

LONELY DEPRESSED RABBITS
OVERWEIGHT PETS
UNVACCINATED
UNNEED
LACK OF PRE-PURCHASE RESEARCH
PETS
FALLING AWARENESS OF THE
WELFARE NEEDS
MISUNDERSTOOD
COST UNTRAINED
OF OWNERSHIP DOGS
33,283 PEOPLE SURVEYED

PAW

PDSA ANIMAL WELLBEING

REPORT

2015

*The essential
insight into the
wellbeing of
UK pets*



Since our vital work began in 1917

we have had a huge impact on the health and wellbeing of the UK pet population, providing around 100 million free treatments to more than 20 million sick and injured pets. Today, PDSA's work goes beyond just treating pets through our UK-wide network of 51 Pet Hospitals and 380 Pet Practices; we are a leading authority on pet wellbeing and are committed to educating pet owners about the five welfare needs and all aspects of responsible pet ownership.

YouGov is one of the UK's leading research companies, providing accurate insights into what people are thinking and doing all over the world, all of the time.

The most quoted research agency in the UK, YouGov has 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 fifth PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report, monitoring changes in pet welfare issues across the UK.



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Introducing the PAW Report 2015

This is the fifth PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report. Since its launch in 2011, we have surveyed over 53,000 pet owners, veterinary professionals, children and young people, giving us all a huge insight into the wellbeing of pets in the UK.

We have identified and monitored the issues facing our nation's pets and raised awareness of them to drive positive behaviour change. While there have been many encouraging areas of change in recent years across many aspects of pet wellbeing, such as improved diets for rabbits and increasing levels of preventive care, there is still much to be done to improve the state of our pet nation's health and wellbeing.

Our previous *PAW Reports* have focused on the most popular companion pets in the UK; dogs, cats and rabbits. This year, for the first time, we have broadened our research to recognise the increasingly diverse pet population of the UK, by investigating the welfare of other types of pets. More detailed results of this wider research will be published online at pdsa.org.uk

This Report has found that the number of pet owners familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts is at an all-time low. Without knowledge of the five welfare needs enshrined within this legislation, owners may not be providing everything their pets need. Pets do so much to enrich and improve our lives

but by failing to meet their needs, their physical and mental wellbeing can be severely compromised.

This year, the *PAW Report* is tailored towards veterinary professionals, allowing us to present a more in-depth analysis of how well the UK pet-owning public are meeting the welfare needs of their pets. The post-legislative assessment of the Animal Welfare Act in December 2010 highlighted the need for improved awareness of legislative requirements among pet owners. We hope that by sharing these results, it will encourage further joint working between PDSA and the wider veterinary profession to continue raising awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts and the five welfare needs. Further collaboration will help us to facilitate behavioural and cultural changes in pet ownership that will lead to a much happier, much healthier pet nation.



Together we can make a difference.



Methodology

The PAW Report 2015 is the largest, most comprehensive and robust insight into the state of our pet nation to date.

Respondents were surveyed about their pets and questions were grouped around each of the five animal welfare needs, to gauge an owner's level of knowledge in each area. An ideal care scenario for each species and each welfare need has been formulated, based on the Codes of Practice for companion animal species, professional opinion and evidence.

This year, for the first time, we conducted an online survey which was open to all pet owners. We were mindful that people who may take part in this survey were more likely to be engaged pet owners (for example, those who follow animal charities on social media) due to the channels we used to publicise the survey. To ensure accurate, robust results, we also utilised the YouGov panel survey, as we have in previous PAW Reports. For this reason, where comparisons have been made to results from earlier PAW Reports, only YouGov panel survey data has been used as this methodology has been consistent across each annual repeat of the Report, allowing for direct comparisons. Any changes referenced in the Report are statistically significant. Unlike the owner open survey, the YouGov panel survey was not self-selecting, so it is also the most representative sample of pet owners in the UK.

Public method:

The total sample size was **31,584** pet owners aged 18+ who live within the UK.

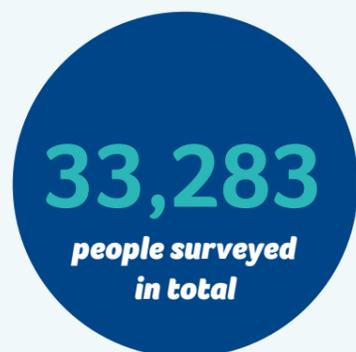
Fieldwork was undertaken between 11 December 2014 and 26 March 2015. The survey was carried out online and responses were achieved through a combination of two sources. **5,152** owners of cats, dogs and rabbits were interviewed via YouGov's online research panel. Additionally, a link to the survey was publicised via PDSA's contact database, website and social media, to achieve a further **26,432** pet owner responses. The figures have been weighted to be representative of the population by pet species and the owner's gender, age and geographic region.

Professional method:

The survey was carried out face-to-face to a sample of **1,127** veterinary professionals, including vets, vet nurses, veterinary care assistants, and vet and veterinary nursing students. *Figures are not weighted.*

In addition, a survey was carried out online through an open link. Fieldwork was undertaken between 18 September and 10 October 2014.

Total sample size was **572** veterinary professionals. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

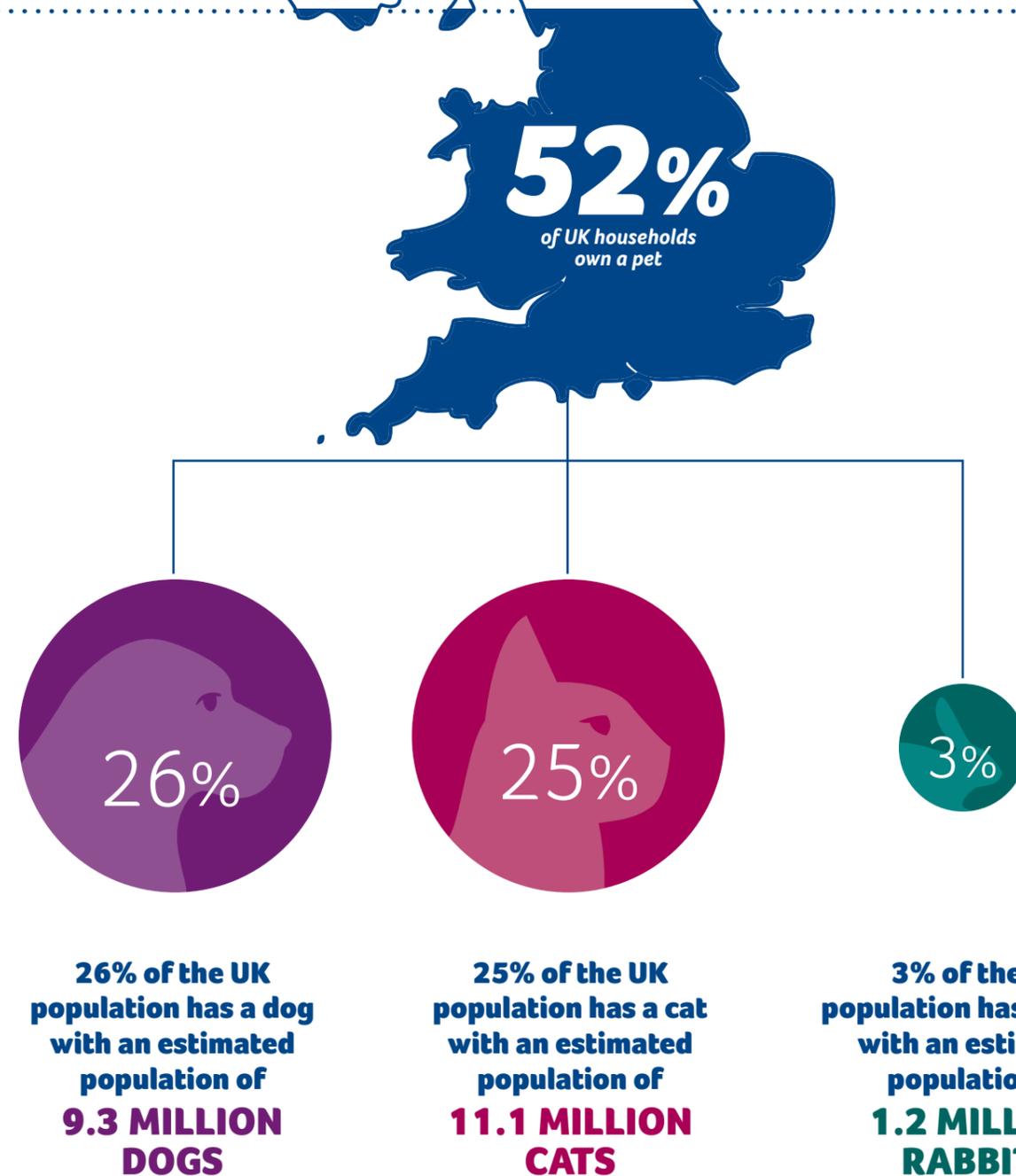


- 13,057 dog owners 
- 12,334 cat owners 
- 1,200 rabbit owners 
- 1,677 owners of small pets 
- 1,055 fish owners 
- 1,115 bird owners 
- 1,092 reptile owners 
- 54 owners of an unspecified species of pet 
- 1,699 veterinary professionals 

Profiling



The UK pet population



The five welfare needs

What are the five welfare needs and why do they matter?

The Animal Welfare Acts 2006* (2011 in Northern Ireland) introduced a legal 'duty of care' for all pet owners to meet the welfare needs of their pets.

These requirements were split into five areas, which act as a simple framework to help owners meet their pets' needs and ensure that their pets experience both physical and mental wellbeing.

The post-legislative assessment of the 2006 Animal Welfare Act in December 2010 reflected that more needed to be done not only to educate the public on their responsibilities in terms of their duty of care, but also to raise awareness of the existence of the legislative requirements among pet owners.

The five welfare needs



Environment

the need for a suitable environment



Diet

the need for a suitable diet



Behaviour

the need to be able to express normal behaviour



Companionship

the need to live with, or apart from, other animals



Health

the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease



* When referring to the Animal Welfare Acts, this includes the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* covering England and Wales, the *Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006* which applies to Scotland, and the *Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011*.

What are the Codes of Practice?

Codes of Practice provide owners and animal keepers with information on how to meet the welfare needs of their animals, as required under the Animal Welfare Acts 2006 (2011 in Northern Ireland). England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each have their own codes:

- England has codes of practice for the welfare of dogs, cats, horses (including other equids) and privately kept non-human primates.
- Wales has codes of practice for the welfare of cats, dogs, rabbits and equids.
- Scotland has codes of practice for the welfare of dogs, cats and equids.
- Northern Ireland has codes of practice for the welfare of cats, dogs, rabbits, horses and primates.

The Codes can be used in court to help guide on care standards that ought to be reasonably provided by animal keepers and owners. In 2014 alone, the RSPCA successfully implemented 82,746 welfare notices to prevent suffering and secured 2,419 convictions.

(Reference: RSPCA Annual Review 2014)

When formulating the ideal care scenario for each welfare need, we referred to these Codes of Practice, along with professional experience and advice.



How valuable are the five welfare needs in educating pet owners?

Professional opinion



97%

of veterinary professionals believe there is value in encouraging owners to understand and follow the five welfare needs.

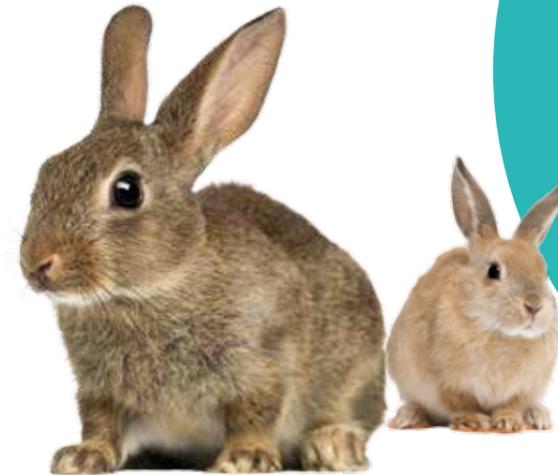


93%

of veterinary professionals believe that learning about the five welfare needs should be a compulsory part of the curriculum taught in UK schools.

The Animal Welfare Acts

When referring to the Animal Welfare Acts, this includes the *Animal Welfare Act 2006* covering England and Wales, the *Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006* which applies to Scotland, and the *Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011*.

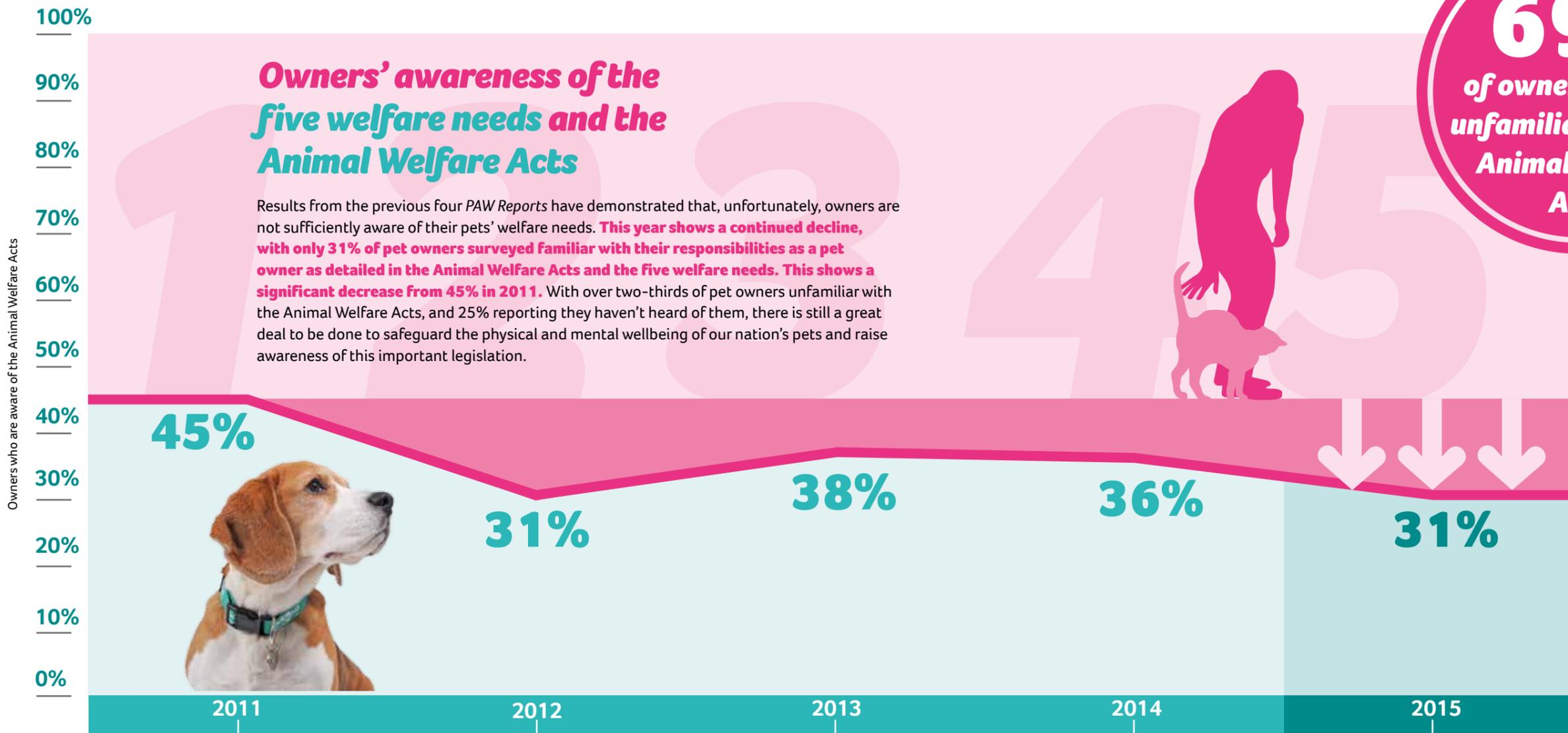


69%

of owners remain unfamiliar with the Animal Welfare Acts

Owners' awareness of the five welfare needs and the Animal Welfare Acts

Results from the previous four PAW Reports have demonstrated that, unfortunately, owners are not sufficiently aware of their pets' welfare needs. **This year shows a continued decline, with only 31% of pet owners surveyed familiar with their responsibilities as a pet owner as detailed in the Animal Welfare Acts and the five welfare needs. This shows a significant decrease from 45% in 2011.** With over two-thirds of pet owners unfamiliar with the Animal Welfare Acts, and 25% reporting they haven't heard of them, there is still a great deal to be done to safeguard the physical and mental wellbeing of our nation's pets and raise awareness of this important legislation.



