



CATS^{*} Report

NORTHERN IRELAND • 2021

*Cats and Their Stats



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Methodology

For the second year we have commissioned an external and independent agency, Basis Research, to conduct the research contained in this report. An online survey was used to collect information among a nationally representative audience of over 18s in the UK, allowing us to identify the proportion of cat owners in the UK. We also conducted a more detailed survey among cat owners. This was carried out between 8 March 2021 and 12 April 2021. 'In the last 12 months' within the report refers to the time period March 2020 to March 2021. Unless otherwise stated, comparative data in this survey uses data from CATS 2020.

Overall, 10,519 interviews were conducted in the UK*. These consisted of a nationally representative sample of 3,585 adults. Additional interviews were undertaken with cat owners, bringing the total number of cat owners interviewed to 6,352. Cat owner regional boosts were undertaken bringing the total number in Northern Ireland to 366.

BASIS

* More information available upon request

Photo credit: all photos taken by Ciaran McCrickard unless otherwise stated.

Welcome to the second annual Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Northern Ireland[©] 2021

Welcome to CATS NI 2021 – the most comprehensive survey of cat owners undertaken in Northern Ireland.

This year's survey was conducted approximately one year after the start of the first lockdown, providing vital insight into how cats and their owners have fared during this difficult period.

Northern Ireland has not seen any increase in the number of households owning a cat, still at 22% as it was in 2020. There has been a fall in the average cats per household from 1.7 to 1.4 in 2021 which has led to a decrease of 70,000 cats. Despite this 83% of cat owners say that their cat brings them joy, highlighting the importance of our pets during the pandemic.

It is fantastic that so many people are enjoying cat ownership; however, with approximately 22,000 cats in Northern Ireland not yet registered with a vet, it also presents a number of welfare challenges that are explored within this report. This year, we have also taken an extensive look at the changing ways people are getting their cats and the sort of cats they are acquiring.

CATS NI 2021 provides an insight into cats' lives and wellbeing and provides us a base to monitor whether the changes from COVID-19 represent a blip, or a wider change in our relationship with cats.

We want to make the world a better place for cats and having more data about them will allow us to help them and their owners more effectively.

Dr Maggie Roberts BVM&S MRCVS

Cats Protection Director of Veterinary Services





“CATS 2021 has found that 68% of cats and kittens purchased across the UK in the last year were found online. Online shopping has undoubtedly become a huge part of our lives – particularly during the pandemic.

But when it comes to cats and kittens, buying online isn't without its risks. It is shocking how easy it is for unscrupulous sellers to operate online and put profit before kitten welfare. Consumers may sadly find themselves duped into purchasing kittens which are too young or sick, leaving them with high vet bills or, in some cases, a kitten which tragically dies. Cats Protection's work with government and extensive advice to consumers is vital to ensure potential cat owners get a healthy and happy pet and stamp out the mis-selling of pets.”

Deborah Meaden
Entrepreneur, TV personality and animal welfare campaigner

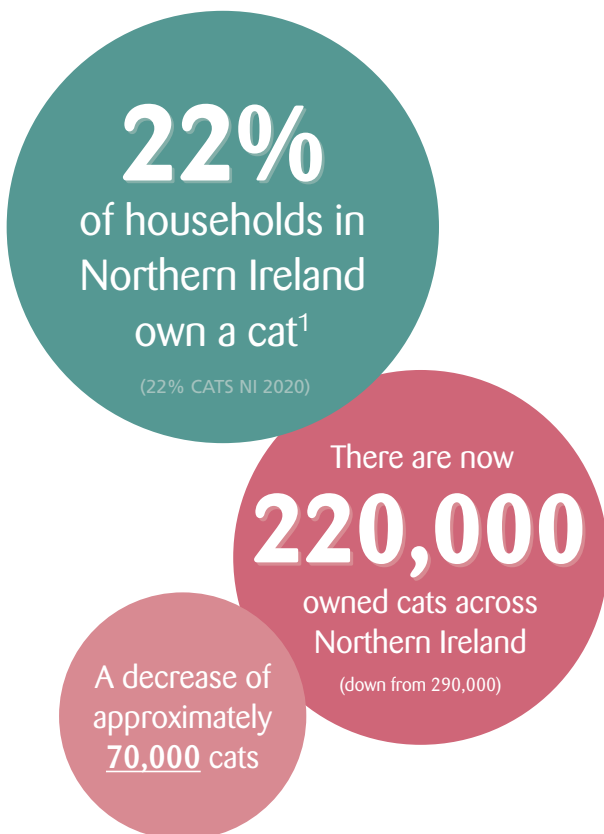


State of the nation

The number of households owning a cat in Northern Ireland has remained static this year; with 22% owning a cat (22% in 2020).

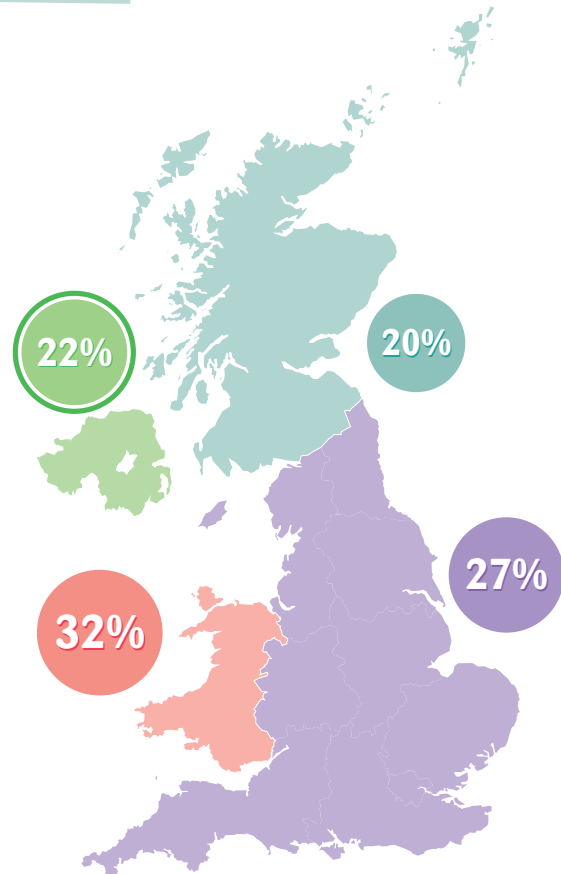
There are now 220,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland (down from 290,000), a decrease of 70,000 cats.

