

FLAT-FACED PUP POPULARITY PLUNGES AFTER YEARS OF SOARING

Health and welfare experts welcome new figures which indicate a downward trend in Pug popularity

Hugely popularised in recent years by celebrities, social media and inadvertent advertising, Pugs, French Bulldogs and Bulldogs are now beginning to see a dip in popularity, according to new registration statistics released by dog welfare organisation the Kennel Club. Miniature Dachshunds - another favourite with celebrities and advertisers - meanwhile, continue to soar and may become the UK's tiny top dog by the end of the year.

Compared with the first six months in 2018, there have been 31 per cent fewer registrations of Pug puppies, seven per cent fewer Bulldogs and eight per cent fewer French Bulldogs in the first six months of 2019. This is the first time in almost a decade these popular breeds have seen a decrease in their numbers in the UK. At the other end of the scale, Miniature Smooth Haired Dachshunds, a breed owned by celebrities including Adele and Tanya Burr, popularised on social media and starring in many billboard and TV adverts, have increased in popularity by 23 per cent since 2018 according to the new data.

Brachycephalic breeds – often referred to as flat-faced dogs due to their short head – can suffer from a number of health problems such as breathing, eye and skin-fold issues. These health issues, coupled with the welfare issues that stem from filling their high demand through irresponsible high-volume breeding and importing from abroad, have created one of the most pressing welfare issues for dogs in the UK. In the last decade, French Bulldogs have risen in popularity by an astronomical 3488 per cent, Bulldogs by 135 per cent and Pugs by 118 per cent.

The Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG), made up of vets, national animal welfare organisations, scientists, and dog breed clubs whose aim is to raise awareness of the issues that some of these dogs can face and to emphasise the importance of potential owners going to a reputable breeder who puts health first, broadly welcome the new Kennel Club figures. “The dropping registrations for these key flat-faced breeds are a step in the right direction and we do welcome them, although with some caution,” said Dan O’Neill, Chair of the BWG. “We hope this is a sign that more puppy buyers, owners and breeders are considering the health and welfare implications these dogs can face, especially if these dogs are bought on an impulse solely because they ‘look cute’ but with little understanding of their potential health issues, or that they are bred indiscriminately to meet demand.”

In 2017, the BWG penned an open letter to advertisers urging them to avoid using flat-faced dogs as promotional aids in the media. Since then, the group has continued to engage with advertisers about the issues. More recently, the group assisted and advised Disney to help mitigate the potential negative health and welfare consequences their film, *Patrick the Pug*, could have on the breed. And last Christmas, BWG supported the British Veterinary Associations' call for responsible retailers to consider not using flat-faced dogs on Christmas jumpers and other festive merchandise.

Dan continued: "While we hope these figures indicate our concerns about flat-faced dogs may be starting to reach the public and that the unprecedented demand we've seen in recent years could be declining slightly, there are still thousands of flat-faced dogs being bred outside any umbrella of influence by irresponsible breeders and being bought by poorly informed owners. We will not rest on our laurels; we must continue to work together to protect the health and welfare of these still very much popular dogs, as many dogs continue to suffer due to impulsive puppy buying habits and indiscriminate, opportunistic, profit-focused breeders. In addition, there are now hundreds of thousands of flat-faced dogs already owned in the UK and who may suffer increasing welfare issues as they reach middle age and older. The flat-faced dog issue is not yet solved.

"We're also aware of extreme features in other breeds, such as Dachshunds, which now seem to be increasing in popularity and could become the new 'breed of the moment'. Extremes of conformation in any animal are a cause for concern so we continue to urge puppy buyers again to really consider their decision before they buy a puppy, instead of choosing a dog because of fashion."

Bill Lambert, Senior Health and Welfare Manager at the Kennel Club and member of the BWG said: "We encourage all puppy buyers to think very carefully about any puppy buying decision, but especially if they are thinking of getting a flat-faced dog. We hope the new figures are a sign of this message getting through and that there are now fewer, better-informed owners buying from responsible breeders who are doing all they can to breed healthy puppies.

"A good breeder will health test the parents before they are bred from and will always show buyers the mum, and ideally the dad, so that they can see if they have exaggerated features such as overly short muzzles, partially closed nostrils or excessive skin folds, which are likely to be passed onto the pup and to cause health problems."

ENDS

Notes to editors

According to the British Veterinary Association, *'Dachshunds are an in-demand breed with their own health issues; as the demand for them has continued to grow so too has the prevalence for spinal and neurological issues associated with elongated backs and shorter legs.'*

Information on the Brachycephalic Working Group www.ukbwg.org.uk

The BWG comprises leading UK dog welfare bodies, veterinary organisations, the Kennel Club, scientific & social researchers and breed clubs. The group aims to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic (flat faced) dogs by working together to improve the conformation-related health of individual dogs as well as reducing the current trend towards rising demand for these dogs. These aims are being approached by a series of actions that target the brachycephalic welfare issue at several points.

The BWG includes representatives of all major stakeholders in dog welfare in the UK. These include:

- Academia – Royal Veterinary College, University of Cambridge
- Breed clubs – Bulldog, French Bulldog, Pug
- Veterinary profession – British Veterinary Association (BVA), British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
- The Kennel Club
- Animal charities – Dogs Trust, PDSA, RSPCA
- Owners, Breeders, Veterinary surgeons