

PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

REPORT

2022



The essential insight into the wellbeing of UK pets

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## Welcome

Over the last 12 years, the annual PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report has surveyed a nationally representative sample of the UK's dog, cat and rabbit owners to find out how they are providing for their pet's welfare needs and reliably estimate pet populations. Robust methodology, consistently applied, enables accurate comparison of data and identification of trends.

With data from February 2020, just before the UK entered the first of the COVID-19 lockdowns, and with further data collection through the pandemic, we have been able to provide an unrivalled source of information about the changes in the welfare of our pets. In 2022, we continue to track the effects of the last 2 years, and assess the impact of developing issues such as the growing cost of living crisis<sup>1</sup>.

While pet populations have not risen dramatically as predicted by some<sup>2</sup>, we have found an increase in both the estimated dog population and the proportion of adults owning dogs. Additionally, we are seeing a continued high level of pet acquisition by new owners, i.e. those who have not owned that species of pet before as an adult. This expansion of the pet owning population should be cautiously welcomed as pet ownership can lead to increasing awareness of and public concern for animal welfare and so help to protect their wellbeing<sup>3</sup>. However, it is imperative that inexperienced owners are supported to ensure they understand how to provide for the needs of their pets.

There are some worrying trends emerging from the data, including the increased number of pets acquired from abroad. These pets may undergo great stress during transport, sometimes in the important formative weeks of their early life<sup>4</sup>. While many integrate into families with no concerns, our data found that a significant number suffer

with behavioural issues. In these situations, post adoption support is invaluable, which may not be readily available if those pets have come from overseas. Additionally, the number of people specifically seeking their pets from abroad in order to obtain animals that have undergone cosmetic mutilation surgeries such as ear cropping is extremely concerning. We've also seen that many dogs acquired during the pandemic years seem to be struggling with separation related behaviours, and will need support as owners continue to spend more time away from their home.

On a more positive note, while preventive healthcare provision has not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels across all healthcare options, uptake is largely unchanged from 2021. We've also found that the proportion of rabbits living alone (46%) is now no different compared to immediately prior to the pandemic (42% in February 2020) which is reassuring given that the 2021 figure (48%) was higher, although improvements are still needed.

The PAW Report continues to be the benchmark for gaining insight into how UK owners provide for the needs of their pets and comply with the Animal Welfare Act, shining a light on the state of the health and welfare of the nation's pets, and enabling informed, targeted interventions to the areas most in need of improvement.

 [Hear from PDSA's Director of Veterinary Services, Richard Hooker, MRCVS here](#)

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Breinlich, H., Leromain, E., Novy, D., & Sampson, T. (2022). The Brexit vote, inflation and UK living standards. *International Economic Review*, 63(1), 63-93.

<sup>2</sup> PFMA (2022) NEW PFMA Pet Population Data Highlights Pet Peak But The Number Of Owners Giving Up Their Pet Is Huge Concern. <https://www.pfma.org.uk/news/new-pfma-pet-population-data-highlights-pet-peak-but-the-number-of-owners-giving-up-their-pet-is-huge-concern->

<sup>3</sup> Schiel, N. (2017). People's perception on animal welfare: why does it matter?. *Ethnobiology and conservation*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Tateo, A., Nanni Costa, L., & Padalino, B. (2022). The welfare of dogs and cats during transport in Europe: a literature review. *Italian Journal of Animal Science*, 21(1), 539-550.

# The Methodology behind the PAW Report

The PAW Report is the largest annual survey of pet wellbeing in the UK and is demographically representative of dog, cat and rabbit owners.

By working with YouGov, our annual PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report is representative of the UK pet owning population. This creates an accurate picture of pet wellbeing across the nation.

The first Report was launched in 2011; this provides us with 12 years of trended data allowing reporting on how owners are meeting the 5 Welfare Needs of their pets, insights from the veterinary profession, and estimates of the UK pet dog, cat and rabbit populations.

## **Data sources used in the PAW Report:**

- Annual nationally representative survey of pet owners
- Surveys of veterinary professionals
- YouGov data on the incidence of pet ownership in the UK (used in the pet population calculations)
- ONS data (used in the pet population calculations)

## **Annual survey of pet owners**

In conjunction with YouGov, each year we survey a large and demographically representative sample of UK dog, cat, and rabbit owners using YouGov's panel methodology.

In the latest Report, based on a survey in early 2022, the sample totalled 5,768 cat, dog, and rabbit owners over the age of 18 and living in the UK. Therefore, when talking about 'owners' throughout the Report, we're discussing cat, dog, and rabbit owners, not owners of other types of pets.

In 2022, data was gathered between 23rd February and 22nd March through an online survey where demographic quotas are set to ensure data gathered is as nationally representative as possible. Any small errors in the final sample are corrected through weighting where necessary. The demographic quotas and weighting that this method uses are determined by a separate YouGov panel survey of 10,000 UK adults which provides demographic information such as regional breakdowns as well as age and gender profiles of owners.

## **Survey of veterinary professionals**

Periodically we survey veterinary professionals online via an open survey. We surveyed last in 2020 where we collected responses from 623 veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses, students, nursing support staff and veterinary academics who are currently working in practice.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 18 January and 16 February 2020, hosted by YouGov using an open link. Due to the nature of this survey these figures are not collected in line with any demographic quotas or weighted as per the survey of pet owners. Details of the survey are shared via social media and professional networks to encourage participation. Participants are usually invited to be entered into a prize draw to win a prize relevant to veterinary practice e.g. a continuing professional development (CPD) package.

## **Pet population calculation**

We work with YouGov to annually calculate estimates of the pet dog, cat and rabbit populations. Three data sources are used in this calculation:

- Separate sampling from the YouGov online survey panel to determine the percentage of UK adults who own each species of pets (n=10,000).
- Data from the PAW Report survey of pet owners on the number of pets owned by each owner.
- Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the number of households.

## **Data presentation**

Percentages throughout the Report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Other figures, such as the estimated numbers of pets, are rounded to two significant figures. When calculating these we have taken the total estimated population figure for that species of pet and multiplied it by the percentage taken at two decimal places. The resulting figure is then rounded to two significant figures.

For example, to calculate the estimated number of dogs acquired from abroad:

Estimated dog population (March 2022) = **10.2 million**

Percentage of dogs acquired from abroad = **6.24%**

$10.2 \text{ million} \times 6.24\% = 636,480$

The figure is then rounded and presented as: **640,000** dogs acquired from abroad.

Where differences between figures are communicated (e.g. there is an increase in the proportion of cats acquired from abroad from 2% in August 2020 to 5% in 2022) the differences are statistically significant and validated by YouGov (C.I. = 95%,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Further details of the PAW Report methodology can be found in our peer-reviewed paper published in the Veterinary Record. 'Driving evidence-based improvements for the UK's 'Stressed. Lonely. Overweight. Bored. Aggressive. Misunderstood... but loved' companion animals' (Wensley et al, 2021) is available via open access.



**5,768**  
pet owners  
surveyed  
in May 2022

**2,569**  
dog owners



**2,586**  
cat owners



**613**  
rabbit owners



**93,000**  
respondents  
in total over the  
last 12 years

# Key findings

## from our 2022 PAW Report

10.2 million  
dogs in the UK



27%

of UK adults own a dog



2.5 million

dogs acquired  
March 2020 to March 2022



6%

of dogs have  
been acquired  
from abroad



45%

of owners  
have concerns  
about walking  
their dogs



11%

of dogs are showing  
signs of distress  
when left alone



20%

of dog owners have used  
aversive training devices



41%

of dogs are  
afraid of  
fireworks



79%

of dogs  
receive regular booster  
vaccinations



11.1 million  
cats in the UK



24%

of UK adults own a cat



2.5 million

cats acquired  
March 2020 to March 2022



5%

of cats have  
been acquired  
from abroad



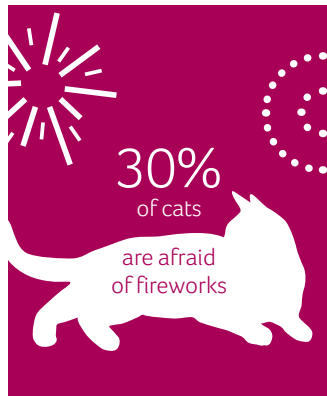
44%

of owners  
report their cats  
are showing  
signs that may be  
indicative of  
stress



30%

of cats  
are afraid  
of fireworks



76%

of cats  
have been  
microchipped



89%

of cats  
have been  
neutered



More owners  
registered with  
a vet know their  
pet's weight and /  
or body condition  
score

1 million  
rabbits in the UK



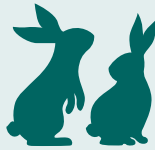
2%

of UK adults own a rabbit



330,000

rabbits acquired  
in the last 2 years



3%



of rabbits have  
been acquired  
from abroad

46%

of rabbits  
are living  
alone



52%

of rabbits  
receive regular booster  
vaccinations

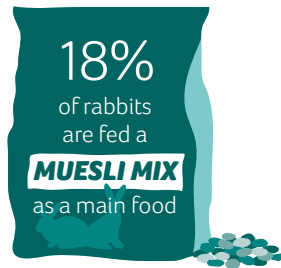


18%

of rabbits  
are fed a

**MUESLI MIX**

as a main food

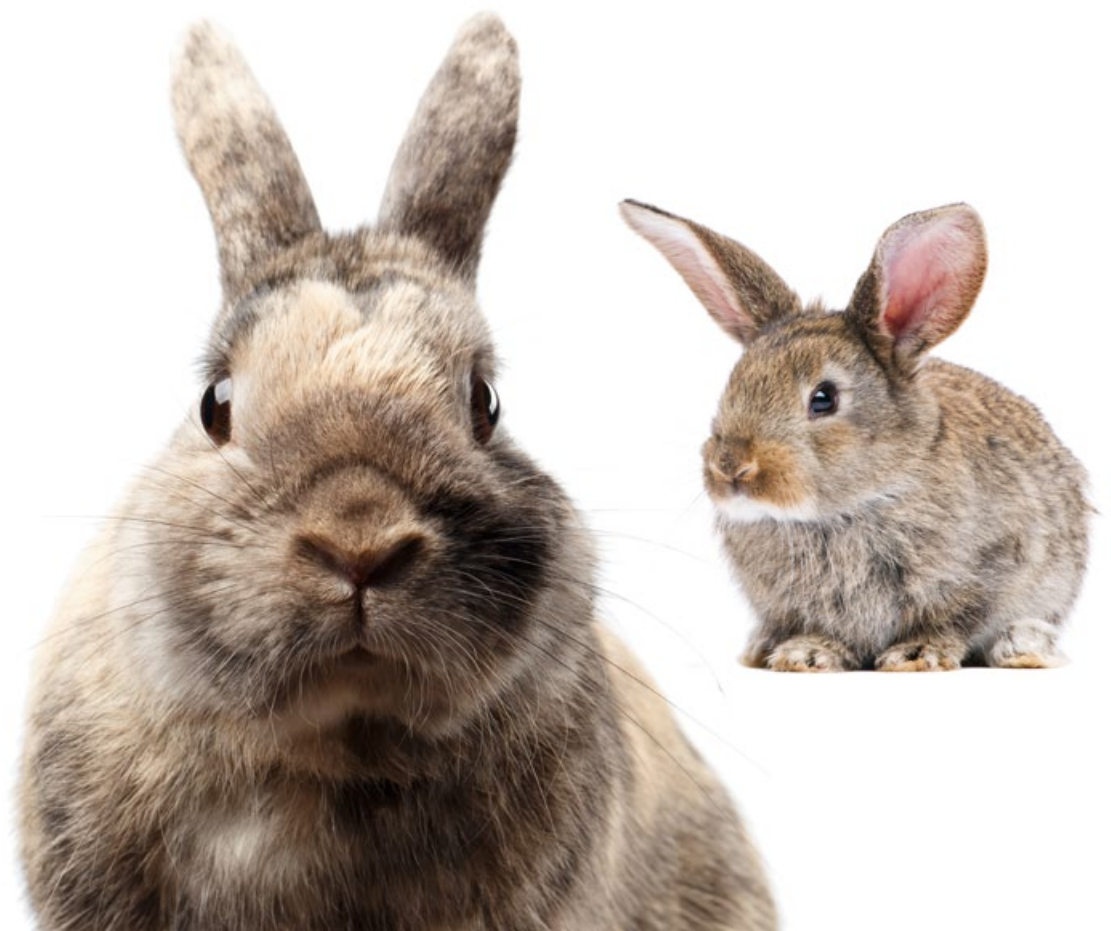


11%

of rabbits have not received  
any preventive healthcare



Fewer rabbits are  
living alone than  
last year.



# Pet populations across the UK

Since 2011, on an annual basis, the PAW Report has collected nationally representative data to accurately determine the proportion of people in the UK who own a pet and to estimate the total population of the UK's pet dogs, cats, and rabbits. Consistent methodology, applied over the last 12 years, enables us to compare the data and provides a true picture of how UK pet populations are changing.

While our data does show that the estimated population of pet dogs in the UK has increased to 10.2 million since our last Report in 2021 when it was 9.6 million, there has not been a statistically significant increase in the estimated population size of the UK's pet dogs, cats and rabbits since February 2020.

## Survey findings

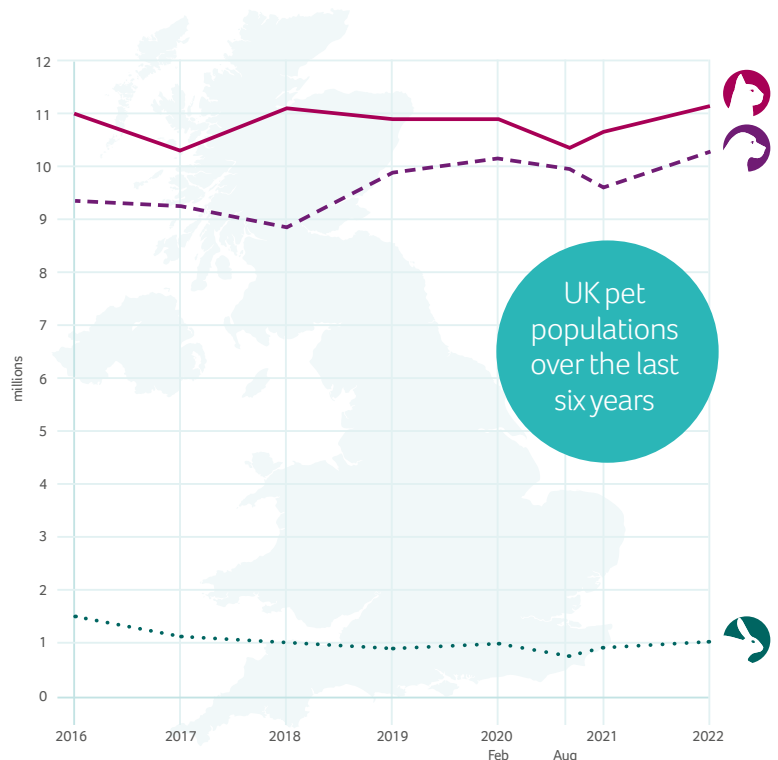
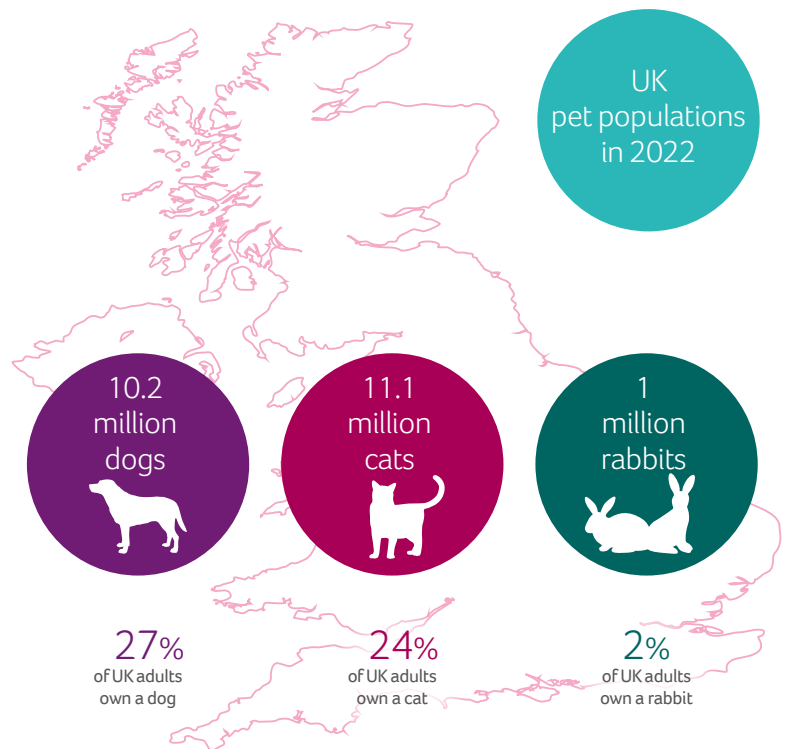
We also found that a higher proportion of UK adults own a dog in 2022 (27%) compared to 2021 (26%). Compared to immediately prior to the pandemic, the proportion of people owning one dog has increased (70% in February 2020, 74% in 2022), while the proportion owning three or more dogs has decreased (7% in February 2020, 5% in 2022).

