



Pathology & Biology Section – 2005

G9 Cane Corsos Attack: Two Fatal Cases

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The goal of this presentation is to present the case of two spouses who were slaughtered by their three pet Cane Corsos. Investigations of the death scene and autopsy findings are described.

Although dog bite related fatalities on humans appear to be a breedspecific problem (Rottweiler and Pit Bull), other breeds may bite and cause fatalities at higher rates. Here the authors present the cases of spouses slaughtered by their own three Cane Corsos, an Italian Molossoid dog breed. This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by confirming the inadequacy of breed-specific ordinances.

The most common animal bite injuries in the United States are inflicted by dogs, accounting for 80-90% of all bites. It is estimated that between 1 and 4 million Americans are annually bitten by "man's best friend;" approximately 1 in 20 dogs will bite a human being during the dog's lifetime. The vast majority of these dog bite wounds produce minor injuries, and the victims never seek medical attention, but serious sequelae, and even death, may occur. In 2001, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that 368,245 persons were treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments (EDs) for dog bite-related injuries (rate: 129.3 per 100,000 population). Bite wounds, in fact, account for approximately 1% of all emergency department visits and more than \$30 million in annual health care costs.

Annual mortality rates from dog attacks are reported at 7.2 cases for 100 million inhabitants. Many victims of these fatalities, unfortunately, are young children (often <1-year-old), and old people (mainly women); in fact, these two groups are made up of weak and defenseless individuals, generally unable to protect themselves properly.

There is a strict relationship between the victim's age, severity of injuries, and injury site. The majority of dog bites to adults are directed to the extremities; conversely, the most frequent targets of dog attacks towards children are head and neck. This explains why the highest mortality is seen among children.

About 50% of fatal attacks towards human beings involve two or more dogs; on the contrary, non fatal bites almost always involve only one dog. In fact, belonging to a pack usually makes dogs behave more aggressive, and increases the probability of causing the victim's death.

The most commonly reported breeds are Pit Bull, Rottweiler, German Shepherd, Golden Retrievers, Husky, and Akita. Presented the case of a couple slaughtered by their three Cane Corsos, in the garden adjacent to their own house. The husband, a 76-year-old man, was found lifeless, lying face down in the bloodstained ground, completely covered with blood. He wore trousers and a pair of shoes, but his legs were hidden by leaves. His trunk was completely naked, but numerous shards of clothes were scattered all around the area of aggression, abundantly blood stained. Injuries were localized to head, neck, trunk, and upper limbs, while the genitalia and lower limbs remained intact. The scalp was almost totally absent, so that the frontal, part of the temporal, parietal and occipital bones lay bare. The left lower eyelid and the left zygomatic region showed a stretch laceration of 4.5 x 3.2 cm, with exposure of the underlying bones; the left external ear presented a grossly semicircular resection of 3 x 2.5 cm. On the left supraclavicular region there was a deep oval shaped laceration of 5.4 x 4.7 cm, with the exposure of the clavicle, muscles, nerves, and resected vessels. There were numerous lacerations on the right side of the neck, the main one was a deep oval shaped gaping wound of 9.2 x 8 cm, which exposed part of the mandible, lacerated musculature and vessels. The left upper arm showed numerous gaping wounds, in particular the deepest were localised on the upper and lower part of the arm, on the elbow, and on the radial face of the forearm exposing, respectively, the humerus and the radius, lacerated muscles, tendons, nerves and vessels. Similar injuries were on the right upper arm, and in particular in the axillary cavity and on the elbow, where underlying tissues appeared completely destroyed. All these torn wounds presented ragged and irregular margins with adjacent puncture wounds, the so called a-hole-and-a-tear combination. In the vicinity of the bites described, but in particular on the back, were found the typical claw-marks: narrow, superficial, linear abrasions, parallel to each other, four or five in number. The wife, a 70-year-old woman, presented similar wounds over the upper extremities, neck and trunk. The internal examination of both deceased revealed mainly multiple transmural vessels tears. Deaths were attributed to exsanguination by external bleeding.

These represent unique cases, because, there appears to be no previous reports of fatal attacks with the involvement of the Cane Corso, an Italian breed of Molossoid dog. This confirms that all types of dogs may inflict injuries—even fatal—to people, and reveals the inadequacy of breedspecific ordinances.



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