

PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

REPORT

2024



THE ESSENTIAL INSIGHT INTO THE WELLBEING OF UK PETS



PAW REPORT 2024

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Welcome

Welcome to the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2024, the UK's largest annual assessment of pet wellbeing. For the last 14 years, working with one of the UK's leading research companies, YouGov, PDSA has collected data annually through a nationally representative survey of dog, cat, and rabbit owners. The findings help us to understand how UK owners care for their pets, alongside accurately estimating **pet population** numbers.

14 years of data gives us unrivalled insight into the impacts of national events such as the cost of living crisis, welfare initiatives and legislative change. Since the **first PAW Report** in 2011, we have tracked the changing trends of how well owners provide for their pets' **5 Welfare Needs** benchmarked against the UK Animal Welfare Acts.

In 2024, we continue to see the impact of the current high cost of living, as well as the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lifestyle changes. Alongside these, 2024 sees the introduction of legislation which has the potential to impact animal welfare, including the addition of **XL Bully types** to the list of banned dogs in the UK, and compulsory microchipping for cats. The consistent methodology of the PAW Report since its inception means we are able to accurately report on how all these changes affect the UK's pets and pet owners, as well as provide evidence to inform upcoming legislative change, such as the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill.

This year, the Report gives us valuable additional information on pre-purchase behaviours by pet owners, a key step in ensuring the welfare of their future pets. We also look at cat behaviour and stress, and how this is influenced by their living arrangements and environmental resources. There are some worrying findings around the use of aversive training aids in dogs, and poor welfare of many of the UK's pet rabbits remains a concern.

The findings contained in this Report give us a deeper understanding of how the UK's pets are cared for and how we can all continue to support owners to provide the best life for the animals in their care. It remains the benchmark for gaining insight into how UK owners provide for the needs of their pets.



Methodology

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 14 years of trend 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 2024 Report, the survey sample totalled 5,258 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.

The majority of questions require owners to pick one or more options from a list or enter a text response. One question for rabbit owners asks them to choose which of a selection of six images most closely resembles where their rabbit lives.

The data was gathered between 21 December 2023 and 16 January 2024 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.

Crunching the numbers

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 analysis

Where differences between figures are communicated (e.g. there is a decrease in the proportion of dog owners who acquired their dog from a rescue or rehoming centre from 22% in 2018 to 17% in 2024) the differences are statistically significant and validated by YouGov.

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.

Further information

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), available via open access.

For example, to calculate the estimated number of rabbits not having their companionship needs met:

Estimated pet rabbit population (2024) = 800,000

Percentage of rabbits kept alone or with another species of animal = 50.18%

$800,000 \times 50.18\% = 401,440$

The figure is then rounded and presented as: 400,000 rabbits not having their companionship needs met.

These estimated numbers of pets are calculated by PDSA.

Additionally, in 2024, using RStudio (Version 1.2.5033), PDSA employed linear regression modelling (method = "lm") to generate a trend line that best fit the observed data to examine trends over time*.

Analysis of rabbit owners selections of images most closely resembling their rabbit's living conditions (see details above) involved grouping together option 1 and 4 to report on living conditions that are classed as inadequate.

Key Findings



Dogs

10.6 million
pet dogs in the UK



28%

of UK adults own a dog



33%

of dogs are acquired from a breeder



6%

of dogs have been acquired from abroad

27%

of dogs sleep for ten hours or less in a day



73%

of dog owners have used treats and rewards as a training aid



22%

of dog owners have used at least one aversive aid for training



26%

of owners say the cost of living has impacted how they care for their dog



68%

of dogs are neutered



Cats

10.8 million
pet cats in the UK



24%

of UK adults own a cat



29%

of cats are acquired from rescue or rehoming organisations



17%

of cats live with another cat who they don't get along with

31%

of cats live indoors only



87%

of multi-cat households have two or fewer litter trays



77%

of multi-cat households have two or fewer scratching posts



87%

of cats are neutered

54%

of cat owners said they were not aware that cats must be microchipped from 10 June 2024



Rabbits

800k
pet rabbits in the UK



2%

of UK adults own a rabbit

42%

of rabbits live alone



71%

of rabbits binky

22%

of rabbits live in inadequate housing



86%

of rabbits are fed grass or hay as one of their main foods



17%

of rabbits are fed muesli mix



54%

of rabbits have regular booster vaccinations



61%

of rabbits are neutered



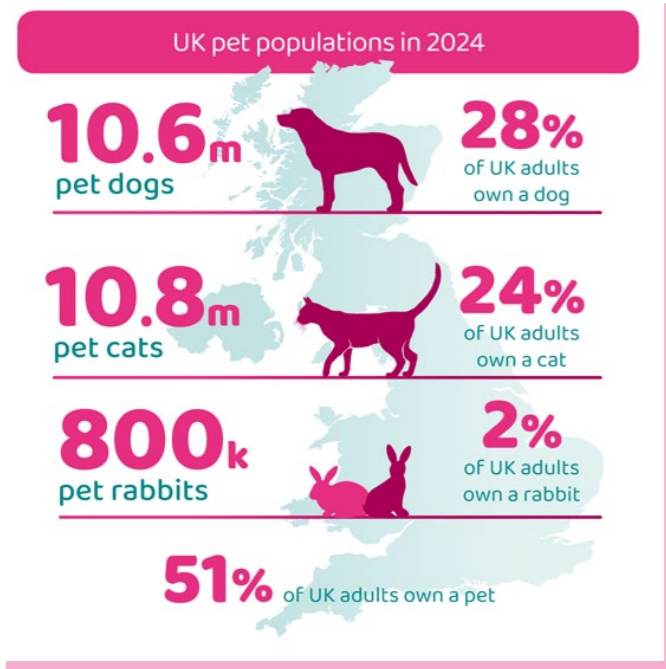
51%

of the UK population own a pet



Pet Populations

Over the last 14 years, the consistent methodology of the PAW Report has enabled accurate tracking of the UK's pet dog, cat, and rabbit **populations**, alongside the proportion of UK adults who own a pet. Using nationally representative data collected annually, the Report provides a reliable picture of how UK pet populations are changing.



Dogs

Looking at the trends, the dog population has been growing steadily since 2011 when it was 8.2 million dogs, to 10.6 million in 2024, although 2024 is not statistically significantly different from 2023.

The proportion of UK adults owning a dog has also increased over time from 23% in 2011 to 28% in 2024. This proportion did not change between 2019 and 2021 (26%) but increased to 27% in 2022 and again to 29% in 2023. The 2024 figure is not statistically significantly different from either 2023 or 2022.

Whilst the proportion of owners who have one, two, or three or more dogs has remained stable between August 2020 and 2024, these proportions have changed when compared to earlier years, with a higher proportion having 1 dog and lower proportion having multiple dogs. For example, in 2024, 74% of dog owners have one dog which is higher than in 2019 and February 2020 (both 70%) and 2018 (72%). In 2024, 5% of owners have three or more dogs, which is lower than 2019 and Feb 2020 (both 7%).

Cats

The UK pet cat population has remained relatively stable over the last 14 years despite a few fluctuations. The proportion of UK adults owning a cat has not changed over the last 10 years (24% in 2024) but is lower than in 2011 (27%). The proportion of cat owners owning one, two, or three or more cats has not changed since August 2020.

60% of owners in 2024 own one cat. This has not changed since 2020 (or 2017), but is higher than 2018 and 2019 when 56% of people owned one cat. 29% of owners in 2024 own two cats which is not statistically significantly different from all findings since 2017. 10% of owners have three or more cats which has not changed since August 2020, but is lower than February 2020 (12%), 2018 (13%) and 2017 (13%). It is no different from 2019.

Our data show there have been no significant changes in dog or cat ownership in the last 12 months, but we have seen a decrease for rabbits. In 2024, we estimate there are 10.6 million pet dogs, 10.8 million pet cats and 800,000 pet rabbits living in the UK.

Overall, 51% of UK adults own a pet of any type, a slight decrease from 2023, when 53% did. 28% of UK adults own a dog and 24% a cat – neither of which are different from 2023. 1.71% own a rabbit, which has decreased from 2.24% in 2023.

In 2024, 38% of all pet owners told us that they were 'new' pet owners

Rabbits

There has been a decrease in the rabbit population from 2023 (1.1 million) to 2024 (800,000). The population has fluctuated over time, but new linear regression analysis conducted by PDSA shows now that there has been an overall downward trend since 2011 (1.6 million).

The proportion of UK adults who own a rabbit has fallen in 2024 (1.71%) compared to 2023 (2.24%) and 2024 is also significantly lower than 2011 when 3.72% of adults owned a rabbit. Overall, 2024 is lower than 2011 (3.72%), 2014 (2.50%), 2015 (2.63%), 2016 (3.18%), 2018 (2.45%), 2021 (2.08%), and 2023 (2.24%), but no different from 2017, 2019, 2020, or 2022.

The number of rabbits people own has not changed in 2024 compared to any of the preceding years from 2017 to 2023. There have been some variations between the years over this time period but no overarching trend.

Acquisition rates

In 2024, 14% of dog owners* have owned their pet for one year or less (1.5 million dogs), which is no different from 2023, 2022 and 2019 but higher than 2020, 2018 and 2017 (12% in August 2020, 11% in 2018 and 12% in 2017).

This appears to reflect a higher rate of acquisition of dogs in recent years. However, there is not a similarly increasing trend across the years for cats or rabbits. In 2024, 12% of cat owners* have owned their pet for one year or less (1.3 million cats), and 19% of rabbit owners* have owned their pet for one year or less (150,000 rabbits). These proportions are no different from the previous eight years.

New pet owners

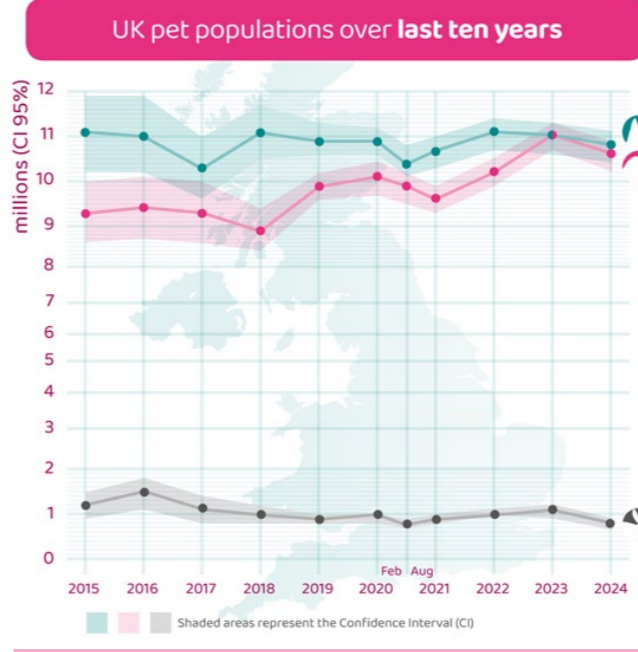
In 2024, 38% of all pet owners told us that they were 'new' pet owners, i.e. this is their first experience of owning this species of pet as an adult, more than in 2021 (34%) and 2022 (36%) but no different from 2023. This includes 22% of pet owners who have never owned any species of pet before as an adult, a proportion which hasn't changed since we first asked the question in 2021. The demographics of new pet owners has not changed since 2021, with new owners more likely to be younger (18-44), educated to university degree or higher, have a gross household income of £50,000 plus, live in households of three - four people, be working full time or a full-time student, living in an urban area and have children.

42% of dog owners have not owned a dog before as an adult, an increase from 2021 (34%) and 2022 (39%) but no different from 2023. There has been no change over the same time period for cat owners - 33% have not owned a cat before as an adult, which is broadly the same as in 2021, 2022 and 2023. As in previous years, more rabbit owners (44%) than dog or cat owners have not owned a rabbit before as an adult. This has decreased from 51% in 2023 but is not statistically significantly different from 2021 and 2022.

If this apparent stabilisation in the proportion of 'new' pet owners, together with that seen for both acquisition rates and population estimates for dogs, continue as trends, it would be interesting to investigate the reasons behind this. There are likely to be multiple factors involved, including changes in lifestyles such as a decline in the home working patterns which many adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. An additional contributory factor could be that the current financial climate is affecting people's decision to own a pet. Owners continue to tell us that the cost of living is having an impact, with 24% of owners (5.4 million pets) saying the cost of living has affected how they care for their pet, increased from 22% in 2023. This includes 1% of owners who said because of the cost of living, they were having to give up their pet for rehoming and 1% who were having to have their pet put to sleep, unchanged from 2022.

Additionally, 2% of owners told us they had to get pet food from a food bank (340,000 pets), doubled from 1% in 2023. In response to the cost of living crisis, charities, including RSPCA, Blue Cross and Dogs Trust expanded their support for pet owners through foodbanks. The Pets at Home Foundation impact report 2022-20231 reports that the Blue Cross Pet Food Bank Service funded by the Pets at Home Foundation has fed over one million pets across Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England.¹

We will continue to monitor the proportion of new pet owners through future PAW Reports to determine whether this is a fluctuation or a true change in the trend.



* Excluding those who didn't know how long they had owned their pet for.

¹ <https://www.petsfoundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/PA230501-PAH-Foundation-Impact-Report-2023-Final.pdf>

Pet Acquisition

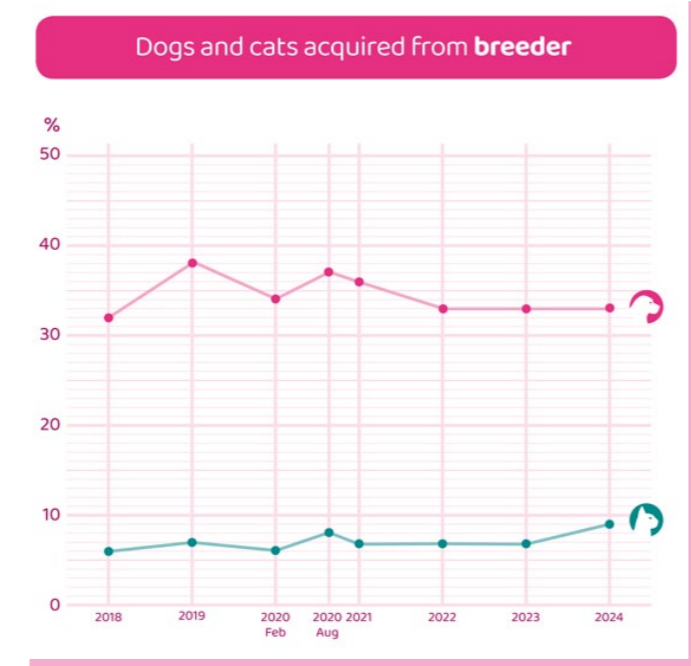
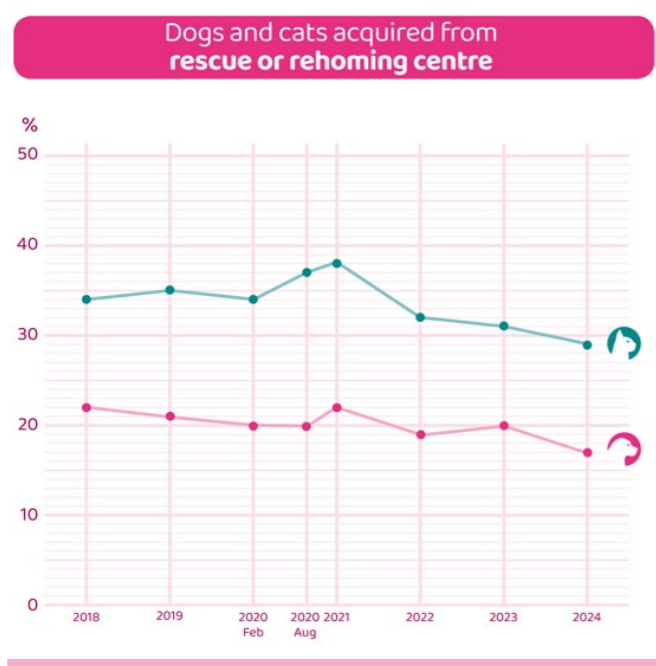
The most common places for people to get their pets from has remained the same for several years. In 2024, dog owners were most likely to get their pets from a breeder (33%), cat owners from a rescue or rehoming centre (29%) and rabbit owners from a pet shop or garden centre (26%). However, there have been some interesting trends within the most common sources for dogs and cats.