Although there does not appear to be a consistent trend across the 12 years of data on the estimated dog population, the proportion of UK adults who own a dog is higher in 2019 – 2022 compared to 2011 – 2014, despite fluctuating during the years in between. Since 2011, the dog population has risen from 8.3 million to 10.2 million currently.

The estimated population of pet cats and rabbits has not changed significantly since 2011, and neither has the proportion of UK adults who own these pets.

24% of all owners acquired their pet in the last two years, meaning that 5.4 million pets have been acquired since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. This is higher for rabbit owners (33%) compared to dog owners (25%) and cat owners (22%), equating to 2.5 million dogs, 2.5 million cats and 330,000 rabbits. This is comparable to data released by the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA), which found that 4.7 million<sup>2</sup> pets had been acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This level of acquisition is not different from previous data from 2017 to 2019 and Aug 2020 when 24%, 23%, 24% and 23% of owners acquired their pet in the preceding two years. Our findings from February 2020 showed that 22% of owners had acquired their pet in the preceding two years. That is slightly lower than the current 2022 figure (24%) but the trend over the last six years of data is stable.



## 36% of all pet owners told us that they were 'new' pet owners

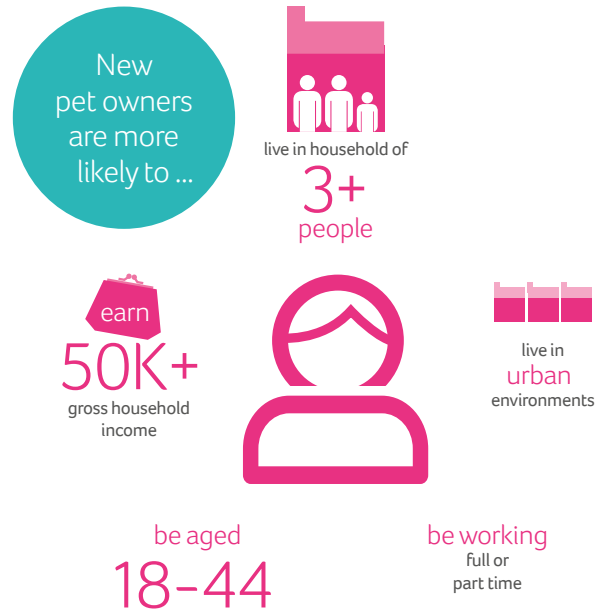
New owners are those who told us that this was their first experience of owning this species of pet as an adult. This has increased from 34% in 2021, largely due to an increase amongst dog owners, where 39% described themselves as new in 2022, compared to 34% in 2021. Rabbit owners were most likely than dog or cat owners to be 'new' owners at 48%, which is unchanged from 2021.

Similar to the 2021 data, this high proportion of 'new' owners in 2022 possibly reflects the continued increased demand for pets<sup>5</sup> that may have been stimulated by lifestyle changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Combined with the increased proportion of UK adults who now own a dog compared to 2021 and the increase in the proportion of owners owning just one dog compared to February 2020, this may be contributing to the perception that the UK pet population has been increasing dramatically during the pandemic. It could also go some way towards explaining some of the workload and capacity pressures that the veterinary profession is currently struggling with<sup>6</sup>.



### Demographics of new\* pet owners

New\* owners were more likely to be younger (58% of pet owners aged 18-44 compared to 20% of those aged 45+) with a higher level of education (39% of pet owners with a university degree qualification or higher, compared to 33% who have qualifications below degree level, and 21% who have no formal qualifications) and a higher household income (48% of pet owners with a gross household income of over £50,000 compared to 34% of those with £25,000 to £49,999, and 26% of those with under £25,000). This could reflect changing work practices during the pandemic, when office based jobs, which may have previously meant working away from home for long hours, were more likely to become home based, so giving these workers an opportunity to own pets they may not have considered possible before. It could also relate to the rising cost of purchasing pets seen early on in the pandemic and the increased cost of living seen more recently. They were also more likely more likely to be urban than town and fringe or rural and to have larger households.



#### Footnotes

\* new owner defined as not having owned that species of pet before as an adult.

<sup>5</sup> Forbes (2022) Pandemic Puppies: Tackling A Growing Problem. <https://www.forbes.com/uk/advisor/pet-insurance/pandemic-puppies/>

<sup>6</sup> BVA (2022) UK's veterinary workforce crisis deepens as EU registrant numbers drop by over two-thirds since Brexit.



# Pet acquisition

The most common places for people to get their dogs, cats and rabbits from have remained largely the same over the last 12 years of PAW Report data. Dog owners were most likely to get their pets from a breeder (32%), cat owners from a UK rescue centre rehoming UK pets (27%) and rabbit owners from a pet shop or garden centre (32%).

However, there have been some changes within the data, particularly around the proportion of owners who got their pet from a UK rescue centre rehoming UK pets. The proportion of dog owners who acquired their pet from this source has decreased from 18% in February 2020 to 14% in 2022. Similarly, the proportion of cat owners who acquired their cat from a UK rescue centre for UK cats has fallen from 35% in Aug 2020 to 27% in 2022, and for rabbit owners, the proportion has decreased from 19% in August 2020 to 14% in 2022.

The proportion of owners getting their pet from a breeder (based in the UK or abroad, of single or multiple breeds) has fluctuated for dogs over the last five years but neither increased or decreased overall (32% in 2022), and remained stable for cats and rabbits over the same time period (14% and 7% respectively in 2022).

New\* owners were more likely to have acquired their pet from a private seller (20%) or UK based breeder of one specific breed (17%) and less likely to get from a UK rescue centre for UK pets (17%) compared to owners who did not describe themselves as new (17%, 15% and 23% respectively).

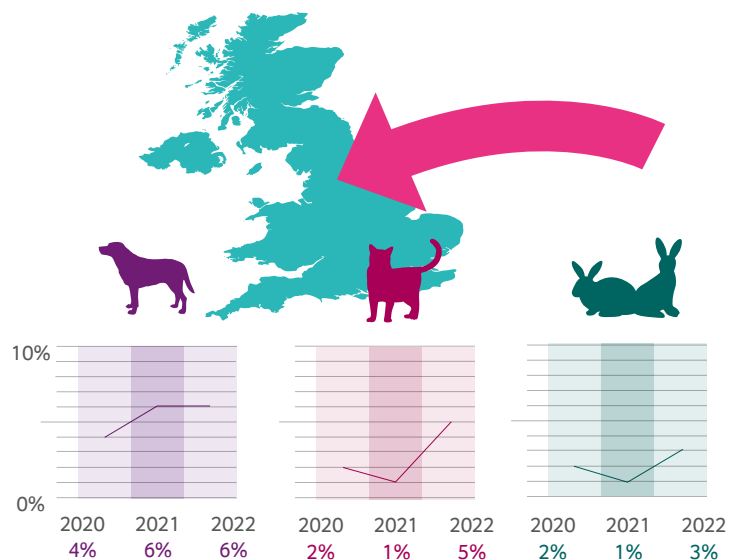
## How owners acquired their pets



## Owners getting pets from abroad

The proportion of pets coming from abroad has continued to increase in 2022, with 6% of owners telling us that their pet was imported compared to 4% in 2021 and 3% in August 2020. The increase is across all three species, but is particularly marked in cats and rabbits. One concern this raises is an increased risk of the importation of exotic diseases and parasites such as heartworm, leishmania, brucellosis and babesiosis<sup>7,8,9</sup>.

The proportion of dogs acquired from abroad has increased from 4% in August 2020 to 6% in 2021 and 6% in 2022, equating to 640,000 imported dogs in 2022. This increase is largely due to dogs coming from UK rescue centres that are rehoming pets from abroad (1% in August 2020 to 3% in 2022), rescue and rehoming centres based abroad (1% in August 2020 to 2% in 2022) and breeders of multiple breeds who are based abroad (<1% in 2021 to 1% in 2022).



## 4% of dog owners who got their pet from abroad told us they did so because they wanted a dog with cropped ears

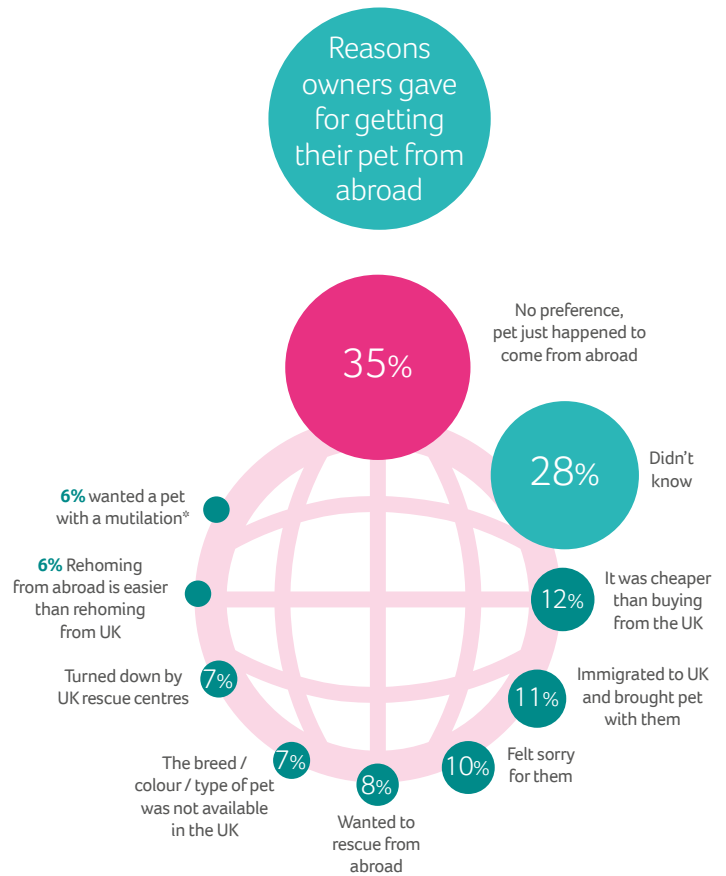
The proportion of cats acquired from abroad has increased from 2% in August 2020 and 1% in 2021 to 5% in 2022, equating to 590,000 imported cats in 2022. This increase has mostly been driven by an increase in cats being acquired from UK rescue centres that are rehoming pets from abroad (1% in August 2020, <1% in 2021, 3% in 2022).

The proportion of rabbits acquired from abroad has increased from 1% in 2021 to 3% in 2022, equating to 31,000 imported rabbits.

When we asked why owners had chosen to get their pet from abroad, the most common reason was that they had no preference where pet came from, they just happened to come from abroad (35%) – this was higher for dog owners at 48% than cat owners at 18%.

4% of dog owners who got their pet from abroad told us they did so because they wanted a dog with cropped ears, meaning that an estimated total of 26,000 dogs have been imported because their owners wanted them to have a cosmetic mutilation surgery that is illegal in this country. While this number appears vastly higher than in 2021, this is largely due to the overall increase in dog population. The proportion of dog owners who acquired their dog from abroad is not statistically different to 2021, nor is the proportion that imported because they wanted a dog with cropped ears. In addition, 3% of owners said they had imported because they wanted a dog with a docked tail (estimated 17,000 dogs).

An emerging issue appears to be that of cat declawing. Alarming, 5% of cat owners who got their cat from abroad, equating to 31,000 cats, told us that they chose to get their pet from abroad because they wanted them to be declawed. Scratching is a natural behaviour for cats, and surgically amputating their claws deprives them of this ability, as well as potentially leaving them with long-term pain issues<sup>10</sup>. We will continue to monitor this issue in order to inform the sector of emerging issues which teams need to be aware of and can work to tackle.



\* dogs with cropped ears or docked tail, cats with no claws



## What did owners do before getting their pet?

Prospective pet owners use the internet both as a source of information and as a place to find their new pet. 28% of owners told us that they looked on the internet before choosing their pet (34% of dog owners, 20% of cat owners, 32% of rabbit owners). 20% of owners said they didn't do anything before choosing their pet, and only 6% took advice from a veterinary professional (9% for rabbit owners, 7% of dog owners and 5% of cat owners). This may reflect a lack of access to veterinary professionals, given the constraints on the veterinary industry over the last 2 years<sup>6</sup>, however the proportion is no different from when the question has been asked in previous years (7% in 2019, 6% in Feb 2020, 7% in August 2020). It is essential that owners and prospective owners can easily and readily access reliable, trustworthy sources of information on the internet.

53% of owners found their pet online, with a higher proportion of dog owners finding their pet this way (63% of dog owners compared to 45% of rabbit owners and 43% of cat owners). The most common online source for pets was dedicated websites, whether online advertising sites such as Gumtree or Pets4Homes (14% of pet owners – 19% of dogs, 9% of cats, 12% of rabbits), individual breeders' websites (8% of pet owners – 13% of dogs, 3% of cats, 7% of rabbits) or rescue centres' websites (15% of pet owners, 14% of dogs, 17% of cats, 11% of rabbits). This highlights the importance of the work that organisations like the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) are doing to try to ensure that pet animals advertised for sale are done so legally and ethically. However, 5% of pet owners told us that they had found their pet on social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok). Despite rules prohibiting such activity being in place on some of these platforms, the lack of any formal regulation and oversight of these channels means this is a concerning finding which we will continue to monitor.

Of those dog owners who acquired their pet from a breeder or private seller, 71% saw them with their mother but only 50% visited them on more than one occasion before taking them home. These are both important steps that can help owners to identify responsible breeders and avoid puppy farms.

