Charity investigation shines a light on the murky world of canine fertility ‘clinics’

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Animal welfare charity, Naturewatch Foundation, has warned of a concerning rise in the number of canine fertility clinics operating without veterinary involvement across the UK, as well as worrying links to the illicit puppy trade.

Following reports about canine fertility clinics to its Animal Crime Investigators, Naturewatch Foundation carried out a six-week investigation into the sector in 2021. It identified at least 120 clinics, but the charity thinks the true figure could be much higher.

The charity’s investigation found evidence that a number of canine fertility clinics are operating with no veterinary involvement. Unqualified people are carrying out highly invasive procedures on dogs, including artificial insemination and blood tests. Regulated veterinary medicines are also being used and supplied illegally.

Many of the clinics identified appear to be targeting owners of flat-faced - or brachycephalic - breeds, such as pugs and French Bulldogs. These breeds struggle to reproduce naturally, and over 80% of French bulldog puppies need to be delivered by caesarean section. Naturewatch Foundation is particularly concerned that canine fertility clinics are enabling people to breed puppies with increasingly extreme features, with no regard for their life-long health and welfare, or the emotional and financial impact on unsuspecting owners.

Veterinary Surgeon, Pete Wedderburn (AKA Pete the vet) said:

“I’ve been practising veterinary medicine for over 35 years, and I have no doubt that there are canine fertility clinics out there that are using unqualified people to carry out procedures that should be performed by a vet. In my opinion, this causes a serious risk of animal suffering. What’s more, by allowing people to breed increasingly extreme versions of brachycephalic dogs, these clinics are complicit in creating a generation of dogs who are destined to suffer.”

Naturewatch Foundation has been campaigning against puppy farming for many years, and has identified links between canine fertility clinics and the puppy trade. It has been sharing evidence of criminality with the relevant authorities, and has sent a report of its findings to the UK Government, which includes recommendations around how to tackle the problem.

Naturewatch Foundation Campaign Manager, Natalie Harney, said:

“Our investigation shows that the illicit puppy trade is evolving in unsettling ways. Just like puppy farmers, many of the people involved in this new sector are motivated by profit. Perhaps what’s most disturbing is that they’re marketing themselves to the public as trustworthy ‘clinics’, but behind closed doors they’re putting dogs at serious risk of harm. Our investigation, which we believe to be the largest of its kind in the UK to date, shows that urgent action is needed to close down any businesses that are operating illegally and to better regulate canine fertility services.

“It’s more important than ever that anyone considering getting a dog or puppy does so from a reputable source. This will not only help the public to avoid puppy farmers, but will also help stop the growth of connected businesses that are just as unscrupulous. Visit the Naturewatch Foundation website or check out the UK Government’s Petfished campaign to find out how to protect yourself from puppy farmers.”

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For an accessible overview of canine fertility clinics, read our short report and visit our website.

About Naturewatch Foundation

Naturewatch Foundation is a registered charity that has been speaking out on behalf of animals for 30 years by:

- ? Campaigning peacefully against animal abuse
- ? Lobbying to improve animal protection legislation
- ? Raising awareness through education
- ? Supporting the World Animal Day movement to raise the status of animals around the globe

Visit www.naturewatch.org.

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