

10TH
EDITION

PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

REPORT

2020

The essential
insight into
the wellbeing
of UK pets

**ISSUE IN
FOCUS:**
The ongoing
impact of the
COVID-19
pandemic

10 YEARS REPORTING ON THE WELLBEING OF THE NATION'S PETS

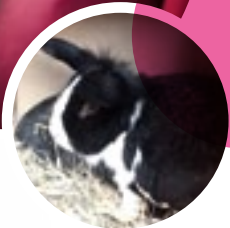
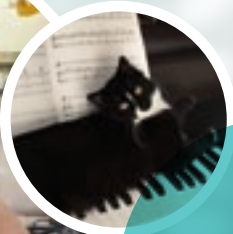


Since 1917, PDSA has worked tirelessly to improve the welfare of pets across the UK by providing free and low-cost veterinary care to the pets of some of the most vulnerable people in society and advocating for the wellbeing of companion animals.

Published annually since 2011, the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report provides UK companion animal welfare surveillance to identify trends and priorities, and to promote and monitor change. It's used to stimulate collaborative working, inform government research, policy and legislation and to inspire innovative approaches in veterinary clinical practice.

Unprecedented global events in 2020, the 10th year of the PAW Report, meant that while the initial dataset was collected from both a representative sample of UK pet owners and the veterinary profession in February, it quickly became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic and UK-wide lockdown were likely to have an impact on the wellbeing of our nation's pets. The PAW Report methodology provided a robust, reputable and validated surveillance model through which to monitor these impacts and compare them against trends across the past decade. We conducted further representative research in August 2020 to enable this, predominantly focusing on areas hypothesised to be most affected by restrictions: pet acquisition, preventive healthcare and behaviour.

Our pre and post-lockdown research findings are presented here, within the context of the last 9 years of PAW Report findings and alongside the reported concerns of the veterinary professions. We hope they will provide a contextualised evidence-base for on-going work to maintain and improve the wellbeing of pets in the UK as we all continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.



Working with one of the UK's leading research companies allows us to produce data that is representative of the UK population for the PAW Report, making it a robust and evidence-based reflection of the pet-owning population in this country. YouGov's thorough survey methodologies provide accurate insights into what people are thinking and doing all over the world, all of the time. YouGov is powered by their unique connected data set, the YouGov Cube, encompassing hundreds of thousands of variables and over a decade of data on their highly engaged proprietary global panel of over 8 million people. They are the most quoted research agency in the UK, with an established track record of consistently accurate and high-quality survey data, representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types. YouGov is delighted to be involved in the tenth PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report, monitoring changes in pet welfare issues across the UK.

“
They've been a focus and distraction when news is constantly bad and the world is changing day to day”

Riley the dog's owner, Northern Ireland

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Supported by players of



We're incredibly grateful to have players of People's Postcode Lottery supporting the production of this Report, helping us gain valuable insight into the health and wellbeing of the UK's pets.

Foreword



Professor The Lord Trees FRCVS

It's a pleasure to contribute a foreword to the 10th PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report. We are all familiar with the role of PDSA in delivering charitable veterinary care, but the PAW Report is another important output from them.

For ten years the Report has collated data on the state of the health and welfare of the nation's pets based on answers to questionnaires and the 2020 Report is no exception, providing a veritable treasure trove of information. In conjunction with the polling organisation YouGov, it presents nationally representative data, particularly on the welfare state of the UK's pets. It describes how well their five welfare needs are being met. It assesses trends in companion animal welfare problems and includes valuable information about experiences of pet ownership. As well as gathering information from pet owners and collating data on UK pet populations, it also presents the results of surveys from veterinary professionals to gain their opinions on companion animal health and welfare.

Of particular interest to me was the opinion of over half the veterinary professionals polled who thought that the UK Animal Welfare Acts were ineffective at improving owners' understanding of their duty of care and the five welfare needs. This reinforces the fact that legislation is but part of a process of changing behaviour, and that communication – and not just by government – and enforcement are essential too.

Another area where improved knowledge and awareness would be beneficial was with respect to rabbits, where in spite of their increasing popularity, vets reported a lack of owner knowledge of their behaviour and health care. Of contemporary importance, the 2020 Report presents results of research investigating the possible effects of lockdown on companion animals and their owners.

In providing valuable year-on-year information about the state of health and welfare of our nation's pets and the attitudes of owners to pet animals, and given that there is little statutory responsibility from government to gather data of this type from companion animals, the PAW Report is a valuable tool in indicating priorities for action by animal welfare organisations, the veterinary professions and indeed government.

Of contemporary importance, the 2020 Report presents results of research investigating the possible effects of lockdown on companion animals and their owners.



Methodology

The PAW Report survey is the largest survey of pet wellbeing in the UK and is representative of the UK population

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

In 2020 we have several new sources of data, in addition to trend data collected over the preceding 9 years.

As with previous PAW Reports, we also estimate the UK pet cat, dog, and rabbit populations.

Primary sources of PAW Report data used in this year's Report:

- Annual survey of pet owners from February 2020
- Survey of veterinary professionals from February 2020
- Post-lockdown survey of pet owners from August 2020
- Data from annual PAW Reports dating back to 2011 for comparison and trend analysis

For continuity, data discussed in the Report is from the survey of pet owners in February 2020 unless stated.

Signposting



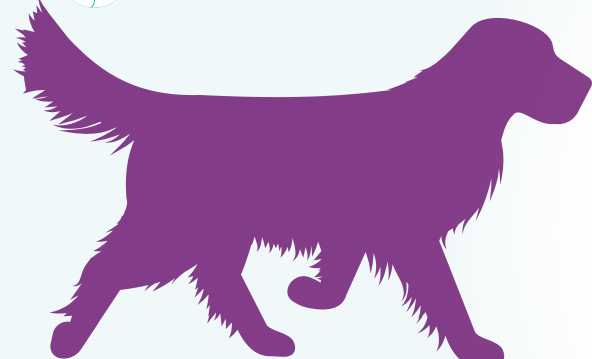
Finding related to our post-lockdown survey in August 2020.



Finding related to trend data from the last ten years.



Finding related to our survey of veterinary professionals in February 2020.



We surveyed 10,000 adults to calculate the UK pet populations

Pet Population calculation

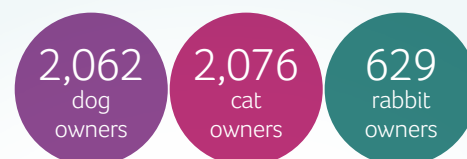
Separate sampling from the YouGov online survey panel to determine the percentage of UK adults who own different types of pets (n=10,000), as well as data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), is used to determine the incidence of UK pet ownership by species, as well as other demographic information such as owner's region, age and gender. This demographic information is used as the basis for weighting the pet ownership sample used in the PAW survey to ensure that it is representative of the entire UK population of pet owners by species (cat, dog or rabbit owners) and the owner's gender, age and region. These three data sources are then all used to estimate the UK pet population of cats, dogs and rabbits.

Trend analysis of data from the last 10 years

Generalised Linear Models (GLM) were used to analyse PAW data collected between 2011 and 2020. GLMs are a modern regression tool used in many areas of scientific research and they predict the response variable as a function of multiple predictor variables.

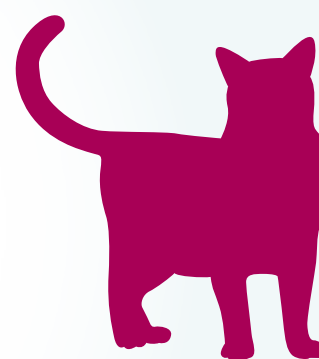
For our annual survey (February 2020)

We surveyed 4,767 pet owners to understand the wellbeing of UK pets:



For our post-lockdown (August 2020) survey

We surveyed 4,103 pet owners to understand the impacts on UK pets following a period of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK:



4,079
responses to our survey
of veterinary professionals
in the last 10 years

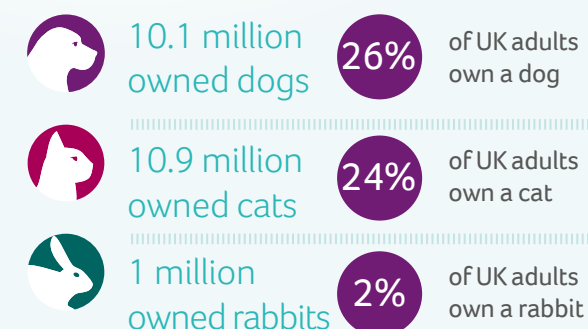
Annual survey of pet owners from February 2020

In conjunction with YouGov, we surveyed a large and demographically representative sample of UK dog, cat, and rabbit owners using their panel methodology.**

In February 2020, the sample totalled 4,767 cat, dog, and rabbit owners over the age of 18 and living in the UK. Therefore when talking about 'owners' throughout this Report, we're discussing cat, dog and rabbit owners, not owners of other types of pets.

Data was gathered between 4 February and 4 March 2020 through an online survey and weighted where necessary to be representative of the UK population.

We surveyed 10,000 adults to estimate the UK pet populations:



Survey of veterinary professionals in February 2020

Our survey of veterinary professionals was carried out online to an open sample of 623 veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses, students, nursing support staff and veterinary academics who are currently working in practice. Fieldwork was undertaken between 18 January and 16 February 2020, hosted by YouGov using an open link. The figures have not been weighted. Details of the survey were shared via social media and professional networks to encourage participation. Participants were invited to be entered into a prize draw to win a continuing professional development (CPD) package.



Survey of pet owners in August 2020

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK and national lockdown starting in March 2020 a second survey of pet owners was undertaken between 18 and 31 August 2020 to identify any impacts of the UK's response to the pandemic on pet wellbeing between March and August 2020. The same YouGov panel methodology** was used as per the February 2020 pet owner survey to ensure that findings were representative of UK pet owners and could be compared to previous findings to look for differences.

Data presentation

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

For example, to calculate the estimated number of cats living indoors only:

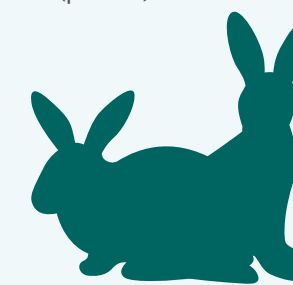
Estimated cat population (February 2020)
= **10.9 million**

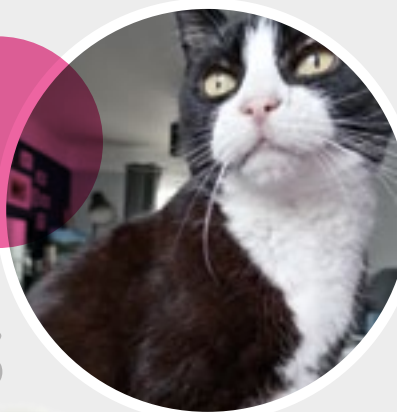
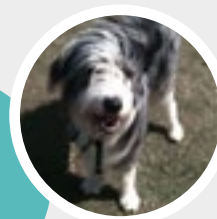
Percentage of cats kept indoors only = **25.87%**

$10.9 \text{ million} \times 25.87\% = 2,819,830$

The figure is then rounded and presented as:
2.8 million cats live indoors only.

Where differences between figures are communicated (e.g. there is an increase in dogs microchipped from 70% in 2011 to 92% in 2020) the differences are statistically significant and validated by YouGov ($p < 0.05$)





Significant changes over the past 10 years

The inaugural PAW Report in 2011 painted a stark picture of UK pets as *'Stressed. Lonely. Overweight. Bored. Aggressive. Misunderstood ... but loved.'*

This introductory comment was based on the evidence presented in the most in-depth assessment ever undertaken of the welfare of pets in the UK.

10 years on, with annual findings collected from over 83,000 pet owners, we've summarised key changes in how the 5 Welfare Needs of UK cats, dogs and rabbits are being provided for by their owners.



- Owners saying that the UK is a nation of animal lovers: **86%** in 2011 to **92%** in 2020
- More owners would consider getting a pet from outside the UK: **28%** in 2016 to **36%** in 2020
- More owners weigh their dog to see if correct weight: **24%** in 2011 to **44%** in 2020
- Dogs trained via courses and classes increased: **24%** in 2017 to **29%** in 2019
- Microchipping for dogs increased: **70%** in 2011 to **92%** in 2020
- More cats being kept indoors only: **15%** in 2011 to **26%** in 2020*
- Microchipping for cats increased: **46%** in 2011 to **74%** in 2020
- Microchipping for rabbits increased: **3%** in 2011 to **30%** in 2020
- More rabbits are being fed pellet food: **53%** in 2011 to **80%** in 2020



- Fewer owners said they would get a puppy from a puppy farm: **24%** in 2012 to **18%** in 2020
- Owners feel less informed about their pet's need to be housed with or apart from other animals: **93%** in 2011 to **81%** in 2020
- Owners feel less informed about how to provide for their pet's need to express normal behaviour: decreased from **94%** in 2011 to **86%** in 2020
- The number of dogs receiving a primary vaccination (when young) decreased from **82%** in 2011 to **72%** in 2019 then increased **81%** in 2020 (no overall change)
- Number of cats with access to both indoors and outdoors decreased: **83%** in 2011 to **72%** in 2020
- Cats receiving primary vaccinations when young has decreased: **72%** in 2011 to **69%** in 2020
- Rabbits are spending less time in hutch per day on average: **13 hours** in 2017 to **11 hours** in 2020
- Fewer rabbits fed muesli-type mix as main food type: **49%** in 2011 to **18%** in 2020
- Fewer rabbits are being fed less than the recommended amount of hay or grass: **42%** in 2011 to **21%** in 2020
- Rabbits living alone decreased: **67%** in 2011 to **42%** in 2020
- The number of rabbits receiving no preventive care reduced: **23%** in 2011 to **8%** in 2020



Little change:

Familiarity with Animal Welfare Acts and percentage of owners who did no research before getting a pet.

How long dogs are left alone, the type of food fed, whether owner feels dog is correct weight or not, percentage who received a primary vaccination when young, received regular boosters or were insured or neutered, and how often a dog is walked.

Resources provided in a multi-cat household, main type of food given, percentage of cats living with or without feline company and cats who are neutered.

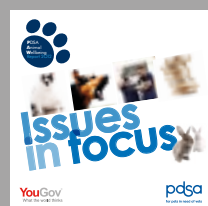
Rabbits living indoors or outdoors, living in adequate housing and whether owner feels rabbit is correct weight or not.

10 years of insight into the health of the nation's pets ...

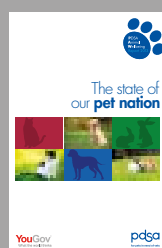
2011



2012



2013



2014



2015



2016



2017



2018



2019

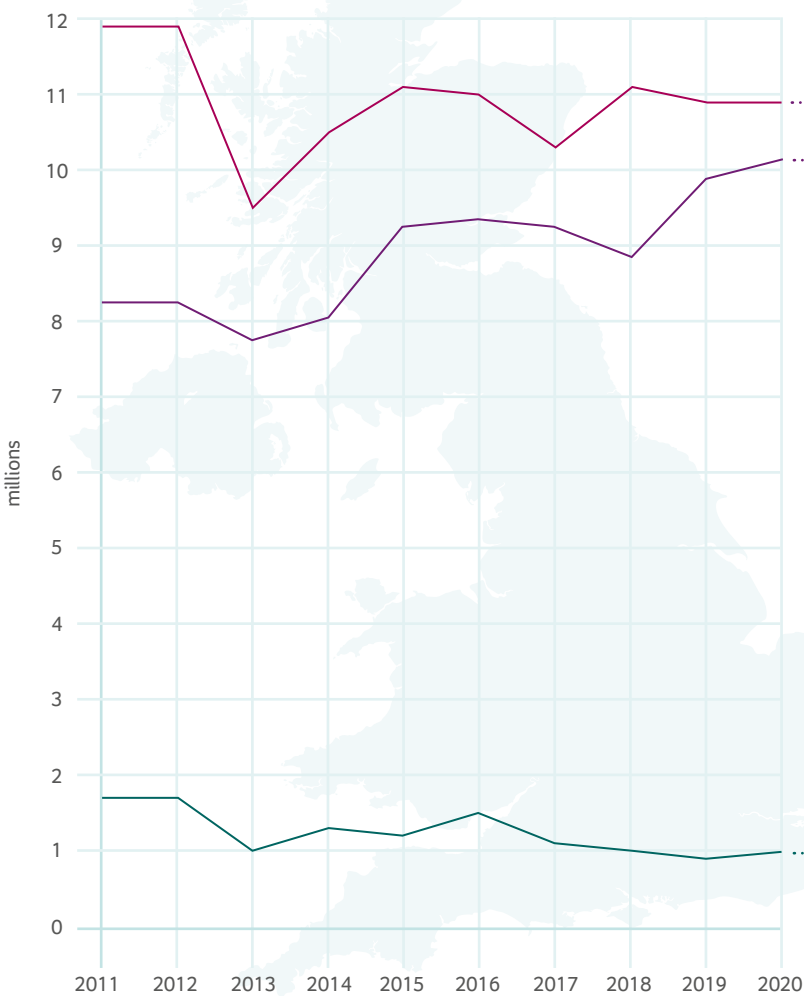


Pet population in the UK over the last 10 years

Reflecting on 10 years of estimating the populations of pet dogs, cats and rabbits in the UK, there have been no statistically significant changes overall in the number of pets over this time.

