

Hulu is apparently having trouble with his eye sight. This especially appears to be the case when there is lower ambient lighting. His caretakers, who wish to remain nameless, have watched Hulu bump into objects in the house with increasing frequency over the last two months and are wondering if he might have cataracts.

Before I delve into Hulu's case, I want to make it very clear that, if you as a caretaker of an animal, regardless of species, notice a change in their eye sight, take them to their veterinarian. Eye sight degradation can be an indication of several potentially serious conditions.

Madam X and/or her partner did not share with me what breed of dog Hulu might be, but they did share that they have noticed Hulu's eyes appearing to turn somewhat blue over the last few months. This might offer a clue as to why his eye sight is worsening.

Rather than list a bunch of possible causes for decreasing vision in dogs, let's focus (get it...focus...) on some of the more common conditions that might be causing Hulu's partial blindness, and too I will mention a potentially very serious cause that can lead to blindness in dogs.

Cataracts, as mentioned by Hulu's caretakers, can indeed cause partial and, in many cases, total blindness. Cataracts involve the lens and/or the lens capsule of the eye and show as an opacity. They prevent normal vision. They can be present from birth or become acquired as a dog ages. They can also occur as a result of underlying metabolic disease, the most common of which is diabetes mellitus. Cataracts are easily diagnosed by a veterinarian, and if causing total blindness, they can be removed to allow a return of some vision.

Another very common potential cause for a decrease in vision in dogs is a process called lenticular sclerosis. This process is a normal part of aging of the lens in the eye that results in the lens crystallizing to the point of blocking some light from reaching the retina in the back of the eye and producing a visual image. This process does produce a blue cast to the eye as the lens becomes more crystalline. Total blindness does not result from lenticular sclerosis and some of these patients do not appear to suffer any vision loss. Some patients with this lens change, however, will have problems seeing in low ambient light situations owing to the fact that the lens lets less light through and there is less light available to begin with. If I was to wager a guess, I would bet Hulu has lenticular sclerosis.

The one eye disease I want to mention here that is very serious and will cause total blindness is glaucoma. This disease results from an increase in the fluid pressure within the eyeball, which left unchecked, causes destruction of the retina in the back of the eye rendering the eye functionless. This disease process is very painful. The problem with glaucoma in dogs is that we seldom catch it before vision is destroyed as our companions do not show symptoms early enough in the disease course so that we can intervene and save their vision. The symptoms that we do note are redness around the eyes and often a blue cast to the eyes with redness in the white portion of the eyes. These dogs will sometimes rub their eyes in response to the discomfort from the increased intraocular pressure. If your dog ever shows any of these symptoms, have him seen immediately by his veterinarian. Glaucoma is treatable in many cases, and if caught early enough, vision can be saved.

Again, the list representing reasons for vision loss in dogs is protracted, but in Hulu's case, I suspect his condition is not serious. That said, a veterinary visit is necessary to verify my assumption, an assumption I hope to be correct.