

PAW
PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING
REPORT
2016

ISSUES IN FOCUS



**THE ESSENTIAL
INSIGHT INTO
THE WELLBEING
OF UK PETS**



PDSA's history dates back to 1917.

Over the last century, we've helped over 20 million companion animals and their owners by providing free veterinary care for those who need it the most. Today, this is still the heart of our work; treating people's beloved pets through our UK-wide network of 51 Pet Hospitals and 380 Pet Practices. However, we're also a leading authority on pet wellbeing, and are committed to helping owners understand how to provide for the five welfare needs of their pets, and we work tirelessly to promote good pet wellbeing, both to this generation of pet owners, and to the next.

YouGov is one of the UK's leading research companies, providing accurate insights into what people are thinking and doing all over the world, all of the time.

The most quoted research agency in the UK, YouGov has an established track record of consistently accurate and high-quality survey-data, representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types.

YouGov is delighted to be involved in the sixth PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report, monitoring changes in pet welfare issues across the UK.



ISSUES IN FOCUS



Contents

- 04** *Introducing the PAW Report 2016*
- 06** *Methodology and Profiling*
- 07** *The Animal Welfare Acts*
- 08** *Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts*
- 10** *Key findings*

The Issues:

- 12** *Pre-purchase and pet ownership*
- 24** *Obesity*
- 28** *Behaviour*
- 36** *Companionship*
- 40** *Preventive health*

- 48** *Topical issues*
- 50** *The veterinary profession's top pet welfare concerns*
- 52** *Devolved areas*
- 54** *Concluding thoughts*

Introducing the PAW Report 2016



To many, they're not 'just pets', they're treasured companions, and an integral part of family life.



The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report continues to be the leading insight into pet wellbeing in the UK. Since its launch in 2011, we've surveyed over 58,000 pet owners, veterinary professionals, children and young people, giving us a thorough understanding of the key issues that continue to face our pet nation.

The PAW Report provides an in-depth analysis of current issues and encourages further collaboration to help tackle them. Joint efforts to improve pet health and wellbeing have proved to be highly successful and we've highlighted many of them throughout this Report. We also focus in more detail on the reasons behind some of the most significant issues highlighted in last year's Report, allowing us an opportunity to look at ways to tackle these issues and prompt positive behaviour change amongst pet owners to improve animal welfare.

Whilst there have been significant improvements in some areas since the first Report in 2011, many of animals still seem to be bought on a whim, without any pre-purchase research

being done. Having little or no prior knowledge about a pet's welfare needs, or the likely costs of caring for that pet over their lifetime, can have a detrimental impact on that pet's mental and physical wellbeing.

All of the issues highlighted in this year's PAW Report can in some way be linked back to that lack of knowledge.

If we can help owners to understand everything their pet will need before offering a home, and how to choose a pet from a responsible source, we should find the right pets in the right homes, and hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, a resolution of these issues.

We all know how much pets enrich our lives. You only need to read the comments from pet owners throughout this Report to see that to many, they're not 'just pets', they're treasured companions, and an integral part of family life. For some, they make a house a home, for others, they give a reason to get up in the morning. In return we should be doing everything we can to keep them happy and healthy, by protecting and providing for both their physical and mental wellbeing. For everything they give to us, we at least owe them this.

Methodology and Profiling

The PAW Report continues to be the largest, most comprehensive and robust insight into the state of our pet nation.

The PAW Report is based on the five welfare needs companion animals require to be met to be healthy and happy, as detailed in the Animal Welfare Acts. This year we are focusing on several key issues:

- **Pre-purchase and pet ownership**
- **Obesity**
- **Behaviour**
- **Companionship**
- **Health.**

We surveyed

4,252
pet owners

1,666
dog owners

2,246
cat owners

340
rabbit owners

759
veterinary professionals

Pet owners survey method:

We worked with YouGov to conduct public opinion research using their panel methodology. The total sample size was 4,252 dog, cat and rabbit owners aged 18+ who live in the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 21 and 30 June 2016. The survey was carried out online by YouGov and was also statistically analysed by them.¹ The figures were weighted to be representative of the population by pet species (cat, dog or rabbit owners) and the owner's gender, age and region.

As part of the survey owners left comments in response to some of the questions. We have added some of these comments in quotation marks through this report.

Vet professionals survey method:

A survey directed towards veterinary professionals was distributed through an open link and completed by anyone who was interested in taking part. The sample size was 701 veterinary professionals who had hands on experience.² Fieldwork was undertaken between 6 June and 10 July 2016 and the data collected was analysed statistically by YouGov.

The UK pet population

51%
of UK households own a pet

25%

25% of homes in the UK have a dog with an estimated population of **9.4m dogs**

24%

24% of homes in the UK have a cat with an estimated population of **11m cats**

3%

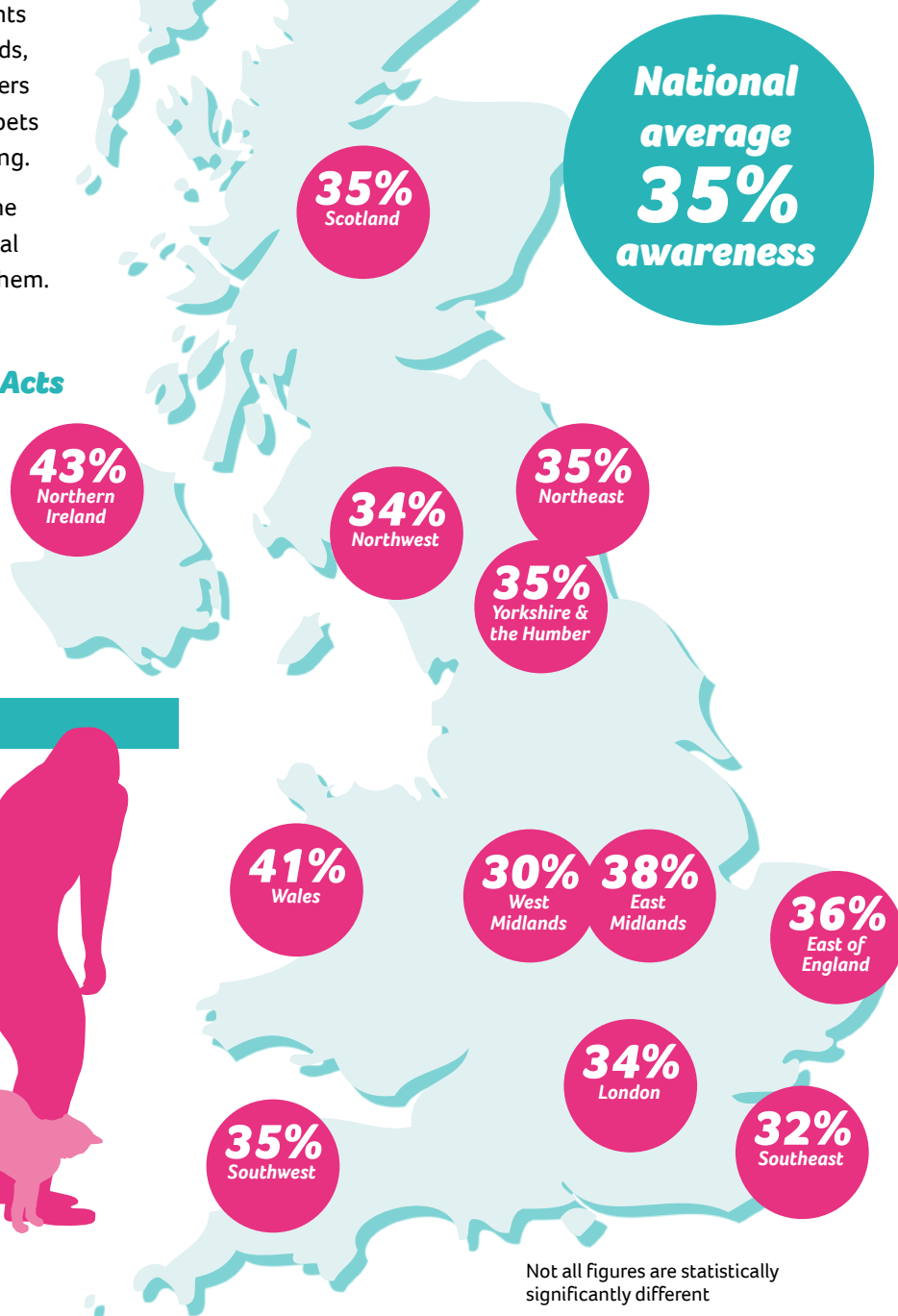
3% of homes in the UK have a rabbit with an estimated population of **1.5m rabbits**

The Animal Welfare Acts

The Animal Welfare Acts (AWAs)³ introduced a legal 'duty of care' for all pet owners to meet the welfare needs of their pets. These requirements were split into five areas, the five welfare needs, which act as a simple framework to help owners meet their pets' needs and ensure that their pets experience good physical and mental wellbeing.

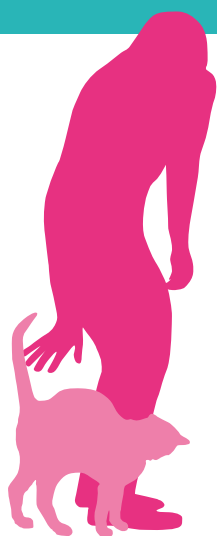
Each year we measure whether owners and the veterinary profession have heard of the Animal Welfare Acts and how familiar they are with them.

Regional breakdown: Pet owners familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts



Pet owners

There's been a slight increase in the number of pet owners familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts and the five welfare needs, with 35% reporting they are familiar with them, compared to 31% in 2015. But with 65% of pet owners unfamiliar with the Animal Welfare Acts, and 26% reporting they haven't even heard of them, there's still a long way to go to raise awareness and understanding of this important legal framework.



The five welfare needs

- Environment**
 the need for a suitable environment
- Diet**
 the need for a suitable diet
- Behaviour**
 the need to be able to express normal behaviour
- Companionship**
 the need to live with, or apart from, other animals
- Health**
 the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts

In this year’s report we’ve looked deeper into the connection between whether owners had heard of the AWAs, how well informed they felt about the five welfare needs, and whether they had provided preventive healthcare for their pet.

Our data shows a clear association between owners having heard about the Animal Welfare Acts or feeling informed about the five welfare needs and providing preventive healthcare to their pets.

Owners who have not heard of their responsibilities under the AWAs were significantly less likely to have provided preventive healthcare to their pet than those who have heard of it.

Percentage of clients who have provided preventive healthcare		
	Heard of AWAs	Not heard of AWAs
Vaccinated – primary course	85%	79%
Vaccinated – regular boosters	69%	61%
Microchipped	78%	71%
Insured	47%	37%
Wormed	81%	74%
Currently registered with a vet	87%	80%
No healthcare	1%	3%

Our data also shows that owners who feel informed about each of the five welfare needs are significantly more likely to provide preventive healthcare to their pets than owners who do not feel informed about the welfare needs.

This data does not show cause and effect and more research would be needed to determine this.

Nevertheless the association revealed is very clear and suggests that informing owners about the five welfare needs framework can help to improve the healthcare provision for pets.



Who should be educating pet owners about the concept of the five welfare needs?

The veterinary profession told us:

95%

Practising vets

91%

Practising registered vet nurses

91%

Animal charities

84%

Media

84%

Pet shops/breeders

90% of vet professionals believe that advice around the five welfare needs should be given by pet shops during the sale of pets, and 94% believe that learning about the five welfare needs should be a compulsory part of the curriculum taught in UK schools.



“The five welfare needs offer a great umbrella-guide to understanding your legal responsibilities as a pet owner, so it’s concerning that, year on year, awareness of the welfare needs is consistently low.

A better understanding of your pet’s welfare needs, which includes providing preventive healthcare, is more likely to ensure your pet is as healthy and happy as possible and to mitigate the upset and potential need for emergency veterinary care.

If you have a pet, or are thinking about getting one, we’d encourage owners to make use of their local veterinary practice as the go-to place for the most up-to-date information and tailored advice on animal health and welfare.”

Gudrun Ravetz, President of the British Veterinary Association (BVA).

Key findings

This year, the PAW Report focuses in more detail on some of the core issues facing pets in the UK today.

Ownership



35%

Familiarity with responsibilities as detailed in the Animal Welfare Acts has increased slightly to 35% from 31% in 2015.

98%

The vast majority of owners still incorrectly estimate the lifetime costs of pet ownership.

5%

Over 5.2 million owners did no research at all before choosing their pet and only 5% of owners went to a vet for advice.

22%

22% of owners say owning a pet is harder work than they thought and 30% of these state that it's because it's more expensive than expected.



50% of owners would consider getting a pet from an online advert on a classified website (e.g. Gumtree, Preloved, Pets4Homes).

92%

92% of dogs have been microchipped, an increase from 83% in 2015

66%

66% of dog owners indicated that there are one or more behaviours that their dog displays that they'd like to change.

22%

Over 2.0 million dogs (22%) are being left alone for 5 hours or more on a weekday.

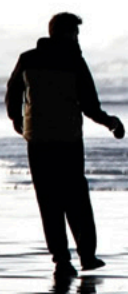
16%

16% of dogs (1.6 million) are walked less than once daily.

15%

15% of dog owners who walk their dog are scared that their dog will be attacked by another dog whilst on a walk.

Dogs





Cats

93%

93% of owned cats have been neutered, 12% of female cats have had at least one litter, and 68% of pregnancies were not planned.

63%

63% of cat owners stated one or more behaviours that they would want to change in their cat.

20%

20% of cats live indoors only and 68% of these are because their owner feels that it's unsafe outdoors.

22%

Around 2.3 million cats (21%) are living with another cat that they don't get on with.

55%

55% of cat owners don't know the current weight or body condition score of their cat and 18% admit to their cat being overweight.

