

True Tales of Canine CSI

Investigators turn to dog DNA to convict criminals and acquit the innocent.

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How do you prove a stolen dog is actually yours when it has no microchip, tattoo, or other identifying marks? DNA from the dogs belongings or relatives can make the ID. In a recent case in Japan, DNA from puppies suspected of being stolen was compared with the parents of the stolen pups. The DNA matched, and the dognapper confessed.

How do you confirm that degraded dog remains might be your long-lost dog? Once again, DNA can be compared post-mortem to that of a dogs toys, brushes, or even canine relatives to make a match, offering grieving owners some closure. How do you prove somebody attacked a dog when the victim can't speak? That was the case of a man accused of stabbing his dog. The owner denied the bloody knife found in his home was involved, but DNA from the blood matched that of the dead dog. In other cases, DNA has been collected from the road surface when a person has been accused of dragging a dog behind a car.

Busted! Just as in criminal cases involving people, canine DNA can be used to identify a dog as a perpetrator. How do you confirm a dog was involved in a dog attack when it has left the scene? In a case in which two dogs attacked two women, killing one, the attacking dogs ran off. Police officers killed one dog in the area that threatened them, and positively identified it as an attacker because it had tissue from one victim in its stomach. But which of the many other loose dogs trapped by the police was involved? One resembled the description given by the surviving victim, but police needed to be positive the culprit was in custody. DNA collected from the victims clothing came from a total of four dogs: the victims two pets (which were not involved in the attack), the dog police had already killed, and the dog under suspicion.

DNA has also been used to exonerate a dog. One of three large-breed dogs attacked a 9-year-old boy, but because nobody was sure which dog did it, authorities were considering destroying all three. DNA from saliva on the boys torn clothing matched that of one of the dogs, confirming the other two were not involved and so saving their lives. Loose dogs often cause property damage, attacking livestock, damaging belongings, or causing car accidents. DNA from blood, saliva, or hair left on the property ranging from an animal carcass to a car bumper can be used to confirm a dogs culpability. Sometimes the DNA evidence comes from another species, such as the case of a dog suspected of attacking a miniature horse. Swabs from the rim of the dogs drinking bowl yielded DNA from the horse, probably from blood that was carried home in and around the dogs mouth.