What can WE do?
See Next Steps on page 58 for how to get involved

The Animal Welfare Acts were introduced in 2006 (2011 in Northern Ireland) and cover animal welfare law. Within the law pet owners have a legal duty of care toward their pets. How familiar would you say you are with your responsibilities as a pet owner, as detailed in the Animal Welfare Acts?

Key findings

Below are some of the key findings from this year's research. Following on from this, we'll look at each welfare need in more detail and how well those needs are being met by the pet-owning public for cats, dogs and rabbits.



Owners

- The vast majority of pet owners continue to underestimate the lifetime costs for their chosen pet, with 12% of all pet owners surveyed believing that their pet would only cost them up to £500 over the pet's entire lifetime.
- Over 4.5 million owners did no research at all before taking on their pet.
- 22% of owners would consider getting a puppy from a puppy farm.
- Over a third of pet owners (36%) believe the most important pet welfare issue is people choosing the wrong pet for their lifestyle.
- Only 4% of pet owners take advice from a vet before taking on a pet.



Dogs

- Over 2.7 million dogs in the UK not given the chance to exercise off the lead outside the home or garden every day
- Over 2.6 million dogs receive scraps or leftovers as their main meal
- 60% of dogs – around 5.5 million – never attending training classes within their first six months of life, a significant increase from 50% in 2011
- Around 2.3 million dogs are left alone for five hours or more on a weekday
- 28% of dog owners believe it is acceptable to leave a dog home alone for 6–10 hours on a typical day
- 83% of dog owners report that their dog has been microchipped, a marked increase from 70% in 2011



Cats

- 24% of cats – around 2.6 million – are now living an indoor-only life, compared to 15% in 2011
- Many cats have to share their resources with other cats in the household:
 - 50% have to share their litter tray
 - 58% have to share their food and water bowls
- Over 4.5 million cats currently live in multi-cat households.
- 92% of cat owners have had their cat neutered



Rabbits

- 97% of veterinary professionals believe that rabbit hutches smaller than a recommended size should be banned from sale
- The main types of food rabbits eat are now:
 - fresh greens/vegetables
 - hay
 - pellet food
- More than half (57%) of rabbit owners report that their rabbit lives alone – equating to around 680,000 rabbits
- Rabbits that eat rabbit muesli as a main source of food are significantly fewer in number from 49% in 2011 to 29%

Environment

How well informed do pet owners feel about the environmental needs of their pets?

	Dogs	92%
	Cats	90%
	Rabbits	94%

Over 2.7 million dogs aren't given the chance to exercise off the lead outside the home or garden every day

24% of cats (around 2.6 million) are now living an indoor-only life

97% of veterinary professionals believe that rabbit hutches smaller than a recommended size should be banned from sale



- **Own dog bed where they can rest undisturbed.**
- **Poisonous or hazardous items in the home or garden stored safely out of reach.**
- **Opportunity to exercise out of the home or garden on a daily basis.**
- **Safe vehicular travel – on the back seat secured with a seatbelt in a comfortable, fitted dog crate of appropriate size or behind a dog guard.**

Toxins

When it comes to keeping poisonous or hazardous items out of reach, it would seem this is one area in particular where improvements could be made. The Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS) annual report 2014 showed that there were **10,896 pet poisoning cases** involving 14,402 agents. **10% of the cases reported to them involved animals eating toxic food**, an increase from 8.4% in 2010.

Over 40% of these cases were due to chocolate, followed by *Vitis vinifera* (grapes, sultanas, raisins etc.), onions and xylitol (a sweetener in some medicines and foods including chewing gum and peanut butter). Where chocolate was involved, there was also some seasonal variation, with peaks in enquiry numbers occurring in April and December – near Easter and Christmas. 21% of all chocolate enquiries occurred in December.

Our research shows that although the number of owners feeding chocolate intended for humans to their pets has decreased slightly since 2011, 5% of dogs, 2% of cats and 1% of rabbits are still being fed chocolate intended for humans.

Of the other 14,402 agents, 42.8% involved human medicines such as ibuprofen and paracetamol, 11.8% involved pesticides, and 1.2% were due to cosmetics and toiletries. A further 11.1% of the total enquiries were due to household products such as disinfectant, fabric cleaning liquid capsules and ethylene glycol (antifreeze).

There are many potential toxic hazards in the home from which pets can be at risk as they explore their environment. This includes exposure to household products through chewing containers, licking up spills, eating medicines in handbags or food in shopping bags and medicines delivered through the post.

Lack of knowledge is a concern as even the most apparently innocuous substance can present a risk; for example, a bouquet of flowers to celebrate a family event could be lethal to a cat or a tablet routinely taken to relieve headaches misguidedly given by an owner for perceived pain in their pet. We therefore need to ensure owners are aware of these hazards and gain a better understanding of animal behaviour in order to provide a safe environment for pets.

Nicola Bates, BSc (Brunel), BSc (Open), MSc, MA, SRCS
VPIS Research Lead
Veterinary Poisons Information Service



Exercise

When it comes to exercise, two thirds of dog owners say that their dog walks or runs outside of the home or garden off their lead once a day or more, for at least ten minutes. A slightly larger proportion, 75%, report that their dog walks or runs outside for ten minutes or more once a day or more on their lead.

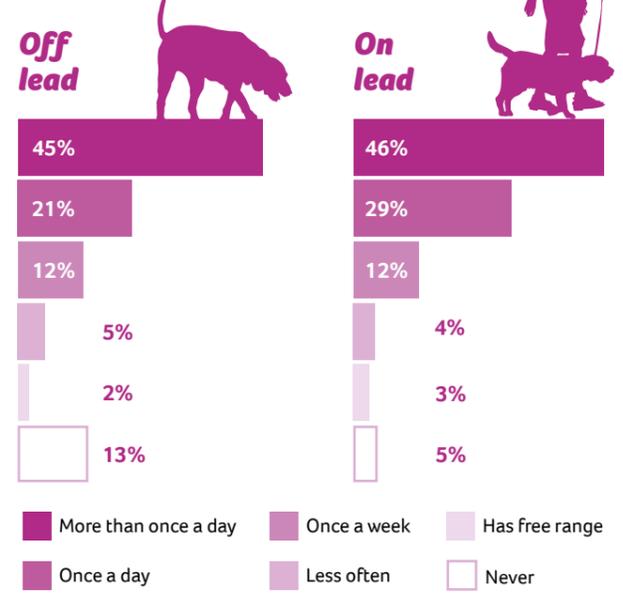
With the effects this can have on a dog's physical and mental wellbeing, why are so many people not walking their dogs?

We think it's important to understand why people don't walk their dogs, so that we can help to change this behaviour. When asked, the public told us:

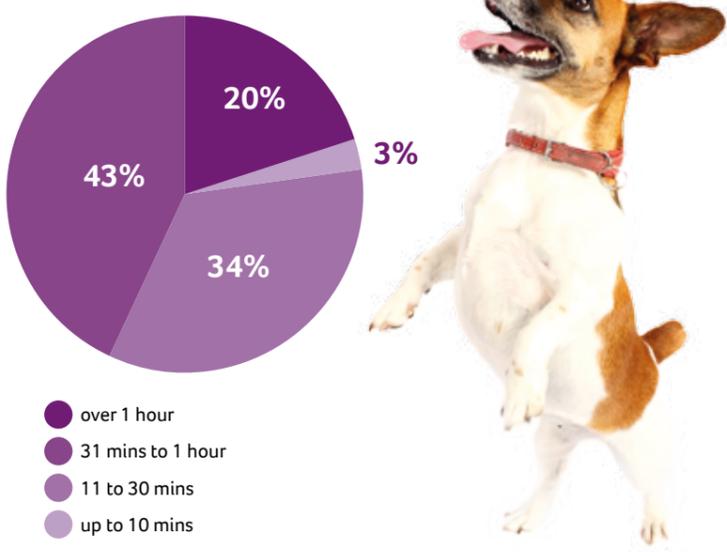
- My dog has health problems
- Garden is big enough for exercise
- I have health problems

* Findings based on the full sample of pet owners, including the open link survey.

How often does your dog walk/run outside the home or garden for 10 minutes or more?



How long is this for?



Travel

There has been little change when it comes to car travel for dogs since the first Report in 2011. When dogs are travelling in a vehicle, they **most commonly sit on the back seat without a seatbelt**. 20% of dogs still travel in this way, leaving them free to move around the car, potentially distracting the driver. Only 15% travel either in the boot behind a dog guard or on the backseat with a seat belt. Owners who are more familiar with the Animal Welfare Act are more likely to say that their dog sits on the back seat with a seat belt than those unfamiliar with the Act, 18% compared with 13%. **Further education is needed to ensure that both owners and dogs are travelling safely together.**



There has been a significant increase in the number of cats now being kept indoors as house cats



- Somewhere comfortable to sleep and rest undisturbed.
- Safe places to hide – including access to high-up areas.
- In multi-cat households, provision of as many resources as the number of cats, plus one, positioned around the house so they aren't forced to share.



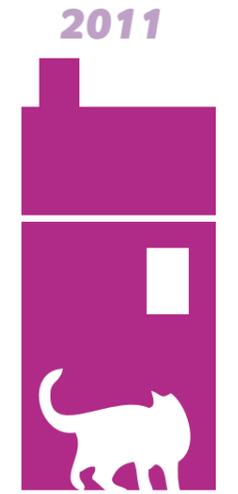
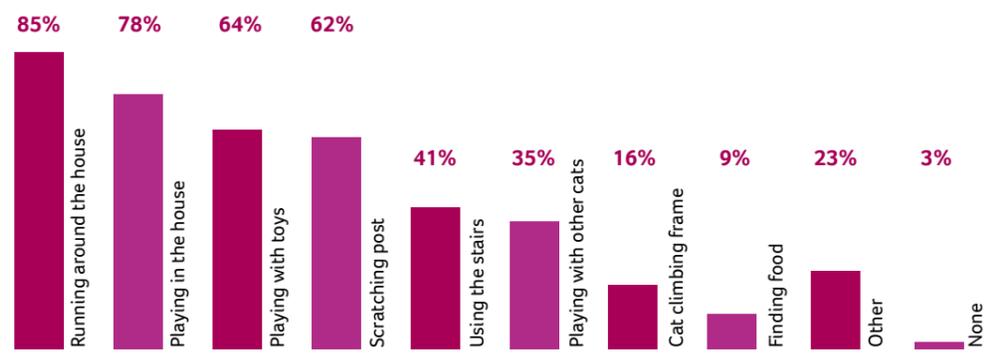
Our findings show that many cats have to share their resources with other cats in the household, with 50% of cats in multi-cat households having to share their litter tray and 58% having to share their food and water bowls, which is likely to be causing stress and anxiety.

There has been a significant increase in the number of cats being kept indoors as house cats, which could not only be causing further stress, but contributing to feline obesity.

24% of cats – around 2.6 million – are now living an indoor-only life, compared to 15% in 2011. 74% of cats can access both indoors and outdoors, which is a decrease from 83% in 2011.



What opportunities for exercise does your cat have every day?





- **A hutch large enough to allow them to lie down and stretch out comfortably in all directions, tall enough for them to stand up on their back legs without their ears touching the top, and long enough to allow at least three hops from one end to the other.**
- **A run should be tall enough to allow the rabbits to stretch up to their full height and they should be able to run, rather than just hop.**
- **Rabbits should have access to their run at all times.**
- **To get enough exercise, pet rabbits should have as much space as possible.**

There have been improvements in the amount of space rabbits are provided with since the first report in 2011. Rabbits are predominantly living in larger hutches but 7% still live in a hutch that is far too small. 49% of rabbits are able to do three or more hops across their living quarters, and increasingly rabbits seem to have free run of the house, 19%, from 17% in 2011, or free run of the garden, 17%.

This is welcome news, as 97% of veterinary professionals believe that rabbit hutches smaller than a recommended size should be banned from sale.

Half of rabbit owners report their rabbits spend three hours or more outside their hutch on a typical day. Relatively small proportions, 5%, say their rabbits are not outside their hutch at all on a typical day, or that their rabbits never leave their hutch at all.

97%

of veterinary professionals believe that rabbit hutches smaller than a recommended size should be banned from sale.



Diet

How well informed do pet owners feel about the dietary needs of their pets?

	Dogs	93%
	Cats	90%
	Rabbits	93%



27% of cat owners continue to use 'common sense' when deciding how much to feed their cat

Over 2.6 million dogs receive scraps or leftovers as their main meal

29% of rabbits eat rabbit muesli as their main type of food





- **Fed a complete, commercial dog food.**
- **Treats given for training purposes or on a very occasional basis, and on days when a treat is fed, the amount of food given in a dog's main meal reduced.**
- **Age, weight and shape, alongside packet feeding guidelines and veterinary advice, taken into account when deciding how much to feed.**

The majority of dogs continue to be fed complete dry dog food, with 70% of owners feeding this as their dog's main type of food. There has been no significant change in the number of dogs being fed

scraps or leftovers, falling from 29% in 2011 to 28% this year, meaning there are still **over 2.6 million dogs that receive scraps or leftovers as their main meal.**

There's been a slight rise since 2011 in the proportion of dogs eating raw diets, from 7% to 10%, meaning 930,000 dogs are eating raw meat and bones as one of their main types of food. This increase hopefully

reflects increased numbers of owners taking an active interest in their dog's diet and providing a well-balanced, commercial diet.



The growth in the number of dogs enjoying the benefits of a biologically appropriate or natural diet is encouraging. However, what many owners fail to realise that it is not enough simply to feed raw meat and bone.

The quality and balance of ingredients is vital to canine health. Many members of the public have recognised the benefits of more natural dog food choices, and it is to be hoped that manufacturers and veterinary professionals will respond appropriately.



