

STRAY DOGS SURVEY 2014

SUMMARY REPORT

A report prepared for Dogs Trust



Prepared by:



GfK NOP Social Research

Your contacts:

Elisabeth Booth / Rachel Feechan

020 7890 (9761 / 9789)

elisabeth.booth@gfk.com / rachel.feechan@gfk.com

Version:

FINAL DRAFT, August 2014

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Background and Methodology	2
1.2	Objectives	4
1.3	Definition of regions	4
1.4	Interpretation of the data	4
2	Summary of findings	5
2.1	The number of stray dogs handled	5
2.2	Seizing stray dogs	7
2.3	What happens to the UK's stray dogs?	8
2.4	Micro-chipping	9
2.5	Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners	10
2.6	Current set up of dog warden services	11
2.7	Status dogs	11
2.8	Conclusions	11
3	Regional figures.....	13

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 what happens to the nation's stray dogs. GfK NOP Social Research has been running the Stray Dogs survey since 2003, and was again chosen in 2014. The research consisted of two stages: an initial telephone sweep of local authorities was carried out between 1st and 4th April 2014, to update contact details and collect email addresses. For those with email addresses, initial email invitations were sent to all named individuals. If no email address had been supplied, postal questionnaires were sent out to named respondents. These invitations were sent to all 371 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in Great Britain in the week commencing 21st April 2014.

Two options for completion were made available to respondents to enable them to go through the survey in the most convenient way for them. They could either complete the survey online, or complete a paper version which was to be returned to GfK NOP via a free post envelope, fax or email. Following postal, email and telephone reminders, 333 questionnaires were returned by the deadline (13th June 2014), giving a response rate of 90% across England, Scotland and Wales (Great Britain).

Table 1 shows the response rate broken down by TV region, campaign region and country. Local authorities within Northern Ireland were contacted separately (directly by Dogs Trust) and their data was later merged with the Great Britain data set. As with previous years, all of the 26 authorities in Northern Ireland responded, giving an overall response rate of 90% across all 397 local authorities in the UK.

Table 1: Response rates

TV Region	Authorities Responding	Total Authorities	Response Rate %
Tyne Tees (North East)	15	16	94
Granada (North West)	33	35	94
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	20	21	95
Central (Midlands)	56	65	86
HTV (Wales and West)	28	29	97
Anglia (East & Anglia)	28	37	76
Carlton (London)	66	70	94
Meridian (Southern)	39	44	89
West Country (South West)	16	17	94
Border (Borders)	7	7	100
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	7	9	78
STV Central (Central Scotland)	18	21	86
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	26	26	100
Wales	22	22	100
Tyne Tees & Border	22	23	96
GADAL North East	26	27	96
GADAL North West	35	37	95
GADAL Wales	22	22	100
GADAL Northern Ireland	26	26	100
England	285	318	90
Scotland	26	31	84
Northern Ireland	26	26	100
Wales	22	22	100
Total	359	397	90

1.2 Objectives

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

In order to track data from year to year, the questionnaire was kept largely the same as in previous years. In 2014, a number of changes were made to the questionnaire. A new question asking about changes in the number of dogs with foreign microchips was added and the questions on expected changes to the service offered were amended to ask about current practices.

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 (Central Scotland), and Ulster (Northern Ireland).

Since 2009, reference has also been made to the newly formed TV regions of Tyne Tees and Border (incorporating Tyne Tees and Border regions), and to Wales and West as two separate regions.

Findings are also analysed by four campaign regions – GADAL North East, GADAL North West, GADAL Wales and GADAL Northern Ireland.

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 totals. As a result, the individual region figures do not always equal the all UK total.

Some of the findings in this report are based on actual numbers reported by each authority; however, at some points reference is made to 'estimated' figures. We have grossed up the reported figures to make estimates for each TV region based on the assumption that the authorities responding are representative of authorities as a whole.

Due to high levels of non-response at some questions it is not viable to provide information in terms of percentages (as we do not know for certain whether a non-response means there is no information available, that zero dogs would fit into that category, or in face something else) and so we have focused on reported numbers rather than reported percentages at some points during the report.

