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## Stray Dog Survey 2009

A report prepared for:

Dogs Trust



Provided by: GfK NOP Social Research

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Methodology

Dogs Trust commissions an annual survey of local authority dog wardens and environmental health officers in order to investigate the state of the nation's dogs. GfK NOP Social Research have been running the Stray Dogs survey since 2003, and were again chosen to conduct the 2009 survey. An initial telephone sweep of local authorities to update contact details and collect email addresses was carried out on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Postal questionnaires were sent to all named respondents without an email address and an initial email invitation was sent to all named individuals with an email address within 404 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in the UK on the 26<sup>th</sup> June.

Two options were made available to respondents to enable them to complete the survey in the most convenient way for them – completing the survey on the web or to return the data to GfK NOP via a paper survey in a free post envelope, by fax or by email. Following postal, email and telephone reminders, 306 questionnaires were returned by the 7<sup>th</sup> August 2009 deadline, giving a response rate of 76%. Table 1 shows the response rate across each of the regions. Authorities within Northern Ireland were contacted separately; directly by Dogs Trust and their data later combined into the overall data set.

**Table 1: Response Rates**

TV Region	Authorities Responding	Total Authorities	Response rate %
Tyne Tees (North East)	13	16	81
Granada (North West)	24	35	69
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	14	21	67
Central (Midlands)	48	70	69
HTV (Wales and West)	20	29	69
Anglia (East & Anglia)	29	38	76
Carlton (London)	53	70	76
Meridian (Southern)	38	45	84
West County (South West)	12	17	71
Border (Borders)	4	7	57
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	8	9	89
STV (Central Scotland)	17	21	81
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	26	26	100
Wales	16	22	73
West	4	7	57
Tyne Tees & Border	17	23	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>76</b>



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## 1.2 Objectives

This survey aims to provide information about the number of stray dogs that local authorities have become involved with, and the methods that they have used for dealing with stray dogs and the ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners. Data is collated at both a national and a regional level.

In order to track data from year to year the questionnaire was kept largely the same as in 2008, but the 2009 survey also saw the inclusion of a number of questions about the types of dogs taken in or handed over and one new question about whether the recession and changes in the law regarding removal of police statutory responsibility have had an impact upon the numbers of stray dogs taken in.

Comparisons are made with previous surveys where appropriate in this report.

## 1.3 Definition of Regions

The findings are analysed according to the 13 ITV regions throughout the UK. The definitions are as follows: Tyne Tees (North East), Granada (North West), Yorkshire (Yorkshire), Central (Midlands), HTV (Wales and West), Anglia (East and Anglia), Carlton (London), Meridian (Southern), West Country (South West), Border (Borders), Grampian (Northern Scotland), STV (Central Scotland), and Ulster (Northern Ireland).

Reference is also made to the newly formed TV regions of Tyne Tees and Borders (incorporating Tyne Tees and Border regions) and to Wales and West as two separate regions.

It is important to note that this year there are some minor changes to the make-up of local authorities across the UK. Since last year's report 37 local authorities have been abolished and 9 new authorities created in their place, with some slight regional overlap.

## 1.4 Interpretation of the data

In order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. The key findings from this survey are based on numbers collected for each authority (e.g. the number of strays). We have used these to make estimates for each TV region based on the assumption that authorities responding are representative of authorities as a whole.

Where figures are shown for the new Wales, West and Tyne Tees & Border TV regions these are additional to and do not make up part of the overall UK totals.

