

PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

REPORT

2026

Key takeaways

THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

What pet owners
don't know
about their pets





The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report is the UK's largest assessment of pet wellbeing. Compiled in partnership with YouGov, the insight it provides allows us to estimate pet population numbers, track trends and understand how people care for their pets.

With this information we are able to plan our services, innovate and identify how we can help more pets in need. Now in its **15th year**, the Report's findings consistently inform government policy, inspire new approaches to pet wellbeing issues, and prompt press coverage, positioning us as a voice of authority in the pet welfare sector.

In partnership with
YouGov[®]
What the world thinks

Cats are the
most popular
UK pet in 2026



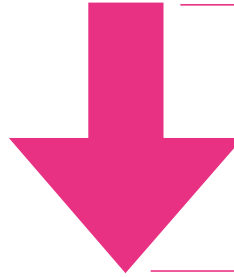
Key takeaways on Pet population

The estimated UK **dog** population has now fallen to 10.2 million dogs, after reaching a peak last year of 11.1 million.

This makes them the second most popular UK pet, with **cats** returning as the most popular, with a relatively unchanged population this year of 11.3 million.

The estimated population of UK **rabbits** has also remained stable at around 700K.

Pet population

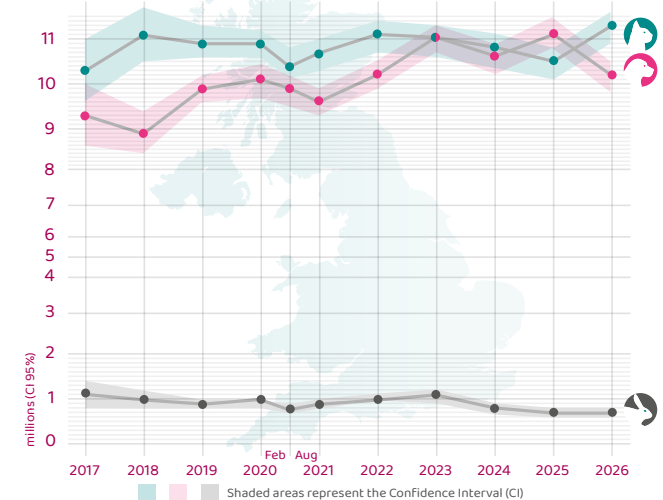


After reaching its peak in 2025 (**11.1m**) the estimated population of dogs in the UK has now fallen to

10.2m

The population of cats (**11.3m**) and rabbits (**700K**) remains steady.

UK pet populations over last ten years



2

Key takeaways on Getting a pet

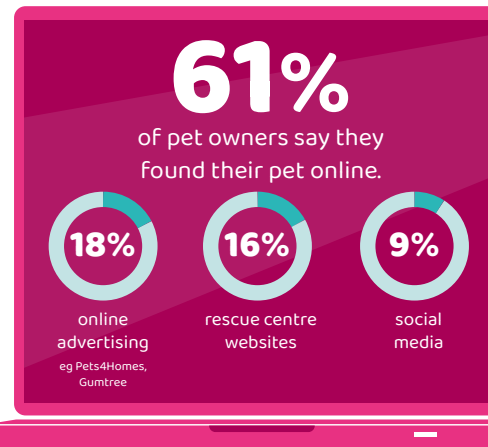
Dogs were most likely to be acquired from breeders, while rescue and rehoming centres were the most common source for cats and rabbits.

Most pet owners are finding their pet online. People are most commonly getting pets for companionship, showcasing the key importance of human-animal bonds.

There is a worrying increase in pet owners doing no research before getting a new pet, and a decrease in those considering the cost of pet ownership.

These findings highlight the importance of carefully considering the responsibilities, costs and welfare needs of a pet before making the decision to acquire a pet.

Getting a pet



Getting a pet

There has been a significant **increase** in the number of pet owners saying **they didn't do any research** before they got their pet.

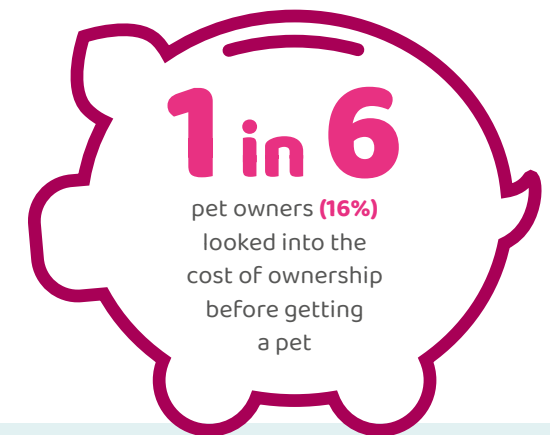


This was higher among cat owners (27%) and rabbit owners (22%) than dog owners (17%).

