



GfK NOP

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## Stray Dog Survey 2010

A report prepared for:

Dogs Trust



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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Methodology

Dogs Trust commissions an annual survey of local authority dog wardens and environmental health officers in order to investigate the state of the nation's dogs. GfK NOP Social Research has been running the Stray Dogs survey since 2003, and was again chosen to conduct the survey in 2010. The research consisted of two stages, an initial telephone sweep of local authorities was carried out between 30<sup>th</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 to update contact details and collect email addresses. Postal questionnaires were then sent to all named respondents without an email address and an initial email invitation was sent to all named individuals with an email address within 378 local authorities with responsibility for environmental health in the UK on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2010.

Two options were made available to respondents to enable them to complete the survey in the most convenient way for them – to complete the survey online or to return the data to GfK NOP via a paper survey in a free post envelope, by fax or by email. Following postal, email and telephone reminders, 311 questionnaires were returned by the deadline (25<sup>th</sup> June 2010), giving a response rate of 82% across England, Scotland and Wales (Great Britain).

Local authorities within Northern Ireland were contacted separately; directly by Dogs Trust and their data was later merged with the Great Britain data set. All of the 26 authorities in Northern Ireland responded, giving an overall response rate of 83% across all 404 local authorities. Table 1 shows the response rate broken down by TV region.

**Table 1: Response rates**

TV Region	Authorities Responding	Total Authorities	Response rate %
Tyne Tees (North East)	15	16	94
Granada (North West)	29	35	83
Yorkshire (Yorkshire)	18	21	86
Central (Midlands)	56	70	80
HTV (Wales and West)	28	29	97
Anglia (East & Anglia)	29	38	76
Carlton (London)	55	70	79
Meridian (Southern)	36	45	80
West Country (South West)	12	17	71
Border (Borders)	6	7	86
Grampian (Northern Scotland)	9	9	100
STV Central (Central Scotland)	18	21	86
Ulster (Northern Ireland)	26	26	100
Wales	21	22	95
West	7	7	100
Tyne Tees & Border	21	23	91
<b>Total</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>83</b>



## 1.2 Objectives

This survey aims to provide information about the number of stray dogs that local authorities have become involved with, the methods that they have used for dealing with stray dogs and the ways in which dogs were reunited with their owners. Data is collated at both a national and a regional level. In order to track data from year to year the questionnaire was kept largely the same as in previous years. However, a number of questions that were asked in 2009 (about the types of dogs taken in or handed over and one question about whether the recession and changes in the law regarding removal of police statutory responsibility) were removed from the survey. In their place, four new questions were added to address:

1. the ways in which dog wardens are employed (by the local council or contracted out)
2. who handles strays (council owned pounds, welfare charity kennels, private boarding kennels or others)
3. the handling of so called 'status dogs'<sup>1</sup>
4. the number of licensed breeding establishments

Comparisons are made with previous surveys where appropriate.

## 1.3 Definition of regions

The findings are analysed according to the 13 ITV regions throughout the UK. These are: Tyne Tees (North East), Granada (North West), Yorkshire (Yorkshire), Central (Midlands), HTV (Wales and West), Anglia (East and Anglia), Carlton (London), Meridian (Southern), West Country (South West), Border (Borders), Grampian (Northern Scotland), STV Central (Central Scotland), and Ulster (Northern Ireland). Since 2009, reference has also been made to the newly formed TV regions of Tyne Tees and Borders (incorporating Tyne Tees and Border regions) and to Wales and West as two separate regions.

## 1.4 Interpretation of the data

In order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional totals. As a result the individual region figures do not always equal the all UK total. Where figures are shown for Wales, West and Tyne Tees & Border TV regions these are additional to and do not make up part of the overall UK totals.

The key findings from this survey are based on actual numbers reported by each authority (e.g. the number of strays); however, at some points reference is made to 'estimated' figures. We have grossed these figures up to make estimates for each TV region based on the assumption that authorities responding are representative of authorities as a whole.

It is also worth noting that the 26 authorities within Northern Ireland only provide data on total number of strays seized by the local authority, the number reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period, the number passed on to a welfare organisation or dog kennel for possible rehoming after the statutory period and total number put to sleep. Where all other figures are reported these are based on the 311 responding authorities in Great Britain.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Status dogs' is a reference used to describe those dogs whose looks or breed type are thought to convey a particular impression of their owner – such as Bull breeds, Rottweilers, Akitas or Crosses of these.



