

# Big Black Dog Syndrome



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WHOLESALE ENQUIRIES & PRODUCT INFORMATION

The Humane Society and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty in the US report that although no formal studies have been done, anecdotal information shows that big black dogs are harder to re-home. Some shelters even have a name for it, 'Big black dog syndrome', where black dogs can languish in shelters, passed over for lighter or fluffier-looking breeds and mixes.

It's been noted that even Labrador mixes have a hard time finding a forever home within shelters, even though they've long been considered great family dogs. Theories abound as to why they're passed over. Some shelter staff suggest that with big dark eyes and black fur, it's harder to see the expressions on the face of a black dog. Muzzles prematurely grey on a black dog making them appear more senior than they actually are. In the minds of would-be adopters, older equates to shorter life span and the probability of increased vet bills and care.

We wanted to find out whether this was just a phenomenon in the US or whether big black dogs were passed over in shelters locally. Karen Rakusan who has worked as a behavioural trainer in welfare organizations since 1984 and now runs a behavioural consultancy confirms that we don't look beyond colour when it comes to choosing a shelter dog. As she states, "Everyone aspires to the most attractive car, house, partner and kids, so pets are no different. I've seen the sweetest Rottie (Rottweiler) passed over for a nasty Labrador, yet people want something that looks cute or appealing and I strongly believe looks do count".

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Black dogs have been referred to negatively throughout history, often as devil dogs or the beasts at the beck and call of Beelzebub. The 'Black Dog of Bungay' refers to a historic event back in 1577 where in Bungay, a little town in Suffolk, a terrifying thunderstorm occurred with such 'darkness, rain, hail, thunder and lightning as was never seen the like.' Storms during that period were greatly feared as most houses and structures were constructed out of thatch and timber and therefore highly flammable should lightning strike. As the people knelt in fear, praying for mercy, suddenly there appeared in their midst a great black Hell Hound. It began tearing around the church, attacking many of the congregation with its cruel teeth and claws. An old verse records:

*All down the church in midst of fire, the hellish monster flew  
And, passing onward to the quire, he many people slew*

Of course, in our enlightened age we would merely say that the church was struck by lightning, but back in a more superstitious age many natural disasters were the work of the Devil.

Black dog also conjures up a negative image as it's a common euphemism for depression, a term coined by Winston Churchill. Here in Australia, we have the Black Dog Institute—a research and educational facility that deals with depression and mood disorders. Even common 'beware of the dog' signs often have big, snarling black dogs on them. On a lighter note, the song 'Black Dog' was a success for legendary English rockers, Led Zeppelin, who used it as the first track off their 1971 album, achieving chart success both here and in the US.

It's fair to say that the image of the big black dog has taken a battering over the years in movies and books like *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Omen*, Stephen King's *Cujo* and most recently the dogs that appear in the *Harry Potter* books and movies.

Here at Urban Animal, we think big black dogs have some great qualities that people should know about so we've compiled a list.

- Standing next to a black dog will make you look slimmer.
- Black dogs are guaranteed not to clash with your furnishings.
- Black dogs can wear anything and look instantly accessorised.
- Cuddling a black dog can alert you to having a dandruff problem.
- Black dogs keep you warmer in winter.
- Black dogs give you a more formal look but never appear ostentatious.
- Black dogs don't shed if you have black carpeting.
- If you're colour blind, black dogs, unlike red dogs, are visible on green grass.
- A black dog is great for security. At night burglars can't see them and trip over them.
- A black dog day is a good day. How can it be depressing with a wet nose and wagging tail?
- Unlike black cats, black dogs are considered a sign of good luck, especially if you own one.
- Once you go black you can never go back.

# Warm Wishes for Sydney's Shelters

A Community Announcement from Urban Animal



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As Old Man Winter gets his icy paws on us, we're wanting to remind readers that shelters throughout Sydney need warm blankets, bedding and towels to keep those awaiting homes warm and comfy. There was an organization called Knitted With Love that had volunteers who knitted blankets for rescue, however despite our trying to find them, it would seem they no longer exist.

We know that many of our readers don't have the luxury of time to knit blankets and throws but we encourage you all to look towards the back of your linen cupboards where forgotten treasures could be found and put to good use this winter. A quick trip into stores like Lincraft and Spotlight can also unearth some cheap and cheerful fleece pieces that are machine washable and dry quickly. A practical donation can improve the comfort of animals awaiting fur-ever homes within our shelters.



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