As seen in previous years, there continues to be a decrease in the proportion of dog and cat owners who acquired their pet from a rescue or rehoming centre. 17% of dog owners acquired their pet from this source in 2024, which is lower than in all years since 2018 (22%) except for 2022 when there was no statistically significant difference. This decrease is mainly for dogs from rescue or rehoming centres for UK pets (12% in 2024 compared to 18% in February 2020 and 17% in 2021). Dogs from abroad acquired from rescue or rehoming centres, either based in the UK or abroad, is higher in 2024 (5%) than in 2020 (3%), although no different to 2021 or 2022, and lower than in 2023 (6%).

For cat owners, whilst the proportion acquired from rescue or rehoming centres in 2024 (29%) is not statistically significantly different from 2023 or 2022, it is less than each of the years between 2018 and 2021 (34% in 2018, 35% in 2019, 34% in February 2020, 37% in August 2020, and 38% in 2021).

The proportion of dog owners who acquired their pet from a breeder in 2024 (33%) is less than 2019 (38%) and February 2020 (37%). However, the proportion of owners (16%) who got their dog from family, friends or neighbours in 2024 is higher than 2019 (11%), February 2020 (12%), 2022



5% of all pets in the UK in 2024 have been acquired from abroad



(13%) and 2023 (13%). Many rehoming organisations have reported an increased rate of relinquishment over the last 12 months^{2,3}. The increase in dog owners acquiring their pet from family, friends or neighbours, could add additional support to the concerns that more people are making the decision to give their dogs up, and potentially passing them onto people they know as an alternative to rehoming organisations.

Likewise, the proportion of cats acquired from a family, friend or neighbour has increased with 2024 (28%) being higher than findings from most of the recent years (25% in 2019 and February 2020, 24% in August 2020 and 2021 and 23% in 2022).

However, the proportion of cats acquired from breeders is higher in 2024 (8%) than most of the recent years (6% in 2018, 6% in February 2020, 7% in 2021).

There has been a significant decrease in the proportion of cats acquired as a stray who 'found the owner' from 11% in 2018 down to 6% in 2024. This is an interesting finding, but it is difficult to interpret without additional data on the stray cat population, estimated in 2021 to be around 250,000 unowned cats living in UK towns and cities⁴. It could be that the stray cat population itself has decreased, or that people are less likely to take them in.



Pets from abroad

Until 2023, there had been a gradual increase in the overall proportion of the total pet population who have come from abroad since we first asked in August 2020, when the proportion was 3%. This was 6% in both 2022 and 2023, and now has decreased, with 5% of all pets in the UK in 2024 having been acquired from abroad. This equates to 640,000 dogs, 370,000 cats and 15,000 rabbits.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/28/animal-refuges-in-britain-are-full-to-bursting-as-owners-give-up-pets-in-cash-crisis?ref=biztoc.com>
³ <https://www.cats.org.uk/about-cp/cats-report>
⁴ McDonald J, Finka L, Foreman-Worsley R, Skillings E, Hodgson D. Cat: Empirical modelling of Felis catus population dynamics in the UK. PLoS One. 2023 Jul 12;18(7):e0287841. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0287841.

In 2024, 5% of dogs owned for one year or less were acquired from abroad. This equates to potentially 82,000 dogs imported for pet ownership in the last 12 months.

4% of all pets came from abroad through a rescue or rehoming centre, whether a UK based centre rehoming pets from abroad (2%) or a rescue centre based abroad (1%). These proportions are no different from our 2023 findings. 1% of all pets were acquired from a breeder based outside the UK, which has remained the same since 2020.

The increase in the overall proportion of pets acquired from abroad has in previous years been primarily driven by an increase in the proportion of dogs acquired in this way. Similarly, in 2024, the proportion of dogs acquired from abroad remains significantly higher (6%) than cats (3%) or rabbits (2%), equating to 640,000 dogs from abroad living in the UK in 2024. Overall, the proportion of dogs acquired from abroad is lower than in 2023 (8%) but still higher than when first asked in August 2020 (4%). The most common source for dogs acquired from abroad remains rescue or rehoming centres (5%), whether based in the UK or abroad.

The reasons people gave for acquiring their pet from abroad have remained similar to previous years.

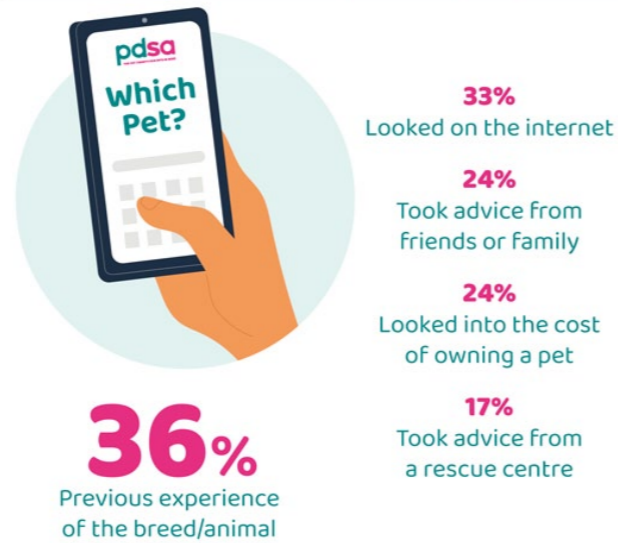
The most common reason chosen was that the owner had no preference for where their pet came from, they just happened to come from abroad – this was higher for dog (38%) than cat owners (16%).

Fewer dog owners (12%) said they acquired their dog from abroad because they were turned down by UK rescue centres than in 2023 (21%). However, more cat owners in 2024 (7%) said they acquired from abroad because rehoming from abroad is easier than rehoming in the UK (0% in 2023).

The findings continue to show a sizable proportion of dog owners acquired their pet from abroad because they wanted a dog with a mutilation (9%), unchanged from 2023. 3% of dog owners who acquired their pet in this way did so because they wanted a dog with **cropped ears**, equating to 21,000 dogs. These numbers demonstrate the urgent need to close the loophole in the current legislation which allows the import of dogs who have undergone this cruel procedure that is banned in the UK, a measure included in the upcoming Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill⁵. 5% of dog owners who acquired their pet from abroad told us they did this because they wanted them to have a **docked tail**, and 3% because they wanted their dog to be debarked. 4% of cat owners who acquired their pet from abroad told us they did so because they wanted them to be declawed, equating to 15,000 cats, which is not significantly different from our findings in 2022 and 2023.

⁵ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9981/>

What did you do before you chose your pet?



Pre-purchase behaviour

It is important that owners understand the needs of their pet before taking on the responsibility of pet ownership, to ensure they are able to care for them properly.

We asked owners what they did before they chose their pet. The most common answer selected was that they had previous experience; 36% of pet owners told us this, which was higher for rabbit owners (41%) compared to dog (34%) and cat (37%) owners.

Unsurprisingly, the internet is an important source of information for people thinking about acquiring a pet. 33% of pet owners told us they looked on the internet before choosing their pet, higher than any of the previous seven years except for August 2020 with more dog owners (40%) saying this than rabbit (34%) or cat owners (25%). 9% of owners told us they looked on social media for advice before choosing their pet. It can be very difficult to determine the reliability of information on social media and online, highlighting the importance of ensuring accurate, evidence-based information is readily available in accessible online formats.

9% of pet owners took advice from a veterinary professional before choosing their pet, higher than for any of the other previous seven years in which this question was asked (e.g. 5% in 2017). The proportion of owners who took advice from a veterinary professional before choosing their pet was higher for rabbit (12%) and dog (10%) owners than cat owners (7%). It is encouraging to see this trend - PDSA has championed the concept of 'pre-purchase' consultations for prospective owners with a vet or vet nurse since the launch of our **'Which Pet?'** consultation framework in 2015. This was designed to help vet professionals guide potential owners through all the areas they need to consider before taking on a pet, including the **5 Welfare Needs** and the time, cost and lifestyle implications that come with pet ownership.

PDSA has championed the concept of 'pre-purchase' consultations for prospective owners with a vet or vet nurse

Only 24% of owners looked into the cost of owning a pet before they chose them. This has increased since we first asked the question in 2022 when 18% of owners told us they had done this, but still remains worryingly low, especially considering that our **2023 Report** found that a significant proportion of owners (60%) underestimate the minimum monthly cost of owning a pet. The proportion of owners who looked into the cost of owning a pet before they chose them is higher for dog (29%) and rabbit (26%) owners than cat owners (17%).

13% of pet owners told us they didn't do anything before choosing their pet. This has continued to decrease from 19% in February 2020, a positive finding that may reflect greater understanding by owners of the need to seek knowledge and advice before taking on the responsibility of pet ownership.

The proportion of pet owners who didn't do anything before choosing their pet is higher for cat owners (18%) than for dog or rabbit owners (both 10%).


Owners who hadn't done any research before choosing their pet were less likely to have got their pet from a breeder (7%) or a rescue or rehoming centre (17%) compared to owners who had done research (25% and 24% respectively), which could reflect the support given by these sources to owners. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as these decisions may need to be taken at short notice, owners who have not done any research before acquiring their pet are more likely to have rehomed their pet from a family member, friend or neighbour (32%), or found a stray (9%) compared to those who had done research (18% and 2% respectively). Owners who hadn't done any research before choosing their rabbit were less likely to have got their rabbit from a breeder (4%) or a rescue or rehoming centre (14%) and more likely to have got from a pet shop or garden centre (36%) compared to those who had undertaken some research (20%, 21%, and 25% respectively).

15% of rabbit owners who acquired their pet from a pet shop or garden centre told us they had not done any research before acquiring their pet. It is important that businesses licensed to sell pets ensure the animals they sell are going to suitable homes, as well as providing owners with the knowledge of what they need to care for their pet.

Understanding of breeder licensing regulations, including how to confirm if a breeder is licensed remains low amongst owners, with only 35% of dog owners who acquired their pet from a UK breeder checking if the breeder was licensed. Significant work is needed to raise awareness of the regulations amongst the public, as well as improving access to the licensing information, if the regulations are to meet their aim of improving the welfare of puppies and breeding dogs.

There are some important steps owners should take when **looking for a reputable breeder** that help avoid **low welfare breeding establishments**. We asked owners who got their pet from a UK breeder what they did before taking their pet home. 73% said they saw their pet with their mum, higher for dog owners at 75%, than cat (63%) and rabbit owners (51%). It is concerning that 25% of dog owners are still failing to take the vital step of seeing their pet with their mum before taking them home and highlights the need for ongoing campaigns to help prospective owners understand why this is so important. 52% of pet owners who acquired their pet from a UK breeder visited their pet on more than one occasion before taking them home, higher for dog owners (56%), than cat (37%) and rabbit owners (32%). This is no different than in 2022 when this question was last asked.

23% of dog owners said they checked the breeder would complete some form of contract such as the **Puppy Contract** and 8% of cat owners checked their breeder would complete something like the **Kitten Checklist**. Developed by a collaboration of animal welfare organisations, these tools encourage the responsible breeding and buying of puppies and kittens - ensuring buyers have all the information they need to make an informed decision and allowing responsible breeders to set themselves apart by demonstrating the care and attention they have put into breeding happy and healthy pets. Raising awareness of these tools would help owners avoid low welfare breeding establishments such as puppy farms.

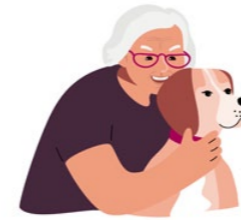
British Veterinary Association President Anna Judson said:  It's encouraging to see more owners taking the opportunity to speak to a vet and undertake a pre-purchase consultation before taking the leap into pet ownership. Impulse buys and poor research into the suitability of a pet can lead to a heart-breaking experience for families who subsequently have to rehome pets, but can also have a significant impact on the welfare of the animal. The findings show good progress but there's still more to do."

Dogs

Owners report benefits that pets bring to their lives. 92% of dog owners agree that owning a dog improves their life, 86% say it makes them physically healthier, and 88% say it makes them mentally healthier. How does this correspond with the care their dogs receive?



In 2024, 19% of dogs are left alone for five or more hours, significantly more than in 2022



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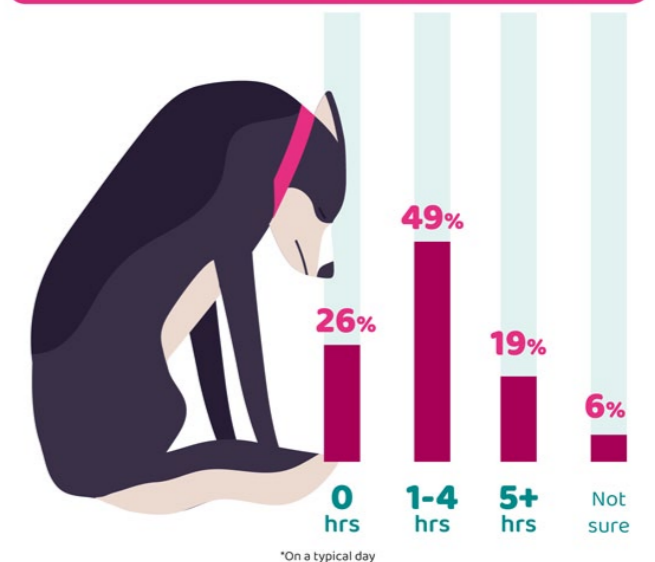
Companionship

89% of owners told us they felt informed about their dog's need for companionship, which was the lowest proportion of all the Welfare Needs. Dogs are social animals and can be negatively affected by being left alone for long periods, although it is also important to ensure they are given the opportunity to rest undisturbed.

Our findings show that the amount of time that dogs are left alone for is continuing to return to the same levels as in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many owners being at home with their pets for longer periods of time. In 2024, 19% of dogs are left alone for five or more hours, significantly more than in 2022 (15%), no different from 2019 but less than in 2018 (24%). This could be because fewer people are still working entirely from home⁶.

26% of dogs are never left alone on a typical weekday, which is significantly lower than in 2022, when it was 32%. It is important for many dogs to spend some time alone, to allow them to rest without disturbance. Dogs need to be taught to be confident spending time alone⁷, even if their usual routine involves someone being at home with them for most of their day. It is difficult to tell from these findings whether dogs are being given the opportunity for undisturbed time, but we did find that fewer dogs left for longer periods (5 or more hours) show signs of distress when left alone (8%) compared to dogs left for 0-4 hours (12%) or never (15%).