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

It is also worth noting that the 26 authorities within Northern Ireland only provide data on the numbers of strays handled by the local authority, put to sleep, reunited with their owners and passed on to welfare organisations. They do not provide information on micro-chipping, reasons strays were put to sleep, and their handling of status dogs. Where these figures are reported, they are based on the 333 responding authorities in Great Britain.

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

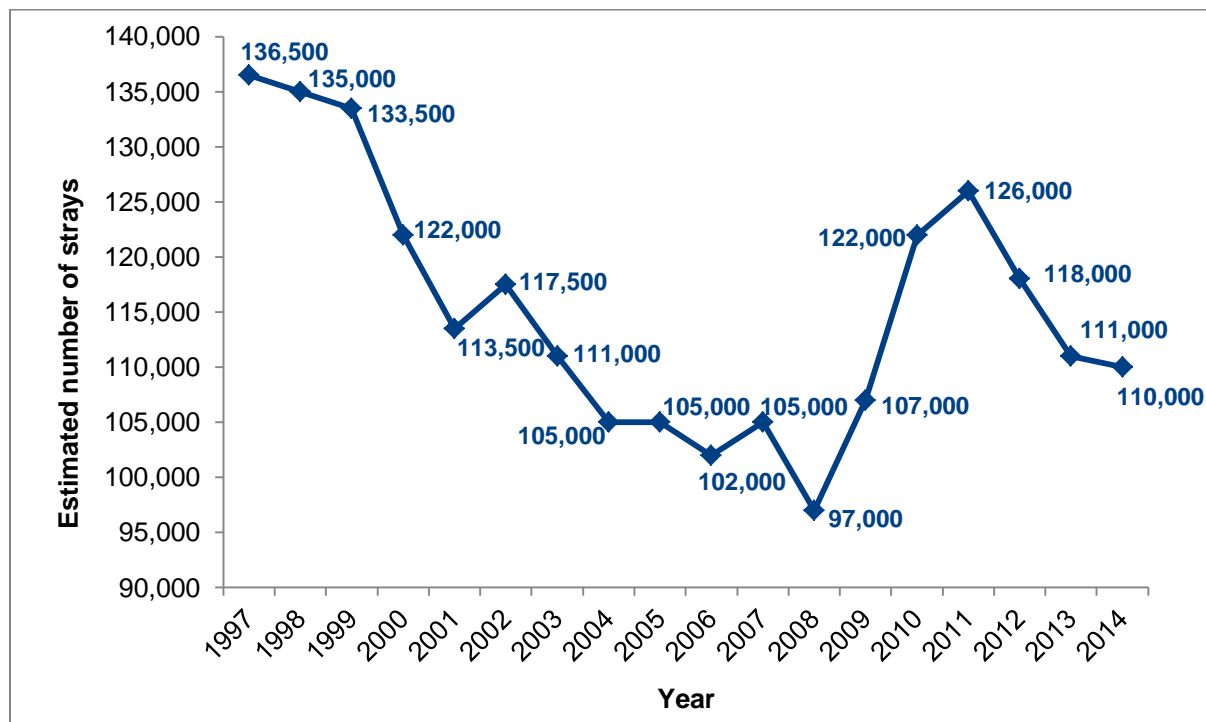
2 Summary of findings

2.1 The number of stray dogs handled

Based on all 359 authorities who responded to this survey, an estimated 110,675 stray dogs were handled by local councils across the UK between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014. This represents a 1% decrease from the estimate of 111,986 dogs handled during the same period in 2012 to 2013.

Chart 1 shows the estimated number of stray dogs handled annually across the UK since 1997.

Chart 1: Estimated number of stray dogs in the UK since 1997



Base: All local authorities in the UK (397)

Using the latest available census data (recorded in 2011) we are able to estimate the number of people per stray dog across the UK. This year local authorities across the UK handled an average of one stray for every 571 people. It is worth noting, however, that there are significant regional variations.