25%

Compared to dogs and cats, significantly more rabbits are purchased because the children wanted a pet (rabbit owners 25%, dog and cat 13% and 12% respectively)

43%

43% of rabbit owners stated that they would like to change one or more things about their rabbit's behaviour.

52%

Rabbits are spending an average of 12 hours per day in their hutch and 52% of rabbits still live alone – equating to around 780,000 rabbits.

24%

24% of rabbits are still being fed muesli as one of their main foods.



Inappropriate diet has been identified by the veterinary profession as the number one issue that needs to be addressed in rabbits.



Rabbits

ISSUES IN FOCUS



Pre-purchase and pet ownership

5.2m

*pet owners (24%)
did no research at all
before taking on
their pet*

98%

*of pet owners
estimated less than the
actual likely lifetime
costs of their pet*

97%

*of owners believe
their pet was
the right choice
for their family*





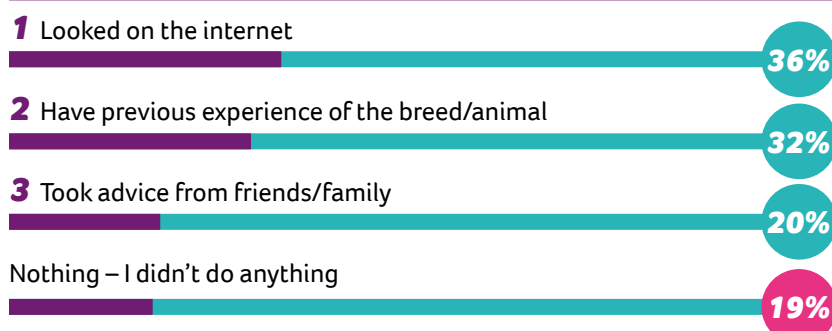
Pre-purchase research

Many of the issues facing our pet nation – and highlighted in this year's PAW Report – can be linked back to people not doing enough research before getting their pet. Getting a pet is a very exciting time, but with little or no prior knowledge about where to get a pet from responsibly, how much they will cost over their lifetime, and what their chosen pet needs, pet wellbeing is being compromised.

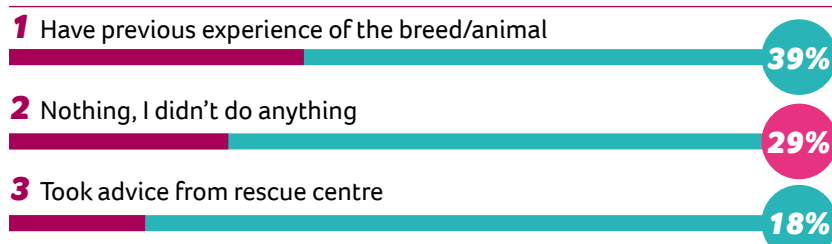
Our research has found that over 24%, some 5.2 million owners, did no research at all before taking on their pet, which could have a huge impact on their ability to provide for those animals' needs.

What research was carried out before getting a pet?

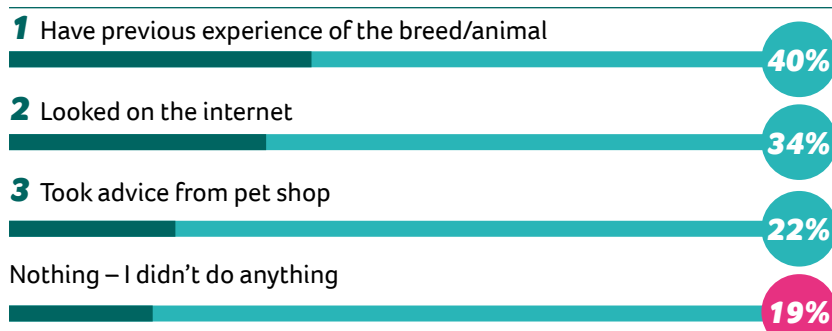
Dog owners



Cat owners



Rabbit owners



Of those pet owners who looked on the internet for advice or information, the top websites being used were:



60% of vet professionals believe that free advice in/outside a consultation with a vet or vet nurse is one of the most useful resources for clients prior to purchasing a pet.



Pre-purchase advice

Only 5% of pet owners took advice from a vet or vet nurse before taking on a pet. Two of the key issues chosen by the veterinary profession, when asked 'Which three issues would you pick to resolve tomorrow?', were lack of owner understanding of the cost of owning a pet (28%), and people purchasing pets from irresponsible sources (23%).

When asked 'which issue will have the biggest health and welfare implication in ten years time if not tackled?' 21% of vet picked 'people choosing pets from irresponsible sources' as one of their top three choices. This demonstrates a clear need for the profession to be helping pet owners with their pre-purchase choices.

Currently, vet practices offer the following pre-purchase education to prospective pet owners:

52%

Free advice in/outside consultation with a vet/vet nurse

38%

Leaflets in the practice on how to choose and buy the right pet

32%

Links to websites on how to choose and buy the right pet

30%

Advice through practice social media

24%

Part of their website is dedicated to pre-purchase information



Having the right pets in the right homes is an important starting point in ensuring that pets' welfare needs are being met. Veterinary professionals are perfectly placed to help prospective pet owners choose the most suitable pet for their lifestyle and advise on the most responsible sources to get pets from and what health screening might be needed.

Veterinary Nurses are often involved in conversations with prospective owners and are well versed at ensuring the new owners have the information they need; however, this is mostly once the pet has been purchased. Both professions need to find a way to reach out to the public to offer advice before this purchase has been made.

BVNA feels that this is an important opportunity to promote the knowledge of the Veterinary professions on the care required for different types of pets and that the public can contact the Veterinary practice for advice on prevention as well as when the pet is unwell.

Samantha Morgan, CertEd DipAVN (Surg & Med) RVN President, The British Veterinary Nursing Association.



We've developed a consultation framework for the profession to use to help guide clients in the process of taking on a new pet. Our 'Which Pet?' consultations aim to help the veterinary profession engage with and educate clients before they take on a new pet. As a result, we hope potential owners will be more likely to choose a healthy pet, suitable to their lifestyle and understand how to provide for their five welfare needs.

When asked ‘which issue will have the biggest health and welfare implication in ten years time?’ 21% of the vet profession selected ‘people choosing pets from irresponsible sources’ as one of the top three issues.








When asked to consider how long they would spend researching various purchases, most owners ranked a pet as number one, followed by a car and then a holiday. Dog owners are most likely to rank researching a pet as top – one in two dog owners have rated a pet as number one. Interestingly women are much more likely than men to rank a pet as number one; men rank a pet and a car equally overall.

Do people think there’s enough information available to help them choose a pet responsibly?




As shown in the findings opposite, this varied by species, with many people unsure. This indicates that there is still much to do to ensure information is being provided in a way suitable to all potential pet owners, in formats in which they like to receive advice and information.



In your opinion, is there enough information available to help people choose a pet responsibly?

	Yes	No	Don't know
 Dogs	52%	30%	18%
 Cats	54%	24%	22%
 Rabbits	40%	27%	33%
 Small pets	43%	27%	31%
 Non-traditional (exotic) companion animals	17%	46%	37%
 Birds	27%	34%	39%
 Fish	40%	26%	34%

What are the main reasons for people choosing to make that all-important decision and introduce a pet into the family?

	 Dog	 Cat	 Rabbit
1	They make me happy	They make me happy	They make me happy
2	For love/affection	Had one before	Had one before
3	Companionship for me	For love/affection	Children wanted a pet / For love/affection

Which breed?

Amongst dog owners, top reasons for choosing a particular breed include their temperament (45%), previous experience with the breed (27%), their size (26%) and how they look (22%).




Choosing a breed for their health (i.e. known to be a healthy breed) was stated as a reason by only 6% of owners and only 1% of owners chose a particular breed based on the recommendation of their vet practice.



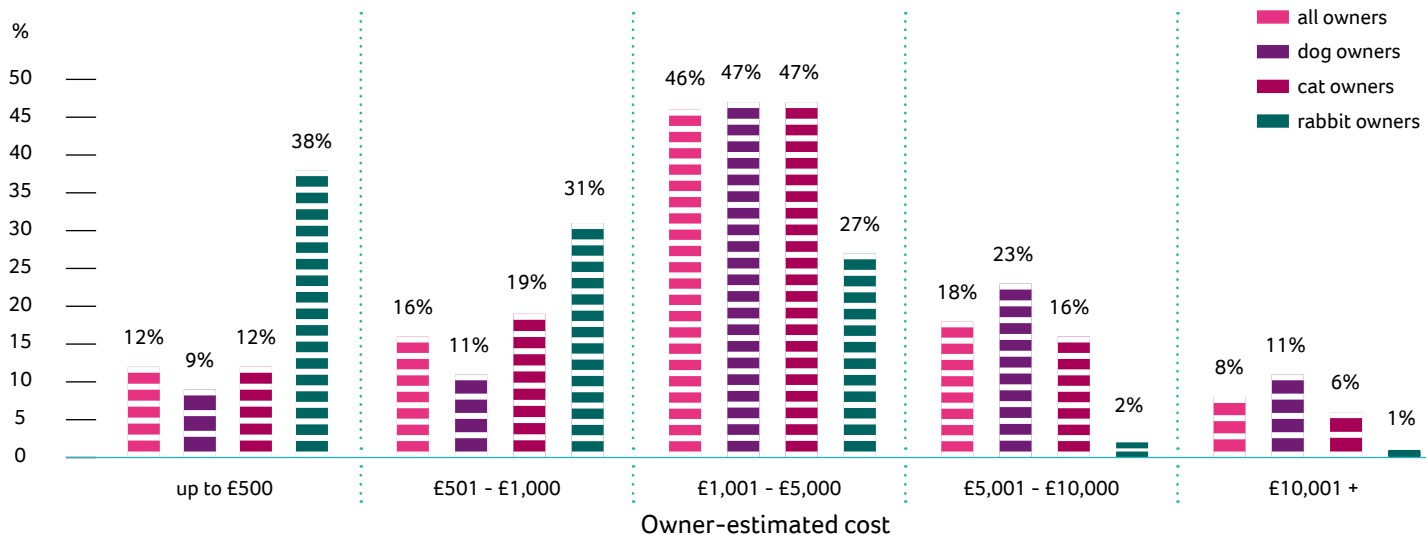
Costs of pet ownership

The vast majority of pet owners continue to underestimate the lifetime costs of their chosen pet, with 12% of all pet owners surveyed believing that their pet would only cost them **up to £500 over the pet's entire lifetime**.

33% of vet professionals stated that cost of ownership is one of the parts of pet ownership least understood by their clients.

	Actual likely lifetime cost ⁴	Owner-estimated lifetime cost
	Dog £21-33k Size of dog affects cost	97% estimated less
	Cat £17-24k	98% estimated less
	Rabbit £10-15k per rabbit	98% estimated less

How much do you think your pet will cost you during his or her lifetime?



12% OF ALL OWNERS BELIEVE THEIR PET WILL COST THEM NO MORE THAN £500 OVER THEIR LIFETIME

The vast majority of pet owners continue to underestimate the lifetime costs of their chosen pet.



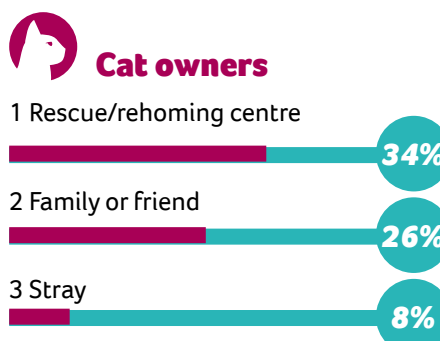
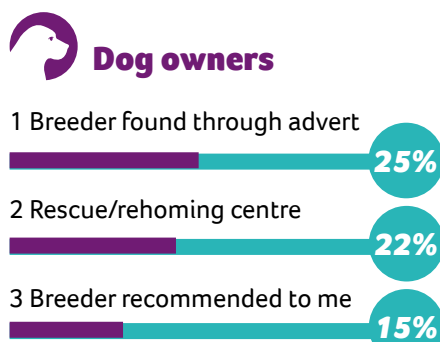
Where would owners consider getting a pet from?

Although many owners get their pets from recommended places such as reputable breeders or rehoming centres, many would still consider getting their pet from other sources.

- 50%** of owners would consider getting a pet from an online advert on a classified website (e.g. Gumtree, Preloved, Pets4Homes)
- 41%** of owners would consider getting a pet from a pet supermarket
- 37%** of owners would consider getting a pet from an advert posted on social media
- 28%** of owners would consider getting a pet that has been imported from outside the UK
- 24%** of owners would consider getting a pet from a seller who approached them
- 18%** of owners would consider getting a puppy from a puppy farm which is a decrease from 22% in 2015.

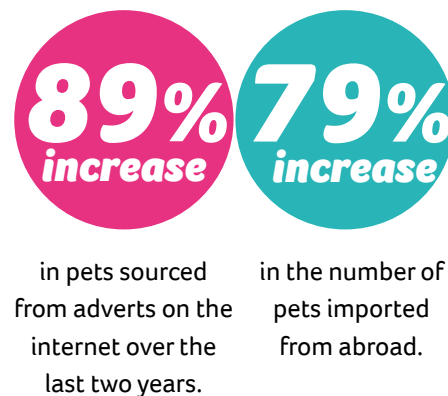


Top three places that owners got pets from



37% of owners would consider getting a pet from an advert posted on social media.

Veterinary professionals report they have seen...



