

# Celebrating feline

*“Forget the BAFTAs, forget the Oscars, these are the awards that matter.”*

Lesley Joseph.



The winners and the judges

*The National Cat Awards 2014 recognised extraordinary feline tales of survival, companionship and bravery at London's Savoy Hotel*



The National Cat Awards is an event that is eagerly anticipated by cat devotees from all over the UK and the 2014 awards were no exception. On 7 August guests gathered at the prestigious Savoy Hotel in London to honour an amazing group of cats who had not only enriched the lives of their owners, but in some cases saved them.

Finalists had travelled from as far as Scotland and as near as Archway in London to enjoy the ceremony which was kindly sponsored by our partners PURINA®.

Maggie Philbin, presenter of *Bang Goes the Theory*, *Swap Shop* and *Tomorrow's World*, to name but a few, was our excellent Master of Ceremonies for the day, introducing the different categories and celebrity judges. A proud cat owner herself she exclaimed: "Where else is it perfectly acceptable, and expected, for people to talk non-stop about cats and fur balls?"

The award categories were Most Caring Cat, Hero Cat, Most Incredible Story, Outstanding Rescue Cat, PURINA® Better Together and Special Recognition Award, culminating with the overall National Cat of the Year award.

Eden Taylor-Draper from ITV's *Emmerdale*, actress and singer Carley Stenson, film and television actor Paul Copley and Saffron Sprackling, lead singer from Republica, were our category judges who had the task of deciding between the finalists. The overall feeling from them all was that it had been incredibly difficult with Carley admitting that she'd found it so hard that she'd had to get her mum to help her!

Each category was introduced by the judge and there followed a short film about each of the cats by their owner. Some stories made the audience laugh, others had them in tears. The judge then announced their final choice and the very proud winners came to the stage to receive their award, to great applause and cheers. If the category judges had found it hard to choose, then the overall winner panel had an

# ouulous felines...

equally difficult task - to choose the National Cat of the Year. Actress Lesley Joseph, former news reader Jan Leeming, TV presenter Tim Vincent and model Lucy Pinder represented the judging panel and joined each other on stage to announce the final award. The National Cat of the Year for 2014 was Nelson, a one-eyed cat from County Durham whose traumatic and eventful life was turned around when he was adopted by Andrea Huntley-Crow and Dave Crow. It was a popular choice met with cheers around the room and his thrilled owners came up to receive the accolade.

Earlier, in her welcoming speech, Chairman Heather McCann, had said: "Running through these amazing stories is a common thread, a relationship between cats and people that is unique and that is based on mutual love, respect and trust. The cats are the stars of today." And the audience completely agreed. It would be safe to say that by the end of the afternoon everyone present had been left in awe and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. The unabashed love for cats was palpable and while the guests were applauding these fantastic animals, the cats themselves were back home, completely unaware of the excitement they were causing at The Savoy.

It was a wonderful event that celebrated, in the words of Chief Executive, Peter Hepburn, "the special bond that we share with our pets and the many wonderful things they bring into our lives."

Now read on about these incredible cats and their amazing tales...



Photos: Philippa Gedde Photography

Nelson's owner hears the news

## The category winners...

### Most Incredible Story and National Cat of the Year 2014



#### *Nelson – Seaham, County Durham*

Twenty-year-old Nelson has certainly used up a fair few of his nine lives during his eventful lifetime. Callously thrown into the sea in a sack, he was one of only two of his littermates to survive when a fisherman plucked them from the waves. There followed a harsh few years living rough on the docks, occasionally gaining shelter from the elements in the fisherman's cabin. Living rough took its toll and Nelson lost an eye when a gang of youths threw rocks at him. But in 2009 his life turned around when he was picked up by a loving family and adopted. Despite being diagnosed with an inoperable heart tumour in January 2014, Nelson has fought back and amazed vets with his zest for life.