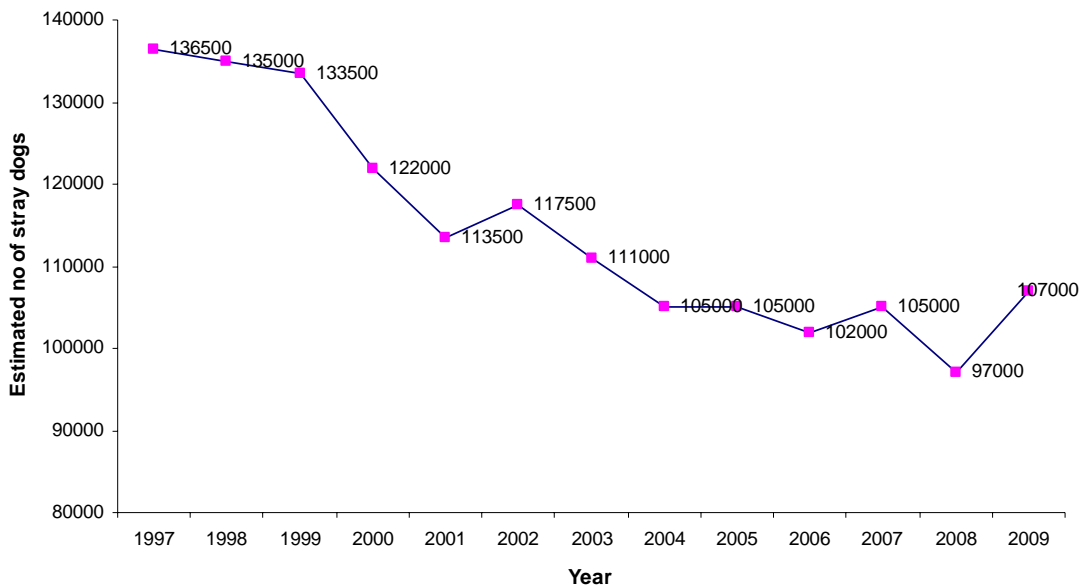


## 2 Summary of Findings

### 2.1 The Number of Stray Dogs Handled

Based on the 306 authorities who responded to this survey, an estimated 107,228 stray dogs were handled by local councils across the UK from 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009. This represents an 11% increase from the estimate of 96,892 dogs handled last year, but is broadly in line with findings from 2004-2007 as Chart 1 illustrates.

Chart 1: The Number of Stray Dogs in the UK Since 1997



Base: All local authorities (306)

Using 2001 census data, we can estimate how many people there are in the population for each stray dog. In the last year, on average, local authorities across the UK handled one stray for every 548 people. However, there is significant regional variation.

For instance, in the Carlton TV region local authorities on average dealt with one stray dog for every 960 people. In the Ulster region, there is an average of 196 people per stray dog reported by local authorities. Table 2, below, provides the full regional breakdown in terms of the number of strays to people across the UK.

The regional differences in the number of stray dogs reported by different authorities will reflect a number of factors, including the overall population and the number of dogs owned.



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Table 2: Estimated Number of People per Stray Dog by TV Region

TV Region	Estimated number of Strays 08-09	Authorities Responding	Strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray dog
Tyne Tees	7,313	13	563	416
Granada	15,871	24	661	396
Yorkshire	7,308	14	522	638
Central	18,805	48	392	539
HTV	15,038	20	752	287
Anglia	7,164	29	247	568
Carlton	11,763	53	222	960
Meridian	7,434	38	196	725
West Country	2,658	12	222	850
Border	861	4	215	808
Grampian	1,218	8	152	870
STV	4,374	17	257	871
Ulster	8,611	26	331	196
Wales	8,896	16	556	237
West	1,475	4	369	547
Tyne Tees & Border	8,705	17	378	357
<b>UK Total</b>	<b>107,228</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>548</b>