There has also been no significant change in the overall proportion of the UK population who own any type of pet (51% of UK adults), or each of the three species over the last 10 years, and no significant increase in the five months between our February and August 2020 surveys.

Pet populations since we published the first PAW Report in 2011



10.9 million cats

26% of the UK population have a cat

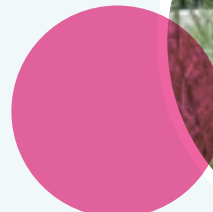
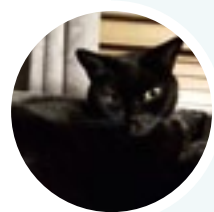
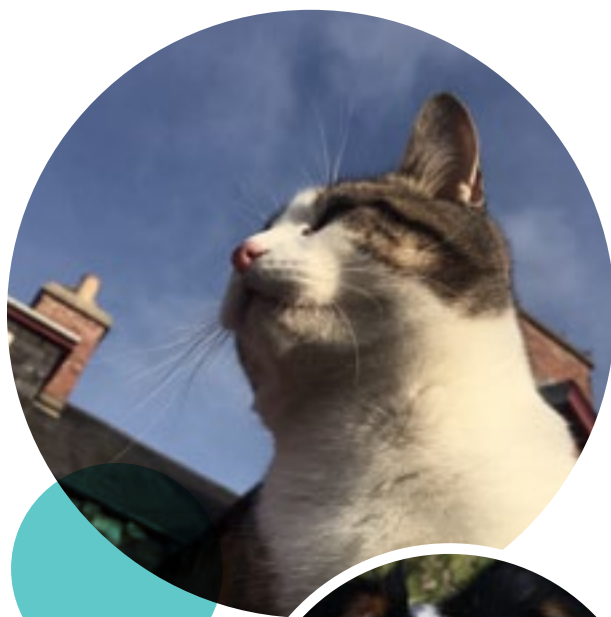
10.1 million dogs

24% of the UK population have a dog



1.0 million rabbits

2% of the UK population have a rabbit



“

I worry that too many people have bought pups and will not be able to look after them properly”

Honey the dog's owner, North East



Percentage of owners who owned their pet less than a year

	Pre-lockdown	Post-lockdown
	11%	12%*
	10%	12%
	16%	22%

There has been an increase in the percentage of rabbit and cat owners who have owned their pet for less than a year compared to before the lockdown. There has been no significant change in this figure with regard to dog owners.

Age of owner of pet acquired in the last year

	Pre-lockdown	Post-lockdown
18-24	10%	8%*
25-34	29%	28%*
35-44	17%	20%*
45-54	23%	20%*
55+	22%	24%*

Additionally, for those who have owned their pets less than a year, there has been no significant change in the age demographic breakdown when comparing pre- and post-lockdown findings.

In our post-lockdown research, pet owners in the 25-34 age bracket (4%) were more likely to have owned their pet for less than five months compared to 55+ (2%). There were no differences between the other age categories.

Issue in focus:

The ongoing impact of the COVID -19 pandemic



There have been well-publicised concerns about the potential for negative impacts on pet welfare resulting from restrictions implemented to stop the spread of COVID-19.¹

These range from poorly researched 'pandemic puppy' purchases encouraging a surge in unscrupulous breeding and selling practices, to projected explosions in the cat population² and outbreaks of disease in unvaccinated pets due to the lack of preventive healthcare. The potential for behavioural issues has also been highlighted with changed routines causing stress, as well as the lack of opportunities for effective socialisation of puppies and kittens.

Our post-lockdown survey focused on the areas where pet welfare was predicted to be the most affected: **population, pre-purchase actions, preventive healthcare, diet and behaviour.**

There were also public concerns about any role pets could potentially play in the spread of COVID-19. Early research, released without proper academic scrutiny, caused much alarm in the press, in particular around cats, then stray dogs. However, members of CFSG (the Canine and Feline Sector Group including PDSA) were able to work together with Defra (The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) to counter this misinformation and produce an ongoing programme of infographics focused on providing guidance for owners and pet care businesses during lockdown.



Pet Population

Our post-lockdown survey found no significant change in the overall estimated population of any of the three species or the percentage of adults in the UK who owned a pet (24% of UK adults own a cat, 26% own a dog, 2% own a rabbit).

There was an increase in the percentage of rabbit owners (16% to 22%) and cat owners (10% to 12%) who had owned their pets for less than one year, which supports reports of increased pet acquisition. There was no significant change found for dog owners, and this acquisition has not led to an increase in the estimated populations of cats and rabbits overall, however we will continue to monitor this trend.

Owners who had acquired their pet since the start of lockdown (12%) or who had owned their pet for up to a year (8%) were more likely to have spent lockdown working at their usual employment location on limited days with the remaining days at home, compared to those who had owned their pet from two to five years (5%) or six years or more (5%).

This suggests that people who were spending more time at home may have chosen to get a pet, however, there was no association between length of ownership and being on furlough during lockdown.

PDSA's analysis of Google search volumes saw an increase of 175% in internet searches for 'getting a dog' in April 2020 compared to the average for the preceding year, and there has been ongoing media coverage of this issue, suggesting widespread pet acquisition throughout the lockdown period. However, while this hasn't yet translated into a significant population increase, this is an area we will continue to monitor closely.

The price of puppies has spiralled in the past few months,³ implying that they are in 'short supply.' We may find that the pet population will increase over the next 12 months, in response to the reported increased demand.



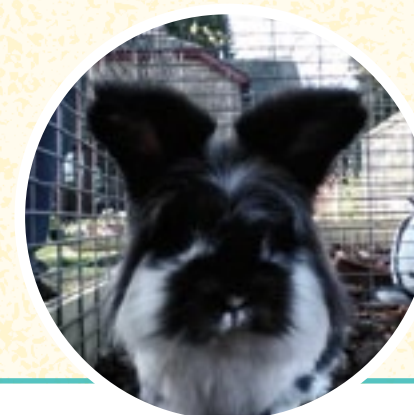
Findings suggest that some people chose to get a cat as a companion during the isolation of lockdown. In our post lockdown survey, respondents who have had their cat less than a year were more likely to say they'd got their pet for companionship for themselves (25% pre-lockdown, 36% post-lockdown), or because they make them happy (36% pre-lockdown, 48% post-lockdown). There were no changes in the numbers of dog or rabbit owners who reported this.

There was no significant difference in where owners said they got their pet from before or after lockdown but we did identify some other changes.

Our post-lockdown survey found that 16% of owners who had purchased between March and August had their pet delivered to them, rather than travelling to the breeder or seller to collect.

This was in line with government guidance at the time to only travel if your journey was essential. Breeders were permitted to travel to deliver pets to their new home as part of their business,⁴ but travelling to collect pets was not considered to be essential. However, seeing puppies with their mother, in the place where they were bred, is recognised as an important part of choosing a responsible breeder and avoiding puppy farms.

To have the puppy delivered, or meeting to collect them somewhere would in normal times be a red flag for spotting an unscrupulous breeder; however, a further 5% of pet dog, cat, and rabbit owners said that they had met the seller in a mutually convenient location to collect their pet.



Issue in focus: The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic



Our post-lockdown survey found changes in four of the Five Welfare Needs, with significant changes to diet, behaviour, companionship and health but no significant changes in any of the questions we asked about the provision of a pet's environmental needs.



Diet

16% of dog owners, 17% of cat owners and 14% of rabbit owners told us that they have fed more treats since the start of lockdown.

More dog owners (10%) than cat (5%) and rabbit (6%) owners said that they had fed their pet more human food as part of their main meals since the start of lockdown.

8% of dog owners say their pet has gained weight during lockdown. This figure is higher than cat (6%) and rabbit owners (3%).



Behaviour

Our routines have changed with the varying lockdown restrictions across the UK, and this has the potential to affect pet behaviour. Many pets may have appreciated the increased time their owners have spent with them, but others need time alone, and together with other welfare and behavioural organisations, we have raised concerns about the negative impacts this could have on pets. Alternatively, if owners begin to spend more time away from home again, those pets who have become accustomed to being with us constantly may find it difficult to adjust back to being alone. Dog's Trust reported in August 2020 that their own survey of dog owners had found 26% reported a new problem behaviour that their dog had developed during lockdown.⁵

In our post-lockdown research, 20% of dog owners and 23% of cat owners who had owned their pet prior to lockdown, reported their pets had started showing at least one new behaviour since restrictions began in March.

These behaviours may be new and have developed in response to the changes of lockdown, or could be the result of increased observation by owners.

5% of dog owners (500,000) told us their dog has started to show signs of distress when left alone since the start of lockdown.

These include scratching, destructive behaviour, barking or howling for more than five minutes or toileting in the house. The research also found that the percentage of dogs left alone for five hours or more on a typical weekday was significantly lower than in pre-lockdown results and in previous years. Dogs who were left alone pre-lockdown for longer periods of time than they have now become used to may find it difficult to adjust again if owners return to working away from home.

5% of dog owners told us that their dog was spending more time in the quieter areas of the house, suggesting a need for more time alone since the start of lockdown.



Dogs left alone for 5 or more hours has decreased from 20% (2 million) to 11% (1.1 million)



Companionship

The percentage of dogs left alone for 0 – 4 hours on a typical weekday has increased from 75% to 85%.

Dogs being left alone for 5 or more hours has decreased from 20% (2 million) to 11% (1.1 million).

There has been no significant change in rabbit companionship including the proportion of rabbits kept alone (47%).



Preventive care

With the introduction of lockdown on 23 March, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) advised vets should stop all elective and preventive care in order to avoid non-essential travel, protect human health and reduce the use of oxygen, anaesthetic gases and other resources needed for frontline human healthcare.⁶ This resulted in concerns about the risk of disease outbreaks due to loss of vaccine protection, and population increases due to the lack of neutering, particularly in cats.⁷

The percentage of owners who reported that their dogs had been vaccinated with a primary course when young decreased from 81% in our pre-lockdown survey to 78% in our post-lockdown survey, while those who reported that their dog had received regular boosters decreased from 82% to 77%.

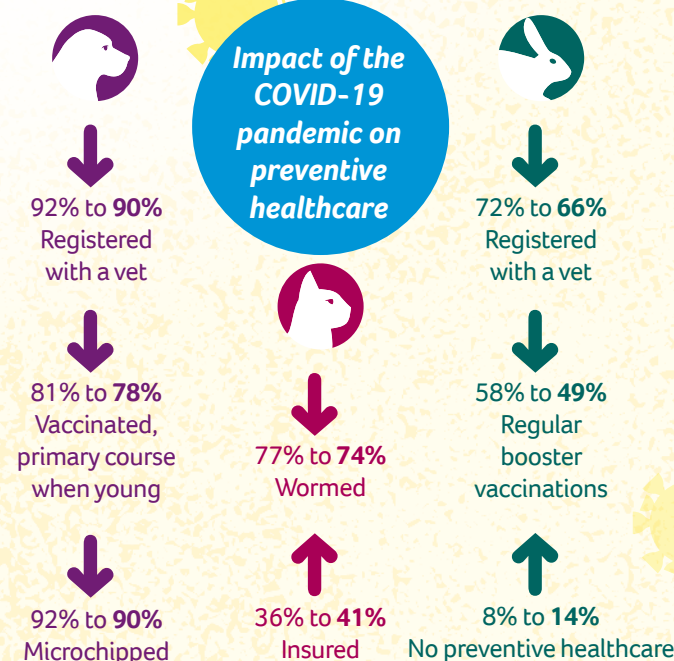
Whilst there was a small decrease in the proportion of rabbits receiving regular boosters (58% down to 49%), there were no similar changes seen for cats. In fact, there was an increase in owners of cats less than a year old reporting that their pets had received a primary vaccination course when young, from 63% in our pre-lockdown survey to 77% in our post-lockdown survey.

Our post-lockdown survey found no change in the percentage of owners who reported their cat had been neutered and no change in the percentage who reported that their cat hadn't received any of the preventive healthcare options given.

“BSAVA welcomes the production of the 10th annual PAW Report which has become an important survey of pets and pet health care in the UK. The post-Spring lockdown results in this report show a small but significant decline in primary course vaccinations given to dogs, and boosters given to dogs and rabbits. This is a potential concern and one the profession needs to be mindful of when discussing a pet's overall health and welfare with their owner.”

Professor Ian Ramsey FRCVS
President, British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on preventive healthcare



Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts and the 5 Welfare Needs



Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts*

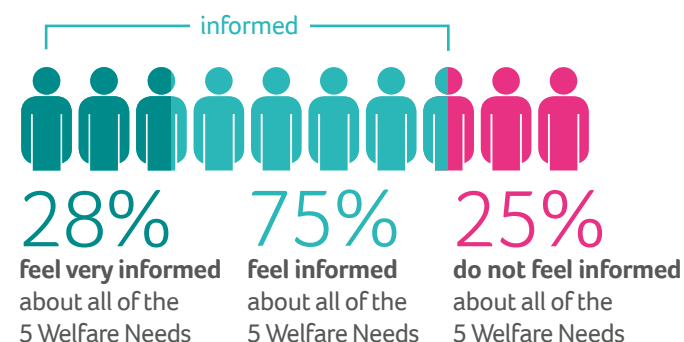
Familiarity with the Animal Welfare Acts has not changed significantly in the 10 years we have been reporting on the state of companion animal welfare in the UK.

In 2020, while 76% of owners are aware of the Act, only 42% say they are familiar with it and how it relates to their responsibilities for their pet's care.

Despite the aim of the Animal Welfare Acts to improve animal welfare in the UK, our findings show that 58% of veterinary professionals think that this legislation has been ineffective at improving owners' understanding of their duty of care and the 5 Welfare Needs.

Whilst lack of knowledge of this legislation does not necessarily equate to poor pet welfare, the findings around how informed owners feel about the 5 Welfare Needs gives us more information. For example, owners who feel informed about their pet's Health welfare need are significantly more likely to provide preventive health care for their pets (pets were more likely to be vaccinated, neutered, microchipped, insured, treated for worms and fleas and be registered with a vet) compared to owners that don't feel informed.

Assessing pet welfare by using the framework of the 5 Welfare Needs as enshrined in legislation, allows animal welfare organisations to gauge the progress of improvements in the five areas and can guide future efforts to drive positive change.



"The Companion Animal Welfare Surveillance Report published by the Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) in May 2008 concluded that trying to develop a way of assessing and monitoring companion animal welfare 'is likely to help very greatly in improving companion animal welfare'. The PAW Report is a first step towards addressing this need.

