



# Ear cropping of dogs: the major welfare concerns

*Ensuring animals have a good life by advocating on their behalf*

## Key facts...

- ★ Over the last six years (2015-2020) the RSPCA has seen a 621% increase in the number of reports of ear cropping and cropped ears, receiving a total of 279 reports.
- ★ Ear cropping is a painful and unnecessary practice in which dogs' ears are removed or surgically altered without anaesthetic or pain relief.
- ★ The procedure is illegal in England and Wales but people may still be doing, or arranging, this illegally and unfortunately it remains legal to import dogs who have had their ears cropped in other countries.
- ★ Cropping does not benefit the dog in any way and can actually be detrimental to their health, behaviour and welfare.
- ★ The RSPCA believes the UK Government should ban the importation of dogs with cropped ears.

## What is ear cropping?

Ear cropping is a painful and unnecessary practice and is generally performed on puppies up to the age of 12 weeks. Removal of part or all of the entire ear flap is increasingly popular in certain breeds and types of dogs e.g. cane corsos and American bullies. Other breeds, such as dobermans, tend to have their ears cropped and splinted; in which the shape of the ear is surgically altered and splinted with cardboard or wood to encourage them to grow upright instead of floppy.

## Case study: Eaton

Neapolitan mastiff cross Eaton has been scarred for life by the experience of having his ears cropped. He was one of two puppies from a litter of eight who had their ears cropped before being seized by police and placed in the RSPCA's care. His ears were inflamed, painful and infected. Investigators believe his ears had been cropped using scissors or a sharp blade without pain relief or veterinary care.

When the case had concluded, Eaton and his siblings were free to find new homes. But RSPCA Southridge Animal Centre manager Anna White said Eaton posed huge challenges for any new owner and felt it would be incredibly difficult to find him a home that could cope with the impact the cropping had had on him so she adopted him herself. Now, Eaton lives with Anna and her family. He's incredibly head shy and is terrified if you make a sudden movement near his head. He also struggles to communicate and socialise with people and with other dogs, having lost one of his key communication tools.

"This awful procedure has ruined Eaton's life," Anna said. "I don't think he'll ever fully recover."

## Ear cropping is illegal in the UK

Section 5 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006<sup>1</sup>, which prohibits certain mutilations, creates a number of offences, namely, carrying out ear cropping; causing such a procedure to be carried out and permitting another to carry out the procedure. This means that as well as an offence being committed by the person carrying out the procedure, an owner commits an offence if they send their dog abroad or if they allow someone to crop the dog's ears in this country.

Despite being illegal in the UK, and across the EU member states, the practice is still widely available in other parts of the world, such as the USA and Russia. As well as illegal activity in the UK, there is significant

<sup>1</sup> The procedure is also illegal under sister legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For further information or if you have any questions please contact: [politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk](mailto:politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk)

concern that dogs are being sent abroad illegally for cropping, or being purchased from countries where the procedure may be legal and imported into the UK. As well as fuelling this cruel and unnecessary trade, the ability to legally import dogs with cropped ears from overseas creates a smokescreen for those who illegally crop dog's ears in the UK.

### **Scale of the issue**

Over the last six years (2015-2020), the RSPCA has seen a 621% increase in the number of reports of ear cropping and cropped ears, receiving a total of 279 reports of the practice. However we strongly believe that the number of dogs affected is much greater.

### **Why do people crop dogs' ears?**

Ear cropping has no benefits for the dog whatsoever. While proponents of cropping claim that the procedure can prevent ear infections and avoid injuries during working or from other animals and dogs, there is no robust scientific evidence to substantiate this claim. In fact, cropping can actually be detrimental to their health, behaviour and welfare. The procedure is carried out purely for aesthetic or cosmetic reasons and, driven by the desire for a particular 'look'. For example, to make the dog look tougher or more intimidating. Conversely, and based on anecdotal experience, it seems that the process can make dogs anxious and nervous around people and other animals.

Worryingly, celebrity culture, images shared on social media from outside of the UK and an increase in bull breeds seen in advertising is both normalising and glamourising the look which in turn appears to be making it more popular.

### **The welfare impact of ear cropping**

Ear cropping is an incredibly painful procedure for the dog and is often carried out without anaesthetic or pain relief. The wounds can take a long time to heal, need a lot of aftercare (such as changing dressings and cleaning) and can become infected easily. Ears are also an important part of the dog's body and are used to signal how they are feeling. Surgical alteration or removal of the ear will impact on their signalling and communication capability.

#### **Case study: Lexi**

Two-year-old American bulldog, Lexi, was left in chronic pain, scratching at her ears and crying after she was left with an untreated ear condition. She needed major surgery called total ear canal ablation and bulla osteotomy to completely remove the ear canal and tympanic bull (middle ear), leaving only the pinna (or ear flap). But her cropped ears made this much more challenging and will increase the risk of infection during recovery.

It is a common misconception that cropping ears will prevent ear infections but Lexi is proof that this simply isn't the case and, in fact, her cropping will likely lead to further problems for her as she recovers from this surgery.

### **What do we want to see?**

The RSPCA is part of the [#flopnotcrop](#) and [#cutthecrop](#) campaign and along with the other welfare organisations we are calling on the UK Government to close the legal loopholes that allow this cruel practice to continue and for a ban on the importation of ear-cropped dogs to be introduced.

For further information or if you have any questions please contact: [politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk](mailto:politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk)