If we do not open up to discussion, our English Setter breeding in the Czech Republic faces a silent extinction.

Looking at the current breeding statistics of English Setters in the Czech Republic is alarming. When around 40 puppies are born here in an entire year, while in Italy this number revolves around 18,000, it is clear that Czech breeding is experiencing a profound crisis. The breeding base has narrowed precariously, and as one of my fellow breeders aptly remarked: “There is nowhere left to turn.”

We are at a stage where the main criterion for a future owner or breeder choosing a puppy is not its temperament, health, or conformation, but simply whether you get lucky and the dog has a full dentition after teething. We stand on the threshold of a possible change in breeding eligibility rules, which are currently the strictest here compared to neighboring countries, and it is time to face the truth. If we do not open up to discussion, our breeding in the Czech Republic faces a silent extinction.

Great thanks belong to foreign breeders from England, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, and other countries who shared their perspectives on the situation in their homelands. Their experiences show that the path to saving the breed does not lead through administrative red tape, but through breeder responsibility and an open mind.

Looking into the Mirror of Time

To understand how we reached this point, we must look into history. In 1936, within the Association for English Pointers and Setters, breeding eligibility was determined purely on an individual basis based on shows and field tests (the so-called *hledačky*). Back then, names like Bajer, Knoll, and Mužík called the shots. In 1964, the rules tightened: dogs required a first prize from Autumn Trials (*PZ*) and Field Trials, while a third prize from Autumn Trials sufficed for bitches. At that time, the absence of any one tooth was tolerated in dogs, and even two teeth in bitches. This rule essentially persisted even after the unification in 1972.

The turning point came in 1991. The newly formed clubs, ČPSK and MSKAO, clamped down and introduced strict full dentition requirements. This was likely due to the post-revolution opening of borders and fear of oligodontia during uncontrolled foreign matings. The fact remains, however, that over the following years, the breed unintentionally split into three directions due to these strict limitations.

Today at shows, we see types of dogs that are absolutely excellent in the field but leave the ring with a "Good" evaluation. Regarding judging according to the valid FCI standard, such a rating is completely realistic because the show judge holds the standard as their bible and must assess conformation and temperament traits accordingly. Conversely, at working trials, we watch conformationally beautiful, heavier show dogs being uncompromisingly disqualified from breeding due to failing a test—for instance, because of an incorrect quartering system or style of pointing. We cannot paint everyone with the same brush. It is a utopia to dictate a height for trial dogs, which the breeder must monitor themselves according to the standard, just as it is impossible to expect show individuals to work in the field in the style of trial specialists. Behind the decline in popularity and practical use of English Setters lies the long-term depletion of small game, which significantly hinders their gundog training and subsequent use in hunting. Breeding conditions must accommodate all directions, not eliminate them.

What Does "Full Dentition is Desirable" Actually Mean?

Teeth are the most sensitive topic in today's debates. The Czech Republic applies extreme strictness, yet the FCI standard for the English Setter speaks clearly: "full dentition is desirable". The dictionary meaning of the word *desirable* is an ideal, welcome, and breeding-preferred trait—not, however, strictly mandatory for preserving the genetic diversity of the entire breed.

As confirmed by breeders from England, the breed's country of origin, the local Kennel Club does not interfere in breeding at all. Neither breeders nor judges treat missing individual teeth as a disqualification. A scissor bite is what matters; in exceptional individuals, they even tolerate a tight level (pincer) bite. Counting teeth, as we know it from continental Europe, is not practiced in England at all. Of course, a good breeder does not knowingly breed an individual with severe dental defects, but a missing premolar will never outweigh the dog's health, excellent bone structure, and temperament.

The aim of these reflections is not to advocate for oligodontia. A flawless muzzle, scissor bite, and the presence of incisors and canines are essential for a gundog. The absence of molars must be considered very seriously by every breeder. However, won't our uncompromising insistence on absolute full dentition destroy English Setter breeding in the Czech Republic for good? Isn't it already happening?

Many enthusiastic people acquire a female with a vision of future breeding, but their dream ends the moment a single tiny premolar is missing after teething. The bitch is lost to breeding, even though both of her parents had full dentition

—which, as we know, is not a 100% genetic guarantee of full-mouthed offspring. Meanwhile, the Slovak model shows us a functional compromise: at least one of the parents in the breeding pair must have full dentition. Why couldn't we take this path as well to save a valuable gene pool?