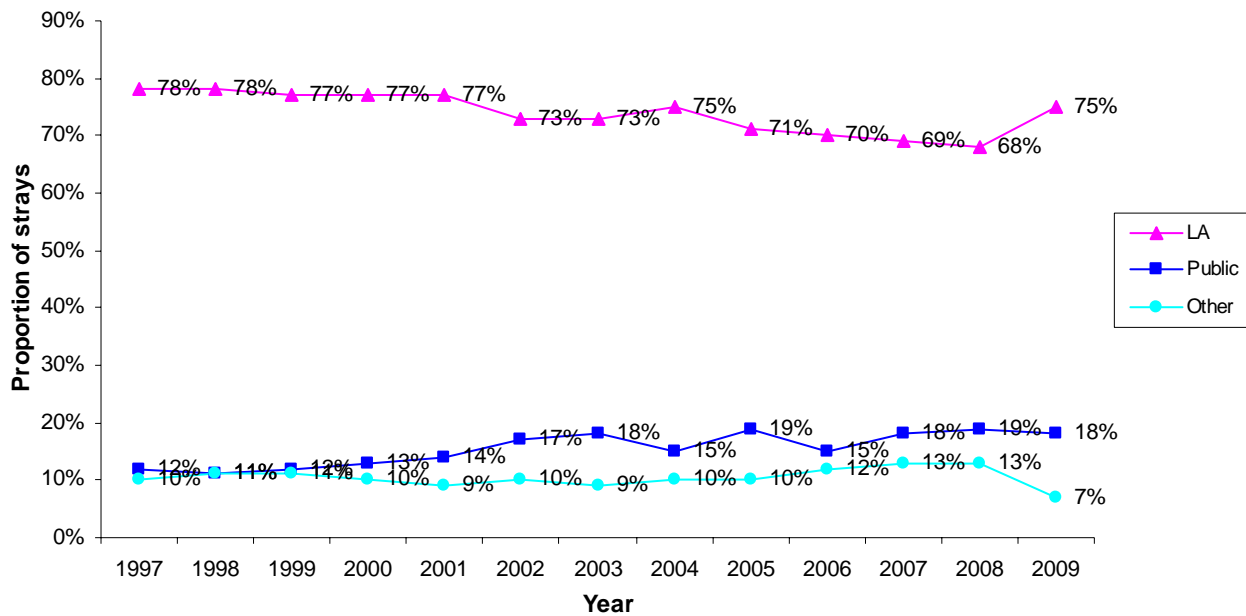


## 2.2 Seizing Stray Dogs

Local authorities played the most important role in seizing stray dogs, as in previous years. The proportion of stray dogs brought in by the general public (18%) has dropped by one per cent since last year, while the proportion seized by local authorities has risen from 68% to 75%.

We can estimate that the number of dogs brought to local authorities by the Police across the UK has fallen from last year's estimate of 8,562, to approximately 3,261.

**Chart 2: How Strays were brought to the local authority**



Base: All local authorities (306)

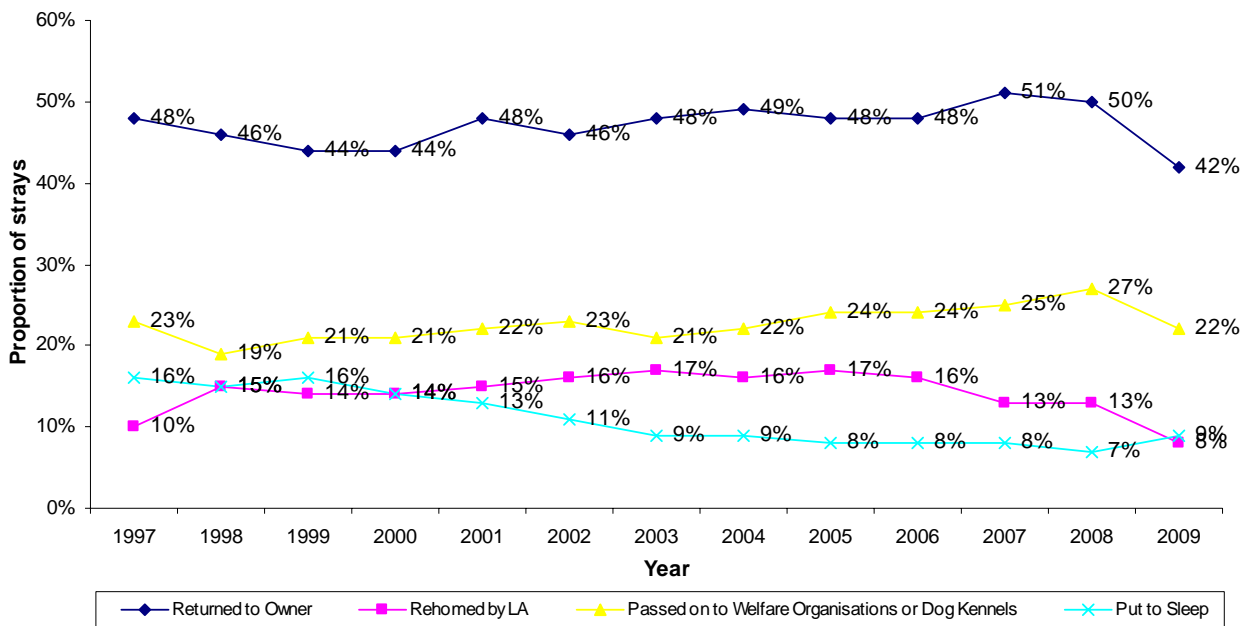
### 2.3 What Happens to the UK's Stray Dogs?

We can estimate that more than two fifths of stray dogs (42%) were reunited with their owners in 2008-2009. This figure is at its lowest since records began in 1997. Around three in ten (29%) of all stray dogs seized were reclaimed within the seven day statutory local authority kennelling period, with a further 13% of all stray dogs returned to the owner without kennelling.

The proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep is 2% higher than last year. This year 7,052 stray dogs were reported as having been put to sleep by authorities taking part in this survey, compared with 5,374 last year. From this figure we can estimate that approximately 9,310 dogs were put to sleep across the UK during the period of 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. This represents 9% of the total estimated number of stray dogs for 2009.

Amongst the authorities responding it was reported that 1,384 dogs were put to sleep due to ill health, 1,437 due to behavioural problems and aggression and 120 under the Dangerous Dogs Act / Order. Reasons were not given to cover all reported cases.

Chart 3: What Happens to Stray Dogs?



Base: All local authorities (306)

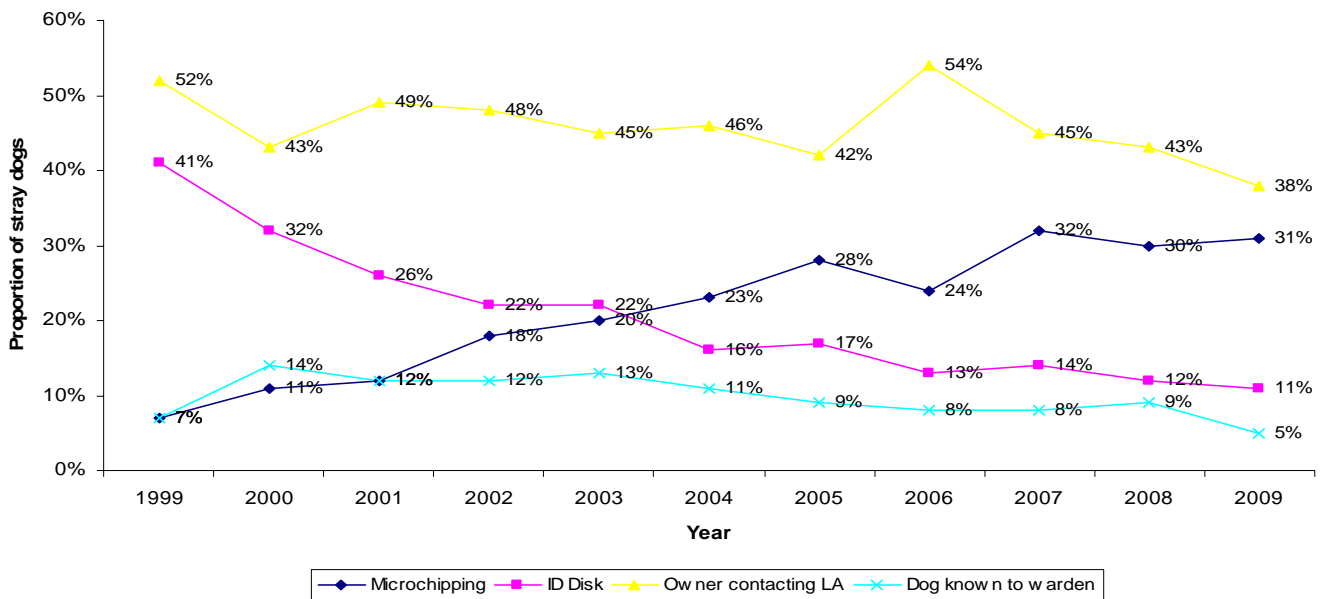
Many strays were passed on to welfare organisations or dog kennels after the statutory period (26%). The proportion of stray dogs reported as having been re-homed by the local authority has fallen slightly compared with the previous two years (from 13% to 10% of the total reported number of strays).

## 2.4 Ways in Which Dogs are Returned to Owners

The questionnaire asked about methods used to trace owners of dogs that have been successfully returned to their owners. Of the four main methods by which dogs are returned, the owner contacting the local authority directly accounted for the largest proportion, with around two fifths (38%) of reasons given for dogs being returned to owners attributable to this. Micro-chipping has risen in significance since 1999, from 7% of reasons given to 24% in 2006 and 31% this year<sup>1</sup>.

The rise in the number of dogs being returned as a result of having a micro-chip could account for the fall in the number of owners contacting the LA directly. Micro-chipping continues to be more important than ID disks for re-contacting owners, which only accounts for 11% of the methods used for the return of dogs. This figure has remained fairly static across the last few years. The proportion of dogs returned to their owners as a result of already being known to the warden has fallen from 9% to 5% since last year and is now at its lowest yet.

**Chart 4: Relative Importance of Methods Used to Return Stray Dogs**



Base: All local authorities (306)

<sup>1</sup> The proportion returned through micro-chipping refers only to instances where the method used to return stray dogs has been identified, i.e. unspecified methods of tracing owners have been excluded from this calculation.



