

Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Cats Protection, 21 March 2025

Summary Points

- Cats Protection welcomes Maurice Golden's Private Member Bill which seeks to address the issue of pet theft with the introduction of the dog theft offence. However, the charity is extremely disappointed that the proposals only apply to dogs and not cats.
- Cats Protection strongly believes that the emotional impact – and welfare impact– of a cat being stolen will be just as great as that of a dog being taken.
- Legislation is needed to tackle the growing concerns around cat theft. The Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill proposes a review to extend to other pets in the future. Last year England and Northern Ireland introduced specific offences for dog and cat theft through the Pet Abduction Act. Cats Protection is calling for the Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill to extend protections to cats now.
- Cats Protection urges the Committee to support the Bill and to recognise the significant welfare impact of pet theft to cats and the emotional impact on their owners, by extending the proposed pet theft offence to protect the 840,000 pet cats in Scotland.

Cats Protection, the UK's leading cat welfare charity, helps thousands of cats every year. Our campaigns change laws to give cats more protection and we continue to call for a better deal for cats.

Background

Under current law the theft of a pet is treated the same as the theft of property like a TV or mobile phone. This does not consider the emotional and welfare impact pet theft has on a pet and their owner. For many their pets are part of the family¹ with 93% of Scottish cat owners saying that they consider their cat part of the family. Cats Protection is concerned about the significant distress caused to cat owners when theft occurs.

Last year England and Northern Ireland introduced specific offences for dog and cat theft through the Pet Abduction Act. The theft of a cat or taking or detaining a dog is now a criminal offence. Similar to the proposals in this Bill, the Pet Abduction Act helps in three fundamental ways:

- By deterring those looking to exploit animals for financial gain.
- By giving pet-owners a specific legal framework to ensure their case is actively investigated.
- By requiring police to log and investigate these crimes as pet theft rather than property, which will lead to the collating of data about this crime, helping to provide information about any patterns emerging.

A Specific Offence for Cat Theft

Cats are a popular pet in Scotland with 22% of households in Scotland owning one.

¹ Cats Protection's Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Scotland Report 2024 [cats-report-scotland-2024.pdf](#)

It is unsurprising that they are recorded as the second most stolen pet in the UK². Cats Protection believes that legislation is needed to deter criminals from taking cats.

- The emotional, and welfare, impact of a cat being stolen will be just as great as that of a dog being taken so it is right that this Bill seeks to cover both dogs and cats.
- There is a buoyant market in cats and kittens which makes cats a tempting target for pet thieves. Some kittens are being sold for as much as £1,700 on sites such as Pets4Homes. Cats Protection has seen a media report where cats have been returning home with shaved sides where a scar for neutering would be present, suggesting some thieves are actively targeting cats to breed from. This is driving theft with both targeted and opportunistic criminals stealing cats and kittens for resale or, where they are unneutered, for breeding.
- In Scotland, there is a growing trend towards new owners obtaining pedigree/purebred cats over moggies/domestic³. 51% of cats obtained in the last 12 months were pedigree/purebred opposed to moggies/domestic. This demand makes pedigree cats a potential target for criminals looking to make a quick profit.

The proposals would help police collect accurate data regarding pet theft

- The true scale of cat theft in Scotland is unknown as pet theft is recorded under the category of property which means that it is usually not possible for the police to pull up data about reported pet theft.
- Reports in the media often focus on dog theft, although less frequently reported on, we are aware that cat theft happens. Among the media stories includes [kittens being stolen from a home in Edinburgh](#) and [suspected cat thefts in East Kilbride](#).
- The secondary benefit of the Bill is the collation of data about pet theft in Scotland. Cats Protection supports this Bill requiring annual reporting from the Police on the number of dogs being taken. Extending the protections in the Bill to cats would give a better picture of the scale of cat theft and allow Police to create prevention strategies.

² UK Pet Theft Report 2023 <https://www.adt.co.uk/blog/pet-thefts-index-2023>

³ Cats Protection's Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Scotland Report 2024 [cats-report-scotland-2024.pdf](#)