For instance, in the Central STV region local authorities dealt with one stray dog for every 1,229 people on average; whilst in the Tyne Tees region, there is an estimated average of 281 people per stray dog. Table 2 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 population size and the number of dogs owned in the area.

Table 2: Estimated number of people per stray dog by TV region

TV Region	Estimated number of strays 2013-2014	Total authorities in region	Estimated strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray
Tyne Tees	9,899	16	619	281
Granada	15,762	35	450	445
Yorkshire	9,612	21	458	670
Central	18,798	65	289	487
HTV	10,573	29	365	526
Anglia	6,269	37	169	726
Carlton	13,131	70	188	909
Meridian	9,419	44	214	644
West Country	3,902	17	230	470
Border	1,417	7	202	446
Grampian	1,490	9	166	933
STV Central	3,238	21	154	1,229
Ulster	5,886	26	226	311
Wales	8,140	22	370	376
Tyne Tees & Border	11,183	23	486	305
UK Total	110,675	397	279	571

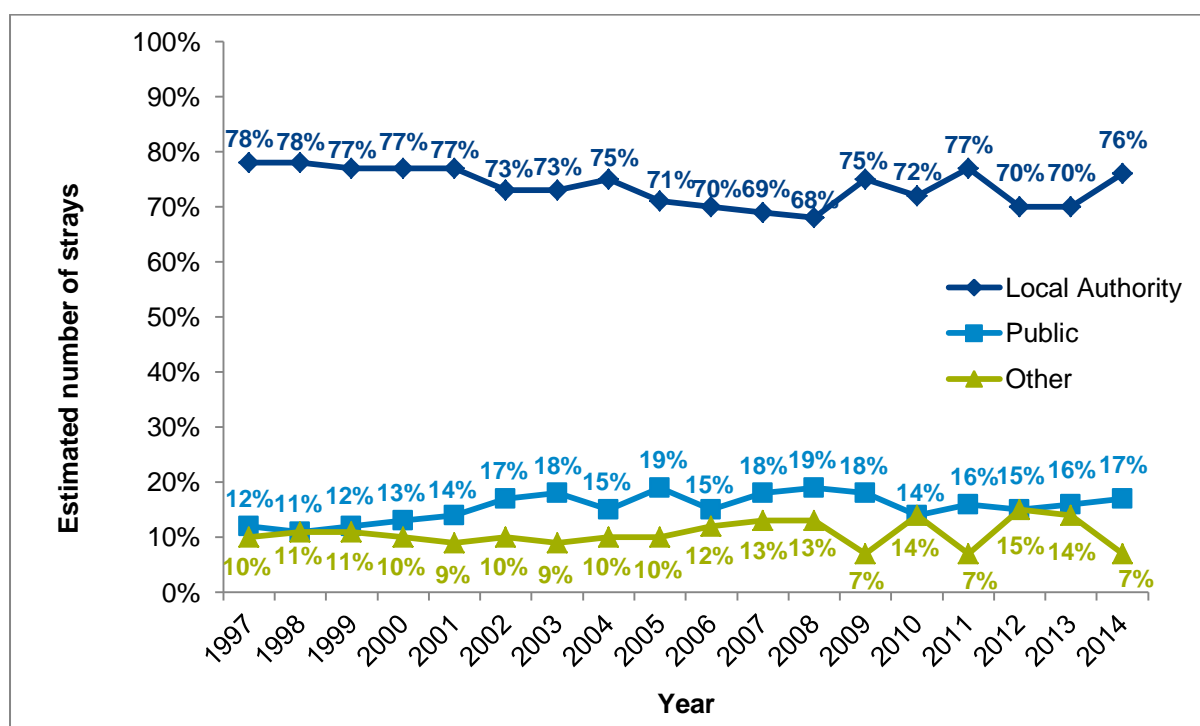
2.2 Seizing stray dogs

The survey asked local authorities to detail the number of stray dogs that were seized or taken in between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014. This was broken down across a number of key sources including: seized by the local authority as strays, brought in by the general public and brought in by the police.