How long is your dog left alone?



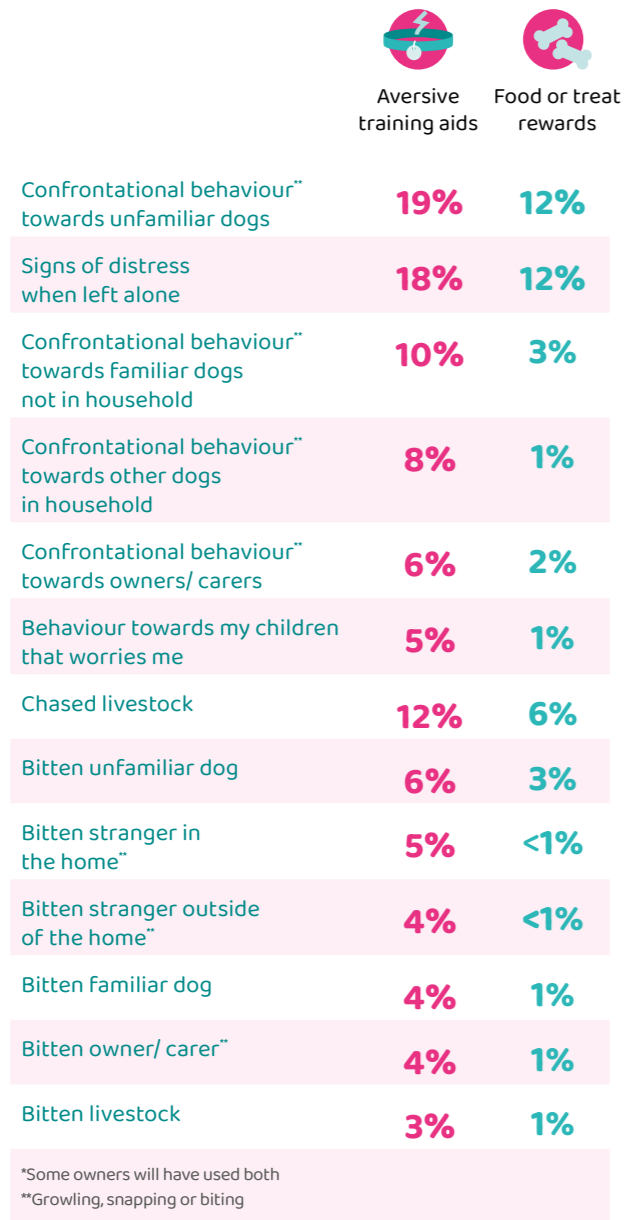
One possibility is that owners may have reacted to dogs showing signs of distress when left alone by finding a way to ensure they are never in this situation. It is also possible that dogs left for longer periods have become more accustomed to being left over time, or potentially just not observed if they do have problems. Either way, leaving a social species like dogs alone for these longer periods can be detrimental to their welfare.

⁶ <https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/47779-half-of-workers-now-working-from-home-at-least-some-of-the-time>

⁷ Fagen, A. (2023). Separation-related disorders. Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat: Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat-E-Book, 297.



Differences in behaviours with different training methods*



While the proportion of dogs that have bitten a person or other animal may seem low, when considered at a population level, the numbers of dogs showing this behaviour are of concern.

Behaviour

The 2024 PAW Report has revealed some concerning results surrounding dog behaviour, particularly in the proportion of confrontational responses dogs show and the training methods used by owners. Dogs that display human- or other animal-related confrontational related behaviour are an important public health concern. While the proportion of dogs that have bitten a person or other animal may seem low, when considered at a population level, the numbers of dogs showing this behaviour are of concern. We asked owners whether their dog had ever been bitten or had themselves bitten or chased other animals or people. 82% of owners told us that their dog had never been involved in any of these situations. However, 5% have been bitten by another dog away from home where veterinary care was needed (570,000 dogs), 2% (180,000 dogs) have bitten a familiar dog and 3% (350,000 dogs) have bitten an unfamiliar dog. In addition, 1% have bitten their owner or carer where professional medical care has been needed (150,000 dogs), however, this is likely to only capture the more severe bites, and those where medical intervention wasn't warranted may be considerably higher. These proportions are unchanged from 2023.

The literature suggests there has been an increase in dog bite cases in recent years. The number of dog bite-related hospital admissions in England between 1998 and 2018 showed an increase in adult cases⁸. This year, we found that significantly more dogs in 2024 have bitten a stranger in the home where professional medical care has been needed (1.2%) compared to 2022 (0.55%). It is important to note that we do not know in what context any of these reported bites occurred, and there are multiple potential factors, both human and dog related, involved in the increase in dog bite incidents⁹.

However, this worrying increase suggests that further bite prevention strategies are warranted including education surrounding **dog body language** and safe interactions, recognition of dog pain and illness, and meeting dogs' needs.

Another behavioural concern is unwanted behaviour around livestock which can present a serious risk to other animals. In 2024, we have seen an increase in the number of dogs that have chased livestock, 6% compared to 4% in 2023. Livestock worrying is a significant welfare concern for a range of stakeholders and can result in major financial and emotional suffering for farmers and livestock keepers¹⁰. Ensuring dogs are kept secure around livestock is essential to help prevent worrying and protect the welfare of dogs and livestock.

Significantly more owners who have used aversive training aids have dogs who show concerning behaviours

An issue that may be contributing to confrontational behaviour and poor welfare in dogs is the use of aversive training methods. This year we have found that 22% of dog owners have used aversive methods* as a training aid. There are significantly more owners using one or more of these aversive devices compared to 2022 (20%), but fewer than in 2019 (25%).

In 2024, 15% of dog owners have used one aversive method for training, 6% have used two aversive methods, and 1% have used three aversive methods. Of those owners who used aversive methods to train their dog, the behaviours they were attempting to correct included barking (43%), pulling on the lead (37%), elimination in the home (20%), growling, snapping, or biting people (12%) or other pets (12%), and chasing livestock (12%). The efficacy of these aversive methods is questionable and there is a high risk of these tools being used incorrectly¹¹. Moreover, the use of aversive methods can cause physical, emotional, and cognitive harm to dogs¹².

Significantly more owners who have used aversive training aids have dogs who show concerning behaviours compared to owners who used food or treat rewards (see infographics). These include worrying behaviour towards owner's children, growling, snapping or biting owners/carers, growling, snapping or biting unfamiliar dogs, and growling, snapping or biting other dogs in the household, as well as dogs who have chased livestock, and those who have bitten a familiar or unfamiliar dog. Worryingly, we also found this association with dogs who have bitten a human where professional medical care was needed, whether their owner or carer, a stranger in the home or a stranger outside of the home. Additionally, 18% of owners who have used aversive methods of training told us their dog was showing signs of distress when left alone, compared to 12% who use treats and food rewards.

It is important to highlight that we cannot infer any causal effect from these data, just that there is an association between certain behaviours shown and aversive training methods. It may be that these behaviours are more likely to make an owner feel they need to use aversive methods to modify the behaviour, or that the use of aversive training methods could cause a dog to develop further concerning behaviours. It is also important to note there may be some owners who use both aversive and reward-based training aids.



⁸ Tulloch, J. S. P., Owczarczak-Garstecka, S. C., Fleming, K. M., Vivancos, R., & Westgarth, C. (2021). English hospital episode data analysis (1998–2018) reveal that the rise in dog bite hospital admissions is driven by adult cases. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-81527-7>

⁹ Reese, L. A., & Vertalka, J. J. (2021). Understanding dog bites: the important role of human behavior. *Journal of applied animal welfare science*, 24(4), 331-346.

¹⁰ Oxley, J. A., Evans, B., & Montrose, V. T. (2017). Prevention of sheep worrying in the UK: Rethinking the approach. *Journal of veterinary behavior*, 19, 61-63.

* shock collar, citronella collar, electric shock collar, vibrating collar, pet corrector spray, water pistol or spray, rattle device, and choke chain.

¹¹ China, L., Mills, D. S., & Cooper, J. J. (2020). Efficacy of dog training with and without remote electronic collars vs. a focus on positive reinforcement. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 7, 547533.

¹² Cooper, J. J., Cracknell, N., Hardiman, J., Wright, H., & Mills, D. (2014). The welfare consequences and efficacy of training pet dogs with remote electronic training collars in comparison to reward based training. *PLoS one*, 9(9), e102722.



We asked dog owners what behaviours their pet was showing. 16% of owners told us that their dog was showing growling, snapping or biting behaviours, which are likely seen in states of protective emotional bias¹³ and may be indicative of poor welfare. 12% were showing signs of fear, 11% were growling, snapping, or biting unfamiliar dogs and 2% were growling, snapping, or biting their owners or carers. In addition, 11% of dogs show signs of distress when left alone and 2% of dogs show behaviour towards their children that worries the owner, equating to 170,000 dogs.

European Veterinary Specialist in Behavioural Medicine, Dr Sarah Heath FRCVS said: “Levels of reported dog bite incidents, together with the reporting of an association between the use of aversive training methods and the incidence of concerning canine behaviours, highlight the need for better education for caregivers about the dogs that they share their lives with. More information is needed to understand the reasons for the confrontational behaviours that are reported but the need for more effective dog bite prevention strategies and education about positive training methods is clear. The potential for a link between poor sleep duration and behaviours which caregivers find problematic is consistent with recent publications in the field of veterinary behavioural medicine and also warrants further investigation.”

This year, we asked dog owners how much sleep their dog got in a 24-hour period. We found several associations between dog behaviour and sleep. Although the optimal sleep duration is likely to vary between dogs, there is evidence to suggest that dogs should get over twelve to sixteen hours sleep.^{14,15,16} Our findings reveal that a large proportion of dogs are likely to not be getting enough sleep**, with 27% (2.9 million) sleeping for ten hours or less in a day, and 53% (5.6 million) of dogs getting under 13 hours sleep.

Confrontational behaviour was one of the associations we found to be linked to the duration of sleep.

Significantly more dogs who get less than 10 hours sleep (4%) show growling, snapping or biting towards other dogs in the household compared to dogs who get more than 13 hours sleep (2%).

Also, more dogs who get less than 10 hours sleep (6%) show growling, snapping or biting towards familiar dogs not in the household compared to dogs who get more than 13 hours sleep (3%). These results support the findings of studies which have shown problem behaviours may increase in dogs sleeping less than eight to ten hours¹⁶, highlighting the importance of providing the opportunity and correct environment for dogs to sleep to protect emotional health.

We found that the environment appears to have a significant impact on the duration dogs sleep for. Significantly more dogs with three to four (28%) or five plus (40%) people in their household are getting less than ten hours sleep, compared to those with two people (24%).

Similarly, in households with one person or two people, 44% and 43% are getting more than 13 hours sleep, compared to 37% of dogs in three to four person households, or 28% in households of five plus people. Additionally, more dogs with children in their household get less than eight hours (8%) or eight to ten hours (24%) sleep compared to those with no children in their household (5% and 19% respectively). Conversely, fewer dogs with children in their household get 13-16 hours (28%) or more than 16 hours (7%) sleep compared to those with no children (33% and 9% respectively). This could suggest that busier environments with children may not be conducive to promoting sleep in dogs. Further research into the quality of sleep in these environments will provide additional insight into canine sleep health.

Cost of Living

The rising cost of living continues to affect how owners care for their dogs - 26% of dog owners (2.8 million dogs) say the cost of living has affected how they care for their pet, which has increased from 23% in 2023. 35% of dog owners have made personal cost-saving decisions to continue caring for their pet, including 20% giving up personal luxuries, 16% making savings on their weekly food shop and 12% reducing energy consumption. 90% of dog owners say that the cost of owning their pet has increased.

8% of dog owners have delayed taking their pet to the vet when they were ill because they felt it was too expensive, which is no different from our findings from 2022 and 2023. There has been no change in the proportion of owners who told us their pet had not received preventive healthcare such as vaccinations (11% of dogs who are not vaccinated) or neutering (10% of dogs who are not neutered) because it was too expensive.

** includes resting quietly, naps, and overnight sleeping.

¹³ Heath, S. E. (2017, June). Canine emotions, behavioural responses and body language. In Proceedings of the BSAVA Northern Ireland Meeting.

¹⁴ Kinsman, R., Owczarczak-Garstecka, S., Casey, R., Knowles, T., Tasker, S., Woodward, J., Da Costa, R., & Murray, J. (2020). Sleep duration and behaviours: A descriptive analysis of a cohort of dogs up to 12 months of age. *Animals*, 10(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10071172>

¹⁵ Mondino, A., Delucchi, L., Moeser, A., Cerdá-González, S., & Vanini, G. (2021). Sleep Disorders in dogs: A Pathophysiological and Clinical Review. In *Topics in Companion Animal Medicine* (Vol. 43). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tcam.2021.100516>

¹⁶ Tooley, C., & Heath, S. E. (2022). Sleep Characteristics in Dogs; Effect on Caregiver-Reported Problem Behaviours. *Animals*, 12(14). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12141753>

There appears to be a significant proportion of owners who are struggling to understand whether their dog is now a banned breed.

Do you think your dog is an **XL Bully** under the Government definition?

93%
Definitely not an XL Bully

3%
Could be considered an XL Bully, but don't think they should be

2%
Definitely is an XL Bully

2%
Don't know



What do you think will be different following the **XL Bully** legislation?

65%
XL Bullies will have to be muzzled in public

47%
XL Bullies should be reported if in public without a muzzle and lead

31%
Vets will have to report XL Bully owners to the authorities

28%
The public will be safer

14%
XL Bullies will have to be muzzled in cars

11%
XL Bullies won't be seen in public

6%
XL Bullies will be put to sleep

XL Bullies

In October 2023, the UK Government announced plans to add **XL Bullies** to the list of dogs banned in England and Wales under the **Dangerous Dogs Act 1991**. The legislation came into force on 31 January 2024 – from that date it has been illegal to own an XL Bully in England and Wales without a certificate of exemption. In January 2024, the **Scottish Government** announced their plans to introduce similar legislation, followed by the Northern Ireland Government in March 2024.

Our findings show that as of January 2024, 9% of dog owners were not aware of the new XL Bully regulations at all. 0.69% of owners (73,000) chose to identify their dog as an XL American Bully or Bully when asked what breed their dog was, however 2.12% of dog owners (220,000) said their dog is definitely an XL Bully under the Government definition, and 3.16% said their dog could be considered an XL Bully, but they don't think they should be. Owners with more than one dog were asked only about the breed of one of those dogs, which may mean these numbers are an underestimate. A further 0.11% of owners told us they owned an American Pit Bull Terrier (approximately 12,000 dogs), a breed which has been banned in the UK since 1991. Data from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) obtained in a Freedom of Information request submitted to the Government by the BBC¹⁷ showed 3,499 banned dogs are registered in the UK, of which 3,465

are Pit Bull Terriers. 0.08% of owners told us they owned an American Bulldog (approximately 8,500 dogs). The dimensions of some dogs of this breed could meet part of the legal criteria to be considered as an XL Bully, particularly as it is a breed not recognised by the UK Kennel Club. Concerns were raised that the **conformation standard** developed by Defra could cause confusion amongst owners¹⁸. There appears to be a significant proportion of owners who are struggling to understand whether their dog is now a banned breed.