The average cats per household decreased from 1.7 to 1.4 cats in 2021 with 63% of cat-owning households having one cat and 37% owning two or more cats.



Proportion of cat owners by UK country

Cat ownership levels vary across the UK from 32% of households in Wales to 22% in Northern Ireland and 20% in Scotland.



¹ Question asked: Do you currently have a cat/s (that live with you)?/How many cats do you have in your household?

Base: Total UK market (n=3,585), Wales (n=181), England (n=3,009), Northern Ireland (n=108), Scotland (n=288).

Example calculation: 26% own a cat in the UK x 27.8m UK households** x 1.5 cats owned on average = 10.8m cats owned across the UK **Source: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds/familiesandhouseholds>. England regional breakdowns only. Sample size too small for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland regions.

Profile of cat owners

The profile of owners remains broad – there’s no such thing as a typical owner.

Northern Irish cat owners are more likely to be younger than the average Northern Ireland household. **92% of Northern Irish cat owners are under 65, compared to 66% of Northern Irish households.**

Those acquiring a cat in the last 12 months tend to be younger than the overall profile of cat owners with half (51%) aged 18-34 compared to one-third (34%) of all cat owners.

The age of cat owners compared to Northern Irish households²

	All Northern Irish cat owners	Northern Irish households	Those acquired in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months
18 - 24	15%	6%	23%
25 - 34	19%	8%	28%
35 - 44	19%	14%	20%
45 - 54	26%	14%	25%
55 - 64	13%	24%	4%
65+	8%	34%	0%

² Question asked: Do you currently have a cat/s (that live with you)?/How many cats do you have in your household?



The cat market



COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns have had a significant impact on pet ownership, with increased demand and high prices being widely reported in the media.

Where are people getting cats from?³

Overall, the majority of cats in Northern Ireland are either adopted from a rescue/rehoming centre or animal shelter in the UK (20%), bought (19%), or taken on from a neighbour, friend or family (17%).

This equates to a cat population in Northern Ireland where around

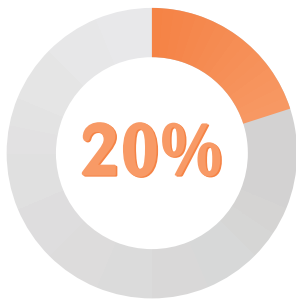
45,000 were adopted

42,000 were purchased

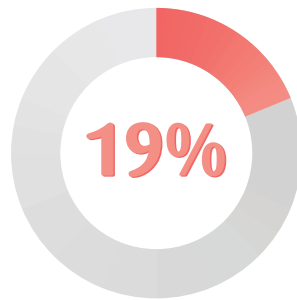
39,000 were taken on

(The additional 94,000 cats were acquired from other sources.)

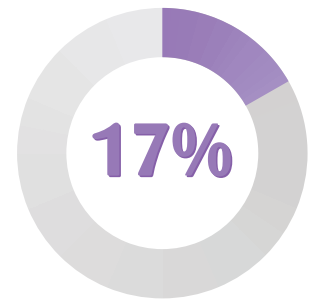
Where are people getting cats from?⁴



Adopted from a rescue/rehoming centre/animal shelter in the UK



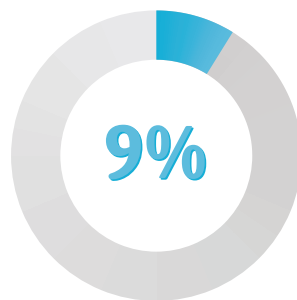
Bought*



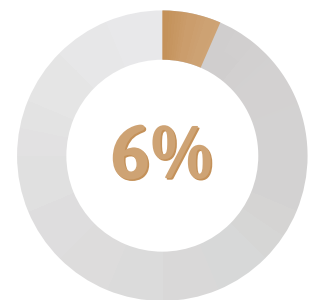
Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family



Found a stray and took them in



They were a kitten of a cat I already had



My cat adopted me (eg they started coming in for food, stayed and now live with me)

(The additional 16% of cats were acquired from other sources.)

³ Question asked: Where did you get/adopt your cat from?

⁴ ibid

* Bought = Bought from someone I didn't know (7%) + Bought from a specialist breeder in the UK (5%) + Bought from neighbour/family etc. (2%) + Bought from pet shop (2%) + Bought from specialist breeder overseas (2%).

COVID-19 impact or changing trends?

With many rescues, including Cats Protection, running at reduced capacity during lockdown, COVID-19 has had a major impact on where people are getting their cats from. Some of the most common sources of cat ownership have fallen in percentage terms in the last year – with just 11% of cats being adopted from a rescue in the UK in the last 12 months compared to 21% of those that were obtained more than five years ago. The survey indicates that the percentage of cats being adopted from the UK is reducing while the percentage of those being bought has been on the rise, although this did slightly reduce in the last year. Whether this is a blip or a longer-term trend will need to be monitored.

Over time a lower percentage of cats are being taken in as strays with a decrease from 20% of cats obtained more than five years ago to just 6% obtained in the last year.

We estimate from this data that, **in the last 12 months** 38,000 cats were obtained in Northern Ireland.

21% bought

19% taken on

16% adopted

(The additional 44% of cats were acquired from other sources.)



Photo credit: Gabriella Clare Marino.

What types of cats do people have?

Moggy v pedigree

67% of owners in Northern Ireland identify their cats as moggies, 19% as pedigrees and 5% as cross-breeds.

There appears to be an increasing trend towards pedigree cats – of the cats obtained more than five years ago, 78% were moggies compared to just 53% in the last year.

Percentage of pedigrees, moggies and cross-breeds obtained over time

	Total pet cat population	Cats obtained in the last year	Cats obtained 1-2 years ago	Cats obtained 3-5 years ago	Cats obtained more than 5 years ago ⁵
Moggy/domestic longhair or shorthair	67%	53%	64%	69%	78%
Pedigree ⁶	19%	29%	26%	21%	9%
Cross-breed (non-moggy)	5%	13%	4%	2%	3%
Don't know	9%	5%	6%	7%	9%

⁵ Question asked: What breed is your cat? Moggy/domestic longhair or shorthair (eg tabby, black, ginger etc)/ When did you acquire (eg buy/adopt) your cat?

⁶ 'Pedigree' includes those selected from a list or, if none of these were suitable, an open text field was available – this has been filtered for any clear non-pedigree cats.

Breed certification

Only those cats with official paperwork (certificate from breed association) can be truly classed as pedigree cats.