As a leader in promoting pet health and wellbeing, PDSA wants this Report to serve as a vehicle for both raising awareness and prompting positive behaviour change. This need is reinforced by the recent Post-Legislative Assessment of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dec 2010). This concluded that a key criticism of the Act relates to the lack of public awareness of the responsibilities that all pet owners have.

So, while the Act is a positive addition to improving animal welfare, there is still much work to do to raise awareness of what the Act requires from owners. Only by doing this, can there be a positive impact on the standard of wellbeing for animals in the UK"

.....
Richard Hooker, BVMS (Hons) MRCVS,
 PDSA Director of Veterinary Services,
 quoted from the introduction to the first
 PAW Report in 2011

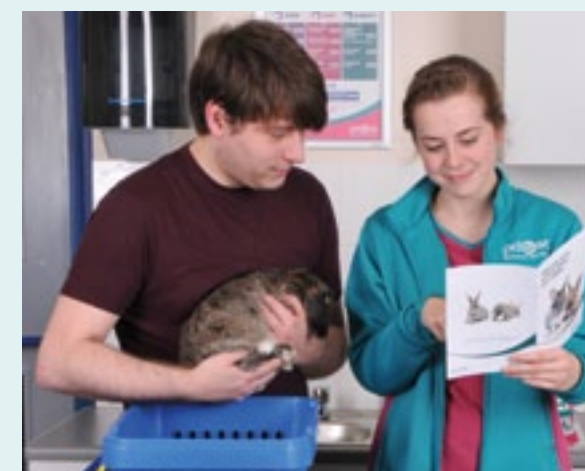
Awareness of the 5 Welfare Needs

Over the last 10 years, we've seen fewer owners say that they feel informed about how to provide for their pet's need to express normal behaviour (decreased from 94% in 2011 to 86% in 2020) and their pet's need for companionship, i.e. being housed with or apart from other animals (decreased from 93% in 2011 to 81% in 2020).

In 2020, as in previous years, companionship remains the least well-recognised of the 5 Welfare Needs.

Adapting client communication

Owner preference for practices to use leaflets and posters to promote awareness of the 5 Welfare Needs has declined (55% selected this in 2013, decreasing to 47% in 2020), while the value placed on social media has increased (31% of owners selected this in 2014, increasing to 43% in 2020).

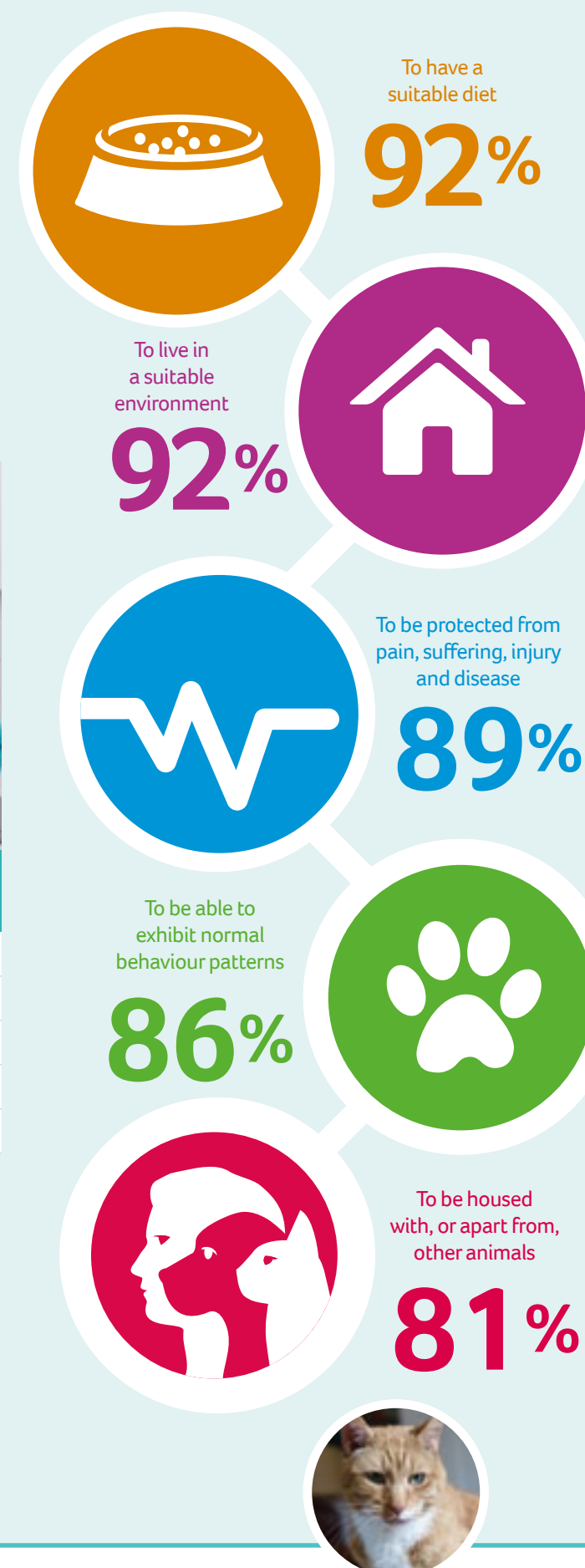


The preferred way for vet practices to promote awareness of the concept of the 5 Welfare Needs

1	Leaflets / posters	47%
2	Consultation with vets / vet nurses	45%
3	Practice website	44%
4	Social media (e.g. Facebook)	43%
5	Email	39%

Only 20% of owners said they had heard of the 5 Welfare Needs prior to participating in our study.

Percentage of owners who felt informed about each of the 5 Welfare Needs:



The benefits of pet ownership

Over 10 years the percentage of owners saying that the UK is a nation of animal lovers increased from 86% in 2011 to 92% in 2020

Impact of pet ownership**

94%

of pet owners told us that owning a pet makes them happy

86%

of owners told us that owning a pet improves their mental health

84%

said that owning a pet makes them less lonely

13%

of owners said that owning a pet makes them stressed

69% of parents said that having a pet during lockdown benefitted their children

89%

of pet owners agree that a charity providing free and reduced-cost veterinary treatment to the most vulnerable in society is important*

91% of pet owners agreed that a pet's health and wellbeing should not suffer due to their owner's financial hardship*

10%

of owners agreed that they were increasingly worried about how they would pay for vet bills if their pet fell ill or was injured*

7%

of owners agreed they were increasingly worried about the financial cost of preventive healthcare needed to keep their pet healthy*

52%

of owners think that the welfare of the pet population in the UK will suffer due to COVID-19*

In our pre-lockdown survey, 67% of people agreed that owning a pet makes them physically healthier. However, this declined to 62% in our post-lockdown survey***

Importance of pets during lockdown:

49%

said that owning a pet was a lifeline during this time

54%
of dog owners

44%
of rabbit owners

45%
of cat owners

We asked owners: "Why did you get your pet?"



Dog owners

51%

They make me happy

47%

For love / affection

35%

Companionship for me



Cat owners

41%

They make me happy

37%

For love / affection

35%

Had one before



Rabbit owners

33%

They make me happy

27%

Had one before

26%

For love / affection or children wanted a pet

Pre-purchase decisions

Getting a new pet means big changes for everyone involved – both pets and people. Yet despite this, 25% of owners said they did no research before getting a pet.*

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. Our findings show that owners would be interested in this and it is a concept welcomed by the profession. **In 2020, 6% of owners said they took advice from a vet or vet nurse before acquiring their pet, a slight increase from 4% in 2015.**

45% of owners said they would be interested in a free online consultation with a vet before getting a pet, however, only 3% of owners said they had already had one.



Veterinary professionals identified 'welfare at breeding establishments (e.g. puppy farms)' and 'poor choice of breed for owner lifestyle' as two of the top five most important issues that need to be addressed in dogs (41% and 39% of respondents respectively). **Both of these could be tackled by vet practices promoting pre-purchase consultations to prospective dog owners.**



Which Pet? consultations are 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. Further details can be found at pdsa.org.uk/whichpet



Where are people getting pets from?

Where we get our pets from has remained largely unchanged over the last 10 years, and in the five months following lockdown.

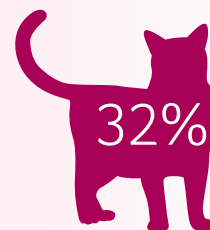
When asked where they got their pet from, the top answer for dogs was a breeder of a specific breed (30%), for cats was a UK rescue or rehoming centre (32%) and for rabbits was a pet shop or garden centre (34%).

Dog owners were more likely than cat or rabbit owners to have got their pet from a breeder or a private seller (56% compared to 21% and 21% respectively).



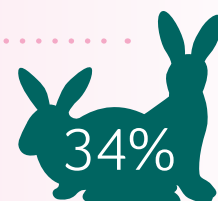
of dog owners got their pet from a breeder of one specific breed

Cat owners were more likely to have got their pet from a UK rescue centre or rehoming centre (32%) compared to dog (18%) or rabbit (20%) owners. Cat owners were also more likely to get their pet from a friend or family member (25%), higher than dog (14%) or rabbit (12%) owners.



of cat owners got their pet from a UK rescue centre or rehoming centre

Rabbit owners were significantly more likely to get their pet from a pet shop or garden centre (34%) compared to dog (1%) or cat (2%) owners.



of rabbit owners got their pet from a pet shop or garden centre

Only 50% of dog owners told us that they had seen their puppy with the puppy's mother and 50% told us that, before they took their dog home, they had visited the litter on more than one occasion. **Both of these could help prospective owners identify responsible breeders.**



“Ten years of PAW provides us with a fantastic insight into how owners' understanding of their pets' 5 Welfare Needs has changed over the years. The Animal Welfare Acts provide the framework and legal underpinning for what our animals need to be happy and healthy, but it's up to us as veterinary professionals to communicate to owners what that really means in practice for their individual animals.”

That's why we're so passionate to work with PDSA and others to promote strong vet-client relationships through pre-purchase consultations and regular health check-ups. We've made a lot of progress but there's still a lot more to do.”
.....
Dr Daniella Dos Santos MRCVS
Senior Vice President, British Veterinary Association (BVA)



Our pre-lockdown survey was conducted in February, before the UK Government's 'PetFished' campaign to tackle unscrupulous pet selling, and before introduction of a ban on the third party sales of puppies and kittens in England, known as 'Lucy's Law', which was implemented in April 2020.

Despite this, it was encouraging that our findings showed that **fewer owners would consider getting a puppy from a puppy farm (18%) or pet shop (47%) compared to 2012 (24% and 60% respectively).**

However, it seems fewer people are aware of how important it is to check the environment a puppy was born in as a way of spotting a puppy farm. **The percentage of owners who, if buying in the future, would even check if a puppy's environment was 'clean and hygienic' reduced from 71% in 2016 to 53% in 2020.**

Pets from abroad

Over the last few years, one emerging issue has been the increase of rescued and commercially imported dogs from overseas.⁸

Between 2016 and 2020 we found that more owners would consider getting a pet from outside the UK (28% and 36% respectively).

91% of vets say they have seen an increase in their practice of pets imported from abroad over the last two years, up from 63% in 2014 and 79% in 2016.

When asked where they got their pet from, 2% of dog owners said 'a UK-based rescue/rehoming centre for pets from abroad' and a further 1% said 'from a rescue centre/rehoming centre based abroad.'

We will continue to monitor trends relating to this complex area in the light of currently increased demand and a reported 'shortage' of puppies in the UK during the pandemic,⁹ which may encourage people to look for puppies from abroad.

We will also support the current range of efforts to tackle both the commercial and illegal import of puppies through various measures, including exploring the introduction of further legislation post-Brexit.

What research did owners do before getting a pet?

Owners who've owned their pet for **less than a year**:



Dog owners:

- Looked on the internet (51%)
- Had previous experience of breed / animal (36%)
- Took advice from friends or family (27%)



Cat owners:

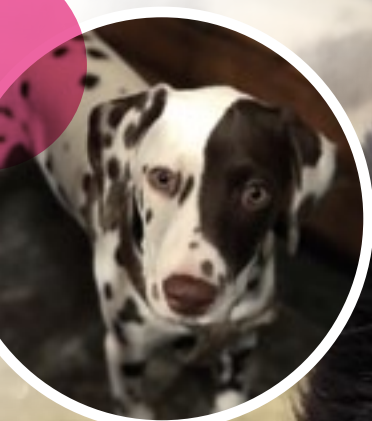
- Looked on the internet (33%)
- Have previous experience of breed / animal (29%)
- Nothing (22%)



Rabbit owners

- Had previous experience of breed / animal (39%)
- Took advice from a pet shop (37%)
- Looked on the internet (30%)

The wellbeing of dogs



“

Walking the dogs twice a day has helped reduce my family's stress levels”

Nico the dog's owner, London

Key findings



89% of owners say owning their pet dog makes them mentally healthier



13% of dogs aren't walked every day



12% of owners haven't trained their dog in any way



44% of owners weigh their dog to check they are the correct weight




23% of dogs are not receiving regular vaccination boosters



92% of dogs are microchipped



 Significant differences between pre and post-lockdown surveys:

↓ 20% to 11% of dogs left for five hours or more

↓ 81% to 78% of dogs primary vaccinations when young

↓ 82% to 77% of dogs booster vaccinations

Dog owners say

8% of dogs have put on weight since the start of lockdown

20% of dogs have started to show new behaviours*

5% of dogs have started to show signs of distress when left alone



26% OF UK ADULTS OWN A DOG



10.1m PET DOGS ARE LIVING IN THE UK



Around 4.3 million dogs (42%) are walked for less than 30 minutes a day

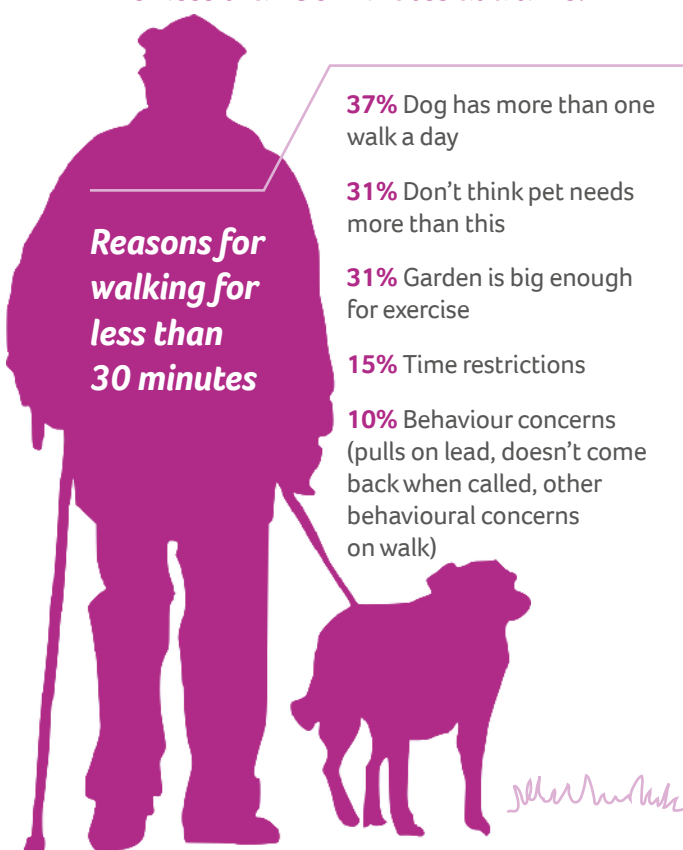
Environment

Exercise

82% of dog owners walk their dog once a day or more.

43% told us that they walk them for between 31 to 60 minutes. However, 13% of owners told us their dog wasn't walked every day, equating to over **1.4 million dogs not getting their physical needs met daily**. There has been no overall increase or decrease in how often dogs have been walked over the last 10 years.

Around 4.3 million dogs (42%) are walked for less than 30 minutes at a time.



Owners may feel that their garden provides their dog with sufficient exercise, however, although the dog may get some physical exercise, the mental stimulation that dogs get from walks will be lacking. When asked about behaviour, **11% of dog owners felt their pet was bored**. A lack of mental stimulation from going on walks may be part of this.¹⁰

Top concerns about walking dogs*



Our post-lockdown research showed that the number of times a day that a dog was walked had not changed since before lockdown.