There is also confusion about whether the legislation will be effective in terms of improving public safety. Only 28% of all pet owners think the public will now be safer. 11% think XL Bullies will no longer be seen in public at all.

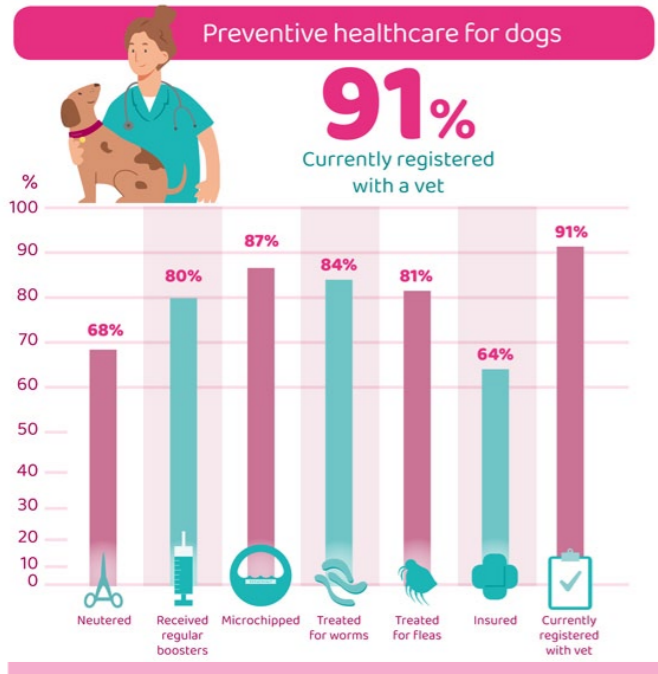
We found significant differences in owners in London compared to the UK as a whole. Fewer dog owners in London are aware of the new regulations around XL Bully dogs (65% compared to 89% in the UK). More dog owners in London say their dog is definitely an XL Bully compared to the UK (9% of dog owners in London compared to 2% in the UK) and more dog owners in London compared to the UK say their dog could be considered an XL Bully but they don't think they should be (15% compared to 3%). In total, 24% of dog owners in London say their dog definitely is or would be considered to be an XL Bully, which is much higher than the UK as a whole (5%).

Dr Samantha Gaines, Head of Companion Animal Science and Policy, RSPCA and secretariat of the Dog Control Coalition, said:

“The lack of awareness and confusion around the breed ban reflect the experiences of those in the rescue and veterinary sector who have been inundated with requests for help and support since its announcement. With the ban yet to be fully implemented in Scotland and Northern Ireland, experiences in England and Wales highlight the urgent need for ongoing support for owners as well as sufficient time and clear and comprehensive information from Governments to help them navigate and adopt this change. This will also help ease the burden on professionals who remain under considerable pressure following the pandemic and cost of living crisis.”

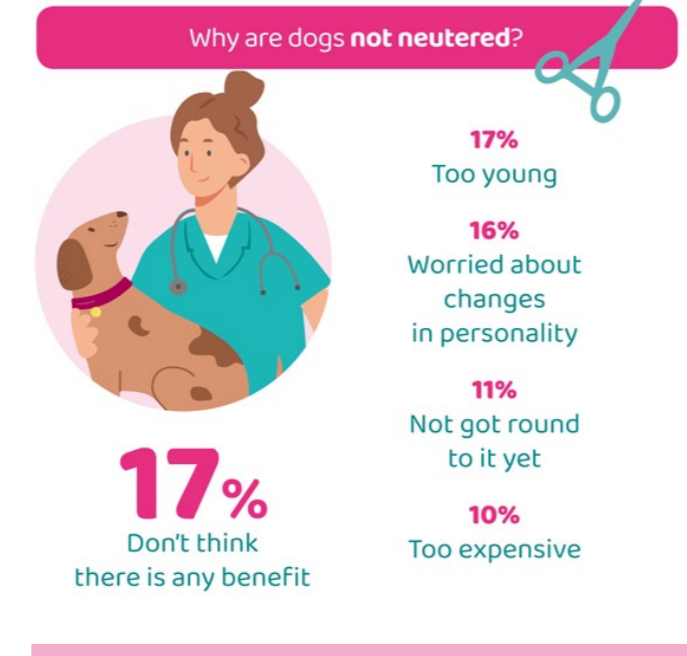
¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67217993>

¹⁸ American bully XLs: Owners confused by ban, says RSPCA - BBC News



Preventive Health

Although the proportion of dogs who are **neutered** is the same as in 2023 (68%), it has decreased since 2019 when 74% of dogs were neutered. This may reflect increasing evidence for the benefits of keeping some dogs entire, particularly males¹⁹. More female dogs (75%) than males (63%) are neutered, and more owners say they haven't neutered their dog because their vet recommended against it in 2024 (9%) compared to 2022 (5%). The proportion of dogs neutered increases with length of ownership^{***}; 38% of dogs owned for up to one year are neutered, 56% of those owned for one to two years, 71% of those owned for three to five years, and 81% of those owned for five or more years.

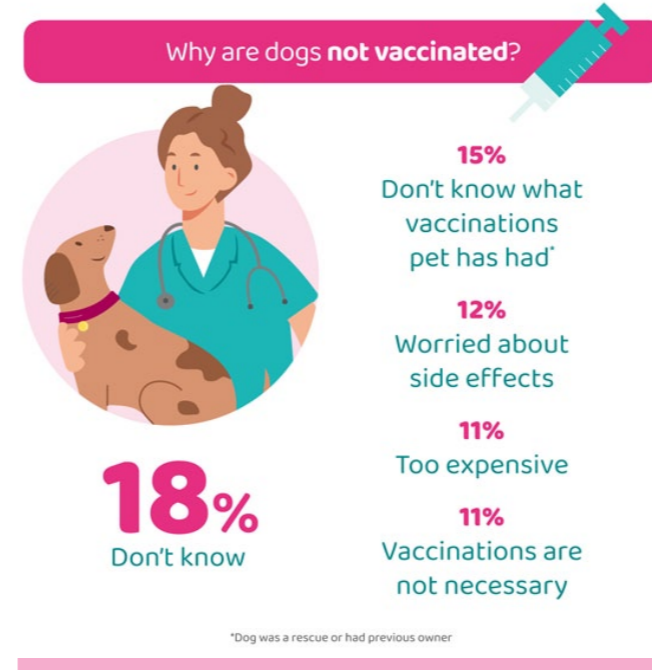


80% of dogs have had regular **booster vaccinations**, no different from the findings in 2023 – this has fluctuated over our years of data, but the 2024 findings are no different from the average since 2017. Of those owners whose dog has not received regular vaccinations, 11% said it was because vaccinations are too expensive, which is not statistically significantly different from any of the previous times we asked owners about this since 2017.

Significantly fewer dogs are microchipped in 2024 (87%) compared to 2023 (90%). This has gradually decreased over time from 93% in 2017.

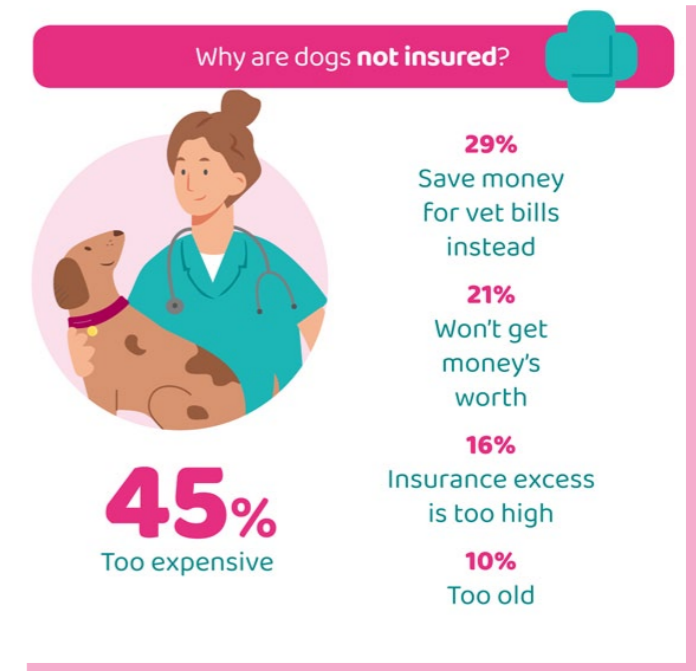
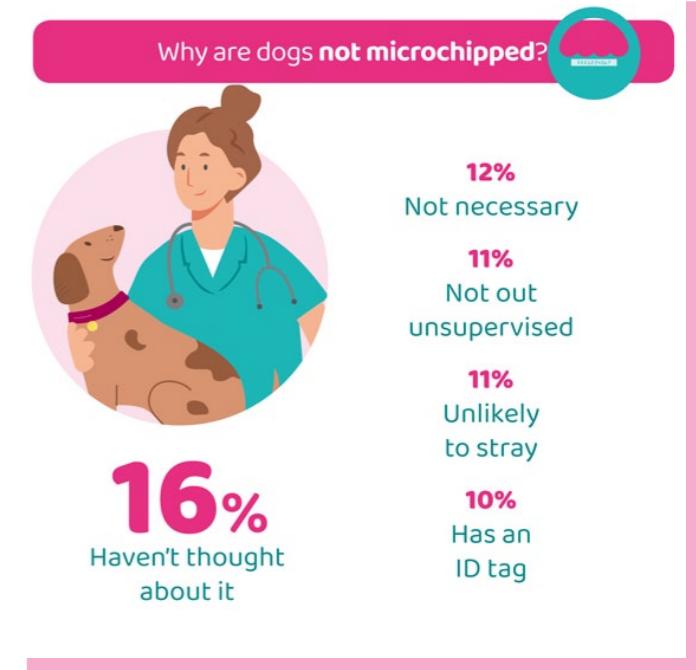
In 2016, **microchipping** became a legal requirement for all dogs over 8 weeks of age²⁰. The introduction of the legislation was accompanied by a great deal of publicity about the upcoming change, so it is possible that awareness amongst owners is now declining. Fewer 'new' pet owners (84%) have microchipped their dog compared to those who have owned a dog before as an adult (90%). However, of those owners whose dog was not microchipped, the proportion who said it was because they hadn't heard of microchipping (8%) is no different from 2023 and lower than 2022 (15%).

Of those owners whose dog has not received regular vaccinations, 11% said it was because vaccinations are too expensive



64% of dogs are **insured**, significantly more than in 2023 (61%). This has been increasing since 2017 when it was 55%. However, in 2024, 45% of those who have not insured their dog told us they had not done so because it was too expensive, which has increased from 38% of uninsured dogs in 2023. More "new" pet owners (71%) have insured their dog compared to those who have owned a dog before (58%).

Of the 84% of owners who have treated their dogs for **worms**, 96% are doing so preventively. Likewise, 95% of the 81% of dog owners who are treating their pet for **fleas** are doing it for preventive reasons rather than treating an active infestation (3%). 63% of dog owners get their pet's flea and worming treatment from their veterinary practice, 23% from a pet shop and 15% from an online pharmacy. With the increasing evidence of the environmental impact of routine parasiticides²¹, advice from veterinary professionals and the creation of tailored treatment plans, considering the specific needs of each pet's individual lifestyle are essential.



*** excluding owners who didn't know how long they had owned their dog.

¹⁹ Urfer, S. R., & Kaerberlein, M. (2019). Desexing dogs: a review of the current literature. *Animals*, 9(12), 1086.

²⁰ Microchipping of dogs legislation (2015) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2015/978011125243>

²¹ Mulcahy, G. (2024). Is it time to re-evaluate anti-parasitic use in companion animals? *Companion Animal*, 29(3), 12-18.

Cats

91% of owners told us owning a cat improves their life, 51% say it makes them physically healthier, and 88% say it makes them mentally healthier. However, only 15% of cat owners had heard about the **5 Welfare Needs**, lower than dog (18%) or rabbit (35%) owners.



Cats may find it less stressful to live alongside each other if they are introduced to a new home at the same time



Companionship

84% of owners told us they felt informed about their cat's need for companionship, which was lower than dog owners at 89% and rabbit owners at 94%.

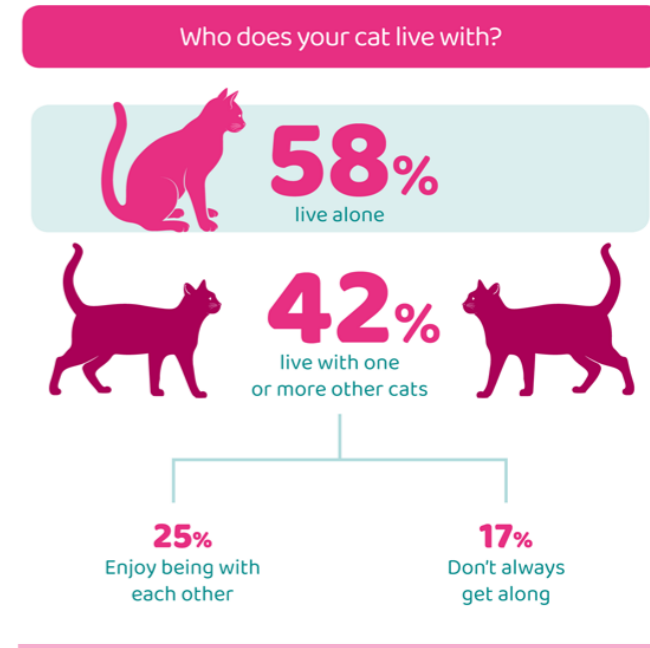
Cats are territorial animals and can find it stressful to live alongside another cat. In 2024, 58% of pet cats in the UK live alone. 42% live with another cat, comprising of 25% who live with one or more cats they enjoy being with, and 17% who live with one or more other cats they don't always get along with, meaning 1.8 million cats are potentially stressed by their living companion. There has been very little change in these proportions since 2017.

Cats living in multi-cat households, whether their owner feels they get on together or not, are more likely (55%) to show one or more behaviours that could be indicative of stress* compared to those living alone (48%). Unsurprisingly, cats living with one or more cats they don't get on with (67%) are more likely to show one or more of these stress-related behaviours* compared to either those living with cats they do get along with (47%) or those living alone (48%).

Cats may find it less stressful to live alongside each other if they are introduced to a new home at the same time, rather than moving into a territory that has already been established by another cat. We asked owners of more than one cat when their pet was acquired. In multi-cat households, owners who acquired their other cat(s) at the same time were more likely (68%) to say their cat lived with one or more cats they got on with, than owners who already had cats (53%) or who have acquired other cats since (55%). Similarly, owners who acquired their cats at the same time were less likely to say their cat didn't get on with the other cats they lived with (32%) compared to those who already had cats (47%) or subsequently acquired other cats (45%).

