

Dog fighting

BY NADIA SAM-DALIRI

When dogs are weapons

DOGS are increasingly being abused and beaten to toughen them up so they can be used as a weapon, animal welfare groups have said.

Two thirds of all calls to the RSPCA are now directly linked to youths using dogs as weapons in parks and on streets, the charity announced last week.

This has increased drastically from 37 per cent in 2007.

The Mayhew Animal Home, in Harrow Road, Kensal Green, said that breeds like Staffordshire Bull Terriers and other cross-breeds are becoming a status symbol on the streets of north west London and the numbers having to be treated for horrific injuries linked to dog fighting are increasing.

Claire Harper, Mayhew's animal welfare officer, deals with 'status dogs' cases.

She said: "We've seen a huge rise in the use of status dogs. Some of them come in with injuries you don't expect to see in this country. They are beaten, burnt and some have had their tails cut off.

"The level of suffering is disturbing. When young people start doing this and seeing others do the same, it makes them desensitised to violence anywhere.

"We hear cases where people have beaten their dogs and gone on to attack people."

One of the biggest problems, Ms Harper said, is the sheer numbers of these breeds on the streets.

Every year in London, 3,000 dogs are put to sleep because there are no homes for them.

Ms Harper said: "Young people are able to get hold of these breeds easily on the internet or just by word



Victims: Cornelius's skin was red raw, cracked and covered with scabs due to untreated mange. He has spent time in foster care homes as it has taken nearly six months for him to recover and right, Hero was dumped outside the Mayhew in a terrible state and clearly linked to dog fighting. He was a walking skeleton, covered in fresh and old scars and his teeth had been filed down. To train puppies to be aggressive, people use another dog as 'bait.' They need the dog to be unable to harm the pups so they file the teeth down and keep the dog starved. Hero has come on well and is in a foster home

of mouth and there's minimum money changing hands. We give free Bull-breed neutering to try and tackle it."

Brent has become a forerunner in tackling barbaric practices against Bull and Terrier type dogs with its police and RSPCA partnership team Brent Action for Responsible K9s (BARK).

The team, made up of animal welfare officers and police, visits dog owners making sure they are properly looking after their pets.

Since BARK began in 2007, there has been a 20 per cent reduction in the number of bite-related incidents in Brent and a 300 per cent rise in public tip-offs regarding badly treated animals.

The BARK team also accompanies officers on raids.

Two years ago, a raid uncovered one of the biggest cases of mistreatment against dogs London has ever seen.

Eleven dogs, including puppies, were found to be living in squalor in a small property in Elms Lane,

Wembley. Other dog raids have since been carried out and seen convictions.

Everyone agrees that the dogs are victims but there is a huge issue around what to do with them when their owners are convicted.

Many status dogs are abandoned when their novelty value wears off and the responsibilities associated with owning a dog hits home, the RSPCA warned.

Becky Kenny, RSPCA branch support advisor, said: "The sad reality is that there are too many of these status dogs being handed in to rescue centres. And the bad press means that even the most friendly family pet is finding it hard to find a home if they happen to be one of these breed types."

BARK continues to expand and has now been rolled out to four other boroughs with three more in the planning stages.



One of the dogs suffered from scalding injuries