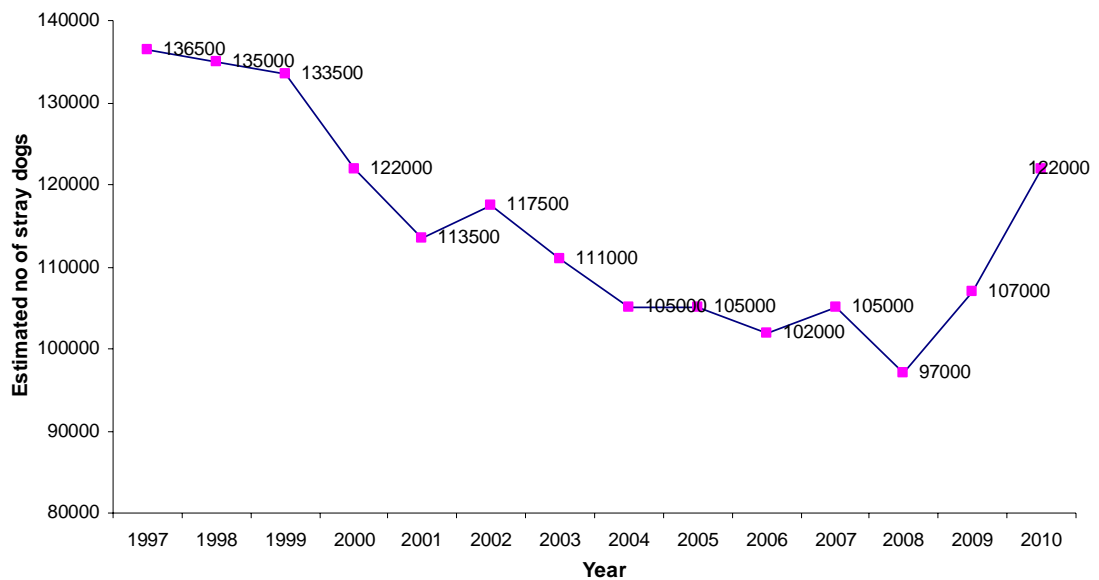
## 2 Summary of findings

### 2.1 The number of stray dogs handled

Based on the 337 authorities who responded to this survey, an estimated 121,693 stray dogs were handled by local councils across the UK from 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010. This represents a 13% increase from the estimate of 107,228 dogs handled last year, the highest figure seen since 2000. Although this represents quite a dramatic increase in comparison with previous years, there is evidence to suggest that the recession has impacted on the number of stray dogs being seized across the UK. Furthermore, the fact that strays are now reported directly to councils rather than to the police could also be a factor.

Chart 1 shows the estimated number of stray dogs handled annually across the UK since 1997.

**Chart 1: The number of stray dogs in the UK since 1997**



**Base: All local authorities in the UK (337)**

Using the latest census data, recorded in 2001, we are able to estimate the number of people per stray dog across the UK. This year local authorities across the UK handled an average of one stray for every 482 people. However, there are significant regional variations.

For instance, in the STV Central TV region local authorities dealt with one stray dog for every 1,038 people on average; whilst in the Ulster region, there is an estimated average of 190 people per stray dog. Table 2, below, provides the full regional breakdown in terms of the number of strays to people across the UK.

The regional differences in the number of stray dogs reported by different authorities will reflect a number of factors, including the population size and the number of dogs owned.



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Table 2: Estimated number of people per stray dog by TV region

TV Region	Estimated number of Strays 09-10	Authorities Responding	Estimated strays per authority	Estimated number of people per stray dog
Tyne Tees	8,425	15	562	361
Granada	16,907	29	583	372
Yorkshire	12,392	18	688	376
Central	21,073	56	376	481
HTV	11,426	28	408	378
Anglia	7,375	29	254	552
Carlton	14,402	55	262	784
Meridian	8,276	36	230	651
West Country	2,938	12	245	769
Border	1,707	6	285	407
Grampian	1,975	9	219	537
STV Central	3,669	18	204	1,038
Ulster	8,870	26	341	190
Wales	9,632	21	459	301
West	1,838	7	263	768
Tyne Tees & Border	10,253	21	488	303
<b>UK Total</b>	<b>121,693</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>482</b>



