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Dog theft on the increase: five pups stolen every day

- Latest published data reveals the number of dogs stolen increased from 1,879 in 2017 to 1,959 in 2018, the equivalent of five every day
- Popular dogs like Chihuahuas, French Bulldogs and Jack Russell Terriers are the most commonly stolen breeds
- Not always a happy ending - as only 17 per cent of stolen pups are returned to their owners
- The Metropolitan Police Service (304), West Yorkshire Police (179) and Greater Manchester Police (161) reported the highest number of stolen dogs

New research from Direct Line Pet Insurance¹ reveals the number of dogs reported stolen has risen for the fourth consecutive year. In 2018 there were 1,959 dogs reported stolen to UK police forces, 80 more than in 2017, despite fewer police forces responding to a request for this data². On average, five dogs are reported stolen every single day across the UK.

The Staffordshire Bull Terrier was the most targeted breed by criminals in 2018, with 88 reported thefts over the year. Crossbreeds remain the second most popular for dognappers. There were 53 reported cases of stolen cross breeds in 2018, likely to be due to the popularity of 'designer' dog breeds like Labradoodles and Puggles.

Chihuahuas have now overtaken the French Bulldog as the third most stolen breed, with 52 Chihuahuas reported stolen in 2018, an 18 per cent increase from 2017 (44 cases). 51 French Bulldogs were reported stolen last year, a 13 per cent increase from 2017 and making it the fourth most-stolen breed, .

There has also been a rise in the number of Jack Russell Terriers (up 15 per cent) and Pugs (up 600 per cent) stolen. Pugs have gone from the 11th most stolen breed, with four cases in 2017, to fifth most stolen in 2018. Flat faced dog breeds like Pugs and French Bulldogs have become increasingly popular due to the number of celebrities who own them. French Bulldog owners include Hugh Jackman, Reese Witherspoon and David Beckham while owners of Pugs include Gerard Butler, Hugh Laurie and Paris Hilton.

Rank	Breed	2017 reported thefts	2018 reported thefts	Percentage change
1	Staffordshire Bull Terrier	172	88	-49%
2	Crossbreed	72	53	-27%

5	Jack Russell	34	39	+15%
6	Pug	4	24	+500%
7	English Bulldog	3	22	+633%
8	Cocker Spaniel	20	14	-30%
9	Labrador	35	12	-66%
10	Terrier	4	11	+175%
	All Breeds	1,879	1,959	+3%*

Breeds that have fallen in popularity amongst thieves include Huskies, which have seen an 88 per cent reduction in the number of reported thefts over 12 months. Huskies have gone from one of the ten most commonly stolen breeds in 2017 with 16 cases reported, to just two in 2018. The number of Rottweilers and Springer Spaniels reported stolen has also decreased, with just five and one reported theft respectively.

Eva Sandstra-Bennett, Head of Pet Insurance at Direct Line, said: "It is heart-breaking to see there are still so many dogs stolen each year and the numbers are continuing to rise. Dogs are a huge part of the family, so it causes real distress and trauma when they are stolen. Unfortunately, the popularity of designer dog breeds and flat faced dogs means they are highly desirable for thieves, as they are easily identifiable and can be sold on for thousands of pounds. Owners of these breeds should be particularly vigilant and aware of situations that make it easier for thieves. This can include leaving them locked in cars, tied up outside a shop or allowing them off the lead out of sight".

Police force data

The Metropolitan Police Service reported the greatest number of dogs stolen, at 304 in 2018, a 30 per cent increase compared to 2017 (234). West Yorkshire Police reported the second greatest number of stolen dogs last year, at 179, although this number has fallen by 19 per cent compared to 2017 (220). Greater Manchester Police completes the top three and received 161 reports of dogs stolen in 2018, a three per cent rise compared to 2017 (156). The Police Force which has reported the greatest increase in reports of stolen dogs is Humberside Police, which recorded 92 more dogs stolen in 2018 compared to 2017, a 167 per cent increase.

	2017 reported	2018 reported	Percentage
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	Service	2017	2018	% Change
1	West Yorkshire Police	220	179	-19%
2	Greater Manchester Police	156	161	+3%
3	Humberside Police	55	147	+167%
4	Lancashire Constabulary	93	106	+14%
5	Kent Police	135	104	-23%
6	South Yorkshire Police	103	91	-12%
7	Thames Valley Police	72	85	+18%
8	Devon and Cornwall Police	95	71	-25%
9	Staffordshire Police	53	71	+34%

At the other end of the scale, Cheshire Constabulary received just two reports of stolen dogs last year. Norfolk received the second lowest number, at just seven reports, an 85 per cent reduction compared to 2017, when 48 dogs were reported stolen in the county. Both Bedfordshire and Warwickshire received eight reports of stolen dogs in 2018.

Returned dogs

The number of dogs returned to their owners has also fallen year on year. In 2018, just 331 cases (17 per cent) resulted in the dog's safe return to its owner, which is 25 per cent fewer than in 2017 when 439 dogs were returned (23 per cent).

When it comes to returning stolen dogs to their owners, Suffolk Constabulary has the greatest success rate, returning 85 per cent of dogs stolen in 2018. Although just 13 dogs were reported stolen across the county in 2018, 11 were returned to their owners. Completing the top three are Leicestershire Constabulary, which returned 26 out of 37 dogs stolen (70 per cent success); and Dorset Police, which returned 37 out of 58, a 64 per cent success rate.

Owners in Nottinghamshire should be extra cautious, as just six per cent of dogs were returned to

Eva Sandstra-Bennett, Head of Pet Insurance at Direct Line, continued: “Unfortunately, while the number of dogs stolen is rising, the number returned is also falling; meaning owners are increasingly unlikely to be reunited with their beloved pet. If the worst does happen and a dog is stolen, owners should report it to the police immediately and start spreading the word among their local community. Online communities are also vital, as is sharing photos of the pet on social media. Owners should also ensure that their pet is microchipped, and the contact details are up to date so if they are taken to a vet’s surgery, the vet will have the right ownership details.”

Steps to follow if your dog is stolen:

- Firstly, check the local area and your dog’s favourite spots as your dog may have wandered off
- Make your dog ‘too hot to handle’ by sharing on social media, putting up posters in the local area and informing local media – include pictures and any distinctive marks in any appeals, and ask others to spread the word
- There are some specific sites set up to help find lost and stolen dogs, like doglost.co.uk
- Report your dog as stolen to the police and provide them with as much detail as possible
- Report your dog as stolen to local pet related services like vets, animal shelters, pet shops, dog wardens and the council. Provide photos, a physical description and the dogs microchip number
- Report your dog to the microchip database

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

¹ Freedom of Information Act request made to police forces across the UK in February 2019. 39 of 45 police forces (87%) responded to the request, of which 34 (76%) provided usable data.

² 2018 study conducted in February 2018, where 41 of 44 police forces (93 per cent) police forces responded to the request and 38 (86 per cent) provided usable data.

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Direct Line

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