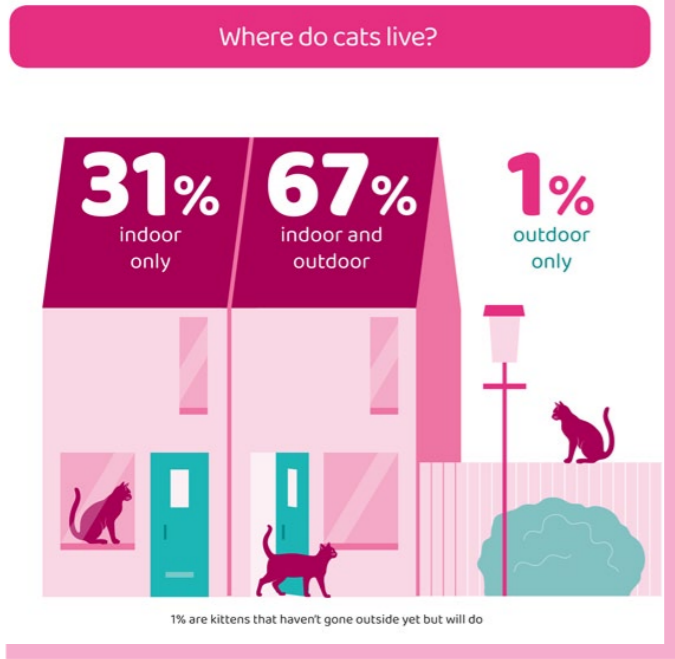
* Growling / swiping / biting people, growling / swiping / biting other household cats, missing the litter tray when peeing / pooping, peeing / pooping somewhere else in the house (away from litter tray if one available), timid / scared / nervous behaviour, overgrooming, fighting with other cats they don't live with.

** Growling / swiping / biting people, growling / swiping / biting other household cats, missing the litter tray when peeing / pooping, peeing / pooping somewhere else in the house (away from litter tray if one available), timid / scared / nervous behaviour, overgrooming, killing wildlife, fighting with other cats they don't live with, scratching inappropriate items (eg. furniture, door frames, carpets).



Cats in households where other cat(s) had been added since they were acquired are more likely to show one or more of the above behaviours which could be indicative of stress* (63%) compared to those where there were already cats in the household (52%) or where other cats were acquired at the same time (51%).

Cats in households where there were already cats are more likely to show none of the behaviours listed** (27%) compared to those where cats have been acquired since (20%), but there was no difference to those who were acquired at the same time. This seems to suggest that introducing a cat into a household may be more stressful for any cats already present than it is for the new cat.



Environment

95% of cat owners told us they felt informed about how to provide their cat with a suitable environment which was less than dog (96%) and rabbit owners (98%).

Two thirds of cats (67%) currently have access to both indoor and outdoor environments, decreased from 70% in 2022, while 31% live indoors only, increased from 28% in 2022, and 1% live outdoors only. The proportion of cats who live solely inside has been steadily increasing since 2011, when only 15% of cats lived indoors only and 83% both indoors and outside.

Of those cats whose owner told us they had access to both the indoor and outdoor environment, 70% can come and go as they choose, 31% are shut inside at certain times of the day or night, 17% have the option to go outdoors but choose to stay indoors, 8% are shut outside at certain times of the day or night and 8% have access to the outdoors but it is either cat-fenced or a catio (i.e. outdoor cat enclosures like patios for cats).

Two thirds of cats (67%) currently have access to both indoor and outdoor environments.

²² Foreman-Worsley, R., & Farnworth, M. J. (2019). A systematic review of social and environmental factors and their implications for indoor cat welfare. Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 220, 104841.

²³ Tan, S. M., Stellato, A. C., & Niel, L. (2020). Uncontrolled outdoor access for cats: An assessment of risks and benefits. Animals, 10(2), 258

It can be harder for owners to meet all their cat's needs with an **indoor only environment**, which can result in stress and unwanted behaviours²². However, we found no difference in the proportion of cats showing one or more behaviours indicative of stress* for indoor only cats (48%) compared to cats living both indoors and outdoors. There are also significant health risks for cats outside, including **fights with other cats** and **road traffic accidents**²³. Of those cats who live indoors only, 57% do so because their owner thinks it's unsafe for them to be outside and 11% of owners said their cat lives indoors for health reasons. 20% of indoor only cats have the option to go outside but choose to live indoors.

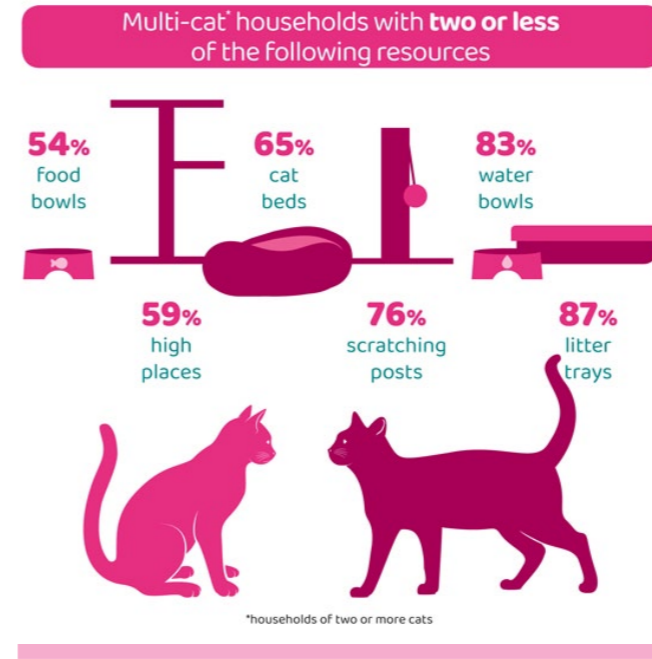
Using cat proof fencing or so-called 'catios' can allow cats the benefits of an outdoor environment while minimising the risks. 10% of cats whose owners told us they live indoors have access to an outside area that is fenced with cat proofing fencing to keep them in and 8% have access to a catio but don't go anywhere else outside.

Having access to the outdoors could potentially improve cats' ability to get along with other cats they live with by giving them the opportunity to avoid each other if wanted. However, cats who live with one or more cats they don't get on with are actually less likely to be indoors only (24%) and more likely to be indoors and outdoors (73%) compared to those who live with other cat(s) they get on with (34% and 63% respectively). One explanation could be that if owners find their cats don't get along together, they give them more space by allowing access to the outside.

Head of ISFM, Nathalie Dowgray MRCVS said: "The trend for more cats living solely indoors, documented by the PAW report over the last 14 years as increasing from 15% to 31%, raises some concerns."

"Whilst some cats can live very successfully as indoor only pets and there are strong safety arguments for keeping cats indoors, the suitability of the cats for this and the ability of the owner to meet their needs is highly individual and variable. The complete lack of litter tray provision for 2% of indoor cats (78,000 cats) is especially of concern and highlights the importance of continued education on feline environmental needs for cat owners."

The proportion of cats who live solely inside has been steadily increasing since 2011



Resources

Adequate **provision of resources** is extremely important to help cats live alongside each other harmoniously. It is recommended practice to provide one of each resource per cat plus one extra²⁴, spread out around the house to allow cats their own space and the opportunity to avoid each other if they wish to.

Unfortunately, as we have found in previous years, many households still provide an inadequate number of resources for their cats.

87% of multi-cat households have two or less litter trays (including 21% who have no litter trays and 40% who have one litter tray), 67% have 2 or less cat beds and 77% have two or less scratching posts.

²⁴ Ellis, S. L., Rodan, I., Carney, H. C., Heath, S., Rochlitz, I., Shearburn, L. D., ... & Westropp, J. L. (2013). AAFP and ISFM feline environmental needs guidelines. Journal of feline medicine and surgery, 15(3), 219-230

²⁵ Grigg, E. K., Pick, L., & Nibblett, B. (2013). Litter box preference in domestic cats: covered versus uncovered. Journal of feline medicine and surgery, 15(4), 280-284.

²⁶ Rochlitz, I. (2009). Basic requirements for good behavioural health and welfare in cats. In BSAVA Manual of canine and feline behavioural medicine (pp. 35-48). BSAVA Library.

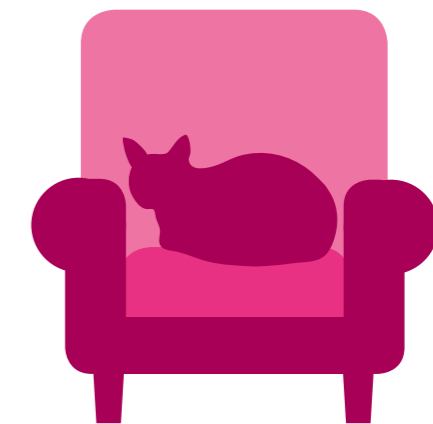
22% of cats have no litter tray at all, equating to 2.4 million cats, including 2% of indoor only cats. Even cats who toilet outside should have access to an indoor litter tray, in case they are unable to access the outdoors for any reason such as injury or bad weather.

Cats have very specific behavioural needs when it comes to litter trays²⁵. If their needs are not adequately met, it can result in inappropriate elimination around the home, which risks damaging the bond between cats and their owner.

Litter trays should ideally be placed in quiet areas of the home²⁶, so cats feel safe when using them, 60% of owners who gave their cat litter tray(s) told us they did this. However, 20% of trays were placed by a doorway to the outside, which could lead a cat to feel unsafe using the litter tray and therefore look for other places in the home to toilet.

Litter trays should also be placed in different areas of the home, particularly important for multi-cat households so cats are able to use a litter tray away from other cats.

45% of owners of more than one cat told us their litter trays are placed in various locations around the home, but 27% are placed together in the same place.





What behaviours do cats show?

34%

scratch inappropriate items*



27%

kill wildlife

18%

show timid, scared or nervous behaviour

18%

fight with other cats they don't live with

9%

growl, bite or swipe other cats they live with

9%

pee or poo in the house away from the litter tray

7%

growl, swipe or bite people

7%

pee or poo close to the litter tray but not in it

7%

overgroom

28%

show none of the behaviours above

*eg. furniture, door frames, carpets

9% of cats toilet in the house away from the litter tray and 7% close to the litter tray but not in it.

Cats living with one or more cats are more likely to toilet in the house away from the litter tray (11%) than cats living alone (7%). In multi-cat households, indoor only cats are more likely (22%) to show inappropriate **elimination** (toileting close to the litter tray but not in it or somewhere else in the home), compared to 13% of indoor and outdoor cats.

In multi-cat households, cats are more likely to display inappropriate elimination behaviours, such as toileting somewhere else in the house (away from the litter tray), when litter trays are placed together (18%) rather than not (11%), litter trays are not spot cleaned daily (19%) compared to when they are (9%), and when they contain scented litter (21%) compared to when they do not (11%).

These results show how important it is to consider litter tray placement and management when investigating causes of inappropriate elimination. Interestingly, there was no difference in the proportion of cats showing this behaviour between cats who live alone or with one or more other cats.



Behaviour

34% of owners told us that their cat scratches inappropriate items such as furniture, doorframes or carpets. **Scratching** is a normal and fundamental behaviour for cats which helps them to maintain their claw condition and to communicate²⁷, so it is important they have the ability to exhibit this behaviour on objects that are acceptable for their owner. Where a cat chooses to scratch²⁸ will depend on individual preferences, what scratching resources they have, and accessibility. Interestingly there is no difference in the proportion of cats who scratch inappropriate items in households with no scratching posts compared to those with one or more scratching posts. It is possible that the scratching posts provided are not in a suitable place or of a suitable texture for their cat.

Scratching can be a way for a cat to mark their territory, and some cats will scratch as a result of stress²⁹, such as could be caused by living with another cat. However, we did not find an association between this behaviour and the presence of other cats within the home compared to cats living alone, although cats in households where other cats were acquired at the same time are more likely to scratch inappropriate items (37%) compared to those where cats were acquired since (30%). There was no difference when compared to those where there were already cats in household.

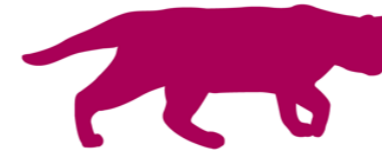
²⁷ DePorter, T. L., & Elzerman, A. L. (2019). Common feline problem behaviors: Destructive scratching. *Journal of feline medicine and surgery*, 21(3), 235-243.

²⁸ Zhang, L., & McGlone, J. J. (2020). Scratcher preferences of adult in-home cats and effects of olfactory supplements on cat scratching. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 227, 104997

²⁹ Tateo, A., Zappaterra, M., Covella, A., & Padalino, B. (2021). Factors influencing stress and fear-related behaviour of cats during veterinary examinations. *Italian Journal of Animal Science*, 20(1), 46-58.

31% of cat owners have made personal cost saving decisions in order to care for their pet

Do cats show predatory* behaviours?



83%

show some type of predatory behaviour

52%

play with toys in this way by themselves

50%

play with toys in this way with their owner

34%

prey on wildlife

30%

play with other household items in this way

20%

play attack their owner or other people

16%

don't show predatory behaviour

*seeking, chasing, catching, pouncing

Cats have a behavioural need to display hunting or predatory behaviour³⁰.

52% of owners told us their cat plays with toys in a predatory way by themselves, and 50% play with toys in this way with their owner.

Younger cats (0-4 years old) were more likely to show predatory behaviour through play (83%) compared to those who are 5-12 years old (77%) or over 12 years old (61%). These younger cats are also less likely to prey on wildlife (33%) compared to those who are 5-12 years old (42%), although still higher than cats over 12 years of age (27%).

Cost of Living

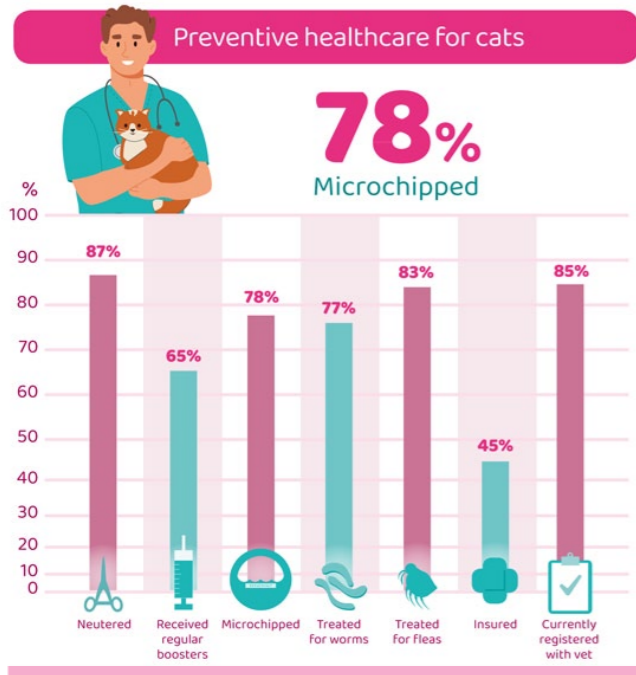
22% of cat owners (2.4 million cats) say the cost of living has affected how they care for their pet, with 10% of owners changing to a cheaper cat food and 4% cancelling their pet insurance. While these proportions have not changed significantly since 2023, it remains a worrying level of owners who are struggling with the financial realities of owning a pet. 89% of cat owners agree the cost of owning a pet has increased.

31% of cat owners have made personal cost saving decisions in order to care for their pet, with 16% giving up luxuries for themselves, 14% making savings on their weekly food shop and 11% reducing energy consumption. As we also found with dogs and rabbits, these proportions remain similar or slightly decreased to 2023, however it is clear that the currently high costs of living continue to affect a notable proportion of cat owners.



It remains a worrying level of owners who are struggling with the financial realities of owning a pet.

³⁰ Cecchetti, M., Crowley, S. L., & McDonald, R. A. (2021). Drivers and facilitators of hunting behaviour in domestic cats and options for management. *Mammal Review*, 51(3), 307-322.



