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The Plight of Greyhounds Abroad

Organizations around the world combat cruel practices against Greyhounds.

JANUARY 20, 2015 by [MEREDITH WARGO \(HTTP://WWW.LUCKYPUPPMAG.COM/AUTHOR/MEREDITH-WARGO/\)](http://www.luckypuppmag.com/author/meredith-wargo/)



Admired for their grace and speed, Greyhounds are one of the oldest breeds of dogs. For thousands of years, Greyhounds have appeared in art, literature and religion and were often considered the desired pets of noblemen.

Thanks, in part, to increased public awareness that dog racing is cruel and inhumane, Greyhound racing is becoming a dying industry in the United States. But as dog tracks close throughout the country, there is growing concern over the treatment of Greyhounds around the world where racing and hunting remain prevalent. Greyhounds from the United States and other First World countries are being exported to new markets – countries such as Argentina, Spain and Ireland – where there is little, if any, animal welfare regulation.



COURTESY OF GREYHOUND FRIENDS, JOHN MOTTERN

In some countries, Greyhounds are valued only as racing dogs and live in confined spaces receiving little human contact or affection.

Complicating matters is that although Greyhounds can live up to 14 years of age, racing Greyhounds retire at an early age, usually between 3 and 5 years old – at which point they are killed or abandoned. Injuries and lack of performance as racers are the two most common reasons Greyhounds retired. Due to overbreeding and brief racing careers, there is a global surplus of Greyhounds that live short, brutal lives.

Changing the luck of Irish Greyhounds

Ireland produces and exports more Greyhounds than any other country. Each year, thousands of Irish Greyhounds are destroyed because they don't make the grade as racing dogs or they're past their prime for racing.

“The image of the Greyhound is somewhat tainted in Ireland because of the sport of coursing, which is part of their culture,” says Louise Coleman, co-director of the American European Greyhound Alliance Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the welfare of Greyhounds around the world. “For years, people have seen Greyhounds hunt rabbits and wrongly assume they are aggressive dogs. As a result, they are reluctant to bring them into their homes as pets.”

Rescue groups in Ireland are trying to change the perception of Greyhounds as pets throughout their country. In 2011, the first annual Walk for Greyhounds in Dublin was organized by the Greyhound Rescue Association Ireland, a group of animal rescues and re-homing organizations in Ireland dedicated to the promotion of Greyhounds as pets. Hundreds of Greyhound owners and their pets walk peacefully through the heart of Dublin to demonstrate that Greyhounds make great family pets.

“The statistics for Irish Greyhounds aren't good,” says Marion Fitzgibbon, chairperson of Limerick Animal Welfare in Limerick, Ireland. “Every year, only about 800 Greyhounds are rescued in Ireland while 8,000 to 10,000 Greyhounds are needlessly put down. In addition, there are between 20,000 to 23,000 Greyhound puppies bred each year with one-third of them not being accounted for because they fail to make the grade as potential racers.” It is believed that these unaccounted dogs are destroyed because they didn't make the grade.

Until adoption efforts become more commonplace in Ireland, rescue organizations like LAW also focus their efforts in transporting retired Irish Greyhounds to other countries where they can readily find homes. One such country is Italy.

“LAW recently formed an alliance with Pet Levrieri, an Italian rescue group in Milan that is dedicated to saving and re-homing dogs that were once used for racing and hunting,” Fitzgibbon says. LAW sends 18 Irish Greyhounds to them every quarter.

The plight of Galgos

In Argentina, the situation isn't any better. The Galgo (Spanish Greyhound), is used to hunt hares and wild boars in the Argentinian countryside. Galgos generally live in deplorable conditions where they are confined to windowless shacks and fed only stale bread and water. They are also deprived of exercise, daylight and, most importantly, affection.



COURTESY OF GREYHOUND FRIENDS, JOHN MOTTERN

After being rescued, these two former racing Greyhounds enjoy open spaces and the perks of being a loved pet.

Galgos are considered second-class animals and few people are interested in owning them as pets. When hunting season is over, owners often view the Galgo as simply another mouth to feed. Instead of re-homing the dogs, the majority of them are killed. Extremely cruel methods are commonplace.

Proyecto Galgo Argentina is a Spanish rescue group located in Buenos Aires, Argentina, dedicated to defending Galgos from abuse and from the individuals who exploit the dogs and use them as commodities.

“In Argentina, Galgueros (Galgo handlers) hunt all year long, even when it’s prohibited,” says Lydia, one of the members of Proyecto Galgo Argentina. Hunting is a major problem, but the bigger problem the group faces is Galgo racing, which takes place all across the country, Lydia says. “Although racing is banned by law in the Buenos Aires province, it still happens on a regular basis.”

Spain’s dirty secret

The uncontrolled breeding of the Galgos and their massive abandoning at the end of the hunting season is also a serious problem in Spain. Galgos are bred indiscriminately by the tens of thousands in the hopes of producing the national coursing champion. It’s estimated that more than 60,000 Galgos are tortured and killed annually in Spain.

With the help of international support, there’s a small but growing adoption effort underway in Spain. A handful of shelters, such as Scooby Medina in Medina del Campo, Spain, are dedicated to rescuing the scores of dogs who are usually abandoned after the coursing season.

Founded in 1987, Scooby has become the largest animal rescue shelter in Spain providing refuge for Galgos and other abandoned animals. Through Scooby’s ongoing dedication, in recent years, Galgueros who live in the area have started bringing their unwanted Galgos to their shelter instead of destroying them, helping to create a shift in the cultural views of how Galgos are treated.

Changing the world one Greyhound at a time

Grass-roots education is a vital first step toward changing the opinions and attitudes about overbreeding as well as the benefits of owning Greyhounds and Galgos as pets. “The attitudes toward the treatment of Greyhounds are changing slowly in many regions around the world, but there is still a long way to go,” Coleman says.

Perhaps, the motto of Proyecto Galgo Argentina best sums up the hope of those dedicated to achieving better welfare conditions for Greyhounds around the world: “The life of any animal is much more valuable than that of the human being able to torture him.”

You Can Help

Many organizations around the world are dedicated to the welfare of Greyhounds and Galgos. For more information, contact any of the rescue groups listed below:

[The American-European Greyhound Alliance, Inc.](http://www.ameurogreyhoundalliance.org)

<http://www.ameurogreyhoundalliance.org>

[Galgo Rescue International Network](http://www.galgorescue.org) (<http://www.galgorescue.org>)

[Limerick Animal Welfare](http://www.limerickanimalwelfare.ie) (<http://www.limerickanimalwelfare.ie>)

[Proyecto Galgo Argentina](http://www.proyectogalgoargentina.blogspot.com) (<http://www.proyectogalgoargentina.blogspot.com>)

[Scooby Medina](http://www.scoobymedina.org) (<http://www.scoobymedina.org>)

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Meredith Wargo is an award-winning freelance writer in Houston.