As in previous years local authorities themselves were responsible for seizing the majority of stray dogs, accounting for 76% of those reported; an increase from 70% last year. Seventeen per cent of stray dogs were brought in by the general public, a figure that has remained stable over recent years.

Chart 2 shows the trends in how stray dogs are being seized since 1997.

Chart 2: How stray dogs were brought to the local authorities



Base: All local authorities in the UK (397)

The 'other' figure shown in Chart 2 accounts for a variety of sources including dogs brought in by the police (1%), seized under the Dangerous Dogs Act (1%) and dogs already in local authority kennels on 1st April 2013 (1%). Transfers from vets, the RSPCA, dog wardens, out of hour's contractors, and other agencies each accounted for less than 1% of reported strays.

2.3 What happens to the UK's stray dogs?

Local authorities were also asked to provide details on what happened to the stray dogs taken in between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014.

An estimated 50% of stray dogs were reunited with their owners in this period, either by being reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period (35%) or returned directly to their owner without entering a kennel (15%). These figures have remained in line with last year's estimates.

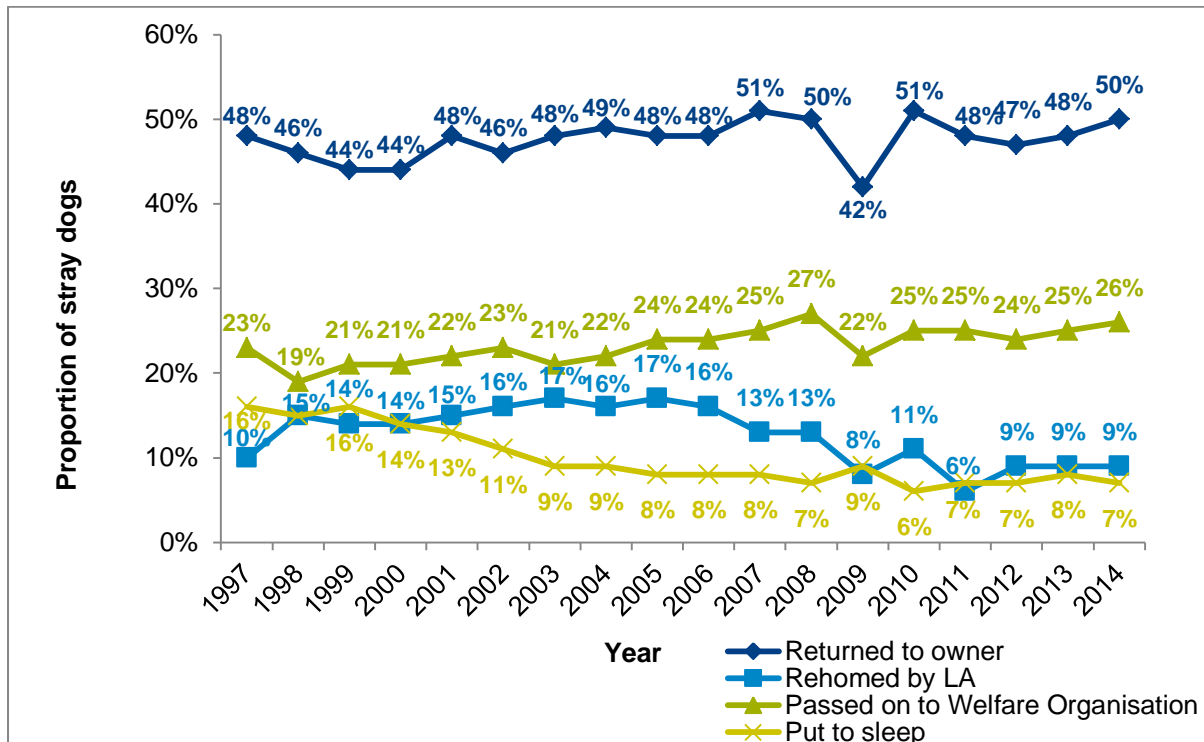
The reported number of stray dogs re-homed by local authorities across the UK has fallen from 9,877 in 2013 to 8,906 this year. This accounts for the same proportion re-homed by local authorities as last year (9%) due to the decrease in the estimated total number of strays. A quarter (26%) were passed on to welfare organisations or dog kennels after the statutory period. This proportion remains the same as last year and is in line with estimates over the last 10 years.

