

Between 50,000 and 100,000 of These Dogs Are Abandoned or Sacrificed Each Year

The brutal treatment of the Spanish Galgo exceeds even the worst abuses of the Greyhound racing industry. Learn what you can do to help these forgotten dogs find kindness and compassion in a cold, cruel world.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Documentarian Yeray Lopez has a passion for the plight of the Galgo, an ancient dog breed used to hunt hare in Spain
- The Galgo is a victim of massive and irresponsible overbreeding, with the result that up to 100,000 dogs are abandoned or killed each year
- Yeray says galgueros often have other dogs as pets that live indoors with their families, but the Galgos will always be found in the garage and are looked at as tools
- Yeray's mission is to raise awareness of the cruel treatment of Galgos in Spain, and ultimately put an end to the horrors these dogs endure
- International adoptions of Galgos are now taking place and dogs are finding homes around Europe and also in the U.S.

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published March 19, 2017.

Today, Yeray Lopez talks about a very special dog breed, the Spanish Galgo, also known as the Spanish Greyhound. Yeray is a documentarian, graphic designer and professional photographer.

The plight of Galgos in his native country of Spain is Yeray's passion, and he wants to help spread the word about the mistreatment of these wonderful dogs.

The Galgo is a hunting dog built to run. Galgos belong to the sighthound family and look similar to the **Greyhound**, but while Greyhounds are sprinters bred to run very fast for short distances, Galgos are endurance runners.



The Galgo – An Ancient Breed Facing a Modern Day Horror

Galgos have been used in Spain for centuries to hunt hare.

"If you look back at our art history," says Yeray, "you'll see Galgos in royal paintings and in many very special places in Spain. It was once a very valuable dog. But things have changed."

"I think we have around 500,000 Galgos here being used for hunting hare," he continues. "Their value is not very high any more. They suffer quite a lot. Actually, Spain is the only country in Europe that allows hunting with dogs in the open fields."

Yeray said that for most people in Spain, "the Galgo belongs to the field." But while the Spanish haven't yet embraced the idea of these dogs as pets, they actually make perfect canine companions.

"They can sleep up to 16 hours a day," says Yeray. "Part of the goal of my documentary project is to counterbalance this image that we have of the Galgo."

Unfortunately, the dogs are being seriously overbred. "The breeders, called galgueros, think that the champion will come," Yeray explains.

"They think it is a matter of character. So they breed and breed and breed. They breed Galgos for hunting. This is not for food or anything like that, this is a hobby. We are talking here about Spain kind of frozen in time."

Up to 100,000 Galgos Are Killed or Abandoned Each Year in Spain

When Yeray began working on his documentary, he wasn't prepared for what he would see deep in the heart of Spain. The galgueros are motivated by the idea of breeding a champion. "They are looking for this champion to come, a kind of a messiah," he explains.

"They imagine a Galgo that would not only run fast, but that would also have this kind of character that would go after the hare no matter what. A dog that will run over very difficult terrain."

His paws are bleeding, he's very tired, it is very hot, but he keeps on running. That's the kind of dog they're looking for."

Unlike the situation with racing Greyhounds in the U.S., which is regulated and controlled to some degree (but is certainly not something that should be condoned), in Spain, Galgos are everywhere. "Here it is tradition and culture," explains Yeray. "Some call it sport. Actually, the Ministry of Culture and Sport finances this thing as well."

"When you are living in a village in deep Spain, you have to actually take a side on the issue. There's this very strong line and you have to say 'I'm on this side of the line. I'm pro-hunting with Galgos, or I'm on this other side of the line.'"

Because the galgueros are looking for "the one" — the champion of all champions, many Galgos are put down. Estimates are that from 50,000 to 100,000 dogs are abandoned or killed every year because they don't meet expectations. Clearly there's no human-animal bond with these dogs. It seems the breed is being thoroughly exploited.

Yeray says galgueros often have other dogs as pets — they live indoors with their families. "But the Galgos will always be found in the garage," he says. "They are looked at as tools. The Galgo, here in this context, is a tool. If it is not sharp enough, you get rid of it."

In addition, according to Yeray, "There is a huge invisible population of Galgos in Spain who are abandoned in the field, very difficult to catch, or are just handed over to shelters."

The Cruel Treatment of Galgos in Spain Is a National Embarrassment

Yeray has two Galgos of his own, which he got while living in Denmark. He quickly realized these dogs have great character and make wonderful pets.

"I knew a little bit about the Galgos of Spain, but I got very intrigued," says Yeray. "It was about my country. I started digging. For two years, I went undercover in their world, because you can only get into their world if you have a Galgo. I was pretending to be one of them. For two years, I was in their world, and it was very difficult."

