

Eye Disease Research to Benefit Guide Dogs

A three-year study will examine the early stages of common guide dog eye disorders.

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The Seeing Eye has specially bred and trained about 14,000 dogs to help people who are blind live more independently. Many of these dogs, however, are forced into early retirement because of eye problems.

A new research project to study inherited eye diseases in dogs aims to find ways to help dogs retain their sight and guide dog status. The Seeing Eye of Morristown, N.J., established in 1929, is helping fund a Morris Animal Foundation three-year project to address retinal disorders in dogs.

The study focuses on the early stages of eye disorders in Seeing Eye dogs, said Tina Martinez, Morris Animal Foundation spokeswoman. This project examines 450 canine genetic traits affecting multiple breeds.

Dr. Gregory Acland is the principal investigator for this study, which is being conducted at Cornell University. The importance of the study, "Pooled Association Mapping for Canine Hereditary Disorders," is its proposal to use new genetic technology that compares DNA samples from a group of affected animals to that of normal animals, looking for differences between the two, according to The Seeing Eye.

The Seeing Eye is addressing eye diseases that could have a different impact on the guide dog population.

"We hope that this study is successful and will lead to early screening capabilities for a variety of retinal disorders," said Dr. James Kutsch, president and CEO of The Seeing Eye.