

TRAGIC TALES

and the
decade of
delay



2011

Dogs Trust first raised concerns over the relaxation of the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) rules.

2014

Dogs Trust first investigation - exposing the widespread abuse of PETS.

2017

Dogs Trust third investigation, which found evidence of vets in Lithuania suggesting it was easier to smuggle a sedated puppy into the UK.

2020

Dogs Trust fourth investigation, which found evidence of illegal importers selling puppies online, and passing them off as UK bred.

2022

Over the course of 2022, Dogs Trust cared for 65 pregnant mums seized at the border. They gave birth to over 300 puppies which would have had a street value of around £500,000 if they had been sold to unsuspecting UK buyers.

The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill stalls, and is unable to pass before the end of the Parliamentary session, but it does receive a carry-over motion.



2013

Dogs Trust hold a conference on the issue of Puppy Smuggling, and invite key stakeholders to discuss the prevalence of the issue, and the best steps forward.

2015

In December 2015 Dogs Trust launched the Puppy Pilot, a scheme which supports seized puppies through quarantine and on to rehoming.

Dogs Trust second investigation, featuring undercover footage of vets in Eastern European countries falsifying pet passports. Investigators also proved the inadequacy of checks at the border by smuggling a toy dog into the UK on three separate occasions.

2019

Dogs Trust announce the landmark rescue of the 1,000th puppy via the Puppy Pilot.

The Conservatives pledge in their manifesto that they 'will crack down on the illegal smuggling of dogs and puppies'. Labour and the Liberal Democrats also committed to tackling puppy smuggling in their manifestos.

2021

The Government reaffirm their manifesto commitment and release their Action Plan for Animal Welfare, pledging to reduce the number of pet dogs that can be moved under PETS.

The Government introduce the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, a flagship piece of legislation under their Animal Plan for Animal Welfare.

2023

Dogs Trust cared for the 3,000th dog through the Puppy Pilot, including dogs intercepted at the border, and puppies born to pregnant dogs whilst in our care.

Currently, Dogs Trust has over 80 MPs signed up to its Puppy Smuggling Taskforce, representing cross-party support.

Dogs Trust submitted a response to the EFRA Committee Inquiry on Pet Welfare and Abuse and hosted members of the EFRA Committee at a Dogs Trust facility, where they heard details of the horrific trade and met smuggled puppies and pregnant dogs.

The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill stalls again. This time, the Government drop it altogether, and commit to bringing forward a single-issue Puppy Smuggling Bill.

For more than 10 years, Dogs Trust has been exposing the widespread abuse of the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS). It is being used by smugglers to illegally import puppies, which are often underage and unvaccinated, in poor welfare conditions from Central and Eastern Europe to be sold to unsuspecting buyers throughout the UK.

PETS is intended for use by people taking their pets on holiday but has long been used as a cover by unscrupulous traders, who have taken advantage of the simple process to illegally import thousands of puppies into the country. This was the case when a litter of four Pugs aged just four to five weeks old were illegally imported into the country in a small wicker basket wrapped in clingfilm. The pups were far too young to leave their mum and needed urgent veterinary care. In the end, one of the puppies very sadly died.

Bringing in dogs via PETS to be sold is illegal because the scheme is not meant for animals destined to be sold commercially, and worryingly far too often the puppies being imported do not meet the requirements for travel. They are often below the legal minimum age of entry or have not received the appropriate vaccinations and therefore have falsified documentation. In 2021, six 11-week-old puppies travelling from Romania were found in appalling conditions in the back of a van. The terrified pups were drenched in oil from a container that had spilled and were suffering from diarrhoea. The pups needed to be shaved in order to remove the oil.

We have provided overwhelming evidence of this continued and evolving abuse of the system through five investigations, and through our Puppy Pilot we continue to fund the quarantine costs of any puppy seized at the border to aid their interception. The Puppy Pilot was launched in 2015, and sadly since its inception, we have cared for **over 3,000 seized puppies, pregnant dogs and puppies born to pregnant dogs**, many of which have endured truly distressing journeys before entering our care. Early in 2018, a litter of ten French Bulldog puppies aged approximately three to four weeks were seized after being discovered heavily sedated in a car travelling from Poland. The pups were found hidden in the hollow of the back seat under a pile of blankets and under one of the front seats. Nine of the puppies survived the ordeal despite some health issues and have been responsibly rehomed by Dogs Trust, but one sadly died. These puppies were discovered by chance and it's impossible to say how many more are crossing the border, hidden in vehicles, undetected, in addition to those that are declared but with falsified paperwork.

