

An interview about cat micro-chipping with Stefan Blakiston Moore, Advocacy & Government Relations Officer at Cats Protection

By Aaliya Butt, Young Animal Lawyers Network Committee, UK Centre for Animal Law

"We will introduce compulsory cat microchipping to ensure lost or stolen cats can be reunited with their owners as quickly as possible. In addition, we are reviewing the operation of the current microchip database systems, which also apply to dogs, with a view to introducing improvements."

- DEFRA Action Plan for Animal Welfare, p.15

Does Cats Protection support a change in the law to make cat microchipping mandatory?

Yes, Cat Protection has led a campaign for several years, we know from our own statistics from the 'Cats and Their Stats (CATS) report 2020' across the UK there are 2.6 million unchipped cats which equates to around 26% of owned cats. Microchipping is the safe and permanent way for cats to be identified. Cats Protection is keen to ensure all pet cats are chipped.

What is the problem this seeks to address - what sort of problems does Cat Protection encounter with unchipped cats?

Cats are free to roam and can end up going missing or sadly be involved in road traffic accidents. It is important to ensure that cats are chipped, so that owners can be informed if their cat is sadly found on the road. It is heart-breaking for cat owners not to know the fate of their beloved pets and microchipping offers closure

For Cats Protection it is an important issue because we take in a lot of unchipped cats. 8 out of 10 of the stray cats that come into our adoption centres are unchipped, which equates to thousands of cats every year. We of course do our best to ensure that these pets are reunited with their owners but sadly it's not always possible.

A couple of months ago, we reunited an owner with their cat after 13 years of their cat disappearing, and that is all because of the microchip. If that very cat had not been microchipped, chances that we would have been able to reunite with its owner are slim to none.

Overall, there is an issue with the number of cats being chipped, we know since dog microchipping has been introduced in 2016, percentage of dogs being chipped is around 92%, whereas the percentage of pet cats is stuck at 71% so we really need something to drive that forward.

Do public bodies who dispose of cats sadly found deceased, have any responsibility to check the microchip, so that the owner can be informed?

Highway England do collect, scan, and notify owners when cats are found on those main roads, but local authorities, are not currently required to.

We did find in June 2019 that 92% of councils do have some arrangements to scan cats, but of course whether the chip company is being contacted and the owner informed is a further issue. We would like to see council's scanning and for best practise guidance to be issued to encourage them to do so, as it's heart-breaking for owners if they cannot learn the fate of their cat and they're left wondering.

There are currently over 14 databases where pet owners can register their animals, but no central database where all the information is exchanged. Do you think a change in the law will be effective if it is not accompanied by a central database for chip registration?

If your cat is brought to Cat Protection and is chipped, we are going to be able to access that chip number and try and contact you, and as long as your details are kept up-to-date, we should be able to contact you.



Cats Protection supports a review of the existing database systems, we would like to see some improvements made to checking chips to ensure it is as efficient as possible.

There are also campaigns that advocate for duties on vets to scan animals when first registered at a vet practice and before euthanasia, to confirm legal ownership. Is this something that you would believe would be useful?

The first thing I would stress, is that Cat Protection would never put a healthy cat to sleep. The priority for us is making sure all cats are chipped to make veterinary scanning effective. We want to make sure all pet cats are chipped, so that if they are scanned, the owner can be identified. This has been the key focus of our campaign, but veterinary guidance has recently been introduced, to ensure healthy dogs are scanned before euthanasia, and when compulsory microchipping is introduced, we would like to see guidance on scanning extended to include cats.

We do recognise that vets may have been treat-

ing an animal for many years and it is important to allow vets to use their judgement.

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

After many years of campaigning, Cats Protection is delighted that the Government have committed to introducing compulsory microchipping in their Action Plan for Animal Welfare. It will make such a difference to all those charities such as ourselves, where we are taking in so many unchipped cats and help more owners be reunited with their beloved pets should they go missing.