

The state of our pet nation ...



The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report

About PDSA

PDSA's history in the UK dates back to 1917. During that time it has provided an estimated 100 million free treatments to around 20 million sick and injured pets of owners in need. Today PDSA has a network of 48 PetAid hospitals UK-wide. As well as treating sick and injured pets, PDSA promotes responsible pet ownership through a wide range of pet health activities.

In 2011, delivery of PDSA PetAid services will cost more than £50 million. The charity's PetAid services are funded entirely by public support and receive no HM Government or National Lottery funding.

This year PDSA PetAid hospitals and branches will provide more than 2 million free treatments and more than 360,000 preventive treatments, such as vaccinations, neutering and microchipping.

PDSA runs more than 170 retail stores UK-wide and is supported by over 5,000 volunteers.

In addition to its dedicated PetAid hospitals, PDSA provides funded veterinary care in smaller communities, through a network of participating private practices.

www.pdsa.org.uk



The first PDSA PetCheck vehicle was kindly sponsored by Julie and Robert Breckman



Why has PDSA produced this Report?

The purpose of the Report is to deliver an annual index (score) reflecting pet wellbeing in the UK. This means each year PDSA can measure how healthy and happy pets are.

The Animal Welfare Act* introduced a 'duty of care' for all pet owners to meet the welfare needs of their pets. There is currently no overarching means of identifying, assessing, monitoring and improving the wellbeing of companion animals – the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report is the first step towards this and is the largest survey of its kind.

The purpose of the Report is to deliver an annual index (score) reflecting pet wellbeing in the UK. This means each year PDSA can measure how healthy and happy pets are.

PDSA's vision is a healthy life for all of our pets; but the only way of achieving this is to determine what level of wellbeing our pets currently have. This will enable us to identify areas where we, and other veterinary and animal welfare organisations, alongside retailers and the broader pet industry, can provide the pet-owning public with further

information and support to help improve any areas of animal welfare that are not being met as well as they should be.

The PAW Report is based on the five welfare needs companion animals require to be healthy and happy, as detailed in the Animal Welfare Act.* Respondents were surveyed about each of the five welfare needs, in direct relation to their pet, and their level of knowledge in each area. *The PAW Report* can be downloaded at www.pdsa.org.uk/pawreport

The five animal welfare needs:



Environment

The need for a suitable environment (place to live)



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

*When referring to the Animal Welfare Act this includes both the Animal Welfare Act 2006 covering England and Wales, and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 which applies to the whole of Scotland.

Note: When mentioning veterinary professionals this refers to veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses.



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

The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report

The state of our pet nation 2011:

**Stressed. Lonely. Overweight. Bored.
Aggressive. Misunderstood... but loved.**

These few words certainly paint a worrying picture, but are sadly a stark reality for millions of pets. They are taken from the landmark *PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report* which, for the first time, paints the most accurate and comprehensive picture of animal health and wellbeing ever produced in the UK.

The Report has been structured around the Animal Welfare Act which identifies the fundamental health and welfare needs of pets that must be met to ensure they live healthy and happy lives.

What is clear is that the UK is a nation of animal lovers; but the affection owners have for their companion animals can be misguided, which is often to the detriment of a pet's wellbeing. A lack of education and awareness of the health and welfare needs of pets is at the heart of the problem. The *Companion Animal Welfare Surveillance Report* published by the Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) in May 2008 concluded that trying to develop a way of assessing and monitoring companion animal welfare 'is likely to help very greatly in improving companion animal welfare'. The PAW Report is a first step towards addressing this need.

One of the most worrying statistics within this Report is the low awareness owners have of the five basic and guiding principles designed to safeguard the wellbeing of pets as set out in the Animal Welfare Act.

This is where the *PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report* comes in as it helps us to identify some of the key issues affecting pets today and gives the most comprehensive evidence-based measure of companion animal wellbeing.

Pets can't speak and tell us if they are unhappy, but with the right information and education, owners can make positive changes to their pets' lives. As a leader in promoting pet health and wellbeing, PDSA wants this Report to serve as a vehicle for both raising awareness and prompting positive behaviour change. This need is reinforced by the recent *Post-Legislative Assessment of the Animal Welfare Act 2006* by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dec 2010). This concluded that a key criticism of the Act relates to the lack of public awareness of the responsibilities that all pet owners have. So, while the Act is a positive addition to improving animal welfare, there is still much work to do to raise awareness of what the Act requires from owners. Only by doing this, can there be a positive impact on the standard of wellbeing for animals in the UK.

Using the results of the *PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report*, PDSA is now in a position to raise awareness of the main issues faced by pets in society today. We want to work with the pet owning public to help them enjoy pet ownership through a deeper understanding of their pets' needs. We also want the Report to act as a catalyst for debate amongst the veterinary profession and pet owners, provide areas for further academic research and encourage collaborative work between animal health and welfare organisations and the broader pet industry.

Change won't happen quickly, but those organisations and individuals committed to improving animal welfare, such as PDSA, can't prompt change unless we have a measure of animal wellbeing as it currently stands.



About YouGov

“YouGov is thrilled to be involved in this comprehensive measure of animal wellbeing. Being the first measure of its kind, the process has drawn on input from academics, veterinary professionals and researchers. It is this involvement from so many disciplines, and the robustness of the sample itself, which leads to such confidence and excitement about the findings. YouGov prepared the index based both on the Animal Welfare Act and input from the PDSA team. The index brings together all aspects of a pet’s life, allowing for various scenarios within the data rather than a simple score per answer. The index is a great hook to encourage people to look behind the data and see how they themselves can improve their score as a pet owners.”

PDSA has worked in conjunction with one of the UK’s leading research companies, YouGov, to produce this Report. YouGov provides the authoritative measure of public opinion and consumer behaviour, producing accurate data and insight into what people are thinking and doing all over the world, all of the time. YouGov pioneers the use of the internet and information technology to collect high quality, in-depth data for research and analytics and operates a large, diverse panel of respondents representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types, which allows it to create nationally representative samples online and reach less accessible groups, both consumer and professional. YouGov’s unique method is of demonstrable superiority in terms of accuracy, frankness and depth of response. The most quoted research agency in the UK, YouGov has an established track record of consistently accurate and high quality survey data.



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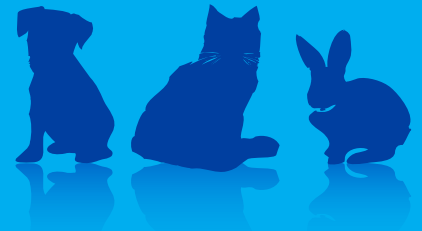
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Academic and veterinary advice have been considered throughout in compiling this survey.





How it was done ...

Survey and index method

The research was formulated around the five animal welfare needs, as detailed in the Animal Welfare Act, which aim to ensure animals lead healthy and happy lives.

An ideal care scenario for each welfare need has been formulated, based on professional advice from PDSA and using information from the DEFRA* and WAG† Codes of Practice for companion animal species. Academic and veterinary advice have been considered throughout in compiling this survey, as well as its analysis. Respondents have been scored against these ideal care scenarios to give an overall score out of 100.

* DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

† WAG – Welsh Assembly Government

Public method:

The survey was conducted using the YouGov panel online. In total 4,675 dog, 5,317 cat and 1,132 rabbit owners aged 18+ were surveyed in the UK between 21 September and 16 November 2010. The figures have been weighted to be representative of dog, cat and rabbit owners.

Professional method:

The survey was carried out online to an open sample of 137 vets and veterinary nurses. Fieldwork was undertaken between 22 October and 16 December 2010. Figures are not weighted.

In total 11,261 people comprising the above groups have been surveyed.

The reason behind focusing on dogs, cats and rabbits

PDSA has focused on these three species for the first year of the *PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report* because they are the most popular companion pets in the UK. In subsequent reports, we hope to expand the survey to include other pets.



11,261

people surveyed

4,675

dog owners

5,317

cat owners

1,132

rabbit owners

137

vets and vet nurses interviewed

5

welfare needs



The results

This is a quick visual guide to the results of the PDSA Report conducted by YouGov between 21 September and 16 November 2010.

An index score (out of 100) was calculated to represent how the UK pet owner met each of the 5 welfare needs of pets (environment, diet, behaviour, companionship and health).

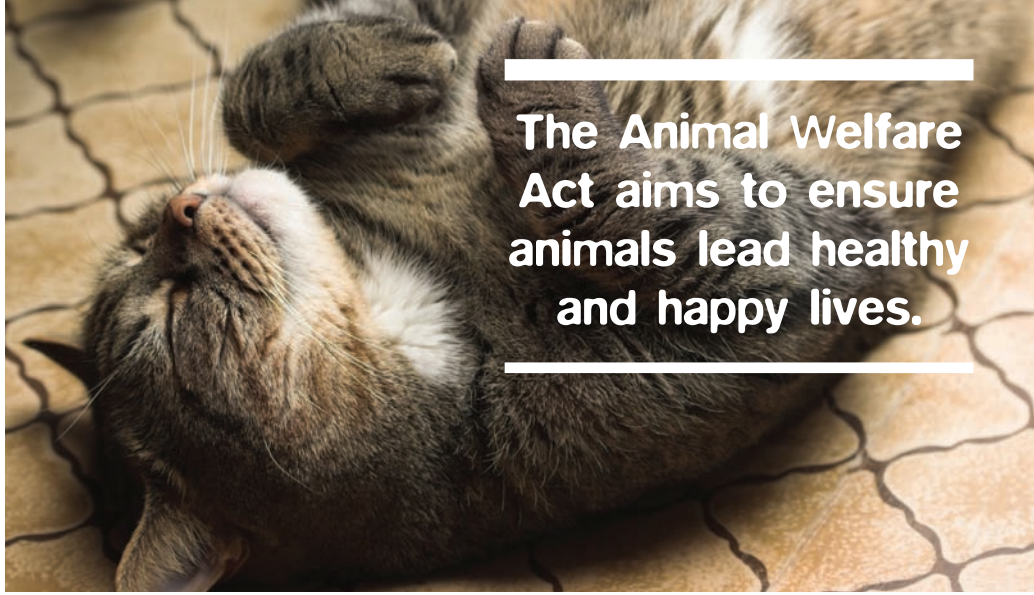
For example, dog owners scored well for environment but not so well for companionship.