Getting a pet



Getting a pet





3

Key takeaways on Dog welfare needs

Our findings highlight that good welfare is about more than preventing health problems; it is also about enabling dogs to thrive.

Everyday decisions around treats, exercise and off-lead freedom can influence a dog's physical health, behaviour and quality of life.

Owners can support their dog's wellbeing by monitoring body condition and weight, providing appropriate physical and mental stimulation, and providing appropriate training and developing their dog's recall skills so they can enjoy greater freedom safely when out and about.

Dog welfare needs

42%
said they gave
treats to make **their dog**
feel happy.

30%
said they did so
because it makes **them**
feel happy.



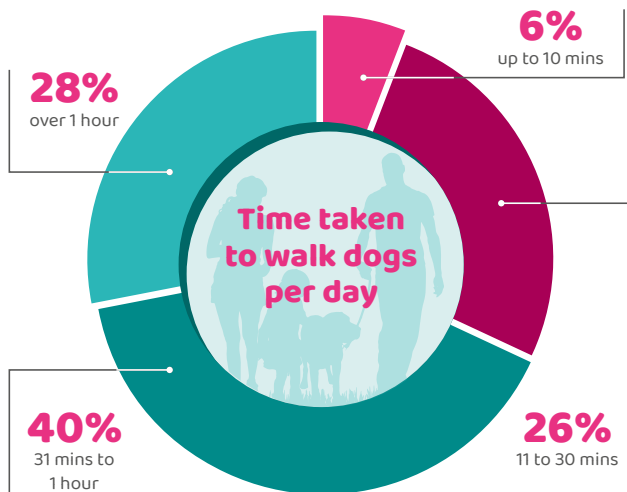
Dog welfare needs

Almost
1 in 3
dogs (**32%**)
were reported
to be walked for
30 minutes
or less
each day.

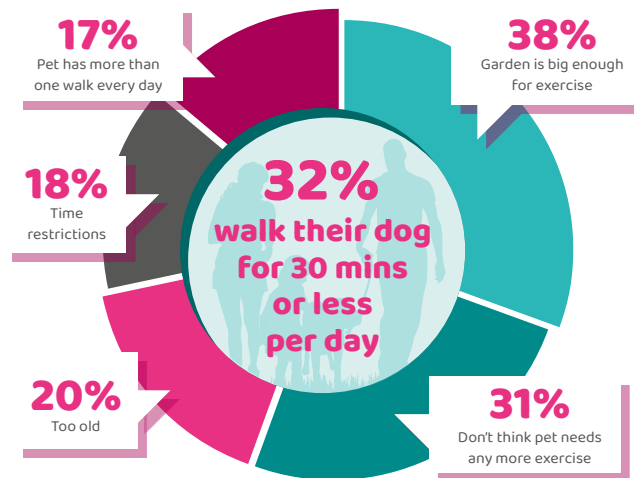


Everyday decisions around
treats, exercise and off-lead
freedom can influence a dog's
physical health, behaviour
and quality of life.

Dog welfare needs



Dog welfare needs





4

Key takeaways on Cat welfare needs

Cat ownership continues to reflect the importance owners place on safety and companionship from their pet.

More cats are being kept indoors, with less cats having both indoor and outdoor access. Alongside this, treats are often used as part of the cat-owner bond, which could have implications for weight gain where exercise is reduced and calories are increasing.

Pedigree cats are often chosen for their perceived temperament and appearance.

While many owners are engaged with their cats' wellbeing, there are still opportunities to strengthen support around weight management, nutrition, recognising behavioural concerns and making informed decisions around breed health when choosing a cat.

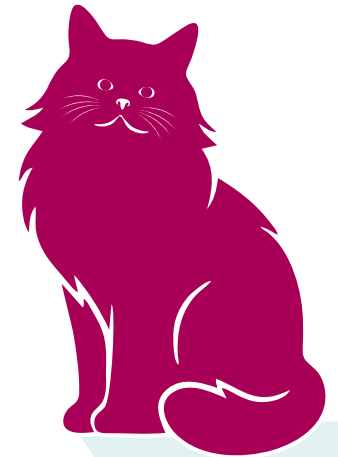
Cat welfare needs

38% of cat owners were significantly less likely to seek advice or take action to address their cat's behaviour, compared with dog owners (**53%**).



Cat welfare needs

52% of pedigree cat owners said temperament, character or personality was a reason for choosing the breed, compared with **13%** of domestic cat owners.