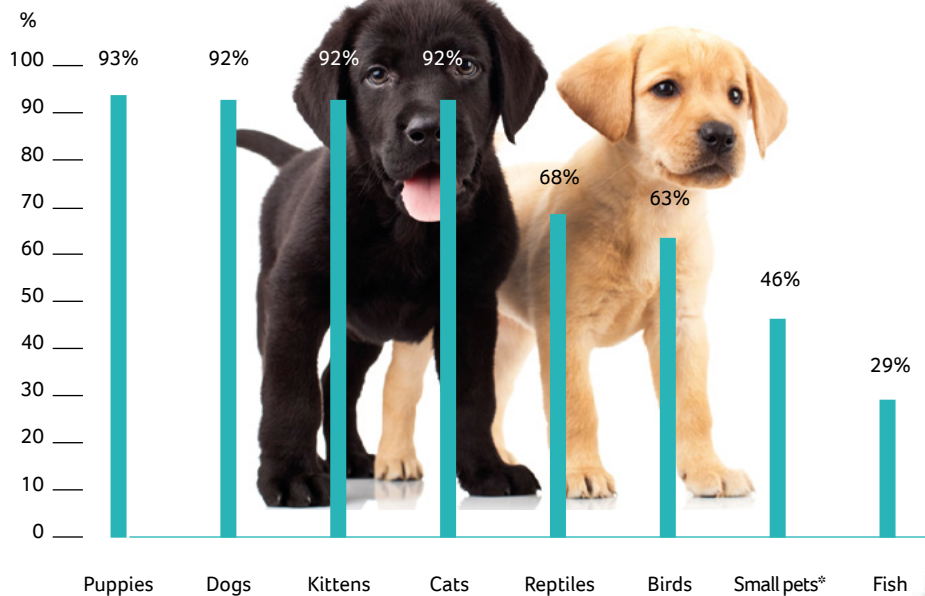
With so many pets, particularly puppies, now available to buy via online adverts, it can make it incredibly difficult to trace the origin of an animal and to determine whether they are from a reputable source. PAAG works closely with a number of online classified sites to improve the quality of their systems to filter out unscrupulous advertisements. Whilst PAAG has made a number of gains when it comes to making the internet a safer place for potential pet buyers, it is essential that consumers are vigilant. Worryingly these statistics show how open owners are to these means of finding a pet.

Paula Boyden, Chair of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG).



We asked the vet profession ...

... Which of the following should **NOT** be sold in pet shops?



... What improvements would you like to see pet shops make regarding the sale of pets?

- 93%** Species-specific advice before and during the sale of pets
- 90%** Five animal welfare needs advice given to owners
- 83%** Animal Welfare Codes of Practice discussed with potential owners
- 81%** No wild caught animals / fish available for sale
- 75%** Sources of animals published by the shop
- 67%** Only certain species available for sale

* Rodents and other small pets (e.g. mice, rabbits, guinea pigs)



Life is just nicer with a pet

Anyone who owns a pet can appreciate the value they undoubtedly bring to our lives. However, is this leading to pet owners making rash decisions about getting a pet? To help us understand this, we asked 'How else do you describe your feelings towards pet ownership?'

Owning a pet ...

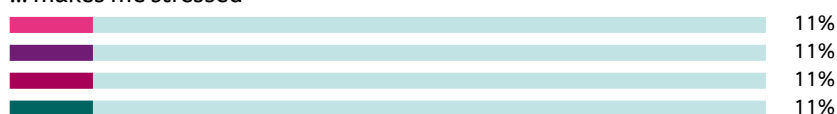
... makes me happy



... is harder work than I expected



... makes me stressed



... is more rewarding than expected



... is a privilege not a right



... improves my life



... makes me physically healthier



... makes me mentally healthier



* = statistically significantly lower than the other two species

** = statistically significantly higher than the other two species

We were keen to understand some of the reasons behind these answers, and so we dug a little deeper. We asked why owning a pet makes some people happy, and why some people found it harder work than they thought.

Top reasons why owning a pet makes owners happy

- 1 I get more companionship than expected
- 2 It motivates me to exercise more
- 3 My pet helped me through a difficult situation/time in my life
- 4 It has improved/increased family relationships
- 5 I meet more people

Some pet owners gave more specific reasons:

Animals that live with us are adopted family, not pets

He's the perfect combination of awesomeness and douchebaggery

My cats are so sweet, funny, loving, intelligent, crafty and full of personality. They just fill me with love and happiness

She has such a beautiful nature

I just love my animal family, pure & simple, and they repay me time and again



It's more expensive than I expected

Top reasons why owning a pet is harder work than owners expected?

- 1** It's more expensive than I expected
- 2** My pet has behavioural issues
- 3** My pet has health issues
- 4** My family situation has changed since I took on my pet

Some pet owners gave more specific reasons:

Holidays are more difficult

More pet-related chores than expected

Big commitment

Rabbits require a lot more space and exercise than expected

Wants too much of my time

Once again the PDSA PAW Report brings us invaluable findings that will help vets and pet owners improve animal welfare.

The benefit of pet ownership has been confirmed – our animals make us happier and healthier. However, for too many, those benefits can turn to heartache if a pet isn't chosen with care.

Abandoned pets are often the result of owners not realizing the cost or needs of their animal, and vets despair at cases where very sick animals are presented to them after being bought from disreputable breeders.

We urge owners to talk to their local vet to help find the right pet for them.

Prof Susan Dawson BVMS PhD MRCVS, President, British Small Animal Veterinary Association

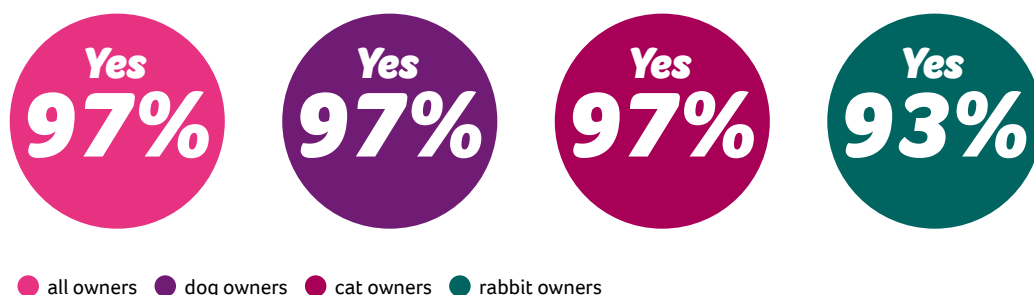


Significantly fewer rabbit owners believe their pet was the right choice for their family.



Ultimately, do people believe that their pet was the right choice for their family?
And if not, why not?

Was your pet the right choice for your family?



Significantly fewer rabbit owners believe their pet was the right choice for their family. They're also the only species where one of the reasons given for choosing a particular pet was because children wanted them. One of the key issues that the veterinary profession feels needs to be addressed in order to improve rabbits' welfare is that they are often 'forgotten about', cited as a concern by 45% of those surveyed.

When asked, 59% of veterinary professionals state they've seen an increase in people choosing an inappropriate pet for their lifestyle over the last two years.

Some owners provided additional reasons about why they don't think their pet was the right choice for their family:

'Having previously owned 6 others and loved this breed for over 40 years, she is totally different from the others – not her fault! She is neurotic, she yaps, has health probs ... but despite this, I love her; just realise daily what a HUGE mistake it was to get her from an internet ad ... a very stupid thing to do!'

'We did not know she is not happy around children that squeal'

'Too energetic'

'Very demanding breed that requires lots of exercise and attention'

'You don't expect to love them so much that you worry when they're ill or go missing for a day or two'

Despite only 6% of owners choosing their dog because it was a 'healthy breed', breed related health issues were often mentioned anecdotally in relation to the wrong choice of dog.

One of the key issues that the veterinary profession feels needs to be addressed in order to improve rabbit welfare is a complete lack of care (i.e. that they are often forgotten about)



It is like having a baby and places too many restrictions on our freedom

Work to improve owner understanding of the five welfare needs of their pets



Developed #Paws First

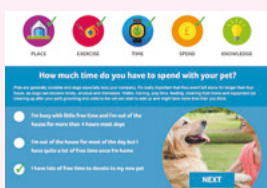


Our #PawsFirst campaign, encourages prospective pet owners to consider the full lifetime responsibility and cost of their chosen pet before getting them.

Promoted 'Get PetWise'



'Get PetWise' is an online quiz to help match an owner's circumstances with the most suitable pet for their lifestyle. www.pdsa.org.uk/getpetwise



Published content



Helpful and easy-to-understand online information and advice on how to choose a pet responsibly, explaining the five welfare needs of their chosen species.

Launched to the sector



At London Vet Show 2015 receiving widespread support from the Sector and promoted at every event attended by PDSA teams.



Generated publicity



A monthly programme of media messages aimed at ensuring that pre-purchase consideration and research into the welfare needs of the specific species is encouraged whenever we speak about pets.

Developed 'Which Pet?' consultations



We've developed pre-aquisition consultations to assist veterinary teams who wish to reach out to prospective owners before they get a pet. www.pdsa.org.uk/whichpet

Tackling pets advertised for sale online



PDSA continued to work as part of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) to encourage a number of online classified sites to improve the welfare standards of pets sold via online channels.

Raising awareness of breed related health issues



Generated high profile media coverage highlighting the health problems associated with brachycephalic breeds which owners should be aware of prior to choosing this type of pet.



Helping people find the right advice



Worked with the Dog Breeding Reform Group to raise awareness of the Puppy Contract and encourage owners to use this to guide their search for a healthy puppy from a responsible breeder.



Scratching the surface



Worked on the Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG) working party which produced a report outlining the issues around cat breeding and sale to present to the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE).

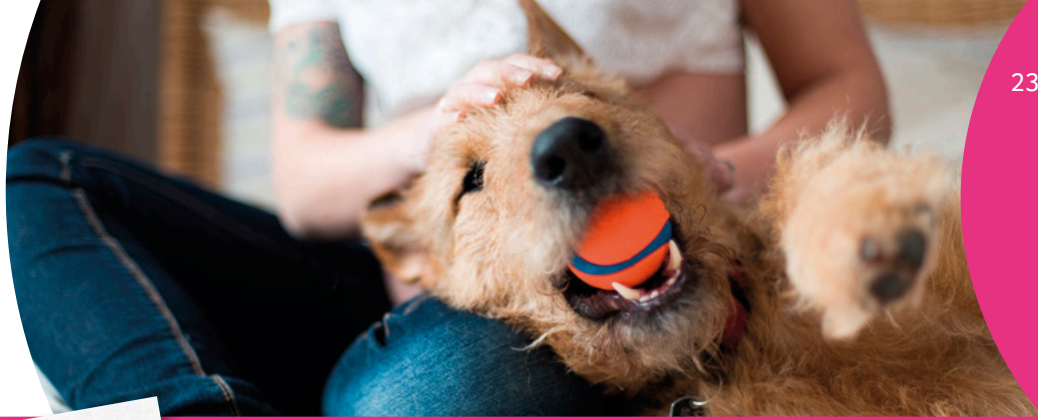


Raising awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts



Joined with other veterinary organisations to form the "Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition" to help raise awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts and mark their 10th Anniversary.





Some owners 'not ready' to have pet

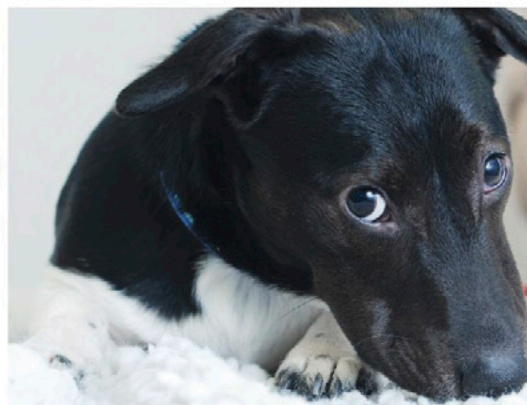
Just paws before buying an animal...



Paws for thought

New report from PDSA suggests that impulse-buying is fuelling pet welfare crisis across the UK

IN NEW RESEARCH published today by PDSA, in conjunction with YouGov, the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report highlights a pet welfare crisis caused by a lack of research by prospective owners. The study suggests more than 4.5 million owners did no research at all before purchasing a pet. PDSA Head of Pet Health and Welfare, and vet, Nicola Martin, said: 'PDSA's research shows that, as a nation, we're still in love with the idea of pet ownership. But impulse-buys and busy lifestyles mean people are totally unprepared for the realities of owning a pet, which leaves 2.7 million dogs not being exercised off the lead outside the home or garden every day. Quite simply, animals' needs are not being met. So, what can we do to address the problem? Well, for a start there's PDSA's Get PetWise quiz which offers practical information to help people understand which pet best suits them. To spread the word, PDSA has launched their #PawsFirst campaign,



encouraging people to fully consider the responsibilities of pet ownership. 'PDSA wants to turn public affection for

pets into positive action by helping them find the relevant information before making a decision,' says Nicola. So,

before buying a pet, make sure you PawsFirst. For more information visit pdsa.org.uk/petro

Anyone thinking of getting a pet wants an animal that will become a loved, well integrated family member, that enjoys a long, happy and healthy life. Many of the cases seen by practising vets and vet nurses where this ideal hasn't been met are preventable.

Vets and vet nurses are perfectly placed to offer advice to prospective owners before they acquire a pet, and veterinary practices are keen to welcome and advise prospective owners at this stage. The public perception of vet practices needs to shift; we will always be the place for skilled veterinary treatment but significant advances in pet wellbeing could be achieved if practices actively marketed themselves as a first port of call for prospective owners.

**ISSUES IN
FOCUS**

Obesity

48%

*of owners
don't know their pet's
current weight*

**OVER
4m**

*pets are fed scraps
or leftovers
as part of
their main meal*

**OVER
96%**

*of vet professionals believe
more focus should be on
preventing obesity
rather than curing it*





Over 5.9 million pets are given treats as part of their daily diet, including crisps, cake, leftovers of human food, cheese, chips and takeaways. This figure has risen from 5.6 million last year.

