

Measuring the Massacre

Just how many dogs are put to death because of the British greyhound racing industry?



Greyhound racing seems to be surrounded by figures - trap numbers, starting prices, prize money, profit and loss accounts. But one figure which the racing industry never publishes, and doesn't even bother to calculate, is the figure for the number of greyhounds killed every year, either because they are "not good enough" for racing or because their racing days are over.

The only such figure we have ever come across from the greyhound racing industry appeared in 1999 in a letter to the *Herne Bay Times*⁽¹⁾ from Simon Marcantonio of the British Greyhound Racing Board, who said that "only" 500 greyhounds a year were killed when their racing careers were over. We don't think many members of the public would consider the word "only" to be appropriate to a figure of 500 dogs killed - and it's pretty obvious anyway that Marcantonio just plucked the figure out of the air in an attempt to counter claims by anti-racing campaigners. Sadly, the true figure is massively higher than 500, as our calculations below will show.

So how can we come to some sort of estimate of how many dogs are killed?

We can start out by trying to work out how many greyhounds are born every year.

The National Coursing Club (English Stud Book) and the Irish Coursing Club (Irish Stud Book) keep records of how many greyhound litters are registered each year in Britain and Ireland.

Although the vast majority of these dogs are bred for the purpose of racing, rather than coursing, the records are kept by the coursing clubs for historical reasons, because coursing far pre-dates racing, which has only existed in Britain on a commercial basis for 80 years.

According to figures published in recent years, about 700 litters are registered annually in Britain and 4,300 in Ireland.⁽²⁾

The general consensus amongst those involved in greyhound rescue and dog breeding seems to be that greyhound litters comprise at least 8 pups, on average.⁽³⁾

Therefore, the figures would indicate that approximately 5,600 (8x700) greyhounds are born every year in Britain and 34,400 (8x4,300) in Ireland. A total figure of 40,000.

There is also bound to be a considerable number of unregistered litters, where greyhounds are bred for such purposes as hunting, rough coursing and unlicensed racing - so the total number of greyhounds born annually in the British Isles (i.e. the UK and the Republic of Ireland) could quite easily be 45,000 or more.

Individual greyhounds are also registered by the coursing clubs, and when the figures for these are examined, a very disturbing situation emerges.

In recent years the annual figure for new greyhounds registered in Britain is about 4150.⁽⁴⁾ This is an average of only 6 pups per litter - so what has happened to the other 2 pups per litter? About 1,450 pups seem to have gone missing.

In Ireland about 23,700 pups are registered ("named") annually.⁽⁵⁾ An average of just over 5.5 per litter, meaning a shortfall of more than 10,700 pups.

Where are these missing puppies - a total of almost 12,150 altogether?

We only have to ask ourselves, is it likely that greyhound breeders, who are in business to make a profit, are going to allow weak puppies or runts of litters to remain alive? Are such people going to put their hands in their pockets to pay for food, bedding etc. for dogs which will never be any good for racing and which they'll never be able to sell?

The majority of dogs which race on British tracks are imported from Ireland, as the British greyhound racing industry is much bigger than its Irish equivalent.

There are less than 20 tracks currently operating in Ireland,⁽⁶⁾ whereas in Britain there are about 30 "licensed" tracks⁽⁷⁾ (operating, supposedly, under the rules of the National Greyhound Racing Club - NGRC) and about 20 independent or "flapping" tracks.⁽⁸⁾ It therefore seems safe to say that the industry is more than twice as big in Britain as it is in Ireland.

This is supported by figures for the number of greyhound race meetings taking place annually in Britain (5880 - excluding independent tracks)⁽⁹⁾ and Ireland (2184)⁽¹⁰⁾, which puts the British industry at 2½ times the size of the Irish.

Therefore, of the estimated 40,000 plus greyhounds bred annually in the British Isles, it would seem that demand from the British industry is responsible for about 28,500.

In order to run on the “licensed” tracks, dogs have to be registered again, with the NGRC, and such registrations total about 11,000 annually.⁽¹¹⁾

There is no way of finding an exact figure for dogs entering racing on independent tracks in the same year, but we can safely say this amounts to little more than 2,000 additional dogs⁽¹²⁾, given that the independent tracks are fewer and race less often than the “licensed” tracks and that many dogs racing at flapping tracks have previously raced on “licensed” tracks.

So if only 13,000 of the 28,500 dogs bred annually for the British tracks get as far as actually racing, what has happened to the other 15,500?

