

Lost and Stolen Dogs The True Sacrifice

Whilst the death of a pet is traumatic and a terribly sad reality for any pet owner at some point, losing a pet and not knowing whether they are alive or dead in tragic circumstances is far more traumatic.

This paper will outline some of the potential costs involved in owner searching it is based on the work done for Harvey's Law and subsequently amended and updated. Further research is necessary to get a national picture of such costs to owners their friends, relatives, society and the animals themselves, both in terms of the financial and as yet uncalculated mental trauma costs to pets and their owners.

The Cost of an Owner Searching

Whilst there are no published figures on the cost of owners searching, reasonable and indeed conservative estimates of the cost of search can be estimated by using the figures provided by the owner of Harvey (see Harvey's Law 2015) and in following the plight and input of time and physical cost of numerous of other owners and families such as Archie's the Springer spaniel, Sky the Rottweiler and others on facebook groups such as "Harvey's Army," Get Sky Home and Dog Lost, owners desperately trying to re-unite with their beloved pet.

Many owners high time and search costs. These time costs may continue for years not just three month exemplar used in this report. Sky's owner, Mick Robinson, 2 years since Sky was stolen, reports he spends 8 hours in Sky search related activities per day (Feb 2018) and gave up his business to look for Sky. There are further costs owners incur Angel's owner remortgaged her house to offer a 10k reward. Data obtained from the organisation Dog lost would indicate these are just a handful of the numerous cases. What is clear is further research is required to accurately quantify this and to really truly understand the magnitude of this problem and how much it affects lives.

Harvey's owner searched for over 3 months (even though he had been killed on the highway within the hour of escaping). Archies owners continue to actively search 4 months following his disappearance. Countless other owners continue to search. In Harvey's case the search could have been avoided if the Highways Agency had followed their guidelines at the time. Dogs and indeed cats do go missing following the lure of a rabbit, frightening by a firework and increasingly stolen - a rise of 70% of dog thefts has been record of the last 4 year (Your Dog 2014) then dumped with no regard to safety, when the financial gains do not materialise or keeping them becomes too risky.

Using Harvey's owner's costs and those provided by other owners actively involved in searching for their missing pet and drawing on the data readily available on facebook pages exemplar costs for the search for pet dogs per annum is given below. All costs are presented in 2017 prices.

Consumables

Item	Cost (£)
Posters \ flyers \ banners	115
Newspaper Advertisements	300
Miscellaneous equipment and consumables including night vision cameras, laminator, paper badges, maps	500
Reward money	1000
Total Cost (£)	1915

These figures in the table above are based on conservative estimates using figures for 10 posters and 3000 flyers from a national based company - vista print. To get posters and flyers instantly from a local high street may result in a higher cost. Owners incur a range of miscellaneous cost which would also include telephone, electric, postage etc. Advertisement costs used a local London based paper rather than a higher cost. Not all owners will offer a reward but rewards can range between £1000 and £10,000. Whilst reward may not actually be realised unless a dog is returned one owner remortgaged their house to be able to supply such a reward.

Travel cost

Mode of Transport	Miles travelled per weekend	Weekends Searched	Total Miles Travelled	Cost per Mile	Total Cost (£)
Car	60	12	720	0.45 ³	324

3. UK Government simplified mileage costs up to 10,000 miles per annum 2017.

The figures for travel cost are based on area return journeys, for example one round trip of 60 miles i.e. 30 miles each ways or two shorter trips of 15miles each way. The distance is used as dogs don't necessarily go or stay missing next to the owner's home. Similarly, a number of volunteers or family members may be involved in the search and these costs may indeed be considerably greater. This distance may easily be exceeded as owners and their supporters will travel many miles to follow a lead on a missing dog.