Then an overall score, taking into account all of the welfare needs for each species, was calculated.

A more thorough breakdown of these results is examined in the species sections later in this document.

NATIONAL INDEX SCORES BASED ON EACH WELFARE NEED





The Animal Welfare Act aims to ensure animals lead healthy and happy lives.

The UK pet population



8,309,000
dogs

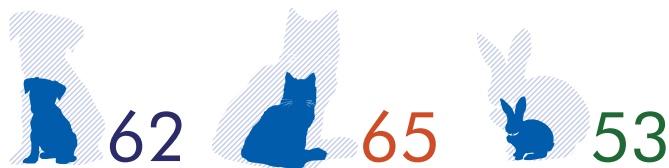


11,916,000
cats



1,669,000
rabbits

OVERALL NATIONAL INDEX SCORES FOR EACH SPECIES



These scores provide an overall summary for each species, taking into account the individual scores for each welfare need as shown in the previous illustration.

OVERALL NATIONAL INDEX SCORE FOR THE UK



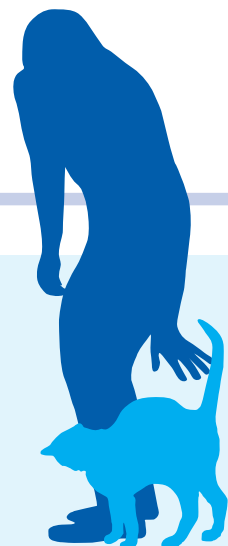
This cumulative score, based on all previous index scores, provides an overall summary for pet wellbeing in the UK.

Note:

All index scores recorded in the illustration above and throughout this document are scored out of 100.

Base for research:

- 4,675 dog owners
- 5,317 cat owners
- 1,132 rabbit owners



Words from the profession ...

"Thanks to PDSA for taking the initiative in doing this survey. I'm sure it will give the veterinary profession food for thought and good signposting for where our limited resources would have the best impact on the health and welfare of our nation's pets.

In general, I think this survey is a great resource for the pet industry and the veterinary profession to get some real evidence upon which to base our ideas for the future. It reinforces some of our assumptions but also shows us areas where we need to work harder with the pet owning public to ensure our pets get the lives they deserve."

Jacqui Molyneux

President, Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS)

"The PAW Report is an excellent initiative. The Animal Welfare Act was a landmark piece of legislation, but evaluating its impact on the way people care for their animals is critical to an understanding of its success.

The findings of the research will help to focus owners on areas where they could improve the care and welfare of their pets. It is encouraging to see that a high percentage of dogs and cats are registered with a veterinary surgeon, although rabbit owners lag a little way behind.

The Animal Welfare Act reminds owners of their responsibility for ensuring the welfare of their animals. Registration with a veterinary surgeon, so that healthcare can be accessed on a preventive and a curative basis, and in an emergency, is a key part of that responsibility.

Especially during the current challenging times, it's important that scarce resources can be targeted properly. I would urge others to assist PDSA in refining this data so that resources can be focused on achieving continued improvement in companion animal health and welfare."

Peter Jinman OBE

President, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)



"The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report is an excellent initiative and provides a new and innovative way of attempting to benchmark responsible pet ownership as well as creating a good template for ongoing data gathering.

It is all too easy to take on a pet without accepting the responsibilities for the care and welfare of that animal. This Report, which revolves around key animal welfare needs or 'five freedoms', identifies areas that are fundamental to the health and happiness of our pets.

I am particularly pleased that the Report focuses on rabbits as well as cats and dogs. Rabbits are the fastest growing sector of the pet market but sadly preventive health care is often neglected and also many of these highly social animals suffer chronic loneliness and boredom because they are kept alone.

Under the Animal Welfare Act we all have a 'duty of care' to fulfil the welfare needs of our pets. This Report not only identifies areas where the wellbeing of companion animals can be improved but offers simple, sound advice to address key health and welfare issues.

I am delighted to give my support to the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report."

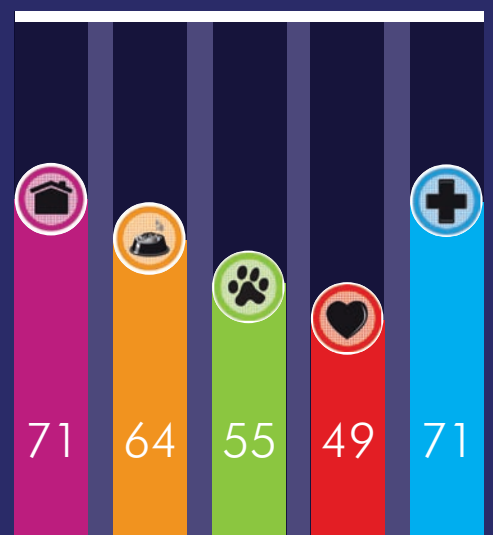
Harvey Locke

President, British Veterinary Association (BVA)





Overall dog score **62/100**



The PDSA Animal Wellbeing scores for each welfare need.



Index score/100

71



Environment

Improve one thing today ...

Make sure your dog is safely restrained every time you travel.

Ideal scenario

To ensure dogs have a comfortable environment it is important for them to have their own dog bed where they can rest undisturbed. Poisonous or hazardous items in the home or garden should be kept safely out of reach. Safety when travelling in a vehicle is also important and dogs should ideally travel on the back seat with a seatbelt or secured behind a dog guard. It is also vital that all dogs get the opportunity to exercise on a daily basis.

PDSA overview

When it comes to the sleeping arrangements for dogs, owners score well. However, travel safety is not as well catered for and many owners are risking the safety of themselves, their pet and other road users by not securing their dog safely when travelling with their companion.

Key findings

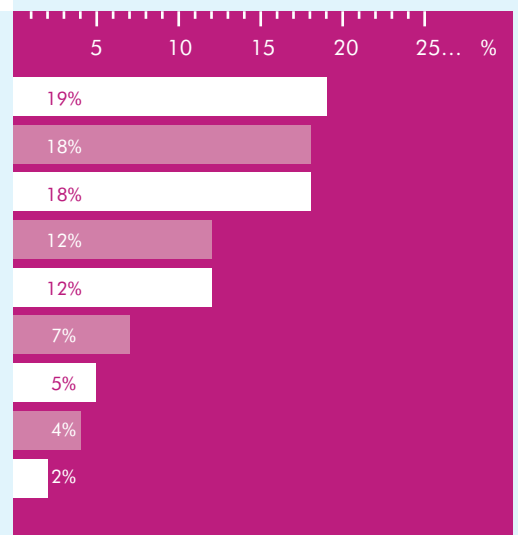
BELT UP – Travel safety concerns as dogs roam free in the car.

- When it comes to a dog’s safe travel, the responses are not as positive. **19% of owners state that their dog travels on the back seat without a seat belt** and 18% that their dog is in the boot without a dog guard.
- 62% of dog owners ensure their dog sleeps in its own pet bed, but **17% of owners allow their dog to sleep either on their bed or on that of a family member.**
- When it comes to exercise, results indicate that dog owners are good at keeping their pets fairly active. 75% of dogs get taken for a walk at least once a day and 87% playing in the garden daily. A further 69% play with toys daily. 58% of dog owners state that three or more exercise activities as well as walking are available to their dog every day – whether this is play in the garden, playing with toys, agility training or swimming.



HOW DOGS TRAVEL

- back seat without seat belt
- in the boot without dog guard
- in the boot with dog guard
- back seat with a seat belt
- does not travel in a car/van
- on the floor of the front/back seat
- in a carrier
- front seat without seat belt
- front seat with a seat belt





Diet



Find out your dog's ideal body shape.



Ideal scenario

PDSA advises that feeding a complete, commercial dog food is preferable to a homemade diet. It is not easy to achieve the correct balance of nutrients if you make a dog's diet yourself. Treats should only be given for training purposes or on a very occasional basis, and on days when a treat is fed, the amount of food given in the dog's main meal should be reduced. Lifestage (i.e. whether puppy, junior, adult or senior) and packet guidelines as well as weight and body shape should be taken into account when choosing what and how much to feed a dog.

PDSA overview

Over the last four years, PDSA has assessed the weight and general health of nearly 30,000 canine companions across the UK. Over that time, the percentage of overweight dogs seen has risen from around one-in-five (21%) to more than one-in-three (35%). Should the next four years follow the same trend, then by 2013 nearly 50% of UK dogs could be overweight. This means a reduced quality of life and the likelihood of an early grave due to obesity and its related health issues such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis.

