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Beijing Police Seek 'Large and Vicious' Suspects (With Wet Noses)

By [ANDREW JACOBS](#)

BEIJING — A boisterous 6-year-old golden retriever with tousled strawberry blond hair and a weakness for boiled carrots, Dou Dou hardly looks like Public Enemy No. 1.

But earlier this month, his unmistakable likeness began appearing on [wanted posters](#) across the capital; in recent days, the police have been scouring the gated apartment complex where he lives, hunting for him and other fugitive canines in [a campaign](#) that is striking fear into the hearts of otherwise law-abiding Beijingers.

“I feel like we’ re living in one of those war movies in which the Communists are searching for the Japanese and threatening to wipe them out,” said the woman who considers herself Dou Dou’ s adoptive mother. “How can the government be so cruel?”

Dou Dou’ s is among the dozens of dog breeds, including supposed miscreants like collies, Dalmatians and Labradors, that the Beijing government has long banned from much of the city. But over the last 10 days, the prohibition against such “large and vicious dogs,” as they are officially branded, has been enforced with zeal, alarming pet owners who thought the size restrictions had long since lapsed.

“People are in a complete panic,” said Mary Peng, chief executive of the [International Center for Veterinary Services](#)

[L](#) a pet hospital in Beijing. “My phone has not stopped ringing.”

The police, often tipped off by cynophobic neighbors, have been carrying out nighttime raids on homes, and scores of dogs have been wrenched from the grip of their distraught owners, even those that had been legally registered with the authorities.

Although [the crackdown](#) has its supporters, it has provoked fury from pet owners, a growing legion that includes young professionals and retirees, many of whom can be seen whiling away their days in Beijing’ s hutongs, or alleys, accompanied by their wheezing, overfed companions.

The well-heeled have been bundling off their boxers and oversize poodles to kennels outside the city limits, while others who cannot afford such accommodations are keeping their pets hidden at home. “I’m not about to give up one of my dogs without putting up a fight,” said Huang Feng, 30, a pet-store owner who has a fondness for big, lumbering breeds. “What’s happening is criminal.”

Dog owners have been posting stories of heartbreaking encounters with the police, and [a video that went viral](#) last week shows an officer confiscating a small white dog whose owner claimed he left his dog license at home. A cartoon making the rounds on Sina Weibo, China’s version of Twitter, portrays a terrified dog chased by three policemen, one of whom is firing what appears to be a cannon. “How about catching thieves instead of little dogs?” reads the caption.

The Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau did not respond to an interview request, but in public statements, the police have said they are simply enforcing the longstanding ban on dogs taller than 13.7 inches in the districts that make up the heart of the capital. Officials note that rabies last year killed 13 people in Beijing, more than double the number in 2011. Big dogs, the police contend, are incompatible with city living. “All resistance as well as violence against enforcement will be investigated and dealt with by the police,” they said in a statement.

The authorities appear to be so worried about a backlash that they have been deleting online criticism of the stepped-up enforcement. Last week they detained a woman who described how the police had kicked to death a golden retriever in front of its owner. The police later issued a statement saying [the woman admitted to fabricating the account](#), a claim that has been met with widespread skepticism.

In addition to risking the seizure of offending dogs on the spot, owners can be fined \$800, an amount that doubles if the owner is a business. Once confiscated, large dogs cannot be retrieved.

With the exception of high-end pedigrees, animal rights advocates say, many of the seized animals are likely to end up in the hands of dog meat traders.

“We wish the police could find a more humane way to deal with this issue,” said Feng Dongmei, who runs [the dog and cat welfare program at Animals Asia](#), a Hong Kong-based organization that wrote the government to plead for a change in the city’s dog regulations.

Other groups are asking the police to clarify what appear to be contradictions in the rules. Can a dog legally registered in rural areas come to Beijing for a checkup at the vet? And why, they ask, have the police in recent years been licensing large-breed dogs across the city and happily collecting the annual \$160 registration fee?

For years, animal advocacy groups have been trying to make a simple point to the police: big does not necessarily equal vicious. In fact, many experts note that petite breeds like Chihuahuas, dachshunds and Jack Russell terriers are often nastier than the Afghans and English sheep dogs that are officially banned.

“There is no bona fide scientific correlation between size and behavior,” said Ms. Peng, the veterinarian.

Instead of hunting down large dogs, advocates say, the government should focus on administering rabies vaccines and requiring owners to leash their pets when out for a walk. Encouraging people to spay and neuter their dogs, especially males, they say, can also have a calming effect on canines.

Pet owners are scrambling for ways to keep their dogs out of harm’s way. Some have stashed their beloved animals at rented farms in Hebei, the province that surrounds the capital, while those of modest means have come up with creative ways to evade the dog catchers, some of whom have admitted operating under quotas that require them to bring in 10 dogs each.

One woman described how she sets her alarm for 2 a.m., taking her black Labrador retriever for brief walks when she knows the police are sleeping. Another woman no

longer allows her 2-year-old husky to venture outside. Instead, he relieves himself on the balcony of her apartment after dark. “It’s getting disgusting out there,” she said.

Like most, a 25-year-old designer, who asked that only her surname, Gao, be printed, is hoping the take-no-prisoners campaign will blow over. Earlier this month, a squad of men swept through her neighborhood with nets and metal snares. Since then, she has been staying home from work, having been traumatized by the sight of a dozen unlicensed dogs, whimpering and bloodied, being thrown into a large metal cage on the back of a police truck.

“Every time there’s a knock at the door, my heart stops,” she said. “I just don’t understand why people think big dogs are a menace. My dog might be big, but he wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

Patrick Zuo and Sue-Lin Wong contributed research.

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