Paul Copley had the task of choosing the winner from our three finalists for this category, saying: "Three amazing stories about three remarkable pusscats, but Nelson is my choice. To survive all that he has and still be able to trust humans is quite something!" ▶



## Hero Cat

### *Cleo – Chessington, Surrey*



Pauline Jenkins knew something was wrong when the normally placid and laid-back Cleo started running up and down the stairs and behaving strangely. So when husband Richard complained of chest pains and Cleo clambered onto the bed to be next to him, she quickly dialled 999. Paramedics arrived and confirmed Richard had suffered a heart attack and needed emergency treatment. Despite being wary of strangers, loyal Cleo, aged 15, only left Richard's side when he was taken to hospital and upon his return stayed with him around the clock until he was back on his feet.

Judge Carley Stenson says "I felt exactly the same for all of the cats [in the category] but Cleo overcame her own fear of strangers to help her beloved owner. She saved his life."



Photo: Anna Branthwaite

## Most Caring Cat

### *Elias – Hillesden, Buckinghamshire*



For army veteran Jack Dignam-Thomas, three-year-old Elias is more than a pet. He is a vital link to the world when he becomes consumed by the painful effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. When his symptoms start, Jack can spend long periods of time withdrawing into himself and it is then that Elias steps in. By jumping up and demanding fuss and attention, Elias can bring Jack round and help him engage once more in everyday life.

Eden Taylor-Draper chose Elias because "It's a lovely story which shows how much the cat cares for Jack."



Photo: Phil Carpenter

## Outstanding Rescue Cat

### *Legz – Charlotte Despard pub, London*



Three-legged Legz is truly the Cat Ambassador of London. Since being adopted by pub landlords Amber Knight and Chris Sparks he has taken a liking to pub life and has become part of the furniture. He has an uncanny knack for winning round non-cat lovers and has inspired many locals to adopt rescue cats of their own and even one to start volunteering for a cat charity. People travel from far and wide to meet chirpy five-year-old Legz and bring him toys and catnip gifts, with Amber and Chris saying he has helped to bring communities together.

Legz was chosen by Saffron Sprackling, who says: "Though Legz has lost one leg, it hasn't stopped him from befriending people and bringing together the community in his local pub with his personality and charm. He is a true ambassador for rescue cats and Cats Protection."



Photo: Anna Branthwaite

## PURINA® Better Together

### *Mr Chips – Llandudno, Conwy*



Mr Chips has had his share of hard luck – found as a stray with a badly broken leg, he was left with a permanent disability. But that hasn't stopped him living life to the full and when new owner Ian Turner was diagnosed with a complex medical condition, Mr Chips proved to be an incredible support. In the past three years, Ian has undergone a dozen operations, affecting both his physical and mental health, leaving him at times feeling suicidal. Throughout it all has been eight-year-old Mr Chips who Ian says has kept him going through times of despair.

Our Facebook supporters cast the votes for this category, and with over 600 'likes', Mr Chips was the clear winner. Cats Protection supporter Bron Smith said: "Very hard to choose. I chose this one not only because of the story but because you can really see how much Mr Chips loves Ian too."



Photo: Ajar Photographics

## Special Recognition Award

### *Holly – St Annes, Lancashire*



This story doesn't fit into the defined categories but stood out to us as a heart breaking example of the special bond we can share with our pets.

Holly is everything to Keith Smith, for the most tragic of reasons. In 2012, Keith lost four of his grandchildren – Reece, Holly, Ella and Jordan - in a house fire in Freckleton, Lancashire. Not long after this, his son also sadly passed away. Since then, heartbroken Keith has drawn much comfort from his pet cat Holly. Keith says: "I haven't got a lot left in my life anymore and Holly has always been there when I get home and when I wake up in the morning. I love her to bits."

Cats Protection Chief Executive Peter Hepburn says: "As cat lovers, we are all aware of the special bond we can share with our pets and the many wonderful things that they bring into our lives. They are there with us in times of happiness but equally they can comfort us in times of sorrow. Keith and Holly's story stood out to us as a heart-breaking example of such a bond and we felt that we could not pass the day without giving special recognition to this story of companionship under tragic circumstances." ●



Photo: Andrew Collier Photography



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