

Huge rise in dangerous dog seizures as more are bred to fight

Katharine Barney, Evening Standard

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The number of dangerous dogs seized by police in London has rocketed in the past two years.

Just 35 animals were seized under the Dangerous Dogs Act in 2005/06 but the total soared to 480 in 2007/08.

In addition, the number of patients aged under 18 treated for dog bites rose from 58 in 2002/03 to 127 in 2006/07.

The figures were revealed by Mayor Boris Johnson in a written answer to Conservative London Assembly member Steve O'Connell.

It follows the news that all dogs owned by people living on council estates in Wandsworth are to be microchipped in an effort to stop organised dogfighting.

Mr O'Connell, a Metropolitan Police Authority member, said: "There seems to be a growing use of certain breeds to create intimidation and an aggressive threat on our streets.

"They have become a weapon of choice in the same ways as knives and guns.

"It's just a matter of time before a young person is killed by being attacked by a dog set upon them by someone else."

"I would like us to look at the issue of microchipping, but we need to recognise that the majority of dog owners are responsible.

"We need to work with animal welfare groups and also look at instances where people having dogs may be against the tenancy agreement."

The rise of dangerous dogs has seen police marksmen in Haringey use taser stun guns to kill one. Another was killed by officers in Hammersmith after it threatened a child.

The trend of training animals to fight has also caused problems in London's parks. More than 100 trees in Kensington and Chelsea have been killed by pit bulls whose owners encourage them to gnaw on trees to strengthen their jaws.

Haringey has said it will have to destroy 20 trees in Finsbury Park after they were damaged by dogs.

Bull breeds make up 42 per cent of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home admissions - the home receives 30 to 40 per day.

Mr Johnson said the Greater London Authority was working with police, animal-charities and Wandsworth council on the People with Dogs Project, to educate young people about dog ownership.

The BARK scheme, which is underway in Brent and other boroughs, focuses on stopping dogs being used for antisocial purposes and fighting.