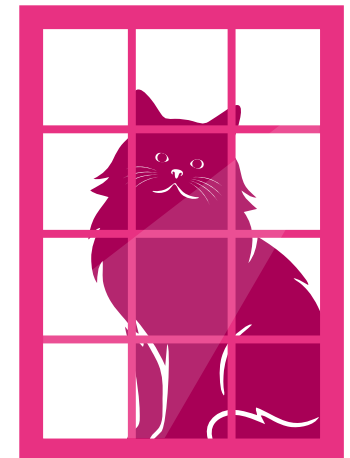
Cat welfare needs

48% of cat owners gave their pet treats to make them feel happy.



Cat welfare needs

Indoor-only living has increased slightly to **29%** in 2026 from **26%** in 2020, while the proportion of cats with both indoor and outdoor access has fallen from **72%** to **68%**.





5

Key takeaways on **Rabbit welfare needs**

Overall, the findings highlight positive trends in some aspects of rabbit welfare, including providing the right diet and access to an exercise area.

However, challenges remain around healthcare, pellet feeding, time spent in hutches and social companionship.

Supporting owners with clear, practical information could help more rabbits experience a good quality of life.

Rabbit welfare needs

43%
of rabbit owners, overall, reported that their rabbit spent between 11 and 23 hours a day in their hutch.

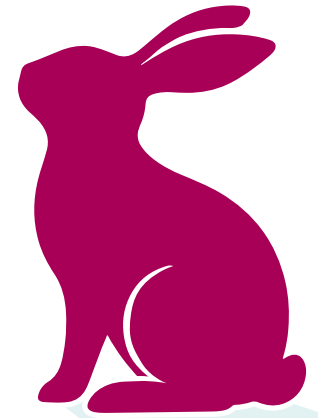
2%
of owners said their rabbit spent all their time there.



Rabbit welfare needs

43%

of rabbits were reported to live on their own.



Rabbit welfare needs



1 in 4

rabbits **(25%)** were not currently registered with a veterinary practice



Rabbit welfare needs

Hay and rabbit pellets were the most commonly reported main foods fed to rabbits. **(80%** for both).

This was followed by fresh greens such as vegetables or herbs **(77%)**.





6

Key takeaways on Preventive healthcare

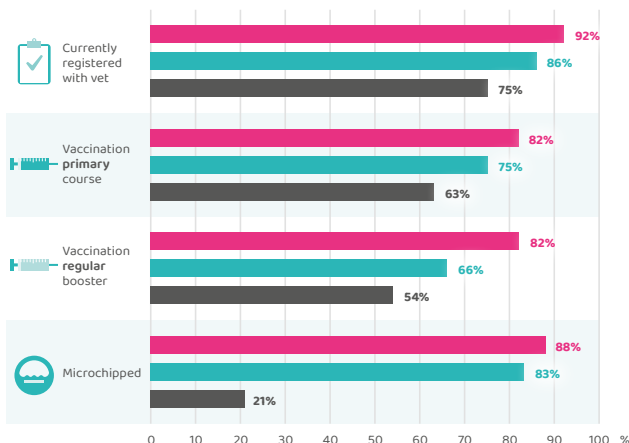
Preventive healthcare is one of the most important ways owners can help their pets live happy, healthy lives.

From vaccinations and parasite control, to microchipping and regular veterinary care, simple preventive measures can make a big difference to a pet's wellbeing.

Generally, pet owners are ensuring their pets access the preventive care they need, but there are still gaps across all species, especially in terms of microchipping and vaccinations.

The findings highlight the value of helping owners make informed choices and take proactive steps to protect their pets throughout their lives.

Preventive health



Preventive health Neutering



69%

of dog owners reported their dogs were neutered.

89%

of cat owners reported their cats were neutered.



This was an increase from **64%** in 2025.



72%

of rabbit owners reported their rabbits were neutered.



Preventive health Booster vaccinations



82%

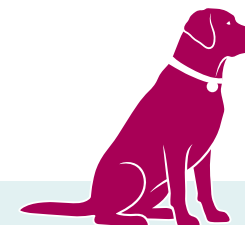
of dogs received regular booster vaccinations.

66%

of cats received regular booster vaccinations.



This was an increase from **79%** in 2025.