Paperwork, registered with a cat fancy or pedigree registration body guarantees the authenticity of the pedigree an owner has purchased. Where pedigrees have been registered, the cat's lineage as well as evidence of any genetic testing required to check for inheritable diseases from both parents will be available. This ensures the cat has been bred from parents free from disease which otherwise could negatively affect both the health and welfare of the individual cat.


Definitions

A **pedigree** is a specific breed of cat produced through selective breeding, with both parents being of the same breed – the cat would be registered with a governing body and their ancestry recorded.

A **cross-breed** is produced through breeding with different breeds – for example two pedigrees or a pedigree and a moggy.

A **moggy** is produced through non-selective breeding and is neither a pedigree nor a cross-breed.





Selective breeding to maintain recognised breeds unfortunately often comes at a cost to the cat. Due to the repeated and constant selection of certain traits, the chances of undesirable and often harmful genetic abnormalities being expressed is increased. So, despite being many times more expensive than a moggy – pedigrees can face more health conditions, and in some cases have a significantly lower quality of life.

For example, Persians are prone to health problems due to being brachycephalic or flat-faced. They can suffer not only from breathing difficulties due to their short muzzle and small nostrils, but also related eye problems, skin infections and can have difficulty eating. In addition, Persians have very long, fine coats which can mat easily, making it difficult for the cat to groom themselves.

It is important to ensure that consumers are aware of the potential health conditions of the – often very expensive – cats they are purchasing and that trends for a particular breed of cat don't come at the expense of cat welfare.

Sarah Elliott – Cats Protection Central
Veterinary Officer

Veterinary care – how well are we caring for our cats?

Vet visits⁷

There is a slight increase this year on the number of cats registered with a vet, from 86% to 90%. But this still means **approximately 22,000 cats (10%) are not registered with a vet.**

Social grade is also a factor with ABC1C2 significantly more likely to visit routinely than DE – those in lower social grades may therefore need more support around regular vet visits.

Approximated social grade is a socio-economic classification and has six categories A, B, C1, C2, D and E. It applies to every Northern Irish household and is based on determining the employment category of the main income earner in a household.



Visiting the vets can be stressful for cats – their response to this stress can make examining and treating them challenging. Making the vet practice a cat-friendly environment can greatly improve a cat's overall experience and reduce their stress levels. Supporting owners to train their cat to be comfortable with the cat carrier, and by making simple changes such as the regular use of synthetic pheromones, gentle handling techniques and providing the cat with somewhere to hide while at the clinic, can all help to make a cat's visit a more positive, less stressful experience.

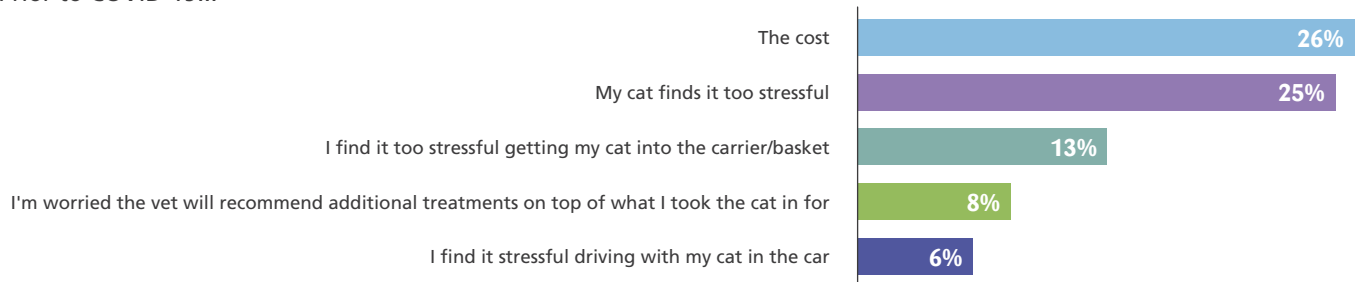
Daniel Cummings – Cats Protection Behaviour Officer

⁷ Question asked: Is your cat registered with a vet? Which of the following best describes how often you tend to go to the vet?

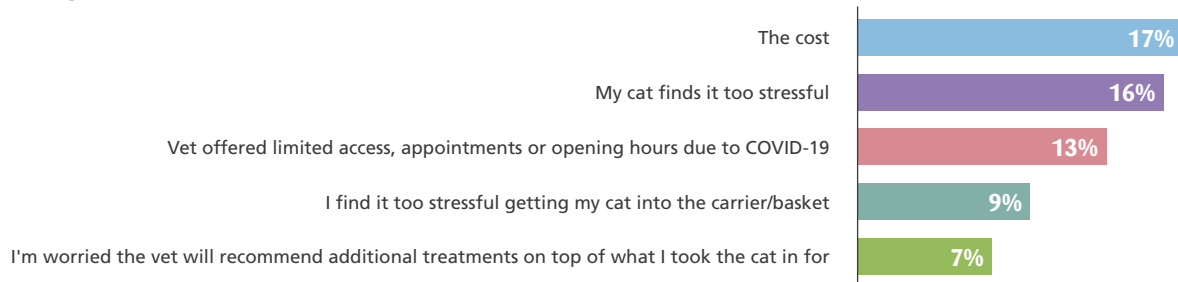
Top five reasons for not visiting vet before and during pandemic⁸



Prior to COVID-19...



Throughout COVID-19...



Cost remains the top reason for not visiting the vet, however it seems the expense of vet visits is less of a concern this year compared to last year, dropping from 33% in 2020 to 26% in 2021.

A small percentage of owners, 8%, are worried that vets will sell them treatments they did not go in for and this is a barrier for some. Whether this is a common misconception or it is true, this is an area where owner reassurance is needed from the veterinary profession to ensure this sector of cat owners are not risking their cats' welfare.

Owners also state that their cats find going to the vets too stressful (25%, up from 21% in 2020).



The COVID-19 effect on vet visits

While nearly all cat owners claim to visit the vet under normal circumstances, the pandemic has seen a fall in those going for their annual visit. Whereas 52% of owners say they usually go for a routine visit to the vet every year, this falls to 45% doing so during the past year of the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning approximately 100,000 cats are not routinely visiting the vet.

Interestingly, the concern over costs reduced during the pandemic but 13% of all owners said they are not going to the vets as often as they would like, the reason they didn't go was due to limited vet access due to COVID-19. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) survey in March 2021 stated that only 16% of UK practices were providing business as usual⁹.

