

Westminster Hall
Monday 2nd July
at 4.30pm

Pets are family, not things!

Why we need pet theft reform

We suspect you already know this is a burning issue with your constituents. The pet theft petition reached 100,000 signatures with months to spare.



Latest statistics from the Pet Food Manufacturing Association show almost half of British households now contain at least one pet and more than a quarter have one or more dogs. *Pet Gazette* recently quoted that 89% of pet owners now consider their pet to be part of the family.

There has certainly been an unprecedented response to the House of Commons' Facebook post on this debate. After just a couple of days, there were thousands of comments and shares – amazingly an even larger response than the popular Lucy's Law debate.

So what is all the fuss about? In this briefing document we want to show you that pet theft is a growing problem, how this crime destroys lives, and what we think is a very simple solution...

MP DROP-IN EVENT

If you would like to find out more about #PetTheftReform Professor John Cooper QC and members of Sampa will be in Room 10, Westminster Palace, from 1-4pm on Monday 2nd July.



The Stolen and Missing Pet Alliance (Sampa) has come up with a small, attainable, but highly significant tweak that would make the existing law much more appropriate for the modern family and their pets.

In answering our petition calling for pet theft reform, Defra said:

“We understand the distress caused by the theft of a much-loved family pet and laws are in place to deal firmly with offenders who commit such crimes.

“Theft of a pet is already a criminal offence under the Theft Act 1968. The maximum penalty is seven years’ imprisonment. The Sentencing Council updated its guidelines in relation to sentencing for theft offences in February 2016. The guidelines take account of the

emotional distress and therefore harm that theft of personal items such as a pet can have on the victim and accordingly recommends higher penalties for such offences. Compulsory microchipping introduced in 2016 makes it easier for lost or stolen dogs to be reunited with their owners.”

Sadly, that quoted seven-year maximum sentence has NEVER been awarded in a pet theft case as 98% of criminal cases are heard in magistrates courts. Currently, the theft of a much-loved family pet is lumped in with general theft of possessions and, as the purchase price of a dog is usually relatively small, most pet theft attracts the lowest possible sentencing brackets.

There are presently two tiers – one for pets that cost more than £500 (which attracts a slightly more serious punishment) and one for those pets that cost less.

I am sure you understand that most pets are priceless in their owners’ eyes –and this financial divide stings, as those who may have rescued their best friend still value their dogs just as highly.

In *Dogs Today* magazine’s recent snap survey of more than 350 people, over 97% of respondents said all cases of companion animal theft should be treated equally seriously, regardless of the pet’s initial monetary value.

And almost as many people agreed with this statement: “The law as it stands leaves pet owners totally exposed to extortion – even when guilt is established, these criminals walk free. There is currently very little chance of being caught and no consequences – apart, obviously, from the suffering of the stolen pets and their devastated owners.”



WHY DID DR DAN START THE PETITION?

Everyone with an animal companion at the heart of their family is a potential victim of pet theft. The thought of someone taking our dog Rupert is unbearable. I always tried to share as many missing and stolen dog posts as possible from my Twitter account, but I started feeling helpless at the scale of the problem and increasingly upset for the families involved.

Pet theft is currently seen as no different to the theft of an inanimate object; few pet thieves are caught, and if they are, sentencing does not fit the crime. Recognising that pet theft reform is needed to help protect our pets, I reached out to Sampa, who accepted my offer to help shine a light on their tireless campaigning, and suggestion to collaborate on a pet theft petition to show the strong public feeling on this all-party issue.

We now have the support of over 100,000 constituents and hope you will help make pet theft reform a reality.

Dr Daniel Allen

Animal Geographer, Keele University; Associate member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (Apgaw)

WHAT IS SAMPA?

In September 2014, Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance (Sampa) was launched at Westminster with Neil Parish MP, then chair of Apgaw, and Angela Smith MP, shadow Defra minister at the time.

SAMPA COMPRISES:

- **DogLost**, the free pet reunification service that helped more than 12,000 people and pets last year. www.doglost.co.uk
- **Pet Theft Awareness**, who highlight and campaign against the theft of pets and horses. pettheft.org.uk
- **Vets Get Scanning**. When Debbie Matthews’ microchipped dogs were stolen in May 2006 – her late father Sir Bruce Forsyth went on TV to help her get them back. Ever since that time, Debbie has campaigned tirelessly to help close the loopholes that work against people getting their pets back home. www.VetsGetScanning.co.uk
- **The Dog Union**, which works for the health and welfare of dogs and is founded by Arnot Wilson.

Dr Daniel Allen and Beverley Cuddy have recently become patrons and Professor John Cooper QC is Sampa’s legal advisor.