It seems that the majority of owners were still ensuring their dogs got the physical exercise they needed during this difficult time, perhaps by individual members of households exercising dogs separately to enable multiple walks.

However, our post-lockdown research found that fewer dog owners agreed that 'owning a dog made them feel physically healthier' compared to pre-lockdown research (88% and 84% respectively). This is a small change but perhaps suggests that people did not feel that dog walking was a suitable substitute for other fitness activities they were unable to partake in, or that they were limited to a single walk per day.



I'm not fit enough for long walks

Kumo the dog's owner, Scotland



Pet obesity is one of the top issues that vet professionals would choose to solve tomorrow (44%)



Diet

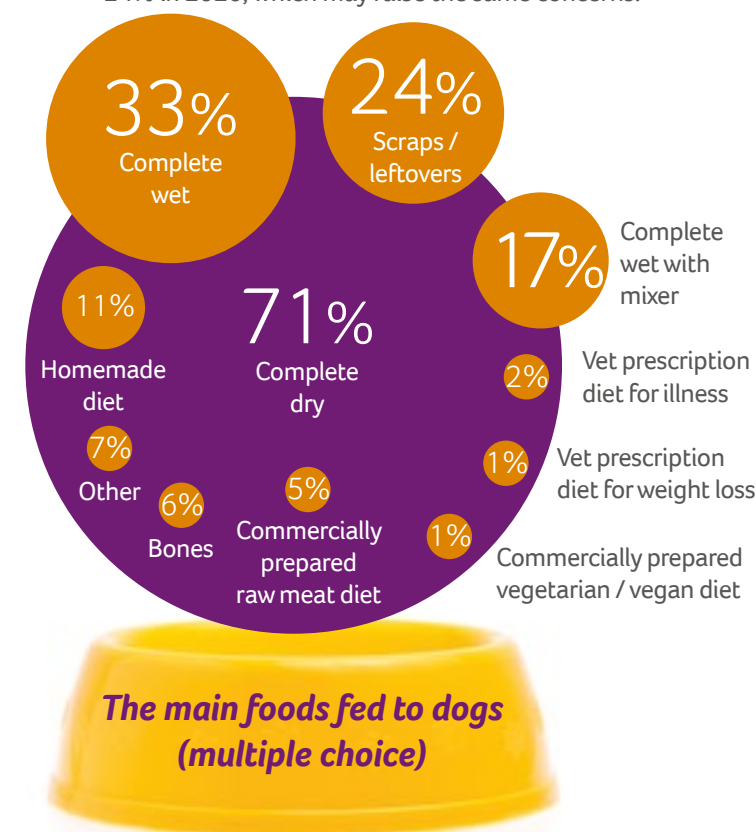
A balanced diet

The main foods owners provide for their dogs haven't changed significantly over the past ten years.

The most common type of food chosen by owners remains a complete dry diet (71%).

Despite increasing publicity and debate over the past decade, the percentage of owners feeding their dog raw (5%) or vegetarian or vegan diets (1%) is at a low level and has remained relatively unchanged in the time we have been monitoring these trends. However, 11% of owners (an increase from 8% in 2019) reported that they fed a 'homemade diet' as one of their dog's main food types. This may include elements of these different diets, and could raise concerns about the nutritional value of the overall diet being provided.^{11,12}

We've also seen an increase in the number of owners reporting that they feed their dog scraps and leftovers as one of their main food types, from 15% in 2019 to 24% in 2020, which may raise the same concerns.



Obesity



In our survey of veterinary professionals, **52% identified obesity as one of the top five welfare issues that need to be addressed in the UK dog population**. 78% of veterinary professionals told us that they have seen an increase in pet obesity over the last 2 years.

However, **84% of dog owners told us that they feel that their pet is an ideal weight**. 14% of owners described their dog as overweight and none selected 'very overweight or obese', potentially implying a lack of recognition of the problem.

29% of owners told us that they didn't know their dog's weight and only 44% of owners told us that they weigh their dog to help them decide if their dog is the correct weight.

Whilst still a low percentage, this is significantly higher than in 2011, when only 24% of owners told us they did this.

A high number of respondents (63%) told us that veterinary advice helped them determine whether their dog was the correct weight, demonstrating that veterinary teams continue to play a vital role in tackling pet obesity.



8% of dog owners say their pet has gained weight during lockdown – equivalent to 790,000 dogs.

Our post-lockdown research found that:

- 16% of dog owners have fed more treats since the start of the UK-wide lockdown in March.
- 10% of dog owners have fed more human food since the start of lockdown.
- 8% reported that their dog has gained weight during lockdown.



84% of dog owners told us that they feel that their pet is an ideal weight



How do you decide if your pet is the correct weight?

63% Vet or veterinary nurse advice

52% The look of your pet's body

44% Weigh him/her/them

42% Common sense

39% Feel of your pet's body

3% Pet breeder advice

2% Friend/relative advice



46% of veterinary professionals reported seeing an increase in dog euthanasia due to behavioural issues in the last 2 years



Behaviour

Unwanted behaviours

75% of owners told us that they want to change one or more behaviours in their dog, including:

- 🐾 Pulling on the lead (24%)
- 🐾 Being afraid of fireworks (22%)
- 🐾 Barking at other dogs (21%)
- 🐾 Aggression towards other pets (4%)
- 🐾 Aggression towards people (3%)

Training

Encouragingly, more dog owners seem to be accessing training classes, with 29% of dog owners reporting that they had trained their dog through classes (i.e. either by 'completing a course of regular classes' or 'one or more organised training classes'). This has increased from 24% in 2017.

However, 12% of owners still say they haven't trained their pet in any way at all, which hasn't changed since 2017.

Despite the vital importance of puppy socialisation,¹³ there has been a disappointing decrease in the proportion of owners who told us that they would check that puppies have had a good variety of positive experiences with pets and people before they agreed to purchase them (52% in 2016 to 32% in 2020).



57% of veterinary professionals report seeing an increase in dog behavioural issues in the last 2 years.

Responses from veterinary professionals identified a lack of appropriate socialisation as one of the main causes (88%) for this increase in dog behavioural issues along with owners not understanding canine behaviour and communication (81%) and a lack of mental stimulation (81%).

How have you trained your pet?



13. Dietz, L., Arnold, A. K., Goerlich-Jansson, V. C., & Vinke, C. M. (2018). The importance of early life experiences for the development of behavioural disorders in domestic dogs, Behaviour, 155(2-3), 83-114. doi: [www.doi.org/10.1163/1568539X-00003486](https://doi.org/10.1163/1568539X-00003486)



Over the last 10 years there has been no change in the percentage (20%) of UK dogs left alone for 5 hours or more



Fears and phobias



Fireworks continue to be a source of concern for both dog owners and veterinary professionals.

61% of veterinary professionals reported seeing an increase in firework phobias in the last 2 years and 80% of dog owners agree that fireworks should only be sold to those who are organising public events.



In our post-lockdown survey, we asked owners about any behavioural changes they had noticed since the start of lockdown. **Of owners who had owned their dog since before lockdown, 20% said that their dog had shown at least one new behaviour** – the most commonly reported were dogs showing signs of distress when left alone (5%) and dogs spending more time in the quiet areas of the house (5%).

Animal welfare organisations and behavioural specialists have raised concerns about the potential for **increasing levels of behaviour problems** arising due to the changes in dogs' routines, environments and day-to-day lives during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns.⁵ They anticipate anxiety levels increasing in our dogs if they are left alone after becoming accustomed to owners spending a lot more time with them. Lack of socialisation opportunities for young puppies has also been highlighted as a concern for the development of future behavioural issues.

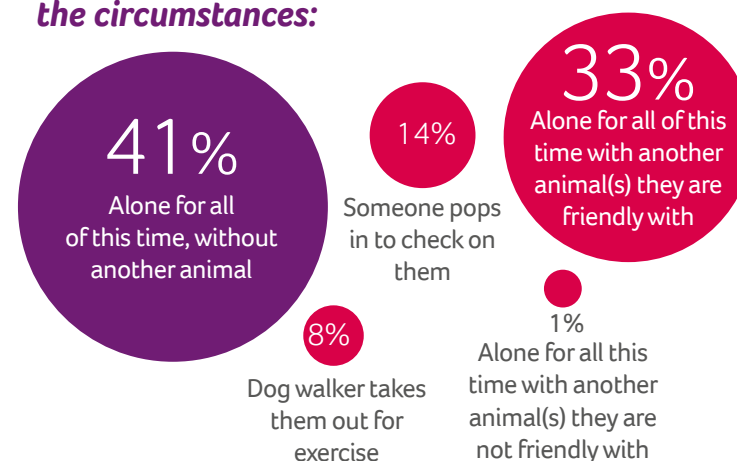


Companionship

Our dogs need companionship; they are sociable animals who can suffer when left alone, especially for long periods and when they are not accustomed to periods of isolation. **Analysis of PAW Report data over the last 10 years shows that there had been no change in the percentage of UK dogs who are regularly left alone for 5 hours or more.**

One in five dog owners (20%) report that they leave their pet alone for 5 hours or more on a typical weekday.

Owners who leave their dog alone for 5 hours or more say this about the circumstances:



Unsurprisingly, our post-lockdown research then found owners reporting that their dog was **left alone for 5 or more hours had decreased, from 20% in February 2020 to 11% in August**. 53% of owners who did leave their dog alone for 5 or more hours were identified as 'keyworkers'.

The percentage of owners reporting that their dogs were left alone for 0-4 hours on a typical weekday **increased from 75% to 85% in the same timeframe**, likely reflecting the shorter amount of time owners spend away from their homes during restrictions.



Health

Vaccination

In our 2019 PAW Report, there was a reduction in the percentage of owners who told us that their dog had had a primary vaccination when young.

In order to tackle this concerning change, we raised awareness of the issue in the media and ran a successful vaccine amnesty across our Pet Hospital network to help owners who could be finding cost a barrier. We also utilised PAW Report findings and human behaviour change methods to engage pet owners on social media as part of our #VacciNation campaign to challenge vaccine hesitancy in a positive way.

Promisingly, in 2020 we saw a reversal in the trend, with the percentage of dog owners telling us that their dog had been vaccinated with a primary course when young almost back up to the level seen in 2011 (81%).

This year, of the owners who told us that they had not vaccinated their dogs, either with a primary course when young or with regular boosters, we saw a drop in those who reported choosing not to vaccinate because it was 'not necessary' (14%), or because 'their dog did not come into contact with other dogs' (13%) compared to 2017 (22% and 24% respectively).



During the movement restrictions of lockdown, veterinary professionals were advised by the RCVS to avoid providing routine care in order to reduce unnecessary travel, contact and use of finite resources.

Despite the widespread concerns of the potential effects of this on vaccination rates, **our post-lockdown survey found that there has only been a moderate decline in the percentage of owners who reported that their dogs have not been vaccinated:**

- Primary vaccination course when young – down from 81% in February to 78% in August 2020.
- Regular boosters – down from 82% in February to 77% in August 2020.

An estimated 420,000 dogs, who had previously been up-to-date with their vaccinations, may not have been vaccinated in the period between February and August 2020.*

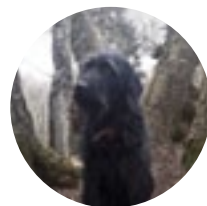
Registration with a vet

92% of owners told us that their dog is currently registered with a vet.

When asked to select the reasons for being registered, most owners (77%) said it was for the value of regular health checks to ensure their pet is healthy, and 68% said for the reassurance that they can access help if needed.



Over the past 10 years, the proportion of dogs microchipped has increased from 70% in 2011 to 92% in 2020



Neutering

The proportion of owners who told us that their dog was neutered (71%) has not changed significantly in the 10 years we have been reporting. Nor was there a significant change in our post-lockdown survey, including with owners who had owned their dog less than a year.

Insurance

58% of owners told us that their dog is insured.

Of those owners whose dogs were not insured, 38% cited the expense of insurance as a reason and 29% said they save money for vet bills instead. The current concerns around financial stability and job security perhaps create a strong argument for owners considering pet insurance, however, as these findings suggest, some may be deterred by, or unable to meet the monthly cost.

Microchipping

Over our 10 years of data, the proportion of dogs who owners reported to be microchipped has increased significantly from 70% in 2011 to 92% in 2020.



However, this dropped slightly to 90% in our post-lockdown survey, possibly partly due to the lack of availability of preventive care during lockdown, which included microchipping.



9%

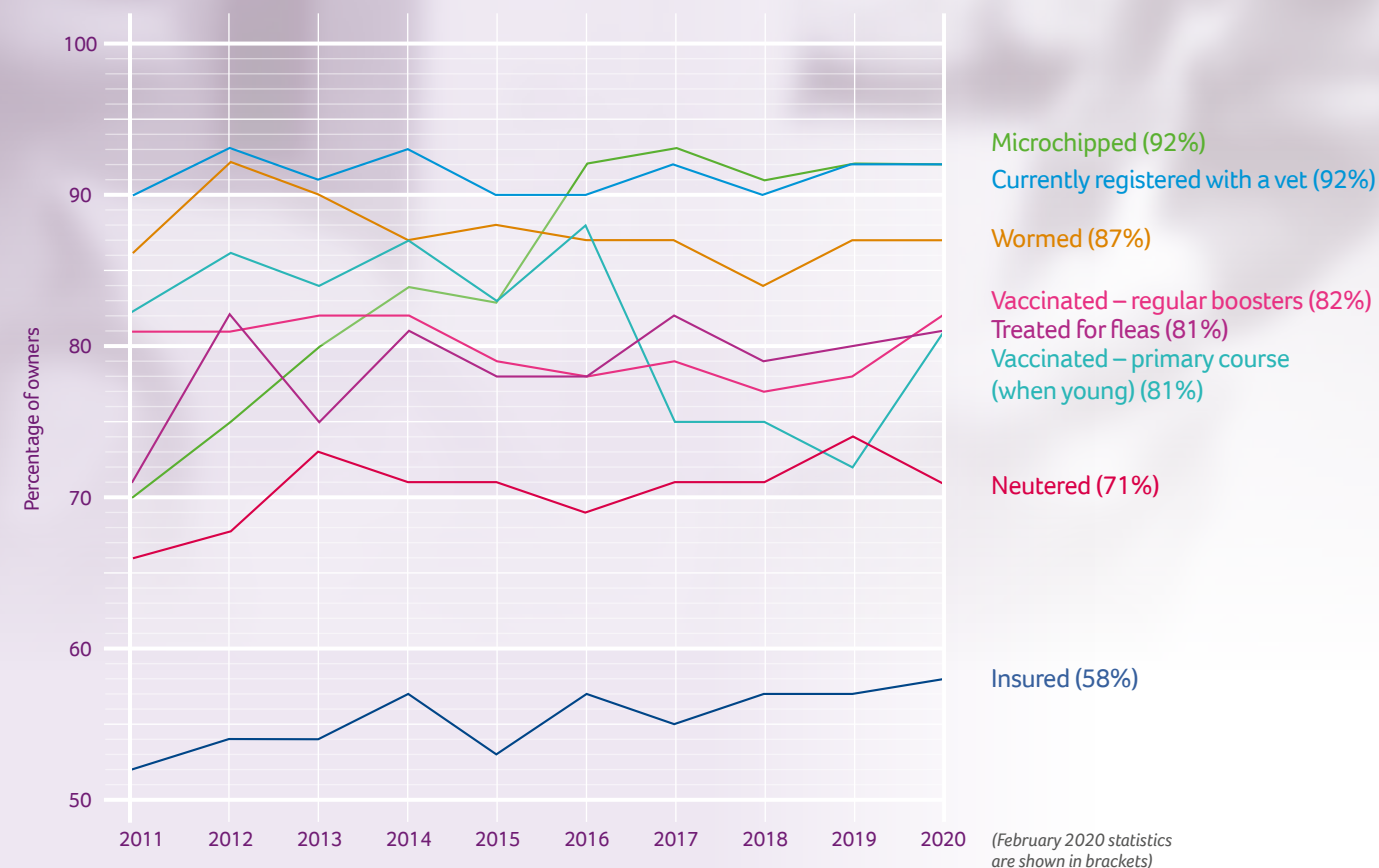
of dog owners in our post-lockdown survey agreed that during lockdown they were increasingly worried about paying for vet bills if their dog were to become ill or was injured.