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There is regional variation in the means by which dogs are identified and returned to their owners. Micro-chipping accounts for over half (59%) of methods in the Grampian and Yorkshire (58%) regions, but much less than this in Granada (23%) and STV (20%).

## **2.5 Profile of dogs taken in or handed in**

This year, a number of new questions were added to the survey to help ascertain the types of dogs that are being taken in or handed over as strays. Amongst those local authorities who responded to the survey a total of 293 Ear-tattooed greyhounds and 14,734 Staffordshire Bull Terriers/Staffie cross dogs were reported as being taken or handed in during the period of 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

Local authorities were also asked which age group of dogs, in their experience, were being abandoned or handed over most. A quarter (26%) of those who responded to the survey did not answer this question.

Almost all of those who did respond (84%) stated that, in their experience, no particular age group of dogs were being abandoned or handed over most. Almost one sixth (15%) reported older dogs and just two local authorities (1%) reported puppies as the age group of dogs being abandoned or handed over most.

## **2.6 Impact of recession and changes in the law regarding removal of police statutory responsibility for stray dogs**

Another new question was also added to the survey this year to help assess the impact of the recession and changes in the law regarding removal of police statutory responsibility for stray dogs. Local authorities were asked whether, in their opinion, they had seen more stray or abandoned dogs as a result of either of these situations. Again, 26% did not answer the question relating to the recession and 27% did not respond to the question about police statutory responsibility.

Amongst those who did respond, opinion on the effect of the recession was fairly evenly split with 53% saying they had seen more stray or abandoned dogs as a result of the recession and 47% saying they had not. Opinion was also fairly split over the effect of changes in the law regarding removal of police statutory responsibility for stray dogs, with 48% saying they had seen more stray or abandoned dogs as a result and 52% saying they had not.



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### 3 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by UK authorities overall has increased since last year. The grossed number now stands at an estimated 107,228 stray dogs across the regions. This is below the level of 96,892 reported in 2008, representing an increase of 11%. However, it is in line with findings between 2004 and 2007.

Regional variations remain and, as in previous years, Ulster (196) and HTV (287) continue to have greater numbers of stray dogs per head of population than elsewhere. Unlike previous years, Granada (396) now also has a greater numbers of stray dogs per head of population than elsewhere; whilst the Border region (808) no longer does.

Micro-chipping continues to play an increasing role in tracing the owners of stray dogs, now accounting for nearly a third (31%) of stray dogs being returned to their owners.

Since 1999 the proportion of stray dogs recorded as having been put to sleep has decreased; and remains at a low level of just 8% this year. In 1999 the actual number of stray dogs was estimated at 133,500. The number of dogs put to sleep in 1999 was approximately 21,300. This year the number of dogs put to sleep is estimated at approximately 8,570, a proportional decrease of 8% from the figures recorded 10 years ago. This continues to represent a real and substantial reduction over a short period.



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## 4 Regional Summaries

Table 3: TV region responses

	TV Region														Wales	West	Tyne Tees & Border
	Total*	Tyne Tees	Granada	Yorkshire	Central	HTV	Anglia	Carlton	Meridian	West Country	Border	Grampian	STV	Ulster			
<b>Base</b>	306	13	24	14	48	20	29	53	38	12	4	8	17	26	16	4	17
<b>Response rate</b>	76	81	69	67	69	69	76	76	84	71	57	89	81	100	73	57	74
<b>Number of Strays</b>	107,228	7,313	15,871	7,308	18,805	15,038	7,164	11,763	7,434	2,658	861	1,218	4,374	8,611	12,232	2,581	8,705
<b>Number put to sleep</b>	9,310	772	1,807	443	914	753	152	262	131	16	42	28	84	3,192	634	102	881
<b>Number re-united</b>	45,329	3,351	6,278	3,404	9,459	6,305	3,091	4,446	4,885	2,214	429	1,004	2,041	-	4,507	1,873	4,016
<b>Passed onto welfare orgs</b>	23,073	1,806	4,821	2,064	4,076	4,453	1,588	3,165	1,249	364	88	138	455	-	3,748	604	2,052
<b>People per stray</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>357</b>

\*Nb: in order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. All figures shown are grossed to represent 100% of authorities within each region. Tyne Tees & Border is calculated separately in this way and so may not directly reflect combined figures from the Tyne Tees region and Border region