Time cost of search and activities related to search over a 3 month period

Individual or group	Number of people involved	FTE Cost (£) for average wage per week	FTE Cost (£) for Leisure time (25% of wage rate including on-cost adjustment)	Time spent in search activity per week per person in minutes	Cost (£) Over search period
Owners	2	550 ⁴	165 ⁵	450	858
Active additional searchers	4	550	165	60	228.80
Other related search activity (e.g.) facebook posts	200 ⁶	550	165	5	953.33
Total					2,040.13

4. Average earnings for the UK taken from ONS Annual survey of hours and earning 2017
5. The cost of leisure time or in this case search time is taken as a quarter of the average wage rate (a figure sometimes used in the economics of transport)
6. Groups such as find Archie tend to have in excess of 2000 members - find Harvey for instance has in excess of 7,500 members. Assuming only 20% of those members actively help to search and post for the missing dog, would still mean that at least 200 people are engaging in this activity on a weekly basis.

The cost of an owner's friends, family and public searching is potentially huge. The cost of search represents a considerable opportunity cost. The cost of searching represents time that all those involved in the search must divert away from other activities, whether this is leisure activities family\ caring activities or paid employment.

Total Costs of Searching for a missing pet.

Activity \ Item	Cost (£)
Consumables	1950
Travel	324
Time	2040.13
Total Cost	4314.13

The figures are based on the search for a missing dog.

Total Costs of a Search for a Missing Dog.

The final calculation is based on the figures from a trawl of registrations on the dog lost data base over a 12 month period which showed around 2400 dogs registered missing \ stolen per annum for 2016.

The figure of 2400 is a smaller figure than the actual figure as it only represent a single registration not multiple dogs stolen from the same household and only dogs that have been registered on dog lost.

The following shows the cost if all the owners of the 2400 dogs retrieved had been searching for 3 months. It then presents the figures if only 50% of owners searched this actively and finally if only 10% were fully engaged in search for their missing pet. It should be stressed that these figures potentially represent the tip of the iceberg and are only calculated on the basis of the 2400 lost stolen dogs per annum (which does not account for multiple dog missing / stolen from the same owner) and that search ceases at 3 months which is clearly not the case. Again one only has to follow many owners' facebook pages to understand that 2 years and more on, owners are still actively engaged in search. The true cost to society of missing and un-found pets would be considerably more. The costs presented are only the financial costs of search and make no allowance for the detrimental costs of pet loss and the mental anguish of not knowing.

This assumption and figures is a simplification for illustration purposes as in truth most owners will engage in some sort of search even if not as fulsome as others. The table below shows the cost of searching for the missing 2400 dogs registered over a 3 month period.

Total Costs Per Annum of Searching for a Missing Pet

% of 2400 owners searching	Total Cost (£)
100	10,353,912
50	5,176,956
10	1,035,391

What is unknown in this report is the percentage of dogs returned relatively quickly within a week to 4 weeks and those dogs sadly never re-united. Even with an optimistic scenario of 50% of missing stolen dogs being returned in the first 1-4 weeks and if only 50% of owners were prepared or did actively search for 3 months, the costs would be in the region of **£2,588,478** per annum. Dog theft represents a huge cost to the individual and society. The report does not taken into account the loss associated with dogs reunited, but sadly deceased.

The figures represent a staggering loss in financial terms alone of missing dogs to society.

Conclusion

There is a staggering social cost of lost and stolen dogs to society.

The cost reported above only present the financial cost of scanning and search. They do not present the much broader and devastating costs on the quality of life from losing a pet. The loss of a pet can be deep and traumatic. Ben Fogle spoke about his loss of Inca, his dog and other celebrities, ordinary folk and politicians alike have wept and mourned the loss of a pet, with grief every bit as real as loss of human life. This area is even more difficult to quantify in this brief paper, as it not only represents the loss of beloved pet, but indeed the awful cost of uncertainty surrounding not knowing whether an animal is alive or dead. Once death is confirmed at least the natural process of grieving can begin to occur.

It should further be noted that loss of a pet not only effect adults but deeply affects the family including children. The Blue Cross report (Blue Cross 2003) highlighted the deep bond that children can have with their pets and the physiological effects of such loss.

References

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Your Dog (2015) January

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