2016 REVISION FAILURE



We have found that since the 2016 revision, there has been no evidence that the courts have become any tougher on pet theft. Very few cases are getting into court and when they do, most often the guilty walk free.

In June 2018, a gang of four were tried at Lincoln Crown Court, following a burglary in Middle Rasen, Lincolnshire. Fifteen Cavalier King Charles Spaniels were taken, including one who was pregnant.

One of the dogs was later recovered on the side of a motorway, having been thrown from a moving vehicle.

All four accused pleaded guilty to theft, but despite this being a very serious case, in the highest possible court, the gang members still only received suspended sentences.

Two years earlier, five connected men had been sentenced in the same court to a total of 12 years in jail for conspiracy to steal railway cable.

This sort of scrap metal theft used to be very fashionable – until the government made that crime have a more serious consequence. We would dearly love parliament to afford our pets improved protection, too. But our proposed tweak would be so much simpler to achieve; we just want to improve the existing legislation.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE PET THEFT LESS ATTRACTIVE TO CRIMINALS?

Sampa's legal advisor, Professor John Cooper QC wants you to tweak the existing Theft Act 1968, so it includes a specific mention of the theft of pet animals in the 'property' section in section 4, subsection 4.

Mushrooms and wild animals are already detailed, so why not pets?

While the word 'property' makes many pet owners understandably uncomfortable, our pets will be better protected if they stay within the 1968 Theft Act, and once pet theft is properly detailed in the act, it will aid the strengthening of the aggravated sentence provision, as is already the case with vehicles and bicycles.

Our survey showed 94% of people are very unhappy with the current low sentencing boundaries allocated to pet theft.

DEFRA'S REPLY & MICROCHIPS

Do microchips help? Well, not as much as they could. Sadly, when Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 came into force, an opportunity was missed to make it legal proof of ownership and we remain 'keepers'. The system is badly flawed, as there is no compulsion for anyone to scan a found dog or cat or a new patient at the vet's. Any mention of best practice to scan and check microchip registration remains only a recommendation and is left optional.

And even if a dog is flagged up on the chip database as being stolen, the records can still be overwritten with a new owner's details, making the selling on of stolen pets much easier. Defra has licensed a large number of chip databases and security compliance is often an issue, with many external people being trusted with codes that allow them to overwrite the database.

Sampa has been advised not to use this debate to solve the problems of microchipping – perhaps that could be a future debate? But as Defra brought it up, we thought we'd address it.

PET THEFT WRECKS LIVES



Dawn's story

In December 2013, Dawn Mau's family's life was changed forever. Angel, their beloved German Shorthaired Pointer, was snatched on a walk in Barnsley.

"Losing Angel was like losing my life," Dawn says. "Angel was my best friend. I spent more than £13,000 trying to get her back. I remortgaged our house and took unpaid leave. I didn't work for a very long time – there was no way I could even think about work; I couldn't concentrate. I started smoking again after eight years of not, lost a lot of weight, and suffered from depression ever since. The marriage was strained and I ended up getting divorced, too."

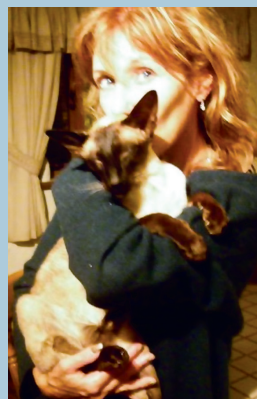
Five years on and Dawn still has no closure.

"If the person who took Angel is reading this, please let her come home. She's too old now for you to breed from – let her have the life with me she deserves.

"To any MPs reading this, come and look at my life and see how much pet theft changed it. My phone might have cost the same as Angel, but could have been replaced within 24 hours."

Home invasions

Oldham-based Kieren Hamilton was asleep when his home was burgled. The criminals stabbed him 40 times before making off with Rambo, his French Bulldog. His mother told the *Manchester Evening News*, "He just wants his dog back."



Cat theft

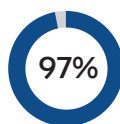
Toni Clarke says, "It's now five long, life-changing, years. The day Clooney, my striking, seal point Siamese disappeared, I wept, I walked, I screamed his name, I

crumbled. There's not been one day since then that the tears have not flowed. All I can say is that I almost lost my sanity in my attempts to reach him."

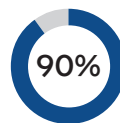
WHY ARE PETS A SPECIAL CASE?



While it's always annoying and inconvenient to have expensive and practical possessions pinched, when a much-loved pet is stolen, owners often experience life-changing emotional damage that can result in depression, marriage breakdown and an inability to work. We believe that this extreme consequential harm needs to be more formally acknowledged as a very serious aggravating factor in these growing pet theft cases.



of our survey respondents said: "I would be more distressed about someone stealing my pet than them taking any of my material possessions."



of our survey respondents agree with this statement: "I would like these criminals to be sentenced at the same level as someone stealing the highest value possessions or harming someone, as this would devastate me more than a physical assault."

