## Dog Trends in US Pet Shelters

## Percentage of Purebred Dogs in US Shelters

The composition of dog populations in US animal shelters: purebreds versus non purebreds

www.shelterproject.naiaonline.org/purebred

A Survey Conducted by the National Animal Interest Alliance


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National Animal Interest Alliance

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## What is the National Animal Interest Alliance?

The National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA) is a charitable 501(c)(3) educational organization of recreational, business, agricultural, and scientific interests founded in 1991 to support and promote best practices for animal ownership and use while providing a viable alternative to animal rights extremism. NAIA's membership consists of pet owners, dog and cat clubs, rescue groups, breeders, veterinarians, research scientists, farmers, fishermen, hunters, and wildlife biologists. NAIA is committed to preserving the human-animal bond, the special bond that exists when people live and work with animals, and supports everyone from beginners to professionals as they strive to learn more about animal care and husbandry. What does NAIA do? NAIA supports animal welfare and the rights of animal owners by:

- Providing factual information to the public about animals and animal welfare issues
- Creating programs to improve the care and welfare of animals
- Helping local animal welfare groups achieve their mission
- Helping local authorities write laws that target irresponsible ownership practices and inhumane treatment of animals while safeguarding the rights of responsible animal owners
- Supporting the enforcement of state and federal laws that mandate the proper treatment of animals and provide penalties for animal abuse.

To join or to learn more about the National Animal Interest Alliance, visit our website at www.naiaonline.org .


# Survey of Shelter Dog Composition: Mutts vs. Purebreds July 2015 

## INTRODUCTION

A major goal of the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA) is to reduce the number of adoptable pets that are euthanized in American animal shelters. The problem of unwanted pets and shelter euthanasia is a multi-faceted problem, however, and to make progress toward effective solutions, we need a clearer understanding of the many issues involved. That is why NAIA focuses its resources on studying the various aspects of the pet marketplace, including pet shelters (shelterproject.naiaonline.org). This study is dedicated to examining the types of dogs present in today's animal shelters to help us better understand and define the issues.

## OVERVIEW

It is hard to speak with certainty when discussing American animal shelters. Even the number of pet shelters operating in the US is unknown. Commonly cited estimates range from 3,500 (based on National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy - NCPPSP - data from the 1990's) to 6,000 based on numerous websites using various sources ${ }^{(1)}$, with Petfinder weighing in at $5,000 .{ }^{(2)}$ The bottom line is that US animal shelters operate with so little oversight, it is very difficult for people outside the sheltering community to understand much about them.

The agency conferring animal welfare status on animal shelters is the IRS, an agency that determines the tax status of businesses, not an agency associated with animal welfare oversight. Moreover, there are no national agencies that oversee animal shelters, municipal or private, and there are no national laws requiring shelters to report information about the activities they conduct or the animals they take in, place with the public, or transfer to other shelters, rescues or foster homes. This lack of oversight assures that animal shelters can operate with a level of autonomy not enjoyed by many other American businesses or institutions.

The historic role of animal shelters has changed dramatically over the last couple of decades as dog overpopulation has been eliminated in some parts of the country. With reduced pressure to hold and place a shrinking number of local dogs, many shelters, primarily ones in the Northern US, have taken on new roles. A significant number of humane societies and SPCA's have dealt with the decline in local dogs by importing dogs from outside their region, a practice they call humane relocation ${ }^{(3)}$, which gives them a steady inventory of dogs for the public. Many have worked to acquire or expand their police powers, a testimony perhaps to the popularity of television shows like Animal Planet's Animal Cops. Some have added or increased their legislative activity, an activity that keeps the shelter and its mission in the public eye, a necessity for organizations that depend on donations from the public. Private shelters in many cities have developed a greater media presence than all other pet related groups combined: veterinarians, kennel clubs, pet stores, dog trainers and private breeders - a situation assuring that their point of view exerts the greatest influence on public opinion.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to estimate the size of the purebred population in US animal shelters. The portion most commonly assigned to purebreds is $25 \%$, a number that is disputed as being excessively high by first-hand observers all over the United States. Establishing more accurate information would benefit policy makers who rely on such data when drafting legislation; consumers who consider it when choosing a family dog; and society at large, which forms opinions and attitudes about dogs, based on their perception of such issues. The commonly cited percentage of shelter purebreds is high enough to suggest that purebreds pose a significant problem to local pet population control. It also suggests to consumers that purebred dogs will be available for adoption in local shelters. It is our hope that more accurate information will lead to better pet laws and raise consumer and public awareness about the modern dog marketplace.