Jonathan Self
Co-founder of Honey's Real Dog Food



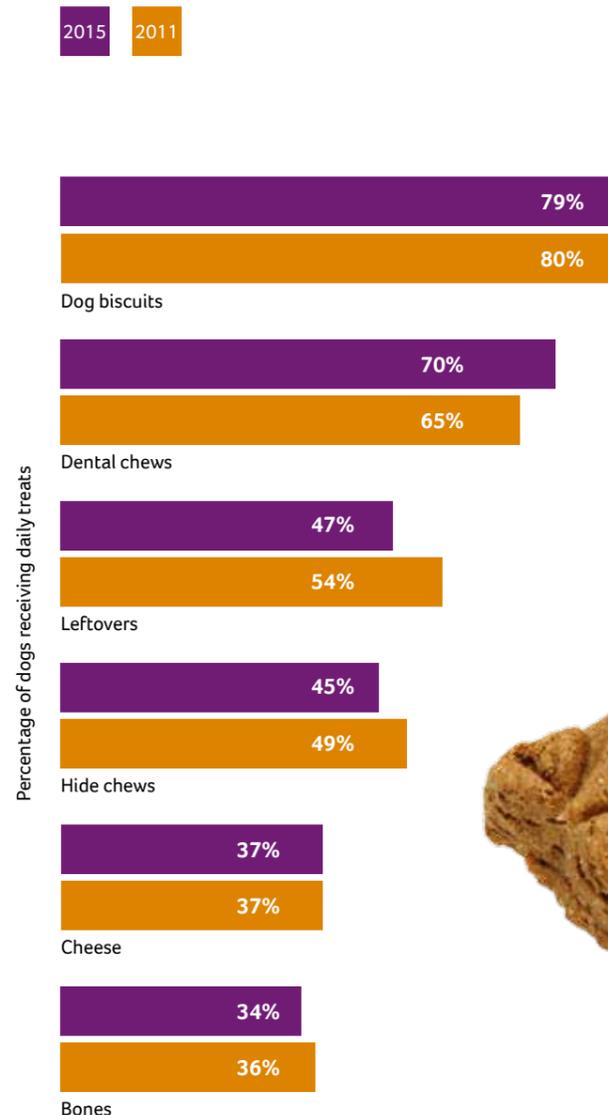
The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) Global Nutrition Committee recommends that homemade and some commercial raw meat based diets not be fed to dogs and cats, due to the increased risks of nutritional inadequacy, contamination with bacteria and parasites and the ingestion of bones, so consideration of these factors is needed.



Marge Chandler, DVM, MS, MANZCVSc, DACVN, DACVIM, DECVIM-CA, MRCVS.
Co-Chairperson
Global Nutrition Committee



Comparison of most popular treats

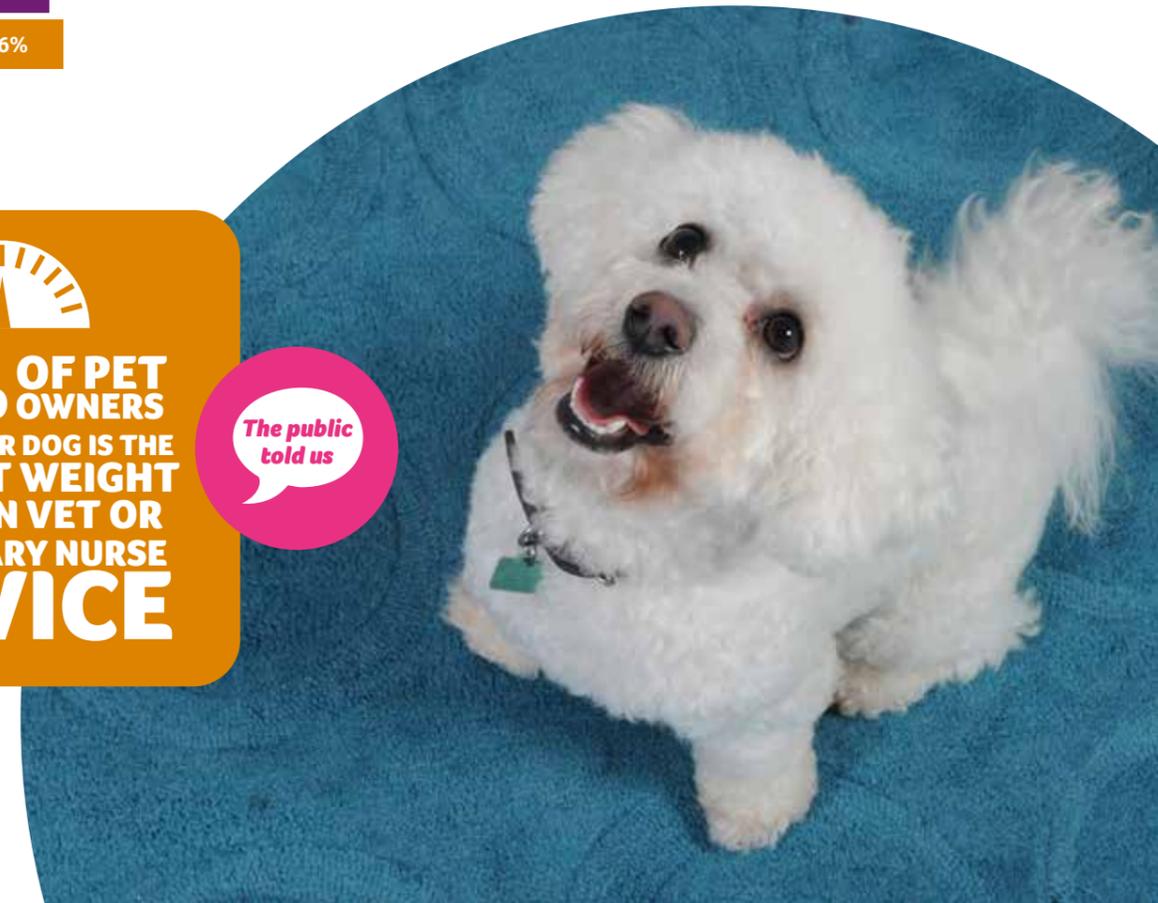


Over 3.3 million dogs receive a treat a daily treat from their owners, comparable with 2011, with the most popular dog treats being dog biscuits. See the chart (left).

Alongside these treats, dogs are also being fed toast, human biscuits, takeaways, milk, chips, cake, human chocolate and alcohol – despite the fact that some of these foods are **toxic** to pets.



55% OF PET OWNERS
DECIDE THEIR DOG IS THE CORRECT WEIGHT BASED ON VET OR VETERINARY NURSE ADVICE





- **Fed a complete commercial cat food.**
- **Only healthy treats given occasionally, if at all.**
- **Age, weight and shape, alongside packet feeding guidelines and veterinary advice, taken into account when deciding how much to feed.**

.....

Across all species, the main reasons cited by pet owners for giving their pets treats was to make them happy and provide variety for them.

.....

Cat owners are choosing to feed a mix of wet and dry food more commonly than previously, with 57% of owners stating that this is one of their cat's main food types, a rise from 50% in 2011. With this has come a drop in the amount of complete dry food being fed, down to 36% from 41%, and complete wet food, down to 32% from 35%.

Cats continue to be fed treats on a regular basis, with 43% of cats being given commercial cat treats, 24% being given cheese, and 24% being given dental treats. Many owners feed their cat treats because they believe it makes their cat feel happy (43%) and it provides variety in their diet. (41%)



- **Rabbit muesli should not be fed because it is linked to painful dental disease.**
- **Owners should vary the greens they feed their rabbits.**
- **Fruit should only be fed occasionally and in small quantities because it is high in sugar.**
- **Sugary treats should also be avoided.**
- **Packet guidelines and body weight and shape should be taken into account, coupled with veterinary advice, when deciding on types and quantities of food.**



Reference: 'Feeding rabbits and getting it right', A. Meredith, BSAVA Congress, 2013

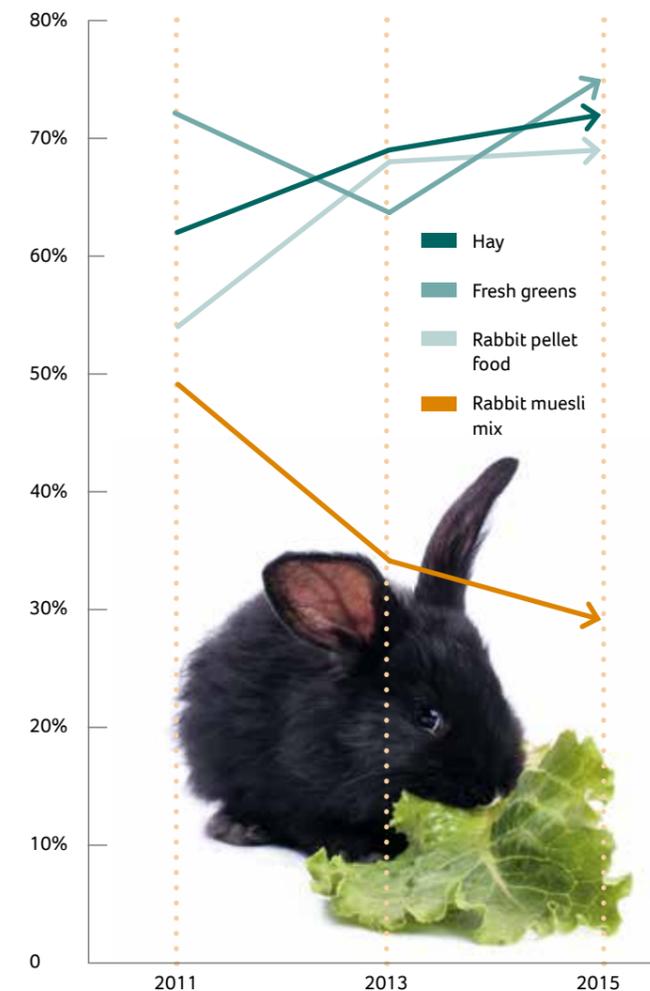
Improving picture for rabbits

There have been encouraging improvements in rabbits' diets since the first PAW Report in 2011, with the main types of food rabbits eat now being fresh greens/vegetables, hay and pellet food.

One quarter of rabbit owners still say their rabbit eats less hay or grass than the ideal amount of its own body size in a day. However, this figure has improved significantly from 42% in 2011. Meanwhile, 20% say their rabbit eats about the same or more than their own body size in hay or grass in a day. Most commonly, owners say their rabbits have constant access to hay for eating (31%) – although this has decreased slightly from 34% in 2011.

Collaborative initiatives such as **Rabbit Awareness Week** may have helped to achieve increased owner awareness and education. There have been improvements, but still 29% of rabbit owners feed rabbit muesli and 3% of owners feed no hay at all, so we must continue to work together and reduce these figures to zero to enable pet rabbits to live healthier, happier lives.

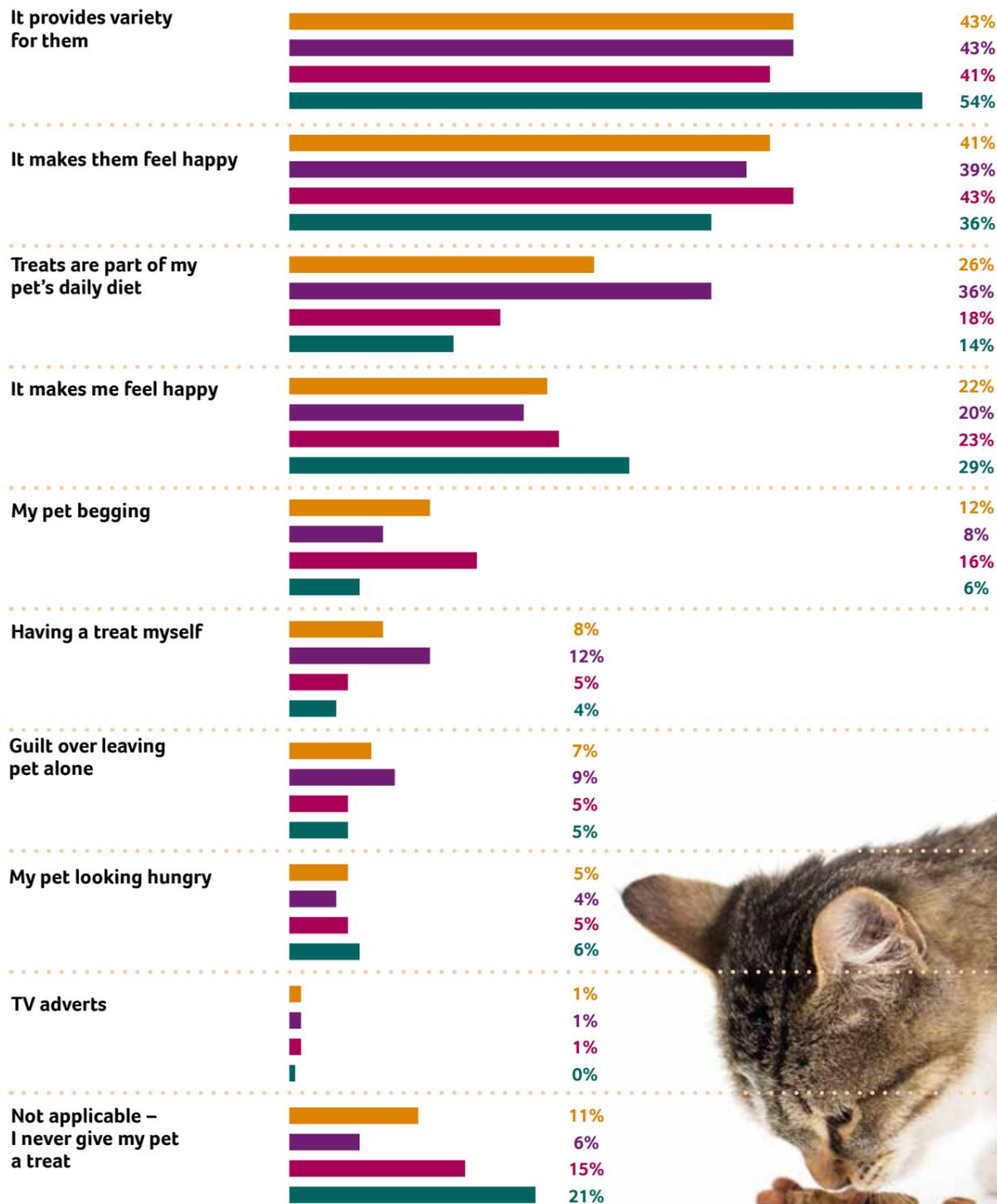
What are the main types of food your rabbits eat?



Treats

Which of the following tend to influence you to give your pet a treat?

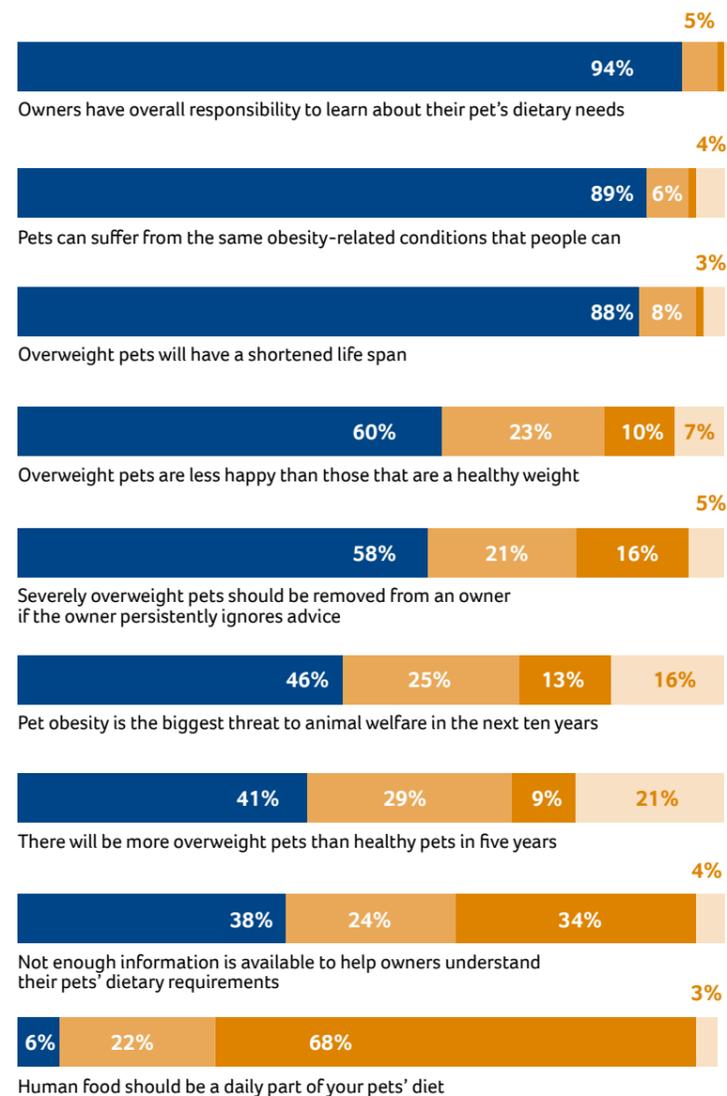
Across all species, owners are most influenced to give their pet a treat because they want to make them happy and provide variety for them.