 **Hear from the Head of Companion Animals at RSPCA, Dr Sam Gaines [here](#)**

### Footnotes

<sup>6</sup>new owner defined as not having owned that species of pet before as an adult.

<sup>7</sup> Karasová, M., Tóthová, C., Grelová, S., & Fialkovičová, M. (2022). The Etiology, Incidence, Pathogenesis, Diagnostics, and Treatment of Canine Babesiosis Caused by *Babesia gibsoni* Infection. *Animals*, 12(6), 739.

<sup>8</sup> McGarry, J. W., Carrozza, R., Bradley, C., Latrofa, M. S., Makepeace, B. L., & Otranto, D. (2022). *Onchocerca lupi* in imported dogs in the UK: implications for animal and public health. *BMC Veterinary Research*, 18(1), 1-4.

<sup>9</sup> Drake, J. (2021). Dog Relocation and Rapidly Changing Parasite Threats. In *Biology and Life Sciences Forum* (Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 4). Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.

<sup>10</sup> Martell-Moran, N. K., Solano, M., & Townsend, H. G. (2018). Pain and adverse behavior in declawed cats. *Journal of feline medicine and surgery*, 20(4), 280-288.

Did you find your dog online?

10%  
Searching online  
e.g. through Google  
or another  
search engine

34%  
Didn't find their  
dog online

13%  
Breeder's  
website

14%  
Rescue centre's  
website

19%  
Online  
advertising site  
(e.g. Gumtree,  
Pets4Homes)

Did you find your cat online?

4%  
Searching online  
e.g. through Google  
or another search  
engine

55%  
Didn't find their  
cat online

17%  
Rescue centre's  
website

9%  
Online  
advertising site  
(e.g. Gumtree,  
Pets4Homes)

Did you find your rabbit online?

9%  
Social media,  
e.g. Facebook,  
Instagram, Twitter,  
TikTok

53%  
Didn't find their  
rabbit  
online

12%  
Online  
advertising site  
e.g. Gumtree,  
Pets4Homes

11%  
Rescue centre's  
website

# Environment



As one of the 5 Welfare Needs, owners have a legal obligation to provide a suitable environment for their pet. This includes the right type of housing with a comfortable place to rest and hide as well as space and opportunity to exercise and explore. 95% of owners told us that they felt informed about how to provide for their pet's environmental needs.

## Dogs

Walking is not just important for the physical health of our dogs, but essential for their mental wellbeing as well. Using their senses when out of the home environment, especially sniffing and scent marking, has been shown to be important to dogs<sup>11</sup>, so being given the opportunity for enrichment while on walks enhances their welfare as well as providing for the opportunity of social interactions. However, walks may not be suitable for every dog as some may struggle to cope with the external environment, so need alternatives to engage the senses and meet their needs.

## Enrichment opportunities on dog walks

75% of dog owners told us that their dog has unrestricted sniffing and exploration opportunities on their walk, while 69% have interaction with other dogs and 64% have off-lead or long-lead exercise which give them freedom to run and explore, unrestricted by the constraints of a short lead. 6% of dog owners, 610,000 dogs, said that their dog had none of the enrichment opportunities\* on a walk.

Owners who said their dog was not currently registered with a vet were more likely to also say that their dog had none of these enrichment opportunities on a walk (21%) compared to those who are registered with a vet (4%). Similarly, those who live in an urban environment (7%) were more likely to say that their dog had none of these enrichment opportunities compared to those in rural locations (3%). Younger owners (10% aged 18-24) were also more likely to say the same (4%) compared to those aged 55-64 (4%) or aged 65 or older (4%).



\*E.g. through training, games, etc

### Footnotes

\* Unrestricted sniffing and exploration, engagement with the owner (e.g. training, games, other interaction), interaction with other dogs, ability to avoid other dogs, interaction with other people, ability to avoid other people, off-lead or long-lead exercise.

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## 45% of owners told us that they have concerns about dog walking.

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### What are owners' concerns about dog walking?

- 
- 17% Scared of their dog being attacked by another dog
  - 11% Dog doesn't come back when called
  - 10% Concerned about their dog's behaviour on a walk
  - 7% Concerns about their own safety
  - 6% Owner had health problems
  - 6% Dog is too strong for them to walk / pulls on lead
  - 5% Time restrictions
  - 5% Dog has health problems
  - 4% Bad experience in the past
  - 2% Restricted areas to exercise their dog where they lived

### Owners concerns about dog walks

45% of owners told us that they have concerns about dog walking. The most common concerns reported were that they were afraid of their dog being attacked by another dog (17%), and that their dog doesn't come back when called (11%). More owners who acquired their dog from abroad said they were concerned about their dog's behaviour on walks (21%), compared to those who acquired their dog from the UK (9%). Owners who agreed with the statement that 'owning their dog is stressful' were more likely to have concerns about their dog's behaviour on a walk (21%) compared to those who disagreed with that statement (7%).

54% of owners said they had no concerns about dog walking – this figure has remained the same from February 2020, but is higher than when the question was previously asked in 2016 (48%) and 2018 (47%). Owners who acquired their dog from abroad were less likely to say they had no concerns about walking their dog, at 41%, compared to those who acquired from the UK (54%).

5% of owners said that their concerns about dog walking related to time restrictions. This is a lower proportion than in previous years - 13% of owners reported these concerns in 2018 and 10% in February 2020. However, a higher proportion of owners who have owned their dog since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (7%) are concerned about time restrictions compared to those who have owned for 3-5 years (4%) or over 5 years (4%). This could reflect that in the last few months some of these owners may be experiencing a change away from home-based working for the first time since owning their dog, as workplaces reopen after the lockdowns of the pandemic.

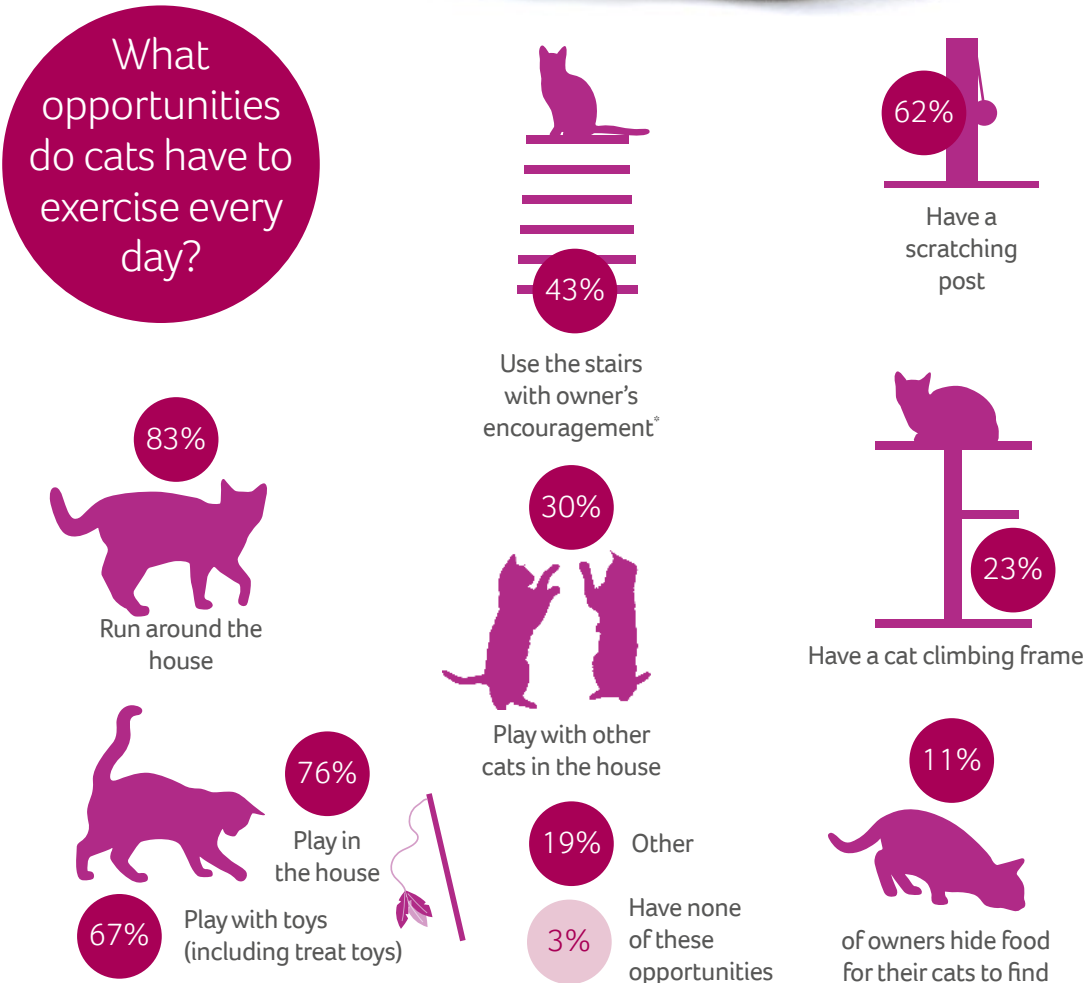
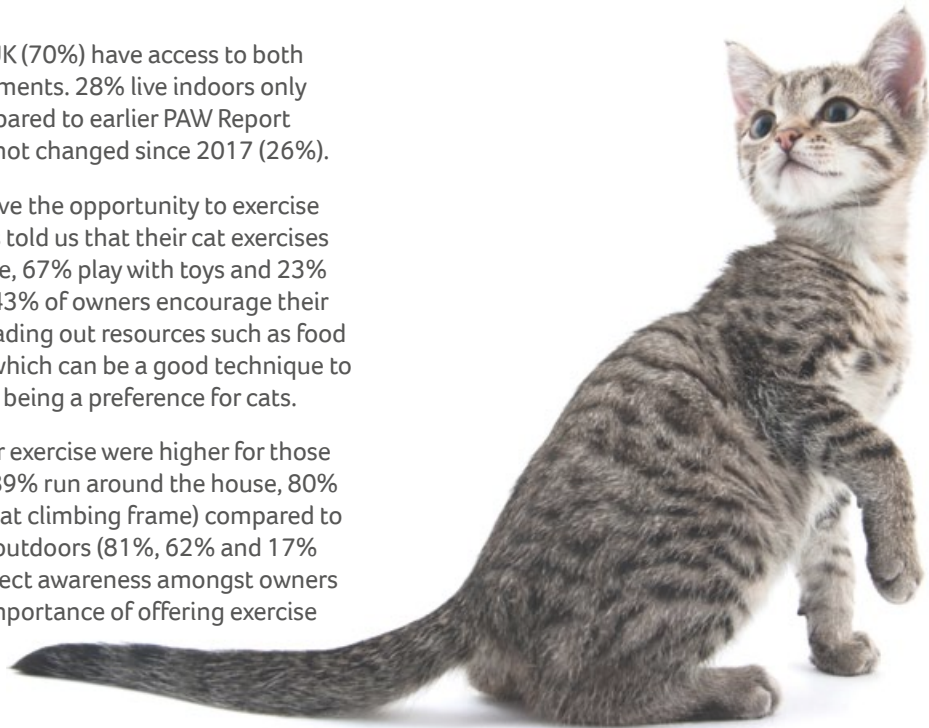
# The majority of cats in the UK (70%) have access to both indoor and outdoor environments.

## Cats

The majority of cats in the UK (70%) have access to both indoor and outdoor environments. 28% live indoors only which, while increased compared to earlier PAW Report surveys (15% in 2011), has not changed since 2017 (26%).

It is important for cats to have the opportunity to exercise in the home. 83% of owners told us that their cat exercises by running around the house, 67% play with toys and 23% have a cat climbing frame. 43% of owners encourage their cat to use the stairs by spreading out resources such as food and water bowls and beds, which can be a good technique to increase exercise, alongside being a preference for cats.

The opportunities for indoor exercise were higher for those cats that live indoors only (89% run around the house, 80% play with toys, 39% have a cat climbing frame) compared to those who live indoors and outdoors (81%, 62% and 17% respectively). This could reflect awareness amongst owners of indoor-only cats of the importance of offering exercise options for their pet.



\*E.g. spreading food and water bowls, litter tray and bed upstairs and downstairs

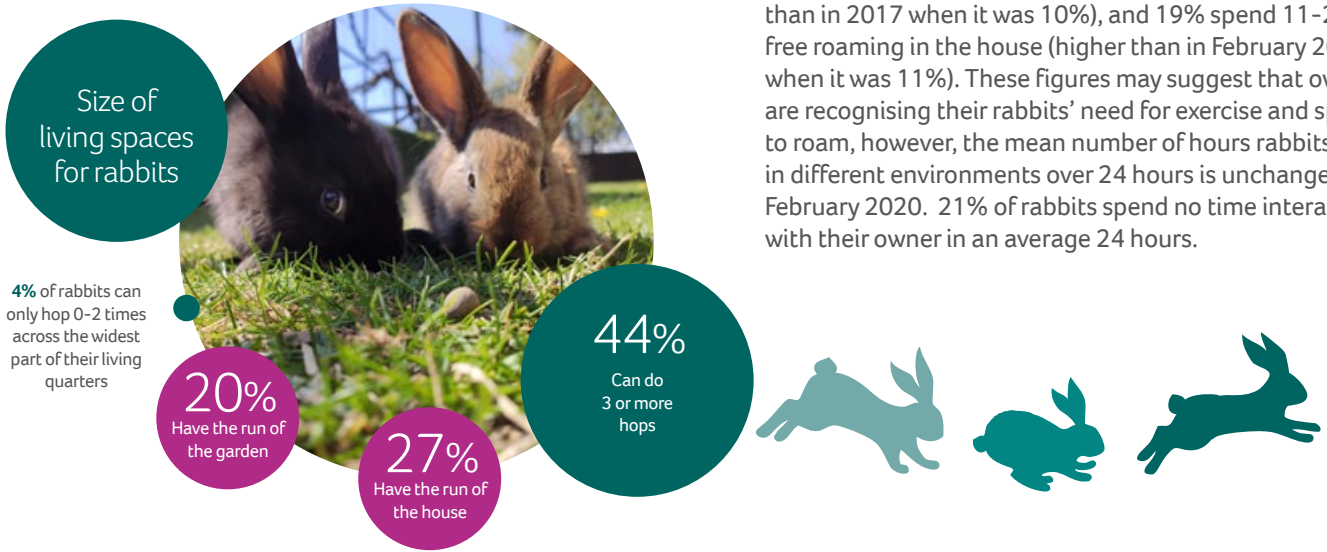
## Rabbits

In 2022, 51% of rabbits live predominantly outdoors, and 49% indoors. Whether owners choose to house their rabbits inside or out, they need to be provided with adequate space to allow them to hop, run, jump, dig and stretch out fully. The recommended living area for two average sized rabbits is a single enclosed area of at least 3m x 2m by 1m high<sup>12</sup>.