90%

During lockdown, owners who said their dog was currently registered with vet decreased from 92% to 90%, however we found no change with the proportion insured, neutered or treated for fleas.

% Preventive health uptake in dogs*



Top reasons for not having a primary vaccination course when young

- 1 Pet is a rescue and I don't know vaccination history 20%
- 2 Pet belonged to someone else and I don't know vaccination history 18%

Top reasons for not registering with a vet

- 1 Not necessary, can just turn up at vets 31%
- 2 Not necessary, pet is fine 13%
- 3 Too expensive 12%
- 4 Haven't thought about it 11%

Top reasons for not having regular boosters

- 1 Not necessary 22%
- 2 Vet hasn't recommended annual vaccinations 15%
- 3 Too expensive 14%

Top reasons for not insuring

- 1 Too expensive 38%
- 2 Save money for vet bills instead 29%
- 3 Don't think would get money's worth 21%



Over the last 10 years we've seen no sustained significant change overall in the proportion of dogs who are registered with a vet, vaccinated with regular boosters, insured, neutered, treated for fleas or wormed

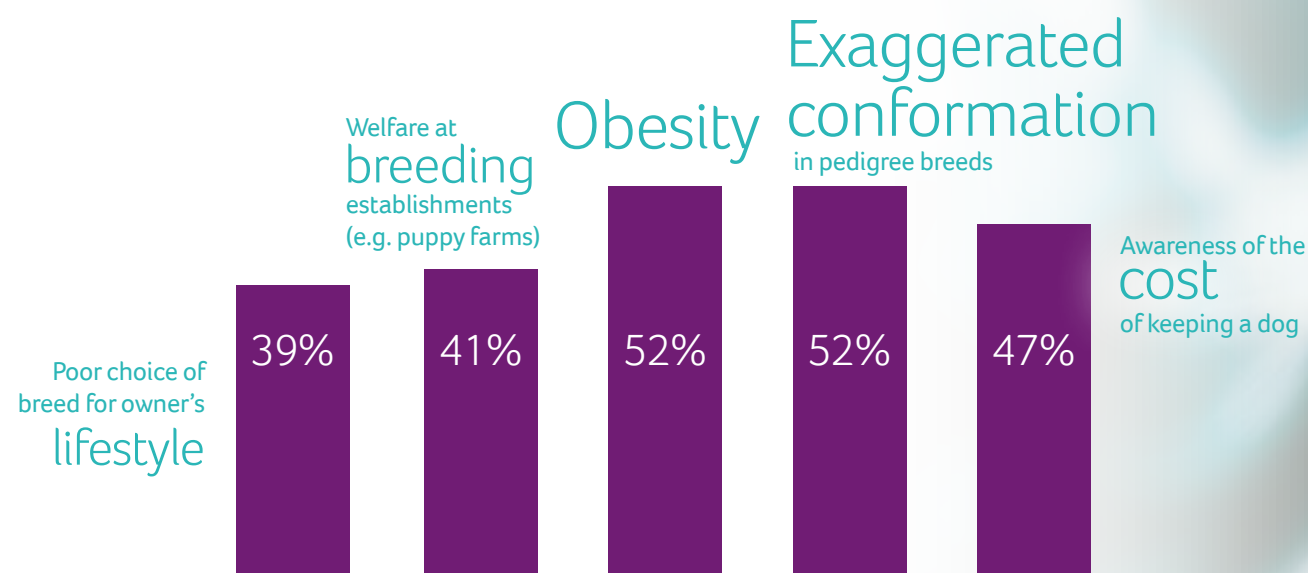


*Owners who selected none of these options has been either 1% or 0% over the last 10 years and is 1% in 2020



The View of the Veterinary Professions

When asked in February 2020, veterinary professionals selected the following as the five most important welfare issues that need to be addressed for dogs:



53%

say that they've seen an increase in owners seeking veterinary / specialist advice for a behaviour issue in the last 2 years. 66% of veterinary professionals routinely recommend referral for behavioural issues in their practice.

Who veterinary professionals refer clients to for problem pet behaviours:

- 52% Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC)
- 32% Animal Behaviour & Training Council (ABTC)
- 32% Local behaviourist or trainer (i.e. accrediting body not necessarily known)

“Veterinary mental health research has shown that some ethical situations around euthanasia and animal welfare can adversely affect vets' mental health at work. Moral distress and moral injury, and the effect they have on vets' mental health, have been described among vets dealing with difficult ethical situations, particularly where they feel the care they want to provide is compromised.

The psychological impact of animal euthanasia on vets can be affected by a range of factors, including the type of euthanasia and the reason for it - whether it is to relieve suffering or whether it is for other reasons. Individual factors including experiences and ethics of the vet and the alignment of their values with what they are being asked to do can influence the psychological impact.

Veterinary professional identity often involves a core value and motivator of caring for animals. When someone's ability to care for animals in the way that they want to is limited this can directly affect their wellbeing.”

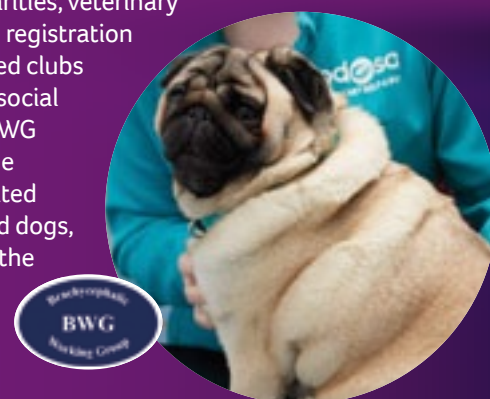
Dr Rosie Allister MRCVS
Vetlife Helpline Manager

Our findings in the 2018 PAW Report (produced with input from BVA and BVNA) found that vets and vet nurses estimated that 46% of dogs they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese.

Obesity has remained a top concern of veterinary professionals since we first collected data in 2011. In 2020, 78% of veterinary professionals say that they've seen an increase in obesity in the last two years and 86% agree that there will be more overweight pets than healthy pets in five years' time. 93% of veterinary professionals say that their practice routinely recommends weight loss programmes for overweight pets or pets suffering from obesity.

Exaggerated conformation in pedigree breeds has also remained a top welfare concern for veterinary professionals since 2016. Breeding dogs for increasingly extreme looks has created numerous health and welfare problems, notably for brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs whose issues include not being able to breathe normally.¹⁴ The popularity of brachycephalic breeds in particular has been highlighted as a concern.

PDSA is a founder member of the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) which comprises leading UK animal welfare charities, veterinary organisations, dog registration organisations, breed clubs and scientific and social researchers. The BWG aims to improve the conformation-related health of flat-faced dogs, as well as tackling the rising demand for these breeds.



46%

say they have seen an increase in dog euthanasia due to behavioural issues in the last 2 years.

61%

say they have seen an increase in pets with phobias (such as noise phobia related to fireworks) in the last two years.

75% of veterinary professionals said that euthanasia due to behavioural issues has been one of the issues that has had the greatest emotional effect on them personally over the last 10 years.

This is higher than the percentage who selected deliberate cruelty cases (66%), however, this also remains a current and pressing concern for the professions, in particular given the widely-recognised link between human and animal abuse,¹⁵ and the reported rise in instances of domestic violence during lockdown,¹⁶ which occurred after the professional survey closed (Feb 2020).



Links Group

PDSA works as part of The Links Group, raising awareness of this issue and training vet teams to recognise non-accidental injuries and act on any concerns of abuse.

The wellbeing of cats

“
Don't want to
change anything
[about my cat].
She is who she is.”

Lola the cat's owner,
South East England



24% OF UK ADULTS
OWN A CAT



10.9m PET CATS ARE
LIVING IN THE UK*

*Estimated population of owned cats which will not account for numbers of unowned 'community', 'stray' or 'feral' cats.

Key findings

26% of cats
live indoors only



64% of owners
of two or more cats provided
no or just one litter tray



73% of owners
say that their cat is an ideal weight



77% of owners
would like to change at least
one behaviour



42% of cats
live with one or more cats



20% of cats
live with one or more cats who
they don't get on with



74% of cats
are microchipped



Significant differences between
pre and post-lockdown surveys:

↑ 36% to 41% of cats
insured

No change
in number of cats neutered

Cat owners say

6% of cats
gained weight during lockdown

17% of owners
fed more treats during lockdown

23% of cats
have started to show new behaviours

15% of cats
spent more time outdoors
during lockdown



The percentage of cats kept 'indoors-only' increased from 15% to 26%



Environment

Access to the outside

The majority of cats (72%) in the UK have access to both indoor and outdoor environments, although this decreased over the last 10 years (from 83% in 2011).

The percentage of cats who live indoors-only increased from 15% in 2011 to 26% in 2020.

1% of cats are described as 'living outdoors only' and this hasn't changed significantly over time. Although a suitable indoor environment may meet an individual cat's needs, the increase in indoor-only cats may be of concern due to indoor cats having a higher incidence of behaviour problems^{17,18}

The main reason owners gave for choosing an indoor-only lifestyle for their cat is because they feel it is **unsafe for them to be outside (62%)**. A further 27% of owners state that their cat has the option to live outside but 'chooses to live indoors', and this is higher for senior cats (38%) than for adult cats (21%).



Our post-lockdown research found that of those cats who had access to outdoors, 60% of owners said that the time their cat spent outdoors hadn't changed since the start of lockdown, while 15% of owners said this had increased since lockdown.



56%

scratching posts

50%

water bowls

cat beds

44%

high places

14%

36%

food bowls

64%

litter trays

Percentage of owners of two or more cats who are providing only one or none of these resources

Resources

Unfortunately, many cat-owning households still have inadequate resources for their pets, with the provision of these largely unchanged since 2018. It is recommended practice to provide one of each resource per cat plus one extra, spread out around the house to allow cats to avoid each other if they wish to.^{19,20}

64% of owners of two or more cats provided no or just one litter tray, 50% provided no or just one water bowl, 44% provided no or just one cat bed.

However, our findings show that in homes with two or more cats, the percentage of cats with no access or single access to a high place decreased from 45% in 2019 to 36% in 2020 and cats with one or no cat beds decreased from 50% in 2018 to 44% in 2020.

Our findings show that one in five (20%) cats live with another cat they don't always get on with.

An inadequate provision of resources runs the risk of creating tensions amongst cats within a home, increasing the likelihood that a cat will develop an undesirable behaviour, potentially negatively impacting their relationship with their owner and reducing their welfare.²¹



17% of cat owners have fed more treats since the start of COVID-19 restrictions



Diet

Most cats (56%) in the UK are fed a mix of wet and dry food as their main diet; this hasn't changed significantly over the last 10 years.

Despite the increased debate around raw diets²², only **2% of owners say they feed a home-prepared raw meat diet and 1% a commercially-prepared raw meat diet as one of their cat's main types of food.**

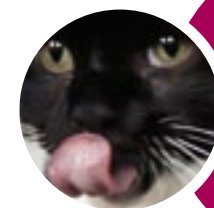
Recognition of obesity



73% of owners say that their cat is an ideal weight, however obesity in cats was highlighted as one of the top 5 welfare concerns in our veterinary professionals' survey by 44% of respondents.

Reflecting similar findings for dogs and rabbits, it appears that some owners are unable to recognise when their cats are overweight or obese.

The main foods fed to cats:



56%

Complete wet and dry food mix



31%

Complete wet food (eg. tins, pouches, trays)

38%

Complete dry cat food

11% Scraps and leftovers

2% Home-prepared raw meat diet

0% Fed either vegetarian or vegan diets

1% Commercially-prepared raw meat diet



Weight

We asked owners to tell us what their cat weighed. The average weight of cats in the UK is 4kg.*

52% of owners didn't know what their cat weighed.

Only 18% of cat owners weighed their pet to help them decide if they are the correct weight, which was significantly lower than dog owners (44%).

The disparity between veterinary professionals and owners' perception of obesity highlights the importance of encouraging owners to weigh their pet regularly to allow for accurate assessment.

At the time of publication, the need for widespread remote consultations is ongoing, and knowing the accurate weight of pets for appropriate advice and dosing of medications is crucial.



In our post-lockdown survey, 17% of cat owners reported feeding more treats since the start of lockdown and 5% said that they have fed their cat more human food.

6% of owners said their cat had gained weight during lockdown



26% of owners want to stop their cats scratching the furniture



Behaviour

Unwanted behaviours

77% of cat owners would like to change at least one behaviour that their cat exhibits. The main behaviour they would most like to change is their cat scratching either the furniture (26%) or carpets (20%).

Scratching is a normal and fundamental behaviour for cats which **helps to maintain their claw condition and to communicate**, so it is important to provide an acceptable alternative for them to exhibit this behaviour.^{23,24}

This is an example of why inadequate resources, reported on page 36, can create problem behaviours; ^{23,24} **the average number of scratching posts in a cat household in the UK is 1.32 and the average number of cats per household is 1.69. This means that 27% of cats have no access to a scratching post at all, which equates to 2.9 million cats.**

Our findings also highlighted that 41% of cat owners wanted to change behaviours that could be related to stress.

This included inappropriate toileting in the house (6%), hiding (6%), and over-grooming (5%). **7% of owners also reported that their cat showed some form of aggression, whether to other cats or people, which is also recognised as a potential sign of stress.**²⁵



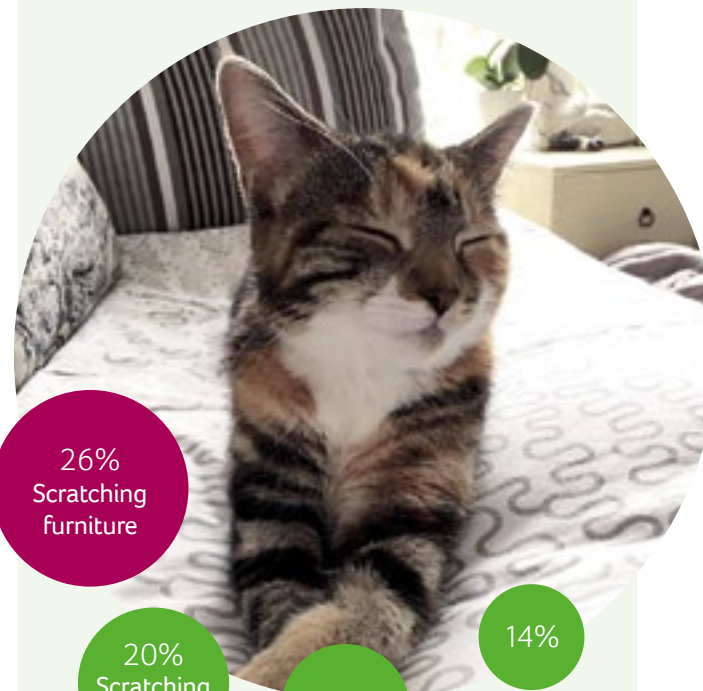
Lockdown appears to have affected our cats' behaviour too. In our post-lockdown survey, 23% of owners reported that their cat was showing at least one new behaviour since the start of lockdown, with a wide range of new behaviours reported, including yowling, miaowing or vocalising (6%), begging for food (4%) and waking owners up (4%).

“

The mad half hour when she tears around the house! ”

Katy the cat's owner, North East

Behaviours which owners would like to change:



26%
Scratching furniture

20%
Scratching carpets

17%

Waking me up

14%

Bringing wildlife into house

16%

Begging for food

14%

Being timid, scared or nervous

14%

Killing wildlife

“

Noises frighten her sometimes ”

Cally the cat's owner, Wales

77% of cat owners would like to change at least one behaviour that their cat exhibits. 41% wanted to change behaviours that could be related to stress

“ It is sad to see that behavioural issues continue to increase, not only in the perceptions of veterinary surgeons, but among owners as well.