## METHODOLOGY

Gathering representative shelter population data is challenging given the immense and changing number of animal shelters operating in different regions of the US and their lack of uniformity. Past studies investigating this subject relied on surveys of shelter personnel and on owner statements taken at the time they relinquished their dogs to shelters ${ }^{(4)}$. Unfortunately, these methods have limitations which tend to result in overestimating the number of purebreds. Shelter personnel are rarely breed experts and owners routinely identify Collie-like dogs as Collies, chunky black dogs as Labrador Retrievers and stocky, short-coated, brown dogs as Pit Bulls. ${ }^{(5)}$

But even if the statistical estimates published in these studies ( $25 \%-30 \%$ ) were fairly accurate in the 1990's when they were done, the shelter world and dog marketplace have changed substantially since then and these outdated statistics are typically misquoted today ${ }^{(6)}$. The studies they originated from did not attempt to identify the purebreds in shelters available to the public, but the number of purebreds that entered shelters. This distinction is crucially important because, 1) purebreds are reclaimed by their owners at higher rates than mixed breeds, and 2) purebred rescue organizations remove, foster and place a very significant number of the remaining purebreds from shelters.

Our goal is to update the work done in past decades; to provide broader coverage of US shelters; to provide a level of transparency that enables readers to interpret the data in a reasonable way despite the inherent limitations of this type of survey. Here are the major survey elements:

- The study is based on 18 US animal shelters, 2 from each of 9 census divisions. Like US shelters generally, they are not uniform in type but representative of the various shelters commonly operating in their divisions. The project originally included more shelters but ones that didn't update their listings regularly were eliminated.
- In order for a shelter to be selected for this study, it was required to maintain webpages displaying the current inventory of dogs available to the public.
- A graduate student was hired to identify the best candidate shelters in each division, and to visit their website and catalog the dogs they had on hand each Monday for 52 weeks. In addition to reviewing the pages and making notes, the pages were captured for later review and publication. They are published in this study.
- Some of the labels applied to the dogs displayed on shelter websites, i.e., Poodle cross, Chihuahua, etc., do not appear to match the breed or breed origin. Given our inability to recruit breed experts to personally travel to each of these shelters and examine the dogs in question, however, we determined that it was best to accept shelter labels as accurate even when a question existed. Because we are aware that a huge number of dogs listed as Pit Bulls, are not in fact purebreds, but mixed-breed dogs with similar appearances, we have counted the dogs listed as Pit Bulls in the purebred grand total, but we are also providing a data set that excludes them from the total. Readers interested in viewing more detailed information on the types and participation rates of dog breeds or mixes in shelters should click on the shelter data tab, pick a census division and a shelter, then open the pdf and read the comment section for each week. Finally, this study displays the data for all 52 weeks in multiple formats: The original weekly screen shots of each shelter are provided. The data distilled from these screen shots into a PDF format are available for easier viewing. Numerous graphs displaying the results for different data sets are provided.