Because pet theft currently has no apposite consequence for the thieves, even when caught, this is increasingly seen as a low-risk, high-reward crime.

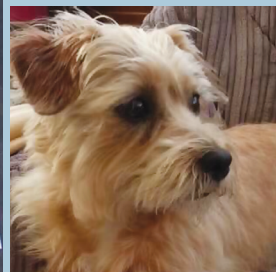
Pet owners are living in fear and are becoming prone to extortion, often being persuaded to pay huge sums to try to get their stolen pets back.

According to Direct Line's recent Freedom of Information (FOI) request, police figures show an average of five dogs are reported stolen every day and that in 80% of these cases, the pet never comes home.

Sampa believes there are very many more cases of pet theft beyond these official figures, as 'theft by finding' is never included in police figures. Dog theft has increased by 24% over the last three years and no one is safe from this crime, which hits families, the elderly and the disabled.

Dogs are stolen from gardens, houses, parks, kennels, outside shops and cars. Nowhere is safe. The loss of a companion and family member is devastating.

Owners often complain that the police are very reluctant to record pet theft as a crime, as it badly affects their figures. Already distressed owners tell us they have



FIFI was stolen and now reunited. Fifi and her family know the pain and devastation caused by #DogTheft and don't want it to happen to you 🐾❤️



to fight to get a crime reference number and that these cases are very rarely thoroughly investigated.

Very few cases have ever come to court.

Potential pet thieves are fast learning that the chance of ever being caught is tiny. And even if caught, the chance of a custodial sentence or a substantial fine is incredibly slim.

As a result, DogLost believes instances of pet theft have increased by 24 per cent over the past three years.

Pet theft data is difficult to collate, as police force procedures and systems for recording are not generic. Dr Daniel Allen issued FOI requests to UK police forces on 7 May 2018. 37 of 44 police forces responded to the request, of which 17 were able to provide useable data relating to charges. Dr Daniel Allen's research found:

- Of the 646 dog theft crimes recorded by 17 police forces in 2017, 30 led to charges (4.6%). 95.4% of dog theft crimes in 2017 ended without charge.
- Of the 2,030 dog theft crimes recorded by 17 police forces from 2015 to 2018, 66 led to charges (3.25%). 96.75% of dog theft crimes from 2015 to 2018 ended without charge.
- Only one police force held details on sentences. The four listed charges included two community orders (12 months), one of six months' imprisonment, and one dismissed case.

It must be noted that charges might include more than the theft of a dog. For example, burglary may include many items; robbery might involve serious injury to a human victim, and sentencing will reflect such circumstances. This research is ongoing – these statistics are indicative.

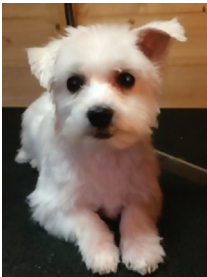


HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST HEART-BREAKING CASES:



ALFIE

Adult male Chihuahua, golden
 Stolen from BL9 area on 17 June 2018
 Please do not judge; a mistake was made to take him with the owner while shopping. His owner is distraught and just wants him home. He was taken at about 4pm. If found, he should be reported to the council dog warden (as required by law).
Call 07882 450699 or Greater Manchester Police on 101



BOBBY

Young adult male Shih Tzu cross, white
 Stolen from DY13 area on 30 May 2018
 Bobby vanished

from his secure garden at home.
Call 07754 891392 or 07724 716648 or West Mercia Police on 101



SCOOBY

Young adult male Yorkshire Terrier cross, black & tan
 Stolen from GU24 area on 5 September 2017
 Scooby was

stolen in a house burglary.
Call 07967018003 or 07891685447 or Surrey Police on 101



OSCAR

Seven-month-old male Cockapoo, gold brown
 Stolen from E3 area on 30 May 2018.

We are deeply sad and brokenhearted that our Oscar was stolen from outside the Widow's Son pub at 4:03pm, after escaping out the door. You can clearly see the plate number in the pictures, taken from the cameras of the pub, as well as a man grabbing Oscar and leaving the premises with no mercy or decency. We couldn't believe how cruel a

human being could be until we saw these videos and screenshots.
Call 07501 026662 or 07405 013333 or Metropolitan Police on 101

HOW POPULAR IS THIS CAMPAIGN?

The campaign has featured on Sky, ITV, BBC, nearly every radio station and newspaper.



Here are just some of the pet-loving celebrities that have backed the #PetTheftPetition...

WE NEED YOUR HELP
 Ella killed and her two sisters stolen out of the garden.