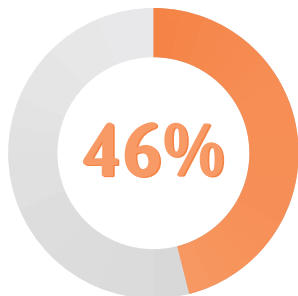
⁸ Question asked: Which of the following, if any, prevents you from taking your cat to the vet as often as you might like to?/Again, thinking now just about the last year, which of the following, if any, prevented you from taking your cat to the vet as often as you might like to?

⁹ www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/coronavirus-economic-impact-on-veterinary-practice-6/

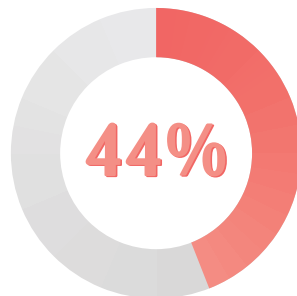
Insurance¹⁰

There has been a significant increase in the proportion of owners who have pet insurance (41% up from 27%).

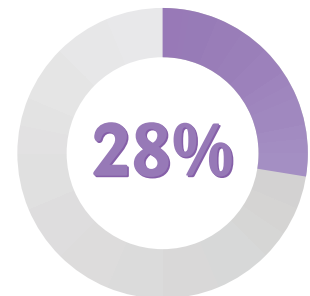
Cat owners taking out insurance



18 - 34



35 - 54



55+

Vaccinations

65%¹¹ of cats (145,000) are up to date with their vaccinations according to their owners (down from 69% in 2020). This may be linked to the limited access to vets during COVID-19. 9% of owners say their cat (20,000 cats) has not received vaccinations altogether with a further 17% (38,000 cats) not having their cat's vaccinations up to date. 9% of owners (20,000 cats) say they either don't know what vaccinations their cat has had or don't know what vaccinations their cat should have had.

This suggests up to 75,000 cats are not benefiting from the protection routine vaccinations can offer.



¹⁰ Question asked: Do you have pet insurance for your cat?

¹¹ Question asked: Is your cat up to date with their vaccinations (ie has had their booster vaccinations as relevant to their age)?

How owners reported their cat's vaccination status

4%

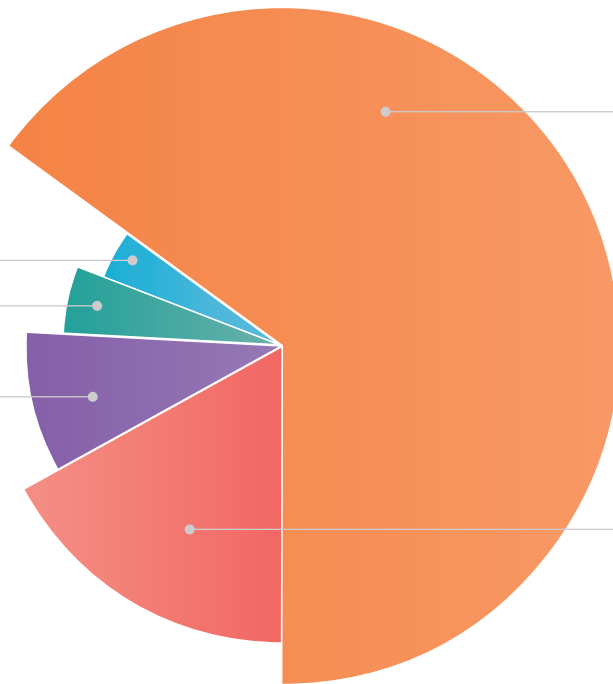
I don't know what vaccinations my cat should have had

5%

I don't know what vaccinations my cat has had

9%

My cat has not had any vaccinations



65%

My cat is up to date with their vaccinations

17%

My cat has had some vaccinations but is not up to date

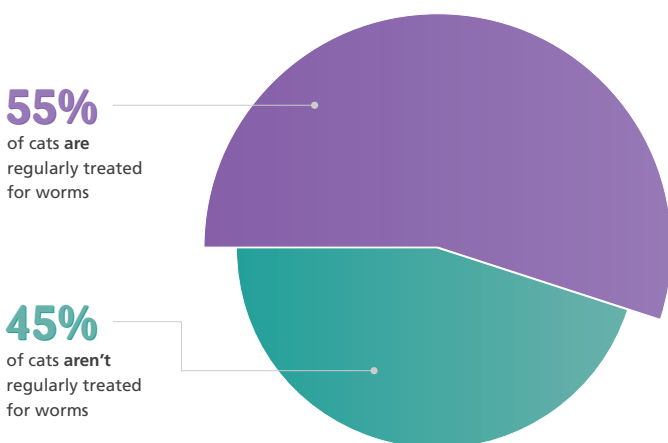
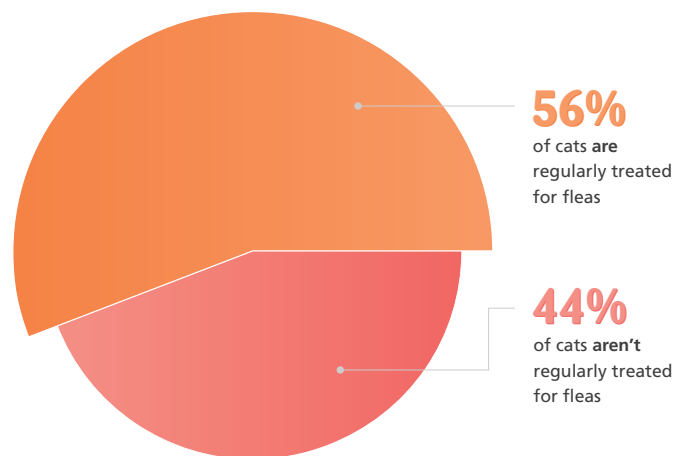


