

Dog attack deaths and maimings, U.S. & Canada

September 1982 to December 31, 2012

Reports are logged as received, and the current log is printed out as requested.

Compiled by the editor of **ANIMAL PEOPLE** from press accounts since 1982, this table covers only attacks by dogs of clearly identified breed type or ancestry, as designated by animal control officers or others with evident expertise, who have been kept as pets. All accounts are cross-checked by date, location, and identity of the victim.

Attacks by police dogs, guard dogs, and dogs trained specifically to fight are also excluded. "Attacks doing bodily harm" includes all fatalities, maimings, and other injuries requiring extensive hospital treatment. "Maimings" includes permanent disfigurement or loss of a limb. Where there is an asterisk (#), please see footnotes. If there are more "attacks" than "victims," it means that there were multiple dogs involved in some attacks. If the numbers of "victims" does not equal the numbers of "deaths" and "maimings," it means that some of the victims -- in attacks in which some people were killed or maimed -- were not killed or maimed.

Over the duration of the data collection, the severity of the logged attacks appears to be at approximately the 1-bite-in-10,000 level.

The "%/dogs" column states the percentage of each breed of dog among 168,534 classified ads listing dogs for sale at web sites during June 2012, screened to eliminate duplicates. For most breeds the numbers differ little from those found among 275,716 classified ads scanned in June 2011. Similar data collected in June 2010 did not eliminate duplicate listings, and thereby appears to have over-counted several breeds, including pit bulls and pit bull mixes, who were over-counted in 2010 by 20%. Similar data has been collected in many previous years, but was not previously included in this table. If a percentage is not listed for a breed or mix, it either appears to be too low to calculate or too difficult to isolate from other variants of the breed or mix. In some cases, including pit bulls and Rottweilers, the percentage includes mixes. Retriever mixes, Labrador and golden combined, were 5.2% of the total dog population.

There is a persistent allegation by pit bull terrier advocates that pit bulls are over-represented among reported dog attack deaths and maimings because of misidentifications or because "pit bull" is, according to them, a generic term covering several similar types of dog. However, the frequency of pit bull attacks among these worst-in-10,000 cases is so disproportionate that even if half of the attacks in the pit bull category were misattributed, or even if the pit bull category was split four ways, attacks by pit bulls and their closest relatives would still outnumber attacks by any other breed.

There is also a persistent allegation by pit bull terrier advocates that the use of media accounts as a data source is somehow suspect. Reality is that media coverage incorporates information from police reports, animal control reports, witness accounts, victim accounts in many instances, and hospital reports. Media coverage is, in short, multi-sourced, unlike reports from any single source.

Note: to ensure that the columns are aligned properly, please print this table from e-mail using a