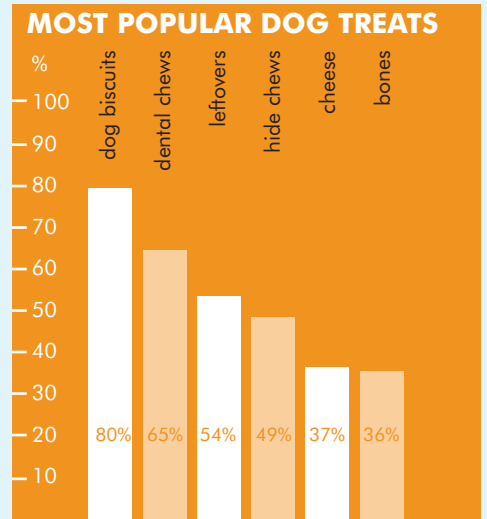
Overweight pets are less mobile, less willing to play and more likely to develop a number of serious health conditions.



Key findings

KILLING WITH KINDNESS – Obesity epidemic worsening as 2.4 million dogs are fed on scraps or leftovers as one of their main foods.

- 29%, or the equivalent of **2.4 million dogs, are fed on scraps or leftovers** as one of their main types of food when they should be getting a complete balanced diet.
- **98% of dog owners give their dog a treat** at some point, with 42% giving a daily treat.
- Only 16% of dog owners decide how much to feed their dog based on its weight or body shape, and just 14% ask a vet or seek other veterinary professional advice. Knowing the correct body shape and weight for your pet is the first step to helping your pet stay a healthy weight.
- **Only 33% of owners actually feel their pet's body to determine whether it is a healthy shape.**
- Worryingly, 26% of owners use 'common sense' and 19% 'past experience with dogs' when it comes to deciding how much to feed them. This is worrying as PDSA health checks show that 35% are overweight.
- While owners do appear to consider the nutritional needs of their dogs, what they feed does not always match up to their dog's requirements. For example, 25% of young dogs are eating a 'normal adult' diet when they should still be on a puppy or junior food formulated specially for growth.



- **7% of owners give their dogs human chocolate as a treat.** This is extremely concerning as human chocolate contains theobromine which can cause severe illness or even death in dogs. Other human foods that can be poisonous to dogs include grapes, raisins, sultanas and onions.
- Owners enjoy giving their pets treats with 49% saying it makes them feel happy and 36% saying it makes them feel caring. Only 3% mention a negative emotion such as guilt. **66% of owners say they think treats make their pet happy** and whilst this may be true in the short term, the long term effect is that owners are killing with kindness.

“PDSA’s Report reveals some very worrying findings with regards to the diets being fed to dogs. The use of inappropriate treats is particularly concerning, especially the frequency that these are being given. It is highly likely that these unsuitable foods are contributing to the obesity epidemic in pets.”

Dr Alex German, Leading animal obesity specialist, University of Liverpool Veterinary School



Behaviour

Ideal scenario

Owners and breeders should pay special attention to socialising puppies from a young age. Socialisation is one of the most important things you can do for a puppy. It's all about letting them meet people and other animals, and letting them experience lots of everyday sights and sounds, especially in their first few weeks of life. Training is also important. Training, using kind and effective methods, is a great way of keeping your dog's mind active and helps make sure you and your dog understand each other, especially when you are out together.

PDSA overview

Improving behaviour is another key area to tackle in dogs. Aggression and destructive behaviour can have serious consequences, but there are also other types of problem behaviour that can have a real impact on both the owner and the pet. As 26% of owners got their dog from a rescue or rehoming centre, many people don't know how much socialisation or early training their dog has had. Owning a happy, well-behaved dog is a very rewarding experience, despite the hard work that may be needed to achieve it.

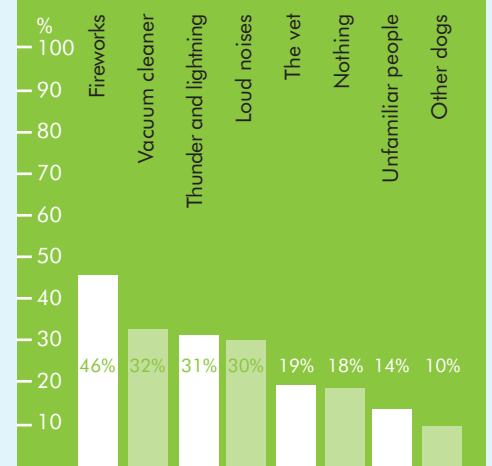


Key findings

BEHAVIOUR MELTDOWN – Over 165,000 dogs show aggression towards people on a weekly basis.

- 5% show aggression towards other pets which equates to over 415,000. Other types of poor behaviour typically shown on a weekly basis by dogs are growling or snarling (8%, which is equivalent to over 660,000). These types of behaviour are a significant concern due to the serious and sometimes fatal consequences they pose to both people and pets.
- Socialising dogs means getting them used to everyday sights and sounds (such as vacuum cleaners, washing machines, people) and getting them used to travelling in a car, going to the vet and being examined. It should be pointed out that some owners did not have their dog as a puppy so were not able to say whether any socialisation had taken place.
- **25% of owners who had their dog as a puppy did not adequately socialise it. 44% of owners don't know what socialisation their dog had when young.**
- 50% of dogs (around 4.1 million) never went to training classes during their first six months of life.
- Just 22% went to a weekly dog training class in their first six months of life. 5% of owners took their dog to training classes very infrequently (3% monthly and 2% less often). 22% do not know whether or not their dog went to training classes.

WHAT IS YOUR DOG AFRAID OF?



Overall 82% of dogs are afraid of something as shown in the graph above.

- **35% of dog owners would consider giving up their dog if its behaviour became a problem** so it is vital to consider their behavioural needs before problems arise.
- The veterinary professionals surveyed also had some key concerns about dog behaviour. Aggression came out top of the issues that need addressing in dogs. Inadequate socialisation, inadequate training and inappropriate training methods also featured highly.

“Many serious problems such as over-aggressive behaviour and separation distress can be traced back to the early experiences of puppies. Considerately exposing puppies to the right kind of experiences is the most useful advice I can give breeders and owners who want a well-balanced adult dog”.

David Ryan PG Dip (CABC) CCAB

Clinical Animal Behaviourist; Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors-Chair



Companionship



Ideal scenario

Dogs are very social animals, so do not like to be left alone. Dogs need plenty of company and it is important that they are not routinely left on their own for more than four hours a day, depending on age. Adequate care and provision should be provided for a pet dog when the owner goes on holiday.

PDSA overview

Sadly, virtually a quarter of all dogs in the UK are not getting the recommended amount of companionship. They are being left alone for long periods of time, which means they can be lonely, distressed and bored on a daily basis. This can lead to a wide range of behavioural issues including destructive behaviours and separation anxiety. Dogs need companionship and stimulation to safeguard their mental wellbeing.

Virtually a quarter of all dogs in the UK are not getting the recommended amount of companionship.

Key findings

HOME ALONE – 1.9 million dogs are left alone for longer than recommended every day.

- **23% of owners leave their dog alone in a house for five or more hours on a typical weekday**, or they do not monitor for how long the dog is left for.
- The average time owners leave their dog alone on a typical weekday varies by the age of the owner; 33% of 18 to 24 year olds typically leave their dog for more than five hours, while just 10% of those aged 55 and over do. Unsurprisingly, owners who work full time are most likely to leave their dog for longer.
- 52% of owners think the ideal maximum number of hours a dog should be left alone is five hours or more, 17% answer 6 hours, 15% answer 8 hours and shockingly 4% of owners think the ideal number is over 10 hours. The remainder are unsure.

HOLIDAY CARE FOR DOGS



- Most owners show consideration for their pet when making holiday plans. 26% of dogs typically go and stay with a dog sitter and a further 18% of dog owners take their pet to stay in a boarding kennel while they are away.
- 25% of owners take their dog on holiday with them. This is beneficial if the dog stays with its owners in the UK, but if they are going abroad, there are potential risks from diseases and travel stress.
- **16% of owners leave their dog in the house while on holiday and someone comes to feed and exercise them.** This is a worrying finding given the social stimulation and care that dogs require.





Health

Ideal scenario

PDSA recommends that dogs are neutered, vaccinated, microchipped, and insured. Owners who wish to breed from their pet should research and take appropriate actions (such as health testing) in advance. Furthermore, the pet should be registered with a vet and receive regular, safe and effective preventive treatments for fleas and worms. Regular grooming and dental care are important and a dog must be checked daily for signs of ill health.

PDSA overview

While owners score fairly well when it comes to meeting the health needs of their dogs, there are still millions of dogs that are not neutered, vaccinated, or protected against parasites such as fleas and worms. Neutering dogs is key to reducing the number of unwanted litters in the UK, as well as having important health benefits. For example, neutering a dog prevents potentially fatal womb infections and reduces the risk of certain types of cancer. Failure to vaccinate puppies leaves them exposed to serious diseases such as parvovirus; vets still see many cases of this life-threatening disease every year. Flea infestations can cause severe irritation and distress in dogs and are entirely preventable.

Key findings

Millions of dogs are not getting the preventive care they need.



34% (2.8 million) are not neutered

29% (2.4 million) are never treated for fleas

18% (1.5 million) have never been vaccinated

14% (1.1 million) are not wormed

10% (830,000) are not registered with a vet

30% (2.5 million) are not microchipped

Of those who haven't had their dog neutered:

20% said they didn't believe in it

15% had not thought about it

15% would like to breed from their dog

12% were 'worried about changes in personality'

10% thought it was too expensive

● **36% of owners never clean their dogs' teeth.** Only 11% clean their dogs' teeth daily despite this being the most effective way of achieving good dental health.

● When it comes to the purchasing habits of flea and worm treatments, 55% and 63% respectively buy their products from a vet and 22% say the cost is more than they were expecting.

● The older an owner the more likely they are to score higher points when it comes to preventive care and their pets' health. The 55-and-over age group score 72 which is notably higher than the 66 score achieved by 18 to 24-year-olds.