The estimated proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep was 7%, a slight decrease from 8% last year. This year 7,058 stray dogs were reported as having been put to sleep by authorities taking part in this survey (7,319 last year). From this figure we can estimate that approximately 7,805 dogs were put to sleep across the UK during the period of 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014. This compares with an estimated 8,985 put to sleep last year.

Amongst the authorities responding, details were given for around half of reported destructions (55%). It was reported that 2,083 dogs were put to sleep due to behavioural problems or aggression, 1,042 due to ill health, and 755 under the Dangerous Dogs Act.

Chart 3 shows the trends in how stray dogs have been handled since 1997.

Chart 3: What happens to stray dogs?



Base: Responding local authorities in the UK (359)

In addition to these key outcomes, 1% of strays were also reported as still being in the local authority kennels after 31st March 2013. A variety of other outcomes were also mentioned, including strays being kept or retained by finders (161 dogs), and dogs being dead when found or dying whilst in the kennels (18 dogs). Details were not given to account for all stray dogs.

2.4 Micro-chipping

This year dog wardens reported that 16,443 of the dogs taken in were already micro-chipped compared to 10,213 last year and 5,920 in the 2011-2012 period¹.

In the 2014 survey, a new question was added which asked whether the number of dogs with foreign micro-chips taken in had increased or decreased since last year. Twenty six per cent of the 313 LAs who answered this question said that the number of dogs with foreign micro-chips taken in has increased (4% said it had increased significantly, compared to 22% who said it had increased slightly). Six per cent said the number had decreased, with 2% saying it had decreased significantly. A quarter (24%) said the amount had stayed the same, and 44% of LAs had not kept data relating to this. Local authorities in Northern Ireland did not answer this question.

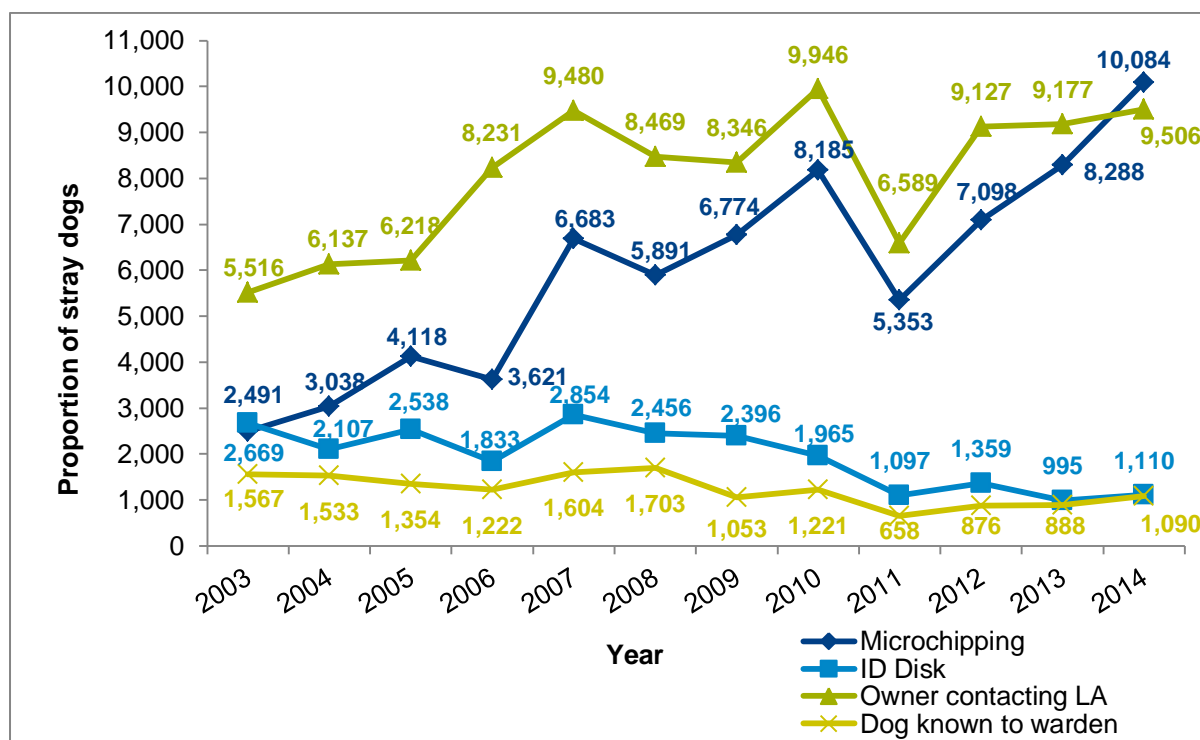
¹ These figures should, however, be treated with some caution as details were only given for around one in six reported strays. This has improved on previous years, however, with details only given for one in ten reported strays last year.