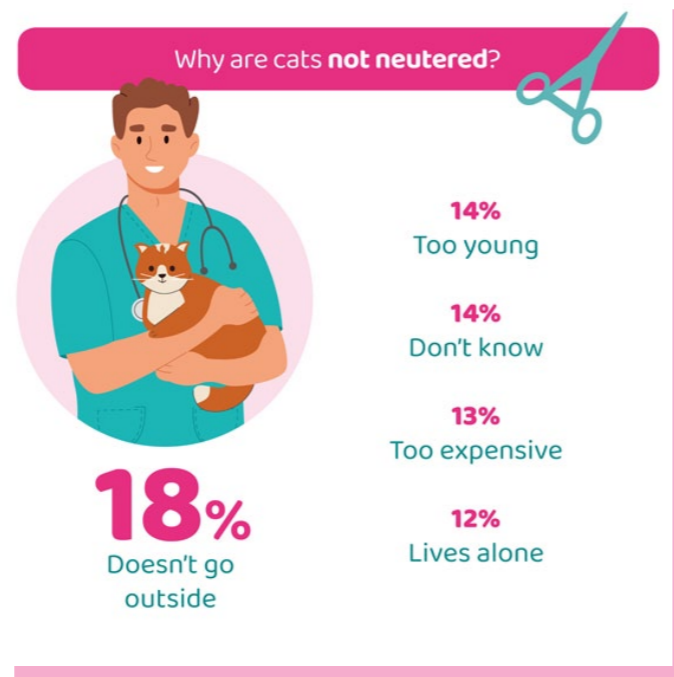
Preventive Health

As in previous years, we found that fewer cats have had each of the preventive healthcare options than dogs, except for neutering, which was higher than dogs, and treated for fleas, which showed no difference from dogs.

87% of cats are **neutered**, 9.4 million cats, proportionally more than dogs (68%) and rabbits (61%). We have seen the level of neutering in cats fluctuate over the years and whilst the current level is unchanged from 2023, it is slightly lower than the average over the last eight years (89%). The most common reasons owners gave for not neutering their cat was because they don't go outside (18%), are too young (14%) or because it's too expensive (13%, unchanged from 2023).

PDSA is part of **CatKind**, who over many years have developed collaborative campaigns across the animal welfare sector and veterinary professions to encourage the neutering of cats at four months to reduce the risk of accidental pregnancies in these young females. 4% (200,000 cats) had their first litter at under six months old, which this initiative would prevent. In addition, 10% of owners cannot recall when their cat had their first litter, so it is possible that the true proportion of cats who had their first litter under six months old is higher.

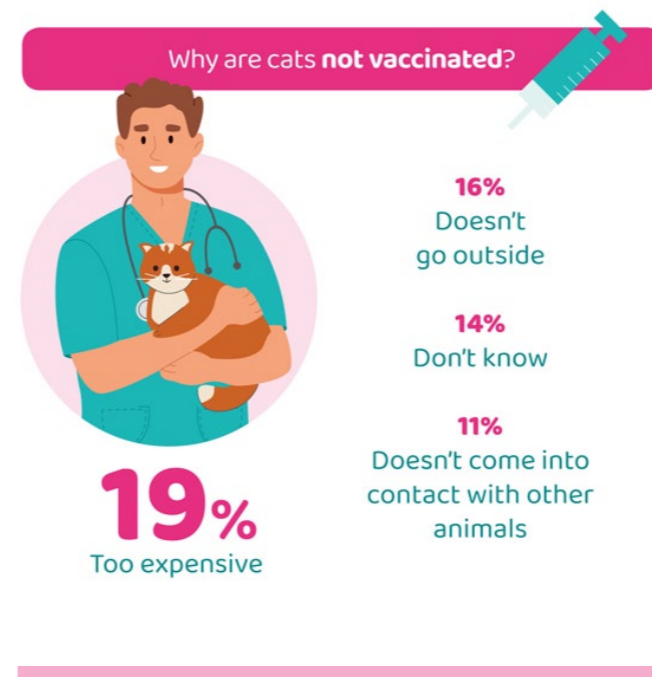
³¹ Microchipping of Cats and Dogs (England) Regulations 2023



65% of cats have regular booster **vaccinations**, 7 million cats, which is no different from 2023. The proportion of cats receiving regular boosters has fluctuated over the years but in 2024 is higher than the average since 2017 (61%). The most common reasons owners gave for not having cats vaccinated were it's too expensive (19%), their cat doesn't go outside (16%) or doesn't come into contact with other animals (11%) - these reasons were also the top findings in 2023.

The proportion of cats in the UK who are **microchipped** has increased steadily from 64% in 2017 until 2021 when it was 77%. In 2024, 78% of cats are microchipped which is no different from 2021 or 2022 but is higher than 2023 (75%). On 10 June 2024, legislation³¹ will be introduced in England, making it compulsory to microchip all pet cats over the age of 20 weeks. 78% of pet cats in England are currently microchipped, meaning approximately 2.4 million pet cats will require a microchip before the legislation is in force. Only 44% of cat owners in England said they were aware that cats must be microchipped after 10 June 2024, although this has increased from 28% in 2023. The most common reasons owners gave for not having their cat microchipped were that their cat doesn't go outside (21%), is unlikely to stray (17%) and they don't think it's necessary (16%).

The most common reasons owners gave for not having their cat microchipped were that their cat doesn't go outside

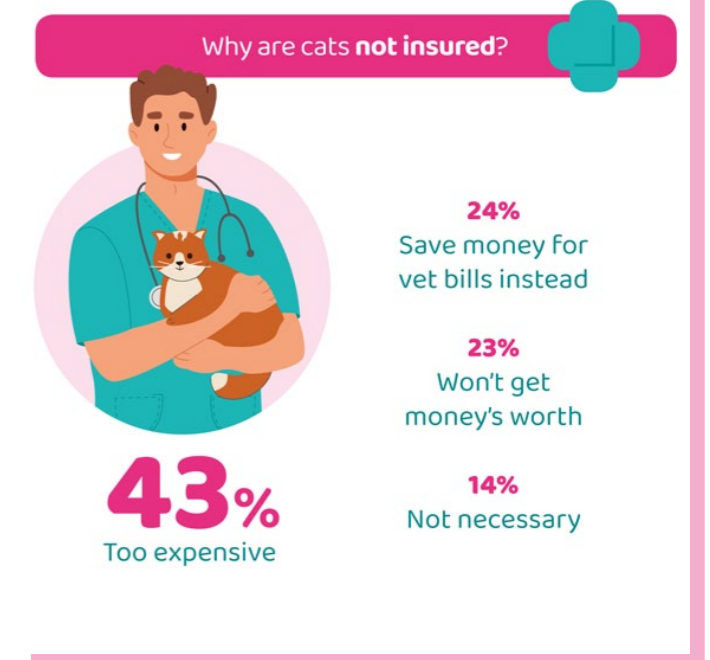


45% of cats are **insured**, higher than in 2023 (39%) but still lower than dogs. This is a positive finding, although 4% of cat owners also told us they are cancelling their pet insurance due to the cost of living so that they can continue to care for their pet. The most common reasons owners gave for not having cats insured were that it is too expensive (43%), they save money for vet bills instead (24%) and they don't think they will get their money's worth (23%).

Similarly to the findings in dogs, of the 77% of owners who have treated their cat for worms, 95% are doing so preventively and 92% of the 83% of cat owners who are treating their pet for fleas are doing it for preventive reasons. A higher proportion of cat owners are treating for fleas due to an active infestation (5%) compared to dog owners (3%). It is also interesting to note that the proportion of owners who are treating their cat or dog for fleas is comparable, whereas all other preventive healthcare options^{***} (apart from neutering) are lower in cats. This could demonstrate that fleas are considered to be more of an issue in cats than dogs.

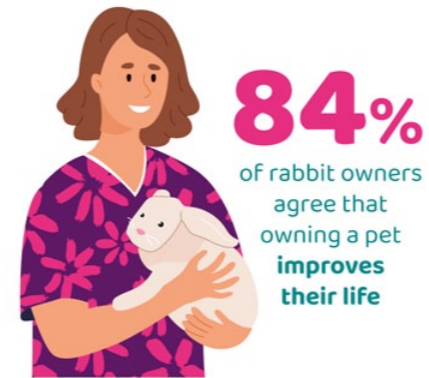
Cat owners were more likely than dog owners to get their flea and worming products from an online pharmacy without a prescription (15% compared to 10%) and less likely to get from a veterinary practice (57% compared to 63%).

^{***} Neutered, Vaccinated - primary course (when young), Vaccinated - regular boosters, Microchipped, Insured, Wormed, Treated for Fleas, Currently registered with a vet



Rabbits

Over 14 years of data collection, the PAW Report has consistently found that a large proportion of rabbits are not having their **5 Welfare Needs** met by their owners, and 2024 is sadly no exception. Despite this, rabbit owners tell us they have a higher awareness of the 5 Welfare Needs than the owners of other species. 35% of rabbit owners had heard of the 5 Welfare Needs, compared to 18% of dog and 15% of cat owners. 84% of rabbit owners say that owning a pet improves their life, lower than dog (92%) or cat (91%) owners.



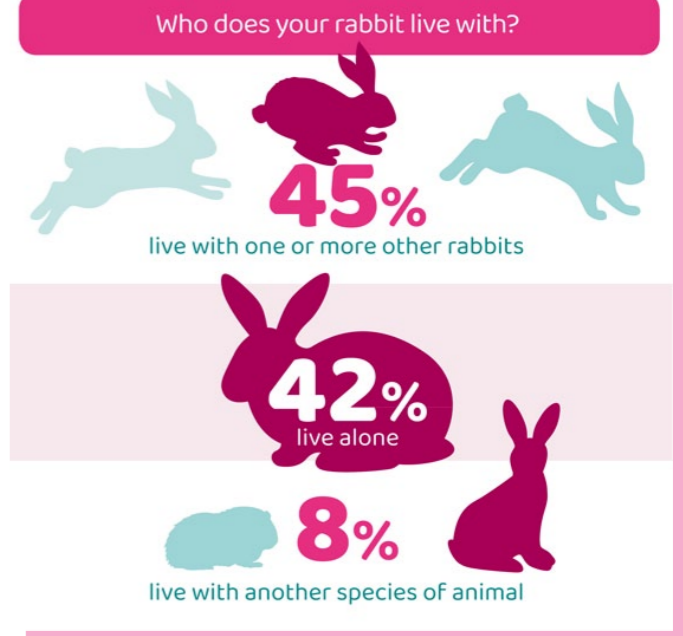
Companionship and Behaviour

94% of rabbit owners said they felt informed about their pet's companionship needs, higher than for both dog (89%) and cat (84%) owners. Companionship is very important for rabbits - studies have shown they are as motivated by the company of other rabbits as much as food³². They need another rabbit to live with for comfort and security, the companionship of a different species is not a suitable substitution due to their different needs and communication³³.

In 2024, 42% of rabbits live on their own and 8% live with other species of animals, meaning 50% of rabbits (400,000 rabbits) in the UK are not currently having their companionship needs met. This proportion has remained unchanged since February 2020, although prior to this there had been steady improvement over the years from 2011 when 72% of rabbits lived alone or with other species. It is not clear why the proportion of rabbits living alone has not improved further, but owner awareness of the importance of this welfare need has to play a part.

PDSA has worked with other organisations to create the non-statutory **Welfare Code for Rabbits** to help owners understand their pets' needs.

However, it appears further awareness amongst owners of the importance of this code for their rabbits' health and welfare is needed – a good way to do this could be if available for owners from wherever they acquire their pet.



In 2021, we found the most common reason for only having one rabbit (34%) was that owners had previously had more than one rabbit, but one had passed away and they chose not to replace them. While we did not ask this question in 2024, we did find some interesting associations that could provide some clues for why owners might choose to keep solitary rabbits. Rabbits who live with other rabbit(s) are more likely to have been acquired from a rescue or rehoming centre (24%) than rabbits who live alone or with other species (16%), which could reflect advice given by these sources.

³² Seaman SC, Waran NK, Mason G, D'Eath RB (2008) Animal economics: assessing the motivation of female laboratory rabbits to reach a platform, social contact and food. Anim Behav 75:31-42

³³ Mullan, S., & Saunders, R. (2018). European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). Companion Animal Care and Welfare: The UFAW Companion Animal Handbook, 163-184.



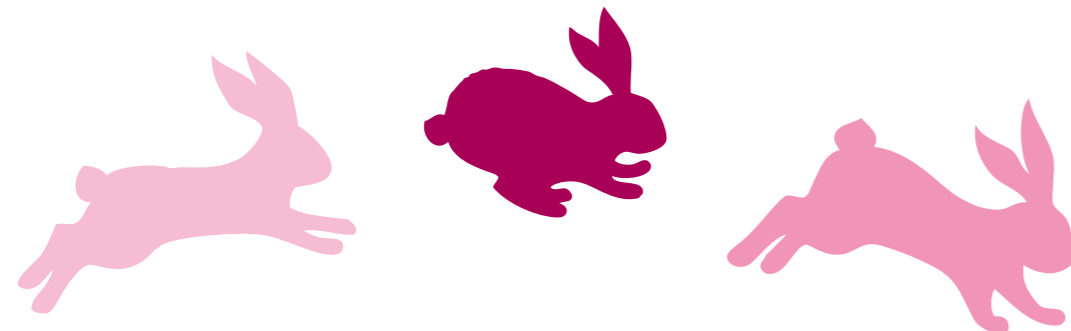
We also found that owners of more than one rabbit were more likely to have had advice from a rescue centre before they got their pet (20%) than those whose rabbit lived alone (10%).

Many rehoming centres offer rabbit bonding services, giving guidance to owners looking to **introduce another rabbit**, this support could encourage owners who might otherwise be unsure about how to ensure their rabbit bonds with another³⁴.

'New' rabbit owners, who have not owned a rabbit before as an adult, are more likely to keep their rabbit with one or more rabbits (52%) compared to those who have owned rabbits before (40%). It is possible this may reflect previous experience of owning a single rabbit without recognising the welfare concern, or that they have chosen not to replace a previous rabbit who has died, though we cannot determine this from our data.

Before getting their pet, owners of multiple rabbits were also more likely to have looked for advice on the internet (39% of owners with more than one rabbit, compared to 29% of those with one rabbit) or social media (18% of owners with more than one rabbits compared to 9% of those with one rabbit). This highlights the continued importance of the online work done by welfare organisations, to educate owners and improve the welfare of pet rabbits. Websites and social media pages promoting rabbit pairing services are another initiative to discourage owners from keeping a solitary rabbit.

If rabbits are kept on their own, they risk becoming lonely and stressed³⁵.



³⁴ <https://woodgreen.org.uk/about-us/woodgreens-small-pet-mixing-service/>

³⁵ Burn, C. C., & Shields, P. (2020). Do rabbits need each other? Effects of single versus paired housing on rabbit body temperature and behaviour in a UK shelter. *Animal Welfare*, 29(2), 209-219

³⁶ Rooney, N. J., Baker, P. E., Blackwell, E. J., Walker, M. G., Mullan, S., Saunders, R. A., & Held, S. D. (2023). Run access, hutch size and time-of-day affect welfare-relevant behaviour and faecal corticosterone in pair-housed pet rabbits. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 262, 105919.

What behaviours does your rabbit show?