The internet gives owners instant access to well-founded advice from several animal welfare charities, yet problems that could be solved simply and quickly remain widespread. Affection alone is not sufficient to guarantee the pet's well-being, though many owners, especially first-timers, appear to believe that it should be. Pets are not little humans; to keep them happy, owners also need knowledge of their behavioural needs, both at the species level (pet dogs crave human company) and those specific to the individual (some cats are born brave, others timid).

A little knowledge, patiently applied, can improve pets' lives immeasurably. For example, most dogs become stressed when left on their own (and five minutes separation from their human carers can be as distressing as the traditional benchmark of five hours). Yet few owners seem to know that this distress can be prevented by a well-validated and straightforward programme of training; for example, the RSPCA's #DogKind, available on their website.

Cats may be even more widely misunderstood than dogs. Many owners express a wish to change their

cat's behaviour, but few seem to realise that cats can be as trainable as dogs. Redirecting unwanted scratching, top of the owner's wish-list, is only one situation where simple training techniques can bring about a more harmonious cat-owner relationship. Yet training can benefit the cat's well-being in many other situations, beginning when – or even before – they first join the household and have to cope with unfamiliar surroundings and the possibility of hostile house-mates in the form of existing pets. Timid cats can be trained to be less fearful of the unexpected. The cat carrier can become a haven of contentment rather than a conflict between cat and owner, with an additional bonus for the veterinary surgeon who encounters a calmer patient on the consulting room table.

A badly trained dog is a liability both to itself and its owner. Sadly, dog training continues to be a battleground between different factions of training 'experts' each believing that their methods are superior to all others. Three decades of attempts at self-regulation by 'behaviour professionals' have produced little consensus, and the sensible way forward seems to be to put regulation of behavioural advice under the aegis of the veterinary profession. ”

John Bradshaw BA PhD
Writer and biologist – author of bestselling 'In Defence of Dogs' and 'Cat Sense'





2.2 million UK cats don't get on with a cat they live with

84% of owners say owning a cat makes them mentally healthier



Companionship

42% of cats in the UK live with one or more other cats and one in five (20%) live with one or more cats who they don't get on with.

This has not changed significantly in our 10 years of surveillance. While many cat owners told us that their cat enjoys the company of their feline companion (22%), this leaves potentially **2.2 million cats (20%) not living in harmony with other cats**. Owners providing adequate resources plays an important part in this, i.e. a cat having access to everything they need without having to compete for anything.

Cats continue to be an important source of companionship for owners. 82% of cat owners said that owning a cat made them feel less lonely.

However, we need to improve recognition amongst owners that what is good companionship for us (the company of others), may not be the same for our cats, who may well prefer a solitary life, away from feline companions.

Cat stress



It is well recognised that stress can lead to a multitude of health problems for cats.²⁶ When asked what were the top five most important issues that needed to be addressed in order to improve cat welfare, the most common answers given by veterinary professionals were multi-cat households (selected by 51% of respondents) and chronic stress (selected by 43% of respondents).

Cat owners were more likely to report that their pet was stressed (11%) compared to dog (8%) and rabbit (6%) owners.

We asked owners about their cat's companions:



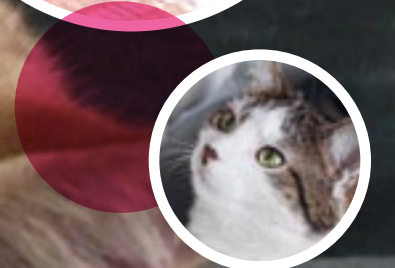
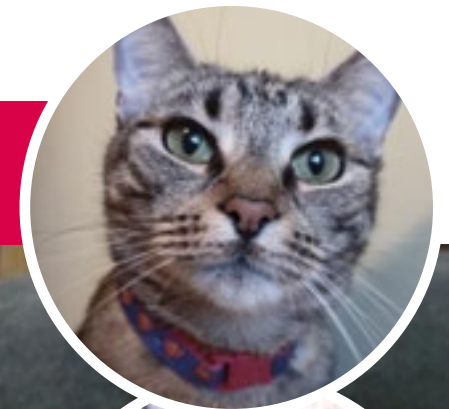
58%
of cats
live alone

22%
enjoy being
with other cats*

20%
live with other
cats they don't
get on with**



Our post-lockdown research found no significant change to these percentages.



“

Bullies other cat if he is annoyed about something but gets along with them usually”

George the cat's owner, North East England



3.9 million pet cats (36%) in the UK are unvaccinated

Health

Vaccinations

As highlighted in our 2019 PAW Report, the proportion of cats who have received primary vaccinations when young has varied significantly over the 10 years of our research, from 72% in 2011, to 82% in 2016, then a sharp decrease in 2019 to 61%. This remains consistently lower than dogs.

In 2020, the findings have improved, with 69% of cats having a primary course when young. Additionally 64% are receiving regular boosters.

However, this means that an estimated 3.9 million cats (36%) in the UK are currently left potentially vulnerable to preventable disease through not receiving regular boosters. Over the past 10 years there have been no significant changes to the proportion of cats receiving these.

21% of cat owners said they hadn't provided regular boosters because their cat found going to the vets very stressful.

This is higher than dog (12%) and rabbit (10%) owners and is something that various initiatives seek to improve, such as the ISFM Cat Friendly Clinic Scheme.²⁷

Microchipping

The percentage of owned cats who are microchipped has steadily increased over the last 10 years, from 46% in 2011 to 74% in 2020. This is an encouraging increase despite the current lack of legislation to make microchipping mandatory for cats.

94% of veterinary professionals in our survey said that microchipping should be made compulsory for cats.

However, not all owners have kept their cat's microchip details updated, with 11% telling us their details have changed but they haven't updated them or they are not sure if their details are up-to-date.

This could leave over 320,000 owned cats in the UK unable to be reunited with their owners if they were lost.

Neutering

In the UK, proportionally more cats are neutered (86%) than either rabbits (57%) or dogs (71%). This has decreased slightly from 92% in 2019, and leaves an estimated 1.5 million owned cats (14%) unneutered.

In recent years there have been collaborative campaigns across the animal welfare sector and veterinary professions to encourage neutering female cats at 4 months to reduce the risk of accidental pregnancies.²⁸

58% of veterinary professionals reported that they routinely recommend 4 month neutering for cats, however, this has decreased from 2014 when 64% said they did this.

Our post-lockdown research did not find any change in the percentage of owners who reported their cat had been neutered, including those who had owned their pet for less than a year.

Registration with a vet practice

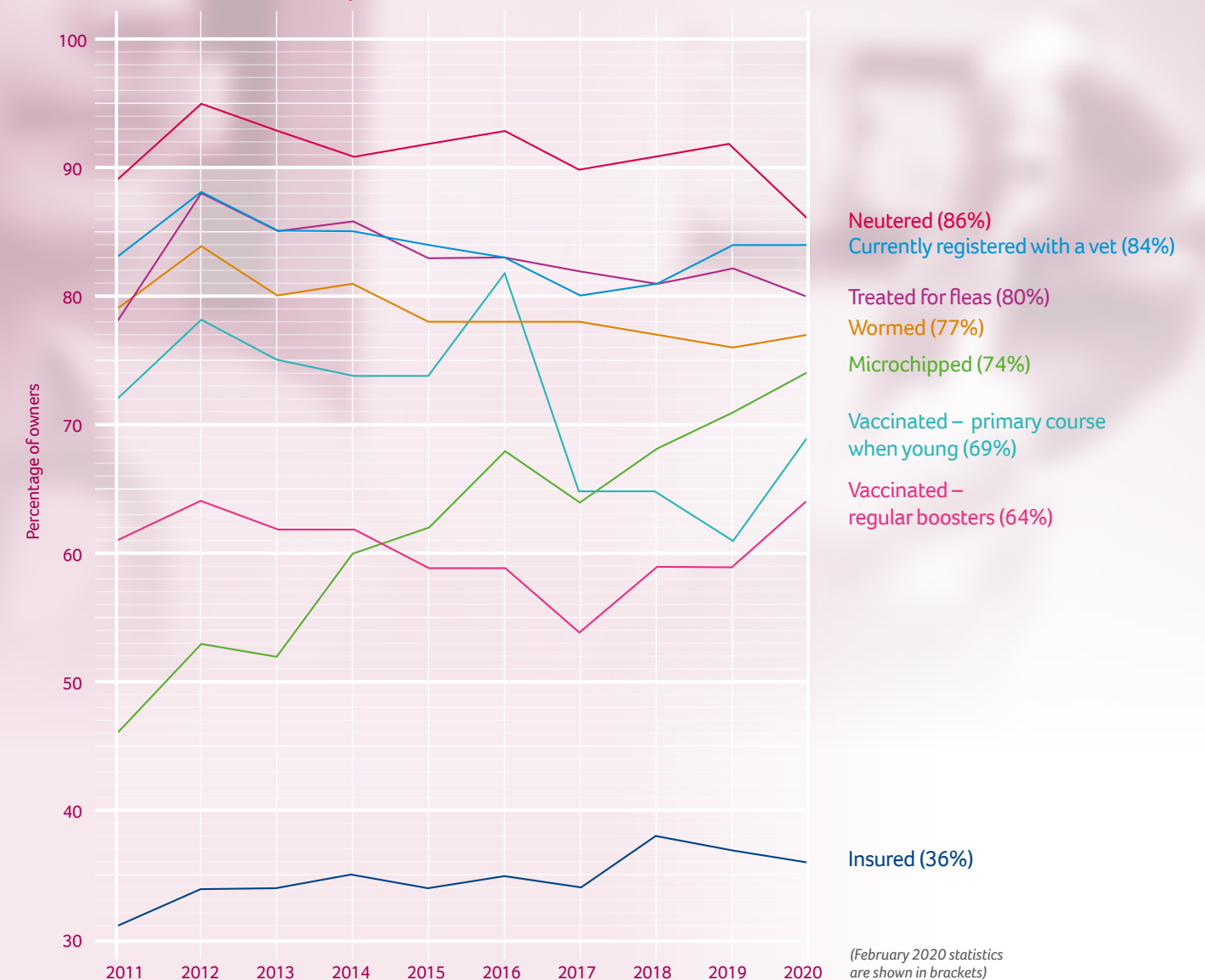
84% of cats are currently registered with a vet.

As found with dog owners, the top 3 reasons given for registering with a vet are the value of regular health checks to ensure their pet is healthy (70%), to get them vaccinated (62%) and the reassurance that they can get help if and when needed (60%).

Preventive health care for cats appears to have been maintained during lockdown. The only significant change is a decrease in cats that were wormed (from 77% in February 2020 to 74% in August 2020).

Interestingly the percentage of cats who were insured rose from 36% to 41% in the same time period.

% Preventive health uptake in cats*



Top reasons for not having a primary vaccination course when young

- 1 Pet belonged to someone else and I don't know vaccination history 23%
- 2 Pet is a rescue and I don't know vaccination history 22%

Top reasons for not registering with a vet

- 1 Not necessary, can just turn up at vets 31%
 - 2 Not necessary, pet is fine 21%
 - 3 Other 14%
- most commonly 'pet has not needed to see a vet'

Top reasons for not having regular boosters

- 1 Pet finds going to the vets very stressful 21%
- 2 Not necessary 20%
- 3 Too expensive 20%
- 4 It is difficult to get pet to the vets 11%

Top reasons for not insuring

- 1 Too expensive 39%
- 2 Save money for vet bills instead 24%
- 3 Don't think would get money's worth 23%



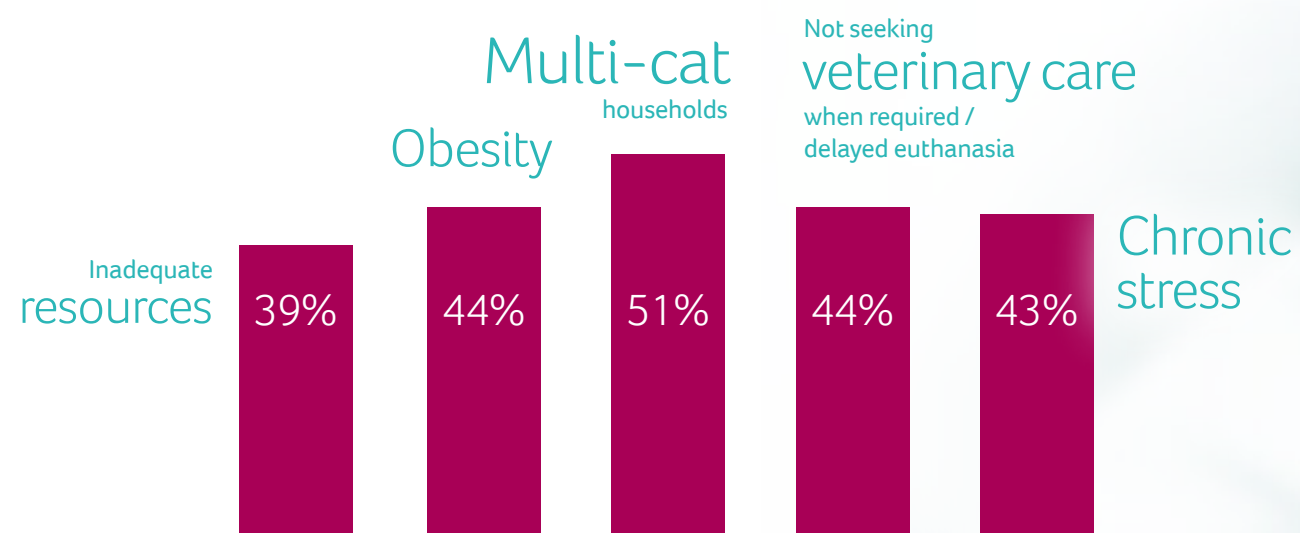
Over the last 10 years we've seen no sustained significant change overall in the proportion of cats who are registered with a vet, vaccinated with regular boosters, insured, neutered, treated for fleas or wormed.





The View of the Veterinary Professions

When asked in February 2020, veterinary professionals selected the following as the five most important welfare issues that need to be addressed for cats:



94%

say that microchipping should be made mandatory for cats.

58%

report that their practice routinely recommends neutering at 4 months of age, which is supported by PDSA and other veterinary bodies.

39%

say that they've seen an increase in cat flu cases in the last 10 years.

18%

say that they have seen an increase in FeLV cases in the last 10 years.

Since we first surveyed the veterinary professions in 2011, multi-cat households, chronic stress and lack of neutering have consistently been the most frequently chosen welfare issues that they feel need to be addressed in cats, although lack of neutering dropped down the list in the 2018 and 2020 surveys.

Obesity remains a concern, however this does not seem to be shared by owners as 73% say that their cat is an ideal weight. From the 2018 PAW Report, the BVA and BVNA surveys showed us that vets

and vet nurses estimated that 34% of the cats they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese. 85% of veterinary professionals say that their practice offers clinics or specialist advice on overweight / obese cats.

19% of veterinary professionals say that their practice provides clinics or specific advice on socialisation and training in cats, and 25% say they provide cat behaviour clinics.

Our findings from the professional survey (run jointly with BVA and BVNA) in the 2018 PAW Report found that vets and vet nurses estimated that 34% of the cats they see in their practice each week are overweight or obese.



85%

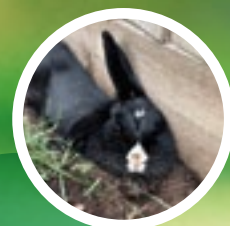
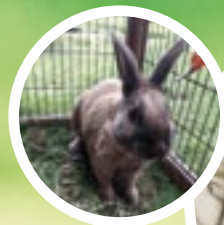
say that their practice offers clinics or specialist advice on overweight / obese cats.