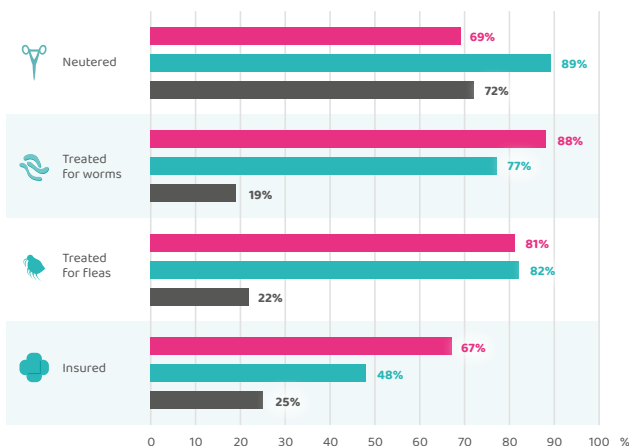


54%

of rabbits received regular booster vaccinations.



Preventive health



Preventive health Microchipping



88%

of dog owners reported their dogs were microchipped.

83%

of cat owners reported their cats were microchipped.



This was an increase from **82%** in 2025.

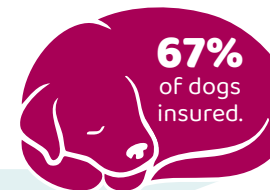


This was an increase from **78%** in both 2024 and 2025.

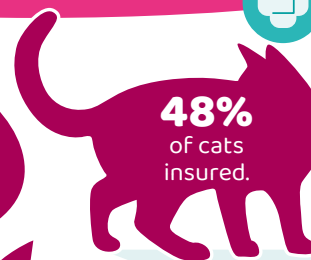
Preventive health Insurance



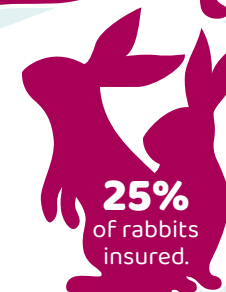
67%
of dogs insured.



48%
of cats insured.



25%
of rabbits insured.



Key takeaways on Responsible dog ownership

Dogs are an important part of millions of UK families, but responsible ownership is essential to supporting their welfare and helping them live safely and happily alongside people and other animals.

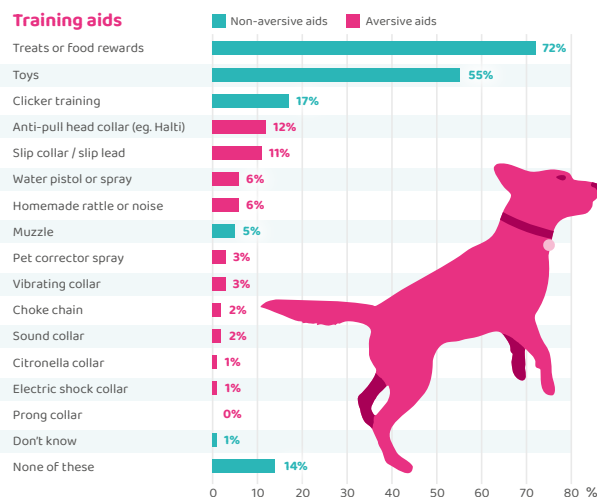
The findings suggest that while many owners are embracing reward-based training methods, concerning numbers continue to use aversive techniques.

There is an opportunity to support owners with greater awareness of appropriate training methods, dog behaviour and responsible ownership.

Creating safer communities for both people and dogs requires a focus on prevention and education, alongside evidence-based approaches to dog control.

These approaches should consider the range of factors that can influence dog behaviour, rather than focusing on breed alone.

Dog ownership



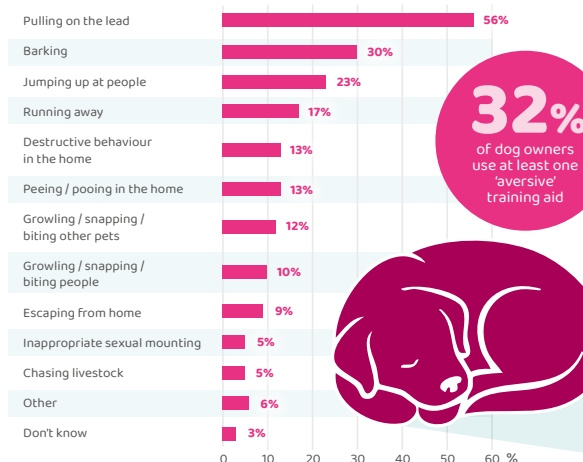
Dog ownership

Only **6%** of dog owners said they had learnt about the **canine ladder of communication**, compared with **4%** of cat owners and **4%** of rabbit owners.



Dog ownership

Reasons for using aversive training aids



**To request the full PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report please email the team:
paw@pdsa.org.uk**

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

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