Chihuahua	1	1	0	1	1	.07%	#
Chow	55	36	16	7	37	.01%	
Chow/German shepherd	1	0	1	0	1		
Chow/husky mix	2	2	0	1	1		
Chow/Labrador mix	4	4	0	0	3		
Chow/Sharpei mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Chow mix (other)	6	5	1	1	5		
Cocker spaniel	1	1	0	0	1	1.2%	
Collie	4	4	0	1	3	2.2%	
Collie/retriever mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Coonhound	2	1	1	1	0	.06%	#
Dalmatian	3	3	0	0	3	1.0%	
Dalmatian/Akita mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Dachschund	6	3	3	1	6	1.0%	#
Doberman	15	8	7	7	7	1.3%	#
Doberman/Great Dane mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Dogo Argentino	3	2	1	1	2		
Doge de Bordeaux	2	1	0	0	1		
East Highland terrier	1	0	1	1	0		#
Fila Brasileiro	1	1	0	0	1		
German shepherd	96	60	28	14	59	2.3%	#
German shepherd mix	41	26	12	7	26		#
German shepherd/husky mix	6	5	1	2	3		#
German shepherd/Lab mix	10	3	2	1	4		
Golden retriever	11	9	2	3	7	1.4%	#
Golden retriever mix	1	0	1	1	0		#
Golden retriever/Lab mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Great Dane	33	11	7	3	16	.03%	
Great Pyrenees	3	0	2	1	1		
Greyhound	1	1	0	0	1	1.6%	
Hound mix	1	0	1	0	1		
Husky	71	44	5	24	20	.05%	
Husky/Malamute mix	2	2	0	0	2		
Husky/Labrador mix	1	0	1	0	1		
Jack Russell terrier	5	3	1	2	2	.05%	#
Jack Russell/English bulldog	1	1	0	0	1		
Karelian bear dog	1	0	1	0	1		
Labrador	49	33	14	3	38	1.0%	#
Labrador mix	18	13	5	1	16	.06%	#
Lab/blue heeler mix	1	0	1	0	0		
Labrador/boxer mix	1	0	1	0	0		
Lab-Doberman	1	1	0	0	1		
Lab-St. Bernard	1	1	0	0	1		
Malamute	13	11	2	5	5	.05%	
Maremma	1	0	1	0	1		
Mastiff	22	18	4	5	13	.08%	
Mastiff/Rhodesian ridgeback	1	1	0	1	0		
Mini-pinscher	1	1	0	0	1		#
Norwegian elkhound	1	0	1	0	1	.02%	#
Old English sheep dog	2	1	1	2	0	.06%	#
Old English sheep dog mix	1	0	1	0	1		
Pit bull	2235	911	806	233	1268	4.4%	#
Pit bull/Akita mix	3	0	3	0	3		
Pit bull boxer mix	27	11	10	2	17		

Pit bull/chow mix	10	2	4	1	4		
Pit bull/Doberman mix	1	0	1	0	1		
Pit bull/Doberman/GSD/Lab	2	2	0	0	2		
Pit bull/GSD mix	12	7	2	1	10		
Pit bull/Lab mix	25	20	6	5	18		#
Pit/Rhodesian ridgeback mix	2	2	0	0	2		
Pit bull/Rott. mix	49	10	8	2	14		
Pit bull/Sharpei mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Pit bull/Sheltie mix	7	4	0	0	4		
Pit bull/Weimaraner mix	1	0	1	0	1		
Pit bull/wolf hybrid	1	1	1	0	2		
Pit mix unknown	7	3	1	1	4		
Pointer mix	1	0	1	0	0		#
Pomeranian	1	1	0	1	0	1.4%	
Poodle	4	2	1	0	1	2.8%	#
Poodle/terrier	1	1	0	0	1		
Pug	1	1	0	0	1	Pug/	
Rottweiler mix	2	1	0	1	0		
Queensland heeler	4	0	2	0	2		
Rhodesian ridgeback	2	2	0	0	2	.04%	
Rottweiler	495	278	131	81	277	2.2%	#
Rottweiler/chow mix	2	2	0	0	2		
Rottweiler/GSD mix	18	9	8	3	14		
Rottweiler/Labrador	7	6	1	0	7		
Rottweiler/mastiff	1	1	0	0	1		
Russian terrier	1	0	1	0	1		
Saint Bernard	11	7	1	1	6	.08%	
Schnauzer	1	0	1	1	0	.09%	#
Sharpei	5	5	0	0	5	.03%	
Sharpei/Rottweiler	2	1	0	0	1		
Sharpei/unknown mix	1	1	0	0	1		
Sharpei/Labrador	1	1	0	0	1		
Shiba Inu	1	0	1	0	1	.04%	
Shih Tzu	1	0	1	0	1	1.2%	
Springer spaniel	3	4	0	0	4		
Terrier mix (not pit bull)	2	0	2	0	2		
Tosa	1	1	0	0	1		
Unidentified	17	4	3	3	4		#
Weimaraner	2	2	0	1	1	.08%	
West Highland terrier	2	0	2	1	1	.04%	#
Wheaten terrier	3	1	1	0	2	.02%	
Wolf hybrid	84	69	5	19	48		#

Totals of dogs attacking humans in fatal & disfiguring cases:

3887 1823 1216 513 2213 41.9%

Totals of humans attacked by dogs in fatal & disfiguring cases:

3655 1773 1193 497 2151 41.9%

Pit bulls & close pit mixes:

2394 971 850 245 1353 4.4%
61% 52% 69% 47% 60%

Large molosser breeds, including pit bulls, Rottweilers, Presa Canarios, Cane Corsos, mastiffs, Dogo Argentinos, Fila Brasieros, and their mixes:

3064	1330	1038	356	1718	8.4%+
79%	72%	85%	69%	77%	

All molosser breeds, adding boxers to the molosser category:

3124	1351	1038	366	1751	9.2%+
80%	74%	86%	71%	79%	

Wolf-like breeds, broadly defined to include Akitas, German shepherds, huskies, Karelian bear dogs, Malamutes, wolf hybrids, and their mixes:

410	272	77	80	226	3.9%+
11%	16%	7%	16%	11%	

Chows & their close mixes, a chow being apparently an ancient cross of wolf-like Arctic dogs with molossers:

69	48	18	9	48	0.1%+
2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	

Notes:

Airedale/boxer: The only listed attack was by 10 dogs at once.

Airedale: Anne Beth Grotzky, 87, died from complications of surgery for a broken hip suffered on July 27, 2010 when an Airedale kept by Dale Eggers, 65, knocked her down. Eggers was fined \$500 for allowing the dog to run at large.

Akita: Two fatalities occurring in 1991 and 1993 were initially excluded because they were reportedly inflicted by guard dogs. This has been disputed. Whether these attacks are included or excluded makes little difference to the overall statistical patterns shown on this chart.

Australian shepherd mix: Involved with golden retriever mix in July 26, 2008 fatal attack on Lorraine May, 74, of Titusville, Florida.

Beagle: The fatality was a strangulation caused by tugging on a leash which was around a child's neck.

Border collie: Involved in 4-dog attack. The other dogs were two pit bulls and a mastiff.

Boxer: Fatal attack on 3-week-old infant also involved a Rottweiler.

Bull mastiff/Presa Canario: A 13-day-old child was killed in Houston on September 3, 2011 by a dog described by sheriff's department and animal control first responders as a pit bull, but later reported by some media as a Lab mix. Harris County Veterinary Services eventually identified the dog as a Presa Canario.

Cane Corso/pit bull: The dog who killed Jayelin Graham, 4, in Brooklyn on 5/27/11 was reported by some sources as a Cane Corso and by others as a pit bull. A pit bull was also found at the scene. A *New York Daily News* photo of the killer dog showed both Cane Corso and pit bull characteristics.

Cavalier King Charles spaniel: Gary Abbuhl, 65, suffered fractured femur & other injuries on March 5, 2009 in Boulder, Colorado after dog belonging to Kelly Engholt, 31, ran into his bicycle.

Dachshund: Julia Beck, 87, of Fort Wayne, died 5/15/05, two weeks after attack by dachshund & Lab at home she shared with Michael T. Kitchen, 48, and Linda A. Kitchen, 57. Linda Floyd, 56, a diabetic, lost toe to dachshund who gnawed it off in her sleep 6/30/08.

Doberman: At least two Dobermans were among 16 dogs who are believed to have killed Sherry Schweder, 65, and her husband Luther Schweder, on August 15, 2009 in Lexington, Georgia.

Chihuahua: Dog on retractable leash leaped up and bit the lip of a six-year-old who was riding past on a bicycle. The bicycle's momentum and restraint on the dog apparently increased the severity of the injury (8-12-08, Springfield Township, Indiana.)

Coonhound: Victim Kenneth D. Bock died in early 2010 from *Capnocytophaga canimorsus sepsis* infection.

East Highland terrier: Victim, age 75, died of heart attack.

German shepherd: Four disfiguring attacks on four different victims were inflicted by the same German shepherd between May 2000 and October 2009. The dog's keeper, Gary McKeown, 55 of Plymouth, Pennsylvania, was sentenced to two years on probation plus 100 hours of community service, and was fined \$2,244 in connection with the fourth attack. The dog was euthanized.