Preventative treatments¹²

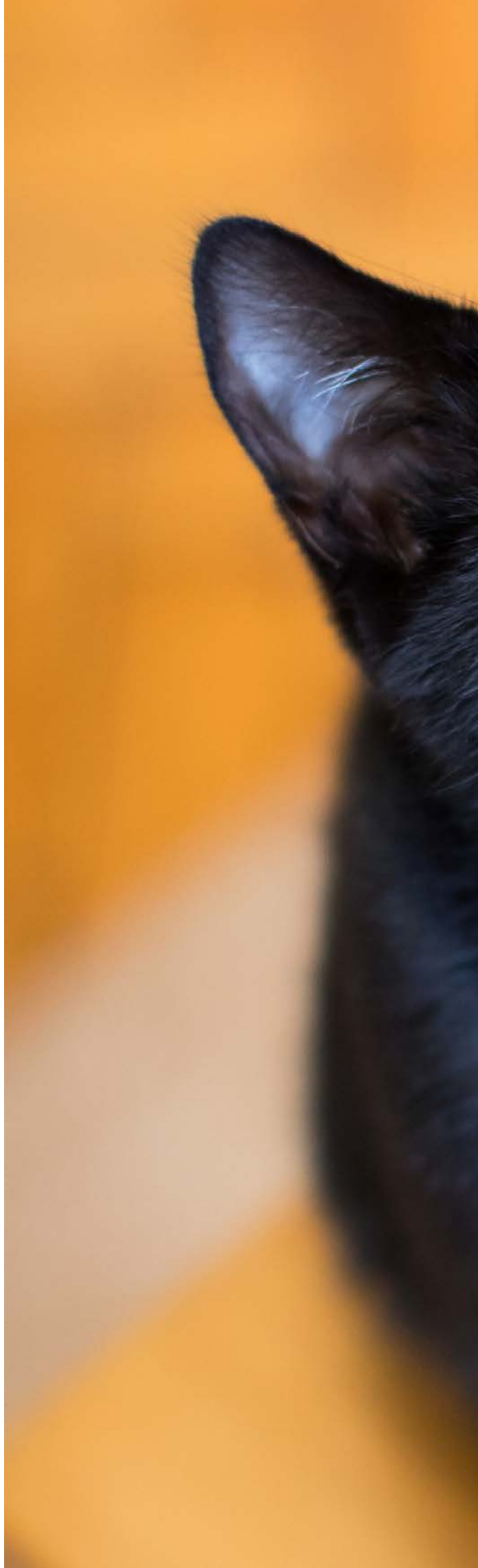
Despite the challenges of the past year, largely owners continue to say they are up to date with preventative veterinary treatments for their cat. However we do see a small impact on the use of worming and flea treatments with a reduction of regular use compared to last year.

Over four in 10 cats are not regularly treated for fleas and worms. 44% of cats are not regularly treated for fleas, an increase from 37% in 2020 and 45% are not regularly treated for worms, a significant increase from 34% in 2020.

Cats not regularly treated for fleas or worms



¹² Question asked: How often do you tend to protect your cat from fleas?/How often do you tend to protect your cat from worms?



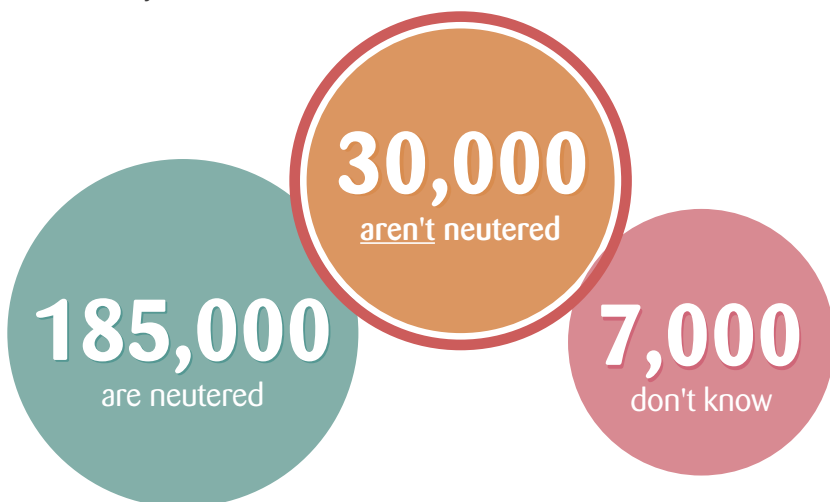


Treatment for fleas and worms should be tailored to an individual cat based on their exposure to fleas and worms and the subsequent risk. Cats Protection therefore recommends preventative treatment in accordance with the European Scientific Counsel for Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP) guidelines for all cats.

www.esccapuk.org.uk/guidelines-uk/

Neutering¹³

The proportion of cats who are neutered has dropped slightly compared to 2020 (83% down from 87%). The proportion of cats that are neutered is significantly lower among cats acquired in the past year compared to all cats owned – 59% are neutered and 35% aren't (6% don't know). Indoor-only cats (vs cats who have access to both indoors and outside) and those living in rural areas (vs non-rural areas) are less likely to be neutered.



The cats less likely to have been neutered

Younger cat owners are significantly less likely to have neutered their cat. 21% of 18-34 year olds have not neutered their cat, compared to 15% of 35-54 year olds and 2% of those aged 55+.

Of concern are an estimated 30,000 cats still unneutered. All unneutered female cats over four months of age are at risk of accidental pregnancies and unwanted litters of kittens¹⁴. There is some positive news as despite the pandemic and limited access to vets, the number of cats neutered four months of age or under has increased from 17% to 21%, a welcomed increase in uptake of pre-pubertal neutering by the veterinary profession.



Alongside providing subsidised neutering vouchers to owners in need, Cats Protection is a founding member of CatKIND, a collaboration of welfare organisations promoting pre-pubertal neutering of cats at four months of age. CatKIND is calling for all vets to take up pre-pubertal neutering to help reduce the number of accidental and unwanted litters of kittens born each year. Vets can help by joining the Kitten Neutering Database.

Jane Clements – Cats Protection
Head of Neutering

www.kind.cats.org.uk

¹³ Question asked: Is your cat neutered/spayed?

¹⁴ Survey of the characteristics of cats owned by households in the UK and factors affecting their neutered status. JK Murray, MA Roberts, A Whitmarsh and TJ Gruffydd-Jones. Veterinary Record (2009) 164, 137-141.