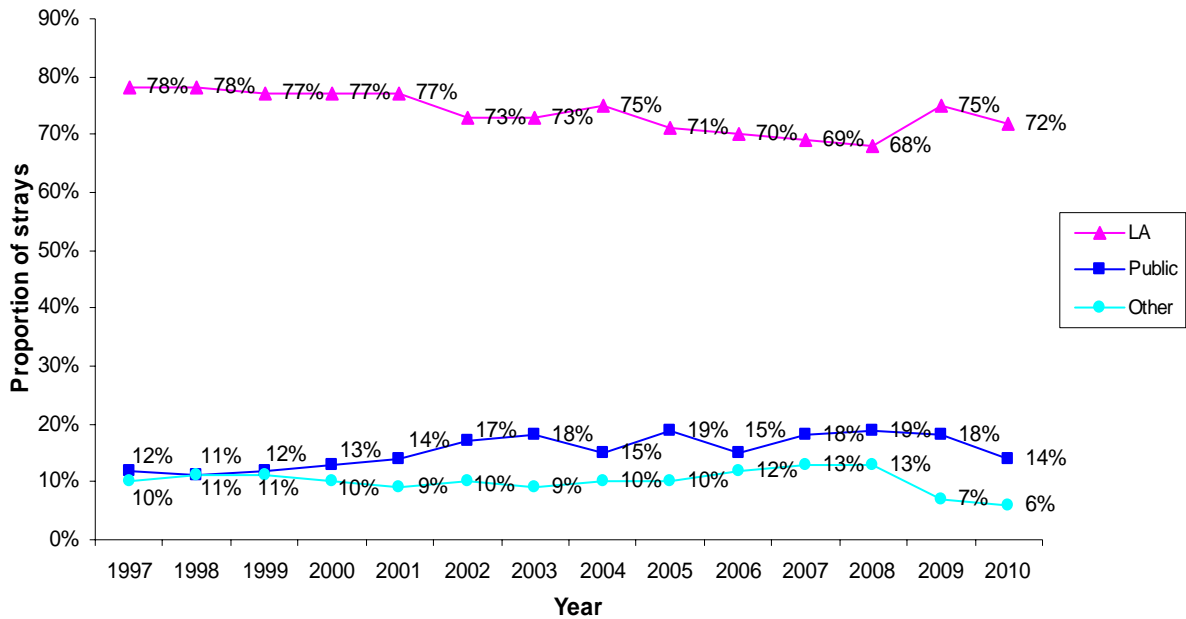
## 2.2 Seizing stray dogs

The survey asked local authorities to detail the number of stray dogs that were seized or taken in between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. This was broken down across a number of key sources including seized by the local authority as strays, brought in by the general public and brought in by the police.

Local authorities themselves played the most important role in seizing stray dogs, as in previous years, seizing 72% of reported strays. The proportion seized by local authorities has fallen slightly since last year to 72%, which is still higher than recent years and significantly higher than all other means by which stray dogs have been received. The proportion of stray dogs brought in by the general public (14%) has fallen again and is now at its lowest since 2001.

Chart 2 shows the trends in how stray dogs are being seized since 1997.

**Chart 2: How strays were brought to the local authority**



**Base: All local authorities in Great Britain (311)**

The 'other' figure shown in Chart 2 accounts for a variety of sources including the police, vets, RSPCA and dogs seized under the Dangerous Dogs Act. The number of dogs brought to local authorities by the Police across the UK has fallen from last year's reported figure of 3,261 to 1,589 this year. This equates to 2% of all strays being brought in, the lowest proportion recorded since the Stray Dogs survey began in 1997. This is likely to be a result of the change in practice, whereby strays are now reported directly to councils rather than being handled by the police.

### 2.3 What happens to the UK's stray dogs?

The second question in the survey asks local authorities to detail what happened to the stray dogs that they handled during the period of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