36% of owners never clean their dogs' teeth



"This is a timely and welcome report, not least because many dog owners do not fully understand the implications of the Animal Welfare Act and the duty of care it imposes. Questioning owners about the welfare needs of their dog provides valuable information about the animal's wellbeing, as well as improving the owner's knowledge and understanding of these important matters."

Professor Sheila Crispin MA VetMB BSc PhD DVA DVOphthal DipECVO FRCVS, Chairman of the Advisory Council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding



Overall cat score **65/100**



The PDSA Animal Wellbeing scores for each welfare need.



Index score/100

64



Environment

Improve one thing today ...

If you own more than one cat, make sure they have enough of the things they need, e.g. litter trays, food bowls, cat beds, scratching posts, hiding places. For example, two cats should have three litter trays.

Ideal scenario

Cats need somewhere comfortable to sleep and rest undisturbed, as well as constant access to safe hiding places. Cats often feel most secure when they are high up, so they should be given safe access to resting places on top of furniture such as cupboards or shelves. If cats are living together in the same household they must be provided with enough of the things they need (e.g. food and water bowls, litter trays, cat beds etc.). A general rule is that owners should provide as many of these items as the number of cats, plus one (so a two-cat household should have three litter trays). They should be positioned around the house so that the cats do not have to come in to contact with each other if they do not want to.

PDSA overview

A worrying proportion of owners provide their cats with too few resources (e.g. fewer litter trays, and food and water bowls than the number of cats in the household). This is a serious concern because cats in these households are not able to avoid each other if they want to and this is a common cause of chronic stress. Stress due to too few resources like litter trays and feeding bowls can cause cats to spray urine indoors. It is also a common cause of feline cystitis (inflammation of the bladder).



Key findings

A worrying proportion of owners provide their cats with too few resources.

- In 34% of cat-owning households the number of litter trays is fewer than the number of cats. 13% of owners have fewer food bowls than the number of cats and 33% have fewer water bowls than the number of cats.



- Only 51% of owners said they have one or more cat beds per cat; the remainder provide fewer cat beds than the number of cats.
- 7% of cat owners living in the inner city let their cats out at night. If a cat lives near a busy road, being let out at night increases their risk of being hit and injured by a car.
- As would be expected, those living in the inner city are more likely than those living in rural or suburban areas to keep their cat indoors (31% compared with 12% and 15% respectively). Indoor-living can also be stressful for cats and it contributes to the problem of feline obesity if they do not have enough opportunity for exercise indoors.
- Most indoor-cat owners (92%) state their cat has opportunities to participate in three or more exercise activities per day.
- Cats feel most secure when they are high up. 44% of owners say their cat has access to a hiding or sleeping place that is high up.



Diet



Find out your cat's ideal body shape.



Ideal scenario

Cats are true carnivores, meaning they have to eat certain nutrients that are only found in meat or commercial cat food. It is preferable to feed a complete commercial cat food to achieve the correct balance of nutrients. Cats do not need treats and should only be given healthy treats occasionally, if at all, to avoid becoming obese. A cat's age, weight and shape, alongside packet feeding guidelines and veterinary advice, should be taken into account when deciding how much to feed a cat.

PDSA overview

The majority of owners assessed their cat as being overweight or obese. This supports the findings of previous research, which has demonstrated that there is currently a pet obesity epidemic in the UK. Obesity reduces a pet's quality of life, is linked to a number of serious health problems and can shorten a pet's lifespan. Sadly, many owners report that they feel 'happy' when they feed treats to their cat, but many may not realise that they are actually killing their pet with kindness.



Cut out the treats!

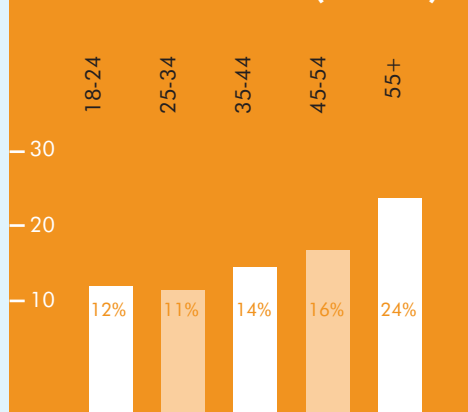


Key findings

Too many fatty treats are contributing to the obesity epidemic in cats.

- **Worryingly, nearly one in three cat owners (29%) say they use 'common sense' rather than taking informed advice when deciding on feed quantity.** 9% say it depends on the cat's appetite or begging. It is worrying that, given the prevalence of cat obesity, owners are not using informed sources (e.g. packet feeding guidelines, veterinary professionals) to decide how much to feed their cat.
- **More owners said their cat is overweight (41%) or obese (12%) than said it is the ideal weight (38%), or underweight (9%).**
- The likelihood that a cat will be obese peaks among cat owners aged 55 and over (16%).
- 69% of cat owners feed a standard adult cat diet, with half (50%) using a mix of wet and dry food. 13% of cat owners feed scraps/ leftovers as one of the main food types that their pet eats, while others feed raw meat and bones (2%), cooked meat (12%), fish/ prawns/ tuna (16%), liver (1%), or hunted prey (7%). Such foods, when fed as a cat's main food type, do not provide a balanced diet.
- Fewer cat owners (86%) than dog owners (98%) give their pet a treat.
- While the majority of cat owners give their cat a specific diet, the research shows that the diet cats are following may not be relevant to their life-stage. For example, among junior cats, 55% are following an adult diet and 1% are even following a diet for a senior cat.
- The most popular treats are meat and fish other than in cat food (52% and 51% respectively). Commercial cat treats (32%) and cheese (26%) are also popular treats. All of these treats contain calories and fat, which can contribute to obesity.
- The majority of these treats are given regularly. For example, among owners who treat their cat, 17% do so once a day and 38% at least once a week.
- As is also the case with dog owners, giving a treat is most likely to make the cat owner feel 'happy' (49% report this), which is worrying because owners may not be considering the harmful effects unsuitable treats are having on their cat's long-term health.
- **A significant number of owners regularly give their pet fatty and sugary food such as cake, cheese, chips and chocolate meant for humans.** These can also contribute to dental disease.

% OF CAT OWNERS WHO GIVE A DAILY TREAT (BY AGE)





Behaviour

Ideal scenario

Kittens have a sensitive period (the first 8-10 weeks of life) which is when they get used to things around them. During this 'socialisation period', kittens gradually need to get used to people, other animals and everyday sights and sounds.

Many cats enjoy playing, even as adults, which provides good exercise and allows them to express their normal behaviour.

PDSA overview

A safe and effective socialisation programme is essential for young kittens. Good, early socialisation leads to friendly, well-adjusted cats. Without positive early experiences cats can become nervous and this often leads to behavioural problems, such as aggression, in later life.

"The social life of domestic cats is relatively complex compared to dogs, as cats will generally only tolerate living in close proximity to cats they have grown up with; other cats are often seen as a threat. Therefore, it is sadly not surprising that aggression increases with the number of cats in the household. Owners should think very carefully, and take appropriate professional advice, before introducing additional cats into their home."

Jenna Kiddie BSc MSc
The Royal Veterinary College

● **Improve one thing today ...**

● **Play with your cat using a variety of toys to keep them mentally and physically healthy.**

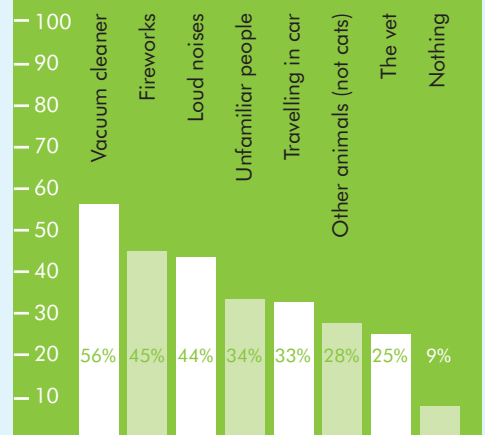


Key findings

1.3 million cats show aggression to other pets on a weekly basis.

- **11% of cats show aggression towards other pets on a weekly basis.** In households with three or more cats this figure increases to 21%.
- **48% of owners do not know what socialisation their cat has had.** This is not surprising considering the fact that 33% of cats are acquired from rescue centres and 10% as strays so the owner is unlikely to know the history of the cat during the key socialisation period.
- Compared with dogs there is a much larger proportion of cats that are aggressive to other pets (21% in multi-cat households compared with 5% of dogs that are aggressive to other pets).

WHAT IS YOUR CAT AFRAID OF?



Scaredy cats – 91% of cat owners report that their cat is afraid of something.

- **30% of cats regularly scratch the furniture,** suggesting that the type or number of scratching posts provided for cats is unsuitable.



Companionship

Ideal scenario

Cats are most likely to be friendly with other cats they have grown up with. Cats are solitary animals and generally prefer to live alone. However, where owners have multiple cats it is vitally important that they provide enough resources (such as litter trays and bowls) for each individual cat otherwise this can lead to chronic stress.

Adequate care and provision should be provided for a pet cat when the owner goes on holiday. It is best if a trusted friend or neighbour can look after the cat in the cat's own home while the owner(s) are away. If this is not possible, the cat should be boarded at a reputable cattery.

PDSA overview

Cats do not naturally live with other unrelated cats and doing so can negatively impact on their health and wellbeing if they do not have access to enough resources.