2.5 Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners

The survey also asked about methods by which stray dogs had been successfully reunited with their owners². This year the method responsible for reuniting dogs with their owners was given for 25,937 strays, which accounts for 52% of all dogs that were returned to or reunited with their owner (49,964).

It was reported that 9,506 dogs were reunited due to the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly. Microchips alone accounted for 10,084 reunions (a figure which has increased year-on-year since 2011: see Chart 4), ID disks for 1,110 reunions and the combination of the two for 882 reunions. In addition, it was also reported that 1,090 dogs were reunited due to already being known to the dog warden.

Chart 4: Ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners



Base: Responding local authorities in Great Britain (333)

Other reasons for dogs being returned to their owners included the dog having a collar (206) or the dog having an identifying tattoo (55 dogs). It was also reported that this information was not available or had not been kept for 2,706 dogs.

² It is worth noting that these figures refer only to instances where the methods used to reunite stray dogs have been identified and that unspecified methods of tracing owners have been excluded from this calculation. As a result, figures cannot accurately be compared to previous years.

2.6 Current set up of dog warden services

This year, three new questions were introduced to investigate the set-up of the dog warden services in local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. They were asked how their dog warden service is employed, who handles their strays, and the hours in which their dog warden service operates³.

Amongst those answering, 63 authorities said their dog warden was employed directly by them, compared to 24 authorities who contracted the service out.

Fifty eight authorities said that a private boarding kennels handled their strays, whereas 14 authorities used a council-owned pound and 11 used welfare charity kennels to house their stray dogs. The remaining 5 authorities said that they used an alternative option for handling their strays.

Amongst those responding, 291 local authorities reported that their dog warden services were operational during working hours, Monday to Friday and 94 during working hours on Saturdays and Sundays. In addition, 126 LAs had a dog warden service which worked on-call out of working hours, Monday to Friday and 133 authorities operated an on-call service out of hours on weekends. Details were not given by all local authorities.

2.7 Status dogs

This year's survey again included a number of questions about 'status dogs'. The media often refers to 'status dogs' as those whose looks or breed type are thought to convey a particular impression of their owner - such as Bull breeds, Rottweilers, Akitas or crosses of these. These questions were not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland.

Across the 333 authorities in Great Britain, a reported 22,350 'status dogs' were handled between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014. This accounts for 22% of all strays reported in Great Britain, although some authorities did not provide figures. This figure has increased slightly since last year when 18,093 'status dogs' were reported (accounting for 20% of all strays).

Of the 22,350, a reported 1,814 'status dogs' (8%) were put to sleep during this period due to aggression. Although the number of 'status dogs' reportedly put to sleep was lower last year at 1,525, this still represented 8% of the 18,093 'status dogs' handled in 2013.