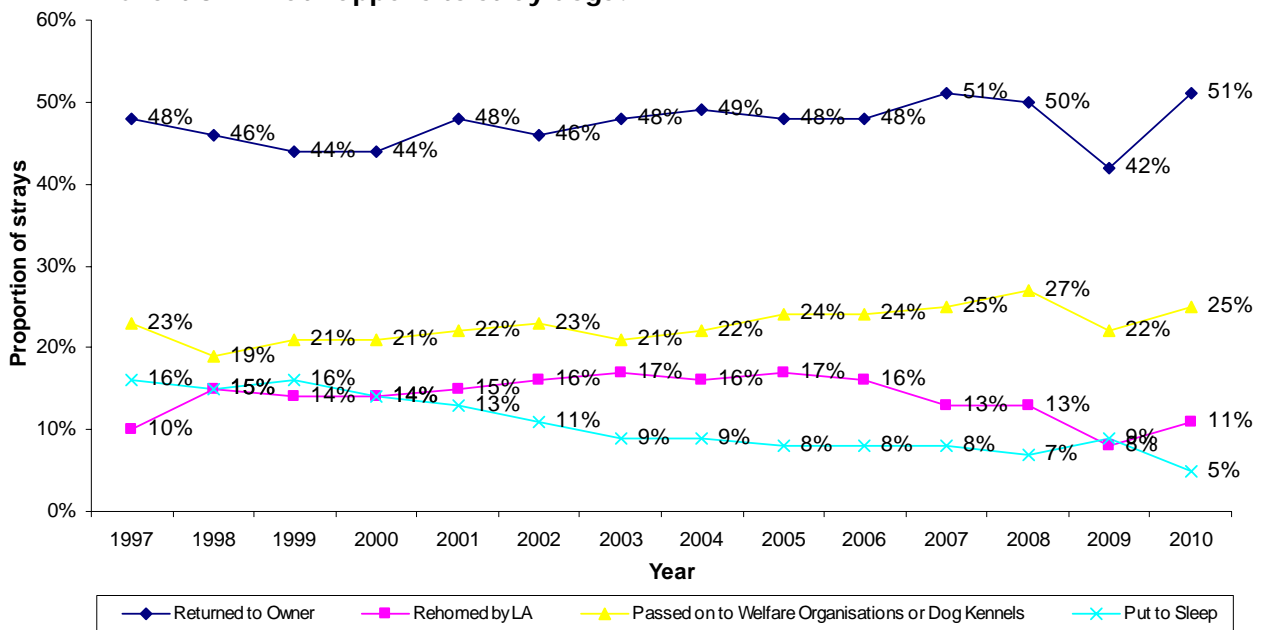
We can estimate that half of stray dogs (51%) were reunited with their owners between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010, either by being reclaimed during the statutory local authority kennelling period (41%) or by being returned directly to their owner without entering a kennel (13%). The proportion of dogs being reunited with their owners has increased by 9% since last year and is back to the highest recorded level, in line with estimated figures in 2007 and 2008.

An estimated 11% of stray dogs were re-homed by the local authority; a figure that has risen since last year, but is still lower than it has been in previous years. A quarter (25%) were passed on to welfare organisations or dog kennels after the statutory period. This proportion has increased slightly since last year, but still remains in line with estimates over the last 10 years.

The proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep has fallen by 3% since last year to just 5% this year and is now at its lowest since the Stray Dogs survey began in 1997. This year 5,342 stray dogs were reported as having been put to sleep by authorities taking part in this survey, compared with 7,052 last year. From this figure we can estimate that approximately 6,404 dogs were put to sleep across the UK during the period of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. This represents 5% of the total estimated number of stray dogs for 2010.

Amongst the authorities responding it was reported that 1,632 dogs were put to sleep due to behavioural problems or aggression, 1,087 due to ill health, and 239 under the Dangerous Dogs Act. Reasons were not given to cover all reported cases. Chart 3 shows the trends in how stray dogs have been handled since 1997.

**Chart 3: What happens to stray dogs?**



Base: All local authorities in the UK (337)