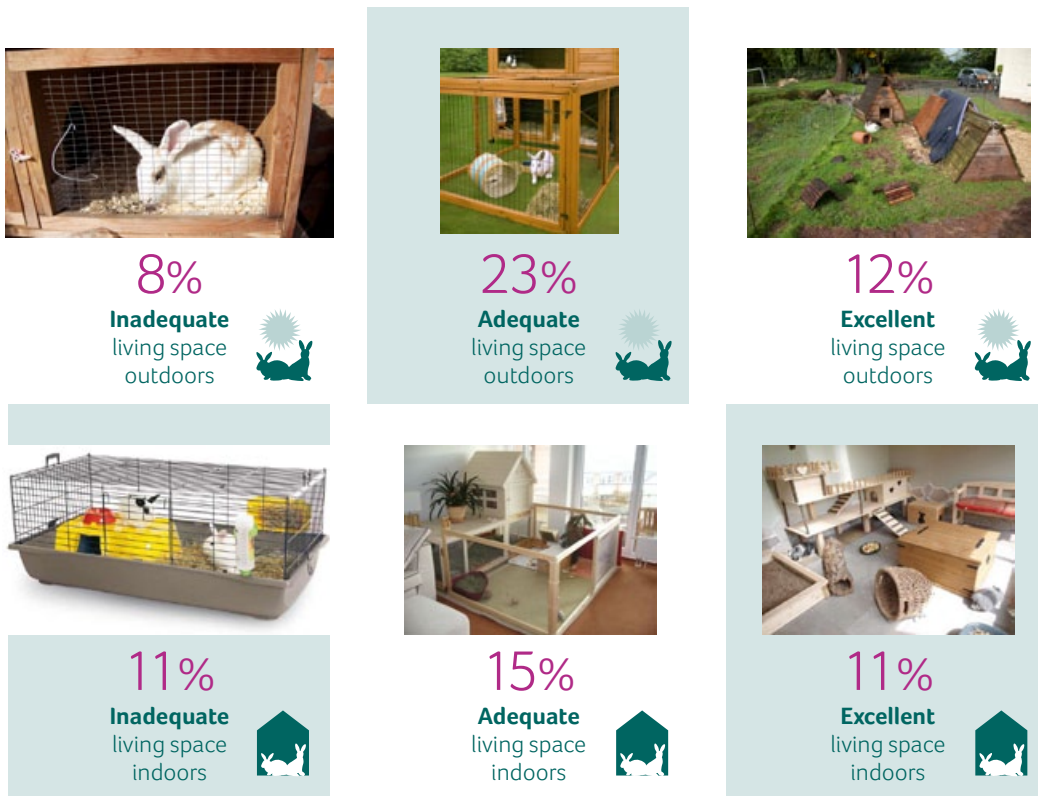
When we asked owners to identify which image most closely resembled their pets' living space, 19% of owners selected images of small hutches with little or no run space, meaning that 190,000 rabbits are living in inadequate housing conditions. 8% of rabbits living predominantly outdoors are in inadequate housing, and 11% of rabbits living predominantly indoors.

4% of rabbits can only hop 0-2 times across the widest part of their living quarters. While this is lower than when we previously asked in 2015 (7%), 39,000 rabbits still do not have adequate space for exercise. 44% of rabbits can do 3 or more hops – this is significantly higher for rabbits who live predominantly outdoors (59%) compared to inside (35%). It is possible for rabbits living indoors to have adequate housing, but it can be more difficult for owners to give them the space they need. 27% of rabbits have full run of the house, while 20% have the run of the garden – this may reflect the need to keep outdoor rabbits enclosed for safety from predators.

In an average 24 hours, 46% of rabbits spend 11-23 hours in a hutch, lower than in 2017 (63%) and 2018 (52%). 15% of rabbits spend 6-10 hours in a run in the garden (higher than in 2017 when it was 10%), and 19% spend 11-23 hours free roaming in the house (higher than in February 2020 when it was 11%). These figures may suggest that owners are recognising their rabbits' need for exercise and space to roam, however, the mean number of hours rabbits spend in different environments over 24 hours is unchanged from February 2020. 21% of rabbits spend no time interacting with their owner in an average 24 hours.



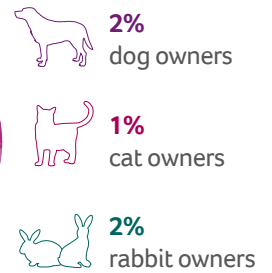
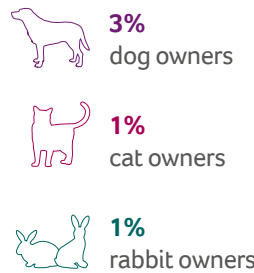
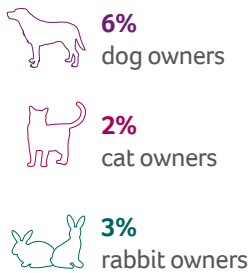
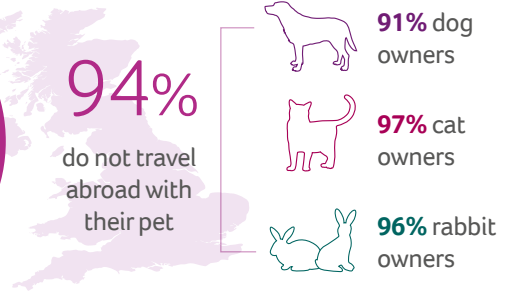
## We asked ... Which of these pictures most closely resembles your rabbits' living space?



## Travel abroad

In 2022, 6% of pet owners told us that they had travelled abroad with their pets. This is higher for dog owners (9%) than cat (3%) or rabbit owners (4%). The most common destinations are countries within the EU (6% of dog owners, 2% of cat owners and 3% of rabbit owners) with 68% of these owners travelling at least once a year. Of those owners that do travel abroad with their pet, 58% do so for a holiday, and 39% visit family abroad. 14% told us that they travel abroad with their pet to compete in pet shows or competitions. 14% told us that they travel abroad with their pet to compete in pet shows or competitions.

Where do owners travel to with their pets?



Why do you travel abroad with your pet?



Hear from Veterinary Specialist Advisor at the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWF) [Dr Richard Saunders, MRCVS here](#)

### Footnotes

11 Rezáč, P., Viziová, P., Dobešová, M., Havlíček, Z., & Pospíšilová, D. (2011). Factors affecting dog–dog interactions on walks with their owners. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 134(3-4), 170-176.

12 <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/space-recommendations/>



# Diet and obesity

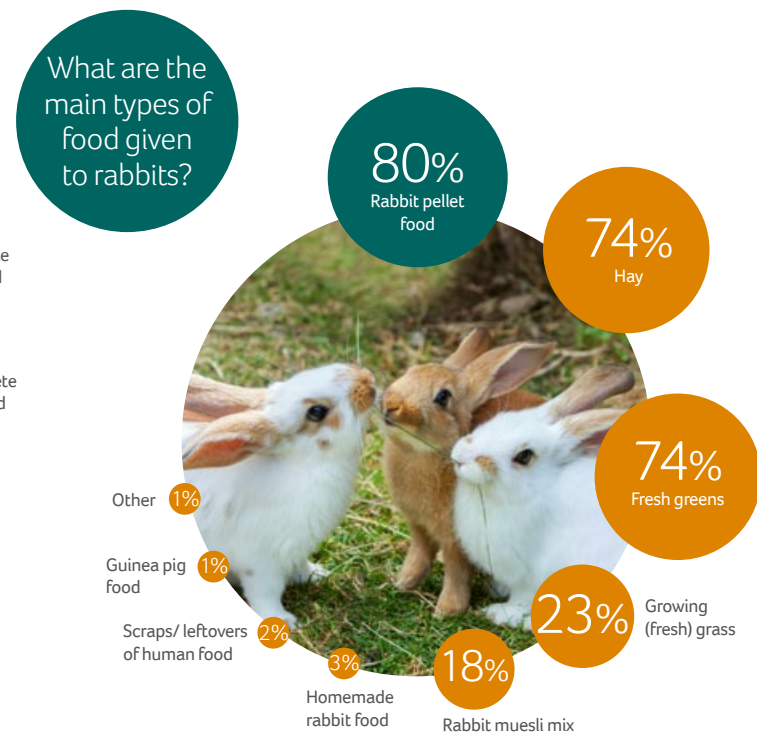
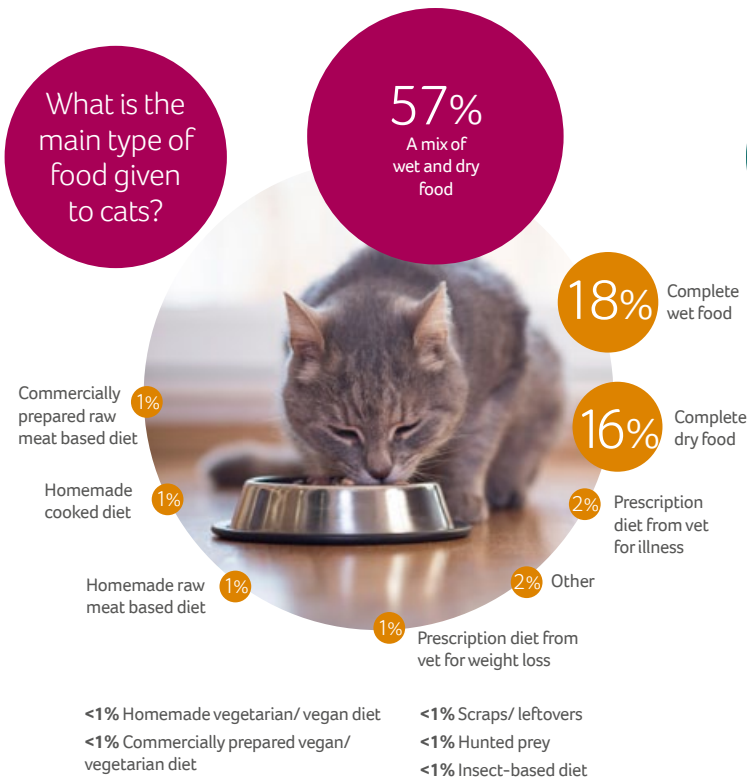
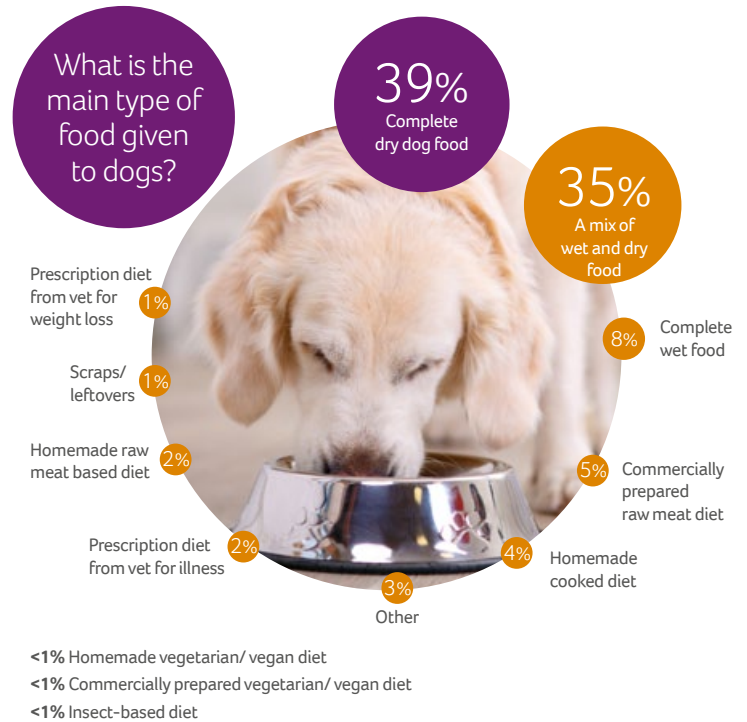


The legal requirement to feed pets a suitable diet may seem simple to fulfil - 95% of owners told us that they feel well informed about their pet's dietary needs. However, knowing what diet is appropriate for their pets' long-term health and wellbeing may be difficult, with a huge amount of conflicting information available. Owners need to be aware of the importance of following evidence-based science and feeding diets that have undergone proper trials with input from nutritional experts.

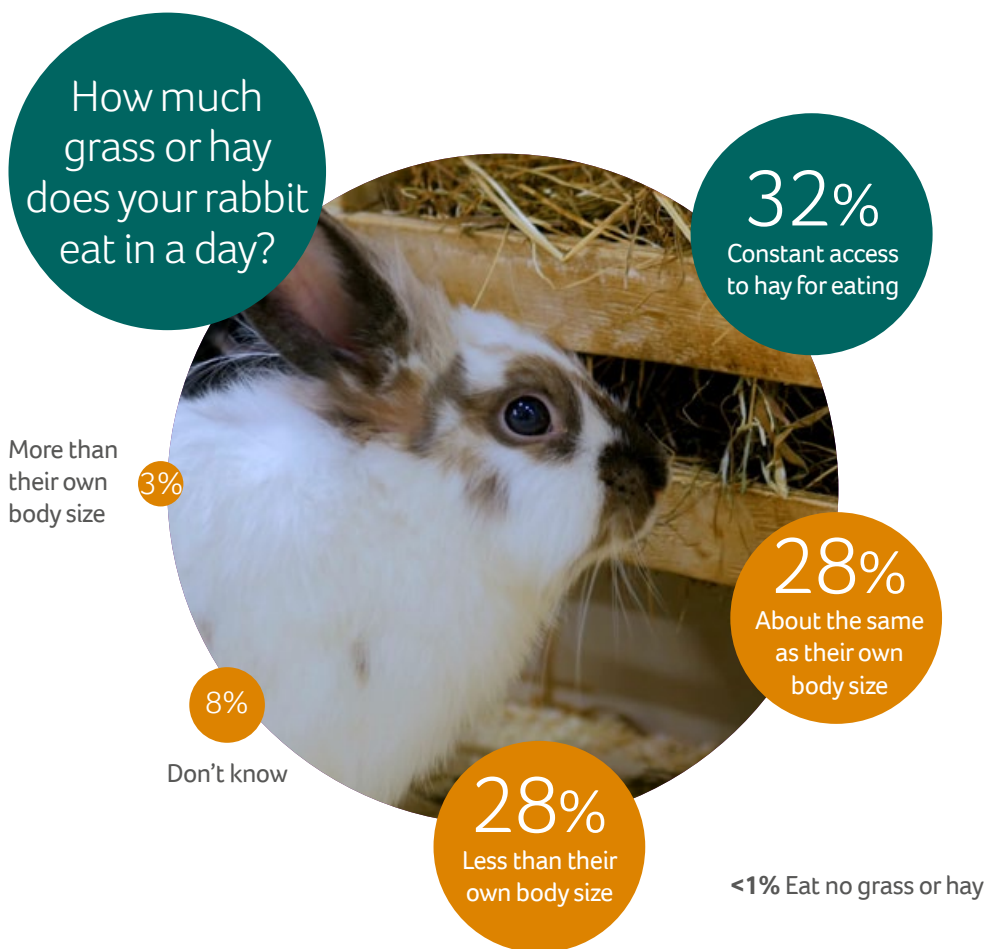
As in previous years, the main type of food dogs are fed is complete dry food (39%) followed by a mix of wet and dry (35%). 5% are fed commercially prepared raw food and 2% given a homemade raw meat diet, equating to 790,000 UK dogs who are fed a raw diet.

Most cats in the UK are fed a mix of wet and dry food (57%). 1% are fed a homemade raw diet and 1% a commercially prepared raw diet.

The main foods given to pet rabbits are rabbit pellet food (80%), fresh greens (74%) and hay (74%). The large proportion that are fed this ideal diet is encouraging, however, 18% of rabbits are still fed a muesli-type diet as one of their main food types. Whilst this is an improvement compared to 2011 when 49% of rabbits received this diet, the figure is unchanged since 2020, meaning that 180,000 rabbits are potentially at risk of health problems due to a poor diet<sup>13</sup>.



Significantly more rabbit owners feel very well informed about diet (64%) compared to dog owners (55%) and cat owners (46%).