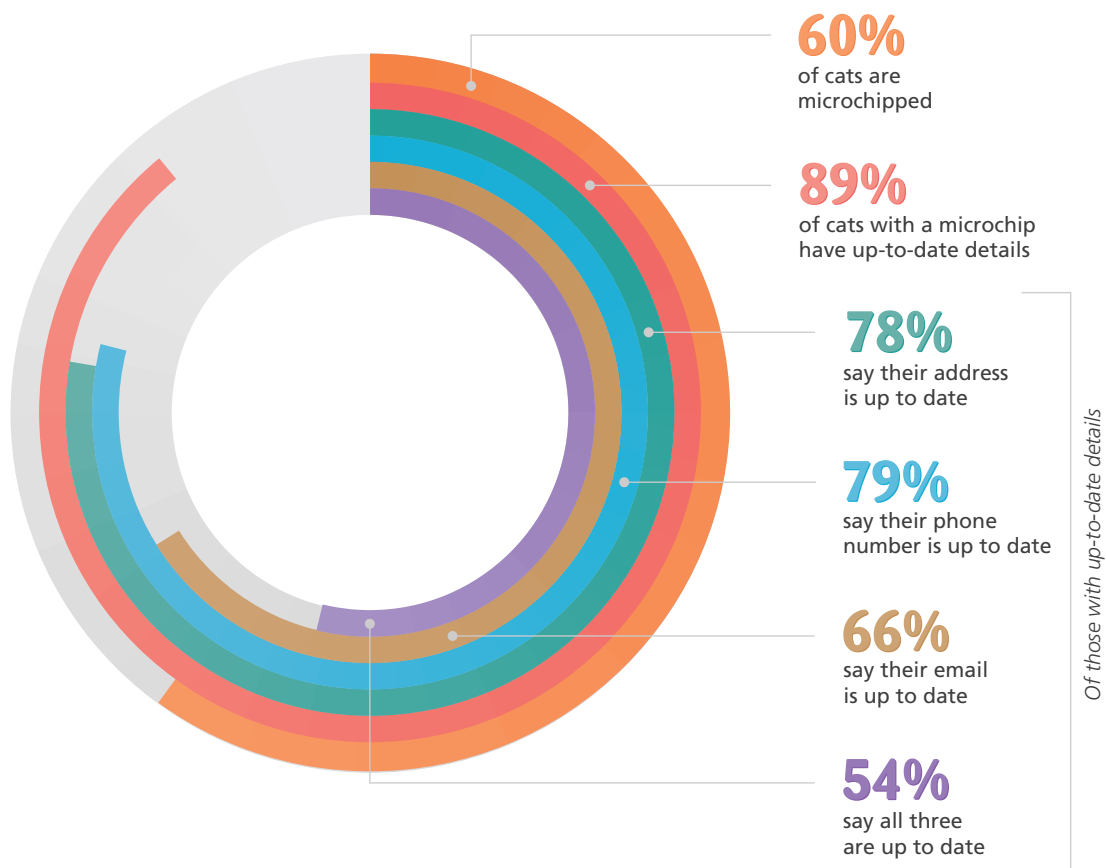
Microchipping

Overall, the proportion of cats who are microchipped has increased slightly compared to last year – **135,000 cats (60%) are microchipped and 74,000 cats (33%) are not microchipped** (6% stated they didn't know if their cat was microchipped)¹⁵. However, this is significantly lower than the UK (70% microchipped). For cats acquired during the pandemic the proportion microchipped drops to 55%.

Reassuringly, a high number of owners tell us their cat's microchip has up-to-date contact details (89% or 120,000 cats¹⁶) however this is a significant drop from 94% in 2020. Only 54% of owners say **all three** of their address, telephone and email address are up to date.

Those aged 55+ are less likely to have their cat microchipped (57% vs 65% of those aged 18-34), and might therefore need some support with microchipping.

Microchips – and keeping details up to date



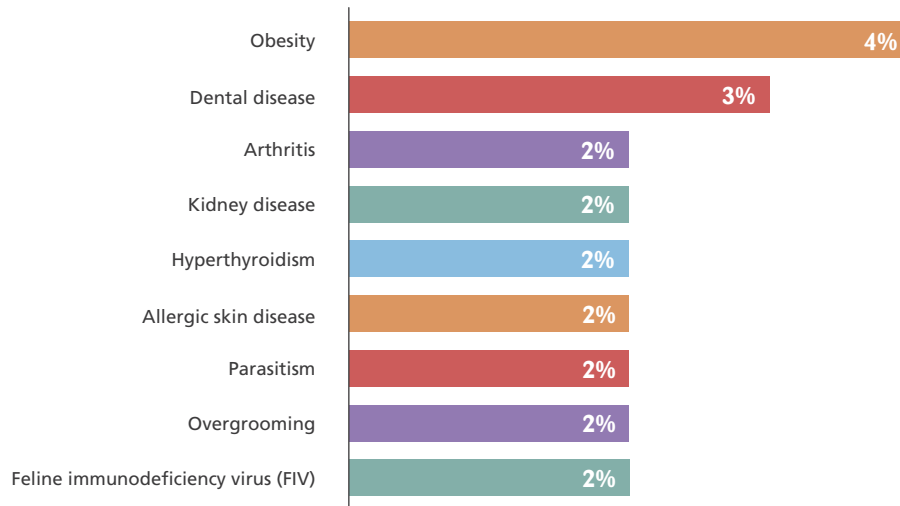
¹⁵ Question asked: Is your cat microchipped?

¹⁶ Question asked: Are your cat's registered microchip details up to date?/Which of the following microchip details are up to date?/Which of the following microchip details are not up to date?

Health and diet

Cats in Northern Ireland remain healthy with the number of diagnosed health conditions remaining level with last year. The majority of owners (79%) say their cat has no health conditions¹⁷. Of the 18% of owners that said their cat does have a health condition, obesity ranks the highest at 4%.

Top health conditions

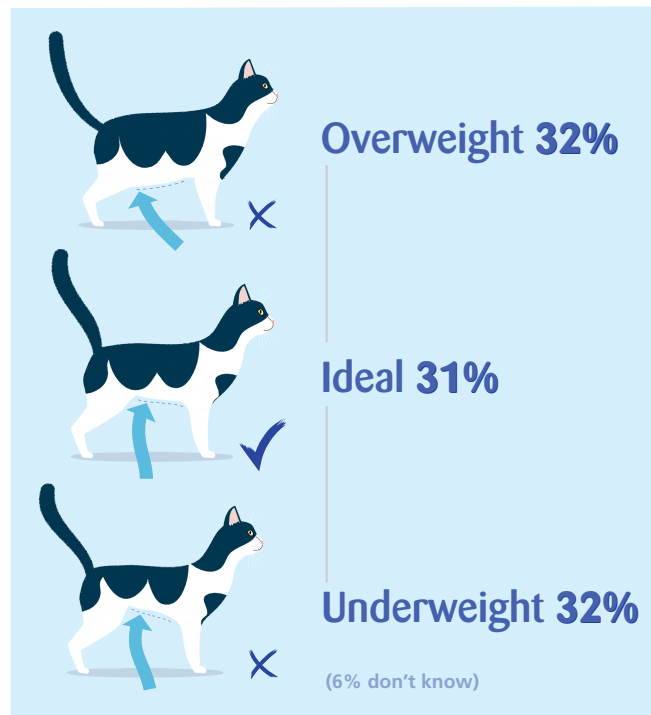


¹⁷ Does your cat have any of the following diagnosed health issues/conditions?