"I think also this story is kind of taboo for us. I think we are a bit embarrassed that our society hasn't been able to recognize that we have a problem in the way we relate to these dogs. Here in Spain, we use animals in a very cruel manner. We have bullfighting. We are very into hunting."

"Spain is one of the very last countries that allow the use of these dogs this way. I thought, 'I need to tell this story because it is about us. It is about what kind of society we want.' For a long time, we haven't been able to talk about this. I'm getting a lot of heat because we have a lot of hunters here."

Yeray actually moved back to Spain from Denmark to tackle the Galgo issue. He's taken on a project he feels is bigger than himself, which is to bring awareness to an incredibly important topic.



Spain Seems to Have Turned Its Back on Its Galgo Problem

Yeray's documentary project started in 2014. He bought his first Galgo, whose name is Bacalao. He was living in Denmark and traveling back and forth to Spain as he got deeper into the story of the dogs.

"I was telling these guys (the galgueros), I want to be like you. I want to understand this. That was the truth. I wanted to understand where the passion for breeding these dogs was, because I didn't get it. I saw a lot of things that gave me the chills. I thought, 'Okay, this is something I need to do.'"

Yeray has finished his documentary. He's finding no support for the project in Spain, so he's hoping to secure funding and support outside his country to get the film completed and into distribution. He's hoping that "If the whole world starts saying it's not okay to treat these dogs this way, then maybe we — the people of Spain — need to give a second thought to it."

"My story was the hero's journey," explains Yeray. "My Galgo, Bacalao, was the only female in the litter. Her five brothers were taken by galgueros. I didn't have to choose because I wanted a female. But when I went back to Denmark, I was thinking a lot about her brothers. I wanted to find the galgueros who had them."

Initially, Yeray just wanted to create a film for children about his dog, the hero of the series, who returns to Spain to look for her brothers. He wasn't able to find Bacalao's littermates, but ultimately he realized his dog could have been any of the dogs he encountered in his journey.

That's when he realized the story he needed to tell was more than a kids' movie — it was a feature documentary. There are other people in Spain also working on behalf of the Galgos, and while Yeray didn't want to give details, he says many of these people who are rescuing Galgos are under threat and living in hiding.

"I don't know," says Yeray. "This is not the country I want. That's why I'm doing this."



Galgo Rescue Efforts

There are similarities between the treatment of Galgos in Spain and the racing Greyhound community here in the U.S. Greyhound racing is a terrible sport, but at least there are rescue groups here that do a tremendous job finding "disposable" Greyhounds homes with loving, compassionate families.

There were no such groups in Spain for the Galgos until fairly recently, but fortunately, several are now in operation, and Yeray has worked with some of them.

One of the groups he's familiar with took in 700 Galgos in February 2015 at the end of hare hunting season and had over 900 galgos in the shelter. In addition, international adoptions of Galgos are now taking place and dogs are finding homes around Europe and also in the U.S.

Sadly, though, all the activity around saving the dogs, in particular the shelters in Spain that have become dumping grounds for all the animals the breeders reject, has made it much easier for galgueros to breed their dogs like crazy in search of the "messiah dog" they're all hoping for.

It's obviously a long-standing cultural norm that certainly isn't going to change overnight. Interestingly, when Yeray couldn't find funding for his film he launched a Kickstarter project, and most of his support came from people in Spain. (U.S. donors were the second largest group.)

Yeray thinks the Spanish people have begun to change their view of the treatment of Galgos. It's about educating people and finding a better way to relate to animals. They shouldn't be used as tools.

"I think sharing, talking about this is very important," says Yeray. "We really need to open a much needed debate."

Where to Go to Learn More About Saving the Galgo

To learn more about Galgos, efforts to save them and also about Yeray's documentary film, visit:

- Instagram: [Yo Galgo](#)

- Facebook: **Yo Galgo**

Also, if you simply do a Google search for Galgos, you'll find lots of information on the breed, as well as on rescue and adoption organizations. It's important to Yeray that we know that there's no way he could put everything he's learned in his three years of research into his first documentary, so one of his goals is to start a conversation between people on both sides of the issue.

"We're not going to change this if galgueros don't understand that things should be done differently," says Yeray. "But more importantly, we need people. We need to build a community. We need to put policies in place. We haven't been able to do it on our own. I mean this has been going on for centuries.

Maybe it is because I lived abroad for many years and I brought my family to Spain that I'm fighting to change my country a bit, because I don't like this," says Yeray. "I like many things, but I don't like this. What we need is a community."

Yeray's warrior spirit is admirable, and it really comes down to awareness and education, which can shift the way people think. But it will take a lot of soldiers in the army to get the education process rolling.