Hay or grass is an essential part of rabbits' diet, needed for digestive and dental health as well as to allow natural behaviours such as foraging, grazing and digging<sup>14</sup>. 32% of rabbits have constant access to hay or grass, which is ideal<sup>15</sup>, but 29% say that their rabbit has access to less than their body size of hay or none at all each day which is less than the recommended minimum amount. This has increased compared to February 2020 (22%) but is still an improvement compared to 2011 (45%).

Significantly more rabbit owners feel very well informed about diet (64%) compared to dog owners (55%) and cat owners (46%). Collaborative campaigns between charities, veterinary organisations and pet trade organisations, such as Rabbit Awareness Week, have focused on owner education around issues such as the ideal diet for rabbits, and could have helped this to increase by raising awareness.

60% of owners told us that they regularly give their pet human food in some form, such as leftovers (26%), cheese (22%) and bread or toast (10%). Human food can be high in fats and sugar, and can contribute to obesity and weight problems as well as potentially leading to an unbalanced diet for our pets<sup>16</sup>.

Despite clinical studies which have found that up to 65% of dogs are obese or overweight<sup>17,18</sup>, 82% of dog owners told us that their dog was the ideal weight and 78% of cat owners and 87% of rabbit owners told us the same. Less than 1% of dog owners and only 1% of rabbit and cat owners described their pet as obese.

One of the claimed benefits of raw diets is that dogs are less likely to be overweight. Our data found that owners of dogs fed a raw diet, whether homemade or commercial, were less likely to describe their pet as overweight (13%) compared to owners who fed their dogs a homemade (vegetarian or cooked) diet (17%) and a wet complete food (20%). However, there were no difference between raw fed dogs and dogs fed complete dry food being described as overweight (12%).

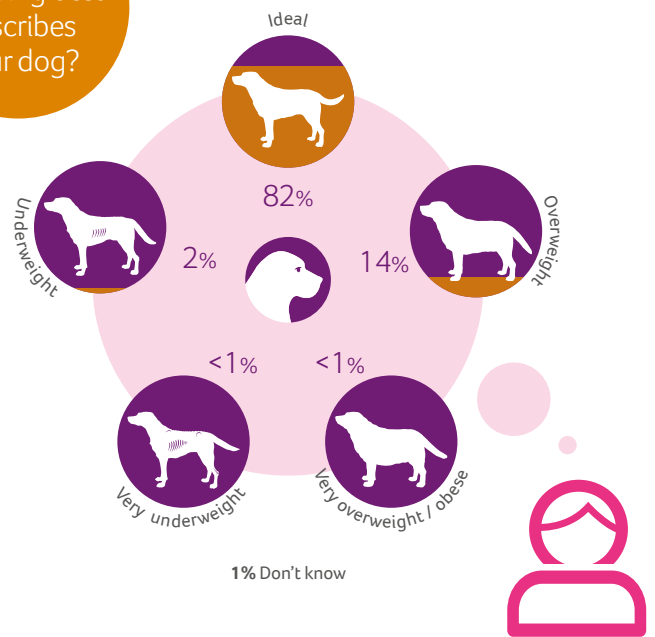
The lack of recognition of obesity amongst owners seems to be increasing. More owners in 2022 describe their pet as being the ideal weight (81%) compared to 2018 (77%) and fewer owners in 2022 describe their pet as being overweight (14%) compared to 2018 (17%).

## More pet owners that are registered with a vet are likely to describe their pet as overweight (15%) compared to those not registered (10%).

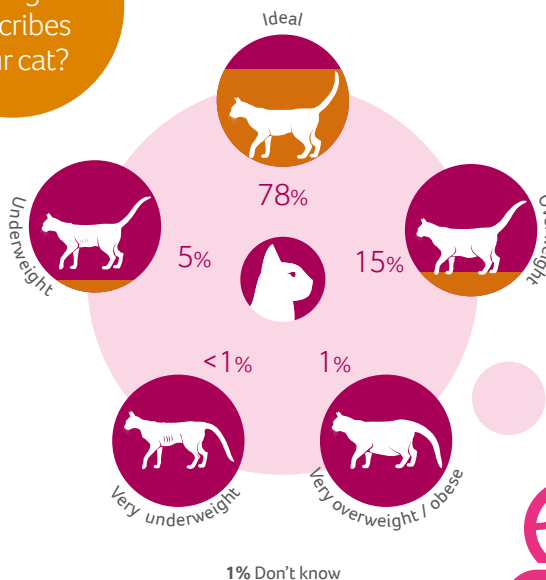
Conversely, a higher proportion of owners who aren't registered with a vet say that their pet is obese (2%) compared to those who are registered with a vet (0%). These findings are interesting and as yet we don't know the reasons why. It could be that overweight pets are more likely to have health problems that need veterinary attention but less likely to be obese because of that veterinary intervention and findings could be complicated by some owners' lack of recognition of weight loss.

Being aware of their pets' weight or body condition score is an effective tool for owners to manage their pets' weight<sup>19</sup>. 64% of dog owners, 41% of cat owners, and 28% of rabbit owners told us that they know their pet's current weight, while 14% of dog owners, 11% of cat owners, and 14% of rabbit owners know their pet's body condition score. More owners registered with a vet know their pet's weight and / or body condition score (59%) compared to those not registered (35%).

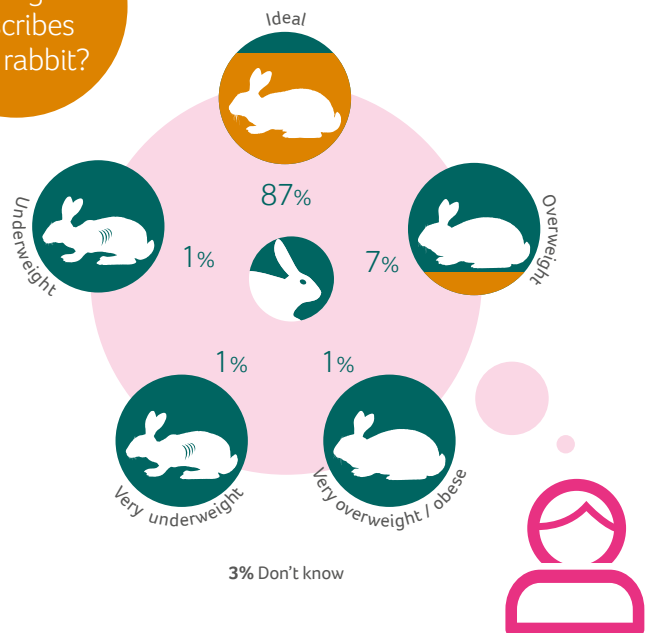
Which of the following best describes your dog?



Which of the following best describes your cat?



Which of the following best describes your rabbit?



### Footnotes

- 13 Prebble, J. L., Langford, F. M., Shaw, D. J., & Meredith, A. L. (2015). The effect of four different feeding regimes on rabbit behaviour. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 169, 86-92.
- 14 Lidfors, L. (1997). Behavioural effects of environmental enrichment for individually caged rabbits. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 52(1-2), 157-169.
- 15 Clauss, M., Hatt, J.-M. (2017). Evidence-Based Rabbit Housing and Nutrition *Vet Clin North Am Exot Anim Pract* 20(3), 871-884.
- 16 Swanson, K. S., Carter, R. A., Yount, T. P., Aretz, J., & Buff, P. R. (2013). Nutritional sustainability of pet foods. *Advances in Nutrition*, 4(2), 141-150.
- 17 German AJ, Woods GRT, Holden SL, Brennan L and Burke C 2018 Dangerous trends in pet obesity. *Veterinary Record* 182: 25. <https://doi.org/10.1136/VR.K2>
- 18 Pegram C, Raffan E, White E, Ashworth AH, Brodbelt DC, Church DB and O'Neill DG 2021 Frequency, breed predisposition and demographic risk factors for overweight status in dogs in the UK. *Journal of Small Animal Practice* 62: 521-530. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JSA.13325>
- 19 Laflamme, D. (2015). Why the Concern Over Obesity: An Introduction. *Companion Animal Nutrition Summit*, 1-4.

# Pet behaviour



Unwanted behaviours can damage the bond between pets and their owner and can also result in serious consequences for their welfare. Behavioural problems remain one of the top reasons for dogs to be surrendered to rescues<sup>20</sup> and can be a cause of stress for owners

## Dogs

Our data this year has shown a higher proportion of dogs are being left alone for longer periods of time than over the last 2 years (see Companionship). If owners have not properly prepared their dogs for this change, there is a risk of them developing separation related behaviours<sup>21</sup>.

11% of dogs (1.1 million) are showing signs of stress when left alone\*. This is significantly higher for dogs obtained from abroad (20%) compared to dogs obtained from a UK rescue centre rehoming UK pets (12%) or UK breeder of one specific breed (10%). Significantly more dogs owned for up to two years are showing signs of distress when left alone (14%) compared to dogs owned for over five years (9%) – these dogs will only have known life through the COVID-19 pandemic and its related lockdowns, so may never have experienced longer periods of time alone.

## Signs of fear in dogs

23% of dogs are growling, biting, snapping or showing signs of fear, all of which could be related to a lack of socialisation to new experiences as a young puppy<sup>22</sup>. Significantly fewer dogs less than one year old (15%) are displaying these signs compared to dogs aged over one (21%). Whilst we don't know the reasons for this, it may be that dogs under one have had more normality compared to those slightly older dogs who would have been obtained during the first few months of the pandemic and therefore may have not been exposed to new experiences or had appropriate positive socialisation during lockdowns. However, it may reflect untreated fears and anxieties worsening as dogs become older when signs may become increasingly severe as more subtle communication attempts are unsuccessful.

13% of dogs are growling, snapping or biting unfamiliar dogs, suggesting they may be uncomfortable around dogs they do not know. The proportion of dogs showing this behaviour that were obtained from abroad (19%) or from a UK rescue for UK pets (17%) is significantly higher than for dogs obtained from a UK breeder of one specific breed (10%). Additionally, significantly more dogs obtained from a UK rescue or rehoming centre for UK pets are showing growling, biting, or snapping behaviours and signs of fear (29%) compared to dogs obtained from a UK breeder of one specific breed (17%). While this may reflect in some cases the reasons dogs were surrendered to rescue in the first place, it does highlight the importance of owners choosing rescue organisations who provide full behavioural assessment and post-adoption support.

Significantly more neutered dogs are growling, snapping or biting unfamiliar dogs (14%) compared to unneutered dogs (10%) and significantly more neutered dogs are showing signs of fear (12%) compared to unneutered dogs (8%). This may reflect a higher proportion of neutered dogs coming from UK rescue centres for UK pets (18%) compared to dogs acquired from a UK based breeder of one specific breed (25%). It also highlights the importance of a full veterinary assessment to include behavioural discussions before owners decide on neutering procedures for their pets as removing sex hormones can make problems worse in those dogs that may be anxious and fearful<sup>23,24</sup>.



## Footnotes

\* e.g. scratching, destructive behaviour, prolonged barking, crying, howling, toileting in the house.

## Which behaviours does your dog show?



We asked owners whether their dog had ever been bitten, or had themselves bitten or chased other animals or people. 83% of owners told us that their dog had never been involved in any of these situations. However, 5% (510,000) of dogs have been bitten by another dog outside the home where veterinary care was needed, 3% (320,000) have bitten an unfamiliar dog and 2% (190,000) have bitten a familiar dog. Also, 1% (140,000 dogs) have bitten an owner or carer where professional medical care has been needed, however, this is likely to only capture the more severe bites, and those where medical intervention wasn't warranted may be much higher.

\* For more than a minute at a time at someone out of the window

† (E.g. scratching, destructive behaviour, prolonged barking, crying, howling, toileting in the house)

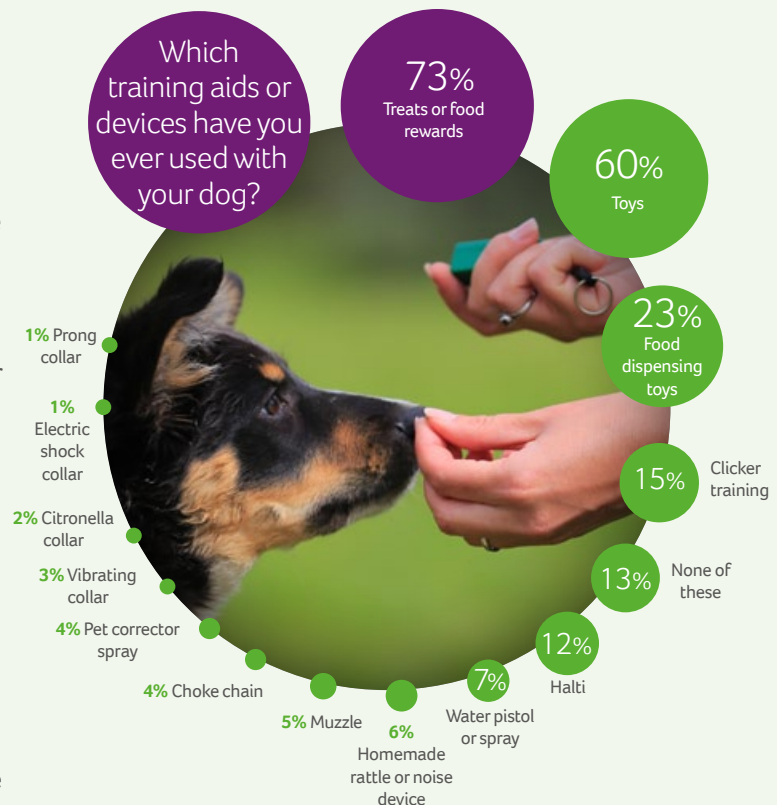
## Training aids for dogs

The majority of owners (86%) told us that they had used training devices for their dog\*\*, with only 13% saying they had not used any of the options given. 20% of dog owners have used training devices that are aversive\*\*\* and can be damaging to welfare. This is significantly fewer than in 2019 (25%) but still means that 2 million dogs are subjected to aversive and negative training methods which can compromise welfare, the human-dog relationship, and make behaviour problems worse<sup>25</sup>.

More owners of dogs obtained from abroad use aversive training aids (31%) compared to dogs from a UK rescue centre for UK pets (14%), from UK based breeders of single or multiple breeds (23%) or from family, friends or neighbours (16%). Fewer dogs registered with a vet use citronella, prong, vibrating, and electric shock collars (5%) compared to those not registered with a vet (10%), which may be a result of veterinary staff communicating the harmful impact these tools can have, or veterinary referrals guiding owners to qualified, registered behaviourists who use positive, evidence-based methods.

Significantly more dogs registered with a vet use treats and rewards as a training aid (76%) compared to those not registered with a vet (42%). Similarly, more dogs registered with a vet use food dispensing toys (24%) compared to those not registered (12%). Again, this could reflect veterinary teams promoting the use of these valuable training aids.

## Which training aids or devices have you ever used with your dog?



### Footnotes

\*\* clicker training, citronella collar, electric shock collar, vibrating collar, prong collar, treats or food rewards, toys, food dispensing toys, muzzle, Halti, choke chain, pet corrector spray, water pistol or spray, homemade rattle or noise device.

\*\*\* citronella collar, electric shock collar, vibrating collar, prong collar, choke chain, pet corrector spray, water pistol or spray, homemade rattle or noise device.