German shepherd mix: One fatality victim, age 83, was apparently killed by an overly rowdy greeting. The victim was knocked down and suffered multiple broken bones, but was not bitten. The dog had bitten a person on a previous occasion. In that case, the skin was not broken. Another 83-year-old victim was killed by either a German shepherd/Labrador mix or a pit bull terrier, but it was not clear whether both dogs attacked her, or just one of them. An 18-day-old child was killed in an attack also involving a pit bull terrier/golden Lab mix. Mail carrier Robert Rochester, 55, of New Castle, Delaware, died on October 17, 2012 from a heart attack five days after receiving hospital treatment for multiple bites inflicted by a German shepherd who was shot at the scene by police. The death was eventually found to have resulted from the dog attack.

German shepherd/husky mix: Neighbors identified the "German shepherd and husky mix" who killed Kyle Holland, 5, in Lincoln Park, Michigan, on July 12, 2010 (with a Lab mix) as a wolf hybrid.

Golden retriever: One dog responsible for an attack was rabid. Another accidentally strangled Kaitlyn Hassard, 6, of Manorville, Long Island, on 1/24/06, by tugging at her scarf.

Golden retriever mix: Involved with Australian shepherd mix in July 26, 2008 fatal attack on Lorraine May, 74, of Titusville, Florida.

Jack Russell terrier: Patricia Schneider, 50, of Discovery Bay, Calif., whose spleen had been removed, died in 2/98 of infection, 3 days after receiving infected bite on lip at home of Diane Gardner and Elaine Goodney. Jack Russell chewed off gangrenous toe of Jerry Douthett, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, in August 2010.

Labrador: Adult victim was attacked in her home by as many as 23 dogs owned by daughter. The Lab who severely mauled Jasmine Charboneau, 2, on 7/29/04 in Devils Lake, ND, proved to be rabid.

Labrador mix: Reports varied as to whether one case was severe enough to include.

Mastiff: One mastiff attack also involved an attacking pit bull terrier.

Mini-pinscher: One miniature pinscher apparently joined two pit bull terriers in attacking a child. The dog has also been identified in some accounts as a Doberman. Either way, this isolated event is not of statistical significance relative to the larger patterns of dog attacks.

Old English sheep dog: Gertrude Monroe, 87, mother of Kathryn Schwarb of Birmingham, Michigan, on December 19, 1984 tripped over King Boots, 8, an award-winning show dog belonging to Schwarb, and was severely bitten. Whether Monroe died of the bites, the fall, or a heart attack or stroke preceding the fall was not clearly established. King Boots was defanged and castrated, by judicial order, as this was the second biting incident involving him.

Pit bull: Two cases have involved dogs who assisted in killings carried out by a human, and may have inflicted the fatal injuries. Another case was a 6-year-old girl who was caught and strangled by a pit bull's chain. An 83-year-old victim was killed by either a German shepherd/Labrador mix or a pit bull, but it was not clear whether both dogs attacked her, or just one of them. One case involved a woman who was apparently killed by two pit bulls and one Rottweiler. A month-old baby girl was smothered in May 2005 in Lockland, Ohio, when a pit bull lay down on top of her. **Rashawn Thompson**, 18, was mauled on

