

AS GAGA GETS STOLEN HOUNDS BACK...

HOW TO STOP IT

HERE are the RSPCA's top tips for keeping your dog safe from theft.

- 1 Don't leave your pet outside a shop on their own or in a car alone.
- 2 Teach your dog a reliable word, to call them back when you are out walking.
- 3 Check your garden to make sure it is secure. If you have a gate, fit a lock.
- 4 Neuter your pet, as this can reduce the likelihood of them roaming.
- 5 Make sure your pet is wearing a collar with an ID tag and that it is up to date. It is a legal requirement for a dog to have an ID tag with your name and address on it. The RSPCA also recommends including your mobile phone number on any tag, as this can help reunite you with your pet quickly should they ever get lost.
- 6 Microchip your pet and keep the details up to date so that if your pet does go missing or is stolen, there is a higher chance they can be reunited with you. It is a legal requirement in England and Wales to have your dog microchipped.
- 7 If you believe your dog has been stolen, report it to police as soon as possible.

ATTACK... James was able to fight off Rosie's dognappers



RETURNED... Gaga with one of her beloved French bulldogs



'I was trying to grab Rosie while the other thief hit me'

We were dognapped too

By AMY JONES

IT'S the crime that sparks fear and heartache in pet owners everywhere.

Dog theft has risen by 170 per cent since the start of the first lockdown, last March, as more people seek to become owners.

Last week a relieved Lady Gaga was reunited with two of her beloved French bulldogs after thieves shot and wounded her dogwalker.

Just like thousands of Brits who have had their pets snatched, the singer – who quickly offered a 500,000-dollar reward – endured days of pain until her pooches Koji and Gustav were handed in to police.

Pub landlord James Cosens nearly became a victim when his collie pup Rosie was snatched by a stranger.

The 29-year-old told The Sun: "My immediate reaction was, 'Oh, this man's just being friendly'."

"But as I got closer, he said, 'I'm taking your dog. If you try to take her back I'll stab you'."

Cruel dognappers are part of a crime wave that has struck terror into pet owners across the nation.

And the thieves are increasingly resorting to extreme violence.

Justine Quirk, from charity Dog Lost, told The Sun: "If you steal one pedigree dog you're looking at making upwards of £3,000 – far more than the price of a phone or the sort of money people carry in their wallet."

Criminals have even been posing as RSPCA officers in an attempt to steal pets.

Senior Tory MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith has been calling on the Government to introduce harsher penalties for dognappers.

He told The Sun: "As it stands, only about one per cent of dog thefts are prosecuted. And of those, they end up with a fine of about 250 to 500 quid."

"A specific offence for pet theft is needed to deter these criminals."

But change could be around the corner after Boris Johnson pledged to act, The Sun can reveal.

During a Zoom call with Dog Lost founder Jayne Hayes last month, the Prime Minister said the loss of a dog was a "terrible thing".

Lady Gaga's pets Koji, Miss Asia and Gustav are now safe after the attacker blasted her dogwalker Ryan in the chest with a handgun. Ryan



'I worry what could be happening to her'

MISSING... Melina's maltipoo Nala was taken in van theft



'Heartbreaking how scared they must have been'

VICTIMS... Charlotte and parents Catherine and Chris had eight dogs stolen

is expected to make a full recovery. While Rosie's attempted dognapping last month – at Morfa Berwig Nature Reserve, near Bynea, South Wales – was also violent, the thieves had not reckoned on James being more than capable of handling himself.

The former amateur boxer and dad of one, from nearby Llanelli, revealed: "I threw a punch at the man holding my dog, which quickly put him on the floor. I was trying to grab Rosie, while the other thief was punching me. I managed to get Rosie and punch the other guy too."

"It's heart-breaking to think how terrified the dogs must have felt."

Social media manager,

Melina Georgiou, 27, had her one-year-old maltipoo Nala stolen by carjackers last Thursday. As her dog-walker dropped off one of her "pack" in Barnet, North London, criminals jumped into the van and sped off with Nala and two others. Nala remains missing.

Melina said: "You think of all these horrible things that could be happening to her."

While some dogs go on to be resold to loving homes who have no idea their new pet is stolen, others end up in backstreet breeding dens destined for a life of misery. There has been a signifi-

cant rise in the cost of many breeds during the pandemic. Dogs Trust research found beagle prices rose by 157 per cent from March to December 2020, and daschunds by 112 per cent. Stolen And Missing Pets Alliance chief Debbie Matthews has been campaigning for new laws ever since her two Yorkies were stolen from her car in 2006. She said: "Under the existing law, dogs are classified the same as a mobile phone being stolen. 'Dogs are members of the family. They're irreplaceable.'"

Additional reporting: MONICA CAFFERKY



Threat... Putin

Chemical weapon web alert

By ED SOUTHGATE

CHEMICAL attacks such as the Novichok poisonings are an increasing global threat now online tutorials show how to make the weapons, the Defence Secretary warns.

The menace is rapidly accelerating with states such as Vladimir Putin's Russia willing to disregard international law, Ben Wallace added.

Ex-Russian spy Sergei Skripal was poisoned in Salisbury, Wilts, three years ago this week.

Meanwhile, biological weapons expert Hamish de Bretton-Gordon has warned that some countries could use Covid as a means of attack after seeing how it can "bring the world to its knees".



IT is too late to begin collecting for our Hols from £9.50. But if you already started, today's codeword and token are here. If you are collecting Sun Savers codes, today's is on Page 16. You get a Covid Money Back Guarantee, in case travel curbs are in place. Booking closes at midnight on March 12. T&Cs apply.



I rate my hamster

A HAMSTER has been given a Blue Peter award for helping her autistic owner through lockdown.

Treacle was nominated by Billy-Jo Howe, 20, who said she "gives me a reason to wake up".

She is a rare animal recipient of the BBC award. When Billy-Jo got the letter she "screamed the house down before my dad told me off".

Billy-Jo, from Weston-super-Mare in Somerset, added: "Treacle's helped me with my confidence."

POPPING UP

Pop-up food stalls were one of the most common types of start-ups among a bumper 835,000 companies launched last year.