Perceptions of pet obesity

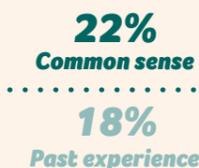
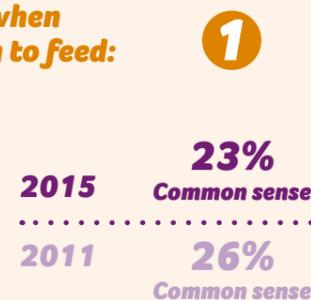


Many owners still rely on common sense or past experience when it comes to deciding how much to feed their pets. Encouragingly, dog owners are now **more likely also to consult veterinary professionals**, with 18% turning to the veterinary profession compared to 14% in 2011.



38% of pet owners believe that not enough information is available to help owners understand their pets' dietary requirements.

The main sources of information used when deciding how much to feed:



26 **Behaviour**

How well informed do pet owners feel about the behavioural needs of their pets?

-  **Dogs 90%**
-  **Cats 88%**
-  **Rabbits 91%**

60% of dogs never attending training classes within their first six months of life

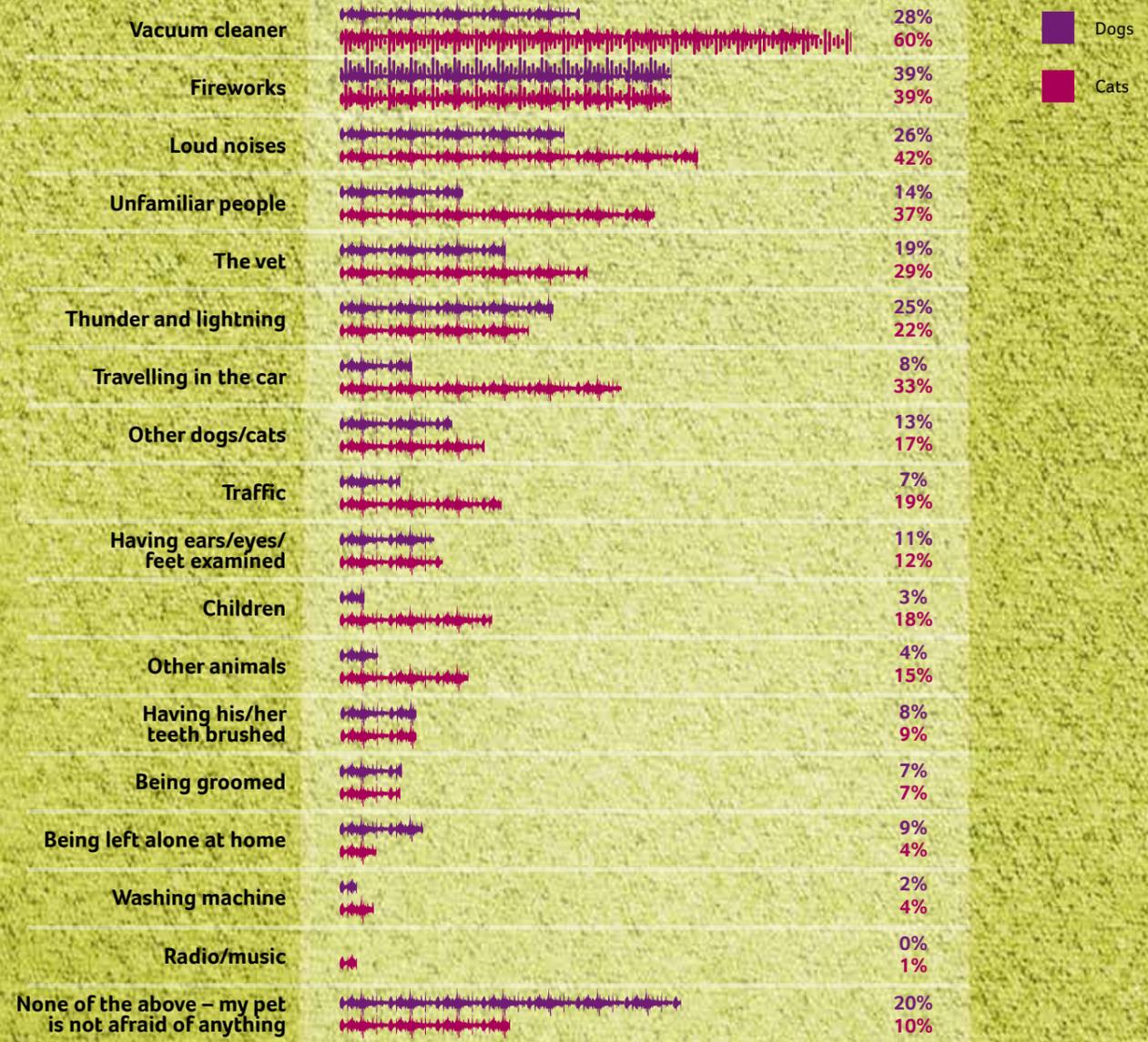
4% of cats show aggression towards people and 9% show aggression towards other pets on a weekly basis

64% of rabbits are reported to frolic/jump on a weekly basis, a behaviour commonly associated with feeling happy



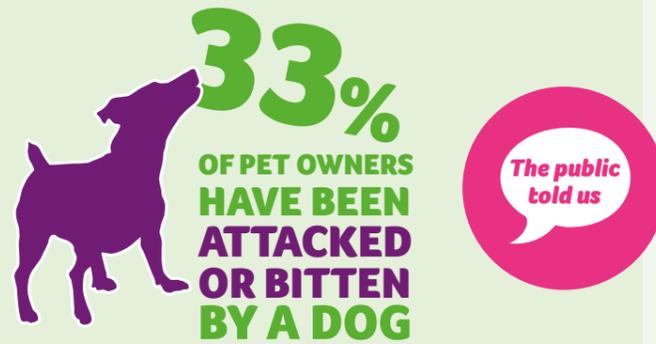
Which of the following is your pet afraid of?

Dog owners are more likely than cat owners to say that their pet is not afraid of anything





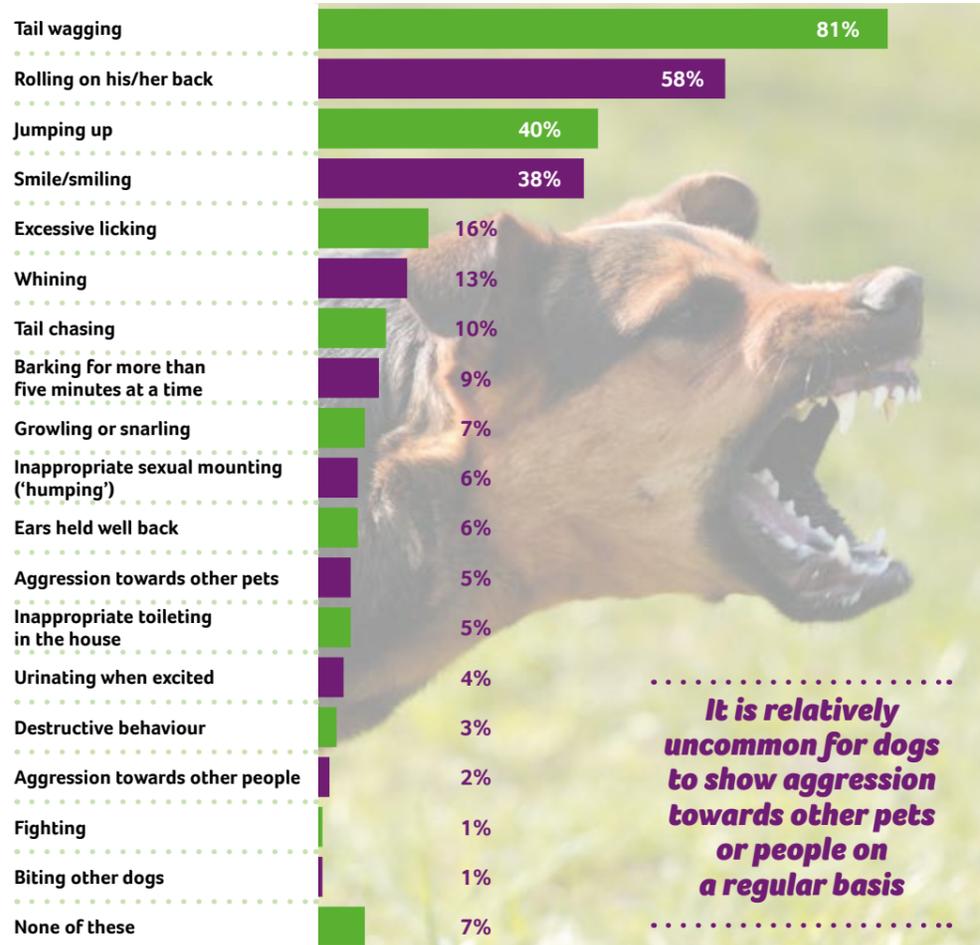
- **Socialised from a young age.**
- **Trained, using kind and effective methods.**
- **Toys to play with to allow expression of normal behaviour.**
- **Behavioural issues addressed with appropriate professional assistance.**



Very little has changed when it comes to dog behaviour. Training continues to be a vastly neglected part of a puppy's upbringing.

60% of dogs – around 5.5 million – never attended training classes within their first six months of life; a significant increase from 50% in 2011.

Which of the following does your dog do on a weekly basis?



It is relatively uncommon for dogs to show aggression towards other pets or people on a regular basis



	2015	2011
Dogs that never attended training classes in their first six months of life	60%	50%
Dogs showing aggression towards people on a weekly basis	2%	3%
Dogs showing aggression towards other pets on a weekly basis	5%	5%
Pet owners who think people should face tougher penalties if their dog attacks another person or animal	84%	87%
Pet owners who have been frightened or concerned by another dog's behaviour	64%	64%

63% of veterinary professionals have seen an **increase** in dog-on-dog attacks in the past two years.

58% of veterinary professionals have seen an **increase** in dog euthanasia due to behavioural issues in the past two years.

89% of veterinary professionals agree that socialisation and basic training classes should be compulsory for all dogs.

93% of veterinary professionals agree that determining whether a dog is dangerous should be based on 'deed not breed'.

According to this Report around 90% of cat and dog owners believe themselves to be 'well informed' regarding the behavioural needs of their pets. However, when asked 'which of the following is your pet afraid of?' it becomes clear that both dogs and cats show a high incidence and variety of fear-related issues.

It is important, therefore, to increase owner awareness that these problems may be resolved successfully by contacting their vet who can refer them, if required, to a qualified clinical animal behaviourist. Even if the pet has not been formally trained or socialised adequately there is still plenty of help out there.

Rosie Barclay, MPhil, CCAB
Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist
APBC Chair

Greater expertise and knowledge are available on how companion animals need to be cared for to maintain good welfare, but this Report indicates that veterinary professionals are being consulted more frequently about a range of behaviour problems.

Does this mean that owners are increasingly turning to their vet for help on such matters or that problem behaviours are on the increase? In either case it is essential that the profession rises to the challenge by ensuring it can offer the same level of high-quality advice on companion animal mental and social health as it does for their physical health.

Prof Daniel S. Mills, BVSc, PhD, CBiol FSB FHEA CCAB Dip ECAWBM(BM)
MRCVS European & RCVS, Recognised Specialist in Veterinary Behavioural Medicine



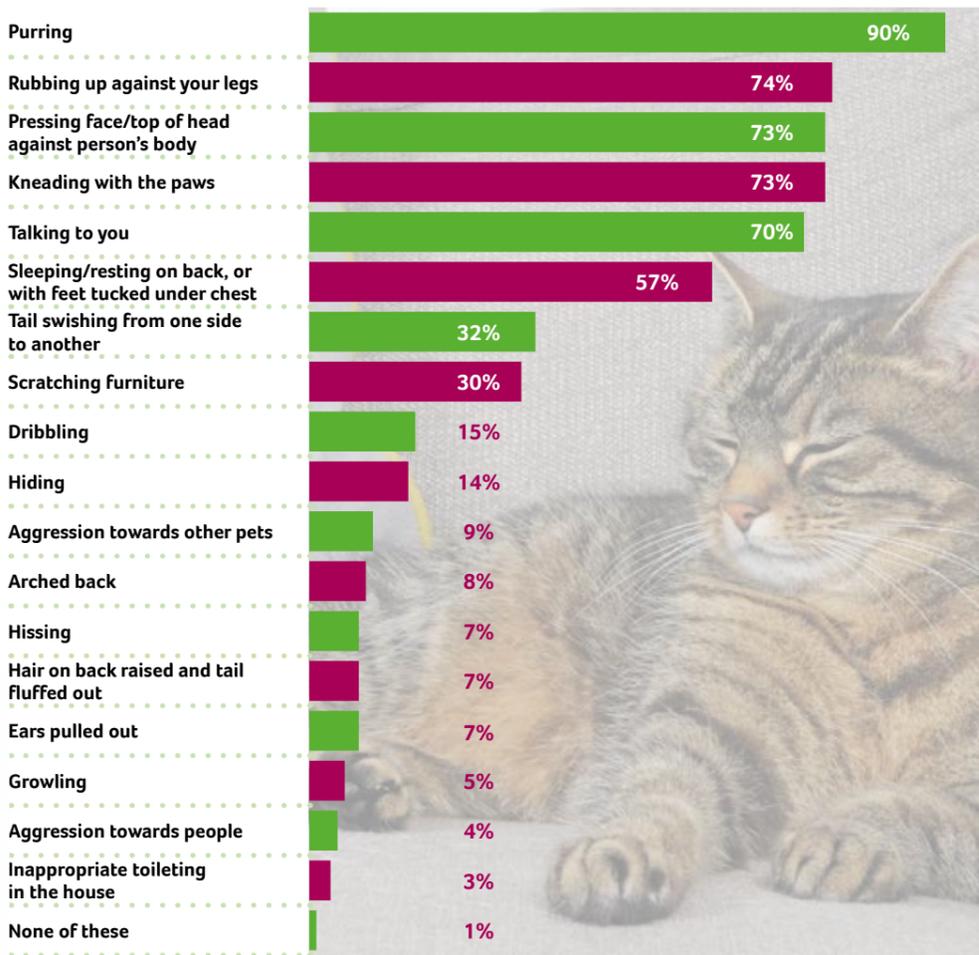
- **Socialised from a young age (particularly during the first 2–7 weeks of life).**
- **Toys to play with to allow expression of normal behaviour.**
- **Behavioural issues addressed with appropriate professional assistance.**



- **Opportunities to dig, run and play on a daily basis.**
- **Gently handled on a regular basis when young (especially during the first three to four weeks of age)**
- **Toys to play with to allow expression of normal behaviour.**
- **Behavioural issues addressed with appropriate professional assistance.**

Many pets continue to be fearful of commonly encountered stimuli; **90%** of cat owners indicate that their pet has at least one fear, a slight decrease from 91% in 2011. With no significant change over the years and with many fears developing as a result of inadequate socialisation, it is important that adequate socialisation by breeders and new owners becomes a higher priority.