The ongoing issue of pet obesity ...

The pet obesity problem shows no sign of improving, with owners continuing to feed their pets inappropriate food and give daily treats. Over a quarter of dogs (26%) – are fed scraps or leftovers as part of their main meal, equating to approximately 2.4 million dogs. Whilst cats and rabbits fare slightly better, still 14% of cats (around 1.5 million) and 2% of rabbits (30,000) – are fed this inappropriate diet.

Over 5.7 million pets are given treats as part of their daily diet, including crisps, cake, leftovers of human food, cheese, chips and takeaways. This is a marginal change from 5.5 million last year.

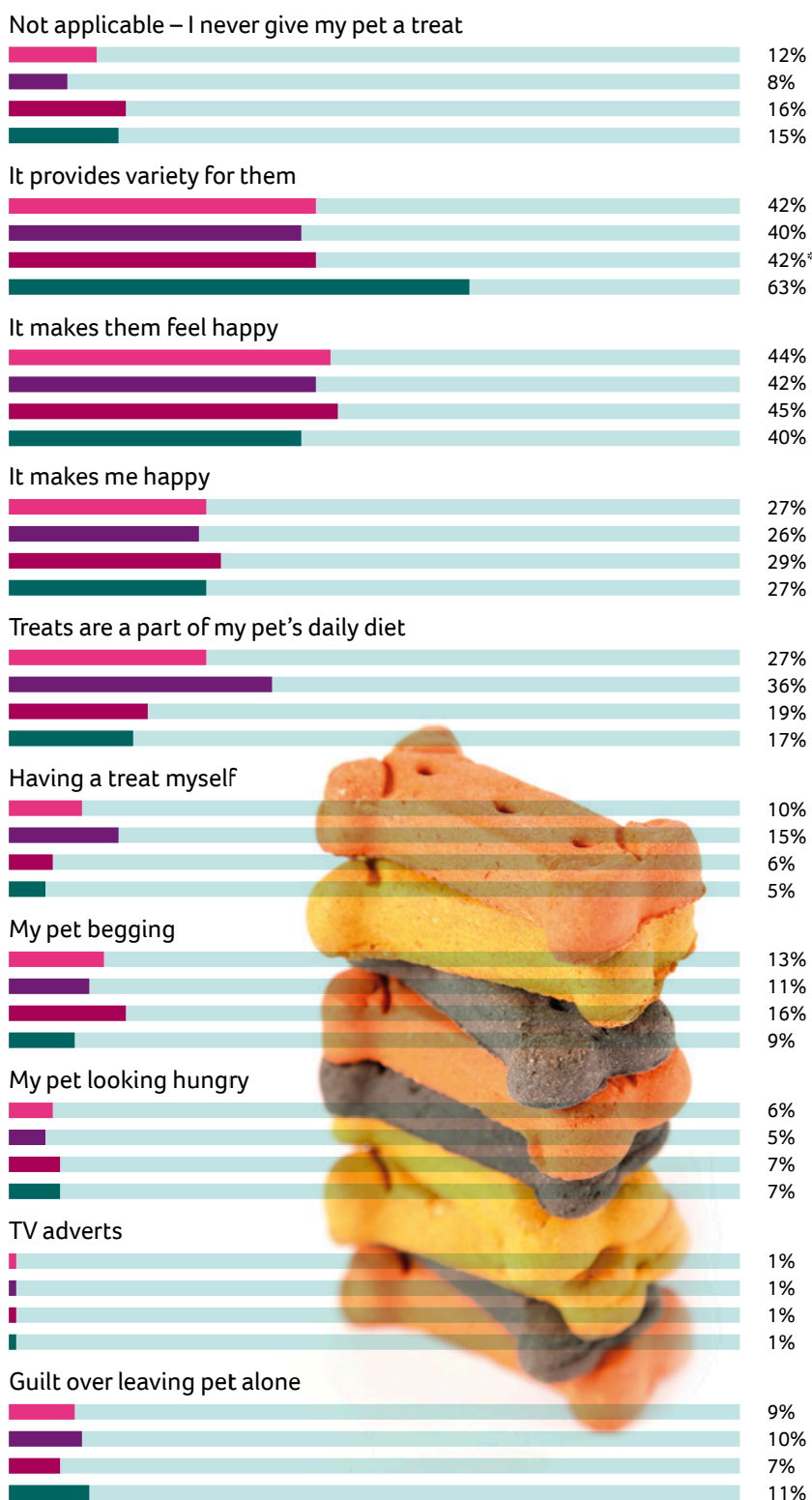
With the extra calories piling the pounds onto our pet nation, we asked why do owners still feel compelled to give their pet extra food as treats.



Why?

Motivations for owners to give their pets treats

all owners dog owners cat owners rabbit owners





With only 56% of pets that have been on a weight loss programme successfully losing weight and maintaining their desired weight, more support seems to be needed in order to help pets achieve their target weight and maintain a healthy weight long-term.

Owner understanding of ideal weights

Almost a quarter of pet owners (24%) told us that they worry about their pet being overweight; this figure is significantly higher in dog owners than in cat or rabbit owners, and is significantly lower for rabbit owners than cat owners. Only 52% of pet owners know their pet's current weight, and only 18% know their pet's body condition score (BCS). Despite this, 79% state that their pet is at its ideal weight.

When asked, 84% of veterinary professionals answered that the majority of pet owners have no understanding of what a healthy body shape looks like for their pet. 61% of vet professionals report that they discuss weight and body shape with most pet owners they see, whereas 33% report to only discuss it if the pet is overweight or obese.

Weight loss programmes

16% of pet owners believe their pet is overweight or obese. This figure is consistent with owners who have tried a weight loss programme with their pet (16%), 66% of whom received advice and support from their vet practice. How successful are these weight loss programmes?

Which of the following best describes the outcome of the most recent weight loss diet or programme you tried with your pet?

- 56%** *It was successful, and they maintained desired weight*
- 21%** *It was successful, but they have gained weight since*
- 20%** *It was unsuccessful, they did not reach desired weight*

Veterinary profession: Views on pet obesity

- 78%** *have seen an increase in pet obesity over the last two years*
- 35%** *Vet professionals identified obesity as one of the biggest health and welfare implication in 10 years' time if not tackled*
- 83%** *agree there will be more overweight pets than healthy weight pets in five years' time*

For those that have seen an increase in pet obesity over the last two years, we were keen to understand what the reasons could be behind this.

Top reasons given to us by the vet profession were:

- 54%** *Lack of exercise*
- 49%** *Pets being fed too many treats*
- 49%** *Pets being fed food intended for humans*
- 48%** *Lack of understanding of a healthy body shape / weight for a pet*

Food for thought

Rabbit diets

80% of rabbits are being fed fresh greens, 72% are being fed rabbit pellet food, and 68% are being fed hay. None of these figures are significantly different from 2015.

Hay is essential for both dental and digestive health. The number of rabbits being fed the correct amount of hay has decreased significantly with 33% being fed less than their own body size per day (the recommended amount) which is up from 26% in 2015. Only 30% of owners report that their rabbit has constant access to hay for eating.

24% of rabbits continue to be fed rabbit muesli mix, although this is down from 29% last year. This should be welcome news to vet professionals, 85% of whom believe rabbit muesli should be completely removed from sale.

Feeding raw food

4% of dog owners and 2% of cat owners feed their pet a home-prepared raw meat diet. A further 3% of dog owners and 1% of cat owners feed their pet a commercially-prepared raw meat diet.

Why carrots are making our bunnies too chubby

How we are putting our fat pets at risk with too many treats

96% of veterinary professionals surveyed believe more focus should be on preventing obesity than curing it.

How do the veterinary profession feel about raw diets?

90% of veterinary professionals' report that they never recommend raw diets for pets. The main reasons for this include the risk of nutritional deficiencies (54%), the risk of food borne diseases or parasites (49%), worries about bones or contamination (40%) and because vets and vet nurses

prefer to recommend commercial diets (non-raw) as they have more experience of these diets (40%).

Of the 10% of veterinary professionals who do recommend raw feeding, the main reasons given are that it is for health (e.g. skin disease or gastrointestinal issues – 69%) and as a healthy, natural option to feed pets (54%).

Work to tackle the ongoing pet obesity crisis



National campaign

- PDSA Pet Fit Club, a high profile national campaign, continues to raise awareness of the issue of pet obesity on an annual basis, helping owners to recognise obesity in their pets and encouraging them to work with their vet team to help your pet lose weight.

#WhyWeight?

- Launched dedicated area on our website to help owners recognise if their pets are overweight, with useful materials and resources promoted through social media stories about our Pet Fit Club contestants.



Helping clients

- Our dedicated 'PetWise MOT' appointments give vet teams the opportunity to discuss a pet's five welfare needs, including their diet and health, and provides an ideal opportunity to discuss any concerns around BCS and/or weight, and create an action plan to improve this.

Supporting our teams

- Ran dedicated sessions focussing on obesity prevention and appropriate pet diets at our Pet Wellbeing Champions Conference, attended by representatives from each of our 51 Pet Hospitals.

Puppy Growth Charts

- We've supported Mars Petcare in the development of their ground-breaking WALTHAM™ Puppy Growth Charts, which enable early identification of any deviation from normal growth, such as a puppy growing too quickly and therefore being at risk of developing obesity.

Joint veterinary advice

- Worked with a group of animal welfare and veterinary organisations to produce a leaflet for owners, compiling the latest evidence-based advice on ideal rabbit diets.

Sector support

- Supported NOAH's 'I ♥ My Pet' campaign by providing veterinary advice on tackling pet obesity.

Oscar, Pet Fit Club winner 2016.



ISSUES IN FOCUS



Behaviour

over
60%

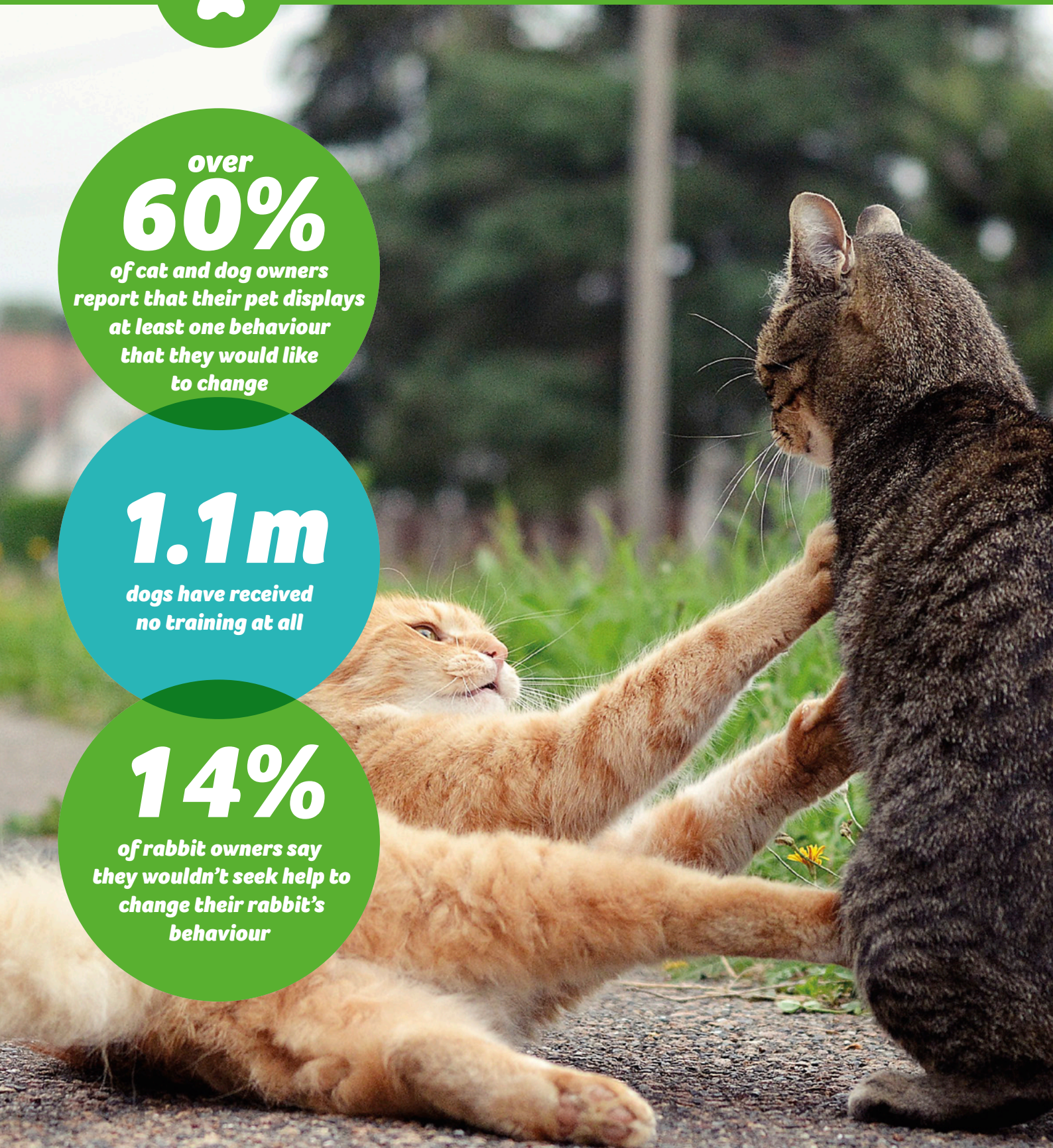
of cat and dog owners
report that their pet displays
at least one behaviour
that they would like
to change

1.1m

dogs have received
no training at all

14%

of rabbit owners say
they wouldn't seek help to
change their rabbit's
behaviour





Of owners who felt that owning a pet was harder than they thought, 27% said that this was because their pet has behavioural issues.

