

# Abandoned

Abandonment is one of the worst forms of suffering that can be inflicted on a companion animal. This has motivated me to choose “Abandoned” as a title for this commentary, instead of “Abandonment”, which dilutes and depersonalises the problem, and thus softens it. “Abandoned” places the focus on the individual who suffers it directly, an animal who has lost that which he loves and admires the most: his human family. For we must be aware that the vulnerability of an animal, his interests and feelings, are not merely a metaphor or an exaggeration employed by animal lovers, but a real object of serious scientific observation, and it is worthwhile to learn about it [\[1\]](#).

The problem of abandoned dogs was discussed at a European Conference organised a couple of years ago in Brussels [\[2\]](#). I had been asked to talk about the situation of animals in Southern Europe, and I was faced with a serious problem: the lack of official, or at least reliable, data for most of the countries I had to refer to – France [\[3\]](#), Italy, Portugal and Greece. This wasn't the case for Spain, however, where FA yearly publishes its paradigmatic Survey on Abandonment [Fundación Affinity](#), the present issue of which has recently come out [\[4\]](#).

The numbers shown in the report are shocking. A companion animal is abandoned in Spain every 3.5 minutes. The fate of these creatures is to be lost, suffer an accident, or to be taken to a shelter to await adoption or euthanasia [\[5\]](#). Someone I know told me recently, while she was walking her old cocker spaniel whom she had rescued from a shelter: “I already had a dog, but when I saw him there, just arrived and looking like he had no idea what was going on, I decided to adopt him. I thought it was very tough to go from the sofa to the cage...” Indeed, animals establish a bond with us so strong that they become part of the intimate landscape of family customs. There are wonderfully written books [\[6\]](#), about these –more or less permissive- bonds between companion animals and their human families which, for them, are their pack, a type of bond that has remained strong through the centuries, as Konrad Lorenz, Nobel Laureate in Physiology and Medicine, illustrates [\[7\]](#).

It is worth highlighting some of the information contained in Fundación Affinity's report. While the number of animals abandoned has dropped in recent years –which proves the effectiveness of campaigns such as the “He wouldn't do it” one–, the number of adoptions has not followed a similarly positive trend. The regions with the highest number of abandonments are Andalusia (17,284, or 14.9% of all abandonments); Catalonia (16,486, or 14.2%) and the Community of Valencia (13,235, or 11.5%). These are, sadly, high figures. They include not only the animals that were literally abandoned, thrown on the street, on the road, in the countryside, roaming aimlessly, their eyes filled with an infinite void; also considered are the so-called responsible abandonments, where owners voluntarily leave their animals at shelters, and also lost animals.

In recent years we have advanced in the knowledge and exploration of that tight bond between companion animals and humans [\[8\]](#), and come to the conclusion that the mutual need of one by the other is a source of wellbeing for both. Abandonment is a social calamity that should make us aware that education in compassion and empathy towards animals is learnt both at home and at school [\[9\]](#). In Spain we all remember the great Fernando Fernán Gómez in the film “La lengua de las mariposas” (the butterflies' tongue), in which he played a school teacher, victim of reprisal, who was determined to pass on to his pupils the love of nature, of all living beings and of animals.

The importance of considering that keeping animals responsibly has to be a serious commitment will never be stated enough. Animals need us; we are their guiding figures. Read Paul Auster's novel "Timbuktu" and you'll be moved by Mr. Bones [10]. The sentence that explains why there is a perfect symbiosis between Willy and Mr. Bones is one to be savoured: "Most dogs acquire a good working knowledge of two-legged speech, but in Mr. Bones' case there was the advantage of being blessed with a master who did not treat him as an inferior." This is the key: they are not inferior, and they do not deserve that we treat them as inferior.

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[1] A.B. SATZ, Animal as vulnerable Subjects: Beyond Interests-Convergence, Hierarchy, and Property, en *Animal Law* 16 (2009) 65ss.

[2] "Systematic and Science-based Solutions for the Management of Stray Dogs in Europe. Second Conference on Animal Welfare", Brussels 7-8 October 2008. "*Stray dogs in South Europe*"

ORGANIZING ENTITY: Vier Pfoten Stiftung and Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, Familie und Jugend"

[3] Something to an official statistic, but without being official, is the one which offers to us the French Association "30 millions d'amis" ([vid. texto](#)).

[4] Also available in our website [Descargar](#)

[5] Except in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, where euthanasia is prohibited, in the rest of Spain most dogs and cats that are not adopted within a longer or shorter length of time are killed. Cfr. Related to Catalonia: [Decreto Legislativo 2/2008](#), de 15 de Abril, por el que se aprueba el texto refundido de la ley de Protección de los Animales; [Decreto 254/2000](#) de 24 de Julio, por el que se establecen los métodos de eutanasia para los animales de compañía que se tengan que sacrificar

[6] P.MAYLE, *La vida de un perro* (Barcelona 1994); M. CAPUZZO & T.B. CAPUZZO, *Il cane che mi rubò il cuore* (Milano 1998); J. GROGAN, *Marley and Me. Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog* (2006).

[7] K.Lorenz, *So kam der Mensch auf der Hund*, trad. Esp.: *Cuando el hombre encontró al perro* (3ª ed. Barcelona 2008).

[8] PODBERSCECK A.L./ PAUL E./ SERPELL, J.A (Ed.), *Companion Animals & Us: Exploring the Relationships between People and Pets* (Cambridge 2005).

[9] Cfr. LL. FERRER, [Els braus i l'Escola](#)

[10] P.AUSTER, *Timbuktu* (New York 1999)