## Cats

44% of cats are showing behaviours that may be indicative of stress\*\*\*\*. It is important to note that some of these behaviours may not always be seen under stress and may be misinterpreted by the owner, however they can indicate welfare problems for the cat.

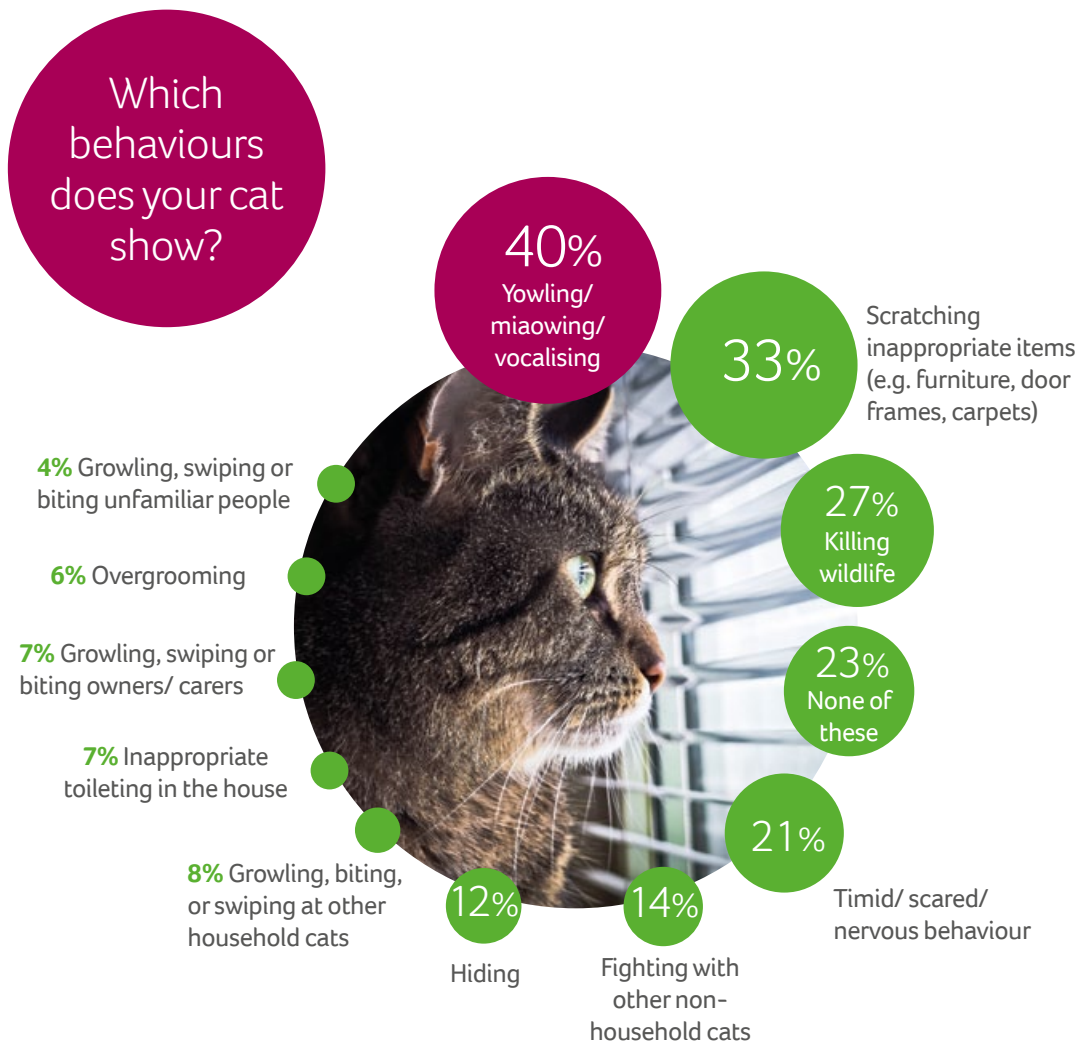
Significantly more cats in a single-cat household are showing signs of hiding behaviour (14%) compared to households with two (10%) or three or more (4%) cats. There are a number of possible explanations - owners may have recognised this behaviour in their cats and have tried to reduce their stress by not acquiring other cats, or it could be more noticeable to owners with only one cat to observe. Alternatively, as cats in multi-cat households often divide up their space, it may be that they are unable to access suitable places to hide.

Significantly more cats in a single-cat household are showing timid, scared or nervous behaviour (24%) compared to households with two (17%) or three or more (10%) cats. Similar to hiding behaviour, it may be that owners notice this more when their focus is only on one cat or contrarily, having another cat/s in the household that they are bonded with may provide confidence and reassurance.

Significantly more cats that live both indoors and outdoors are growling, swiping, or biting other household cats (9%) compared to those cats that live indoors only (5%) which is an interesting finding given that conflict is likely to be higher in indoor-only cats due to potential limitation of resources; however, it may be that owners with indoor cats manage the environment better. Conversely, significantly fewer cats that live both indoors and outdoors are hiding (10%) or showing timid, scared, and nervous behaviour (19%) compared to indoor only cats (16% and 24% respectively). This could reflect the type of cat that owners choose to keep indoors.

**30% of owners told us that their cat was afraid of travelling in the car, and 25% were afraid of the vet.**

This could lead to owners being unwilling to seek veterinary attention when needed. Initiatives such as the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM) Cat Friendly Clinic scheme provide education and resources for veterinary teams on reducing the stress for cats during visits to the vets.



### Footnotes

\*\*\*\* Growling, biting, snapping, inappropriate toileting, hiding, timid, nervous, scared, overgrooming.



## Fireworks

41% of dog owners (4.1 million dogs), 30% of cat owners (3.3 million cats) and 16% of rabbit owners (160,000 rabbits) told us that their pet was afraid of fireworks. In comparison, 24% of dogs, 17% of cats and 11% of rabbits told us that their pet was afraid of thunder and lightning. Firework phobia is well recognised in dogs but may be under recognised by owners in cats and rabbits, due to those species not showing overt signs of fear, particularly if their coping mechanism is to hide away. Therefore, the proportion of cats and rabbits with fear of fireworks is likely to be much higher than our findings suggest. This is an area where owner education and support is vital.

82% of all owners agreed that fireworks should only be allowed on certain dates and times and 71% of owners agreed that there should be a compulsory reduction in the noise of fireworks to make them quieter.

 **Hear from European Veterinary Specialist in Behavioural Medicine, Dr Sarah Heath FRCVS [here](#)**

### Footnotes

- 20 Powdrill-Wells, N., Taylor, S., & Melfi, V. (2021). Reducing dog relinquishment to rescue centres due to behaviour problems: identifying cases to target with an advice intervention at the point of relinquishment request. *Animals*, 11(10), 2766.
- 21 Meneses, T., Robinson, J., Rose, J., Vernick, J., & Overall, K. L. (2021). Review of epidemiological, pathological, genetic, and epigenetic factors that may contribute to the development of separation anxiety in dogs. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 259(10), 1118-1129.
- 22 Puurunen, J., Hakanen, E., Salonen, M. K., Mikkola, S., Sulkama, S., Araujo, C., & Lohi, H. (2020). Inadequate socialisation, inactivity, and urban living environment are associated with social fearfulness in pet dogs. *Scientific reports*, 10(1), 1-10.
- 23 Guy, N. C., Luescher, U. A., Dohoo, S. E., Spangler, E., Miller, J. B., Dohoo, I. R., & Bate, L. A. (2001). Demographic and aggressive characteristics of dogs in a general veterinary caseload. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 74(1), 15-28.
- 24 Bradshaw, J. W. S., McPherson, J. A., Casey, R. A., & Larter, I. S. (2002). Aetiology of separation-related behaviour in domestic dogs. *Veterinary Record*, 151(2), 43-46
- 25 Fernandes, J. G., Olsson, I. A. S., & de Castro, A. C. V. (2017). Do aversive-based training methods actually compromise dog welfare?: A literature review. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 196, 1-12.

# Companionship

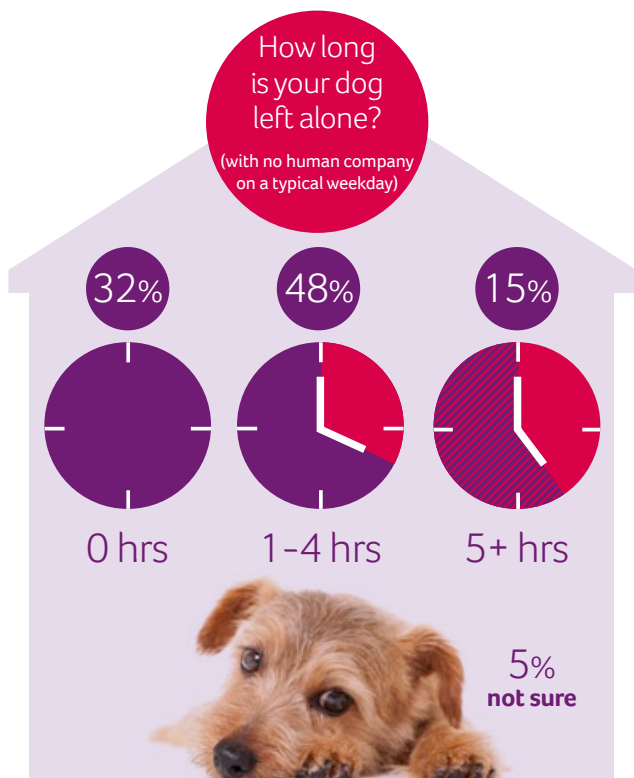


It is important that owners provide for the different companionship needs of their pets. Dogs' and cats' companionship needs can often be met by humans<sup>26</sup>, but rabbits need the company of other rabbits<sup>27</sup>. 85% of owners felt informed about their pet's companionship needs. Significantly fewer cat owners feel very well informed about companionship (33%) compared to rabbit owners (46%) and dog owners (42%).

## How long were dogs left alone?

Not surprisingly, our August 2020 survey, conducted after the first UK lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, found that owners were spending more time with their dogs. At that time, 43% of owners told us that their dog was not left alone on a typical day, and only 11% said that their dog was left alone for 5 hours or more.

In 2022, the amount of time that dogs are left alone for is beginning to return to pre-pandemic levels, with 32% of owners saying that on a typical day, their dogs were not left alone, and 15% were left for 5 hours or more hours, equating to 1.5 million dogs. Owners who had acquired their dog since the beginning of the pandemic were no more likely to leave their pet alone for 5 hours or more (14%) compared to those who had owned for 3-5 years (17%) or over 5 years (15%). Owners who not registered with a vet (22%) were more likely to leave their dogs at home for 5 or more hours compared to those who were registered with a vet (14%), which may reflect a better awareness of their dog's companionship needs, following discussions with a veterinary professional.

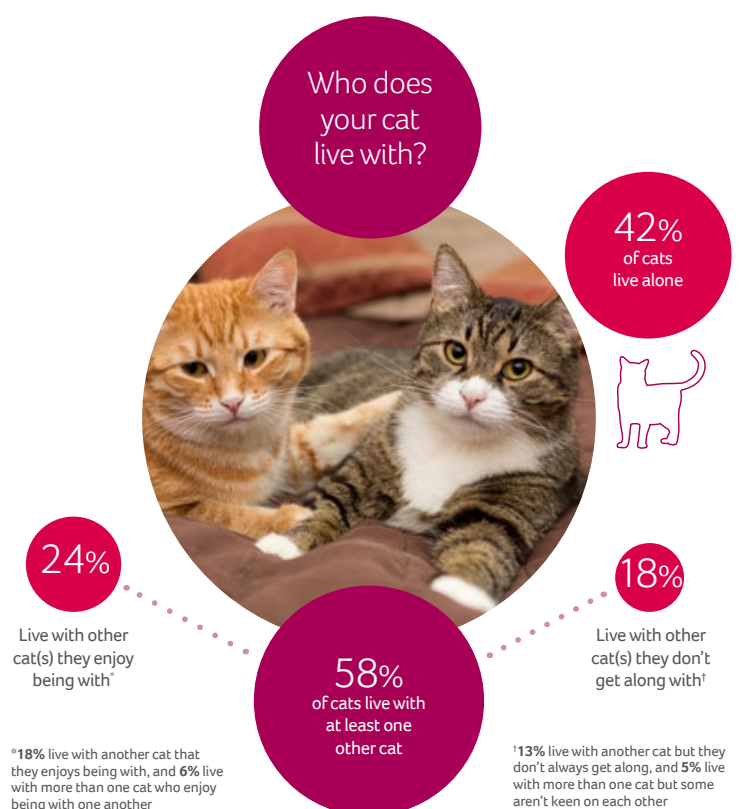


## Cats

42% of cats in the UK live with another cat including 18% who live with another cat who they don't get on with, or where some aren't keen on each other, which could mean that 2 million cats are living under stressful living conditions. It is possible that this is under-reported, as owners may not always recognise when their cats are not getting on together.

In multi-cat households, younger cats are more likely to get on with other cats they live with; more cats aged 1 – 5 years (63%) live with other cats that they enjoy living with compared to cats aged 16 years or more (42%). This may be related to being accustomed to other cats from a younger age or not being socially mature yet. These findings suggest that, at least in the eyes of their owners, male cats are also more likely to get on with other cats that they live with – in multi-cat households, 61% of male cats live with other cats they enjoy being with compared to 51% of female cats.

65% of cat owners living on their own had one cat compared to 57% of owners living in a household of 2 people and 57% living in a household of 3-4 people.





## The proportion of rabbits living with at least one other rabbit is down from 47% in February 2020 to 41% in 2022.

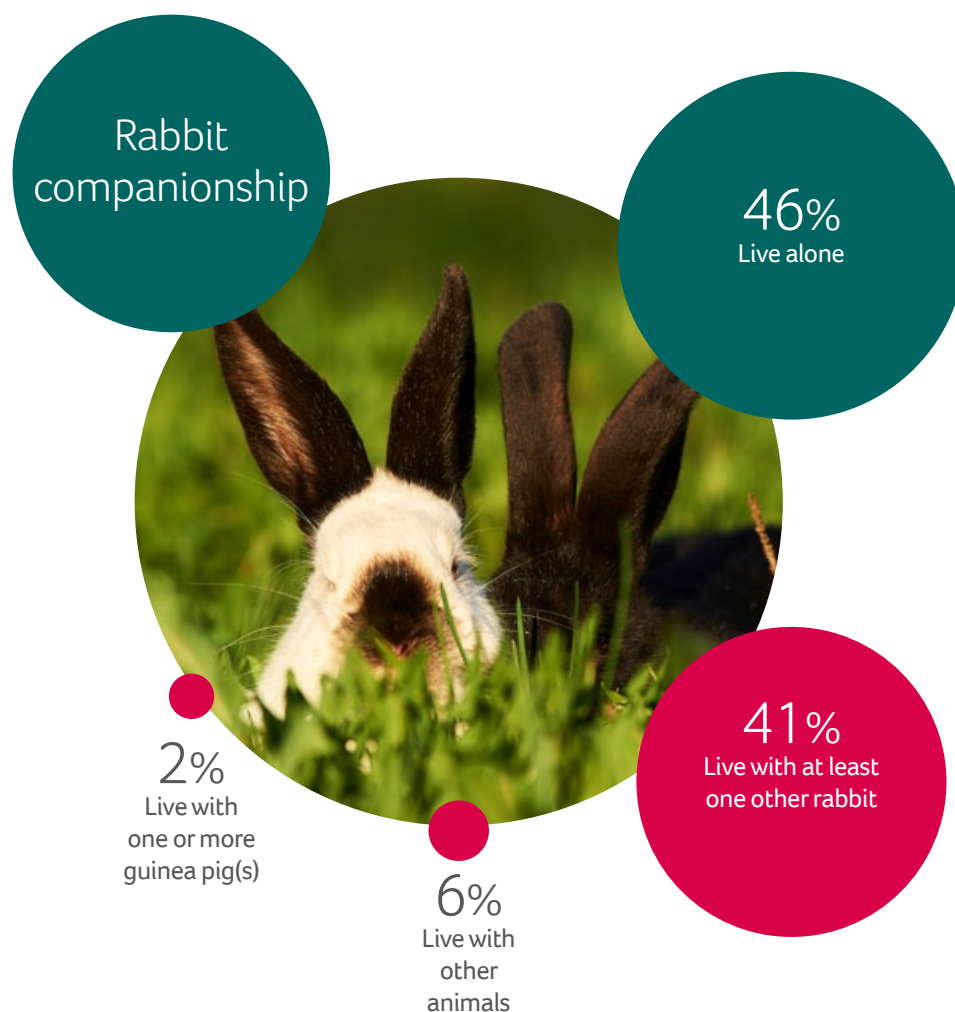
### Rabbits

The proportion of rabbits living alone (46%) is now no different compared to immediately prior to the pandemic (42% in February 2020) which is reassuring given that the 2021 figure (48%) was higher than February 2020. However, this still means that over 460,000 rabbits are living a lonely existence without the companionship their highly social species requires.