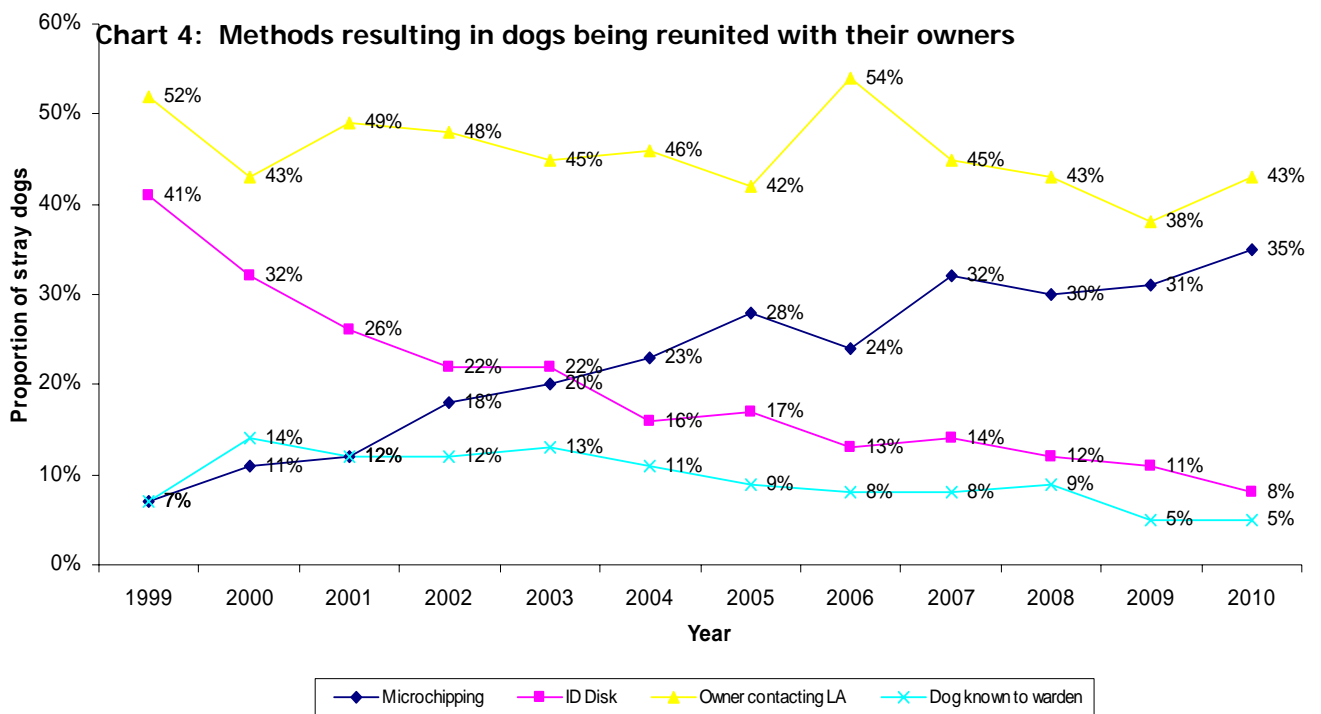


A variety of other outcomes including strays being kept or retained by finders (92 dogs), RSPCA (53 dogs) and non Dogs Trust or RSPCA rescue centres and shelters (143 dogs) were also mentioned. In addition to this, it was reported that information as to how they had been handled was not kept or recorded for around 500 stray dogs.

### 2.4 Ways in which dogs were returned to owners

The survey also asked about methods by which stray dogs had been successfully returned to their owners. Of the four main methods by which dogs are returned, the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly accounted for the largest proportion, with a reported 43% of reunions attributable to this. The proportion of dogs returned to their owners as a result of already being known to the warden remains at its lowest level of 5% for the second year running.

Micro-chipping has continued to rise in significance since 1999, when it accounted for approximately 7% of reunions, to 24% in 2006 and is now at its highest significance of 35% this year<sup>2</sup>. Whilst micro-chipping has risen in importance, there appears to be a corresponding decrease in the importance of identification disks in reuniting dogs with their owners. This year identification disks accounted for 8% of the methods used for the return of dogs; a proportion that has continuously decreased and is now at its lowest ever reported level since 1999.



Base: All local authorities in Great Britain (311)

<sup>2</sup> The proportion returned through micro-chipping refers only to instances where the method used to return stray dogs has been identified, i.e. unspecified methods of tracing owners have been excluded from this calculation. This year the method responsible for returning dogs to their owners was given for 23,282 strays.



Other Reasons for dogs being returned to their owners included work by wardens (10 dogs), identifying tattoos (four dogs) and other reasons (167 dogs). This information was not available or had not been kept for 524 stray dogs.

There is regional variation in the means by which dogs are returned to their owners. Owners contacting the local authority or pound directly accounts for around two thirds of methods in the Grampian (68%) and Border (61%) regions, but for just a quarter (24%) in HTV and just 17% in the West. Micro-chipping accounts for half (51%) of methods in the West TV region, but much less than this in Grampian (13%).

## 2.5 Dog Wardens

This year, a number of new questions were added to the survey. The first of these asked local authorities how they employ their dog wardens. Respondents were asked to state whether the dog warden for their authority was employed by the local authority itself or whether they were contracted out.

The majority (67%) reported that their dog warden was employed by the local authority, and just under a quarter (22%) reported that their dog warden was contracted out. Just 12 authorities in Great Britain did not specify how their dog warden was employed. This question was not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland.