Which of the following characteristics does your cat show on a weekly basis?

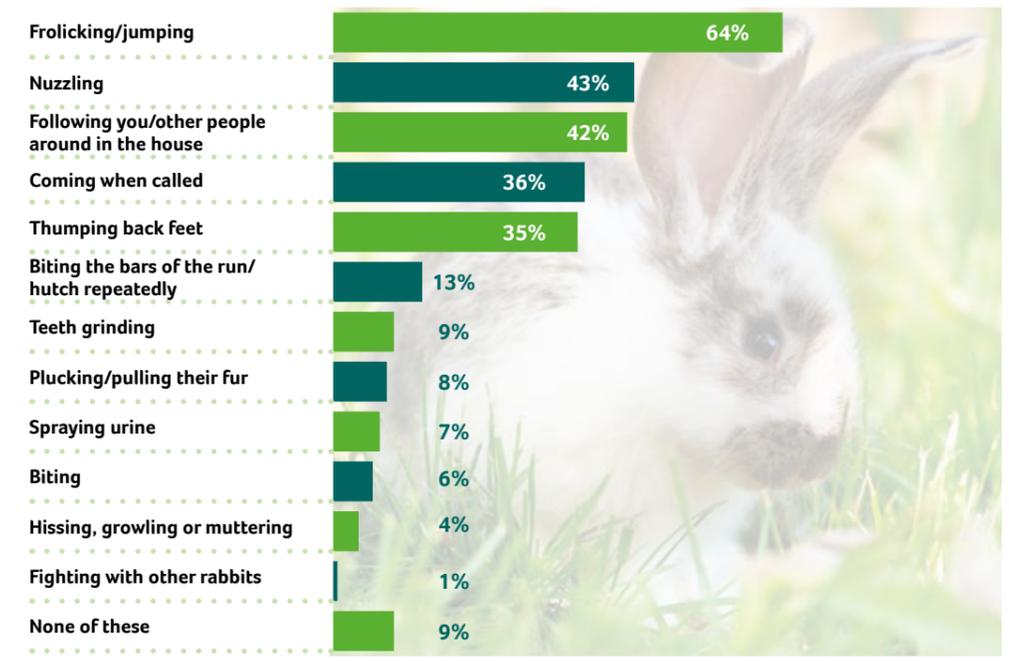


There has been little change in the levels of aggression shown by cats, with 4% showing aggression towards people and 9% showing aggression towards other pets on a weekly basis.

Battling bunny boredom

There have been significant improvements in the number of rabbits that play with toys on a daily basis, rising to 49% from 38% in 2011. 46% play in their run and 40% in the garden, while just 24% get the opportunity to dig on a daily basis, a very important natural behaviour for rabbits. It seems there are still many improvements that could be made to help keep UK rabbits mentally stimulated.

Which of the following characteristics do your rabbits show on a weekly basis?



The most common behaviours regularly displayed by rabbits include frolicking, jumping, nuzzling and following people around the house.



Companionship

How well informed do pet owners feel about the companionship needs of their pets?



Around 2.3 million dogs are left alone for five hours or more on a weekday

Over 4.5 million cats currently live in multi-cat households

More than half (57%) of rabbit owners report that their rabbit lives alone – equating to around 680,000 rabbits



- **Not routinely left alone for more than four hours a day.**
- **Adequate care should be provided for a dog when the owner goes on holiday.**



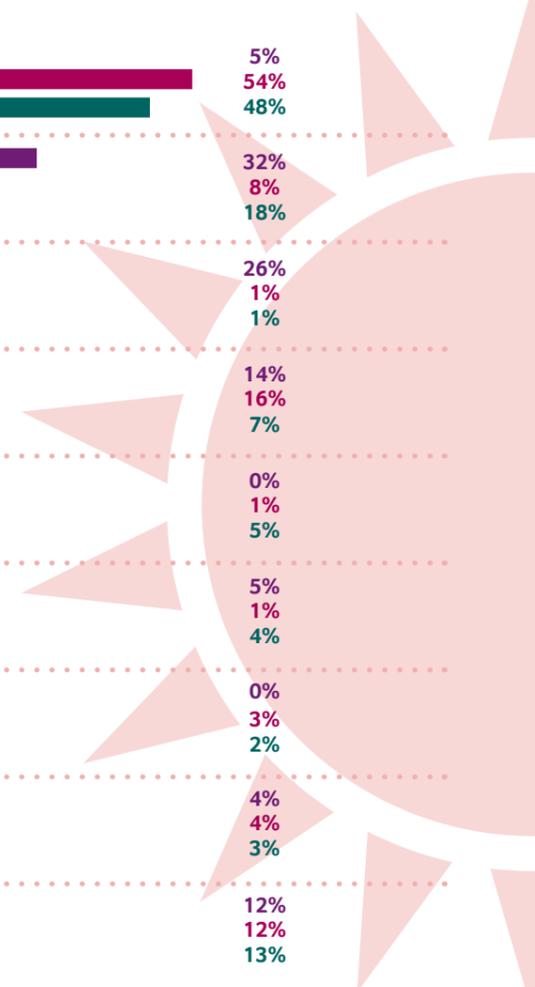
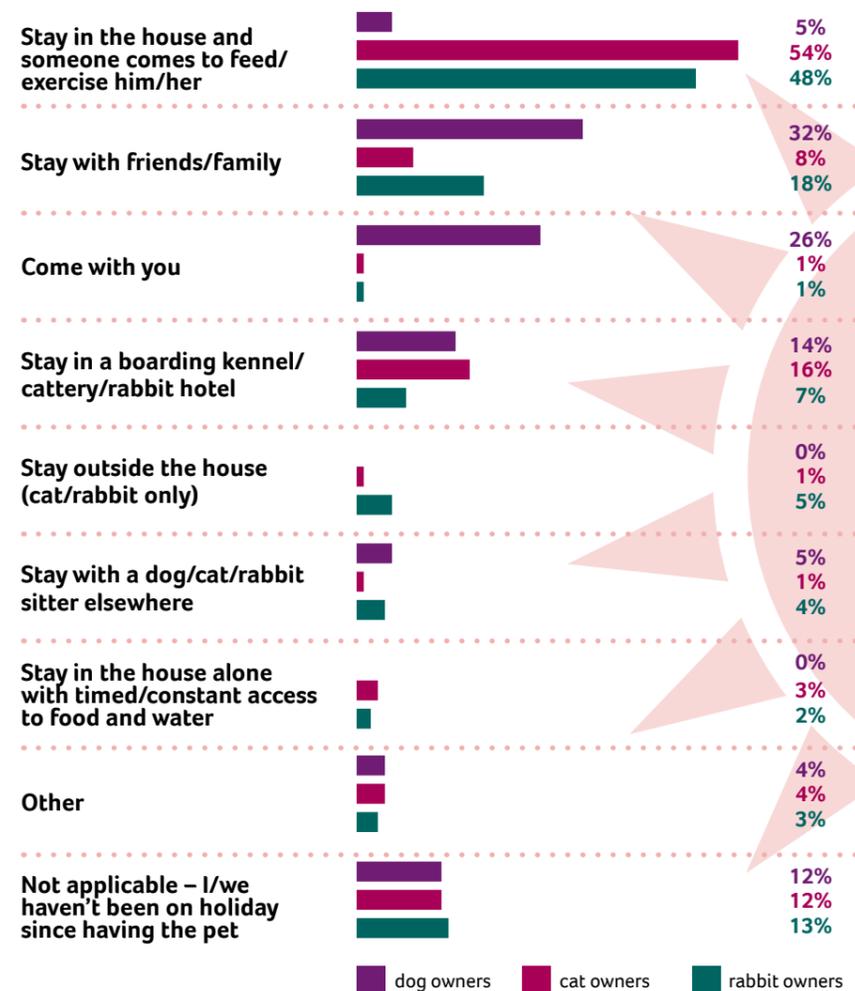
Dog owners are most likely to have their pet stay with friends or family when they go away, while cat and rabbit owners are much more likely to leave their pet in the house and have someone to come and take care of him/her.

Lonely dogs

The number of dog owners who leave their pet alone in the house for five hours or more on a weekday has marginally increased from 23% in 2011 to 25% – meaning that around 2.3 million dogs are left alone for longer than recommended every day.

Even more worryingly, our research shows that 28% of dog owners believe it is acceptable to leave a dog home alone for 6–10 hours on a typical day.

When you go away from home, what arrangements do you typically make for your pet?



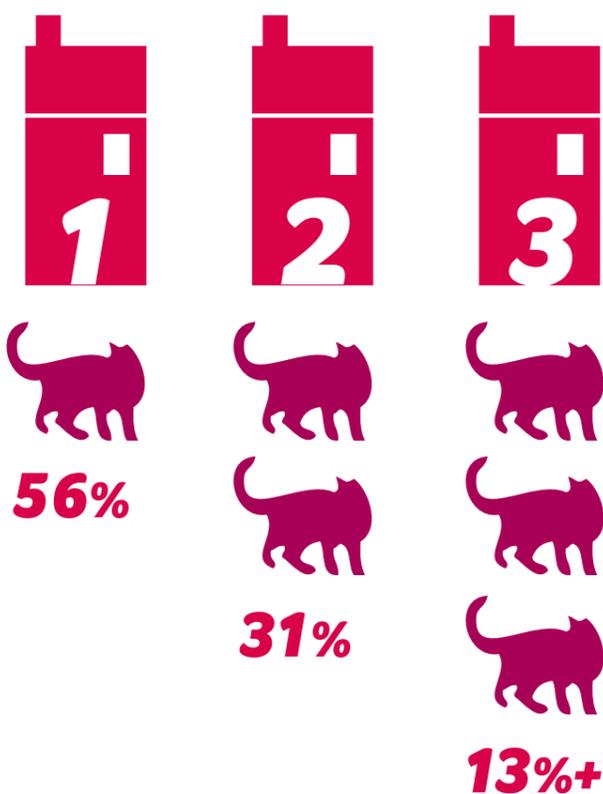


Multi-cat households

Among UK pet owners with a cat in their household, the average number of cats owned is 1.7. There has been little change with findings from the first *PAW Report*, when 31% reported having two cats and 14% having three or more. 44% of cats – over 4.5 million – currently live in multi-cat households.

While cat owners most commonly indicate that their cat lives alone, nearly one in five say their cat lives with another cat they enjoy being with. How the owners determine that the cats enjoy being with each other was not assessed. Of these, cat owners of a pedigree breed (29%) are more likely than those of a non-pedigree (19%) to say their cat lives with another cat it enjoys being with. However, there are still 16% of cats – around 1.7 million – that live with another cat they don't always get along with, and 6% of cats that live with more than one other cat are in a situation where some 'aren't keen on each other'.

Percentage of cats owned per household

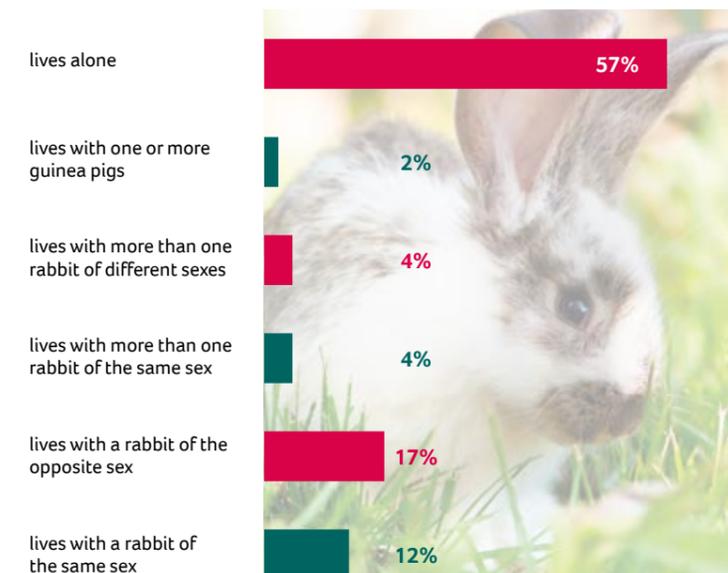


When an owner goes on holiday, it's best if a trusted friend or neighbour can look after the cat in the cat's own home while the owner is away. If this is not possible, the cat should be boarded at a reputable cattery.

- **As solitary animals, cats should generally be kept on their own.**
- **Adequate care should be provided for a cat when the owner goes on holiday.**



My rabbit ...



Of those rabbits that share their living space with another rabbit, 71% of rabbit owners reported that all rabbits are neutered, 12% that some are neutered, and 17% that none are neutered.

More than half (57%) of rabbit owners report that their rabbit lives alone – equating to around 680,000 rabbits. While this still needs to be greatly reduced, **this is a significant improvement from 2011 when 67% of rabbits lived alone** – equating to over 1.1 million rabbits.

- **Kept with other compatible rabbits, ideally neutered male with neutered female.**
- **Not kept with guinea pigs to avoid the risk of bullying.**
- **Adequate care should be provided for rabbits when the owner goes on holiday.**

The findings of this most recent survey echo those of our own RSPCA-funded project, in which we found that only 42% of rabbits are kept with other rabbits; very similar to the 36% found by PDSA. For a social species this a great concern, and we identified solitary living as one of the most important welfare concerns for pet rabbits. Rabbits can gain great benefit from living in compatible pairs or groups, but it is essential that these pairs are chosen and introduced carefully in a way that maximises their chances of getting on amicably, and that owners pay close attention to their rabbit for early signs of any problems.

Health

How well informed do pet owners feel about the health needs of their pets?