Undesirable behaviours in dogs

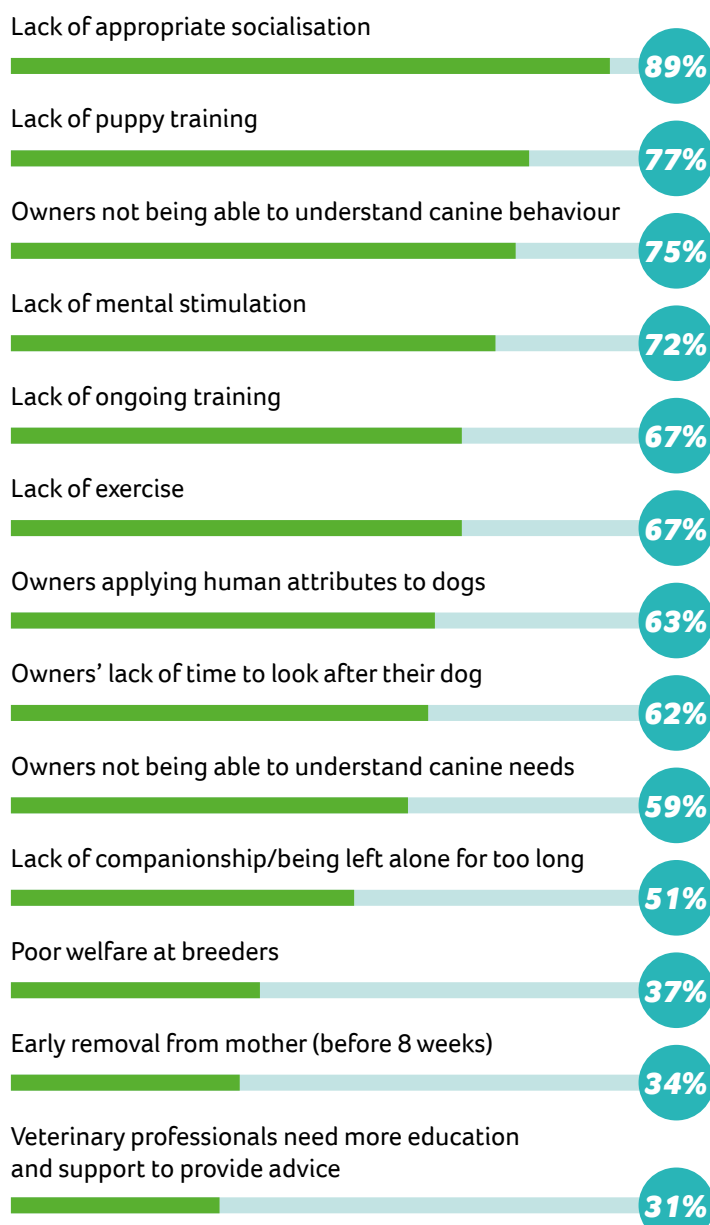


66% of owners report that their dog displays at least one undesirable behaviour that they'd like to change. Top behaviours include jumping up at people (25%), not coming back when called (20%), and barking or vocalising for more than five minutes when someone is present (11%).

Other behaviours owners worry about include growling or snarling (7%), biting other dogs (3%), aggression towards people (3%) and other pets (9%), signs of distress when left alone (5%), chewing items (7%) and showing signs of fear (9%).

51% of vet professionals report that they've seen an increase in pets who have been bitten by a dog over the last two years, and 58% report an increase in dog behavioural problems.

We asked veterinary professionals: For what reasons do you think there has been an increase in dog behavioural issues over the last two years?





Training

12% of owners state they haven't trained their dog in any way – equating to around 1.1 million untrained dogs in the UK. 56% of dog owners have applied previous experience of how to train a dog, 21% have attended one or more organised training classes, 16% have completed a course through regular dog training classes, and 5% have used an online or digital training programme.

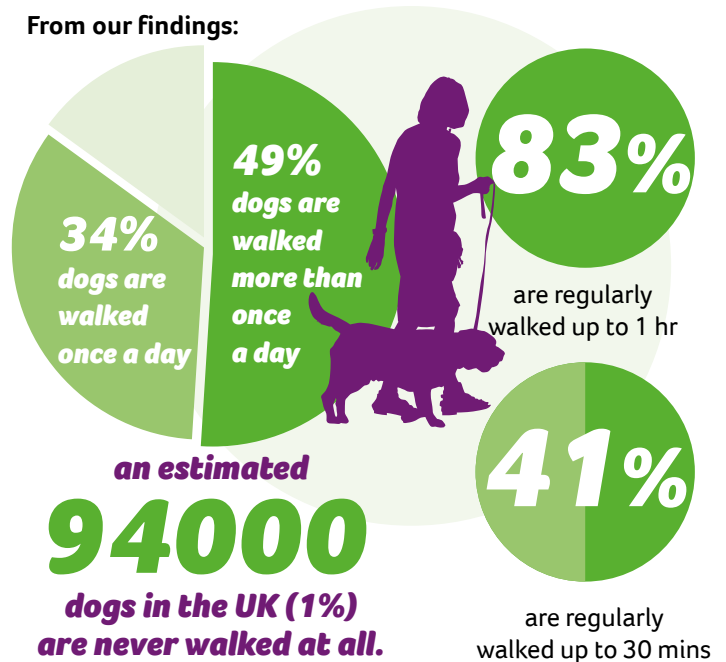
When it comes to using training aids, the majority of pet owners use food treats or rewards (71%), followed by toys (50%), food dispensing toys (20%) and clickers (16%).

It's not always positive reinforcement that's being used however, with 2% of dog owners using citronella collars, 1% using electric shock collars, 1% using prong collars, 6% using choke chains, 8% using a water pistol or spray, and 6% using a homemade rattle or noise device. 5% of owners had used at least one aversive training device from citronella collar, electric shock collar, vibrating collar or prong collar.

This could be a contributing factor in be a key contributor in the increasing numbers of dogs exhibiting undesirable behaviours but is also likely to be negatively impacting on the ongoing pet obesity crisis. This is a concern shared by over half of the veterinary profession, who cited lack of exercise as the top reason there has been an increase in pet obesity over the past two years.

Exercise

From our findings:



A small number of owners never walk their dog. There are several reasons given by these particular owners with the main one being that owners believe their garden is big enough for exercise. Other reasons given by these owners are that 'my dog has health problems', 'I have health problems' and 'my dog is too strong for me to walk or pulls on the lead'.

If you were to seek help to change your dog's behaviour, where would you go?

- 33%** Behaviourist
- 33%** Online search engine e.g. Google
- 31%** Veterinary professional



Pet owners need to seek appropriate, professional help to overcome undesirable behaviours in their pets. 52% of veterinary professionals report that they've seen an increase in the number of pet owners seeking veterinary or specialist behavioural advice for a behavioural issue over the past two years.



Digging deeper

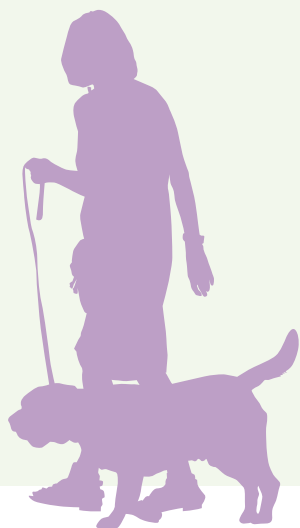
into dog behaviour

Owners who would like to change one or more behaviours in their dog are more likely to

- have only one dog
- walk their dog(s) for up to 30 minutes
- have concerns over walking their dog, including having had a bad experience in the past, concerns about their dog's behaviour when on a walk, and their dog not coming back when called
- more likely to own a male dog
- have young or adult dogs rather than a senior, or have owned them for less than 5 years
- have taken advice from breeders, looked on the internet or looked in book(s) / magazines / newspapers prior to choosing their pet
- disagree that owning a pet makes them mentally healthier
- consider the most challenging aspects of pet ownership to be too time consuming, or too much commitment
- have been frightened by another dog's behaviour
- feel there is enough information available to help people choose a dog responsibly

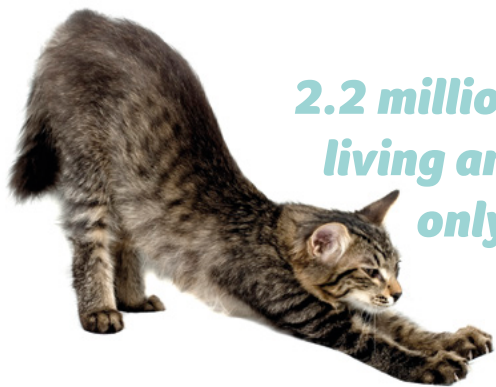
Owners who don't want to change any behaviours in their dog are more likely to

- never leave their dog alone
- have 3 or more dogs
- walk their dogs for over 2 hours daily
- have no concerns over walking their dog
- own a female dog
- have senior dogs, or have owned them for 6+ years
- have chosen their dog by knowing they're good with children or by having previous experience of the breed
- disagree that owning a pet is more expensive than expected
- own a gundog
- have not been concerned or frightened by another dog's behaviour



There are 1.1 million dogs in the UK who have received no training at all.





2.2 million cats are living an indoor-only life



into cat behaviour

Problem behaviours in cats

Whilst slightly lower than dogs, 63% of owners report that their cat displays at least one behaviour that they'd like to change. Top behaviours include scratching the furniture (32%), kneading with paws (16%) and 'other' behaviours (11%), which included nervousness, biting, hunting, scratching, and waking owners up at night.

9% of owners reported that they would like to change aggression towards other pets, and 9% would like to change inappropriate toileting in the house.

Findings suggest that many cats are getting plenty of opportunities for exercise on a daily basis, through playing in the house, playing with toys, using cat climbing frames and using the stairs with encouragement. 36% of cat owners report their cat has 'other' opportunities for daily exercise, with the vast majority of these stating this is through outdoor access.

79% of UK cats currently have access to both indoors and outdoors, an increase from 74% in 2015. 20% of cats – around 2.2 million – are living an indoor-only life. Of those cats living indoors, 68% of owners report the reason for this is that they believe it is unsafe for their cat to go outdoors.

Why do owners deem it unsafe for cats to go outdoors?

- 83%** Road safety
- 45%** Fighting with other cats / animals
- 42%** They might get stolen
- 42%** Straying
- 34%** Poisons

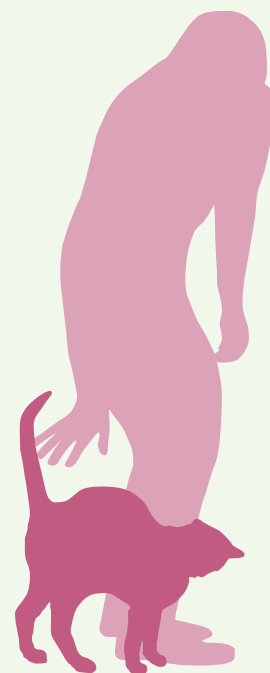
For those cat owners who would like to change one or more behaviours in their cat, reassuringly, they are more likely to turn to the veterinary profession for advice (45%). Still 41% would turn to an online search engine such as Google, and 22% report they wouldn't seek advice from anywhere.

Owners who would like to change one or more behaviours in their cat are more likely to

have got their cat from a pet shop or friend/family member
 agree that owning a pet is more expensive than expected
 agree that owning a pet makes them stressed
 disagree that owning a pet is more rewarding than expected, improves their life, or makes them physically or mentally healthier
 believe that the most challenging aspects of ownership are that it is:
 too expensive
 too time consuming
 too much commitment
 think that their cat is overweight / obese
 feed scraps / leftovers as a main type of food
 give treats because their pet looks hungry
 state that the cat wasn't the right choice for them

Owners who don't want to change any behaviours in their cat are more likely to

know the current weight and body condition score of their pet
 feel very well informed about all five welfare needs
 never consider getting a pet from a pet shop, pet supermarket, or online advert on a classified website (e.g. Gumtree, Preloved, Pets4Homes)





Digging deeper

into rabbit behaviour

Problem behaviours in rabbits

43% of rabbit owners report their rabbit displays at least one behaviour they'd like to change, mainly stating thumping their back feet and biting the bars of the run or hutch repeatedly.

With 52% of rabbits living alone, and 22% of rabbits living in a hutch that's too small, these are likely to be contributing factors to any behavioural problems. We've found that rabbits are spending on average 12 hours per day in their hutch, with over a quarter (26%) of rabbits spending no time at all interacting with their owners on a daily basis.

Are rabbit owners seeking help to change behaviours?

14% report that they wouldn't, 50% would go to a veterinary professional for help and 38% would rely on a search engine such as Google to provide the answers.



22% of rabbit owners selected this image as most like where their pet lives when compared to a medium and large size hutch and run .

Owners who would like to change one or more behaviours in their rabbit are more likely to

agree that owning a pet is more expensive than expected

agree that owning a pet makes them stressed

be feeding rabbit muesli as a main type of food or at least once a month

give treats because it makes their rabbit happy

have tried a weight loss diet with their rabbit

feel uninformed about rabbit's ability to express normal behaviour

agree that owning a pet it harder work than thought.

Owners who don't want to change any behaviours in their rabbit are more likely to

rank 'purchasing a pet' as number 1 when ranking how long they spend researching new purchases⁵

feel informed about the behavioural needs of their rabbits to express normal behaviour

haven't tried a weight loss diet or programme with their rabbit

disagree strongly that owning a pet makes them stressed

disagree that owning a pet is harder work than thought

have rabbit(s) with a significantly higher average age.



Big rise in number of dog attacks

Lack of training and aggression levels

Work to improve our pets' problem behaviour



Canine communication

- A national programme of 'Canine Communication' workshops, delivered in schools by our Community & Education Veterinary Nurses, in order to help children and families have a better understanding of how dogs communicate with us, and how to behave safely around them.