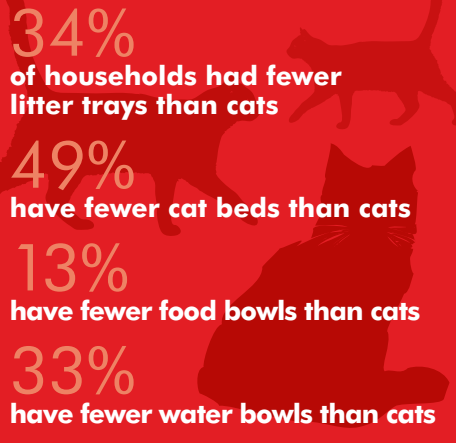
Top tip

Think twice before getting a second cat as a 'friend' for your existing cat. Cats are naturally solitary animals, which means they usually prefer to live alone.

Key findings

In some cases owners of more than one cat are not providing them with enough resources such as litter trays and food bowls.

- 56% of owners surveyed own one cat. 44% own two or more cats which equates to around 5.25 million cats that are living in a household with another cat.
- The majority of owners score positively for the provision they make for their cat when going on holiday (85%). The majority of owners leave the cat in the house and someone comes to feed and exercise him or her (63%).



"Cats are fantastic companion animals but their natural behaviour does not prepare them very well for living in houses with people and other cats. Early experiences are crucial to ensure that they are comfortable with social interaction from people, and kittens need to be handled appropriately from a very early age. They also need special consideration if people wish to own more than one cat. Living with housemates can be very stressful and cats are not naturally tolerant of feline company. They can learn to enjoy it but it is important to make sure that their environment is suitable and especially that they are not being expected to share resources, such as food, water, litter facilities and resting places, with other cats. If they do so out of choice that is a different matter! Cats like to be in control and having choices is very important to them, as is privacy and a chance to eat and rest alone."

Sarah Heath BVSc DipECVBM-CA CCAB MRCVS
European Veterinary Specialist in Behavioural Medicine (Companion Animals)





Health

Ideal scenario

It is recommended that cats are neutered at a young age to prevent unwanted kittens and certain serious illnesses. It is also recommended that they are vaccinated against potentially fatal diseases and that they receive regular preventive treatments for parasites such as fleas and worms. Owners should buy treatments that are appropriate and effective. Pet cats should be microchipped to increase their chances of being reunited with their owner should they stray, and be registered with a vet. Cats should be regularly groomed and checked daily by their owner for signs of illness.

PDSA overview

A high percentage of cats are neutered, which is encouraging. However, those owners who have not yet 'got around to it' or haven't thought about it should consider the benefits of neutering for feline health and welfare – it helps to reduce the problem of unwanted litters and has important health benefits. Only a minority of cats are microchipped and insured. The simple act of microchipping can help reunite the many cats that go missing each year with their owners, and pet insurance helps people budget for unexpected veterinary costs if their cat becomes sick or injured.

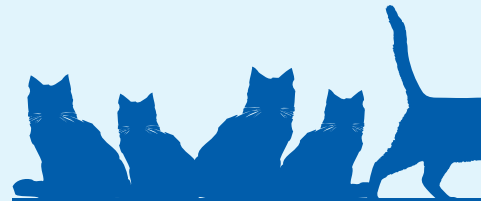
"I would like to see a much higher proportion of cats microchipped – there's nothing more frustrating than having an injured cat brought to the surgery and not being able to trace its owner."

Jacqui Molyneux
President, Society of Practising
Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS)

Key findings

Over 3.3 million cats are not vaccinated, making them susceptible to potentially fatal diseases.

- 89% of cat owners have had their pet neutered; this is considerably higher than is the case for owners of dogs and rabbits. When asked about other preventive treatments it was found that 72% of pet cats have been vaccinated with a primary course and 61% with their boosters. 79% have been wormed and 78% treated for fleas at some point.
- **54% of cats (over half) are not microchipped.**
- Among the 11% of owners who have not neutered their cat only 4% would like to breed from it. **The most common answers for not having their cat neutered are that they have not got around to it (10%) or that they have not thought about it (8%).**
- 83% of owners say their cat is registered with a vet.
- 20% of owners only brush their cat monthly – 16% of owners say they never brush or groom their cat. Grooming is an important way of reinforcing the bond between a cat and its owner, as well as ensuring good coat condition and providing an opportunity to check for signs of fleas and other problems.
- **60% of owners do not check their cat for fleas frequently enough** (at least weekly), and 33% do not treat their cat for worms on a frequent enough basis (at least every six months).



11% (1.3 million) are not neutered

22% (2.6 million) are never treated for fleas

28% (3.3 million) have never been vaccinated

21% (2.5 million) are not wormed

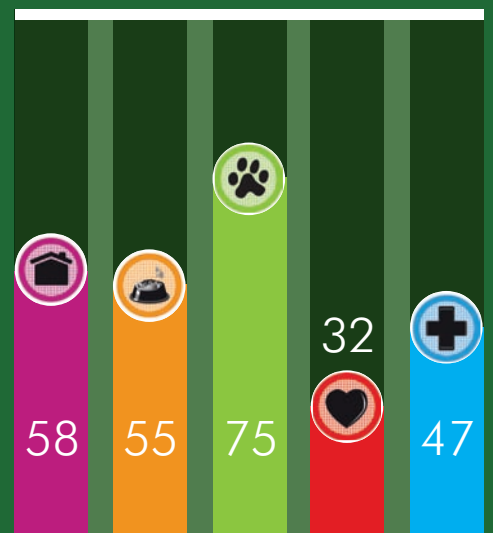
17% (2 million) are not registered with a vet

54% (6.4 million) are not microchipped





Overall rabbit score **53**/100



The PDSA Animal Wellbeing scores for each welfare need.



Index score/100

58



Environment

Improve one thing today ...

Ensure your rabbits have a large hutch with constant access to a secure run that is large enough to allow them to run and stretch up fully on their hind legs.

Ideal scenario

If rabbits are kept in a hutch it should be big enough to allow them to lie down and stretch out comfortably in all directions, tall enough for them to stand up on their back legs without their ears touching the top, and long enough to allow for a run of more than three hops from one end to the other. To get enough exercise, pet rabbits should have as much space as possible. A large run on a grassy area will help ensure they get enough exercise and, ideally, their run should be attached to the hutch so that the rabbits can exercise whenever they want to. A run should be tall enough to allow the rabbits to stretch up to full height and they should be able to run, rather than just hop.

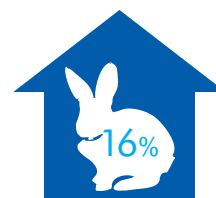
PDSA overview

Having a spacious hutch and an area for daily exercise is key to providing a suitable and healthy environment for rabbits. Owners need to make sure that the hutch and run are giving their rabbits enough space. Even if rabbits have a large hutch to sleep in, they still need plenty of secure safe space in which to exercise.

Key findings

Hopping mad – over 150,000 rabbits live in hutches that are too small.

- **Nearly 10% of rabbits – around 150,000 – live in hutches that are too small where they can only do up to two hops.** 18% of rabbit owners did not know how many hops their rabbit could do across their living quarters.
- Of the rabbits that do have access to an exercise run, 16% have a run that is no bigger than the recommended size of a hutch – this does not provide them with enough space to exercise properly.



6% of owners think a rabbit doesn't need to go outside its hutch, meaning 100,000 rabbits may be confined to a hutch with no regular access to space outside it.

16% of rabbits (260,000) live indoors.





Diet

Ideal scenario

Vets recommend the following diet for rabbits:

1. At least their own body size in good quality hay each day (it is best to allow constant access to clean, good quality hay that is not part of their bedding).
2. A handful of suitable fresh vegetables morning and evening.
3. A tablespoon of commercial rabbit nuggets once daily (or twice daily if the rabbit weighs over 3.5kg).

Rabbit muesli (a mix of seeds and flakes) should *not* be fed because it is linked to painful dental disease.

Owners should vary the greens they feed their rabbit. Fruit should only be fed occasionally and in small quantities because it is high in sugar. Sugary treats should also be avoided. Packet guidelines and body weight and shape should be taken into account, coupled with veterinary advice, when deciding what and how much to feed rabbits.

PDSA overview

Hay and grass are the key elements of a rabbit's diet as they ensure good dental and digestive health and are important for good mental wellbeing. Two of the main issues vets commonly see, dental disease and obesity, are directly linked to the inappropriate diets that are commonly being fed (i.e. rabbit muesli and not enough hay or grass). Muesli doesn't wear their teeth down and, because rabbits often leave the bits they don't like, this also causes nutrient deficiencies.

Key findings

Diet disaster for UK bunnies.

- Rabbits fare the worst on diet when compared to the other species surveyed.
- **42% of rabbits eat less than their body size in hay or grass each day, with a further 3% not eating any hay at all.** Given the essential role that hay and grass play in ensuring the health and wellbeing of rabbits, it is of particular concern that 9% of rabbit owners did not know how much of these foods their rabbits are eating. In summary, around 750,000 rabbits are not eating the recommended daily amount of hay or grass.
- Owners most commonly use 'common sense' (22%) or 'past experience' with rabbits (18%) when deciding how to feed their pets, and this contributes to bad feeding practices and associated health problems.
- **10% of owners are giving their rabbits leftovers.** Human foods that owners report feeding include cheese, cake, toast, crisps, chocolate and biscuits meant for humans.
- 88% of owners give their rabbits carrots, but these should only be fed occasionally as they are high in sugar. The leafy tops however are high in calcium, which is beneficial.
- **Rabbit muesli is another serious concern with 49% of owners reporting it is one of the main types of food that their rabbit gets.**
- **65% of owners giving a treat do so daily and 28% weekly.**
- Furthermore, rabbit owners report the most satisfaction compared to dog and cat owners, when giving a treat to their pet, with 56% saying it makes them feel happy and 45% saying it makes them feel caring.

