



GREYHOUNDS BEING KILLED BY THEIR OWNERS IN SOUTH WALES

A report by Greyhound Rescue Wales

1. Background. The report “The fate of racing greyhounds and working lurchers in Wales” (1) identified nine fates of retired greyhounds and lurchers. One of these fates related to dogs who were killed by, or at the request, of their owners when they were no longer useful. Favourite methods were believed to be shooting or being hit over the head. The discovery of the greyhound “Last Hope”, shot through the head and with both ears cut off but still alive, on Fochriw Mountain on Sunday 2nd May 2004 shocked greyhound owners and led some of them to give information about the practice and the people involved. The following is a summary of the main findings.

(1: The fate of racing greyhounds and working lurchers in Wales, by the All Party Group for Animal Welfare at the National Assembly for Wales in association with Greyhound Rescue Wales, October 2003).

2. Registered tracks are a source of cheap greyhounds. It is possible to buy greyhounds cheaply from registered tracks. These are dogs that are too slow to win on the registered tracks or who have been barred from racing there. They are no longer of any use on the registered sector and can be bought for as little as £10 to £15 per dog. Some people who race greyhounds on the south Wales tracks will drive to a registered track (Swindon or one of the London Tracks were specifically mentioned), and buy four or five greyhounds from a trainer at a time. The registered trainers do not demand any proof of identity and buyers can give a false name and address. This “no questions asked attitude” allows the trainer at the registered track whose job it is to “dispose of the dogs” to make some extra money from them at the end of their useful lives.

3. A small number of people are responsible for shooting a large number of greyhounds. Everyone who gave information agreed that the bulk of the problem is caused by a few people associated with each track.. For example, GRW has been given information about five individuals in the Rhymney Valley area who are responsible for killing the dogs. GRW now has the full names of these people. As well as killing greyhounds, some of these individuals also buy large quantities of dogs from the registered sector. They then trial them discreetly at one of the south Wales tracks, then keep the fastest and best one or two dogs in each batch and immediately dispose of the other three or four by shooting them and incinerating the bodies.

4. The root cause of the problem is commercial. The people who shoot the dogs build their livelihood around a raft of mainly greyhound-related activities. Most of the 5 are unemployed and receive state benefits. Most also supplement their income by working unofficially at one of the south Wales greyhound tracks or further afield in casual work related to greyhounds (e.g. one worked at a greyhound kennels in London). All of them supplement their income further by gambling on the dogs they buy and race at the tracks. The gambling element of their income is generated by placing bets at high odds on unknown or unfancied dogs. This is why they need a supply of fresh dogs, that they know are very fast, but that are unknown to others (especially bookmakers) in the area. The element of “surprise” is maintained for as long as possible by racing the dog under different names at different tracks in Wales and England. (Last Hope for example also raced as “Rusty”, “Charlie” and “Score”).

A further element in their income is the £15 to £20 fee they charge other owners to shoot and incinerate their unwanted dogs. This has led to the establishment of an informal but well-organised and commercially based system to shoot and incinerate greyhounds.

5. The practice of shooting greyhounds is supported by a “conspiracy of guilt and fear”. The identities of the five dog-killers are widely known within greyhound racing circles as are the fees they charge. Other owners who are not prepared to pay euthanasia fees (£65 to £80) will approach the dog killers when they need to dispose of a dog. Many people who race greyhounds in south East Wales will have had a dog shot at some time by one of the dog-killers. This creates a “conspiracy of guilt” that makes it difficult for owners to speak out against the dog killers. Some owners will also be afraid of reprisals if they speak out. Both these factors explain why it has proved difficult to persuade owners to identify and expose the dog killers, and why it took a shocking event like the death of Last Hope to persuade some of them to speak out.

6. Large numbers of greyhounds are being shot. It is obviously not possible to give a precise figure for the numbers of greyhounds being shot in south Wales each year. It is also likely that the scale of the problem varies between tracks. Only one person is known to provide the service of shooting and incinerating greyhounds in the Swansea area for example, and the fees are apparently lower (£5 per dog) suggesting there is less of a demand here. However all but one of the informants gave figures in a range between 100 and 300 greyhounds being shot in south Wales each year (one informant gave a much higher estimate). Given that the informants had nothing to gain from exaggerating the figures and that they were in a good position to know the scale of the problem it seems safe to say that at least 100 greyhounds are being shot in south Wales each year.

7. Suggested responses

- Make representations to the NGRC to insist proof of identity is provided by anyone buying a greyhound and to enforce rule 18 about transfer of ownership.
- Propose through Wales Greyhound Forum that all three south Wales tracks set up a proper and transparent system of recording to link greyhounds to owners.
- Work through Wales Greyhound Forum to help provide acceptable alternatives to shooting their dogs to greyhound owners. E.G. develop a “greyhound tree” of all-breed rescues willing to take a “quota” of greyhounds; appeal to both the Registered sector and the Independent sector for help with funding; set up a subsidised euthanasia scheme as a last resort.
- Work through the Wales Greyhound Forum – to develop a longer-term information/education campaign e.g. an information leaflet to be distributed by Welsh tracks.
- Make it as difficult as possible for the known dog killers to carry on shooting greyhounds e.g. provide names and addresses when known to Benefits Agency, awareness raising appealing for public vigilance in areas where greyhounds are being shot, having a regular presence at all 3 south Wales tracks to continue to develop relations, all organisations to continue to generate as much publicity as possible in the media,

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