



Dog Breeding in the UK and Ireland 2025

The [Dog Breeding Map of the UK and Ireland](#) by Naturewatch Foundation helps the public find out about dog breeding in their area and gives potential puppy buyers the tools to check if a breeder is licensed.

This interactive map also provides valuable insights into licensed dog breeding and the domestic puppy trade.

Key findings

● Number of licensed breeders

There are 2,897 licensed dog breeders in the UK and Ireland. England accounts for the majority (81.3%) with 2,355 licensed breeders. Wales has 216, Scotland 185, Northern Ireland 48 and the Republic of Ireland 93.

● Scale of breeding operations

Across the UK and Ireland, licensed breeders keep approximately 25,998 adult female breeding dogs, with 23,022 kept in the UK. 66.1% of licensed breeders keep 10 or fewer adult dogs. Larger-scale establishments remain a concern, particularly in Northern Ireland and Ireland, where the largest licensed breeder keeps 350 adult dogs for breeding on one premises.

● Star rating system in England

England is the only nation operating a star rating system. 55.8% of licensed breeders hold the highest five-star rating, while 2.3% (55 breeders) have a one-star rating, indicative of minor failings. 671 adult dogs are kept by one-star rated breeders.

● Transparency

68% of local authorities publish a dog breeding register in some form. In England, 70.8% of councils publish a

register. Northern Ireland has the lowest transparency, with zero councils publishing this information. A national register of dog breeding establishments exists in the Republic of Ireland and similar is being trialled in Wales with some councils.

● Unregulated trade

We estimate that only 14.6-19.5% of UK puppies are bred by licensed breeders. Approximately 5.8% of UK dogs are commercially imported. This suggests that ~75-80% of UK dogs come from unlicensed, illegal or otherwise unknown sources.

Recommendations

1. Improve transparency

All local authorities should publish dog breeding licensing registers, and UK governments should support the creation of national animal activities licensing registers.

2. Improve staffing ratios

A minimum staffing ratio of one full-time staff member per ten adult dogs should be introduced across the UK and Ireland to ensure dog welfare needs are met.

3. Encourage higher standards

Local authorities in England could work with animal welfare experts to support improvements at one-star rated businesses, where appropriate.

4. Standardise recording of dogs

Local authorities should record and specify all adult dogs kept by licensed breeders and their microchips, as well as the number of litters permitted in a 12-month period.

5. Address unregulated and illegal breeding

We support calls for commercial licensing thresholds to be reduced to two litters in a 12-month period, with registration systems for lower-volume breeders.

The trade in dogs easily crosses domestic borders, making greater regulatory alignment across nations desirable for this animal activity.

6. Ban puppy smuggling

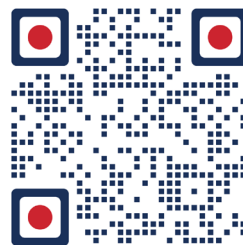
The Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Private Members' Bill should be passed by the UK Parliament as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Despite improvements to regulation in the past decade, our findings suggest most dogs and puppies in the UK still come from unlicensed, illegal or otherwise unknown sources. In the short-term, measures such as greater transparency and improved recording practices would help. However, more fundamental regulatory reform and greater support for enforcement is needed to address low-welfare and illegal dog breeding.

Further analysis

For further analysis, visit [Naturewatch Foundation](#).



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