Top
tip

Hay and grass are the key elements of a rabbit's diet as they ensure good dental and digestive health.

To avoid upsetting their digestive system always change their diet gradually. If they won't eat hay, take them to see your vet as this can be a sign of dental disease.

750,000

rabbits are not eating the recommended daily amount of hay or grass.





Index
score/100

75



Behaviour

Improve
one thing
today ...

As well as a large exercise run, give your rabbits items and objects that they can explore and interact with.

Tunnels for hiding in, planters filled with potting compost and cardboard boxes can all be great for providing stimulation and preventing boredom. Change them regularly so that your rabbits do not become bored.

Ideal scenario

As well as lots of space, rabbits need things to do so they don't get bored. Within their living space they should have opportunities to dig, run and play on a daily basis; this can be achieved by ensuring they have the company of another rabbit (see the *Companionship* section of the Report) and by providing things with which they can interact, e.g. planters filled with potting compost, large diameter tubes and cardboard boxes. Rabbits should be handled regularly from a young age (especially during the first three to four weeks of age) so that they are used to being handled as adults. Rabbits are more intelligent than many people think and can, for example, be trained to understand commands and to use a litter tray.

PDSA overview

Rabbits need mental stimulation like any other pet. Companionship from another rabbit, as well as positive contact with their owner, are important ways of achieving this, as are providing suitable toys and other objects for them to hide in and interact with. Not enough rabbits are getting the mental stimulation they need on a daily basis.

Daily handling at a young age helps ensure that rabbits are not scared of being handled when adult.

Key findings

Bored bunnies – lack of mental stimulation for over 1 million rabbits.

- Just 38% of rabbits are reported to play with toys on a daily basis, while just 24% dig, which is important natural behaviour. The reason for these low figures may be that toys are not being provided, toys are not of the right type or they are not being changed regularly (so the rabbits become bored with them).
- **28% of rabbits were not handled daily when young.** Daily handling at a young age helps ensure that rabbits are not scared of being handled when adult. Scared rabbits often kick and struggle when picked up. These rabbits are distressed and can become injured.
- 35% of rabbits have been litter trained.
- Only 23% of owners have looked for advice on aspects of their rabbits' behaviour in the last four years compared to 46% of rabbit owners who have looked for advice on diet.





Companionship



Ideal scenario

Rabbits are highly social animals and need the company of other rabbits. The best combination is usually a neutered male with a neutered female. Rabbits should not be kept with guinea pigs because rabbits can bully and injure guinea pigs, and they both need company from their own species. Adequate care and provision should be provided for pet rabbits when the owner goes on holiday.

PDSA overview

Companionship for rabbits scores the lowest in the entire *PAW Report*, making this one of the most neglected of all the welfare needs. Rabbits, like other social animals, can suffer chronic loneliness and boredom when housed alone. Ensuring rabbits have company from another compatible rabbit is a key area for improvement highlighted by the *PAW Report*.

Key findings

The lonely life of UK rabbits – over 1.1 million rabbits crave a suitable companion.

- **67% of owners report that their rabbit lives alone.** As a highly social animal that needs the company of its own species, this is a significant failing.
- While 26% of rabbit owners have made sure their rabbits have the companionship of another rabbit, only 67% of these owners have made sure their rabbits are neutered. This can lead to unwanted litters, as well as increasing the likelihood that the rabbits will fight with one another.
- Owners also score poorly for the unsuitable provision they make for their rabbits when going on holiday. 24% leave their rabbits with a trusted carer or in a suitable boarding establishment (equivalent to a kennel or cattery), which is recommended. However, 61% of owners simply leave their rabbits at home with someone calling in to feed them. This is particularly concerning for a rabbit that lives alone because during the holiday period, as well as the absence of companionship from another rabbit, he or she will also be missing out on any human interaction that there might normally be.

“The Report’s statistics on rabbits are very worrying. Rabbits are a naturally social species and it is really important that they are kept with other rabbits. Keeping them on their own is likely to have a highly detrimental effect on their welfare.”

Dr Shirley Seaman, Animal Welfare Scientist

**Top
tip**

If you are thinking of getting a companion for your rabbit, make sure you find out how to introduce them safely to prevent fighting, and ensure they are neutered in order to prevent unwanted babies.





Health

“I welcome this excellent report about rabbit health and welfare. Rabbits have been the poor relations of pets for too long – they deserve better. This Report shows us where their care falls short of the required standards and what needs to be improved.”

Mrs Frances Harcourt-Brown BVSc DipECZM (Small Mammal) FRCVS, RCVS, Recognised Specialist in Rabbit Medicine and Surgery

Ideal scenario

All rabbits should be registered with a vet, vaccinated and neutered. It is advisable that they are regularly brushed to keep their coats healthy. It is also important that rabbits are checked daily for any signs of illness. In warmer weather they should also be checked under the tail at least daily for signs of maggots as well.

PDSA overview

Preventive care is often neglected in rabbits compared to cats and dogs. Regular checks help owners to see if their rabbit is healthy and enables them to pick up the early signs of disease. The low uptake of vaccination means that, as well as not being protected from potentially fatal diseases, many rabbits also miss out on a regular health check from a vet. Compared to the other species within the report, rabbits fare the worst in terms of their health needs not being met.

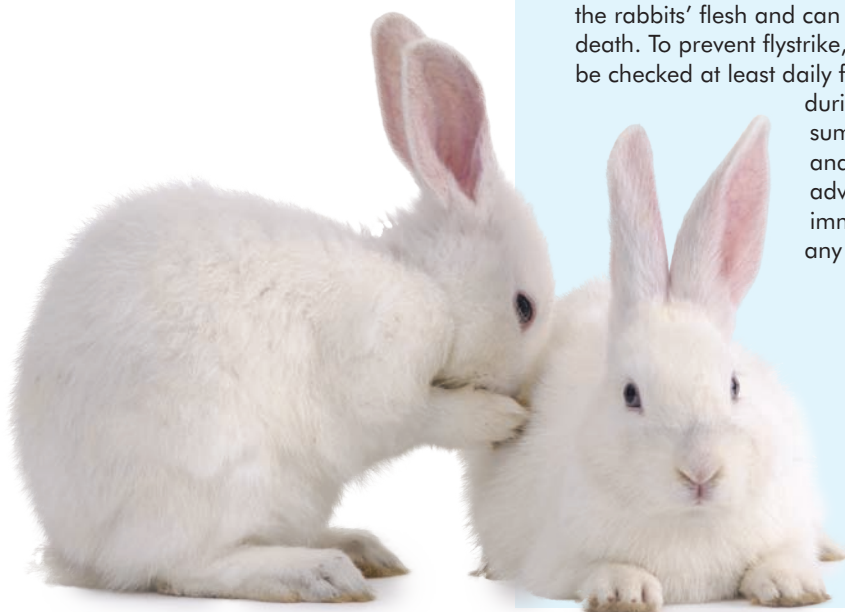
Key findings

Health crisis on the horizon as rabbits miss out on vital healthcare.

- **Only 56% of rabbit owners say their rabbit is registered with a vet,** and only 46% have had their rabbit vaccinated with a primary course. Only 37% of rabbits are neutered. Unneutered females have a high risk of developing cancer of the uterus and other problems can include unwanted babies and aggression. Additionally, it is important that rabbits have company from other rabbits, and experts recommend that in most cases this should be a neutered male with a neutered female.
- Rabbit owners were asked how often they brush or groom their pet, the ideal response being daily for long-haired and at least weekly for short-haired. Only 15% of owners groom their rabbit daily while 36% do so at least weekly. 14% never groom their rabbit.
- 12% of rabbit owners never check their rabbit to see if there are any maggots on the skin **leaving over 200,000 rabbits at risk of undetected flystrike,** a condition where maggots eat into the rabbits' flesh and can cause rapid death. To prevent flystrike, rabbits should be checked at least daily for maggots

during the warm summer months and veterinary advice sought immediately if any are seen.

- **Encouragingly, 64% of rabbit owners check their rabbit's teeth at least monthly.** This is vital as rabbits commonly suffer from painful dental disease. However, the back teeth are commonly affected by dental disease and examining the back teeth is only usually possible for veterinary professionals. This means it is important for owners to look out for other signs of dental disease on a daily basis, such as going off their food, dribbling, weight loss, runny eyes or having a dirty bottom.
- **Exercise is an extremely important part of rabbit health and welfare. While 49% of owners think rabbits should have constant access to an exercise area outside their hutch, only 21% actually provide this.**
- **19% of rabbits go outside of their hutch less than once a day.** The longer the owner has kept the rabbit, the less likely it is to go outside every day. 6% of owners think a rabbit doesn't need to go outside of its hutch at all. Adequate opportunity to exercise is linked with lower levels of obesity, good physical health and improved mental wellbeing.