Peggy
 stolen from garden.

Ruby
 stolen from garden.

Ella
 killed for protecting her two sisters

Peggy adult female Terrier cross
Ruby female adult Spaniel cross
Ruby is a working therapy dog. Rubys clients have dementia, her clients are confused. So Ruby's love and sensory benefits are priceless.
 Ella was kicked so hard she died 2days later of her injuries. Their owner has had a breakdown after losing her babies.
 Information needed now please.
 07957776059 or 07977749735.

Ivy

Buddy

Zeena

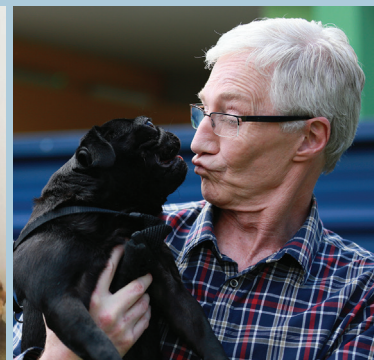
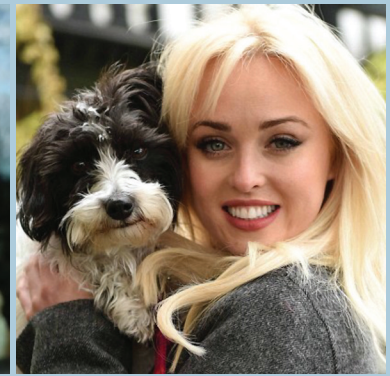
RIP DOTTIE ❤️

Tilly

Daisy

Bentley

Storm



Ricky Geruavis

Reclassify the theft of a pet to a specific crime in it's own right - sign the petition'

Lorraine Kelly

Thank you for supporting the #PetTheftPetition. I've signed - make sure you do too!

Peter Egan

If I lost a dog and it was never found, I know I would spend the rest of my life with a hole in my heart, full of fear and anxiety. Please join me and sign and share this important #PetTheftPetition, our pets are depending on us.

Jorgie Porter

Pets are family and this should be reflected in law to give families protection from #PetTheft.

Deborah Meaden

Right people... anyone who has never felt the terrible loss of a stolen pet can only imagine the trauma... let's do this!

Dermot O'Leary

I'm a proud cat dad and can only imagine what a massive heart-shaped hole #PetTheft leaves in people lives. They make a house a home and make us better people. They are family members and why I'm asking you all to sign the #PetTheftPetition Pls sign & RT

Miranda Hart

My dog is family, simple as that. Pet theft is deeply destructive and violently upsetting to family units whose pets are key or sole members. Fellow animal lovers, roll up. Thank you.

Chris Packham

When the world is difficult to process, having a friend who offers unconditional, judgement-free love and devotion can calm even the busiest of minds. Owning dogs has brought huge benefits to my life. A big woof to all those who worked so hard to get pet theft to be considered for debate in parliament and continued sympathy to all those who have endured this horrible crime. Top work.

David Wardell & #FabulousFinn:

Dogs aren't property, and they shouldn't be seen as such in law. Please support the #PetTheftPetition and let's get these amazing animals the respect they deserve.

Kirsty Gallacher

#DogTheft is one of the biggest growing crimes in the UK because there is no minimum sentencing deterrent in place. We want the government to 'Reclassify the theft of a pet to a specific crime in its own right'.

Paul O'Grady

The anguish and pain caused to owners of stolen dogs is unbearable to think of! Our dogs are family members and can never be replaced.

Paul Ross

Dog theft is a cruel and callous crime that tears the heart out of families - a vile act perpetrated by evil people. Time to make the punishment fit the crime.

PROFESSOR JOHN COOPER QC SAYS:



I am very pleased to have been asked to advise upon the drafting of an amendment to the Theft Act, which will properly recognise what every pet owner in the country has always known. That is that our pets are not inanimate pieces of property, but sentient, caring, animals that are an integral part of our homes, the theft of which should attract far more serious sentences to adequately reflect that. My experience in helping to formulate the Hunting Act, which criminalised hunting in this country, will be invaluable to the work I will be doing.



Giles Watling MP
#DogTheft for breeding is a terrible crime. Cruel to the dogs and cruel to the owners who have no idea what is happening to their beloved pets. Big issue in my constituency and there should be serious penalties for these thoughtless, money-grabbing criminals!

Many MPs of all parties have already pledged support for #pettheftreform, please will YOU join them on July 2nd!



Gareth Johnson MP
Gareth has been championing pet theft reform in Parliament for many years and hosted Dog Theft Awareness Day at Westminster for Sampa in 2017. He says, "Dog theft is a cruel crime and whilst it continues, I will do all I can to highlight this issue and call for tougher sentences for the perpetrators."