4/25/07 by 13 dogs, including one pit bull and 12 of unidentifiable mix. **Amber Strode**, 22, of Springfield, Illinois, was found dismembered by pit bulls in her home on January 28, 2008. Coroner Susan Boone ruled that Strode had died of a cocaine overdose before the pit bulls attacked her. Boone later resigned for allegedly falsifying evidence in that and several other cases. **Leanne Bechtel** was convicted on October 26, 2012 of killing **Autumn Franks**, 3, on April 3, 2008, in Lakewood, Washington. Bechtel contended that Franks suffered multiple skull fractures when knocked off a couch by a pit bull. However, Franks had suffered earlier injuries, including a prior skull fracture, indicative of human-inflicted abuse. The Franks case is accordingly not included in the dog attack data. As many as 27 pit bull puppies in August 2008 used terminal cancer patient **Michael Warner**, 55, "as a food source," according to Pierce County sheriff's spokesman Ed Troyer. Warner died from his injuries. **Louanne Okapal**, 55, of Sauk County, Wisconsin, suffered severe facial injuries on February 14, 2009 when a pit bull attacked a horse she was saddling and the horse kicked her in the face. A woman who was not named by police was killed on June 4, 2009 in Hayward, California, when a leashed pit bull ran after his owner, who had bicycled across railway tracks in front of an oncoming train, and dragged the woman in front of the train. The pit bull was also killed. This chart formerly included a stat line separate from pit bulls for "American bulldogs." That line recorded an attack on September 13, 2007 in Livingston County, Michigan, by five dogs described by Livingston County animal control director Anne Burns as resembling an "English bulldog on stilts." Photos subsequently established that these dogs were in fact pit bull terriers. They killed two adults. **Robert J. Klatch**, 83, of Port St. Lucie, Florida, was injured by a pit bull who attacked his shih tsu on February 11, 2009. Klatch died of his injuries and other deteriorating health conditions apparently aggravated by the dog attack on April 21, 2009. Animal control officer **Teresa Foss**, 48, of Plainfield, Connecticut, died on October 8, 2009, from head injuries suffered when a pit bull she had been called to apprehend apparently knocked her down. **Timothy Niemeyer**, 56, of Indianapolis, suffered a fatal heart attack on October 10, 2009 when attacked by a pit bull; he died on October 14. **Ethel Baker Horton**, 65, of Lee County, Wisconsin, died of a heart attack on March 4, 2010 while intervening in an attack on her husband, Jerry Horton, 71. Portland, Oregon police officer **Stephen Gandy**, 33, suffered a life-threatening blood infection from a bite by a pit bull on April 12, 2010. **Miracle Parham**, 14, of Henry County, Georgia, was killed by a car on October 5, 2010 while trying to escape from a pit bull who rushed her at her school bus stop. **Christina Casey**, 53, was killed on November 2, 2010 in her yard in Moreno Valley, California, by two dogs who were initially identified as pit bulls, but were later mentioned in various reports as mixes of pit bull & Akita and/or pit bull & Weimaraner and/or pit bull, Wainmaraner, and Labrador retriever. The one consistent aspect of the description was that the dogs were at least part pit bull & of pit bull configuration. **Richard Martratt**, 64, died from a heart attack on November 25, 2010, after stabbing one of two pit bulls who had knocked down Joan Hardin, 78. Alan Hardin 50, was bitten in the same incident. A fatality not included in the numbers was **Anna Smith Brown**, 68, of Wilmington, North Carolina, who was killed in a car crash on December 5, 2010 while trying to rush her 20-month-old granddaughter to a hospital after the granddaughter suffered a facially disfiguring bite from a pit bull. **Cary Grant**, 56, died of a heart attack in Sullivan, Ohio, on April 17, 2011, soon after a pit bull attack which appeared to be the triggering event. **Addyson Paige Camerino**, nine days old, was killed on August 30, 2011 in Bladen County, North Carolina, by at least three dogs from among a group including "a pit bull, bulldog, Alaskan malamute, German shepherd and German shepherd-bulldog mix," according to investigators. Neighbors reported that the household also included a Rottweiler. **Emako Mendoza**, 76, of San Diego, died on December 24, 2011. She had been hospitalized since losing her left arm and leg in a June 18, 2011 attack by two pit bulls. **Mable Harrison McCallister**, 84, of Cleveland, Tennessee, was mauled on the face and neck on December 18, 2011. She died on January 1, 2012. **Diane Jansen**, 59, suffered a fatal stroke when attacked by a pit bull on March 4, 2012 in Escondido, California. **Tim Thomas**, 49, of Douglas County, Georgia, on July 13, 2012 suffered a fatal heart attack while trying to stop his two pit bulls from killing a Lhasa Apso. **America Viridiana**, 4, was killed on August 23, 2012 in Tijuana, Mexico, by an

adult pit bull brought from San Diego only days earlier by her grandfather, **Godofredo Cruz Martinez**, 55. Although the attack occurred a few miles outside the U.S., it is listed because almost the entire life and acculturation of the dog were in the U.S.

Pit bull/Lab mix: One child was killed in an attack also involving a German shepherd mix. Cary Phelan, of Papillion, Nebraska, died in August 2012 from an infection transmitted by a pit bull/Lab mix.