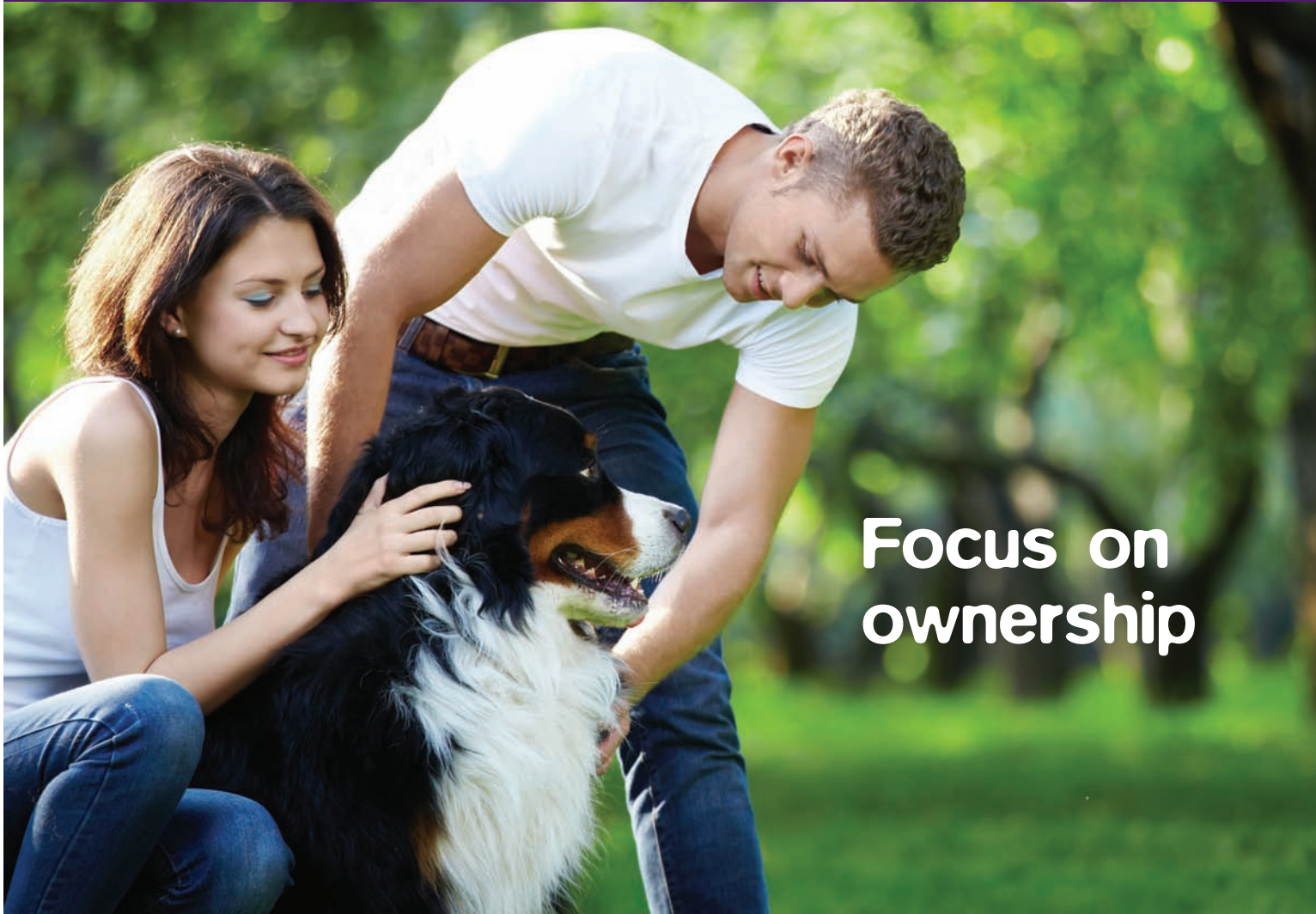


44% (730,000)
not registered with a vet

54% (900,000)
not vaccinated (primary course)

62% (1 million)
not having regular boosters

63% (1 million)
not neutered



Focus on ownership

This section reports on how well-informed owners are about their animals' needs, assesses the amount and source of advice they seek on each welfare need and what level of research they undertake before taking on a new pet. It also reveals their understanding of the Animal Welfare Act and overall opinions of pet ownership, including cost.

1 Understanding

Ideal scenario

The Animal Welfare Act puts a duty of care onto owners to meet five key needs to ensure their pets' health and happiness. All owners should understand their responsibilities before taking on a pet. This should include research into the most suitable pet for their lifestyle and ensuring they understand the five welfare needs of that pet as outlined in the Act. For areas where they do not have full understanding, they should seek information from reliable sources. Owners should also look into the lifetime costs of owning a pet, taking into account a wide range of ongoing costs, including feeding, veterinary emergency and preventive care, training, holiday provision and toys, as well as all the initial costs.



The main concern in this area is the low percentage of owners who are familiar with their responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act. By being fully informed of what their pet needs in order to stay healthy and happy, owners can give their pets a good quality of life while having an even more enjoyable and fulfilling experience of pet ownership.

The other main worry is the lack of understanding of the cost of pet ownership; a concern also highlighted by a survey of the veterinary profession. It is vital that owners learn more about the lifetime costs of pet ownership.

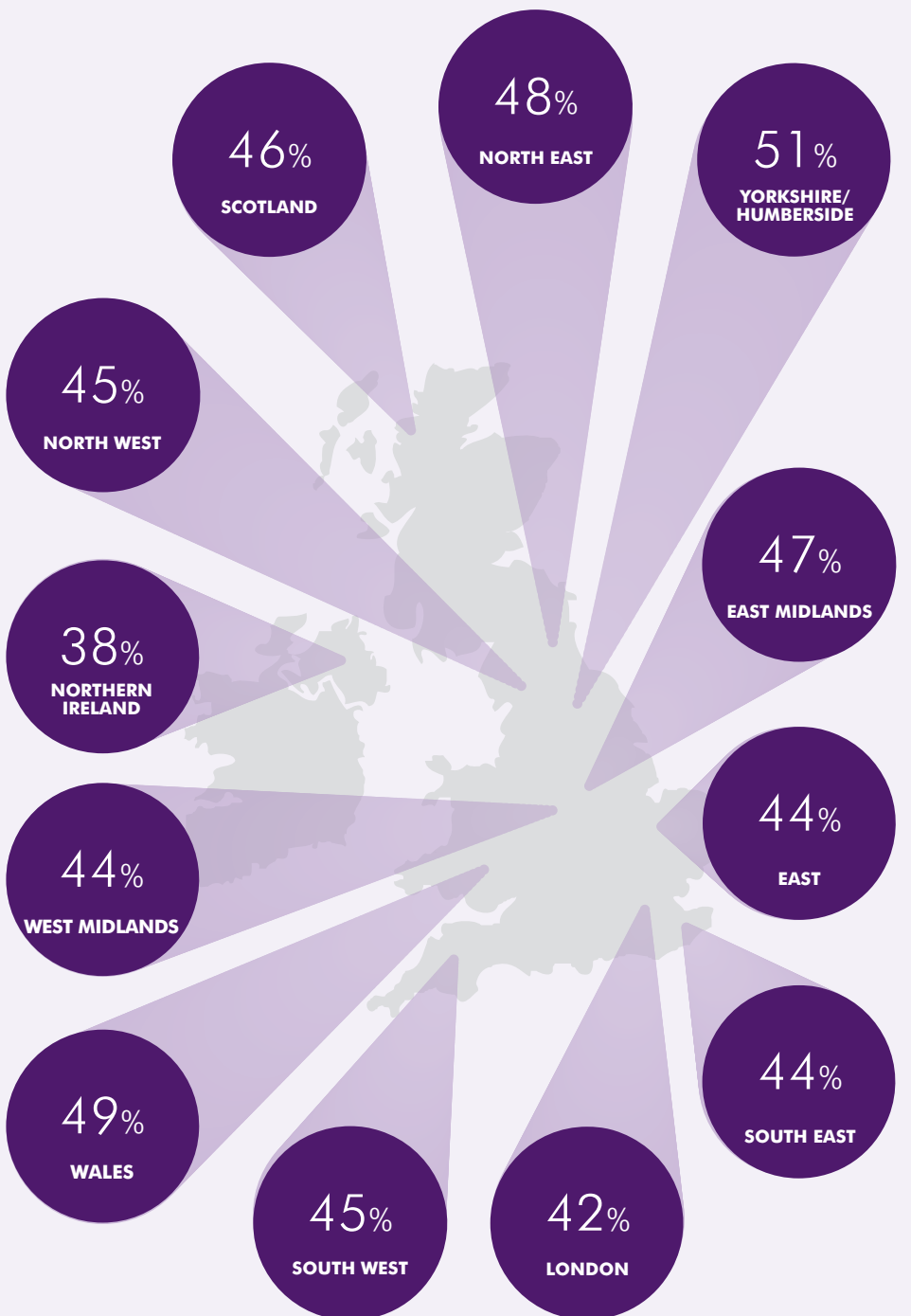
Key findings

Misguided and unaware – but still a nation of animal lovers

- On average, only 45% of owners feel they are familiar with the Animal Welfare Act.
- **Dog owners are the most likely to be familiar with the Act (49% being familiar), followed by rabbit owners (44%) and cat owners (42%).**
- Male owners are more likely to be unfamiliar with the Act (59% compared with 51% of female owners).
- 50% of retired pet owners are familiar with the Act compared with just 42% of those who work full-time.
- There was quite a lot of variation in familiarity with the Act between regions, with 51% of owners within the Yorkshire region being aware compared with 38% of those in Northern Ireland.
- Despite having a relatively low overall familiarity with the Act, **89% of pet owners feel people should have a basic understanding of the health and welfare needs outlined within it.**
- 88% of veterinary professionals believe there is value in encouraging owners to follow the five welfare needs.
- 91% of veterinary professionals think it should be compulsory for owners to acknowledge they fully understand their responsibilities before taking on a pet – this is a similar response to owners; 89% responding that all owners should have a basic understanding of the Act.

On average only
45%
 of owners feel
 they are familiar
 with the Animal
 Welfare Act.