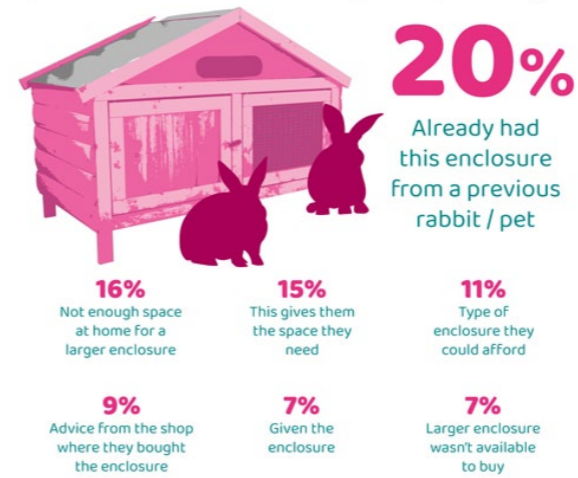
The lack of companionship could potentially lead to a change in the behaviours they show.

Rabbits who live with other rabbits were more likely to binky, i.e. jump for joy (77% compared to 65% who don't live with other rabbits). They were also more likely to dig in a sand pit or similar shallow area (36% compared to 24% of those who don't live with other rabbits) and use an agility course in their enclosure (21% compared to 12% who don't live with other rabbits). However, the ability to show these behaviours could also be affected by whether rabbits have the resources and space to perform these behaviours.

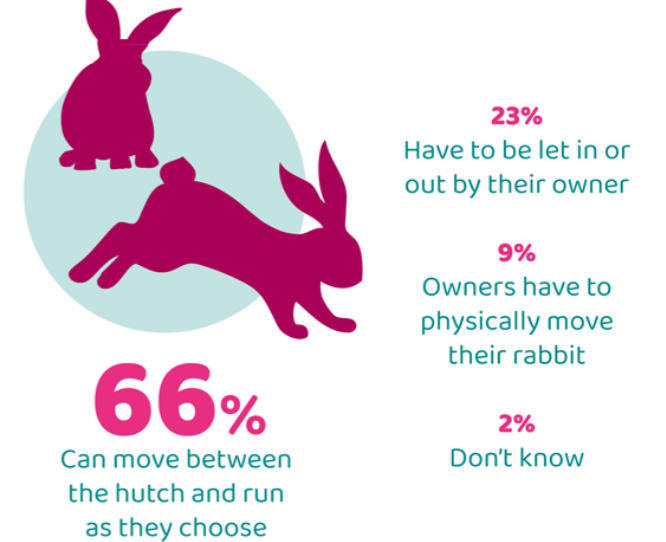
Availability of both appropriate housing and correct advice at the point of sale would be a major step to improving rabbit welfare.

Why did you select this type of housing for your rabbit?


(We asked this of owners of rabbits living in inadequate housing)



Is your rabbit able to move freely between their hutch and run?



Environment

 98% of rabbit owners told us they feel informed about their pet's environmental Welfare Needs, which was higher than cat owners (95%) but no different from dog owners. This is the highest it has been since 2012.

Rabbits need the space in their **home** to perform natural behaviours such as digging, foraging, hiding, running and standing up on their hind limbs. To provide the space for this, the recommended living area for two average sized rabbits is a single enclosed area of at least 3m x 2m by 1m high³⁶.

In 2024, almost a quarter of all pet rabbits (22%) which equates to 180,000 rabbits, continue to have inadequate housing, based on owners selecting an image of small hutches with minimal or no run space as the one most closely resembling their pet's living arrangements. This proportion has not improved in the last six years of findings, although is an improvement from 2017 when 35% of rabbits were kept in inadequate housing. Owners whose rabbits lived in inadequate housing were more likely to have chosen this housing because they already had this enclosure from a previous rabbit or pet (20% compared to 9% for rabbits in larger enclosures), because they didn't have enough space at home for a larger enclosure (16% compared to 5% for rabbits in larger enclosures) or because this was the type of enclosure they could afford (11% compared to 2% of owners of rabbits in larger enclosures). Worryingly, 9% of owners said they chose inadequate housing on advice from the shop where they bought the enclosure and 7% said that they chose it because a larger enclosure wasn't available to buy.

Availability of both appropriate housing and correct advice at the point of sale would be a major step to improving rabbit welfare.

Of those owners whose rabbit lived in adequate (i.e. larger) housing, 57% told us they had chosen this to give them the space they need and 9% said they already had one from a previous rabbit or pet. Only 6% said they chose it on advice from the shop where they bought it and 2% said it was the type they could afford.

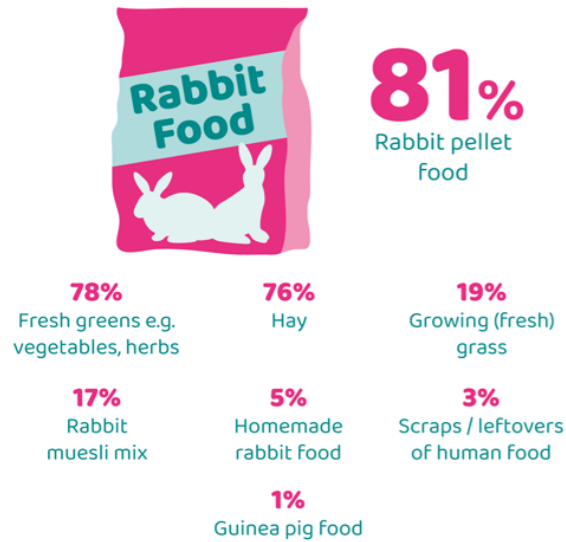
It is possible that if an owner is aware of their rabbit's need for companionship, they are also more aware of their need for a suitable environment. Rabbits who live alone or with other species are more likely to live in inadequate housing (31%) compared to those who live with other rabbits (14%). Similarly, rabbits who live with other rabbits are more likely to live in very good housing (32%) compared to those who live alone or with other species (17%).

Ideally, rabbits should have permanent access to all areas of their accommodation to give them control over their environment and allow for a predictable routine, enabling them to perform natural behaviours at the times of day when they are naturally most active, i.e. dawn, dusk and overnight. 66% of owners told us their rabbit can move between the hutch and run as they choose, 23% that they have to be let in or out by their owner and 9% have to be physically moved from one to the other by their owner. Rabbits in inadequate enclosures are less likely to be able to move between the hutch and run as they choose (33%) compared to those in adequate housing (76%).

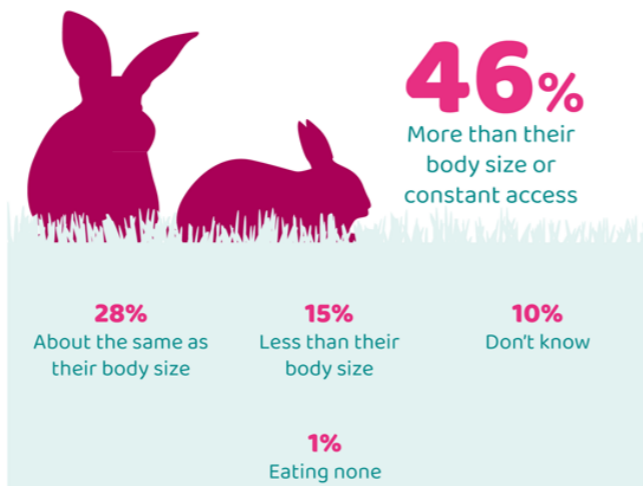
Examples of inadequate rabbit housing can be viewed in the online version of the report in the rabbit section.



What are the main types of food fed to rabbits?



How much hay or grass is your rabbit eating daily?



Diet

97% of rabbit owners feel informed about their pet's **dietary needs**. Rabbits require a high level of fibre in their diet in the form of hay or grass to keep their digestive system functioning normally and to allow natural behaviours such as grazing and foraging as well as to avoid weight gain and obesity³⁷. 86% of rabbits are fed grass or hay as one of their main foods.

Significantly more rabbits are being fed fresh grass (19%) compared to 2023 (13%) but less than in 2018 (28%).

Ideally, rabbits should have constant access to grass or hay, but as a minimum they should be fed the equivalent of at least their body size daily³⁸. 46% of rabbits are eating more than their body size or have constant access, 28% are eating about the same as their body size and 15% are eating less. More rabbits in 2024 are being fed the correct amount of hay or grass (74%), compared to when last asked in 2022 (63%) and all previous years back to 2017 (46%). Correspondingly, less rabbits are being fed too little hay or grass (16%) compared to 2022 (29%) and all previous years back to 2017 (33%).

As well as high levels of good quality hay and/or grass, rabbits' diet should also include fresh vegetables and herbs alongside commercial pellets³⁹. 57% of rabbits are being fed hay or grass, together with pellets and fresh greens as their main foods. However, 24%, 180,000 rabbits, are fed an inadequate diet option in their top three main foods* and 3%, 21,000 rabbits, are fed none of the recommended food types as their main food.

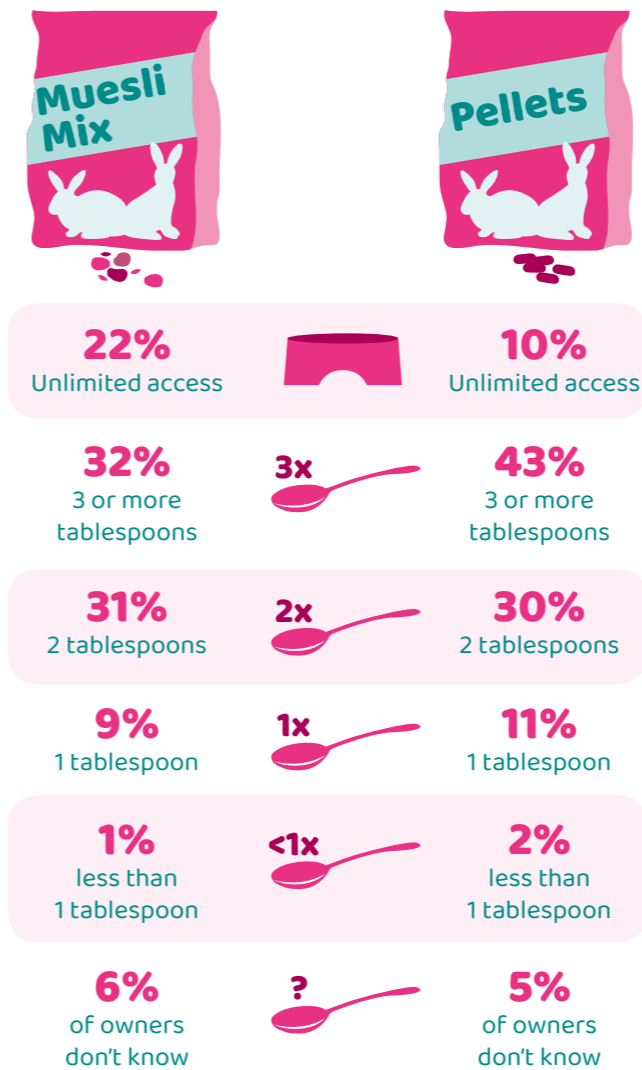
17% of rabbits are still fed a muesli mix food as one of their main food types. These diets have been implicated in a variety of health problems, including obesity, dental disease and gastrointestinal disease⁴⁰. The proportion of rabbits fed muesli as one of their main foods has not changed since 2018 but is lower than in 2017 (25%) and earlier.

A common misconception amongst rabbit owners is that their pet's commercial food, whether pellets or muesli, should make up the majority of food consumed, when in reality, it should be a supplement to the main diet of hay or grass. Of those owners who are feeding rabbit pellets, only 11% have the recommended amount of one tablespoon daily (29% have two tablespoons, which is the recommended amount for rabbits over 3.5kg). 54% have either three or more tablespoons or unlimited access. Similarly, 54% of those rabbits who are fed muesli mix have three or more tablespoons daily, or unlimited access.

* homemade rabbit food, guinea pig food, rabbit muesli mix, scraps / leftovers of human food, other foods, or none of these
³⁷ Carabaño, R., Piquer, J., Menoyo, D., & Badiola, I. (2020). The digestive system of the rabbit. *Nutrition of the rabbit*, (Ed. 3), 1-20.
³⁸ Bourne, D. (2018). Hay for a healthy rabbit: the importance of appropriate feed. *Companion Animal*, 23(6), 348-352.
³⁹ Meredith, A., & Lord, B. (2014). *BSAVA Manual of Rabbit Medicine Nutrition and Feeding*. Wiley
⁴⁰ Kazimierska, K., & Biel, W. (2021). Analysis of the nutrient composition of selected commercial pet rabbit feeds with respect to nutritional guidelines. *Journal of Exotic Pet Medicine*, 39, 32-36

Feeding excess amounts of pellets or muesli can lead to obesity, as well as reducing the amount of hay or grass rabbits will eat

How much do you feed your rabbit daily?



Feeding excess amounts of pellets or muesli can lead to obesity, as well as reducing the amount of hay or grass rabbits will eat, as they often preferentially choose commercial diets.



In addition, if rabbits are fed too much muesli, they are more likely to preferentially choose certain parts of the diet, leading to nutritional imbalances⁴¹.

⁴¹ Adji, A. V., Pedersen, A. Ø., & Agyekum, A. K. (2022). Obesity in pet rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*): A narrative review. *Journal of Exotic Pet Medicine*, 41, 30-37.

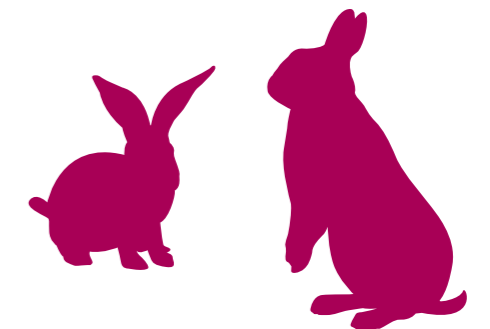
Cost of Living

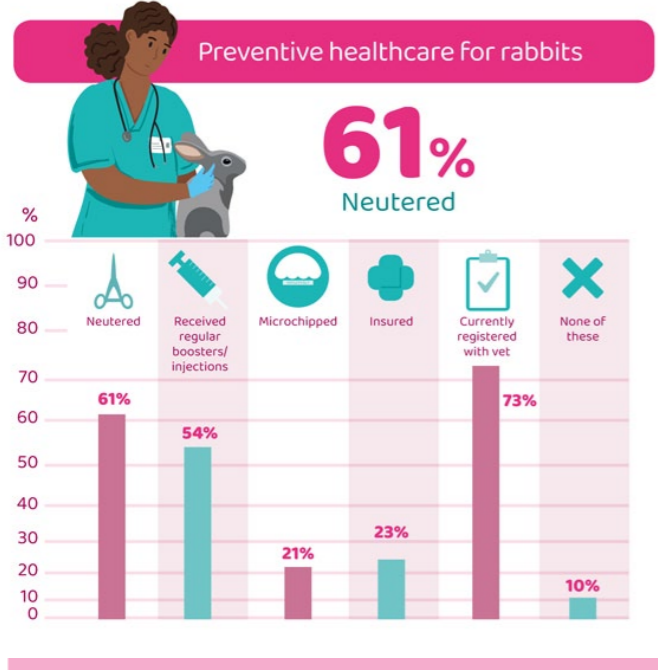
As we found with cat owners, the proportion of rabbit owners who say the cost of living has affected how they care for their pet is unchanged from 2023 at 24% (190,000 rabbits), including 8% who have swapped to a cheaper brand of pet food, and 3% who have cancelled their pet insurance. 32% of rabbit owners have made cost-saving decisions to continue caring for their pet, with 20% giving up personal luxuries and 16% saving on their weekly shop. 5% have gone without necessities such as missing meals in order to continue caring for their pet.