-  Dogs **92%**
-  Cats **88%**
-  Rabbits **95%**

83% of dog owners report that their dog has been microchipped

92% of cat owners have had their cat neutered

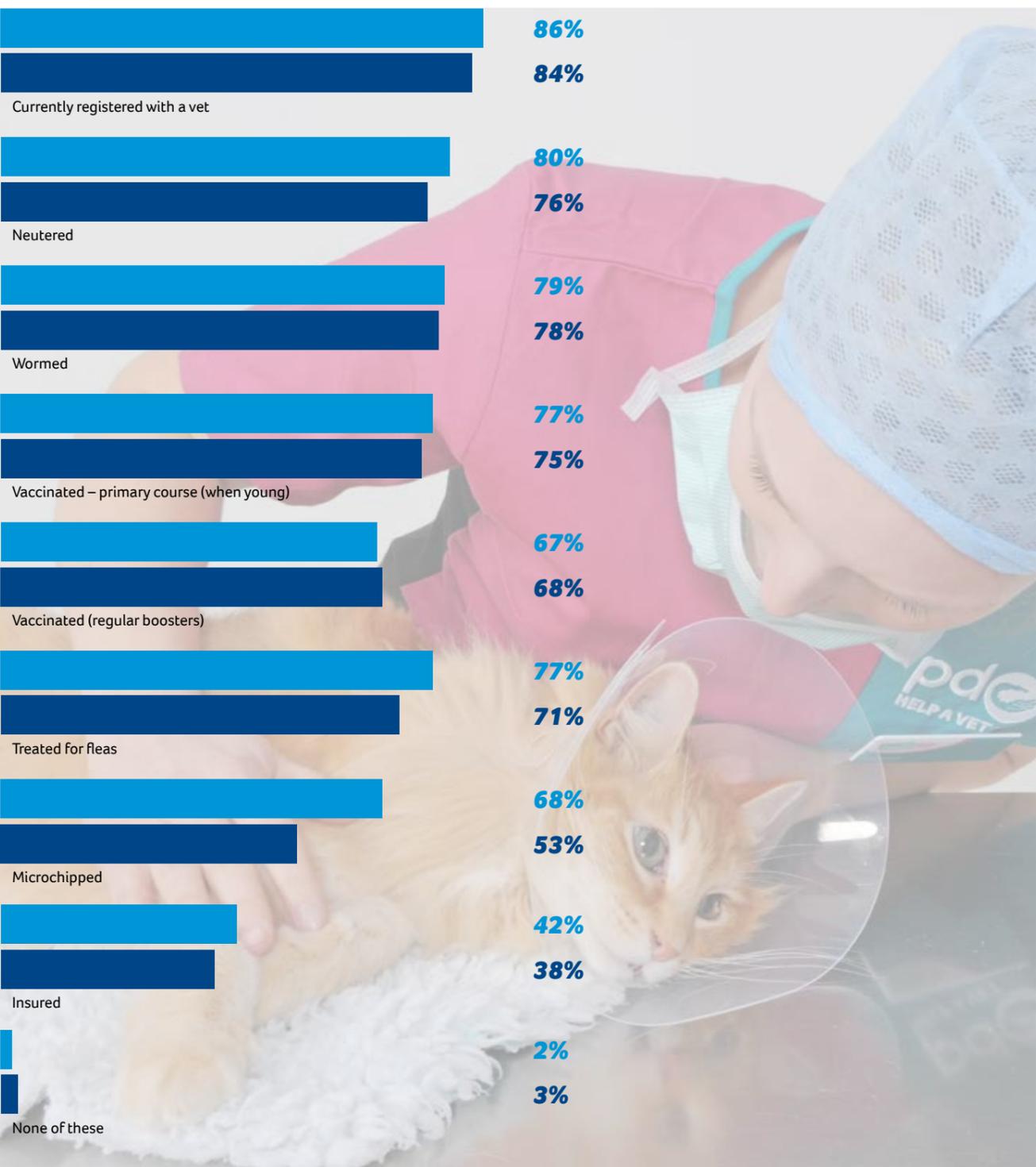
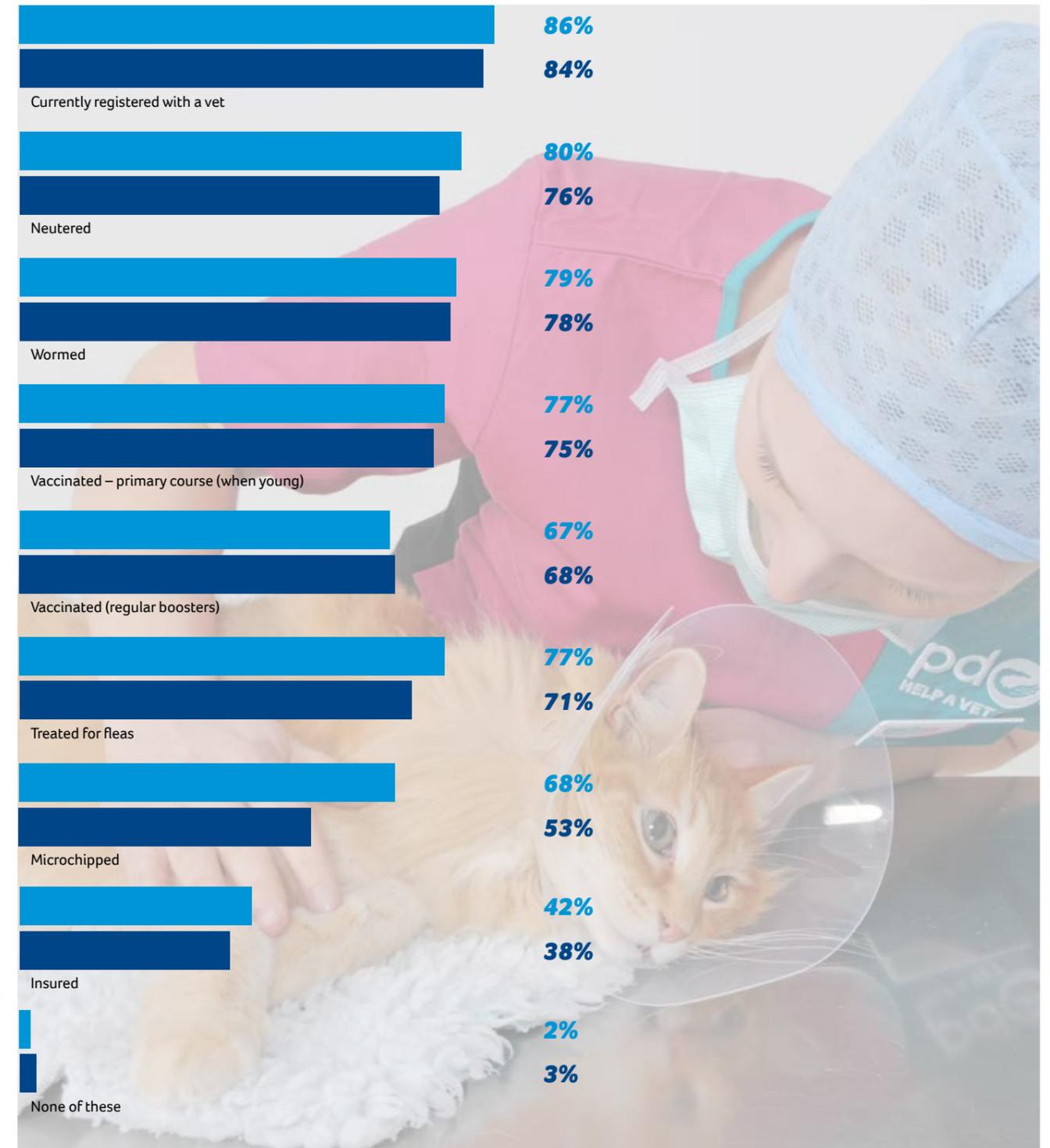
50% of rabbit owners have had their rabbit vaccinated



Health treatments among pets

2015 2011

% of pets receiving preventive treatment





- **Neutered**
- **Vaccinated**
- **Microchipped**
- **Regular safe and effective preventive treatments for fleas and worms**
- **Insured**
- **Registered with a vet**
- **Regular grooming and dental care**
- **Checked daily for signs of ill health**

Key findings

Neutering

Four in five pet owners told us that their pet has been neutered. Among owners that have not had their pet neutered, the main reasons for not doing so are that they haven't thought about it (12%) or they don't believe in it (13%). 22% of dog owners do not believe in neutering compared with only 6% of cat owners and 9% of rabbit owners.

Vaccinations

77% of owners have had their pet vaccinated with a primary course and 67% of owners have had their pet vaccinated with regular boosters. 22% of those who have not had their pet vaccinated think vaccination is unnecessary, with 33% of rabbit owners stating this in comparison with 18% of dog owners.

24% of owners whose pets have received their primary course vaccinations but not regular boosters say it's because they don't think it's necessary. 22% cite the expense of vaccinations as their reason for not vaccinating their pet since its primary course.

Insurance

40% of pet owners have insured their pet. Among those who have not, their top three reasons for having made this choice are that it's too expensive, they don't think they'd get their money's worth, and they'd prefer to save money for vet bills instead. Dog owners (44%) are most likely to find insuring their pet expensive, compared with 37% of cat owners and 29% of rabbit owners.

Registered with a vet

The majority of pet owners (86%) have registered their pet with a vet. Among those owners who haven't, many think it's unnecessary as they believe they can just turn up at the vet's (43%) or because their pet is fine (22%). This demonstrates the importance of pre-purchase education, including the value of preventive healthcare.

Microchipping

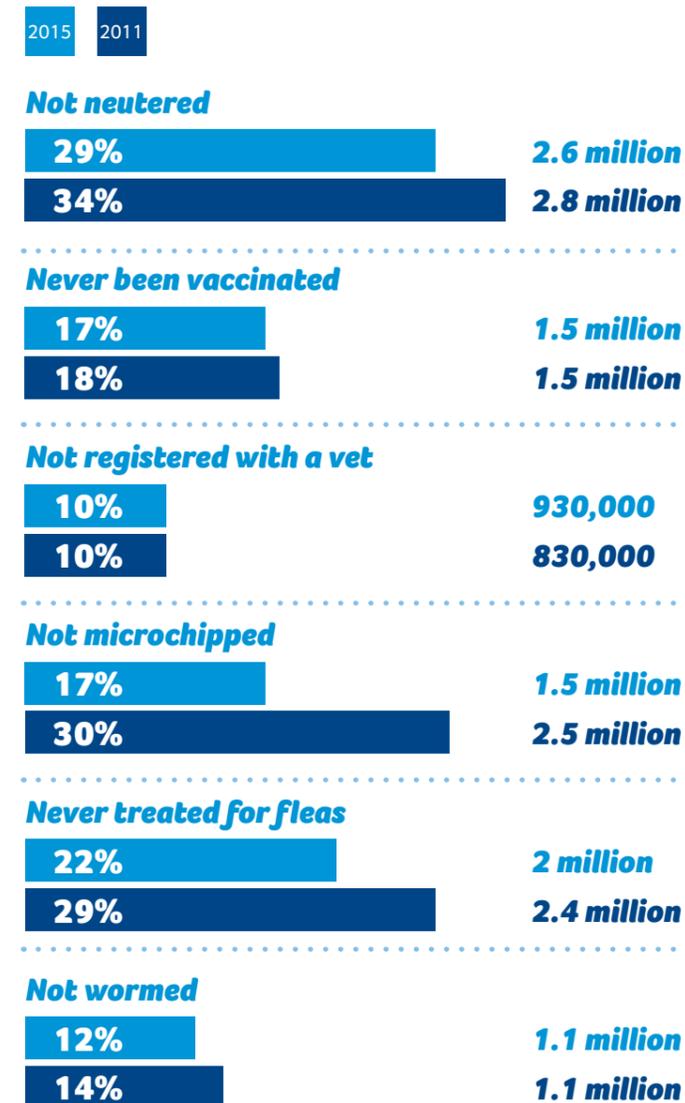
There has been a steady increase in microchipping of pets since the first *PAW Report*, and for dogs in particular – this is likely due to legislative changes introducing compulsory microchipping. **83% of dog owners report that their dog has been microchipped, a marked increase from 70% in 2011.** However, the remaining 17% of dog owners say they haven't microchipped their dog as it is 'not necessary', meaning more needs to be done to raise awareness around compulsory microchipping before it comes into force in England, Wales and Scotland (microchipping dogs is already compulsory in Northern Ireland).

Treated for fleas and worms

77% of owners have treated their pets for fleas, and 79% of pet owners report their pet has been wormed. Half of pet owners buy their flea and worm products from their veterinary practice, with 19% buying from a supermarket (off the shelf), and 15% from a pet shop (off the shelf). A further 14% of pet owners buy their flea and worm products from an online pharmacy without a prescription, and 3% buy from an online pharmacy with a prescription.

Key findings: Preventive care

Comparison of preventive treatments for dogs that have not been taken up



Breeding

For those owners who want to breed from their dog, the main reasons given were:

- **This pet has a good temperament (74%)**
- **To keep the lineage of this pet (48%)**
- **To continue the memory of this specific pet (39%)**
- **It would be nice for my pet to experience being a parent (38%)**
- **To help my pet develop maternal/paternal instincts, therefore improving how he/she behaves with other animals/children (28%)**

Top reasons for dog owners not taking up preventive treatments are:

Don't believe in it (22%)
Would like to breed (16%)
Haven't thought about it (16%)

Too expensive (23%)
Not necessary (18%)
Other (13%)

Not necessary – I can just turn up at the vet's (39%)
Too expensive (20%)
Other (17%)

Not out unsupervised (25%)
Unlikely to stray (22%)
Not got around to it yet (18%)

Flea and worm treatments

Of those owners who treat their dog for fleas and worms, 50% of owners buy their flea and worm products from their veterinary practice, 18% buy from a supermarket (off the shelf), and 17% buy from a pet shop (off the shelf).

Although there have been general improvements across all aspects of preventive care among dogs, there are still many not having all their health needs met.

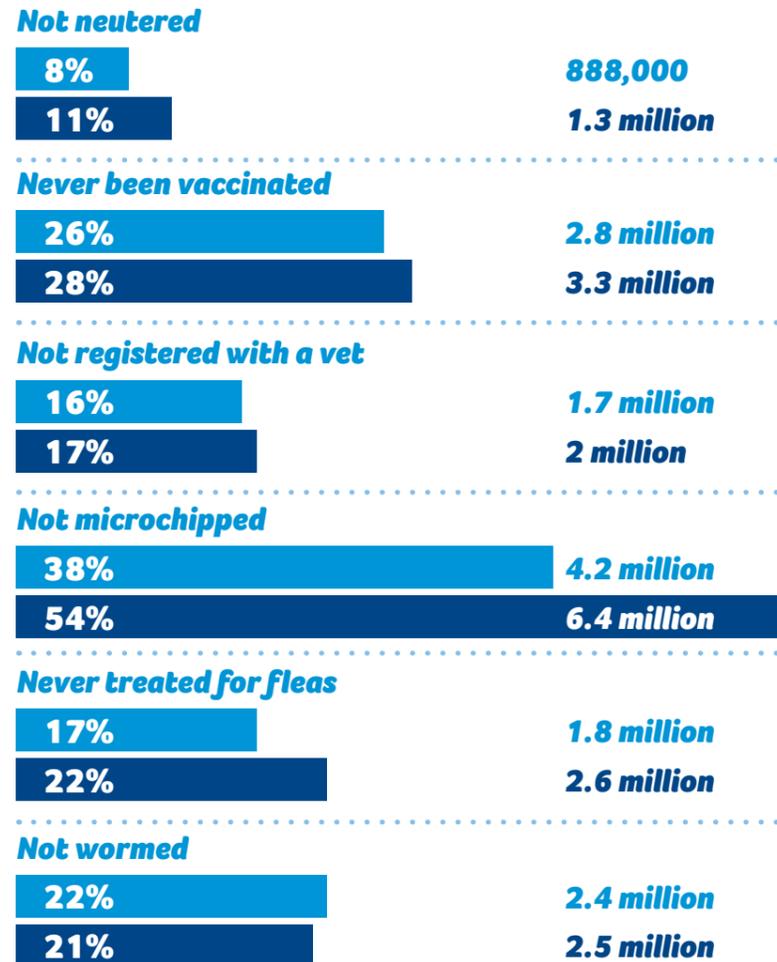


- Neutered at four months
- Vaccinated
- Microchipped
- Regular safe and effective preventive treatments for fleas and worms
- Insured
- Registered with a vet
- Regular grooming and dental care
- Checked daily for signs of ill health



There continue to be improvements in preventive healthcare provision in cats.

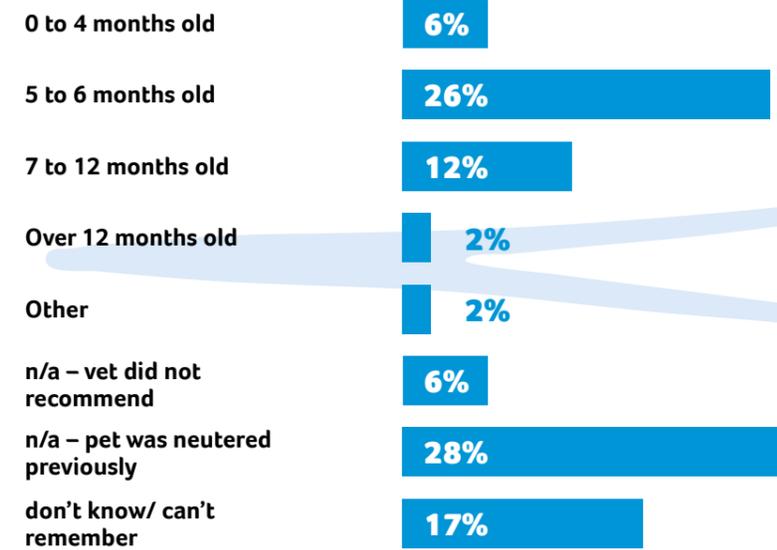
2015 2011



Top reasons for cat owners not taking up preventive treatments are:

- Haven't thought about it (24%)
- Not got around to it yet (13%)
- Too expensive (8%)
- Too expensive (23%)
- Not necessary (21%)
- Doesn't come into contact with other animals (19%)
- Not necessary – I can just turn up at the vets (45%)
- Not necessary – pet is fine (23%)
- Other (11%)
- Unlikely to stray (31%)
- Not necessary (25%)
- Haven't thought about it (14%)

At what age did your vet recommend that your cat should be neutered?