## CONCLUSIONS

According to this study, the number of purebreds in US animal shelters is closer to $5 \%$ (5.04\%) than to the $25 \%$ so commonly cited by national animal organizations and quoted by the media. It is interesting to observe that the number of purebreds in shelters would be $3.3 \%$ were it not for two breeds that are overrepresented, Chihuahuas and dogs described as Pit Bulls. Together, these two breeds account for $35 \%$ of all purebreds listed by shelters in this study. The public seems to be aware that dogs described as Pit Bulls are overrepresented in American shelters. What is not well known is that Chihuahuas are the single most numerous purebred found in shelters today. Because Chihuahuas are small, attractive to adopters and highly adoptable, their numbers are especially high in shelters that import dogs for adoption. For more detail, see the screen shots and PDF listings for Northeast Animal Shelter in MA, the Humane Society of Utah and Oregon Humane Society in Portland, Oregon, all of which maintain major import operations.

1. Oxford-Lafayette Humane Society: www.oxfordpets.com/index.php?option=com_content\&view=article\&id=61
2. Petfinder.com www.petfinder.com/pro/for-shelters/facts-about-animal-sheltering/
3. See the Shelter Project glossary for terminology: shelterproject.naiaonline.org/page/glossary
4. John C. New Jr., DVM, 2000. Characteristics of Shelter-Relinquished Animals and Their Owners Compared With Animals and Their Owners in US Pet Owning Households: John C. New, Jr., DVM, M. D. Salman, Mike King, Janet M. Scarlett, Philip H. Kass, Jennifer M. Hutchison: and M. D Salman, 1998. Human and Animal Factors Related to the Relinquishment of Dogs and Cats in 12 Selected Animal Shelters in the US: M. D. Salman, John C. New Jr., Janet M. Scarlett, Philip H. Kass, Rebecca Ruch-Gallie and Suzanne Hetts.
5. Dog breed identification is no basis for shelter policy: nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/uploaded_files/tinymce/Dog\% 20breed\%20ID\%20no\%20basis_Maddies\%201.pdf
6. Although some organizations and news sources quote the 1990's information correctly, many more misstate the original findings, some using the incorrect information to promote shelters over breeders:

- www.humanesociety.org/issues/pet_overpopulation/facts/pet_ownership_statistics.html
- www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/magazine/08animal.t.html?pagewanted=all\&_r=0
- www.oxfordpets.com/index.php?option=com_content\&view=article\&id=61
- www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/adopting-shelter-dog
- www.foundanimals.org/pet-adoption/we-love-sheltershttp://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/ ridiculous-myths-about-shelter-pets/
- www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-animal-homelessness
- www.globalanimal.org/2012/06/02/adopt-a-purebred-shelter-dog/
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overpopulation_in_domestic_pets\#cite_note-HS.org-17
- www.petsmartcharities.org/news-stories/survey-finds-young-adults-overlook-animal-shelters
- www.hartz.com/Dogs/Getting_Started/October_is_Adopt_Shelter_Dog_Month.aspx
- articles.courant.com/2012-03-11/features/hc-rescue-top-dogs-0311-20120311_1_westminster-spokesman-david-frei-top-dogs-purebred-dogs



## National Data:

## National Results

The composition of dog populations in US animal shelters: purebreds versus non purebreds

|  | $\frac{\text { National Shelter }}{\text { Data Summary }}$ |
| :--- | :--- |
|  | Total |
|  | 9 |
| Census Divisions: | 18 |
| Shelters Reviewed: | 52634 |
| Non Purebreds: | 2655 |
| Purebreds: | $5 \%$ |
| Percent of Purebreds: |  |




4. Non Purebreds Purebreds


## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:

## West Pacific

WEST
PACIFIC


Total West Pacific Purebred Data

| Non Purebred | 5166 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Total Purebred | 443 |
| Percentage Purebred | $9 \%$ |




## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:

## West Mountain

WEST
MOUNTAIN


## Total West Mountain Purebred Data

| Non Purebred | 13922 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Total Purebred | 817 |
| Percentage Purebred | $6 \%$ |




## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:

## Midwest North Central

MIDWEST NORTH CENTRAL


Total Midwest North Central Purebred Data
Non Purebred 2290

Total Purebred 125
Percentage Purebred 5\%



## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:


EAST
NORTH CENTRAL


Total East North Central Purebred Data
Non Purebred 2947

Total Purebred 286

Percentage Purebred 10\%



## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:

## West South Central



Total West South Central Purebred Data
Non Purebred 7556

Total Purebred 102

Percentage Purebred $1 \%$



## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:


Total East South Central Purebred Data

| Non Purebred | 4907 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Total Purebred | 273 |
| Percentage Purebred | $6 \%$ |




## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:

```
New England
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## Total New England Purebred Data

| Non Purebred | 2400 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Total Purebred | 364 |
| Percentage Purebred | $15 \%$ |




## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:


Total East Mid Atlantic Purebred Data

| Non Purebred | 6764 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Total Purebred | 213 |
| Percentage Purebred | $3 \%$ |




## Regional Purebred Data:

## Regional / Census Divisions

The US census divides the country into 9 divisions. In order to get a balanced view of shelters in different parts of the country, this study reviewed information from two shelters in each of those divisions. The Non Purebred and purebreds and the percentage of purebreds shown on this page average the totals from both shelters in the division.

Please select Region:


Total East South Atlantic Purebred Data

| Non Purebred | 6682 |
| :--- | :--- |
| Total Purebred | 32 |
| Percentage Purebred | $0 \%$ |




## Shelter Purebred Data:

All of the shelters in this study maintain a website showing their current inventory of adoptable dogs. This survey provides 52 successive weeks of screen shots from each of these shelters showing the dogs they had on hand each week. It is our hope that by providing the actual screen shots of these published inventories, readers will gain a better understanding of the typical composition of shelter dog populations. To their credit, some of these shelters also disclose other pertinent information about their operations. It is especially helpful to know how many dogs each shelter takes in each year and whether those animals come from the local community or from distant locations. Several states recognize the public health, animal welfare and marketplace impact of shelters and rescues, and require them to be licensed by the state department of agriculture and report information about the number and types of animals they receive each year, and about the final disposition of those dogs. The NAIA Shelter Project (shelterproject.naiaonline.org) records this information when it is available. At this point in time, the most comprehensive shelter information is published by Colorado's Department of Agriculture (shelterproject.naiaonline.org/shelter_data/shelter/354/2/received).


To view individual weekly shelter totals, visit the shelter project: http://shelterproject.naiaonline.org/purebred/6shelterpdfs.php


Shelters Reporting the Highest Percentage of Purebred Dogs


Period: 52 weeks


NOTE: The shelters with the highest number of purebreds all maintain dog relocation programs, which bring in dogs from outside their local service areas for adoption, many from distant states and Puerto Rico. Although Capital Area Humane Society in Ohio takes in dogs from outside its local service area, it does not fit the same profile as the other shelters listed above. The largest number of their purebreds are dogs described as Pit Bulls taken in from other shelters in Ohio.

## Download Shelter Stats in Table Format

## West Pacific Division

- Oregon Humane Society (OR):
- Humane Society of Central Washington (WA):


## West Mountain Division

- HALO Animal Rescue (AZ):
- The Humane Society of Utah (UT):


## Midwest North Central Division

- Tri-County Humane Society (MN):
- Kansas Humane Society (KS):


## East North Central Division

- Wisconsin Humane Society (WI):
- Capital Area Humane Society (OH):


## West South Central Division

- Houston Humane Society (TX):
- Humane Society of North Central Arkansas (AR):


## East South Central Division

- Kentucky Humane Society (KY):
- Saving Grace Animal Rescue (AL):


## New England Division

- Northeast Animal Shelter (MA):
- Central Vermont Humane Society (VT):


## East Mid Atlantic Division

- Animal Rescue League (PA):
- Sean Casey Animal Rescue (NY):

East South Atlantic Division

- Washington Humane Society (DC):
- Baltimore Animal Rescue \& Care Shelter (MD):



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