7% of rabbit owners who have delayed taking their pet to the vet when they were ill told us it was because they were concerned about the cost.

15% of rabbit owners who have not neutered their pet said it was because it was too expensive, higher than dog owners at 10%, but no different from cat owners.

23% of owners who have not vaccinated their rabbit said it was because it was too expensive and 37% of owners who have not insured their rabbit said it was because it's too expensive (lower than for dog owners at 45% and cat owners at 43%).

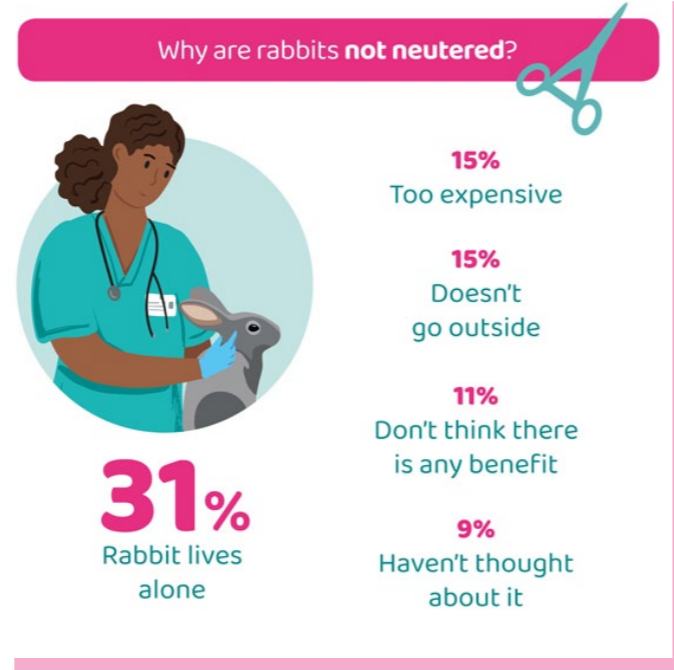




Preventive Health

As we have seen in every year of PAW Report data, in 2024, a lower proportion of rabbits receive each of the preventive healthcare options compared to both dogs and cats, though findings have improved over the last 14 years.

61% of UK pet rabbits are **neutered** (480,000 rabbits). This figure has increased from 2011 when 37% were neutered. The proportion of rabbits who are neutered has fluctuated over the last six years and this year's figure is no different from the average over that time period. As well as providing health benefits, neutering rabbits allows them to live happily together in pairs or groups without unwanted pregnancies, so is an essential part of helping owners to ensure their rabbit's companionship needs are met appropriately. 31% of owners whose rabbit was not neutered said it was because their rabbit lives alone. This was higher than for dog (8%) and cat (12%) owners, despite rabbits' need for companionship. 7% of owners haven't had their rabbit neutered because they are worried about the anaesthetic - higher than for cat owners (3%) but no different from dog owners.

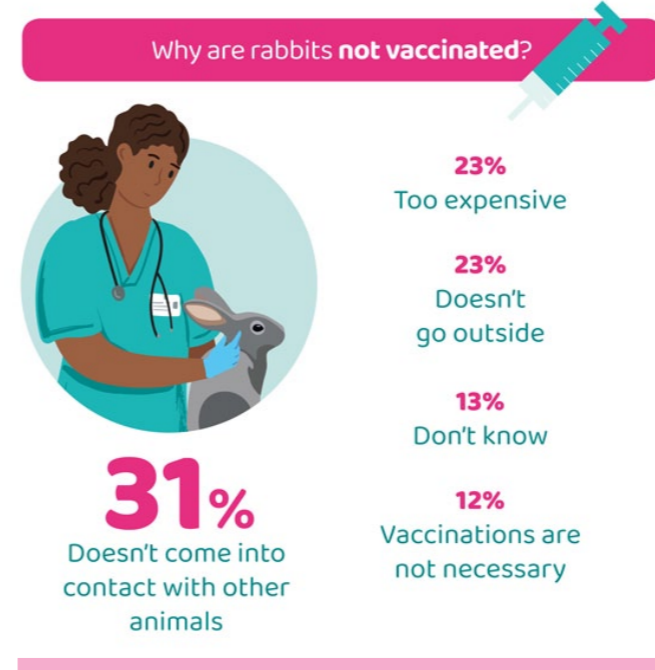


54% of rabbits have had regular **boosters**. Similar to the trend seen with neutering, this has increased from 38% who were receiving regular vaccinations in 2011 but fluctuated over the years since 2017. The 2024 figure is not significantly different from the average over the last seven years. Of the owners whose rabbit has not received regular booster vaccinations, 31% said it was because their pet doesn't come into contact with other animals and 23% that they don't go outside. The two main diseases vaccinated against in rabbits in the UK, **myxomatosis** and **rabbit (viral) haemorrhagic disease** (R(V)HD) can both be spread by biting insects, so these rabbits remain vulnerable.

21% of rabbits are microchipped, this proportion has increased greatly from only 3% in 2011.

In 2024, less rabbits are microchipped compared to February 2020 (30%) and 2021 (29%) but is no different from the average over the last seven years.

Rabbit owners were more likely to say they haven't insured because they feel it's not necessary

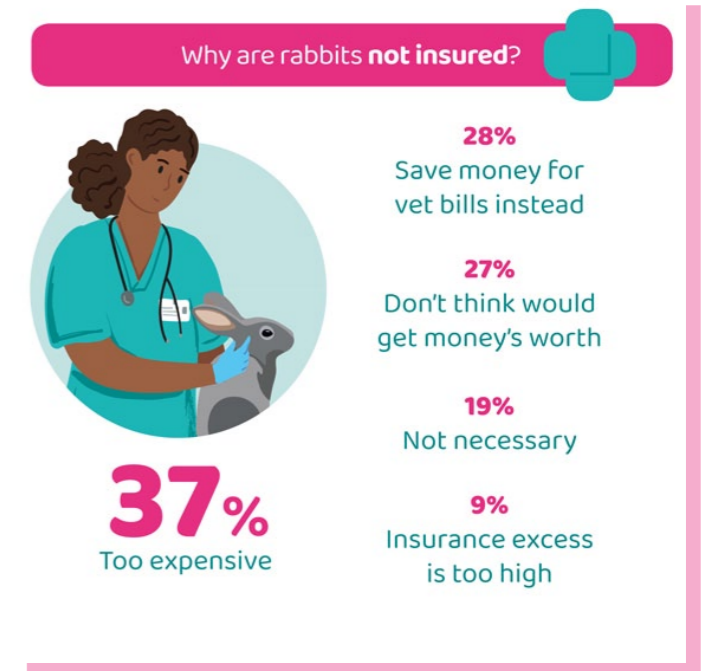
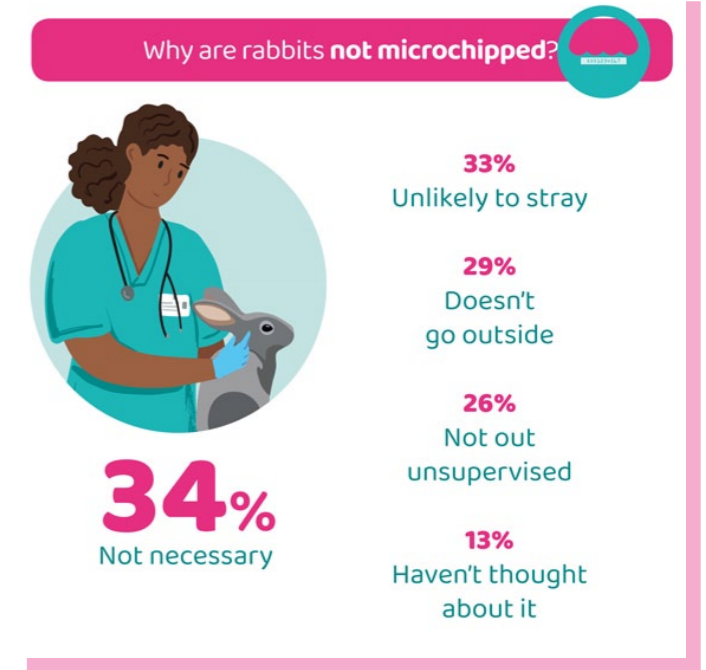


23% of rabbits are insured, which has increased from 6% in 2011. Financial reasons remain important for rabbit owners who have chosen not to insure their pets – 37% who haven't insured said this was because it was too expensive. Rabbit owners were more likely to say they haven't insured because they feel it's not necessary (19%) compared to dog (9%) and cat owners (14%), and more likely than dog owners to say it's because they don't think they'll get their money's worth (27% of rabbit owners compared to 21% of dog owners).

73% of rabbits are currently registered with a vet. This proportion is not significantly different from the average of the last seven years but has increased from 56% in 2011.

10% of rabbits are receiving none of the preventive healthcare options**. As with all preventive healthcare options, this is significantly different from dogs (<1%) and cats (1%). Whilst still a high proportion of rabbits, this has decreased from 23% in 2011 but has not changed over the last seven years. Those rabbits who have had one preventive healthcare options, such as neutering, vaccination or being insured, are more likely to have the other healthcare options too.

** Neutered, primary vaccinations (when young), regular booster vaccinations, treated for fleas, wormed, currently registered with a vet, insured, microchipped



Concluding Thoughts

From our Director of Veterinary Services, Richard Hooker



Now in its 14th year, the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report provides vital insights into how owners care for their pets and the positive experiences pets can bring to their owners' lives. Our findings have shown over the years just how much pets mean to their owners, and 2024 is no exception.

91% of owners tell us that owning a pet improves their life, increased from 90% in 2023, with 88% saying their pet makes them mentally healthier and 69% physically healthier. Yet, as we have highlighted since the first PAW Report in 2011, 'love is not enough' – our pets need to have their **5 Welfare Needs** met to help them live happy and healthy lives.

The **UK Animal Welfare Acts** introduced a legal duty of care requiring that owners or keepers provide for their animals' welfare needs - but 18 years on, only 17% of owners have heard of the 5 Welfare Needs. This proportion has improved since we last asked the question in 2022, when it was 14%, but it is lower than in February 2020 (20%) and has fluctuated over the years. As in previous years, despite this low awareness of the 5 Welfare Needs, a high proportion of all owners tell us they feel informed about how to provide their pet with each of the specific areas, but is that enough, without having an understanding of the Welfare Needs which lies behind what every pet needs to live a happy and healthy life?

The consistent methodology of the PAW Report over the last 14 years gives us an unrivalled opportunity to examine exactly how owners' provision for their pets' wellbeing has changed over time, with some interesting differences highlighted in 2024.

We have seen how the dog population has grown over the years, but there are indications that the population of pet rabbits may be falling. Similarly, the rising proportion of 'new' pet owners seen since 2021 seems to have now stabilised, along with the proportion of pets, particularly dogs, acquired from abroad.

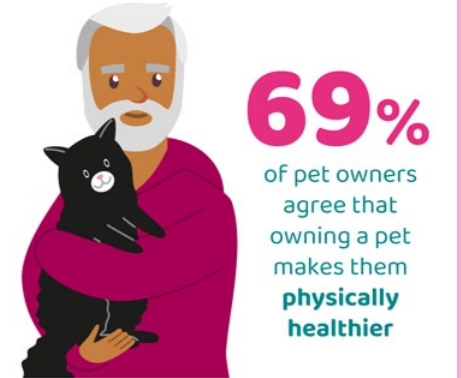
We are also seeing some improvements in the proportion of owners who undertake research before acquiring their pet. This is a vital step for any prospective owner to take to ensure they understand whether they can provide appropriately for their chosen pet's needs. It highlights the continued importance of education campaigns to raise awareness and understanding of this, along with other human behaviour change interventions in order to effect real and lasting change. Other trends reflect what we have been seeing since the **first Report in 2011**, such as the increasing proportion of cats living an indoor only life.

Sadly, some concerning trends remain stubbornly unchanged. A disappointingly high number of rabbits still live alone, and this hasn't changed significantly since 2020, alongside the proportion who live in inadequate accommodation. The proportions of dogs and cats receiving preventive healthcare have also shown little change for the most part, though maybe this should be seen in a positive light – even though the high cost of living continues to cause financial anxiety for many, owners are still providing for their pets' preventive healthcare needs. More positively, we continue to see an improvement in the diets rabbit owners give to their pets, with a higher proportion feeding a suitable amount of hay.

The data from the PAW Report allow us to view these changes over time, providing an accurate picture of how trends are developing and whether any interventions are having the desired impact overall.

Alongside this analysis of trends, every year the PAW Report brings us new and interesting findings and the 2024 Report is no different. Novel findings this year include the amount of sleep dogs are getting and how this relates to their behaviour, the behaviours rabbits show and how cats' behaviour is linked to their environment. Looking at these findings together with all our other data gives us insights into what more can be done to improve the welfare of the UK's pets.

Even though the high cost of living continues to cause financial anxiety for many, owners are still providing for their pets' preventive healthcare needs



PAW Report data allow us to assess the impact of animal welfare legislation, such as the compulsory microchipping of cats in England from June 2024. When the same legislation was introduced for dogs in 2016, we saw a corresponding increase in the proportion of dogs who were microchipped in subsequent years, although this has decreased in 2024. It will be interesting to see in future years if a similar picture emerges in cats.

Our 2024 Report also provides us with an estimate of the population of XL Bully dogs in the UK, essential to inform future policy discussions and track the impact of the **new legislation** that adds them to the banned breeds list.

The PAW Report provides insight into welfare issues that need addressing amongst our pet population, and a means of measuring the overall changes that may result from any interventions.

It demonstrates PDSA's commitment to producing high quality evidence on how well the UK's pet dogs, cats and rabbits are having their 5 Welfare Needs met and conveys the importance of our work with many partners in the veterinary, animal welfare and pet industry sectors in continuing to drive positive change.

Pet Education Partnership



Every year the PAW Report shows us ways we can all work together to improve the wellbeing of the UK's pets. **The Pet Education Partnership** exemplifies this collaborative spirit by bringing together eight of the UK's leading animal welfare charities, united by a shared mission: To make animal welfare education available and accessible to every child aged between 5-11 in the UK. This alliance uses the unique strengths and resources of each organisation, creating a powerful union that amplifies their collective impact. By working together, these charities are able to reach a wider audience, fostering a deeper understanding of responsible pet ownership among the younger generation, creating online resources and tools that make learning about animal welfare accessible to all, and providing educators with a central platform for all animal welfare education. The partnership's joint efforts not only enhance the effectiveness of their individual programmes, but also ensure a more cohesive and far-reaching approach to animal welfare education, ultimately striving to create a more compassionate and informed society.

We hope reading the 2024 PAW Report will serve as encouragement to all those working to improve pet welfare. It showcases the positive impacts made possible when we collaborate with a common goal and provides clarity and insight around issues which need urgent action to improve the lives of our beloved pets.

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**To contact the team,
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Thank you to everyone who is
already working alongside us
to improve pet wellbeing.
We can't do it alone.