Helping clients

- Produced an online video to demonstrate how to reduce stress for cats when travelling to the vet practice, and a leaflet to be provided to clients whose cats are suffering from a stress-related condition.



Supporting our teams

- Ran dedicated sessions focusing on how vet teams can best help owners with dog behaviour problems commonly seen in practice, at our Pet Wellbeing Champions Conference, attended by representatives from each of our 51 Pet Hospitals.



Educational collaboration

- Continued work of the Animal Welfare Education Alliance (AWEA), whose member organisations produce a range of useful resources on different aspects of pet care and dog safety, which are promoted to teachers via a collaborative online initiative www.peteducationresources.org.uk

Dog Bite Prevention

- Worked with Liverpool University on Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership, an ongoing collaborative initiative to reduce dog bite incidents in the area.



More needs to be done to help owners understand their pet's behaviour and how to provide for their behavioural needs.

Taking the fight out of aggressive pets

CUTTING DOG BITE INJURIES



The reported rise in behaviour cases is worrying, particularly as most problems are preventable through proper socialisation and appropriate training.

Both prevention and resolution of behaviour issues requires quality expert guidance. Some behavioural modification methods are responsible for exacerbating potential or actual problematic behaviour.

At best this undermines the owner/pet relationship. At worst, it has serious implications for animal and human welfare. The survey results thus emphasise the need for properly qualified trainers and behaviourists. These must meet recognised standards, as do those found on the ABTC registers of practitioners.



David Montgomery, Chairman ABTC.

5%

*of owners have used at least one aversive training device **



* Citronella collar, electric shock collar, vibrating collar or prong collar.

ISSUES IN FOCUS



Companionship

over
2m

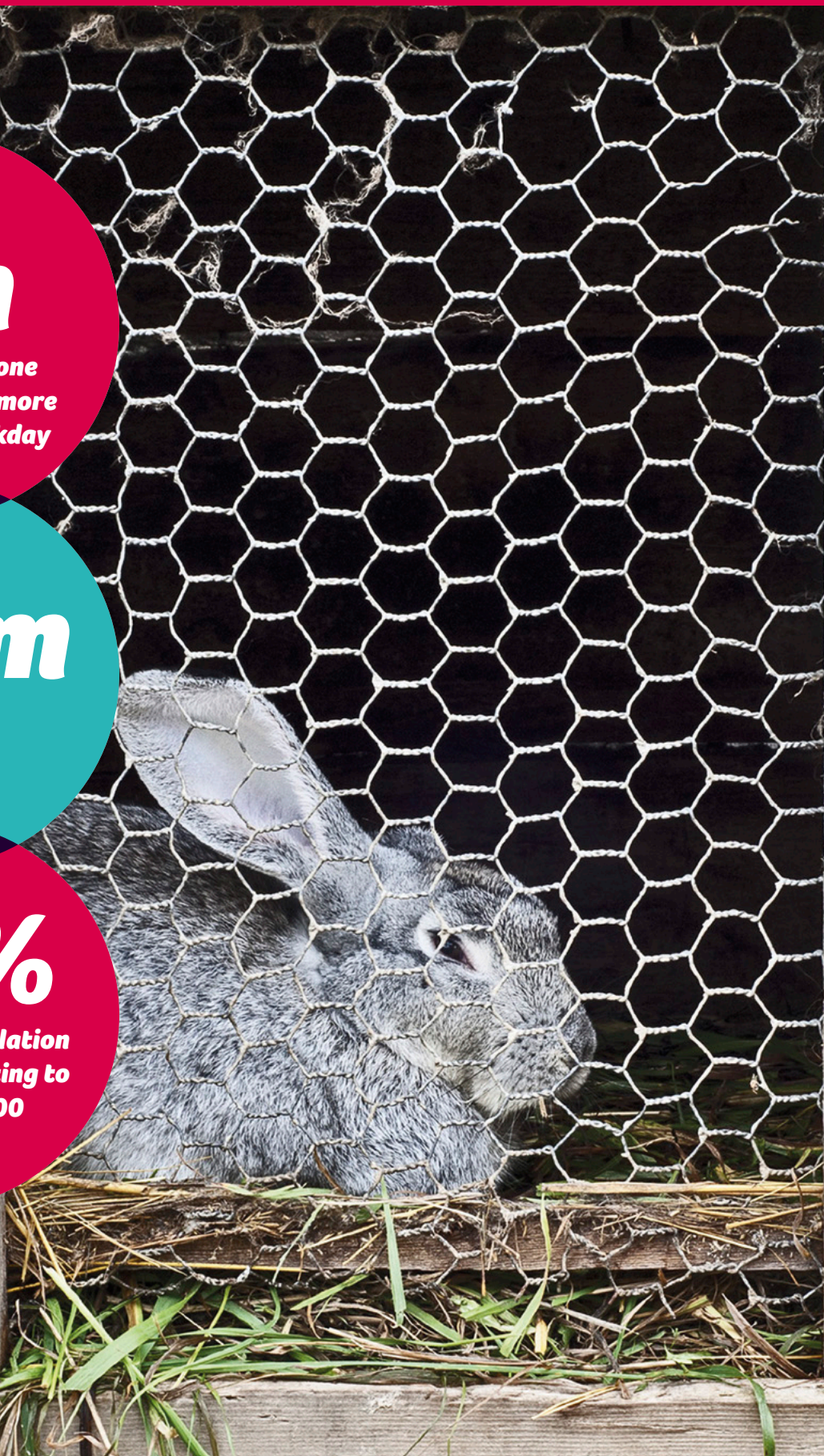
*dogs are left alone
for five hours or more
on a typical weekday*

over
4.7m

*cats live in
multi-cat
households*

over
50%

*of the rabbit population
lives alone – equating to
around 780,000
rabbits*





Over 2 million dogs are being left alone for longer than recommended on a daily basis

Lonely dogs

As social animals, dogs need and value companionship, either with people or another dog. There's been a slight decrease in the number of dogs being left alone for five hours or more on a weekday, down to 22% this year from 25% in 2015.

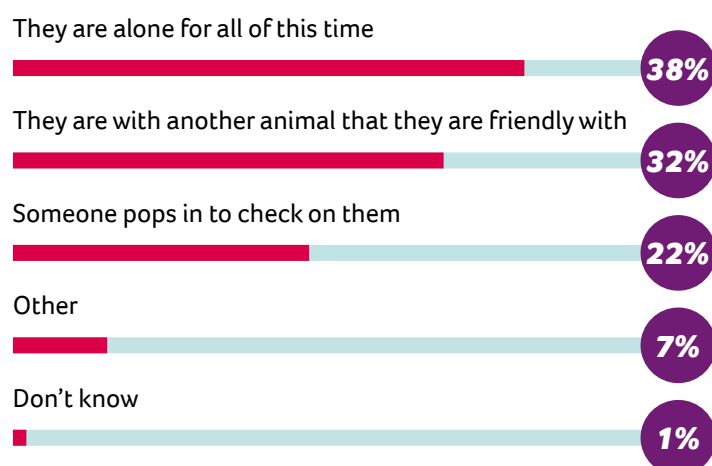
However, this still means that over 2 million dogs are being left alone for longer than recommended on a daily basis, which could be having a significant impact on their wellbeing.

Another concern is the high number of owners who don't recognise that this is an issue, with 45% stating that they think it's acceptable to leave a dog home alone with no human company for over 5 hours on a typical day.

Lack of appropriate companionship and dogs being left alone for too long is a concern held by many veterinary professionals, with 51% stating that they believe it to be a contributing cause for the increase in dog behavioural issues over the last two years. Another reason given by vet professionals was owners' lack of time to look after their dog properly (62%).

For those dogs who are left alone for more than four hours on a typical day, we were keen to understand the circumstances in which they were left. Were these dogs being left alone with no interaction all day?

When your dog is left alone for more than 4 hours, which best describes the circumstances?



45% of dog owners state that they think it's acceptable to leave a dog home alone with no human company for over 5 hours on a typical day.

50%

of owners state that they'd like to spend more time with their dog*



* **75%** are restricted by their work hours
12% by family commitments
10% state nothing is preventing them from spending more time with their dog.



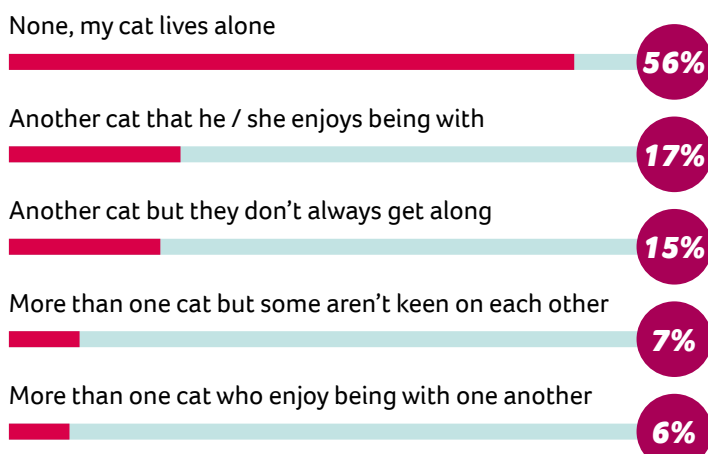
Multi-cat households

There's been little change regarding the numbers of multi-cat households, with the average number of cats per household currently 1.68. 43% of cats – around 4.7 million – live in multi-cat households with at least one other cat.

21% of cats – around 2.3 million – are living in households with another cat or cats that they don't get along with. This could be contributing to chronic stress in cats, which is another of the key issues that vet professionals believe needs to be addressed (34%).

46% of cat owners say they'd like to spend more time with their cat. They're prevented from doing this by work hours (67%), family commitments (16%) and social activities (13%).

Which of the following does your cat live with?



The increasing popularity of the cat as a companion animal is easy to understand. After all, they make ideal pets in so many ways. However, a lack of understanding of the feline species and their natural behavioural needs has led to them being kept in conditions that are far from ideal from their perspective.

Cats are solitary survivors who naturally live with relatives and keep distance from total strangers. Living with unrelated cats and being made to share life's essential resources, such as food, water, resting places and latrines, with them can be a significant source of stress.

Sarah Heath, BVSc Dip.ECAWBM(BM) CCAB MRCVS European Veterinary Specialist in Behavioural Medicine (Companion Animals)

Work to help owners understand the social needs of their pets



Reaching out to rabbit owners

- Introduced a revised PetWise MOT consultation framework for rabbits which can be completed over the phone. This helped to engage more owners, and helped to avoid potential stress of travel for the rabbits, while enabling an important discussion around the five welfare needs, including how essential the right companion is for a rabbit.



Supporting our teams

- Ran dedicated sessions focusing on 'Bonding Bunnies – the importance of companionship to rabbits' at our Pet Wellbeing Champions Conference, attended by representatives from each of our 51 Pet Hospitals.

Social media

- Provided regular media stories to help owners understand the importance of their pet's species specific companionship needs, in particular in response to the press interest in the behaviour of the Downing Street cats.



780K
lonely rabbits



**Bunny needs
a best buddy**

Solitary rabbits

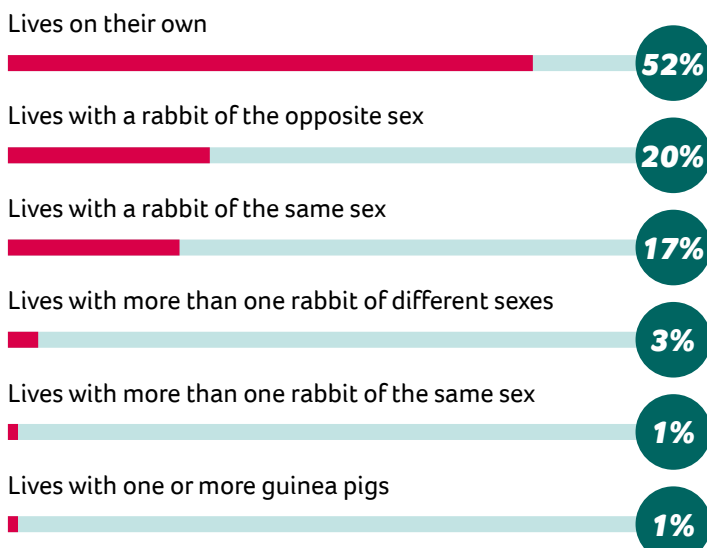
The majority of rabbits still live alone (52%). This equates to around 780,000 rabbits who do not have the appropriate companionship of at least one other rabbit. This percentage of rabbits is not significantly different from last year.

Of those rabbits that live with a companion, 64% of rabbit owners report that all rabbits are neutered, a marginal change from 71% in 2015. 23% state that none are neutered, up from 17% in 2015.

The veterinary profession reflects these concerns regarding rabbits, with one of the key issues being **a complete lack of care, i.e. rabbits being forgotten about, (45%)**. Another concern was lack of an appropriate companion, an issue identified by 27% of vet professionals.

59% of rabbit owners would like to spend more time with their pet than they currently do – significantly more than dog (50%) and cat (46%) owners. Reasons for not being able to do this are cited as work hours (65%), family commitments (23%) and social activities (19%).

Which best describes your rabbit's living arrangements?



BETTER  TOGETHER

Rabbit Awareness Week



PDSA is a member of the Rabbit Awareness Week committee, which focused on 'Buddies for Bunnies' for 2016, helping to raise awareness of the importance of a suitable companion for rabbits.



In recent years, society has been journeying towards a better understanding of the health and welfare needs of pet rabbits. Improvements in diet have reduced the risks of dental and gastrointestinal disease, yet over half of rabbits still live without appropriate companionship, experiencing extended periods of confinement. It is reassuring to see increasing vaccination rates against fatal yet preventable diseases, particularly as new variant Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease has spread across the country. Nonetheless, veterinary professionals face an ongoing challenge to harness the evident good intentions of most owners to reach our destination of good welfare for all pet rabbits.

