

## The 7 Most Commonly Stolen Pets – Is Yours One of Them?

Pet theft is on the rise, with a 30% jump in cases in 2015. Watch out for this red flag that may be your tip-off that someone is eyeing your pet. Learn 3 areas to never leave your pet unattended as they could make him a target for theft.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pets are often stolen for monetary reasons, which explains why purebred dogs are the most common victims of theft
- Leaving your dog unattended — in a vehicle, in front of a store or even in a fenced backyard — could make him a target
- If a stranger asks you how much your dog costs, it's a red flag; don't give out this detail or share where your pet lives

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Pet theft is on the rise in the U.S. According to the American Kennel Club National Pet Theft Database, 831 dogs were stolen in 2015, which is a 30% rise from the number stolen in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

The overall number of pets stolen each year is higher than this, even, as the AKC is only reporting on AKC-recognized breeds and doesn't include cats, either. Pit bulls and pit bull mixes are most commonly stolen, followed by:<sup>2</sup>

- Yorkshire terriers
- Chihuahuas
- Bulldogs
- Pomeranians
- Shih tzus
- German shepherds

### Why Are Pets Stolen?

There is often a monetary reason why pets are stolen. Purebred dogs, which are the most common victims of theft, can be worth thousands of dollars if sold to an unsuspecting family. Purebred puppies are especially coveted by criminals, but any high-value (monetarily speaking) dog is at risk.

Dog-flipping schemes are unfortunately all-too-common as well. A person may steal a purebred puppy or claim to be a lost puppy's owner. Then they quickly sell the dog online for a profit.<sup>3</sup>

If your pet isn't spayed or neutered, she or he may be stolen and sold for a high price to a breeder or a puppy mill.

Some stolen pets are sold to laboratories, universities and other research institutions for use in experiments. There are actually "Class B dealers" licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that may legally collect dogs and cats from "random sources" and sell them for research use.

Unfortunately, sometimes stolen (and lost) pets may get caught up in the mix. According to the Humane Society of the United States:<sup>4</sup>

*"These dealers obtain dogs and cats from various 'random sources,' including auctions, flea markets and animal shelters.*

*Some Class B dealers have also been known to obtain animals from unregulated middlemen known as 'bunchers,' who have been documented acquiring lost, stray and 'free to a good home' pets, and even pets from neighborhood backyards.*

*After purchasing animals, the dealers typically hold them until they transport them to universities or other research institutions."*

It's sickening to think about, but other dogs, particularly German shepherds, Doberman pinschers and American pit bull terriers, may be stolen and used as "bait" dogs in dog-fighting rings (cats may also be stolen for this purpose). Pets may also be stolen and kept until a reward is offered.

Some pet thefts are also emotionally driven. Pets may be stolen as an act of revenge or by a former romantic partner who believes the animal is rightfully theirs, for instance.

## How to Protect Your Pet From Being Stolen

Unlike material possessions, your pet is irreplaceable. Yet many pet owners neglect to take even the most basic safety precautions. While a pet may be stolen at any time, there are steps you can take to significantly reduce your pet's chances of becoming a victim.

1. **Avoid leaving your pet unattended** — A dog left alone outside, even in a fenced-in backyard, is a prime target for thieves. A fenced yard with a locked gate may deter some thieves, but not all (especially if you regularly leave your dog alone for long periods).

Be sure you keep an eye on your pet at all times and avoid letting him wander off-leash to areas where you can't keep see him.

Also avoid tying your dog out in front of stores or restaurants or leaving him in a vehicle unattended (this also poses a risk of heat stroke). Howard Simpson of Integrated Security and Communications in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts told Care2:<sup>5</sup>

*"Leaving your dog tied up in front of a store is about as ludicrous as leaving your child out front and saying, 'Wait right there, I'll be back in 10 minutes' ...*

*Do yourself a favor and realize that there are security risks in even the safest of neighborhoods. Being naive makes you a target."*

2. **Avoid sharing details about your dog with strangers** — If you're on a walk with your dog, it's natural to chat with passersby. However, if a stranger asks you how much your dog cost, it's a red flag. Avoid sharing this information and do not give out details about where you and your dog live.
3. **Create a neighborhood watch** — Neighbors can act as each other's eyes and ears, helping to keep an eye out for suspicious activity.

When you become familiar with the pets in your area, you'll know something is wrong if you see a stranger with a neighbor's pet. Your neighborhood will also be less likely to be targeted in the first place if thieves know you're looking out for each other.

4. **Keep an up-to-date photo** — A recent photo of your pet can serve as proof that you're his rightful owner. A microchip can also serve this purpose.

## What to Do if Your Dog Is Stolen

If you think your dog has been stolen, call the police and make a police report. Also notify your local animal control officer. If your dog is microchipped, you can ask to have its serial number and your dog's description added to the "stolen article" category on the National Crime Information Center.<sup>6</sup>

Next, put up "Lost Dog" flyers with your dog's photo in your neighborhood and post it online to your social circles and also local sites that report lost pets. Ask around in your neighborhood whether anyone saw any suspicious activity when your pet went missing.

Another option is to contact your local TV station, radio station and newspaper and ask them to report your lost pet online. State that a reward is offered for your pet's return (but don't say how much). You can also keep an eye out for any online ads advertising the sale of a pet that meets your pet's description.

Hopefully you will never need to use these suggestions, but if the unthinkable does happen, you will at least be prepared. Quick action may save the life of your pet. Post your pet's info on websites such as **FidoFinder**, **PawBoost**, **LOSTMYDOGGIE.COM**, The Center for Lost Pets, **PetFinder** and **Pet FBI**. Also post information on your community's social media page.

## Avoid Buying a Stolen Pet

Equally important is to avoid buying stolen pets, which means avoiding obtaining an animal from any source that does not allow you to verify the animal's origins. This includes:

- Flea markets
- Roadside stands or vans
- Directly off the internet (online classifieds can be easily faked)
- Newspaper ads

Be especially wary of any advertisement that offers a dog for sale at a reduced price or for a “relocation fee.” A request for last-minute shipping fees is also a red flag. While ideally it’s best to adopt dogs from reputable animal shelters or rescue organizations, if you find an animal through other means (online or by newspaper, for instance), there should not be any fee involved. As noted by the AKC:<sup>7</sup>

*“Dog owners who truly love their animals and are unable to keep them will opt to find a loving home without compensation for re-homing the animal.”*

## Sources and References

<sup>1,2</sup> [VetStreet, July 12, 2016](#)

<sup>3</sup> [New York Daily News July 21, 2015](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Humane Society of the United States, Pets Used in Experiments](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Care2 October 25, 2015](#)

<sup>6</sup> [AKC, Pet Theft on the Rise](#)

<sup>7</sup> [AKC, Pet Theft](#)

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