise funds for rescue, which was hugely entertaining, if not totally bonkers as probably the highest bids this year went to our friends the “ ‘Mericans” for 2 beautifully knitted dressed bunnies.....don't ask!!! It is now such a huge event that every cottage on the estate is booked well in advance, in fact it is now spreading to other cottages in the area, and some come in their camper-vans.

Some 140 vizslas attended (of the smooth and wire variety, and a longhair) with numerous 'honorary' vizslas in addition ranging in size from a miniature Dachshund, Yorkshire and Jack Russell terriers to large labradors and a Bernese Mountain Dog. The charities Hungarian Vizsla Society rescue, Polymyositis research (via the Hungarian Vizsla Welfare Charity), the American rescue organisations Iowa Vizsla



Rescue and Midwest Viz Rescue, and Cyprus Vizsla Rescue all benefitted from the £4,100 that was raised.

Vizwhizzes are fun for all - young and old.....or young and younger!!! As shown by my Lanokk Szivos (Jamal) taking the opportunity for a cuddle with a very willing young lady.....



Why not look on Facebook and see if there is one in your area, and if not, set one up? Members of existing groups come from a walks of life and include pet owners, people who show their dogs, those who work their dogs or do gundog training, who do agility, and also breeders. It's an ideal opportunity in a fun and social setting to share knowledge, problems, ideas, and to encourage others to share the things YOU enjoy doing with your vizslas - and usually there's a pub meal at the end too!!! What more could you want?