92% of cat owners have had their cat neutered, which is significantly higher than dog (71%) and rabbit owners (50%). Among cat owners whose cats have been neutered, 49% were advised by a vet on the matter, with 26% having been advised that neutering should take place when the cat is 5 to 6 months old.

There is growing awareness, however, that for maximum health and welfare benefits, kittens should normally be neutered at 4 months old. This is the clear recommendation of the Cat Population Control Group, which includes several veterinary and animal welfare organisations, including PDSA. Awareness of this message is growing, with 64% of veterinary surgeons stating that they now routinely recommend kitten neutering at 4 months old.

81% of cat owners state their cat has never had a litter of kittens. 9% say their cat has had one litter, and much smaller proportions say their cat has had more than one. Of those reporting that their cat has had at least one litter, 65% say their cat's pregnancy was unplanned, compared to 15% who had planned for their cat to have a litter.

It is heartening that so many owners have their cats neutered. However, it is still a major concern how many cats have a litter before they are neutered and the majority are unplanned. It's vitally important that vets in practice recommend that cats are neutered before puberty.

The surgery is straightforward with fewer post-operative complications and recovery is rapid; all practices should offer it routinely not only for the benefits to the individual kitten but to avoid unplanned litters becoming the unwanted cats of the future.

Dr Maggie Roberts, BVM&S, MRCVS
 Director of Veterinary Services, Cats Protection





- Neutered
- Vaccinated
- Insured
- Registered with a vet
- Regular grooming
- Checked daily for signs of ill health, especially for signs of flystrike in the summer months

There have been improvements across all aspects of preventive care among rabbits, but there are still many not having all their health needs met.

2015 2011



Top reasons for rabbit owners not taking up preventive treatments are:

- Haven't thought about it (30%)
- Too expensive (19%)
- Worried about changes in personality (14%)
- Not necessary (33%)
- Doesn't come into contact with other animals (29%)
- Too expensive (22%)
- Didn't know they were needed every year (21%)
- Not necessary (19%)
- Haven't thought about it (12%)
- Not necessary – I can just turn up at the vet's (41%)
- Not necessary – pet is fine (30%)
- Too expensive (15%)

Despite these improvements, compared to dogs and cats, rabbits continue to fare the worst in terms of their health needs not being met.

Health treatments by region for dogs, cats and rabbits



The following data gives an insight into the uptake of health treatments by region.

	Registered with a vet (%)	Neutered (%)	Vaccinated primary course (%)	Microchipped (%)	Insured (%)
National average	86	80	77	68	42
Northeast	81	70	77	58	39
Northwest	84	79	77	67	38
Yorkshire and the Humber	85	80	79	71	43
East Midlands	87	80	71	68	41
West Midlands	90	76	72	68	37
East of England	86	84	80	71	48
London	80	79	72	68	40
Southeast	89	87	79	73	44
Southwest	90	77	79	71	46
Wales	81	81	70	60	33
Scotland	89	80	81	65	44
Northern Ireland	83	76	78	77	42

Same or higher than national average
Lower than national average

44 **Ownership**

12% of pet owners surveyed believe that their pet would only cost them up to £500 over the pet's entire lifetime

Over 4.5 million owners did no research at all before taking on their pet

36% of pet owners believe the most important pet welfare issue is people choosing the wrong pet for their lifestyle



45 **Pet owners familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts**

Regional breakdown: Pet owners familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts
Awareness of the Animal Welfare Acts has dropped significantly across all regions of the UK.

	2015	2011	
Northeast	30%	48%	↓
Northwest	29%	45%	↓
Yorkshire and the Humber	32%	51%	↓
East Midlands	29%	47%	↓
West Midlands	33%	44%	↓
East of England	31%	44%	↓
London	33%	42%	↓
Southeast	29%	44%	↓
Southwest	36%	45%	↓
Wales	33%	49%	↓
Scotland	31%	46%	↓
Northern Ireland	31%	38%	↓

FALLING AWARENESS OF THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS



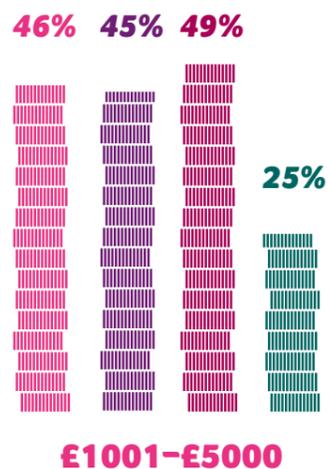
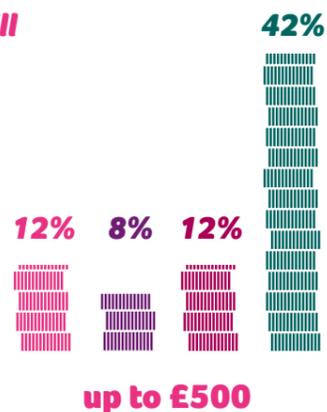
Costs of pet ownership

The vast majority of pet owners continue to underestimate the lifetime costs for their chosen pet, with **12% of all pet owners surveyed believing that their pet would only cost them up to £500 over the pet's entire lifetime.**

AWARENESS OF LIFETIME COSTS HAS DECLINED SINCE THE FIRST PAW REPORT IN 2011.

How much do you think your pet will cost you during his or her lifetime?

-  all owners
-  dog owners
-  cat owners
-  rabbit owners



Actual likely lifetime cost
Dog £16-31k Size of dog affects cost
Cat £17k
Rabbit £9k per rabbit*

Owner-estimated lifetime cost in 2015
95% estimated incorrectly
98% estimated incorrectly
100% estimated incorrectly

Owner-estimated lifetime cost in 2011
92% estimated incorrectly
97% estimated incorrectly
99% estimated incorrectly

(The likely costs above are based on estimates calculated by PDSA using current market prices and include: initial costs of the purchase of pet(s); neutering; first vaccinations; microchipping and accessories as well as the ongoing costs of food; booster vaccinations; pet insurance; toys; grooming; worming; flea treatments and cat litter in the case of cats. They do not include veterinary costs if a pet becomes sick or injured, so these average lifetime costs could be even higher.)

* This is the likely lifetime cost for 1 rabbit – we recommend keeping rabbits in neutered pairs as they are social animals, so this should be taken into account when budgeting for the lifetime costs of rehoming rabbits.

Pre-purchase research

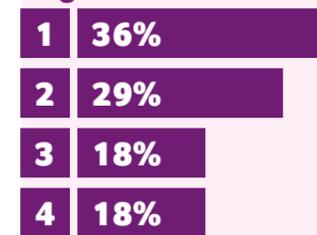


Research before taking on a pet is essential and can help with understanding the costs of owning a particular pet. Additionally, it gives greater awareness and understanding of the chosen pet's needs. Despite this, **over 4.5 million owners did no research at all before taking on their pet**, which could have a huge impact on their ability to provide for those animals' needs.



What research was carried out before getting a pet?

Dog owners



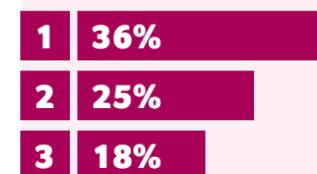
Have previous experience of the breed/animal

Looked on the internet

Took advice from family/friends

None – I didn't do anything !

Cat owners

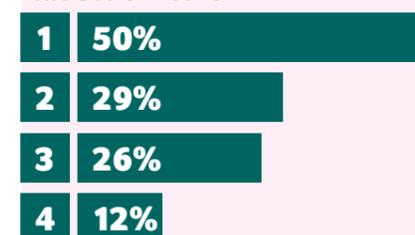


Have previous experience of the breed/animal

None – I didn't do anything !

Took advice from rescue centre

Rabbit owners



Have previous experience of the breed/animal

Looked on the internet

Took advice from pet shop

None – I didn't do anything !

ONLY 4% OF PET OWNERS TAKE ADVICE FROM A VET BEFORE TAKING ON A PET.

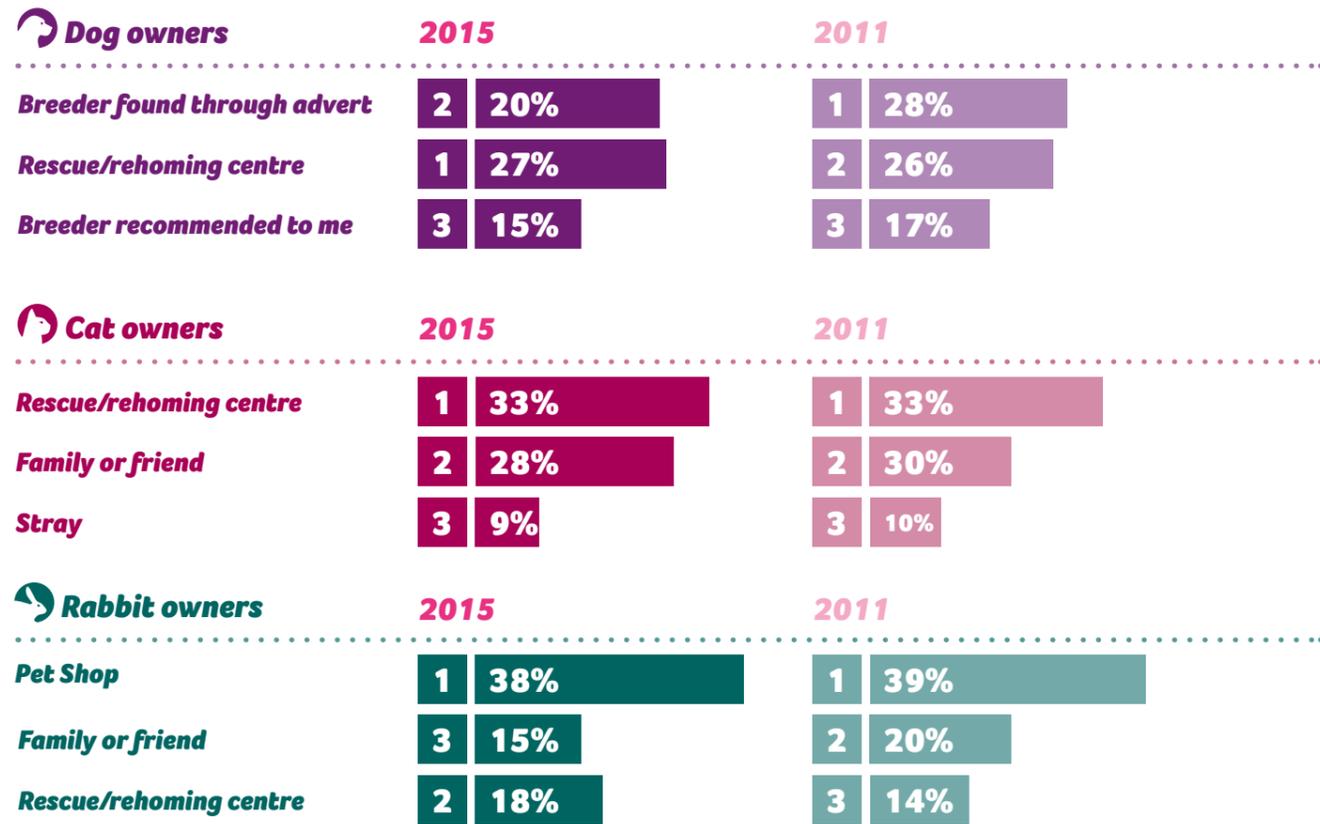
This demonstrates the need for raised awareness among pet owners so that the veterinary profession is able to support owners with their pre-purchase decisions.



Where do people get their pets from?

Although many owners get their pets from recommended places such as rehoming centres or reputable breeders, many would still consider getting their pet from unsuitable places. **22%** of owners would consider getting a puppy from a puppy farm; **20%** of owners would consider getting a pet off the internet, and **31%** of owners would rehome from an advert posted on social media.

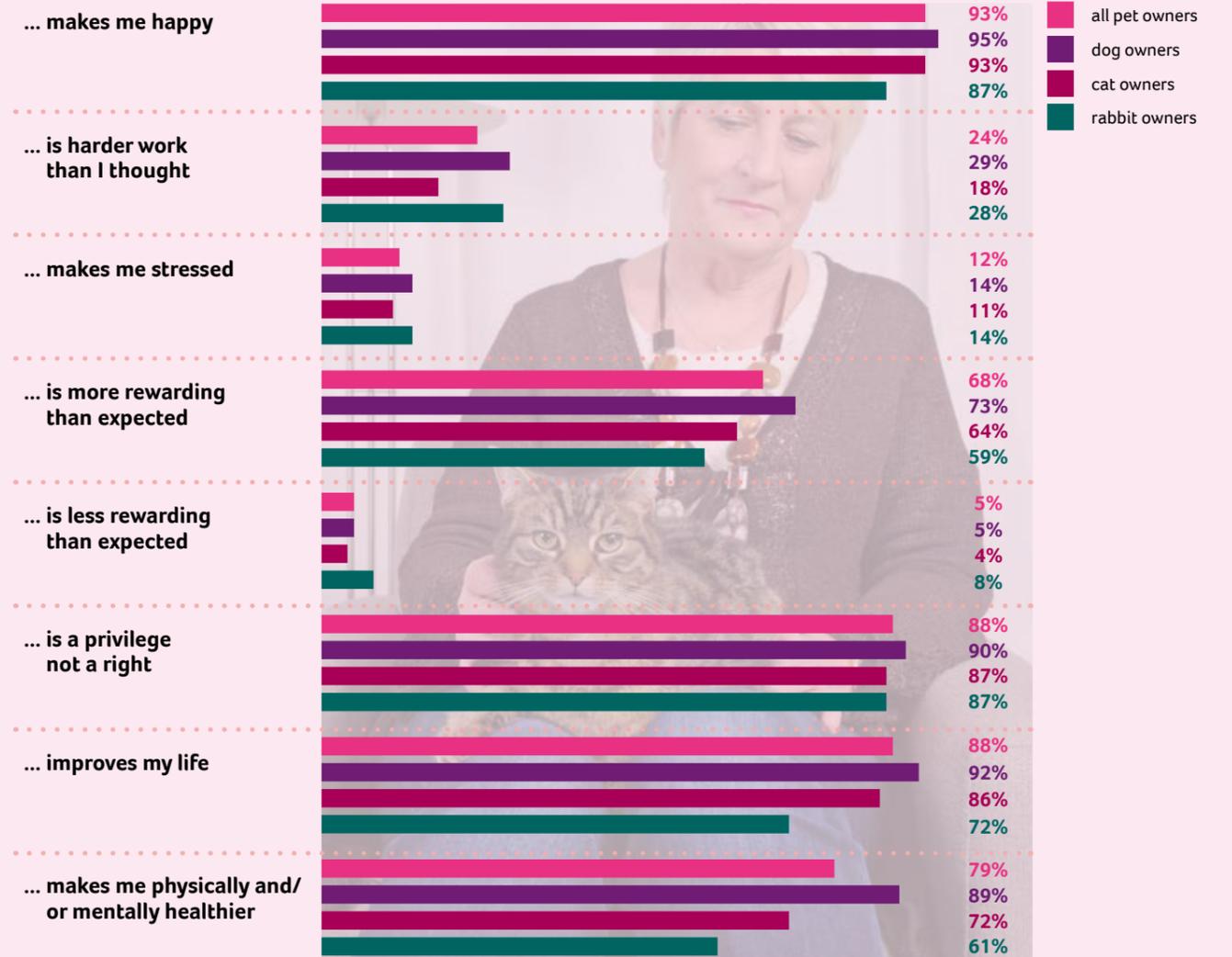
Where did your pet come from?