2.8 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by UK authorities overall has decreased by one percentage point since 2013. The grossed number now stands at an estimated 110,675 stray dogs across the UK. Reported figures suggest that the majority (76%) of these dogs were seized directly by the local authority as strays, with a further 17% surrendered by the general public.

³ Analysis of these questions is based only on those LAs who answered each question. Just 87 (24%) LAs gave information about how their dog warden is employed, with 86 (24%) providing information about who handles their strays. As a result of the low base sizes at this question it is not practical to provide a discussion of these questions on an individual TV region basis. Figures for each TV region can be supplied in tabular format if needed. A total of 322 (90%) of LAs gave information about the operating hours of their dog warden service, and so it is possible to give a breakdown on this for some, but not all, individual TV regions.

In line with last year, half (50%) of the estimated stray dogs handled in the UK between 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 were reunited with their owners, and a quarter (26%) were passed on to a welfare organisation or dog kennel for possible rehoming. A further 9% were re-homed by the local authority.

When methods used to return stray dogs to their owners have been identified (for 25,937 dogs), this year it was reported that 10,084 reunions were due to microchips. This compares to 7,098 last year.

An estimated 7% of strays were put to sleep this year, a slight decrease of 1% since last year.

Amongst those answering, most (63) authorities reported that their dog warden was employed directly by them and that they used private boarding kennels to handle their strays (58). The majority (291) reported that their dog warden service operated during working hours Monday to Friday, with 94 operating during these hours on the weekend. In addition, 126 said their service operated on-call out of working hours during the week and 133 offered this service over the weekend.

The number of 'status dogs' handled overall has increased by 4,257 to 22,350 from 18,093 in 2013. This equates to 22% of all strays in 2013, compared with 20% in 2012. This increase was seen in 12 of the 14 TV regions that were asked about 'status dogs', by an average of 365 dogs per region. Larger increases were seen in the Granada and Meridian TV regions, with 921 and 1,083 dogs per person respectively. The number of 'status dogs' handled in Yorkshire and Anglia regions had decreased by an average of 197 dogs per person.

There has also been an increase in the number of 'status dogs' destroyed due to aggression, with 1,814 put to sleep this year, compared with 1,525 in 2013. However, this equates to 8% of all strays in both years and is still in line with the 1,848 reported in 2012. These increases were seen in 9 of the 14 regions asked about 'status dogs', and the number put to sleep had increased by an average of 24 dogs per all of the 14 regions. The increase in the number of 'status dogs' put to sleep averaged 57 dogs by the nine regions that reported an overall increase, but the greatest increase was seen in the Central TV region, which put 317 more 'status dogs' to sleep this year due to aggression.

3 Regional figures

Table 4: Key estimated figures by TV region

	Total*	Tyne Tees	Granada	Yorkshire	Central	HTV	Anglia	Carlton	Meridian	West Country	Border	Grampian	STV Central	Ulster	Wales	Tyne Tees & Border
Base	359	15	33	20	56	28	28	66	39	16	7	7	18	26	22	22
Response rate (%)	90	94	94	95	86	97	76	94	89	94	100	78	86	100	100	96
Total strays	110,675	9,889	15,762	9,612	18,798	10,573	6,269	13,131	9,419	3,902	1,417	1,490	3,238	5,886	8,140	11,183
Put to sleep	7,805	429	1,279	1,351	1,396	460	325	1,083	378	67	70	40	70	690	364	493
Reunited with owner	55,253	4,982	7,120	4,279	9,903	4,827	3,722	6,527	6,313	1,967	644	840	1,579	2,244	3,493	5,557
Passed on to welfare orgs	29,236	3,604	3,489	2,629	6,344	2,803	2,056	3,278	1,358	495	461	96	676	1,661	2,415	4,015
People per stray	571	281	445	670	487	526	726	909	644	470	446	933	1,229	311	376	305

*Please note: in order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. Therefore totals do not always equal the sum of all regions. All figures shown have been grossed up 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