Mark Stidworthy, BVZS President.

ISSUES IN FOCUS



Preventive health

92%

*of dog owners have had
their dog microchipped*

93%

*of cat owners have had
their cat neutered*

63%

*of rabbit owners have
provided their rabbit
with a primary course
of vaccinations*





Key findings:

Neutering

79% of owners have had their pet neutered. Owners who had chosen not to have this done gave reasons such as they hadn't thought about it, hadn't got round to it, or didn't believe in it. Dog owners appear to be significantly more worried about changes in personality and have cited this as a reason (13%), than cat (3%) or rabbit (6%) owners.

Vaccinations

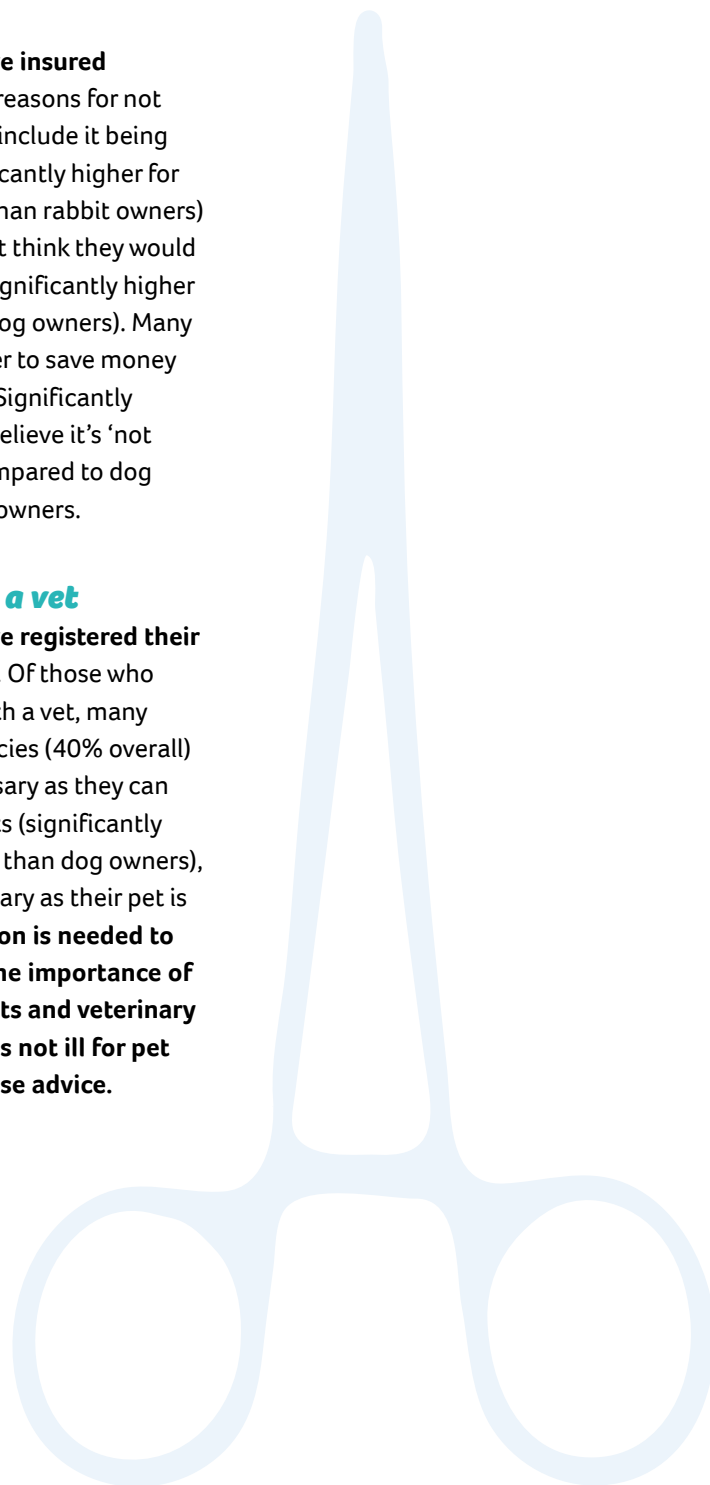
84% of owners have had their pet vaccinated with a primary course, an improvement from 2015, and 67% of owners have had their pet vaccinated with regular boosters, consistent with last year. Of those that haven't vaccinated their pet, some pet owners believe vaccinations are not necessary (21%), and some say their pet doesn't come into contact with other animals (16%). Some haven't thought about it (15%), or consider that it's too expensive (15%), demonstrating a need for increased awareness around the potentially fatal diseases pets can come into contact with and how they can be transmitted. When asked, 91% of veterinary professionals report that they routinely recommend annual boosters, whilst 3% recommend titre testing pre-booster vaccinations.

Insurance

44% of owners have insured their pet. Top reasons for not taking out insurance include it being too expensive (significantly higher for dog and cat owners than rabbit owners) and that owners don't think they would get money's worth (significantly higher for cat owners than dog owners). Many owners say they prefer to save money for vets bills instead. Significantly more rabbit owners believe it's 'not necessary' (29%), compared to dog (12%) and cat (20%) owners.

Registered with a vet

85% of owners have registered their pet with a vet. Of those who haven't registered with a vet, many owners across all species (40% overall) believe it's not necessary as they can just turn up at the vets (significantly higher for cat owners than dog owners), or that it's not necessary as their pet is fine. **Further education is needed to raise awareness of the importance of preventive treatments and veterinary support when a pet is not ill for pet care and pre-purchase advice.**





Microchipping

76% of owners have microchipped their pet. There's been a significant increase in the number of dogs microchipped since 2015 – up to 92% from 83%. This is likely to be due to the introduction of compulsory microchipping for dogs which has been a legal requirement since April 2016. Many animal welfare organisations offered free or reduced price microchipping and the collaborative #ChipMyDog campaign, led by Defra and supported by many stakeholders had a positive impact. However, 10% of dog owners who haven't microchipped their dog have never heard of microchipping. Many pet owners believe their pet is unlikely to stray (significantly more for cat and rabbit owners than dog owners), and many believe it's not necessary (significantly more rabbit owners than cat and dog owners) and state that this is why they haven't microchipped their pet.

Treated for fleas and worms

76% of owners have treated their pet for fleas, and **79%** have wormed their pet, showing no change since our last Report. Significantly more dogs have been treated for worms than cats, whilst the reverse is true for flea treatments, with more cats being treated for fleas than dogs.

Further education is needed to raise awareness of the importance of preventive treatments and veterinary support when a pet is not ill.





There have been general improvements across all aspects of preventive healthcare in dogs, other than a slight reduction in the proportion receiving booster vaccinations.

Preventive healthcare in dogs:

31% Not neutered

- 1 **19%** Don't believe in it
- 2 **17%** Haven't thought about it
- 3 **14%** Not got around to it yet

12% Never been vaccinated

- 1 **19%** Too expensive
- 2 **18%** Not necessary
- 3 **14%** Haven't thought about it yet

10% Not registered with a vet

- 1 **32%** Not necessary – I can just turn up at the vets
- 2 **23%** Not necessary – pet is fine
- 3 **17%** Not got around to it yet

8% Not microchipped

- 1 **23%** Not got around to it yet
- 2 **20%** Not necessary
- 3 **19%** Unlikely to stray

56% Not insured

- 1 **38%** Too expensive
- 2 **24%** Save money for vet bills instead
- 3 **22%** Don't think would get money's worth

22% Not having regular booster vaccinations

22% Not treated for fleas

13% Not wormed

Breeding

Of owners who haven't neutered their dog, significantly fewer want to breed from them, compared to previous years. (10% down from 16% in 2015). However, dog owners are still more likely to want to breed from their pet than cat and rabbit owners, with just 2% of cat owners and 3% of rabbit owners citing 'would like to breed' as a reason for not having neutered their pet.

For those dog owners who do want to breed, the main reasons given were:

43% *This pet has a good temperament*

40% *To keep the lineage of this pet*

20% *To protect the breed*

16% *To continue the memory of this specific pet*

13% *It would be nice for my pet to experience being a parent*

Microchipping

8% of dogs – around 752,000 – are still not microchipped, despite the change in legislation. 77% of pet owners, and in particular, 89% of dog owners (significantly higher than cat and rabbit owners) are aware that microchipping is now compulsory for all dogs in the UK over the age of 8 weeks. When asked what the biggest barrier may be to compulsory microchipping being a success, 59% of veterinary professionals cited lack of enforcement as the top reason.

When asked if they felt that veterinary professionals should be responsible for scanning and checking the database details for all dogs new to a practice, following the change to compulsory microchipping, 52% agreed.



There continue to be improvements across most aspects of preventive healthcare in cats.

Preventive healthcare in cats:

7% Not neutered

- 1 **38%** Haven't thought about it
- 2 **13%** Not got around to it yet
- 3 **12%** Too expensive

18% Never been vaccinated

- 1 **22%** Not necessary
- 2 **16%** Doesn't come into contact with other animals
- 3 **15%** Haven't thought about it

17% Not registered with a vet

- 1 **45%** Not necessary – I can just turn up at the vets
- 2 **27%** Not necessary – pet is fine
- 3 **12%** Not got around to it yet

32% Not microchipped

- 1 **32%** Unlikely to stray
- 2 **26%** Not necessary
- 3 **16%** Haven't thought about it

65% Not insured

- 1 **37%** Too expensive
- 2 **27%** Don't think would get money's worth
- 3 **21%** Save money for vet bills instead

41% Not having regular booster vaccinations

17% Not treated for fleas

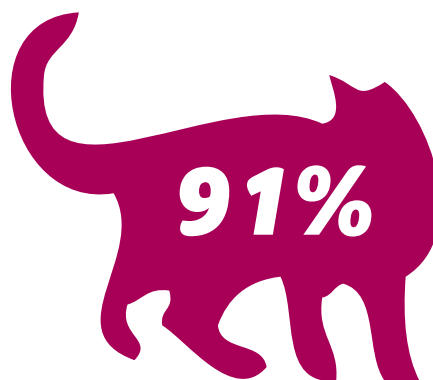
22% Not wormed

93% of owners have had their cat neutered, which is significantly higher than dog (69%) and rabbit (52%) owners. Despite this, lack of neutering came out top at 47% when vet professionals were asked which were the three most important issues that needed to be addressed in cats.

Of those owners whose cats have been neutered, 7% were recommended by their vet to be neutered at 0-4 months old. This increased significantly for junior cats, rather than adult or senior cats* which could suggest that work of the Cat Population Control Group, of which PDSA is a member organisation, to promote neutering at 4 months old is succeeding. 26% were recommended by their vet to be neutered at 5 to 6 months of age. 61% of veterinary professionals report that they routinely recommend neutering at 4 months.

79% of owners of female cats report their cat has never had a litter, and this figure is significantly higher if length of ownership is over 6 years. 8% state their cat has had one litter, 3% have had two litters, and 1% has had three litters. Of those reporting their cat has had a litter of kittens, 68% say that it wasn't planned, with 12% stating that it was and 20% who didn't know if it was planned or not

There has been a significant increase in the number of cats microchipped from 62% in 2015 to 68% this year.



91%
of veterinary professionals believe microchipping should be compulsory in cats.

* Junior cat = up to 1 year old, adult cat = 2 - 9 years old, senior cat = 10 years or older.



There have been continued improvements across all aspects of preventive health for rabbits. However, compared to dogs and cats, rabbits continue to fare the worst when it comes to having their health needs met.

Preventive healthcare in rabbits:

48% Not neutered

1	33%	Haven't thought about it
2	20%	Other
3	14%	Too expensive

37% Never been vaccinated

1	34%	Doesn't come into contact with other animals
2	25%	Not necessary
3	15%	Too expensive and haven't thought about it

37% Not registered with a vet

1	38%	Not necessary – I can just turn up at the vets
2	27%	Not necessary – pet is fine
3	14%	Too expensive

60% Not having regular booster vaccinations

1	30%	The booster vaccinations are not due yet
2	20%	Not necessary
3	19%	Too expensive

87% Not insured

1	30%	Too expensive
2	29%	Not necessary
3	26%	Don't think would get money's worth

Many rabbit owners still cite expense as a reason for not carrying out many preventive healthcare measures.



There's been a significant improvement in the number of rabbits receiving primary vaccinations in 2016 (63%) compared to 2015 (50%). However, many rabbit owners still cite expense as a reason for not carrying out many preventive healthcare measures.



Raise awareness of the importance of preventive healthcare to ensure rabbits in the UK are receiving the same treatments as dogs and cats, as well as increasing owner understanding of the true cost of pet ownership. (See page 16)



Health treatments by region for dogs, cats and rabbits

The following data gives an insight into the uptake of health treatments by region.

	Registered with a vet (%)	Neutered (%)	Vaccinated primary course (%)	Microchipped (%)	Insured (%)
National average	85	79	84	76	44
Northeast	81	74	82	75	45
Northwest	83	76	82	74	42
Yorkshire and the Humber	90**	78	85	78	44
East Midlands	85	79	79*	75	41
West Midlands	84	81	84	78	43
East of England	89**	80	84	75	47
London	78*	83	87	71*	42
Southeast	87	84**	84	80**	50**
Southwest	88	79	81	76	42
Wales	83	80	82	68*	35*
Scotland	89**	77	88**	82**	47
Northern Ireland	86	77	88	87	55
England	85	80	83	76	44

* significantly lower than national average

** significantly higher than national average



Work to increase the uptake of preventive healthcare



PetWise for Cats



Offered PetWise MOTs, free neutering and microchipping for our feline patients across the UK through our 'PetWise for Cats' programme, kindly supported by the Marchig Animal Welfare Trust.

Kitten neutering



Introduced 4 month cat neutering across all of our Pet Hospitals.