How this issue is approached elsewhere in the world (breed English setter):

Country	Trials / Tests	Teeth & Bite	Health & Conformation
Czech Republic	Very strict (ZV in 1st prize – 2nd prize, FT or PZ)	Full dentition, scissor bite	HD X-ray (max. grade C), Excellent (V), Very Good (VD)
Slovakia	Selection: Club Hunting Aptitude Test (T.A.N.), or JSS (min. 2nd prize), or FT (Newly from 2026) Pointer Breeding Test	Scissor bite. Tolerance of missing **max. 1 tooth** (P or M, not simultaneously). One of the pair must be full dentition.	Show min. Very Good (VD) or Excellent (V) from 12 months. HD X-ray only grades A and B. Tail defect (kink) disqualifies from breeding.
Poland	(Min. 3rd degree) or field trials / FT focused on quartering and pointing	Scissor bite, number of teeth is not specified	Conformation assessment, HD X-ray grades A, B, C
Germany	Specific field test, conformation assessment (Junior 6–24 months)	Full dentition desirable, scissor bite, **2 missing premolars allowed**	HD X-ray (grades A, B), mandatory CLAD tests and hearing test (BAER)
Austria	**Club conditions**	**Breeders prefer full dentition and a scissor bite due to shows, but in the breeding regulations themselves, a strict requirement regarding missing teeth is not stated**	**Mandatory hearing testing (BAER), HD X-ray with a specialist**
USA *(AKC breed standard)*	Free breeding based on the full responsibility of the breeder	Standard is more lenient about missing teeth, scissor bite preferred, level/pincer bite accepted, height of dog/bitch lower than in the FCI standard	Selection of partners relies on the breeder's reputation and health
Hungary	Breeding eligibility test (bonitation)	The judge checks the bite, a completely faulty bite will not pass, missing teeth are assessed according to the standard	Monitored by breeders voluntarily
Italy	Everything is up to the breeder, without	Guided by the standard and the breeder's reputation	Monitored by breeders voluntarily, massive breeding base

restrictive breeding
eligibility rules

Health and Temperament as an Uncompromising Pillar

While there is room for breeding discussion and tolerance regarding teeth, we must be uncompromising in the areas of health and temperament. The English Setter is happiest in motion, and our task is to keep it healthy. The FCI Breeding Regulations strictly forbid breeding individuals with severe hip dysplasia (grade E), and it is wonderful that Czech breeders often go far beyond the scope of their duties. Inspired by foreign practice, alongside hip X-rays (HD), they voluntarily check elbow joints (ED) and test puppies' hearing (BAER). We should support this path.

Temperament is also crucial. The English Setter is a gentle, active, and reliable companion. Aggression must not be tolerated in breeding in any form, and shyness must not be underestimated. A balanced temperament is what makes a Setter a Setter—whether in hunting practice, at shows, or in everyday life.

The Way Forward: Trust and Transparency

The way out of this vicious circle does not lead through more prohibitions that discourage people from breeding, especially when there is already nowhere left to turn. We must shift more responsibility to the breeders themselves and give them the freedom to fulfill their visions, just as is the case in successful foreign breeding programs. Every breeder vouches for their own name and the reputation of their kennel.

A great solution is offered by absolute transparency. What if we introduced an official breeding card for each individual, publicly accessible on the club's website? Such a card would contain a detailed critique from the club show, an accurate and truthful description of the dentition, height at the withers, and complete health test results (HD, ED, BAER). The future puppy buyer would thus get a perfect overview, could check the parents' traits themselves, and would clearly see what vision the breeder is following.

Transparency would replace harsh restrictions, more dogs would enter the breeding pool, and the breeding base could grow once again. I believe this is precisely the way to save our beloved English Setters from silent extinction in the Czech lands. What do you think, would this help us open a new, successful chapter?

Thank you all for the time you have dedicated to reading these lines. My reflections did not arise from a desire to criticize, but from a deep concern for the future of a breed that means the world to me. From the bottom of my heart, I want to urge you—breeders, owners, and lovers of the breed—to reflect deeply. We stand at a crossroads, and our next steps will determine whether the English Setter in the Czech Republic is given a chance to breathe new life, or whether we definitively stifle its breeding with bureaucracy. Let us, please, decide wisely, with an open mind, and with regard to the health and genetic future of our dogs, not just the perfection of charts. Our Setters deserve it.

Veronika Horváthová