Views on ownership

Owning a pet brings many benefits to our lives. 93% of pet owners surveyed state that owning a pet makes them happy. But what other feelings do owners experience as a result of owning a pet?

Owning a pet ...



What is the most important pet welfare issue that needs to be addressed?

Again the need for pre-purchase research is highlighted, as **over a third of pet owners (36%)** believe the most important pet welfare issue is

people choosing the wrong pet for their lifestyle.

Dog owners (21%) are more likely than cat owners (16%) and rabbit owners (9%) to believe that

aggressive behaviour in dogs

is the most important welfare issue.

Top concerns relating to pet welfare: pet owners



- People choosing the wrong pet for their lifestyle
- Aggressive behaviour in dogs
- Health issues relating to pedigree/unsuitable breeding

Top concerns relating to pet welfare: veterinary professionals



- Obesity
- Lack of understanding of the cost of pet ownership
- Pre-purchase education relating to suitable pet choice

93% of owners surveyed state that owning a pet makes them happy

Five years of the PAW Report

There have been some significant changes since the first PAW Report in 2011



Environment	2015	2011	
Dogs getting off the lead exercise at least once a day for ten minutes or more	66%	71%	👎
Cats living indoors only	24%	15%	👎
Rabbits given the opportunity to play in their run on a daily basis	46%	53%	👎



Diet	2015	2011	
Rabbits that eat less than their body size in hay/grass each day	26%	42%	👍
Dog owners who use professional veterinary advice to help as the main source of information when deciding how much to feed their pet	18%	14%	👍
Rabbits that eat rabbit muesli as a main source of food	29%	49%	👍
Rabbits that eat hay as a main source of food	72%	62%	👍



Behaviour	2015	2011	
Dogs that met up with other dogs at least once a week in the first six months of life	71%	65%	👍
Dogs that met up with people outside the family at least once a week in the first six months of life	71%	68%	👍
Dogs that never attended training classes within their first six months of life	60%	50%	👎



Companionship	2015	2011	
Rabbits that live alone	57%	67%	👍
Dogs that are typically left alone in the house for more than four hours during a weekday	25%	23%	👎

Measure of change between Reports



Health	2015	2011	
Owners who have had their pet microchipped	68%	53%	👍
Owners whose pet is registered with a vet	86%	84%	👍
Owners whose pet has been neutered	80%	76%	👍
Owners whose pet has received primary course vaccinations	77%	75%	👍
Owners whose pet has received regular booster vaccinations	67%	68%	👎
Owners whose pet has been insured	42%	38%	👍
Owners whose pet has been treated for fleas	77%	71%	👍
Owners whose pet has been wormed	79%	78%	👍



Pet ownership	2015	2011	
Owners who are familiar with the Animal Welfare Act	31%	45%	👎
Owners who feel well informed about how to provide their pet with a suitable place to live	91%	98%	👎
Owners who feel well informed about how to provide their pet with a suitable diet	92%	97%	👎
Owners who feel well informed about how to provide their pet with the ability to express normal behaviour	89%	94%	👎
Owners who feel well informed about how to provide their pet with the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals	85%	93%	👎
Owners who feel well informed about how to provide their pet with protection from, and treatment of, illness and injury	90%	95%	👎
Owners who agree that pet owners should have a basic understanding of the five welfare needs of their pets as outlined in the Animal Welfare Act	85%	89%	👎



The nation reflects

Earlier in 2015 we launched *The Big Pet Survey* to ask the pet-loving public in the UK their opinions on the state of our pet nation.

We were delighted that over 26,000 pet owners took part and as part of the survey, we also found out more about the wellbeing of different pet species; from guinea pigs to fish, and ferrets to reptiles. Here are some of the facts revealed:

We all know what an important part of the family pets are, they make us laugh, make us smile and provide invaluable companionship ...

95%

OF PET OWNERS BELIEVE OWNING A PET PROVIDES INVALUABLE COMPANIONSHIP



85% of pet owners believe owning a pet improves their life

75% of pet owners believe owning a pet makes them physically or mentally healthier

73% of pet owners have bought their pet a birthday or Christmas present

17% of pet owners have taken their pet to work

12% have Skyped or Face-timed their pet

87%

OF PET OWNERS BELIEVE ...

... THE UK IS A NATION OF ANIMAL LOVERS

We all know pets are a lifetime commitment, and this is what the respondents to the Big Pet Survey thought about some of these lifelong decisions ...

34%

BELIEVE VETERINARY FEES ARE MORE THAN THEY EXPECTED THEM TO BE

45% believe that their pet will cost them £1,000 to £5,000 over its entire lifetime

42% believe that people should pass a test before taking on a pet

92% believe that anyone breeding puppies should be licensed and regulated to meet certain standards



Since 2011 we've been surveying dog, cat and rabbit owners to find out if their pet's welfare needs are being met. This year we can reveal some facts about some of the other species in our pet nation ...



Guinea pigs

51% of guinea pigs spend 2 hours or less outside their hutch/cage on a daily basis

40% of guinea pigs live indoors only all year-round and 25% of guinea pigs live on their own

91% of guinea pigs are given hay and 60% are given pellet food as part of their main diet

74% of guinea pigs frolic/jump or 'popcorn' on a weekly basis



Reptiles

83% of reptiles bask in heat at least once a day, specifically 94% of tortoises bask in heat at least once a day

89% of reptiles are given objects to climb on and 87% places to hide

65% of reptile owners looked on the internet for advice before taking on their reptile



Birds

63% of birds live in a cage in the house, with only 8% living in an indoor aviary, and 4% in an outdoor aviary

30% of birds are given treats from a pet store on a daily basis

Only **34%** of birds are currently registered with a vet (avian or normal)



Fish

41% of fish owners talk to their pet at least once a week

26% of fish owners think owning a pet is harder work than they thought it would be

16% of indoor fish live alone



Rats

48% of rats are given scraps/leftovers as part of their main diet

4% of rat owners are feeding their pet chocolate intended for humans more than once a week



Mice

20% of pet owners are feeding their mouse cheese more than once a week

50% of mouse owners post pictures or talk about their pet on social media at least once a week



Ferrets

54% of ferrets have had training with basic commands

11% of ferret owners take their pet on holiday with them



Chinchillas

53% of chinchillas live on their own

22% of chinchillas spend no time at all outside their cage



A better life for pets

What PDSA has done since the first PAW Report in 2011

We have:

- Monitored pet wellbeing on an annual basis over the last five years through the **PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report** to measure the impact of the activities in the sector.
- Presented at a wide range of industry and sector conferences on some of the issues from the **PAW Report** and used evidence from the **PAW Report** to support government consultations and strengthen campaigns and messaging.
- Established a **Community and Education Veterinary Nursing team to work in local communities** providing advice, guidance and information to help people better understand their responsibilities to their pets through our **PetCheck** and **Education** programmes.
- Completed over 21,000 free wellbeing checks for dogs through our **mobile PetCheck programme** in communities across the UK.
- Engaged just under 160,000 children through **school talks by our veterinary nurses** as part of our **Education** programme.
- Developed a **Pet Wellbeing Task Force** and team of **Pet Wellbeing Champions** thanks to players of **Peoples Postcode Lottery**, to drive improvements in pet wellbeing across all of our 51 Pet Hospitals.
- Introduced **'Pet Wise MOTs'** and delivered over 100,000 MOTs and action plans across our **Pet Hospitals** and on our **PetCheck** tours – unique veterinary consultations structured around the **Five Welfare Needs**.
- Delivered over 1.8 million preventive treatments through our **Pet Hospital network**.
- Raised awareness of key pet wellbeing issues to millions of pet owners through high profile national annual campaigns such as launch of the **PAW Report, Pet Fit Club** and **Pet Survivor**.
- Developed the **Big Pet Check**, an online interactive quiz measuring over 35,000 pet owners against the five welfare needs framework with advice on making a change.
- Developed a wide range of **e-learning modules, pet health videos, literature** and **digital content** for pet owners and all those working in animal health and welfare roles to provide education and knowledge transfer.
- Launched **PetWise for Cats** supported by **The Marchig Animal Welfare Trust** offering free neutering, microchipping and **PetWise MOTs** to our cat-owning clients across the UK. In the first year we have carried out over 24,000 neuters, over 30,000 microchips, and over 33,000 **PetWise MOTs**.



Sponsored by the Marchig Animal Welfare Trust



Collaboration with the sector

We've collaborated with many animal welfare charities, organisations and groups to promote preventive healthcare and educate the public about pet wellbeing including:

The Microchip Alliance – successfully campaigned to bring in new legislation that means that all dogs in England and Scotland will need to be microchipped from April 2016. Dogs in Wales will need to be microchipped from Spring 2016 and it is already a legal requirement in Northern Ireland (effective from 9th April 2012).

The Links Group – developing training materials for the veterinary profession with this multi-agency group that promotes the welfare and safety of vulnerable children, animals and adults so they are free from violence and abuse.

The Pet Advertising Advisory Group – comprising the UK's leading veterinary, animal welfare and pet industry organisations, working closely with DEFRA and, in September 2013, receiving Government endorsement for minimum standards for the online sale of pets.

Rabbit Awareness Week – a collaboration of industry bodies, vets, welfare organisations and more, all aiming to improve the welfare of rabbits through raising public awareness, vet checks and advice.

Dogs Trust and Cats Protection – helping to neuter even more pets.

Animal Welfare Network Wales – running **Protect Your Pet** Events with other charities offering visitors health checks, microchipping, preventive care vouchers and advice.

Burgess – creating the **Rabbit Wellbeing Challenge** to engage owners digitally with the five welfare needs for rabbits.

The British Veterinary Association – inputting into development of an animal welfare strategy to provide veterinary professionals with tools and support to address animal welfare issues.

Helped form the **Animal Welfare Education Alliance** to improve how animal welfare is taught in schools and to continue to drive the proposal to get the **Five Welfare Needs** onto the **National Curriculum**.

Become a Patron of the **Advisory Council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding** to make a difference to the lives of future generations of dogs.

Endorsed the **Animal Welfare Foundation and RSPCA puppy contract** to support buyers and help them to avoid the problems that can come about as a result of buying from an irresponsible breeder.

Been a founder member of the **Cat Population Control Group**, aiming to tackle the issue of cat overpopulation in the UK by increasing the awareness and uptake of 4-month kitten neutering.

Played an integral role in the newly formed **Canine and Feline Sector Group**, advising and working alongside the **Animal Health and Welfare Board** England and **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** Ministers to address key issues facing the sector.

Worked in partnership with **The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW)** Sub-Group for **Dogs** to compile the 'Review and Recommendations for Developing an Effective England-wide Strategy for Dogs' launched in December 2014.



What next for PDSA?

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



The constant, unconditional love that we receive from our pets means so much to so many people. This Report demonstrates that both pet owners and veterinary professionals recognise and appreciate this. So the question remains: despite this, how are we still failing our pet nation? With so many positive changes appearing throughout this year's findings, what more can we do to improve our pets' lives and prove that we do, in fact, love them as much as they love us?

It's clear from the success stories seen in this year's *PAW Report* that collaboration is key to achieving behaviour change and an improvement in pet wellbeing.

Reducing the age that kittens are neutered, introduction of microchipping legislation, improvement in rabbit diets through withdrawal of rabbit muesli from the shelves of many shops, and increased preventive treatments by consistent promotion from veterinary practices and animal charities are just some of the highlights that will bring with them significant welfare improvements.

We are concerned, however, that many of the critical problems we are still seeing are rooted in poor pre-purchase decision-making, based on a complete lack of or misguided information on what pet ownership truly involves.

To start to tackle this issue, we've produced an online quiz to encourage

people to stop and think about what pets need before they're tempted by cute adverts or heartbreaking rescue stories. This is where **we really need your help**. Join us by encouraging friends, family, clients and customers to **#PawsFirst** before making an impulse decision. We want everyone to **Get PetWise** with our quick quiz and reliable and easy-to-read advice. Together we can help people consider everything their pet will need, and how much it will really cost, before offering a home.

With your help, we can start to tackle the welfare issues we see in the *PAW Report* every year. We also plan to support initiatives looking at the breeding and sale of puppies from the UK and overseas; increase the numbers of PetWise MOTs completed across the UK; and look for partners to help us develop ways to engage the public before they buy a pet.

We can't do this alone; only together can we achieve lasting change.

Next steps for the veterinary profession

PDSA's vision of a lifetime of wellbeing for every pet makes good moral and legal sense.

Sean Wensley, BVSc MSc, Grad.DMS, MRCVS
President, British Veterinary Association (BVA)



Morally, there is evidence that companion animals bring important benefits to society, including companionship and comfort to the elderly or vulnerable; to be fair we should give them a good quality of life in return.

Legally, the duty to meet our pets' five welfare needs is enshrined in the UK's updated **Animal Welfare Acts**. In 2016, it will be a decade since the first of these Acts introduced a legal duty to ensure pets are well cared for through the meeting of their five needs.

For each of the past five years, the *PAW Report* has highlighted where those needs are not being met, what progress has been made, and on what scale. Issues such as social isolation in dogs and rabbits, and obesity in all species, must be understood and addressed if we are to claim that we are treating our companion animals fairly.

The legal responsibility for meeting our pets' five welfare needs lies with their owners but the veterinary profession is here to help. **The scientific training and compassion of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses makes them uniquely placed to guide on how to meet our pets' welfare needs.** This begins before a pet is even acquired. Everyone's lifestyle and circumstances affect their ability to meet a pet's needs – for example, available space and time, and ability to afford lifetime costs. These include the costs of everyday care, preventive healthcare (e.g. vaccinations), as well as veterinary care for unexpected illness or injury. There is no NHS for pets and these costs are usually met privately. Speaking to staff at a local veterinary practice ensures these factors are understood before taking on a

thinking and feeling animal that will rely on their owner throughout their life. Once a suitable pet has been identified and acquired, registering them at a local veterinary practice and developing a relationship with the practice team is important in order to benefit from services such as practice newsletters and vaccination reminders, as well as to receive tailored advice at different stages of the pet's life.

Improving animal welfare is a top priority for BVA and we support our members to help address issues such as those revealed by the *PAW Report*. With many challenges affecting many animals we will continue working closely with trusted partners such as PDSA and share new approaches with our members – for example, PDSA's pet wellbeing MOTs.

It is unnecessary for pet owners to have a detailed knowledge of animal welfare legislation but it is valuable to know that there are five key steps to a pet's health and happiness – **the five welfare needs** – and that it is a legal requirement to follow them. The more this is promoted and achieved, the more pets will experience the wellbeing they deserve. BVA welcomes the *PAW Report* as a valuable reminder to everyone with an interest in pet wellbeing that this is the case.



Improving animal welfare is a top priority for BVA and we support our members to help address issues such as those revealed by the PAW Report.

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

REFERENCES

When referring to the Animal Welfare Acts this includes the Animal Welfare Acts covering England and Wales, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 which applies to Scotland, and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

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