

Editorial Board

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A spirit of cooperation on imported dogs?

The COVID-19 crisis and associated travel restrictions have led to an 80% reduction in pet travel from the UK. It has, however, had remarkably little impact on the importation of rescue dogs and puppies from abroad, which has seen an upturn during the crisis. Demand for puppies and rescue dogs has risen and attention has turned to foreign breeders and charities for new pets. Given the long distances and stress endured by puppies imported from abroad, it is easy to conclude that this is to be discouraged, and that puppies purchased from a reputable source in the UK. A petition for this is currently being submitted to the Government, which I would encourage everyone to sign (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/326261>). The importation of rescue dogs from abroad however, is a more complex issue. Many vets including myself feel very strongly for biosecurity and welfare reasons that dogs should be rehomed in their country of origin. With importation comes the risk of introduction of exotic pathogens, such as *Leishmania*, heartworm and *Rhipicephalus* ticks. For these reasons, ESCCAP UK & Ireland strongly supports the rehoming of dogs in their country of origin, and would encourage people looking for a new dog to consider rescuing one here in the UK.

There is another side to this argument, however. Many dogs in need of rehoming abroad are living in terrible conditions in government institutions, as part of the meat trade or in disaster zones around the world. In the short term it simply is not possible to rehome these pets where they are. The long-term goal is to improve attitudes and conditions in their home countries, so local rehoming will become a more realistic prospect over time. Supporting charities carrying out essential work on neutering stray dogs and improving living conditions will go a long way to achieving this, and charities such as the World Veterinary Service and Humane Society are doing amazing work.

Strength of feeling among UK pet lovers is high and people with a similar view on rescuing dogs from abroad band together on social media. It is tempting for vets who feel strongly that rehoming dogs from abroad is wrong to simply state this and to take a confrontational stance. This, however, often only leads to entrenching views, and for those in favour of importation to stop listening to the profession. This is potentially dangerous as there is much to do for these dogs, their owners and biosecurity if they are going to enter the country. Accurate testing for exotic parasites, clinical examination and preventative treatments against ticks and tapeworm are required to keep owners, pets and the wider public safe. Many dog charities are starting to embrace parasite testing before exporting dogs, but do not know which to test for and appropriate tests to use. Advising charities on best practice for testing and treating rescue pets is vital to limit the risk of introduction of exotic parasites.

Once these pets arrive on our shores, then UK veterinary professionals are on the front line to ensure that any relevant testing, clinical examination and treatment is carried out. Rather than a combative stance, it is time to hold out the olive branch to rescue charities and owners so we can work together to keep both pets and the public safe. **CA**



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