The proportion of rabbits living with at least one other rabbit is down from 47% in February 2020 to 41% in 2022. As the proportion of rabbits living completely alone hasn't increased, it might be that slightly more owners are keeping their rabbit with another species (e.g. guinea pig), but these changes are not visible in the data as yet.

59% of rabbits owned for 5 years or more live alone, compared to 38% of those owned for up to 2 years and 45% of those owned for 3-5 years. Senior rabbits (55%, aged 5 years and older) are more likely to be kept alone compared to adult rabbits (41%, aged 2-4 years old) or junior rabbits (33%, aged up to 1 year old).

This supports last year's finding that the most common reason for only having one rabbit (34%) was that owners had had more than one rabbit but one had passed away and they chose not to replace them.



#### Footnotes

26 Bradshaw, J. W. (2016). Sociality in cats: A comparative review. *Journal of veterinary behavior*, 11, 113-124.

27 DiVincenti Jr, L., & Rehrig, A. N. (2016). The social nature of European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). *Journal of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science*, 55(6), 729-736.

# Preventive health

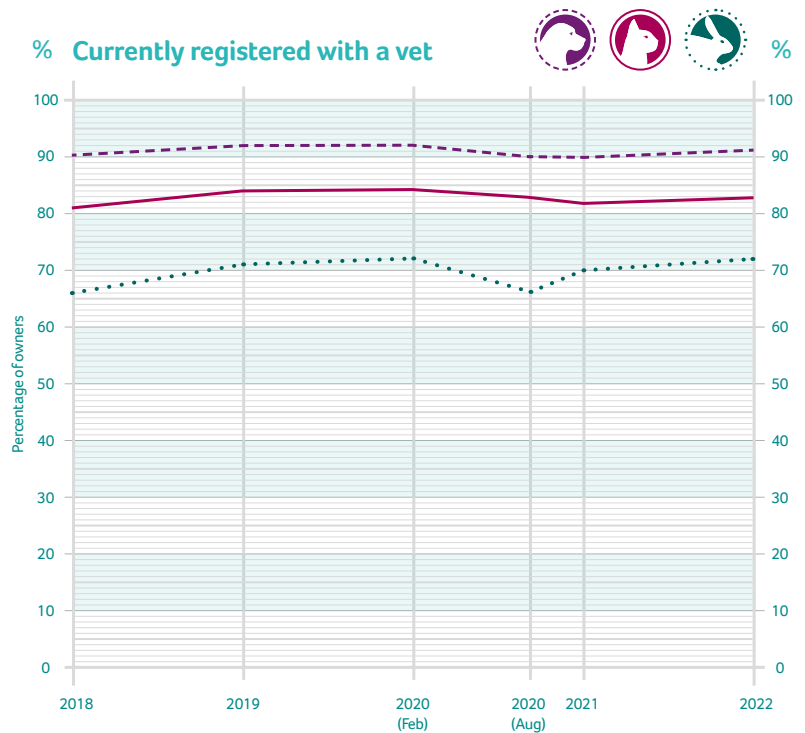


As in previous years, in 2022 we asked owners what preventive healthcare their pets had received, and reasons why their pet may not have received any.

Financial concerns remain one of the reasons for owners not providing preventive care for their pets, with 13% of owners saying it was too expensive when asked why they hadn't had their pet vaccinated, and 8% why they hadn't had their pet neutered. The current rising cost of living crisis could worsen the ability of owners to afford to provide preventive care for their pets.

However, it is widely recognised that there are concerns across the sector regarding the capacity at veterinary practices with reports of staff shortages and long waiting times for appointments<sup>6</sup>.

This year's PAW Report findings show that approximately 170,000 pets are not currently registered with a vet because their owners say that practices in their region are not taking on new clients (5% of owners who say that their pet is not currently registered). Additionally, some owners reported that their practice wasn't providing neutering, vaccination, or microchipping procedures (2% of owners who haven't had their pet neutered, 4% of owners whose pet hasn't had regular boosters, and 3% of owners who hadn't had their pet microchipped).



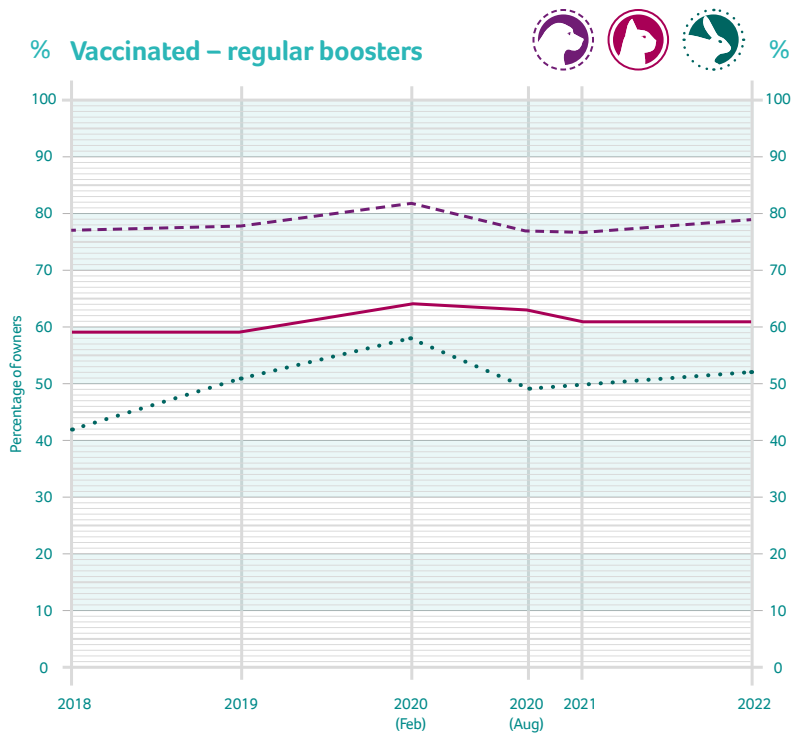
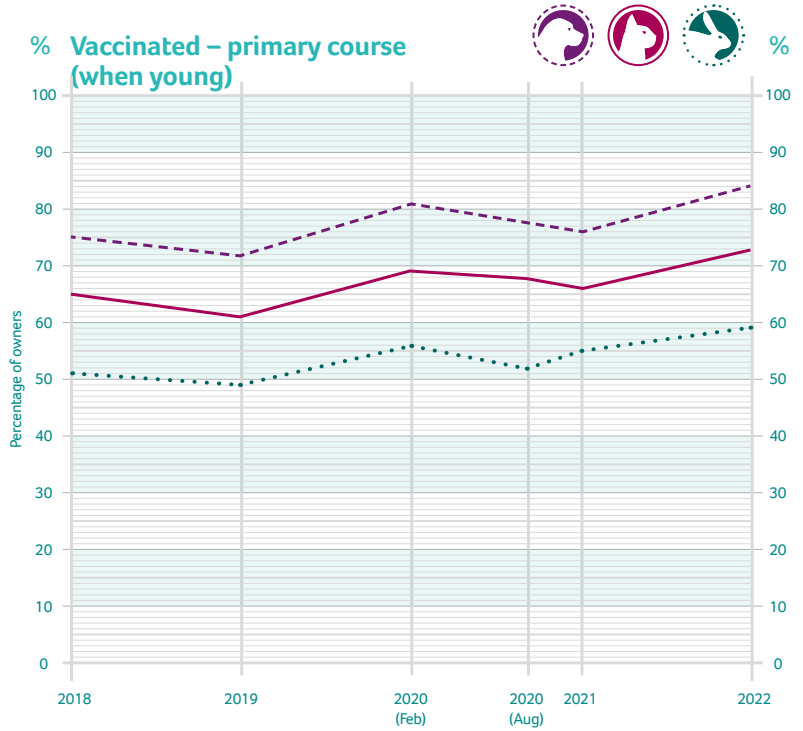
# Uptake of preventive health measures in pets

## Vaccinations

In 2022, 79% of dogs, 61% of cats and 52% of rabbits have received regular booster vaccinations. While this is slightly lower than the proportion in February 2020 (82%, 64% and 58% respectively), it is not significantly different from 2021 (77%, 61% and 50% respectively). In 2022, 2.2 million dogs, 4.3 million cats and 480,000 rabbits have not received regular booster vaccinations.

Owners who acquired their cat from a UK rescue centre for UK pets (73%) were more likely to say that their cat was receiving regular booster vaccinations than those who acquired from a UK based breeder or private seller (65%), from abroad (59%), or from family, friends or neighbours (53%).

Although unchanged since 2021, the number of dogs, cats and rabbits not receiving regular boosters remains a concern. Disease such as leptospirosis in dogs, where vaccinations do not provide long lived immunity and protection cannot be predicted with titre testing, is still regularly seen in the UK<sup>28</sup>. The emergence of a second strain of Viral Haemorrhagic Disease in rabbits over the last few years<sup>29</sup> emphasizes the importance of regular vaccination in all our pets.



## Neutering

70% of dogs in the UK are neutered with owners of female dogs more likely to report that their pet has been neutered (75%) compared to owners of male dogs (65%). When asked why their dogs had not been neutered, the owners of male dogs were more likely to say there was no benefit (23%) or be concerned about a change in personality (18%) than the owners of female dogs (10% and 7% respectively). 9% of owners said their dog wasn't neutered because they wanted to breed from them, which is unchanged from 2019 (9%) and lower than in 2011 (15%) and was the same proportion for owners who acquired their dog in the last 2 years (11%) compared to those who'd owned for 3 years or more (8%). This appears to indicate that the increased price of puppies during 2020 and 2021<sup>30</sup> has not encouraged owners to breed from their family pets, or try to recoup the price of their purchase.

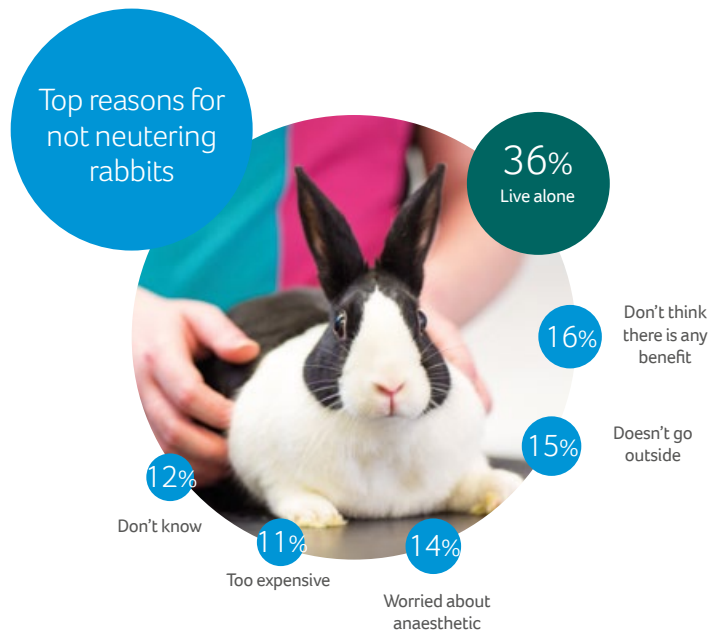
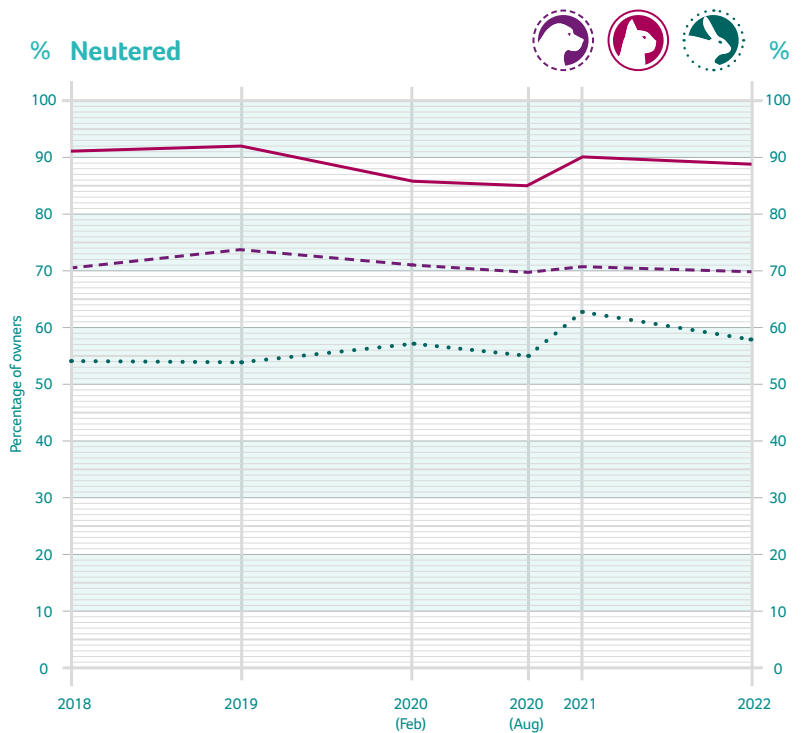
Dog owners who acquired their dog from a UK breeder of one specific breed were less likely to say that their dog had been neutered (66%) compared to those who got their dog from a UK rescue centre for UK pets (89%). This could be because rescue centres commonly neuter their pets before rehoming, or could be because owners of pedigree dogs choose not to neuter.

Findings from the PAW Report survey in February 2020 showed that owners who said their dog was a crossbreed were more likely to be neutered (79%) than those who said they had a pedigree dog (68%).

89% of cats have been neutered, which remains the same as in 2021 (90%) and slightly higher than in February 2020 (86%). Findings from the February 2020 PAW Report showed that there was no difference in the proportion of pedigree cats who had been neutered (86% compared to "moggies" (87%). More male cats (91%) have been neutered than female cats (87%). 7% of owners of female cats who haven't been neutered said it was because they were waiting for their first season. While this may be recommended for dogs to help to ensure skeletal maturity, the benefits of a season are not documented in cats<sup>31</sup>.