Pit bull/Pointer mix: Was involved in attack on Iran Menses, 66, of Los Angeles, on 5/28/00, along with two pit bull terriers, but apparently did not inflict any of Menses' injuries.

Poodle: Very strange 2002 case involved prescription drug use possibly affecting dog as well as victim. A pit bull attack on a 3-year-old on December 2, 2011 in Seymour, Tennessee also involved two poodles who apparently joined in.

Rottweiler: Jonathon Chandler, 6 months, of Lancaster, Ohio, was reportedly crushed in bed by the family Rottweiler. Four other children, ages 2-11, were removed from home of Shelly Fisher; case was investigated as possible negligent homicide. Another case involved a woman who was apparently killed by two pit bulls and one Rottweiler. The May 15, 2005 death of **Neil Pera** in Wallingford, Connecticut, was attributed by the coroner to cirrhosis of the liver, but police photographs of his remains and the reports of the responding police officers indicate that innumerable bites were involved, apparently as Pera curled into a fetal position to avoid further injury. He died afterward, stretched out on his badly bitten back. **Joe Mortensen**, 22, of Dix Hills, N.Y., was mauled by two Rottweilers belonging to James Mazzone, 44, in June 2007, when the Rottweilers allegedly attacked his pit bull mix. A man fleeing an attack by two Rottweilers was critically injured by a car on September 20, 2009 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Mail carrier **Hao Yun "Eddie" Lin** of Oceanside, California, suffered a fatal head injury in a fall while trying to evade a lunging Rottweiler on May 25, 2010. **Michael Winter**, 30, of Henrietta Township, Lorain County, Ohio, was killed on June 15, 2010 by a reportedly Rottweiler-led pack also including five bull mastiffs and three pit bull/boxer mixes.

Schnauzer: A schnauzer joined a pit bull in fatally injuring Mike Rocha Gomez, 86, on October 14, 2005 in West Covina, California.

Unidentified: The death of Nicholas Benjamin Loris, 6, of Davidson County, North Carolina, on February 21, 1987, was belatedly recognized by the county medical examiner as having been caused by an attack by an unknown dog in January 2012. Keith Trout, 60, of York, Pennsylvania, died on November 23, 2011 from a septic dog bite, apparently inflicted by one of his own dogs. No breed information was immediately available about the dogs. This attack will be classified by breed if & when details become available.

West Highland terrier: Rose Kazarian, 75, suffered a fatal heart attack after a bite by a leashed West Highland terrier while visiting her husband's grave at the Hope Cemetery in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Wolf hybrid: One adult fatality was a small woman who was defending two children. The other was a small woman, 61, who was apparently defending her dog. In that instance, the wolf hybrid was identified as being a wolf hybrid/German shepherd cross, with the German shepherd configuration dominant. Some experts are skeptical that the animal had any wolf ancestry at all.

Analysis

The tallies of attacks, attacks on children, attacks on adults, fatalities, and maimings on the above data sheet must be evaluated in three different contexts. The first pertains to breed-specific characteristic behavior, the second to bite frequency as opposed to the frequency of severe injuries, and the third to degree of relative risk.

Of the breeds most often involved in incidents of sufficient severity to be listed, pit bull terriers and their close mixes make up only about 3.3% of the total U.S. dog population, according to my frequent surveys of regionally balanced samples of classified ads of dogs for sale, but they constitute 29% of the dog population in U.S. animal shelters at any given time, according to my 2011 single-day shelter inventory survey, which followed up similar surveys producing similar results done in 2004, 2008, and 2010.

Pit bulls are noteworthy on the chart above for attacking adults almost as frequently as children. This is a very rare pattern, also seen in the bull mastiff/Presa Canario line. Children are normally at greatest risk from dog bite because they play with dogs more often, have less experience in reading dog behavior, are more likely to engage in activity that alarms or stimulates a dog, and are less able to defend themselves when a dog becomes aggressive. Pit bulls and the bull mastiff/Presa Canario dog category (whose ancestry partially overlaps pit bull ancestry) seem to differ behaviorally from other dogs in having far less inhibition about attacking people who are larger than they are. They are also notorious for attacking seemingly without warning, a tendency exacerbated by the custom of docking pit bulls' tails so that warning signals are not easily recognized. Thus the adult victim of a pit bull attack may have had little or no opportunity to read the warning signals that would avert an attack from any other dog.

