

## Alarming Increase In Dog Thefts

Michele Quinlivan (WSPCA)

There has been an alarming increase in the number of dogs reported missing and robbed over the last few months around the country. A few have been reunited with their families but sadly the majority have not been found. It is believed that thieves are targeting dogs due an increased demand for pets during the pandemic. Dogs Trust report that the asking prices for dogs has increased by anything up to 400% this year.

This all comes in times of social isolation and cocooning when we are really valuing the companionship provided by our pets big and small and it alerts us to the urgent need to keep our pets safe from what has been described as a pandemic of dognappings.

Gardaí, have reported a spate of dog thefts in Dublin, Kildare, Cork, Tipperary and Waterford areas. Earlier this month, Gardaí reunited four foxhound puppies with their owners. The puppies were stolen in Co. Galway and found in Belfast Harbour on their way to a ferry.

Gardaí in conjunction with Revenue Commissioners, Port Authorities, Wexford SPCA and the Waterford and ISPCA Animal Welfare Officer and ISPCA discovered seventeen puppies in a container in Rosslare Harbour about to board a ferry. Gardaí recently reunited a Kilkenny dog with his owners. "Pop" as he is known had gone missing in Mullinavat last March and was found in Cork. A suspect in Pop's disappearance has been identified and investigations are ongoing.

Many of our readers will be familiar with the story of Daisy, a springer spaniel and her seven puppies stolen earlier this month from a locked kennel in Enniscorthy. Daisy was found in Dublin some days later and reunited with her family through a kind member of the public and the DSPCA. The thieves had used a knife to brutally cut out the microchip from under the skin on Daisy's neck. Sadly Daisy's seven weeks old pups have not been recovered and Daisy's family are appealing to the public for any information that will help them find them find the pups.

A recent trawl of social media, by Waterford SPCA, revealed that one hundred and twenty dogs have been reported as missing in the southeast area in the last two weeks.

At a time where there is a high market demand for dogs there are reports on social media of drones being used to survey back gardens for pets and anecdotal reports of organised crime being involved in dog theft. We call on the public to take care and ask for proof of ownership when purchasing new pups and dogs.

This week, Barbara Bent of Waterford SPCA and Wexford Fianna Fail TD James Brown spoke with Damien Tiernan on WLRFM on the subject of dog theft. Deputy Brown told Damien about his plans to address the problem of dog theft through giving greater legal protection to pets. Deputy Brown is drafting new legislation that proposes those who steal pets will face tougher sentences.

The majority of dog owners regard and love their pet as a member of their family and it would be unthinkable that they could be stolen by thieves just for money. The anguish of owners speculating on how their beloved dog is been treated after it has been stolen and the dog's anguish and suffering from been caged and taken away from its home is difficult to overstate. And yet this crime can only be treated legally by the Gardaí and the Courts as if the thieves had stolen a garden chair or a mobile phone.

Current legislation on dog theft does not take into account the role pets play in our emotional wellbeing and the support that

assistance dogs provide for children and adults with special needs. Deputy Brown's proposed legislation seeks to reflect the important of pets in modern day life.

Deputy Brown's private members bill will address the online sales market and proposes an end to same day "click and collect" and third party sales of dogs. It proposes requirements for greater levels of documentation and proof of ownership. Deputy Brown's proposed new law for pet theft has received cross party support and the support of animal welfare groups and is welcomed by all as it reflects the important role that our beloved pets play in our lives.

Barbara Bent of Waterford SPCA commended Deputy Brown for his efforts. She told listeners on WLRFM that dog theft has become a huge issue and that loss of a beloved pet is traumatic especially for older people and children with special needs who depend on their pets for support and companionship. She called for greater enforcement of current laws and convictions for all those found guilty of pet theft.

She advised the public to ensure their pets are microchipped and registered with reputable microchip agents such as fido.ie. She encouraged the public to think about the security they have in place for their pets. She cautioned against leaving dogs unattended outside shops and in front gardens and advised that dogs are kept indoors when owners are away. She encouraged people to try and take photos and make a note of car registrations when they are worried about suspicious activity and to pass on such information to the Gardaí as soon as possible.

If your family pet goes missing please report the matter immediately to your local Garda Station. Post clear pictures and descriptions of your pet on as many missing animal websites and social media platforms as you can. Inform Waterford SPCA at [info@waterfordspca.ie](mailto:info@waterfordspca.ie) and at 051-841432. Put up posters in local shops and the local area and contact your local radio station requesting a "shout-out" so that the public can keep an eye out for your beloved pet. Keep an eye on social media selling pages.

If you are concerned about the origins of a new pup or dog in your area please report the matter in confidence to Waterford SPCA and to your local Garda station. By working together and staying aware we can all help reduce the current spate of pet thefts and lessen the misery it's causing to beloved dogs and their heartbroken owners. For more information on how to keep your dog safe: <https://www.garda.ie/!6MPWQ3>

Report concerns of cruelty to animals to Waterford SPCA. REMEMBER! It only takes one call to save an animal's life. DOGS OF THE WEEK Contact us on 051-841432 or by email to [info@waterfordspca.ie](mailto:info@waterfordspca.ie)