According to the greyhound racing industry, about 75% of dogs running on British tracks originate in Ireland.⁽¹³⁾ This means that only 3,250 of the estimated 13,000 dogs entering racing annually in Britain are British in origin. But, based on the litter registration figures from the National Coursing Club, about 5,600 greyhounds are bred in Britain every year. So what happens to the 2,350 British dogs which obviously don't make it as far as the track?

Of the approx. 28,500 dogs bred every year because of the demand from British tracks, about 22,900 (28,500 - 5,600) are Irish, but only about 9,750 make it to the tracks. What has happened to the remaining 13,150?

Another indication of the scale of the greyhound slaughter comes from the statement of a vet from the Nottingham track at the World Greyhound Racing Federation (WGRF) conference in 1998, who admitted to destroying about 10 perfectly healthy dogs a week.⁽¹⁴⁾

If the same thing is happening at all the other 31 “licensed” stadiums, that would mean that a total of about 15,000 dogs are being destroyed a year by vets at these tracks. Seeing as NGRC registration figures indicate that about 11,000 dogs begin their “careers” at “licensed” tracks every year, the figure of 15,000 must include thousands of dogs destroyed before they even enter racing.

In addition, the figure of 15,000 doesn't take into account the thousands of dogs “put to sleep” by other vets or killed by other methods.

The Retired Greyhound Trust, set up some years ago by the greyhound racing industry in response to disquiet about the number of greyhounds abandoned and killed, claims to find homes for about 3,500 dogs per year.⁽¹⁵⁾ This figure is open to suspicion, however, as many of these dogs are actually homed for the RGT by other greyhound rescues and it has been claimed that some dogs are counted twice in the figures if they are returned to the RGT and then homed again. However, for the sake of argument, we shall say 3,500.

To this must be added the number of non-RGT dogs homed by other rescues. This is unlikely to be more than 2,000 as there are far less of these rescues than there are RGT branches.

Then there are the dogs which continue to be looked after by their “owners” when they are no longer able to race. It is impossible to arrive at an exact figure for these, but it is unlikely to be more than a few thousand.

The NGRC has claimed that “in January 2006, a survey showed that 4,919 retired greyhounds were resident at trainers' kennels”.⁽¹⁵⁾ At first sight this may seem impressive, but this is a one-off figure, rather than a yearly one. Given that greyhounds “retire” from racing at 3 to 4 years of age⁽¹⁶⁾ and can live to be 12 years old⁽¹⁷⁾, we would need to divide the figure of 4,919 by at least 8 to arrive at an estimate for the number of greyhounds retiring annually to trainers' kennels. This gives an approximate figure of only about 600, of which many will be kept for the RGT and subsequently included in its rehoming figures.

The racing industry would have us believe that almost all the approx. 11,000 dogs which “retire” from racing on “licensed” tracks every year are looked after by their “owners” or trainers when their racing days are over, if they cannot be rehomed or found a place in a rescue.

Greyhounds can easily live to at least 12, so if the industry claims are to be believed, at any one time there would be 130,000 ex-racing greyhounds in the country. All this without taking into account the thousands of dogs which don't even make it to the racetrack.

Sadly, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that at least 20,000 of the 28,500 dogs bred annually to supply the demands of the British greyhound racing industry end up being “put to sleep” or killed by other, more horrific, methods in order to avoid veterinary fees.

This amounts to the killing of more than 50 greyhounds every day!

The “licensed” tracks, being, in general, much bigger operations than the independents, are no doubt the cause of the major part of this slaughter - and we would estimate that each NGRC track is responsible, on average, for the deaths of at about 600 greyhounds every year.

This ties in with the statement of the vet (mentioned above) at the WGRF, because if 10 greyhounds are being destroyed every week at each of these tracks, the total comes to over 500 per track every year, without taking into account dogs killed elsewhere.

Any wonder why the racing industry doesn't keep records or publish figures for the number of dogs that are killed!!

And it gets even worse, because commercial greyhound racing is not just responsible for the deaths of greyhounds, but for the killing of thousands of other dogs as well.