## 2.6 Who handles stray dogs?

Another new question asked respondents to specify who handles strays in their local authority. They were asked to identify whether stray dogs were handled by council owned pounds, welfare charity kennels, private boarding kennels or others. Respondents could mention all that applied within their local authority.

The most frequent response was private boarding kennels, mentioned by 61% of respondents. The next most frequent response was welfare charity kennels, mentioned by 34% of respondents. Other mentions included council owned pounds (9%), out of hours service (1%), contractors (1%) and rescue kennels (1%). Other responses were mentioned, each by less than 1% of local authorities. Just 16 authorities did not specify who handled their strays. This question was not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland.

## 2.7 Status dogs

Picking up on media coverage of 'status dogs', this year's survey included questions about the number of 'status dogs' handled and how many of those, if any, had been put to sleep due to aggression. The media often refers to 'status dogs' as those whose looks or breed type are thought to convey a particular impression of their owner - such as Bull breeds, Rottweilers, Akitas or Crosses of these. These questions were not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland.

Across the 311 authorities that responded 17,834 'status dogs' were reported as having been handled between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. This accounts for 18% of all strays reported in the UK, although some authorities did not provide figures. Furthermore, a reported 1,137 of these 'status dogs' were put to sleep during this period due to aggression.



## 2.8 Licensed breeding establishments

The final new question added to this year's survey asked respondents in Great Britain to report, if they knew, how many breeding establishments were licensed by their local authority.

A total of 332 licensed breeding establishments were reported. Fifty nine local authorities reported not to know this information. This question was not asked of authorities in Northern Ireland.

## 2.9 Conclusions

The number of stray dogs reported by UK authorities overall has increased by 13% since last year. The grossed number now stands at an estimated 121,693 stray dogs across the UK, the highest it has been since 2000. Reported figures suggest that the majority (72%) of these dogs were seized by the local authority as strays.

Half (51%) of the estimated stray dogs handled in the UK between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 were reunited with their owners, and a quarter (25%) were passed on to a welfare organisation or dog kennel for possible rehoming. A further 12% were re-homed by the local authority. Of the dogs that were returned to their owners, it was reported that 43% of these cases were a result of the owner contacting the local authority or pound directly. Micro-chipping continues to play an increasing role in tracing the owners of stray dogs, now accounting for over a third (35%) of stray dogs being returned to their owners.

Since 1999 the proportion of stray dogs being put to sleep has decreased year on year, except for a 1% rise between 2008 and 2009. This year an estimated 5% of stray dogs were put to sleep across the UK, the lowest recorded figure since the survey began.

The most common way for dog wardens to be employed was directly by the local authority, and the most used service for handling strays was private owned pounds.



### 3 Regional responses

Table 3: Responses by TV region

	Total*	TV Region															
		Tyne Tees	Granada	Yorkshire	Central	HTV	Anglia	Carlton	Meridian	West Country	Border	Grampian	STV Central	Ulster	Wales	West	Tyne Tees & Border
<b>Base</b>	<b>337</b>	15	29	18	56	28	29	55	36	12	6	9	18	26	21	7	21
<b>Response rate (%)</b>	<b>83</b>	94	83	86	80	97	76	79	80	71	86	100	86	100	95	100	91
<b>Number of Strays</b>	<b>121,693</b>	8,425	16,907	12,392	21,073	11,426	7,375	14,402	8,276	2,938	1,707	1,975	3,669	8,870	9,632	1,838	10,253
<b>Number put to sleep</b>	<b>6,404</b>	356	716	266	705	544	202	490	200	38	20	18	69	2,278	481	66	284
<b>Number re-united</b>	<b>61,908</b>	4,871	7,765	6,043	11,071	5,638	4,742	6,701	6,018	1,999	777	1,392	2,171	2,131	4,269	1,369	4,236
<b>Passed onto welfare orgs</b>	<b>30,901</b>	1,839	3,852	3,131	7,183	3,675	1,403	4,223	1,284	697	786	282	742	1,382	3,257	439	1,941
<b>People per stray</b>	<b>482</b>	361	372	376	481	378	552	784	651	769	407	537	1,038	190	301	768	303

\*Please note: in order to maintain comparability with methods used in previous surveys, the national total is calculated separately from the regional total. Therefore totals do not always equal the sum of all regions. All figures shown have been grossed up to represent 100% of authorities within each region. Tyne Tees & Border is calculated separately in this way and so may not directly reflect combined figures from the Tyne Tees region and Border region.