

Dogs Trust issue advice on eve of Dog Theft Awareness Day

Dogs Trust, the UK's leading dog welfare charity, says pet theft is on the increase in the UK, and it has issued guidance to owners in a bid to prevent dogs from being separated from their families.

According to a recent report by Direct Line, 2,290 dogs were stolen across the UK in 2023, a six per cent increase on 2022 and in an effort to make people aware of the dangers Dog Theft Awareness Day is on Thursday 14 March 2024.

But despite the fact that having a dog stolen is distressing, pet theft is not a specific crime. As it stands, the crime of stealing a dog is treated in the same way as the theft of household items such as phones and bikes, without considering the huge emotional impact losing a pet has on families and individuals.

For many years, Dogs Trust has called for harsher penalties to deter those who profit from the theft of dogs. A Proposed Private Members Bill in The Scottish Parliament, the Dog Abduction (Scotland) Bill, has been introduced by Maurice Golden MSP and is awaiting Stage One. If successful, this would see Dog Theft become a specific offence.

Maurice Golden MSP said: "Dog theft soared during the pandemic

and only seems to be getting worse as time goes on. It's now a matter of urgency that we have a set of laws designed to punish severely those who steal a dog, that are also strong enough to deter others who may be considering it. I'm glad this is underway in Scotland and across the wider UK and look forward to taking my Bill forward in the coming months in Holyrood. Dogs are so much more than a simple household commodity, which is how the law currently regards them. They deserve all the protection we can give them."

To help owners reduce the risk of their dog being stolen, Dogs Trust has issued the following advice:

- Ensure your house and property boundaries are secure – keep your dog in and intruders out.
- Keep an eye on your dog when they are in the garden and never leave them unsupervised.
- Do you post pictures of your dog on social media? If so, regularly review your privacy settings and make sure your address can't be identified from your posts.
- When exercising your dog, always keep them in sight and pay attention to what they are doing. If exercising your dog off lead, make sure they have good recall and come back to you when you call them, regardless of where they are.
- Never leave your dog unattended in a public place – even if it's just for a minute.
- Likewise, never leave your dog alone in a car. As well as the risk of being stolen, they can also easily overheat, even if the weather is cold or mild.
- Make sure your dog is searchable in case the worst should happen. Ensure your dog is wearing a tag with your name, phone number and address on it, and make sure your dog is microchipped. Let your database provider know if any of

your contact details change, and keep up-to-date, clear photos of your dog, making sure to show any distinctive features.

If the worst does happen and your dog is stolen, you can feel helpless and have no idea where to start looking for them. Dogs Trust suggests the following:

- Report the theft to the police straight away. Make sure you get a crime reference number and insist that your dog is recorded as stolen and not missing.
- Report the theft of your dog to your local authority dog warden.
- Notify your microchip database provider.
- Ask local rescue centres, animal charities and vet practices to keep an eye out for your dog.
- Monitor places thieves may try to sell your dog, like pet websites, pet shops and notice boards. Notify the police immediately if you come across anything.
- Use missing and stolen animal websites [such as DogLost](#) which help to reunite missing pets with their owners by offering free advice and support.

Maria Murray, Associate Director Prevention and Community Engagement at Dogs Trust said: “Having your beloved pet stolen is an extremely stressful, often heart-breaking experience. For many owners, pets are members of the family, and being separated from them, without knowing where they are, is devastating.

“It’s disappointing to hear that pet theft is on the rise, but by following a few simple tips, you can reduce the chances of this despicable crime happening to you. Never leave your dog unattended, especially in a public area, and if you are walking them off lead, always keep them in sight. You should also be careful with what details you share online about your

canine companions.

“Not only is it a legal requirement for your dog to be microchipped and to wear an ID tag while out in public, but these two simple steps will also help to get your dog home to you as quickly as possible if the worst does happen.”

For more information, visit [Dog Theft – What To Do If Your Dog Is Stolen | Dogs Trust](#)