PDSA is part of the Cat-Kind group (previously called the Cat Population Control Group), collaborating to promote the benefits of neutering at 4 months in cats to reduce the risk of accidental pregnancies.

In 2022, 58% of rabbits are neutered. This is no different from the proportion immediately prior to the pandemic (57% in Feb 2020) or the intervening surveys (55% in Aug 2020, 63% in 2021). More male rabbits (63%) have been neutered compared to female rabbits (51%).



The most common reason owners told us for why their rabbit wasn't neutered was that they live alone (36%) which was higher than for dogs (8%) and cats (8%), which is expected as companion rabbits that live alone are unlikely to come into contact with other rabbits in contrast to dogs and cats. Encouraging the routine neutering of rabbits could make it easier for owners to provide companionship for their solitary rabbits in the future. 14% of owners said they hadn't had their rabbit neutered because they were worried about the anaesthetic, which was higher than for dogs (5%) or cats (4%).

## Microchipping

The number of dogs who have been microchipped remains slightly lower than pre-pandemic levels, with 90% microchipped in 2022 compared to 92% in February 2020. Interestingly, despite it having been a legal requirement for dogs to be microchipped since 2016, 15% of owners whose dogs were not microchipped told us that they had never heard of microchipping. This was a higher proportion than for cat (4%) or rabbit (7%) owners and has increased from 3% in 2019. This figure is no different for new\* owners.

14% of all dog owners (equating to 1.4 million dogs) told us that they did not think it was the law that dogs had to be microchipped. This is lower than in 2019 (16%), but both are higher than 2017 (11%). This may be because at that time there were high levels of recognition due to media coverage and promotion of the recent passing of dog microchipping legislation in 2016.

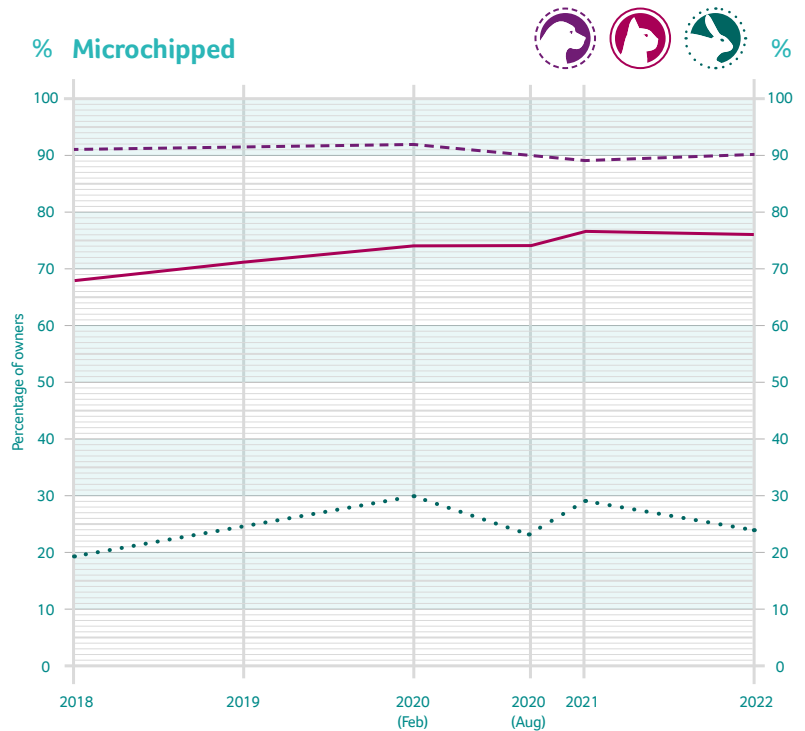
76% of cats have been microchipped, which is unchanged from February 2020 (74%) and 2021 (77%). 27% of owners told us that their cat wasn't microchipped because they were unlikely to stray, while 19% thought it was not necessary.

Worryingly, only 88% of dog owners and 72% of cat owners who got their pet from abroad said that their pet was microchipped, which is a legal requirement for all imported dogs and cats.

24% of rabbits are microchipped, which has fallen from 30% in February 2020. 37% of owners who hadn't had their rabbit microchipped said that this was because they thought microchipping wasn't necessary, 29% said their rabbit was unlikely to stray and 28% said their rabbit was not out unsupervised.

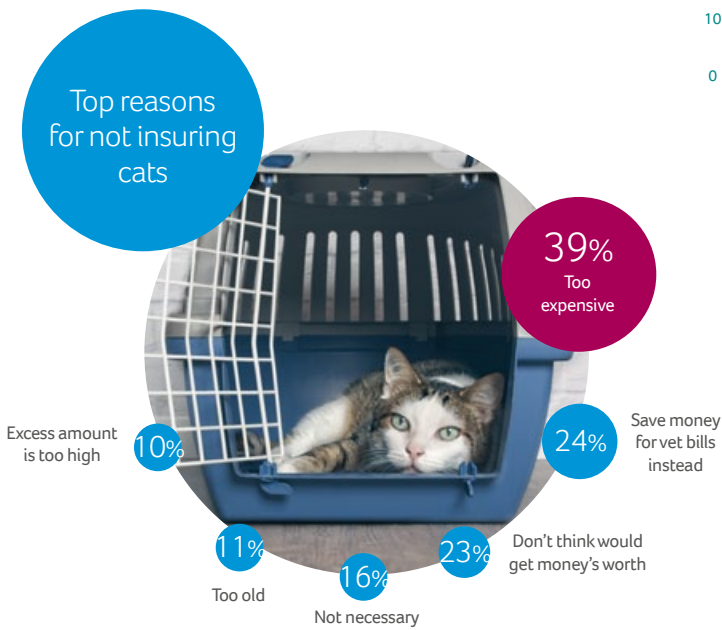
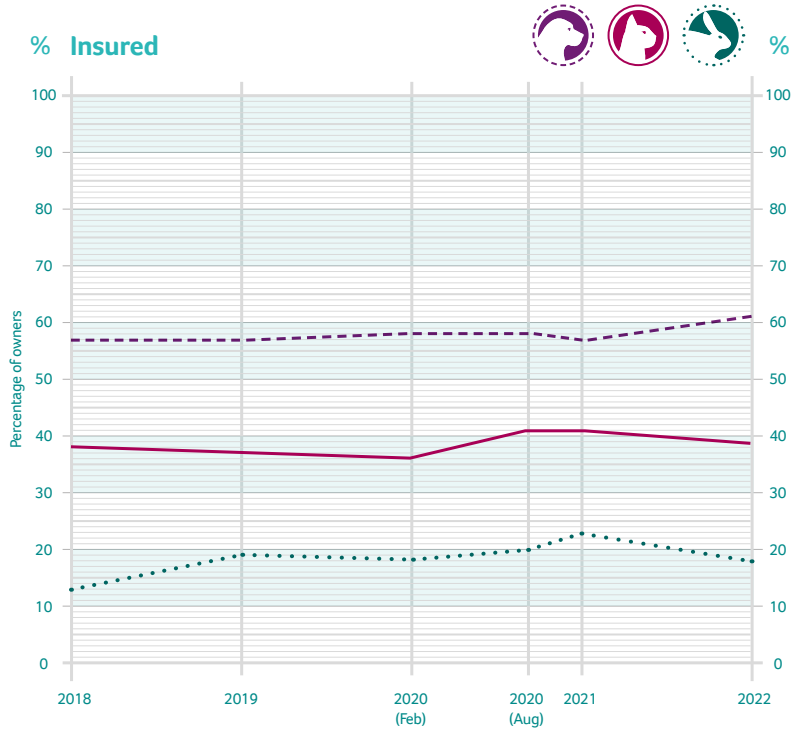
Keeping microchip details updated remains an issue, with 5% of dog owners, 6% of cat owners and 8% of rabbit owners telling us that their details had changed but the microchip database hadn't been updated and 4% of dog owners, 6% of cat owners and 12% of rabbit owners saying they weren't sure if their details were up to date or not. This equates to 1.8 million pets (830,000 dogs, 970,000 cats, 47,000 rabbits). Of those that hadn't updated their details, 30% said this was because they did not know how to get their details updated, while 17% said they had lost the paperwork about their pet's microchip and 14% said it was because they didn't know their pet's microchip number.

It is essential that the current government plans to introduce legislation to require cats to be microchipped includes mandatory changes to the current system to make it clearer and easier for owners to update their pet's details.



## Insurance

39% of cats are insured. This is slightly higher than the figure for cats from February 2020 (34%) and higher in 2022 than rabbits (18%). However, the proportion of cats insured is still much lower than the proportion of dogs (61%) which has also increased compared to February 2020 (58%). The most commonly selected option when we asked owners why their cat was not insured was that it is too expensive (39%), followed by that they are saving money for vet bills instead (24%). Separately, 31% of cat owners say they are worried about how they'll pay for vet bills if their cat falls ill or gets injured.



## Hear from the President of the British Veterinary Association, Dr Justine Shotton, MRCVS [here](#)

### Footnotes

- \* new owner defined as not having owned that species of pet before as an adult 28. Schuller, S., Francey, T., Hartmann, K., Hugonnard, M., Kohn, B., Nally, J. E., & Sykes, J. (2015). European consensus statement on leptospirosis in dogs and cats. *Journal of Small Animal Practice*, 56(3), 159-179.
- 28 Schuller, S., Francey, T., Hartmann, K., Hugonnard, M., Kohn, B., Nally, J. E., & Sykes, J. (2015). European consensus statement on leptospirosis in dogs and cats. *Journal of Small Animal Practice*, 56(3), 159-179.
- 29 Rocchi, M. S., & Dagleish, M. P. (2018). Diagnosis and prevention of rabbit viral haemorrhagic disease 2. *In Practice*, 40(1), 11-16.
- 30 CTSI (2021). <https://www.tradingstandards.uk/news-policy/news-room/2021/ongoing-effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-impacting-puppy-purchases/>
- 31 Yates, D., & Leedham, R. (2019). Prepubertal neutering in cats and dogs. *In Practice*, 41(7), 285-298.

# Concluding thoughts

We know how important pets are to people's lives – 94% of owners agreed that owning a pet made them happy and 84% agreed that owning a pet improves their mental health. However, does this translate into good care for our pets, especially as only 14% of owners had heard of the 5 Welfare Needs before completing the PAW Report survey?

While the long-term trend since 2011 has shown some positive changes to the welfare of UK pets, the findings this year do not seem to show continued improvement. There has been no increase in regular vaccine uptake, half of all rabbits are still living alone, often in unsuitable accommodation, and many of our pets are displaying concerning behaviours which could be linked back to stress, anxiety, and frustration due to a number of factors including genetics, experiences such as inadequate socialisation when young, inadequate companionship, and environmental considerations<sup>32</sup>. Overall, the findings do not depict an entirely positive picture of companion animal welfare in the UK.

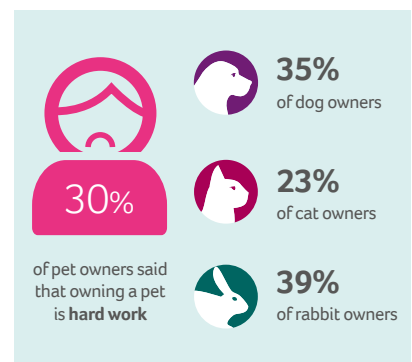
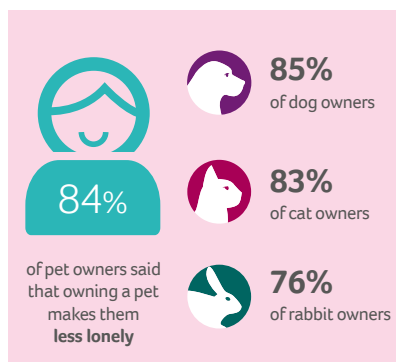
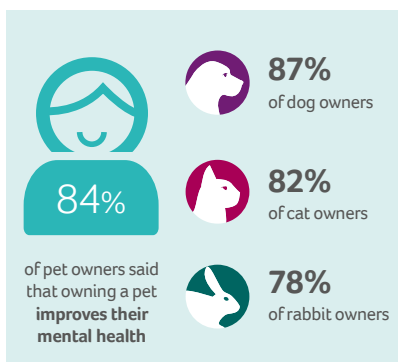
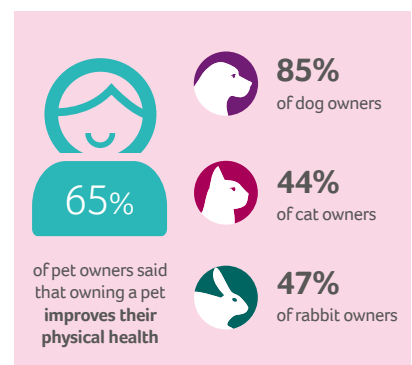
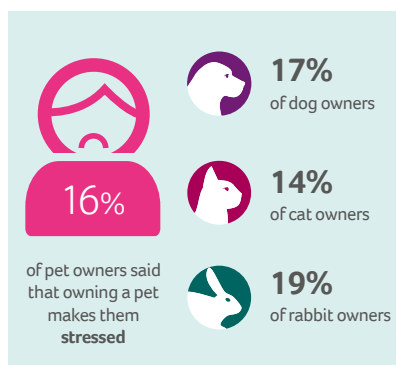
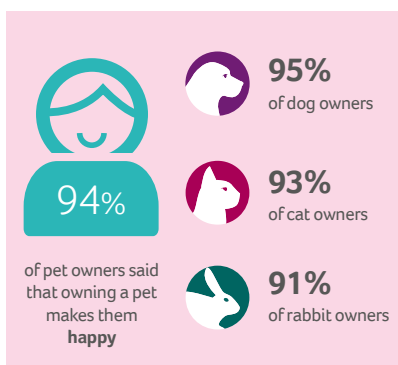
There have been serious impacts on human wellbeing over the past two years, initially through the COVID-19 pandemic and now ongoing due to the cost of living crisis and other worldwide events. It is absolutely vital that despite these human costs, we continue to monitor and report on pet welfare, to ensure that we don't lose any progress we have made and to identify and track emerging concerns.

Ensuring the welfare of our pets needs to start well before a new pet is brought home. Deciding to share your life with an animal should be thought about carefully, with consideration given to the pet's needs as well as your own. Yet 20% of

owners told us they did no research before acquiring their pet, and only 18% looked into the cost of owning a pet. Owning a pet takes commitment – of finance, emotion and time. When asked, 30% of owners agreed that owning a pet is hard work, 40% agreed that it is 'expensive' and 16% agreed that it 'makes me stressed'.

This highlights that despite the numerous benefits of pet ownership such as a reduction in loneliness – 84% of owners believe a pet makes them feel less lonely – the care of a pet is something that should not be considered lightly. We need to ensure both the welfare of the pet and wellbeing of the carer is considered, especially when approaching pet welfare issues.

Pet owners need support, and the PAW Report highlights the areas that need to be targeted to drive positive change. It is essential that we continue to work towards understanding and overcoming the barriers owners have to providing the care that pets require, and helping them learn about how to take care of their pets, especially at a time with so many competing voices. The veterinary profession and the wider animal welfare community have a vital role to play in using both empathy and evidence-based information to guide owners to help them improve their pet's wellbeing.



## Footnotes

<sup>32</sup> Miklósi, Á., Turcsán, B., & Kubinyi, E. (2014). The personality of dogs. In *The Social Dog* (pp. 191–222). Academic Press.

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