Rottweilers by contrast show a fairly normal child/adult attack ratio. They seem to show up disproportionately often in the mauling, killing, and maiming statistics simply because they are both quite popular and very powerful, capable of doing a great deal of damage in cases where bites by other breeds might be relatively harmless.

Wolf hybrids, German shepherds, and huskies are at the extreme opposite end of the scale, almost never inflicting severe injury on adults—but it would be a huge mistake to assume that these seemingly similar patterns reflect similar behavior. They do not. According to an analysis by the late Robert Lewis Plumb, done at the peak of wolf hybrid popularity in the mid-1990s, at a time when German shepherds were also much more popular than today, German shepherds and German shepherd mixes in which the German shepherd line predominates together amounted to 16% of the entire U.S. and Canadian dog population, according to the data Plumb was able to assemble about breed-specific licensing, or just about nine million total dogs. There were by contrast only about 300,000 recognized wolf hybrids: about one for every 30 German shepherds. Relative to their overall numbers, wolf hybrids were accordingly 60 times more likely to kill or maim a child than a German shepherd—and that was before even beginning to consider the critical behavioral distinctions.

German shepherds are herding dogs, bred for generations to guide and protect

sheep. In modern society, they are among the dogs of choice for families with small children, because of their extremely strong protective instinct. They have three distinctively different kinds of bite: the guiding nip, which is gentle and does not break the skin; the grab-and-drag, to pull a puppy or lamb or child away from danger, which is as gentle as emergency circumstances allow; and the reactive bite, usually in defense of territory, a child, or someone else the dog is inclined to guard. The reactive bite usually comes only after many warning barks, growls, and other exhibitions intended to avert a conflict. When it does come, it is typically accompanied by a frontal leap for the wrist or throat.

Because German shepherds often use the guiding nip and the grab-and-drag with children, who sometimes misread the dogs' intentions and pull away in panic, they are involved in biting incidents at almost twice the rate that their numbers alone would predict: approximately 28% of all bite cases, according to a recent five-year compilation of Minneapolis animal control data. Yet none of the Minneapolis bites by German shepherds involved a serious injury: hurting someone is almost never the dogs' intent.

In the German shepherd mauling, killing, and maiming cases I have recorded, there have almost always been circumstances of duress: the dog was deranged from being kept alone on a chain for prolonged periods without human contact, was starving, was otherwise severely abused, was protecting puppies, or was part of a pack including other dangerous dogs. None of the German shepherd attacks have involved predatory behavior on the part of an otherwise healthy dog.

Every one of the wolf hybrid attacks, however, seems to have been predatory. Only four of the fatality victims were older than age seven, and all three were of small stature. The first adult fatality was killed in the presence of her two young sons, whom she was apparently trying to protect. The second was killed while apparently trying to protect her dog. Most of the victims were killed very quickly. Some never knew the wolf hybrid was present. Some may never have known what hit them. Some were killed right in front of parents, who had no time to react.

Unlike German shepherds, wolf hybrids are usually kept well apart from children, and from any people other than their owners. Yet they have still found more opportunity to kill and maim than members of any other breeds except pit bull terriers and Rottweilers, each of whom may outnumber wolf hybrids by about 10 to 1.

Huskies appear to be a special case, in that even though they are common in the U.S., the life-threatening attacks involving them have virtually all occurred in Alaska, the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, Labrador, and the northernmost parts of Quebec. In these regions, huskies are frequently kept in packs, in semi-natural conditions, and in some cases are even allowed to spend summers without regular human supervision. Thus many of the husky attack cases might be viewed more as attacks by feral animals, even though they technically qualified for this log because they were identified as owned and trained animals, who were supposed to know that they were not to attack.