According to our survey of veterinary professionals, the most pressing issue which needs to be tackled to improve cat welfare in the UK is multi-cat households



PDSA works as part of The Cat Group who developed 'The Kitten Checklist' to help prospective owners find a responsibly-bred kitten, and understand what their pet will need to be healthy and happy.

The wellbeing of rabbits



“

All behaviours are communication.
I don't want to change them.”

Rabbit owner, London

Key findings

26% of rabbits are kept in inadequate housing conditions

18% of rabbits are fed muesli-type food

42% of rabbits live alone

14% of rabbits receive no preventive health care at all (post-lockdown research)

56% of owners want to change at least one of their rabbit's behaviours



Significant differences between pre and post-lockdown surveys:



16% to 22% of owners who have had their rabbit for less than a year



58% to 49% of rabbits receiving regular booster vaccinations



72% to 66% of rabbits currently registered with a vet

Rabbit owners say

14% of owners have fed more treats since the start of lockdown

3% of owners say their rabbit has gained weight in lockdown

As respondents answered about an individual pet, rabbits are discussed in the report as singular, despite it being best practice for these highly social animals to be kept in a bonded pair or group.



2% OF UK ADULTS OWN A RABBIT



1m

PET RABBITS ARE LIVING IN THE UK



36% of veterinary professionals said small hutches are one of the top five welfare concerns for rabbits



Environment

A quarter of rabbits (26%) are still kept in inadequate housing (small hutches with minimal or no run space).

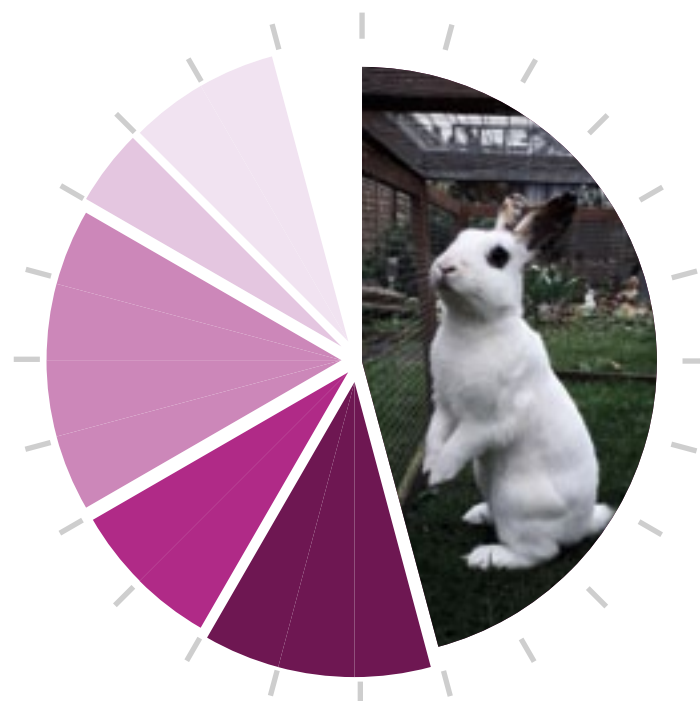
However, this is an improvement on the 35% kept this way in 2017. Rabbits need to have the space to exhibit normal behaviour; to stretch, jump, run and dig. Smaller hutches or cages simply don't allow for these natural behaviours, making them unsuitable accommodation.

36% of veterinary professionals identified small hutches as one of the top five welfare concerns for rabbits in our survey.

57% of owners say their rabbit lives predominantly outdoors, and 43% predominantly indoors.

This split between rabbits being kept indoors or outdoors has remained constant over the last 3 years we have been reporting on this and hasn't changed following lockdown.

This year's findings indicate that rabbits are spending less time in their hutches (average of 10.73 hours in a 24 hour period) than they did in 2017 (average of 13.18 hours in a 24 hour period).



In a 24-hour period, rabbits spend on average:



'Not stated' accounted for 1 hour



Feeding a muesli-style mix to rabbits has reduced from 49% of owners in 2011 to 18% in 2020



Diet

The ideal daily diet for rabbits consists of their body size or more in feeding hay, a handful of fresh greens twice daily and a tablespoon of commercial rabbit pellets.²⁹

Our findings show that there are some improvements in reported rabbit diets over the last 10 years, but still far too many are fed inappropriately, with linked health risks.^{29,30}

55% of veterinary professionals identified inappropriate diet as one of the top five welfare concerns facing rabbits today.

One of the ongoing concerns with the diet of many pet rabbits is the popularity of the widely available 'muesli-type' diets.

Encouragingly, only 18% of owners say that their rabbits are now fed this diet as one of their main food types, compared to 49% of owners in 2011.

There has been a corresponding increase in the proportion of owners who say they feed their rabbits a pellet food as one of their main food types, from 53% in 2011 to 80% in 2020.

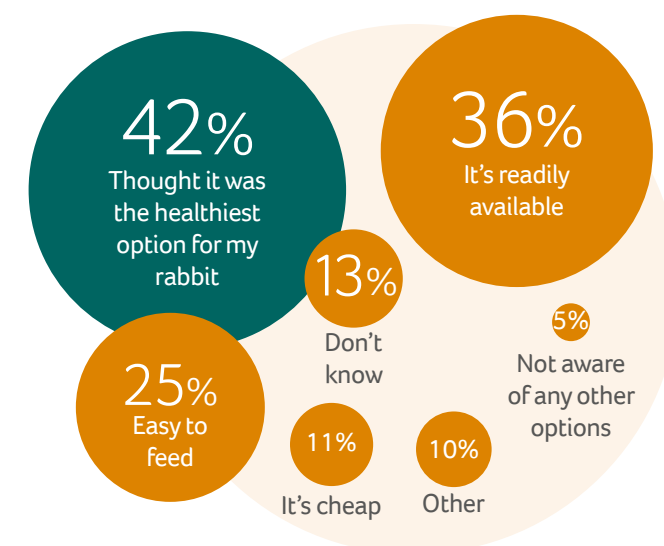
However, this means that around 180,000 (18%) rabbits in the UK are still being fed a muesli-style mix as one of their main food types.

These diets have been implicated in a variety of health problems, including obesity, dental disease and gastrointestinal disease.^{30,31,32} We asked owners why they chose a muesli-style diet. The most common answer was 'I think it is the healthiest option for my rabbit' (42% of owners who feed muesli-style food). Continued efforts are needed to help owners to make the right choices for their rabbits' welfare, especially given that dietary purchasing decisions are driven by wanting the best for their rabbits' health.



Our post-lockdown survey found that 14% of owners had fed more treats and 3% felt their rabbits had gained weight since the start of lockdown.

Reasons for feeding muesli-style mix:



Inadequate hay provision is associated with rabbit obesity and also affects their ability to express some of their natural behaviours by spending a large proportion of their time grazing and feeding.³²

One in five rabbits (21%) are fed less than the recommended 'body size' in hay or grass daily which is less than in 2011 (42%). The percentage who say their rabbits have constant access to hay or grass has decreased from 47% in 2012 to 34% in 2020.

The percentage of rabbits fed no hay or grass at all has fluctuated over recent years, from 3% in 2011, to 10% in 2014, and is now just 1% in 2020. However, this still amounts to 10,000 rabbits not being provided with this vital part of their diet.

10% of owners said their rabbit was overweight or obese and 84% said they were the ideal weight.

However, only 18% actually weigh their pet to decide what their correct weight is. 64% of owners didn't know what weight their rabbit was.

29. Meredith, A., & Lord, B. (2014). BSAVA Manual of Rabbit Medicine Nutrition and feeding. Wiley

30. Prebble, J. L., Shaw, D. J., & Meredith, A. L. (2015). Bodyweight and body condition score in rabbits on four different feeding regimes. Journal of Small Animal Practice, 56(3), 207-212. 31. Clauss, M. (2012). Clinical Technique: Feeding Hay to Rabbits and Rodents. Journal of Exotic Pet Medicine, 21(1), 80-86

32. Bourne, D. (2018). Hay for a healthy rabbit: the importance of appropriate feed. Companion Animal, 23(6), 348-352



15% of owners told us their rabbit was stressed

Behaviour

56% of rabbit owners reported wanting to change at least one behaviour in their pet, an increase from 43% in 2016. Many of the behaviours owners wanted to change are natural behaviours in rabbits (such as digging and chewing), so it is important for owners to recognise this and provide the appropriate environment for rabbits to be able to express these behaviours. It may also reflect increased awareness in owners of behaviours that can indicate stress in their pets.³³

Significantly more owners of rabbits living in inadequate housing (30%) wanted to change at least one behaviour when compared to the owners of rabbits living in more ideal environments (15%).

All rabbit owners were asked questions related to their rabbit's emotions.

22% said their rabbit was bored and 15% said their rabbit was stressed.

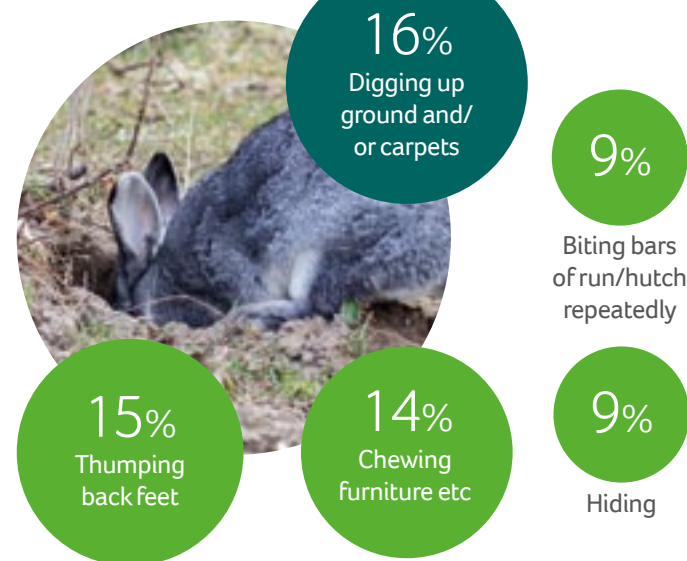
While it's encouraging that some owners are recognising negative welfare states in their rabbits, it highlights the need for further education about enhancing welfare in rabbits.

In our post-lockdown survey, we asked owners of rabbits that live alone about their relationship with their rabbit. We found that 28% of rabbits struggle when being lifted which suggests that a large proportion of rabbits do not tolerate handling and that further work is needed to help owners train their rabbits to accept handling. Rabbits were also reported to display biting (9%), growling (8%) and boxing (5%) behaviours towards their owner; suggesting many rabbits do not enjoy some interactions with their owner.³³

“Doesn't like to be handled”

Annie the rabbit's owner, Scotland

Top five behaviours owners wanted to change:



“The PAW Report provides a valuable insight into the state of our nation's pets and as veterinary professionals, we can use this information to help us target, refine and increase the types of information that we provide to the general public.

Many people assume that animal abuse consists of deliberate harm or neglect, however this is not always the case. Some pets, for example rabbits, are greatly suffering but not because the owner is deliberately being cruel – but because they are not aware of the basic levels of care that need to be provided. The PAW Reports can help us track these trends and I am delighted to see that in the past 10 years, the number of rabbits being kept alone has reduced (67% in 2011, 47% in 2020). This is just one example of how awareness and education has really helped to improve animal welfare and RVN's play a key part in this process – from running species specific clinics to taking part in national awareness events such as Rabbit Awareness Week, nurses are uniquely placed to offer professional and factual guidance on how to keep your pet happy and healthy.”

Jo Hinde, RVN
Senior Vice President, British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA)



Fewer rabbits are being kept on their own, decreasing from 67% in 2011 to 42% in 2020



Companionship

Rabbits are highly social animals and should always be kept with another compatible rabbit companion where possible.³⁴ Analysis of the last 10 years of PAW Report data suggests that recognition of this need amongst owners has improved.

Encouragingly, there has been a significant decrease in rabbits being kept on their own from 67% (2011) to 42% (2020).

However, this still means that 420,000 (42%) rabbits are living without another rabbit.



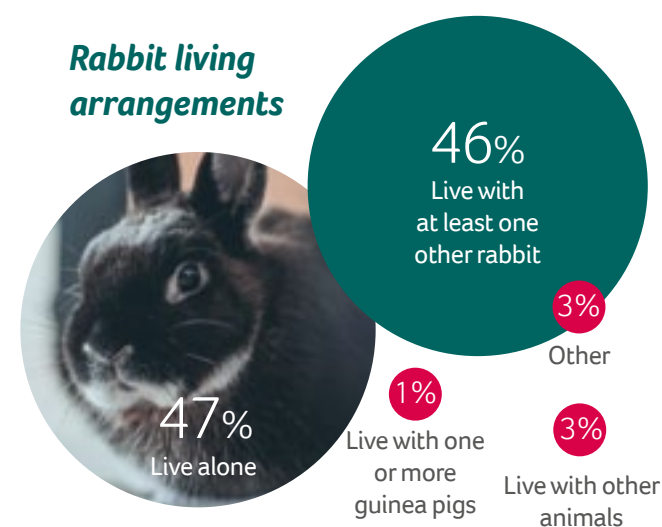
This hasn't changed significantly following lockdown with 47% of rabbits still living alone.

Despite the fact that so many pet rabbits live alone, only 20% of owners think that their rabbit is lonely.



Our post-lockdown survey found that most rabbits who live with other rabbits showed significantly higher instances of positive behaviour such as grooming one another (83%) and resting near each other (82%), than negative, such as fighting (10%) and boxing (11%).

Rabbit living arrangements



Behaviours shown by rabbits living with another rabbit:*



Positive behaviours³⁵

Grooming one another	83%
Resting near each other	82%
Eating near each other	80%
Nuzzling / snuggling each other	81%
Nose touching	66%
Playing	65%
Mirroring / copying each other	37%

Negative behaviours³⁶

Growling or grunting	13%
Boxing the air	11%
Fighting	10%
Avoiding one another	7%
My rabbits don't show any of these behaviours towards each other	2%

* Question asked in August 2020 survey



Runs, jumps, cuddles, wants attention”

Toad the rabbit's owner, East Midlands



Rabbits who have been microchipped has increased over the last 10 years from 3% in 2011 to 30% in 2020



Health

57% of owners report that their rabbit has been neutered, 30% have been microchipped and 18% insured, compared to 37% neutered, 3% microchipped, and 6% insured in 2011.

The proportion of owners who reported that their rabbit had received none of the preventive healthcare options we list in the survey* reduced from 23% in 2011 to 8% in 2020.

Microchipping

As seen with both dogs and cats, the proportion of owners who report that their rabbit has been microchipped has increased over the last 10 years from 3% in 2011 to 30% in 2020.

While this is positive, the proportion of rabbits being microchipped remains significantly lower than either dogs or cats. **700,000 rabbits remain without microchips and may not be reunited with their owners if they became lost.**

Vaccination

Vaccination rates in rabbits also remain low, with **56% reporting that their pet has had a primary vaccination when young and 58% reporting that their pet has had regular boosters.** These proportions have not increased or decreased significantly overall over the past 10 years but there have been some changes following lockdown.

440,000 pet rabbits are not vaccinated.

Although 5% of the rabbit owners who hadn't provided booster vaccines were worried about vaccine side effects and 3% believed vaccines have more risks than benefits, no rabbit owners reported that they haven't vaccinated their pet since their primary course because their rabbit had had a previous reaction to a vaccine. This was the same as for cat and dog owners. **Yet from the open text responses of the 19% of owners who selected 'other' for reasons given for not vaccinating, the main themes were concerns about vaccine safety and efficacy.**

Neutering

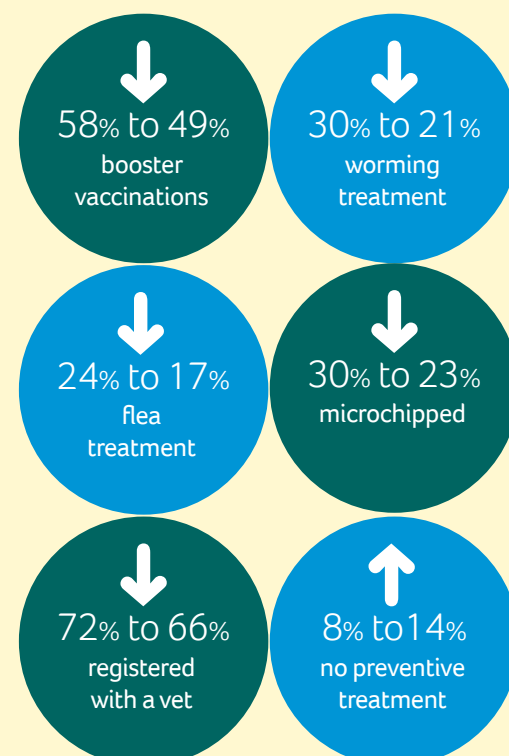
Neutering rates in rabbits remain below those for either dogs or cats, with **57% of owners reporting that their rabbit has been neutered**, an increase from 37% in 2011.