**PET OWNERS FAMILIAR WITH
 THE ANIMAL WELFARE ACT**



Base: 11,124 pet owners

REGIONAL RANKINGS

1. YORKSHIRE/HUMBERSIDE	51%
2. WALES	49%
3. NORTH EAST	48%
4. EAST MIDLANDS	47%
5. SCOTLAND	46%
6. NORTH WEST	45%
SOUTH WEST	45%
7. EAST	44%
SOUTH EAST	44%
WEST MIDLANDS	44%
8. LONDON	42%
9. NORTHERN IRELAND	38%
OVERALL NATIONAL FIGURE	45%



2 Awareness of cost

When asked to estimate the lifetime cost of their pets, many owners dramatically underestimated these costs.

The veterinary profession also highlighted owners' lack of understanding of the cost of pet ownership.

Actual likely lifetime cost



Owner-estimated lifetime cost

<£1K	10%
£1K-5K	59%
£5K-10K	23%
£10K+	8%

92%
guessed incorrectly



£17K

<£1K	32%
£1K-5K	51%
£5K-10K	13%
£10K+	3%

97%
guessed incorrectly



£9K

<£1K	81%
£1K-5K	18%
£5K-10K	1%
£10K+	0%

99%
guessed incorrectly

Likely costs based on estimate calculated by PDSA using current market prices – please see below.*

This shows that only 8% of dog owners, 3% of cat owners and 1% of rabbit owners were anywhere near estimating the lifetime costs correctly.

***PDSA lifetime cost figures are based on:**

Initial costs

- purchase of pet(s)
- neutering
- 1st vaccinations
- microchipping
- accessories

Ongoing costs

- food
- boosters
- pet insurance
- toys
- grooming
- worming
- cat litter

They do not include veterinary costs if a pet becomes sick or injured, so these average lifetime costs could be even higher.



Insuring pets



48% of dogs are not insured



69% of cats are not insured



94% of rabbits are not insured

Veterinary fees are the most underestimated cost by pet owners with **33% stating that vet fees were more than they expected.** Despite this a large proportion of owners do not have their pet insured.

The main reasons given for not insuring a pet were:

too expensive

40%

not necessary

23%



AVERAGE COST TO PURCHASE A PET



....£215



....£56



....£19

40%
of owners who don't insure their pets say it's because they consider it too expensive.

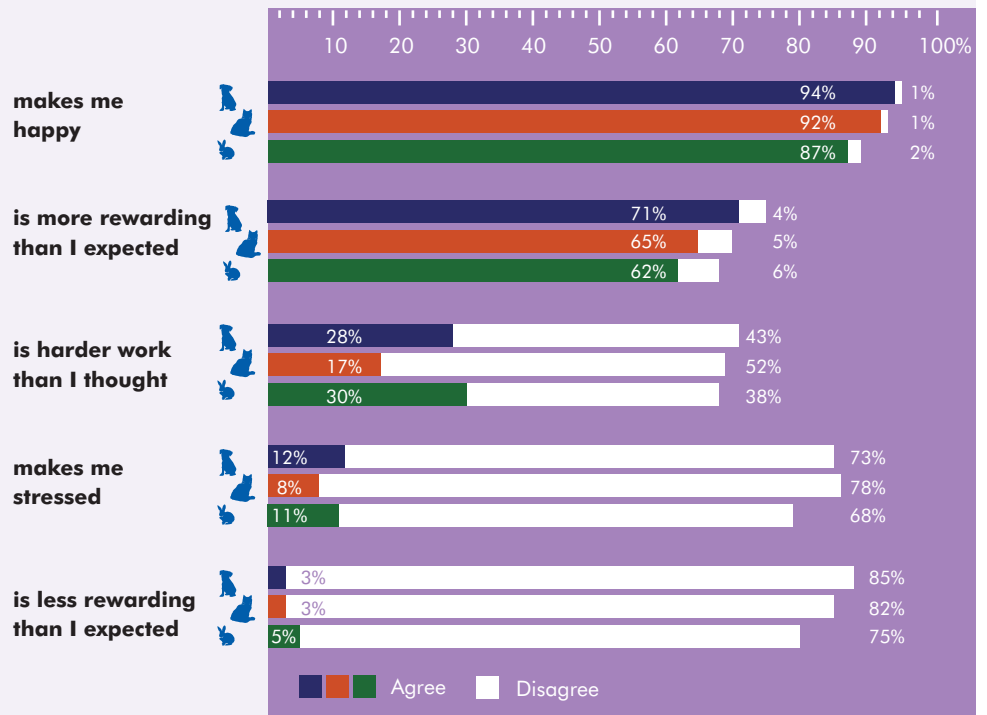
3 Benefits of pet ownership

Another area the PAW Report has focused on is the benefits of pet ownership.

The majority of owners say they are happy with their pet; 94% of dog owners, 92% of cat owners and 87% of rabbit owners report that they feel this way. The chart on the right shows some of the other feelings that owners experience as a result of owning a pet.



HOW OWNERS FEEL ABOUT OWNING A PET



Base: 4,675 dog owners, 5,317 cat owners and 1,132 rabbit owners

10% of pet owners find owning a pet more stressful than they had thought. This is particularly true of full-time students with 16% reporting it to be a more stressful experience than expected, compared to only 6% of retired pet owners.

One of the main reasons given for getting a pet in the first place was that they 'make me happy'.

The table below shows that while the reasons for getting a pet are very similar for dogs and cats, it is often children who influence whether a family gets pet rabbits.

A problem here is that a child's novelty of owning rabbits often wears off and the rabbits may be left with only a minimal and inadequate standard of ongoing care and attention.

TOP 4 REASONS FOR GETTING A PET ...

	Dog	Cat	Rabbit
1	Makes me happy 44%	Makes me happy 39%	Children wanted one 40%
2	Companionship 39%	Had one before 36%	Makes me happy 18%
3	Had one before 36%	Companionship 23%	Felt sorry for it 17%
4	Completes the family 35%	Completes the family 20%	Had one before 17%



10%
of pet owners
find owning a pet
more stressful
than they
had thought.

WHERE OWNERS OBTAIN THEIR PETS

Dogs



Cats



Rabbits



4 Opinions of pet owners and the veterinary profession

Although not scored as part of the report, owners and veterinary professionals were also asked about their opinions on certain issues surrounding pet ownership (see table right).

It is encouraging to see that owners and veterinary professionals feel similarly about key issues such as owners facing tougher penalties if their dog attacks another person or animal; pet ownership being a privilege not a right and that we are a nation of animal lovers. The main differences between public and professional opinion arise around the statements about compulsory microchipping and insurance and whether dog licences should be re-introduced.



PERCENTAGE OF OWNERS AGREEING ...



It is encouraging to see that owners and veterinary professionals feel similarly about key issues.

WHAT THE VETERINARY PROFESSION SAYS:

When asked what the biggest welfare issue would be in ten years time if not tackled now, vets and vet nurses said:

Health issues related to pedigree or unsuitable breeding.



In this section PDSA gives an overview of what vets and vet nurses think are the key areas for concern with regard to animal wellbeing. Around 15 options were given for each question as well as a free hand option.

Top 3 issues

	Most concern regarding companion animals 	Dog specific issues 	Cat specific issues 	Rabbit specific issues 	Issues needing URGENT attention 
1	Health issues relating to unsuitable/pedigree breeding	Aggressive/Status dogs	Multi-cat households	Inappropriate diet	Addressing inadequate pre-purchase information
2	Lack of understanding of the cost of pet ownership	Health issues relating to pedigree or unsuitable breeding	Stressed cats	Dental disease	Lack of understanding of the cost of owning a pet
3	Inadequate pre-purchase advice prior to getting a pet	Obesity	Lack of uptake of neutering	Inadequate space for exercise	Lack of awareness of the five welfare needs



Summary and next steps ...

The picture painted by the first *PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report*, while positive in some areas, does raise serious concerns across many areas of animal health and wellbeing.

Most notably, the Report has highlighted the low awareness owners have of an animal's five welfare needs and how these should be met. Furthermore, many owners are unaware and unprepared for the lifetime costs of pet ownership.

Rabbits fare the worst of the three species assessed within the Report and will be a specific area of focus, in conjunction with some of the other rabbit initiatives that are already under way. Across all species assessed, obesity, behavioural problems, and the living environment of some pets, all need attention to help improve standards.

PDSA's focus during 2011 will be to raise awareness of these key areas by working in collaboration with relevant organisations and educational bodies to inform owners and encourage positive behaviour change.

PDSA will continue to develop its existing activities. These include Your Right Pet – our digital pet selector tool designed to help people make an informed choice about pet ownership, Pet Fit Club – our annual and highly successful pet slimming competition – and our UK-wide PetCheck programme, as well as continuing to develop new initiatives. Within our PetAid hospitals we will continue to encourage preventive care as well as give staff more tools to help promote the key messages based around the five welfare needs.



PDSA's
Actions for
2011-12 ...

- **A quick reference guide for pet owners, highlighting the key needs and tips on how to improve their pets' wellbeing**
- **Work in conjunction with relevant organisations on some of the key issues**
- **A repeat survey to see what is changing**



The Report has highlighted the low awareness owners have of an animal's five welfare needs and how these should be met.

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The state of our pet nation



References

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When referring to the 'Animal Welfare Act' this includes both the Animal Welfare Act 2006 covering England and Wales, and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 which applies to the whole of Scotland.

Post-Legislative Assessment of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dec 2010).

The Companion Animal Welfare Surveillance Report published by the Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) in May 2008.

DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats
Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs
www.defra.gov.uk

WAG – Welsh Assembly Government
Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats
Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs
Code of Practice for the Welfare of Rabbits
www.wales.gov.uk

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