If sold to unsuspecting members of the public, the puppies cared for and rehabilitated on the Puppy Pilot would have made **over £4 million** for the illegal importers. We have sadly seen little progress to suggest the issue is even close to being dealt with. Instead, we've faced challenges with **traders adapting their practices to avoid detection**, including the troubling development of **heavily pregnant female dogs being transported illegally** in the very late stages of pregnancy; a tactic used by unethical traders to get around Government advice to prospective buyers that they should always see a puppy with its mum. Once they have given birth in the UK, the dogs are often transported back out of the country to continue their cycle of abuse.

Since 2019, the trade in pregnant dogs has escalated with around 160 mums and their 700 plus puppies having been cared for by Dogs Trust since then. Prior to 2019, just three pregnant dogs had been cared for on the Puppy Pilot. We estimate the total street value of puppies born to pregnant dogs seized under our Puppy Pilot to be approximately **£1 million**, highlighting the extortionate value of this illegal trade to smugglers.

We are seeing an increasing number of dogs enter the country with diseases not normally found in the UK. Dogs Trust has been screening all dogs that have travelled in, or were born overseas, for such diseases since 2015. *Brucella canis*, a zoonotic disease, meaning that it can also infect humans, was added to this panel in April 2021. Since then, a number of Puppy Pilot dogs have tested positive for *Brucella canis*. We are concerned not only about the impact this has on dog welfare but also the public health implications. *Brucella canis* is transmitted through contact with infected bodily fluids, most notably those associated with reproduction e.g. semen, vaginal fluid, and giving birth. There is therefore a greater risk of infection with whelping dogs.

Illegally imported dogs are also at risk of infectious diseases such as Parvovirus. Whilst vaccines are available, they are not a requirement for travel. The risk is exacerbated by low welfare breeding establishments and being kept in cramped and dirty conditions whilst in transit.



In February 2021, two Labradors, two Springer Spaniels and one Dachshund were found hidden in a cat carrier in the back of a van. The puppies were seized after being illegally transported to the UK from Slovakia. They were all under five weeks of age. Within five days of arriving in the country all of the puppies were found to have Parvovirus and despite round the clock care from dedicated staff, three of them sadly died.

There has also been a significant rise in the importation of dogs with illegal mutilations. As many as **75 dogs coming through our Puppy Pilot have had their ears cropped**, despite this cruel procedure being illegal in the UK and across the EU. Currently, it is not illegal to sell or import dogs with cropped ears; a serious loophole in the legislation, which is being exploited by criminals to enable them to continue to sell mutilated dogs.

Whilst we have been taking action, the Government has spent the last decade delaying introduction of legislation that would help crack down on this illegal trade. This book outlines the story of four dogs who we have rescued through our Puppy Pilot over the last decade. Their stories show four different, but equally traumatic, experiences of the puppy smuggling trade. Fortunately, Dogs Trust were there to change the tale for these four but sadly this isn't always the case. We need to see effective legislation to ensure that countless numbers of dogs do not have to suffer any longer at the hands of unscrupulous breeders and importers.

While the Government delays, puppies pay. End Puppy Smuggling now.





Poppy's story

Poppy was one of 15 Dobermann pups rescued at the UK border after being illegally imported from Hungary.

They were all under 15 weeks of age, the age at which they could legally enter the UK and sadly all had their tails docked and ears cropped, a **procedure that is illegal in the UK and across the EU**. The prospective owners of the pups had paid £3,500 each for their dogs and could not only request that the dog be cropped and docked, but even what style of ear cropping they wanted.

Poppy is now safe in our care, but she'll always bear the marks of her time as a smuggled pup. Her case isn't just a 'one off' - **80% of all Dobermanns we have rescued on our Puppy Pilot have had their ears mutilated, a practice that is illegal in the UK and in all EU member states.**



Help us end the cruelty for more dogs like Poppy.


Sean's story

Sean was 8 weeks old when he was brought 1,000s of miles from Romania to be sold in the UK. This is well under the 15 weeks that puppies must be to legally travel across European borders.

Sean had so much excess skin, it was causing his eyelashes to roll in and rub on his eyes. This incredibly painful condition meant **Sean could not even open his eyes**. There were old stitches which were likely placed to try and help, but these were not working.

Whilst in Dogs Trust's care, Sean underwent surgery to correct the rolling of his eyelids and alleviate the pain he was in. There is a likelihood he will need further surgery before adulthood, potentially costing his new owners **thousands** in vet bills.

Many of the dogs we rescue on the Puppy Pilot require urgent veterinary assistance when they come into our care, and in some cases this treatment must be continued for the rest of their lives.



Help us end this cruelty, so unsuspecting families are no longer forced to pick up the bill for the actions of unscrupulous breeders.