Registering with a vet

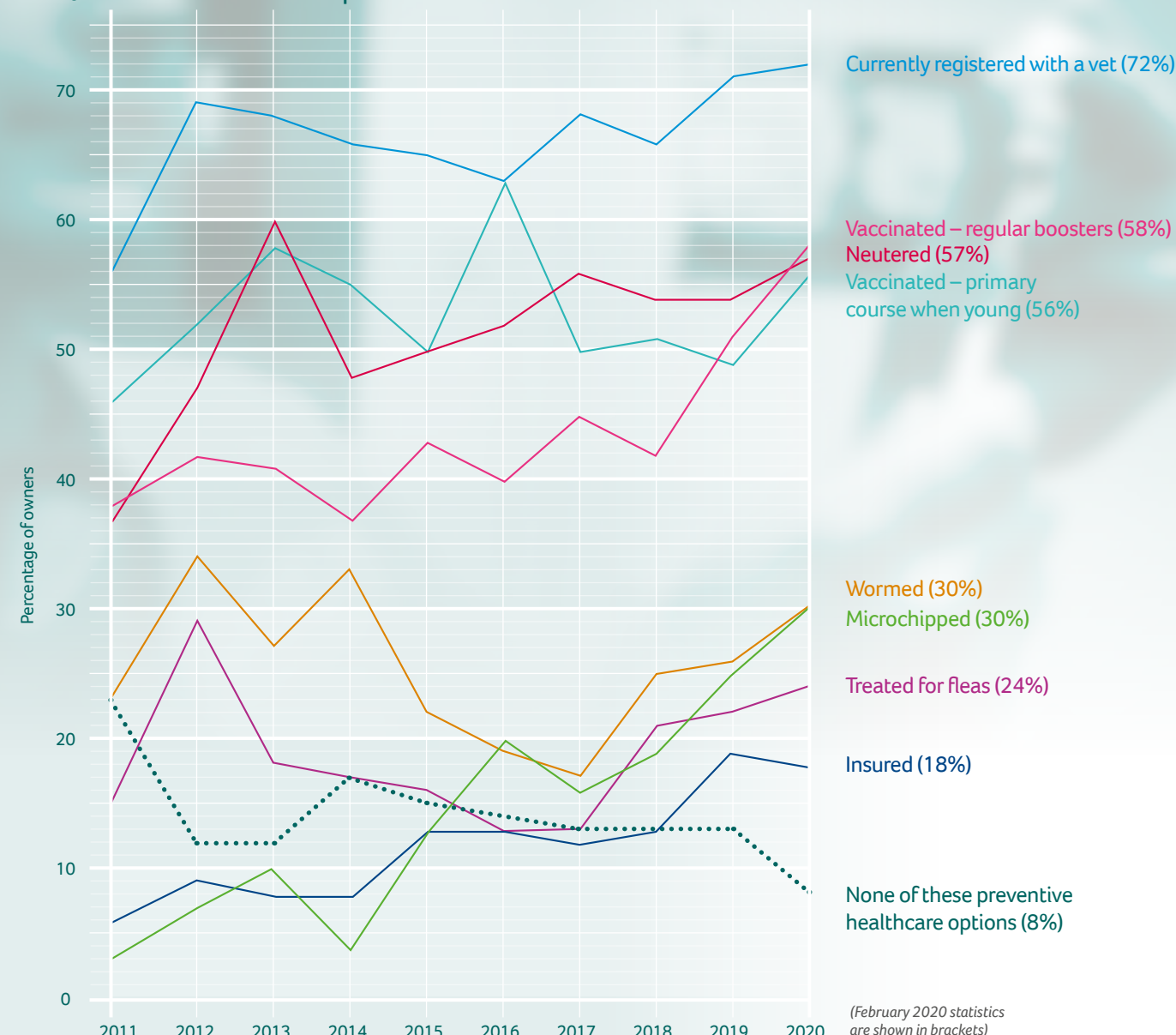
72% of rabbit owners report that their pet is currently registered with a vet. 70% of these had done so for regular health checks to ensure their pets are healthy, 64% for vaccinations and 61% for the reassurance they could get help if needed.



Our post-lockdown survey found that there had been significant reductions in pet rabbits who have received preventive care over this time:



% Preventive health uptake in rabbits



Top reasons for not vaccinating when young

- 1 Pet belonged to someone else and I don't know vaccination history 19%
- 2 Pet didn't come into contact with other animals 16%
- 3 Didn't think about it at the time 15%
- 4 Pet is a rescue and I don't know vaccination history 14%
- 5 Not necessary 13%

Top reasons for not having regular boosters

- 1 Doesn't come into contact with other animals 35%
- 2 Not necessary 21%
- 3 Too expensive 20%

Top reasons for not registering with a vet

- 1 Not necessary, can just turn up at vets 35%
- 2 Not necessary, pet is fine 25%
- 3 Haven't got around to it yet 17%



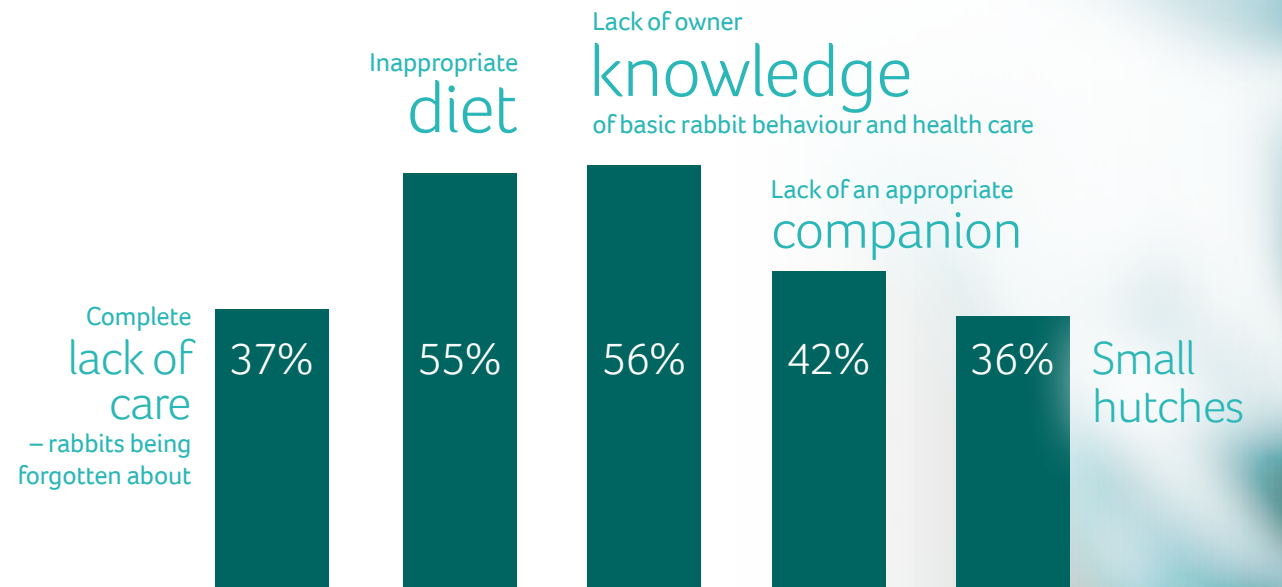
Over the last 10 years we've seen the percentage of owners who provide no preventive care for their rabbits decrease from 23% to 8%





The View of the Veterinary Professions

When asked in February 2020, veterinary professionals selected the following as the five most important welfare issues that need to be addressed for rabbits:



98%

say that rabbit hutches smaller than a minimum recommended size should be banned from sale.

90%

say that rabbit muesli should be removed from sale.

83%

say that they routinely recommend pellet diets rather than muesli for rabbits.

Inappropriate diets for rabbits has remained a top welfare concern for veterinary professionals since the first PAW Report in 2011, together with lack of an appropriate companion (since 2016) and an inadequate amount of space, either small hutches or space for exercise.

It is encouraging to see the improvement in rabbits' diets over 10 years of surveillance, especially as dental disease has often been one of the top concerns since 2011, although it has dropped down the list in 2020.

However, there remains some way to go to improve how owners are providing for rabbits' environmental and companionship needs.

Part of this may be the lack of recognition of the complex husbandry needs of rabbits. This has also been highlighted as a top welfare issue in our survey of veterinary professionals, with 'a lack of knowledge of basic behaviour and healthcare' chosen by 56% of respondents as a concern this year.

Another ongoing issue is the 'complete lack of care (rabbits being forgotten about)' of this species, possibly related to the fact that they are sometimes considered to be a suitable pet for a child. 6% of rabbit owners say a child under the age of 16 is the main person caring for their pet, whereas no cat or dog owners told us this.

A lack of preventive health care in rabbits also remains a concern.

49% say that their practice offers clinics or specific advice on overweight / obese rabbits. 33% of respondents say that their practice offers no specific advice or clinics for rabbits

32%

say that they've seen an increase in viral haemorrhagic diarrhoea (VHD) in rabbits in the last two years.

17% say they've seen an increase in myxomatosis.



78%

say they routinely recommend another rabbit as companionship for rabbits kept alone.

69%

say that small pets (i.e. rabbits, guinea pigs) should not be sold by pet shops.

10%

thought that rabbits are not suitable to be kept as pets.

The regional picture

This year, we have drilled down deeper into our regional data and have outlined some of the main statistics that were significantly different from the UK average.

While it's not possible to draw causative conclusions, we hope these will highlight areas for extra regional focus. Despite geography, most regions show similar trends in pet wellbeing, which are discussed in the rest of this report.

Northern Ireland

More people want to change at least one of their dog's behaviours	83%	75%	👎
More dogs are left alone for five or more hours on a typical week day*	25%	11%	👎
Fewer dogs are microchipped*	79%	92%	👎
Fewer cats are microchipped	60%	74%	👎

Wales

More cats live with one or more other cats	52%	42%	👎
Fewer cats receive their primary vaccinations when young*	57%	68%	👎
Fewer cats are microchipped	63%	74%	👎

Midlands

Not significantly different from UK average

South West

Not significantly different from UK average

Scotland

Fewer rabbits live in inadequate housing	11%	26%	👍
More rabbits are registered with a vet	85%	72%	👍
Fewer people would choose to get a puppy from a puppy farm	14%	18%	👍

North of England

Fewer cats are microchipped*	69%	74%	👎
Fewer rabbits live in inadequate housing	16%	26%	👍
Fewer people would consider importing a pet from outside the UK	32%	36%	👍

East of England

More dogs receive less than one walk per day	26%	18%	👎
Fewer owners want to change at least one of their cat's behaviours	70%	77%	👍
More cat owners say their cat had their primary vaccinations when young	77%	69%	👍
More cats are microchipped	82%	74%	👍

London

More people haven't heard of the Animal Welfare Act	32%	24%	👎
Fewer dogs are microchipped	78%	92%	👎
More rabbits live in inadequate housing	45%	26%	👎
Fewer rabbits are registered with a vet	56%	72%	👎
More people would consider importing a pet from outside the UK	47%	36%	👎
More people would consider getting a puppy from a puppy farm	29%	18%	👎
More dogs are left alone for five or more hours on a typical week day	30%	20%	👎
Less dogs are left alone for five or more hours on a typical week day*	7%	11%	👍

South of England

Fewer people have not heard of the Animal Welfare Act	21%	24%	👍
Fewer cats are living with one or more cats	37%	42%	👍
More cats are microchipped*	83%	74%	👍
Fewer rabbits are fed muesli style food as part of their main diet	10%	18%	👍
More dogs are microchipped	95%	92%	👍

Concluding thoughts



PDSA has provided a safety net for UK pet owners in times of financial hardship and crisis for over 100 years

The 10th annual PAW Report is a milestone in PDSA's ongoing journey to assess and improve pet wellbeing in the UK. It demonstrates our commitment to providing high quality evidence on how well the UK's pet dogs, cats and rabbits are having their 5 Welfare Needs met, and again conveys the importance of our work with many partners in the veterinary, animal welfare and pet industry sectors in continuing to drive positive change. It also comes at a time of acute global upheaval.

The 10th Report prompts reflection. When the first PAW Report was published in 2011, there was optimism and ambition for the future of health and wellbeing for the UK's pets. We were in the early stages of implementation of the progressive UK Animal Welfare Acts. Each had introduced a legal duty of care, requiring that owners meet their pet's 5 Welfare Needs. There was no accompanying Government surveillance of pet wellbeing, so PDSA set out to fill this evidence gap and use it to help motivate necessary actions and interventions.

10 years on, the PAW Report remains a unique dataset and the largest annual survey of pet wellbeing in the UK

Crucially, it has enabled us to benchmark progress and monitor trends. In some areas, there have been improvements – the percentage of owned dogs and cats that are microchipped, for example, and the diets fed to pet rabbits. Continuing focus is needed in other areas, such as ensuring the social and environmental needs of pet cats are properly met, to protect them from chronic stress and stress-related disease.

Overall, while we can be encouraged by the areas of pet wellbeing that have improved, there is still much work to be done to ensure our pets receive the care they deserve. As we have said since the first PAW Report, 'love is not enough'. Meeting their 5 Welfare Needs is the translation of our love that is meaningful from our pets' perspective.

As well as contributing to our long-view of pet wellbeing, the 10th Report has been used to gain early indications of how the COVID-19 pandemic

may be affecting the UK's pets. For example, we have not found a significant change in the percentage of UK adults owning a pet dog, cat or rabbit, despite media concerns of large scale impulse acquisition linked to lockdown. 8% of dog owners said their pet gained weight during the national lockdown in spring, which is against a backdrop of an existing pet obesity epidemic. Such results demonstrate the value of having robust pet welfare surveillance that can be applied at times of acute need.

Importantly, this 'pandemic PAW Report' has also provided evidence of the critical roles that our pets can play in alleviating stress and helping safeguard our health and wellbeing. Half of owners (49%) said that owning a pet has been 'a lifeline' during lockdown and 10% (owning 2.1 million pets) say that they are increasingly worried about how they'll pay for veterinary bills if their pet falls ill or gets injured. PDSA has provided a safety net for UK pet owners in times of financial hardship and crisis for over 100 years, but this is increasingly difficult with the reduced capacity of our hospitals due to social distancing measures, the predicted surge in demand for our services as more pet owners become unemployed and the critical drop in our income. For every million additional benefits claimants,

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we anticipate 50,000 additional pets will be in need of our services. It will be important that we continue to closely monitor and provide ongoing evidence and insight, and ensure we remain on the lookout for any adverse impacts of primarily a human health crisis, on the health and welfare of the UK's pets.

While society battles with the effects of COVID-19, PDSA will stay true to our vision of 'a lifetime of wellbeing for every pet'. Society doesn't stop caring about pet wellbeing in times of crisis – in fact, often quite the opposite. How we all respond to the pandemic will be key, with an emerging societal ambition to 'Build Back Better'. For me, this will link to significant sustainability, climate and biodiversity challenges that were present before COVID-19. Looking ahead to the next 10 years, PDSA, the veterinary professions and all those who have such a positive impact on pet welfare should work and make it a collective ambition not to forget our companion animals, and ensure that pet wellbeing is recognised and acted upon as a marker of our collective social progress.

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

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