Akitas, Malamutes, and Samoyeds have a similar attack pattern, but while these are also “northern breeds” commonly used to pull sleds, most of the attacks by Akitas, Malamutes, and Samoyeds have occurred in ordinary home situations. Cumulatively, the northern breeds appear to have an attack pattern resembling that of wolf hybrids more than that of most other dogs—which might merely point toward the numbers of wolf hybrids who are illegally kept under the pretense that they are various of the northern breeds.

Chows, apparently an ancient cross of Arctic dogs with dogs of molosser lineage, exhibit an attack pattern comparable to that of the northern breeds.

What all this may mean relative to legislation is problematic. Historically, breed-specific legislation has proved very difficult to enforce because of the problems inherent in defining animals for whom there may be no breed standards, or conflicting standards. Both pit bull terriers and wolf hybrids tend to elude easy legal definition; neither can they be recognized by genetic testing.

The traditional approach to dangerous dog legislation is to allow “one free bite,” at which point the owner is warned. On second bite, the dog is killed. The traditional approach, however, patently does not apply in addressing the threats from pit bull terriers, Rottweilers, and wolf hybrids. In more than two-thirds of the cases I have logged, the life-threatening or fatal attack was apparently the first known dangerous behavior by the animal in question. Children and elderly people were almost always the victims.

Any law strong enough and directed enough to prevent the majority of life-threatening dog attacks must discriminate heavily against pit bulls, Rottweilers, wolf hybrids, and perhaps Akitas and chows, who are not common breeds but do seem to be involved in disproportionate numbers of life-threatening attacks. Such discrimination will never be popular with the owners of these breeds, especially those who believe their dogs are neither dangerous nor likely to turn dangerous without strong provocation. Neither will breed discrimination ever be acceptable to those who hold out for an interpretation of animal rights philosophy which holds that all breeds are created equal. One might hope that educating the public against the acquisition of dangerous dogs would help; but the very traits that make certain breeds dangerous also appeal to a certain class of dog owner. Thus publicizing their potentially hazardous nature has tended to increase these breeds’ popularity.

Meanwhile, because the humane community has demonstrated a profound unwillingness to recognize, accept, and respond to the need for some sort of strong breed-specific regulation to deal with pit bulls and Rottweilers, the insurance industry is doing the regulating instead, by means which include refusing to insure new shelters which accept and place pit bulls. That means a mandatory death sentence for most pit bulls, regardless of why they come to shelters.

This is not a problem for older shelters, which have long established insurer

relationships, but it is a hell of a problem for organizations without long histories of successful and mostly accident-free adoption, predating the present abundance of pit bulls and Rottweilers in the shelter dog population.

Individual dog owners are also getting clobbered, either with liability premiums so high that no one can afford to keep pit bulls or Rottweilers, or by inability to find an insurer willing to cover anyone who has such a dog--or any other dog breed with a bad reputation, whether or not the reputation is deserved. (Compare attacks by pit bulls with attacks by Dobermans on the chart above.) This in turn means more pit bulls, Rottweilers, et al being surrendered to shelters, when their people cannot find rental accommodations or even buy a house because of their inability to obtain liability insurance.

The humane community does not try to encourage the adoption of pumas in the same manner that we encourage the adoption of felis catus, because even though a puma can also be box-trained and otherwise exhibits much the same indoor behavior, it is clearly understood that accidents with a puma are frequently fatal.

For the same reason, it is sheer foolishness to encourage people to regard pit bull terriers and Rottweilers as just dogs like any other, no matter how much they may behave like other dogs under ordinary circumstances.

Temperament is not the issue, nor is it even relevant. What is relevant is actuarial risk. If almost any other dog has a bad moment, someone may get bitten, but will not be maimed for life or killed, and the actuarial risk is accordingly reasonable. If a pit bull terrier or a Rottweiler has a bad moment, often someone is maimed or killed--and that has now created off-the-chart actuarial risk, for which the dogs as well as their victims are paying the price.

Pit bulls and Rottweilers are accordingly dogs who not only must be handled with special precautions, but also must be regulated with special requirements appropriate to the risk they may pose to the public and other animals, if they are to be kept at all.

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