Snowy's story

Snowy was illegally transported thousands of miles to the UK while heavily pregnant, in dark, dirty and cramped conditions with no food and little water. Snowy was in the final 10% of her pregnancy when she was seized, which is illegal.

Just days after she was seized, and despite her ordeal, Snowy gave birth to four puppies. Snowy and her puppies have all now been rehomed responsibly through the charity's rehoming centres.

The disturbing trend of transporting heavily pregnant dogs into the country in the late stages of pregnancy can cause significant suffering and health implications to both mum and puppies. For the dealers, importing one dog attracts less suspicion at the border, and as responsible buyers will ask to see the puppies with their mother, this tactic also allows criminals to give the impression of being legitimate breeders.

In the last three years, we have seen a **600% increase** in the number of pregnant dogs intercepted via our Puppy Pilot. The stress imposed on these dogs as they are forced to travel thousands of miles in discomfort and used as mere money-making machines for their illegal importers can be incredibly detrimental to them and their puppies' welfare.

Help us end the cycle of abuse for more dogs like Snowy.





Bailey's story

Bailey was just 7 weeks old when he was rescued at the border with his brother — too young to be separated from their mother or legally enter the UK.

They travelled in cramped and squalid conditions, in one single cage with little to no access to food, for over 1,600-miles - a journey that takes over 26 hours by car.

Their importers glued microchips into their fur, making it simple to cut them out once in the UK, and sell the pups on to unsuspecting dog lovers.

Both puppies were taken from their mum too early and were found in very poor condition. Thankfully Bailey and his brother recovered and have both found their forever home. It doesn't always end this way for smuggled pups.

Sadly, this story is all too familiar - the average age of puppies we have intercepted via our Puppy Pilot is between 8-11 weeks old.



Help us end the nightmare start to life for dogs like Bailey.

Sadly, the harrowing tales of Poppy, Sean, Snowy & Bailey are not unique. Dogs Trust has been working to tackle this abuse for the past decade.

We have repeatedly seen dogs come into our care seized from their illegal importers who have no regard for the welfare of these animals. This cruelty must end.



We desperately need the Government to bring forward a single-issue Puppy Smuggling Bill as soon as possible, to make good on their manifesto commitment, and their promise to the country. In order to stop the abuse of dogs being illegally imported into the UK, we urgently need legislation that will:

- 1.** Increase the age at which puppies can be imported to **6 months**, crucially doing so by reintroducing the requirement for a rabies blood (titre) test before entry into the UK, together with a 12 week wait period post vaccination which is in line with the incubation period of rabies.
- 2.** **Ban the non-commercial transport of pregnant dogs in the last 30% (more than 42 days pregnant) of their gestation period as a minimum.** This would be more robust than the current 10% in terms of protecting dog welfare and helping to reduce the number of seized pregnant mums that are handed back to importers.
- 3.** We would like to see a complete ban on the **commercial movement of pregnant dogs** into Great Britain. Given the health and welfare implications for the animals involved, we cannot think of a reasonable justification for importing dogs that are pregnant for commercial reasons. In the absence of a complete ban the Government should, at a minimum, introduce a ban on the commercial movement into Great Britain of dogs which are more than 42 days pregnant (in last 30% of gestation).
- 4.** **Introduce a ban on the importation and sale of dogs with cropped ears and docked tails for cosmetic reasons.** There should be a tightly worded exemption for any dogs illegally landed and seized to be responsibly rehomed through legitimate rehoming organisations.
- 5.** **Bring in tougher penalties for smuggling pups to deter deceitful sellers.** This is already within the gift of Government and could be implemented immediately. Only a handful of puppy smuggling cases have ever been prosecuted and you can get a longer sentence for smuggling cigarettes than you can for smuggling puppies.

The puppy smuggling industry has gone unchecked for too long, with legislation due to help smuggled pups repeatedly delayed by the Government over the last 10 years.

Dogs and puppies are transported in horrifying conditions, leaving some with long-term consequences. Yet there are very few deterrents for puppy smugglers if they are caught.

In 2019, the Conservative Party promised to do something about this illegal trade in their Manifesto, committing to cracking down on the illegal smuggling of dogs and puppies.

But the Bill that intended to implement this pledge, the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill was recently dropped. After a decade of delay, the Government is running out of time to take action on this vital issue.



These delays cannot go on any longer. Without legislation, more dogs will suffer at the hands of unscrupulous breeders & importers. We have changed the tale for Poppy, Sean, Snowy, Bailey, and thousands of other dogs rescued through our Puppy Pilot.



Will you help change the tale for other dogs?



dogstrust.org.uk/publicaffairs



publicaffairs@dogstrust.org.uk



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Registered charity numbers: 227523 & SC037843