Out and about



Travelled the UK with our PetCheck tour, educating pet owners on the importance of preventive healthcare.

The next generation



Our national schools Education Programme helped thousands of children learn about the welfare needs of their family pets, including their preventive healthcare needs.



Pet Survivor



Promoted the importance of registration with a vet practice and pet insurance through media coverage of our 'PDSA Pet Survivor' competition.



Inspiring stories



Regular media coverage of case studies from our 51 Pet Hospitals promoted the value of regular health checks and getting advice from your vet practice team on a tailored preventive health plan for your pets.

Legislation success



Due to the collaborative work of the Microchip Alliance, it's now a legal requirement for all dogs in the UK over the age of 8 weeks to be microchipped. Further collaboration around funding, campaigns and outreach delivery has resulted in 92% of dogs in the UK being microchipped.

Cat Population Control Group



Worked as a member of the Cat Population Control Group to raise awareness of 4 month neutering in cats amongst owners and encourage vet practice teams to adopt this as standard.

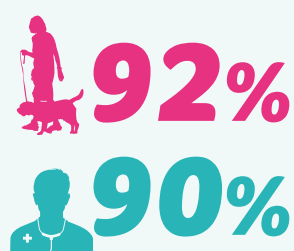
PDSA PetWise MOTs are unique veterinary consultations structured to help owners learn about the five welfare needs of their pet. The vet or vet nurse then works with them to create an action plan to improve any areas that could help improve the wellbeing of their pet.
www.pdsa.org.uk/petwise

Topical issues

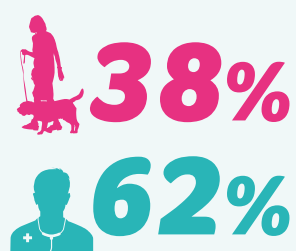


Each year we ask the veterinary profession and pet owners their views on a number of topical issues. Here's what we've been told ...

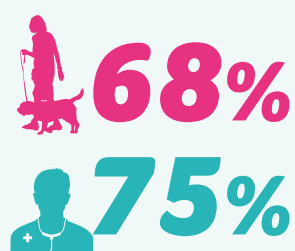
The UK is a nation of animal lovers



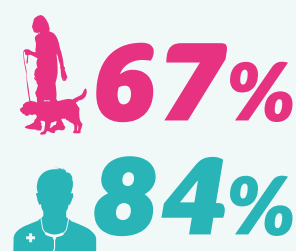
Pet insurance should be compulsory for all pet owners



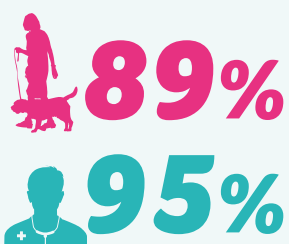
Dog licenses should be re- introduced



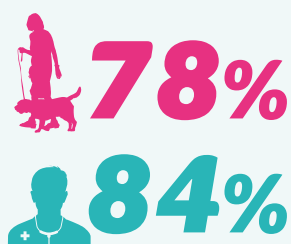
There should be a compulsory basic test of owner competence before they acquire a pet



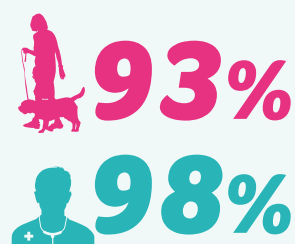
Owners should face tougher sentencing for animal welfare-related offences



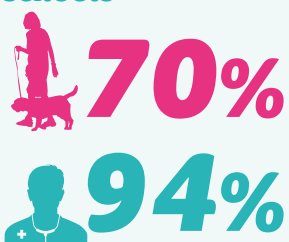
The government should review dangerous dog legislation



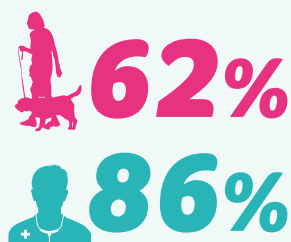
Anyone breeding puppies should be licensed and regulated to meet set standards



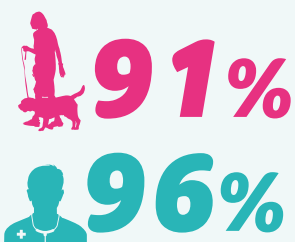
Learning about the 5 welfare needs of animals should be a compulsory part of the curriculum taught in UK schools



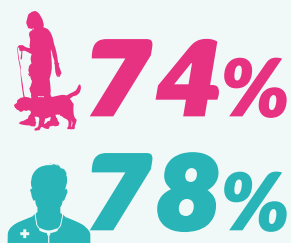
Socialisation and basic training classes should be compulsory for all dogs



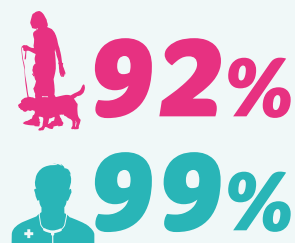
There should be regulation of the online advertising and sale of pets



Fireworks should be regulated to allow use for licensed events or on certain days only



Pet shops should give species-specific advice before and during sale of pets



Top concerns relating to pet welfare



Veterinary professionals have identified the TOP THREE issues, per species, that need to be addressed relating to pet wellbeing and ownership in general:



Awareness of the cost of keeping a dog

Obesity

Exaggerated conformation in pedigree breeds



Lack of neutering

Multi-cat households

Chronic stress



Inappropriate diet

Complete lack of care (i.e. rabbits being forgotten about)

Lack of an appropriate companion

We asked the veterinary profession: 'Thinking specifically about cats, dogs and rabbits, which THREE of the following issues, if any, would you pick to resolve tomorrow?'

29%

Deliberate cruelty

28%

Lack of owner understanding of the cost of owning a pet

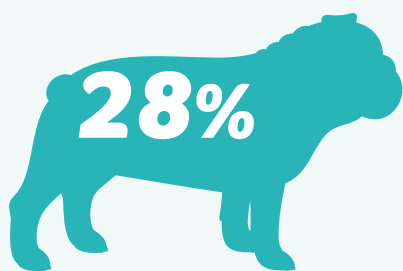
23%

People purchasing pets from irresponsible sources

And which issue, if not tackled, will have the biggest health and welfare implication in 10 years' time?

35%

Pet obesity



Exaggerated conformation in pedigree breeds

21%

People purchasing pets from irresponsible sources



The welfare of dogs bred for exaggerated conformations has been hitting the headlines in 2016, but despite this negative attention there have been dramatic increases in ownership of flat faced breeds such as the Pug and French Bulldog.



Dogs bred with exaggerated conformations such as flat faces are predisposed to a range of quality of life limiting inherited disorders, and it is of great concern that some owners are prioritising how dogs look above their health. It is imperative that all puppy buyers carry out thorough research on their breeds of interest prior to acquisition to avoid the perpetuation of these problems.



Devolved areas



Key findings for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

England (24%) significantly higher than Scotland (19%) in percentage of owners who did no research at all before choosing their pet.

Scotland (96%) significantly higher than England (91%) in percentage of dog owners who have had their dog microchipped.

England (16%) significantly higher than Wales (6%) in percentage of owners who are scared that their dog will be attacked by another dog whilst on a walk.

Scotland (26%) significantly higher than Wales (13%) in percentage of cat owners whose cat lives indoors only.

England (15%) and Wales (21%) significantly higher than Scotland (9%) in percentage of cat owners who report that their cat lives with another cat but they don't always get along.



Concluding thoughts

Vets and vet nurses, day in and day out, in over 5000 veterinary practices across the UK, meet pets and their owners. We see, first-hand, how much owners love the animal members of their family, and their commitment to providing them with veterinary healthcare.

We also see some of the things that go wrong – such as undesirable pet behaviour or health problems linked to obesity – which can result in poor wellbeing for pets and a less enjoyable experience for pet owners.

Some of the problems we see are common and preventable, and vets and vet nurses, both at PDSA and across the wider veterinary profession, recognise our responsibility to raise awareness of these problems and provide pet owners with information and resources to help prevent them.

While this work by the veterinary profession, animal welfare charities and others goes on, it is only with the PAW Report that we can truly build a national picture of how successful we are being. The Report provides us with a unique insight annually as to how well we are meeting our pets' five welfare needs and what factors are likely to be helping or hindering. Where we reveal improvements, we maintain our focus in those areas to ensure the improvements are sustained. Where we reveal deficiencies, we help ensure our and others' efforts are redoubled and directed towards these areas.

This year, as ever, there are areas of improvement and areas that still require more attention.

Thanks to co-ordinated lobbying by veterinary and animal welfare bodies, the microchipping of dogs became compulsory across the UK on 6th April 2016.

PAW reveals that 92% of dogs are now microchipped, up from 70% in 2011. These microchipped dogs can now be reunited with their worried owners if they get lost or stray, and we will continue highlighting this legal responsibility to owners to ensure all dogs are microchipped that should be. Happily, the number of cats that are microchipped has also risen, up from 46% in 2011 to 68% today. Microchipping is not compulsory for cats (though 91% of vets we surveyed felt it should be), but 7.5 million of the UK's 11 million cats can now be safely reunited with their owner; for example, if they are taken to a veterinary practice for emergency treatment following a road traffic collision.

One of the most significant factors affecting whether pets have their welfare needs met is the amount of research an owner did before acquiring their pet. Here, we still have serious concerns.

Anyone over the age of 16 is legally able to buy a pet, yet nearly a quarter of pet owners – some 5.2 million – told us that they did no research prior to taking on their pet. The same proportion said they found pet ownership harder work than they thought and the majority were unprepared for the costs involved with pet ownership.

In response to this issue, we launched our #PawsFirst campaign and our online 'Get PetWise' quiz to prompt potential owners to fully consider their circumstances before taking on a pet. This was linked to a dedicated web area which provided a range of information about different breeds of dogs, cats and rabbits to help owners to make a responsible decision about which pet to choose, and where best to get them from.

**Anyone over the age of 16 is able to buy a pet,
yet nearly a quarter of pet owners –
some 5.2 million - told us that they did no
research prior to taking on their pet.**

In conjunction with this, we rolled-out our **'PetWise MOT' consultation** framework and nationwide programme of free CPD workshops to the veterinary profession. This is a free-to-access tool that vet teams can use to work with clients to help them understand the five welfare needs of their pets, to assess the pet's wellbeing using a simple traffic light system, and to provide a personalised action plan to improve this, including advice and guidance to support owners.

All of our future initiatives will continue to be in partnership with veterinary associations and other animal welfare charities whenever possible, as coordinated and collaborative effort, as demonstrated by the success of dog microchipping, will be the most effective way to achieve a lifetime of wellbeing for every pet.

Richard Hooker, BVMS (Hons), MRCVS
PDSA Director of Veterinary Services.

Building on the success of these campaigns, this year we're launching an exciting new version of this consultation framework called 'Which Pet?' designed to encourage people to speak to their local vet practice for invaluable expert advice before they get a pet. The resources and tools to deliver these pre-purchase consultations are free-to-access and are available through our website: www.pdsa.org.uk/whichpet



Additional notes

- 1 Percentages throughout the PAW Report are rounded to nearest whole number. All differences between figures are statistically significant unless stated. When we refer to 'owners' we mean dog, cat and rabbit owners, not the owners of all types of pets. In 2015 we conducted two pet owner surveys: a YouGov survey (with the same methodology as this year) and one distributed via social media and open to all pet owners. In this year's report, where we compare to 2015 data we use data from the YouGov surveys from both years so that the data is comparable. When calculating approximate numbers of the population we've taken the population figure from page 6, multiplied it by the percentage and rounded to two significant figures. E.g. 22% of dogs are being left alone for 5 hours or more on a weekday. This equates to $9,400,000 \times 0.22 = 2,068,000$ dogs, which when rounded comes to 2.1 million.
- 2 The veterinary professional survey responses were made up of 28% veterinary surgeons, 41% veterinary nurses, 4% vet students, 10% veterinary nurse students, 7% nursing support staff, 3% veterinary academics, 3% practice owners, 2% partners and 2% practice managers.
- 3 When referring to the Animal Welfare Acts, this includes the Animal Welfare Act 2006 covering England and Wales, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 which applies to Scotland, and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
- 4 The actual likely lifetime costs are based on estimates calculated by PDSA using current market prices and include: initial costs of the purchase of pet(s); neutering; first vaccinations; microchipping and accessories as well as the ongoing costs of food; booster vaccinations; pet insurance; toys; grooming; worming; flea treatments and cat litter in the case of cats. They do not include veterinary costs if a pet becomes sick or injured, so these average lifetime costs could be even higher. This is the likely lifetime cost for 1 rabbit. We recommend keeping rabbits in neutered pairs as they are social animals, so this should be taken into account when budgeting for the lifetime costs of owning rabbits.
- 5 Owners were asked to rank how long they would spend researching each of the following purchases: TV, car, pet, Christmas present, holiday, new mobile phone, insurance providers, new computer or laptop.

Thank you to everyone who is already working alongside us to improve pet wellbeing. We can't do it alone.

Material in this Report is the copyright of The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the Report, and neither the Report nor any part of the Report or any material or any statistics contained therein may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by means, electronic, mechanical, by way of photocopying, recording or otherwise, either in full or in part, without the prior permission of The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals. Further, this Report has been distributed subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals prior written consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it has been distributed and if reference is made to any statistic or statistics in this Report, with the consent of The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, the source of the statistic or statistics shall always be referred to as the 'PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING (PAW) REPORT 2016.' The trademark 'PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING REPORT – THE STATE OF OUR PET NATION' is a trademark of The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals.

paw@pdsa.org.uk

All images sourced from PDSA or © Shutterstock.com and © Alamy.com



YouGov®
What the world thinks

pdsa.org.uk

© The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals 11/16
Registered charity nos. 208217 & SC037585