Owners are no more likely to think their cat is overweight¹⁸ than last year – 32% say they think their cat is overweight, with 31% saying they are an ideal weight and 32% saying they are underweight. Although almost a third of owners consider their cats to be heavier than ideal, there is still a small proportion of owners who don't know the body condition of their cat (6%) – vets think 44% of cats are overweight or obese¹⁹, so there currently appears to be some disparity between owners' perceptions and data collected from vets²⁰.

A cat's body condition²¹



It seems spending more time at home with their cats has not only seen owners playing with their cats more but also spoiling them more.



17% of owners said they gave more treats due to the COVID-19 situation, particularly younger owners.

18 Owners self-selected their cat's body condition having seen picture prompts and descriptions based on the Purina body condition tool.

19 In Chapter 4, Basic requirements for good behavioural health and welfare in cats by I Rochlitz, p36 in BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine, DF Horwitz and DS Mills. 2nd Ed, p36 Published by BSAVA, Woodrow House, Gloucester.

20 PFMA Obesity Report 2019. www.pfma.org.uk/_assets/docs/White%20Papers/PFMA-Obesity-Report-2019.pdf

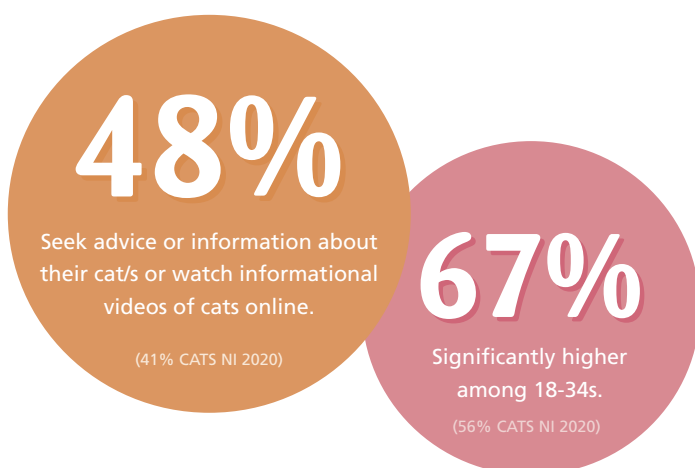
21 Question asked: Which of the following descriptions and images would you say best reflects your cat in relation to their size?/To what extent do you agree with the following statements about having cat/s?/And now thinking about COVID-19 specifically in relation to your cat, which of the below, if any, apply to you?

Cat behaviour and welfare

Sources of cat care information

Although it is increasing, only 25%²² (significantly up from 15%) of owners agree that they tend to do lots of research on how best to look after their cat. This year we found more owners are seeking advice or information about their cats at least monthly (48% up from 41%).

More people are seeking information or advice about their cats



The percentage of owners contacting their vet for information and advice about their cat has decreased from 67% to 62% over the last 12 months²³. Owners continue to speak to friends and family (30%), use social media (16%) for advice and search the internet (50% – down from 55%).

There is also a welcome upward trend in contacting animal charities (13% significantly up from 8%), or the centre from which the cat was adopted (7% up from 4%) for advice. Animal welfare organisations have a vitally important and ongoing role to play in not only providing good cat welfare information and advice, but also in supporting and signposting owners to the veterinary profession.

²² Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statement? I tend to do lots of research about how best to look after my cat/s.

²³ Question asked: Which of the following would you do if you were seeking information or advice about your cat/s?



Who are people seeking cat advice from?

2020 2021



24 Question asked: Which of the following, if any, do you use/visit on a regular basis when looking for the following content related to cats?

Social media is becoming more important for obtaining information and advice about cats, particularly among younger owners (18-34 year olds). When asked specifically about social media platforms used 69%²⁴ (up from 65%) of the cat owners surveyed say they use social media for information or advice on a regular basis. The most frequently used social media platforms remain YouTube (32%), Facebook (31%) and Instagram (14%). The largest increase in usage is for TikTok, which sees an increase from 4% to 12% of owners using it on a regular basis for information about cats. **The younger cat owners (18-34 year olds) have seen the biggest increase in using TikTok with a jump from 6% to 28%** when comparing 2020 and 2021 reports. These results show that social media is a significant source for providing owners with cat welfare information. Ensuring that good cat welfare content from animal welfare organisations is accessible on a wide variety of social media platforms will mean that different audiences are reached.



Throughout the pandemic Cats Protection has continued to provide support to cat owners through its Contact Centre, local branches and centres. By providing cat welfare information and advice, the charity helped owners to make the best decisions for their cat's wellbeing, whether this was by suggesting simple changes in the home, offering behaviour advice or helping with the rehoming of their cat.

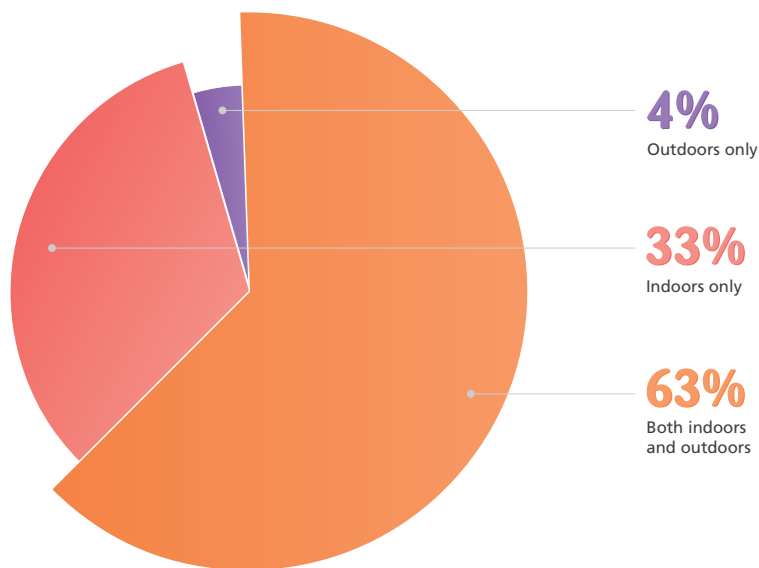
Nick de Bruxelles – Cats Protection Head of Customer Experience