According to Dogs Trust, 7,743 dogs were “destroyed” by local authorities in 2005 “for want of a home”.⁽¹⁸⁾

How many of these dogs could have found a home, or a kennel in a rescue centre, if those homes and kennels had not already been taken up by greyhounds disposed of by the racing industry? Our experience in greyhound rescue has taught us that almost everyone who gives a home to a greyhound would have given that home to a different type of dog, had no greyhounds been available for adoption. Thus the figure of 3,500 greyhounds found homes by the Retired Greyhound Trust doesn't mean 3,500 dogs saved from destruction. It means 3,500 greyhounds saved and 3,500 other dogs condemned to death.

Conclusion

Our conclusion is that commercial greyhound racing inevitably causes the mass killing of dogs and could not exist profitably without their slaughter, because the cost to the industry (with the average cost of keeping a dog being £800 per year⁽¹⁹⁾) of looking after those dogs properly for the rest of their lives, would be far too great. 20,000 (estimated number of dogs currently put to death annually) x 8 (lifespan of greyhound after retirement) x £800 = £128 million per annum. The industry gave just £1.3 million to the Retired Greyhound Trust in 2005.⁽²⁰⁾

The only way to put a stop to this mass-slaughter of dogs is for commercial greyhound racing to be brought to an end, as has already happened in several states in the USA.⁽²¹⁾ This would just require a simple piece of legislation making it illegal to place or accept bets on dog races and limiting the value of prizes for dog racing to a very small amount. Greyhound racing could then only be done as a hobby and the huge demand for the breeding of dogs, caused by a commercialised industry, would disappear.

It cannot be morally justifiable in a so-called civilised society, for thousands of dogs to be bred for slaughter, just so that a minority of people can bet money on them running round a track and a group of unscrupulous characters line their pockets with the proceeds.

References:

- (1) Herne Bay Times on June 10th, 1999
- (2) English Stud Book - 690 in 2005 (although the NGRC website states 716 - <http://www.ngrc.org.uk/default.asp?article=The+Registry&articleid=27&parentarticletype=Our+Role>). Irish Stud Book - 4366 in 2005.
- (3) <http://www.greytadventures.org/FAQ.html> “When they are born, the average litter size is about eight pups”.
<http://www.ownagreyhound.com/how.html> “An average track ready litter of 8 would cost around \$20,000”.
<http://www.petplanet.co.uk/petplanet/breeds/Greyhound.htm> “Average Litter Size 8”.
<http://www.bit1development.com/goinc/faq.asp#1> “When born, the average litter size is about nine pups”.
<http://www.mytopdogs.com/greyhoundbreed.shtml> “Average Litter Size: 8 puppies”.
http://www.greysmatteradoption.org/?page_id=3 “The average litter size is about eight to ten pups”.
- (4) English Stud Book - 4145 in 2005
- (5) Irish Stud Book - 23671 in 2005
- (6) http://www.igb.ie/meeting_selection.aspx - 18 as at 8/10/2006
- (7) <http://www.ngrc.org.uk/default.asp?articletype=Fact%20Sheets> - 31
- (8) <http://www.ngrc.org.uk/default.asp?articletype=Fact%20Sheets> - 18
- (9) Calculated from information given at http://www.thedogs.co.uk/trap2/who_races_when.php
- (10) Calculated from information given at http://www.igb.ie/meeting_selection.aspx
- (11) <http://www.ngrc.org.uk/default.asp?articletype=Fact%20Sheets>
<http://www.ngrc.org.uk/default.asp?article=The+Registry&articleid=27&parentarticletype=Our+Role> 11,412 in 2005
- (12) Calculations extrapolated from figures given at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/2840371.stm>
- (13) <http://www.ngrc.org.uk/default.asp?articletype=Fact%20Sheets>
- (14) <http://www.veggieglobal.com/annette-crosbie/>
- (15) Dog Racing: 'Clean up your act' warning to greyhound racing - Racing Post 18/07/2006
- (16) <http://www.retiredgreyhounds.co.uk/index.asp?pageid=36>
- (17) <http://www.saveagrey.com/faq.htm>
- (18) http://www.dogstrust.org.uk/press_office/stray_dog_survey_2006
- (19) <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/cash/story/0,6903,1207651,00.html>
- (20) <http://www.thedogs.co.uk/trap1/GreyhoundWelfare.pdf>
- (21) http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/running_for_their_lives_the_realities_of_greyhound_racing/greyhound_racing_facts.html

Greyhound Action, PO Box 127, Kidderminster, DY10 3UZ
Tel: 01562 700 043 Fax: 0870 138 3993 E-mail: info@greyhoundaction.org.uk
Website: www.greyhoundaction.org.uk