



MEDIA RELEASE

Older dogs find it harder to find a permanent home

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New research challenges the idea that black dogs are less likely to be adopted and finds age and breed of dog key factors in waiting time for adoption

In the past, news reports have regularly quoted animal shelter personnel and spokespeople from various humane organisations, who state that it is harder to rehome black dogs compared to others. The idea is so entrenched that there's even a name for it – Black Dog Syndrome – with various surveys appearing to support the concept.

However, new research not only challenges this view, but has resulted in some surprising findings. Published in UFAW's scientific journal *Animal Welfare*, the study aimed to determine whether the colour of a dog's coat had a significant impact on its average length of availability for adoption in a shelter and on its likelihood of euthanasia.

The study used four years of adoption and euthanasia data from two private, not-for-profit animal shelters located in the USA. The data amounted to 16,692 records of dogs and was carried out by the Department of Animal Behaviour, Ecology and Conservation at Canisius College, New York.

Only those dogs considered to have the potential to be rehomed were included in the analysis. Dogs under 1 year of age or over 13 years were excluded as well as those with missing or incomplete information relating to their coat colour, breed, sex or age. The study determined the number of days which passed between when the dog first became available for adoption and the actual adoption date and this was defined as the LOA or length of availability for adoption. Breeds were grouped into herding, hound, non-sporting, sporting, terrier, toy, bully and working. The bully breeds (American pit bull, American Staffordshire terrier or Staffordshire bull terrier) were considered separately from the other terrier breeds. Coat colour was also categorised and reduced to nine standard options – black, brindle, brown, grey, red, tan, white, yellow and multi-colour. .

Assistant Professor Christy Hoffman PhD who co-authored the study, said: "Approximately 3.9 million dogs each year are accepted into community animal shelters in the United States. Whilst the impetus for this study was to examine the impact of

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

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black coat colour on the length of availability for adoption (LOA) and the likelihood of euthanasia, our results indicated that it is in actual fact a brindle coloured coat that is associated with increased likelihood of euthanasia and increased LOA, not black.

Also, age and breed group were more consistent predictors of shelter outcomes than coat colour. Previous research has found that factors other than coat colour, such as age and breed or breed group, are better indicators in predicting the length of stay at a shelter and our study results support those findings.”

The study found that, in general, younger dogs were more quickly rehomed and had lower euthanasia rates than older dogs. They were also less likely to be classified as unhealthy or untreatable. The bully breeds had the longest waits prior to adoption, were euthanised at higher than expected rates, and were more likely than expected to be labelled as unhealthy/untreatable.

Findings from this study may provide shelters with insight regarding how best to use limited resources to market animals whose physical characteristics may place them at risk for euthanasia. Shelters may also benefit from applying some of the methods utilised in this study to take a closer look at their own adoption and euthanasia-related trends. Doing so may help them make informed changes that could potentially increase adoption success and reduce euthanasia rates within their organisations.

Further information

Subscribers to the Animal Welfare Journal will find this paper (Svoboda, H., & Hoffman, C. (2015). *Investigating the role of coat colour, age, sex, and breed on outcomes for dogs at two animal shelters in the United States. Animal Welfare, 24 (4), 497-506*) in Volume 24 issue 4. The full abstract of the study can be read at UFAW's website <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/the-ufaw-journal/animal-welfare>.

If you wish to read the full paper, you can visit [ingentaconnect.com](http://www.ingentaconnect.com) to access the paper for \$25 (US) plus taxes.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/search/article?option1=tka&value1=Factors+affecting+helter+dog+outcomes&pageSize=10&index=1>

Those purchasing the paper or choosing to subscribe to the Animal Welfare journal will be supporting UFAW's work.

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Ends

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Note to editors:

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UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

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