A cat's environment

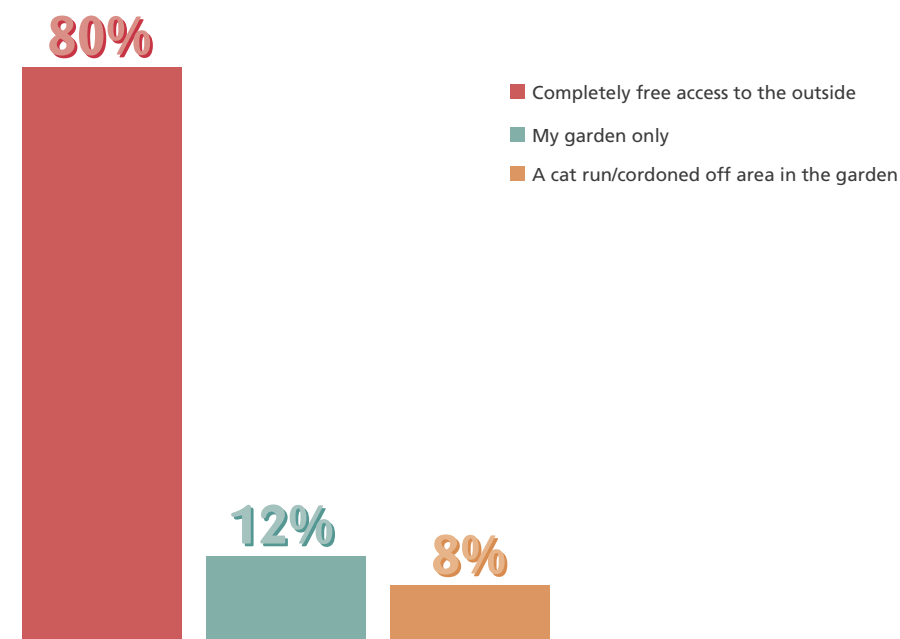
Indoor vs outdoors²⁵

The majority of cats enjoy both outdoor and indoor life (63%), coming and going more or less as they please. But 33% live exclusively indoors (up significantly from 26%). This is more common where owners live in densely populated urban environments (38%).

The majority of cats in Northern Ireland continue to have access to outdoor space

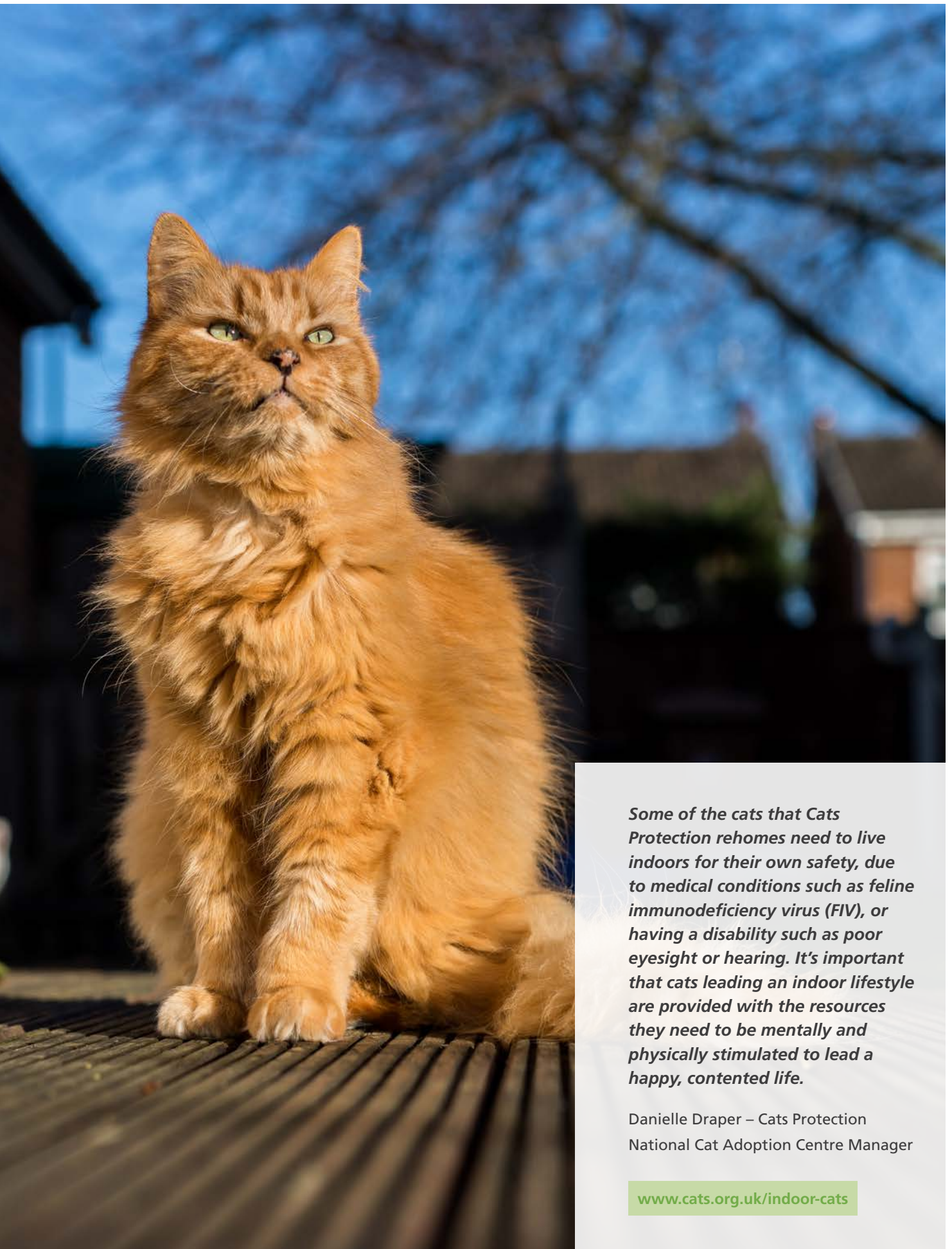


Cats and outdoor access



²⁵ Question asked: Which of the following best applies to your cat?





Some of the cats that Cats Protection rehomes need to live indoors for their own safety, due to medical conditions such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), or having a disability such as poor eyesight or hearing. It's important that cats leading an indoor lifestyle are provided with the resources they need to be mentally and physically stimulated to lead a happy, contented life.

Danielle Draper – Cats Protection
National Cat Adoption Centre Manager

www.cats.org.uk/indoor-cats

Cats at night

Of those cats that are given outside access, 39% are able to come and go freely during the night²⁶. Dawn and dusk are when they are at their most active, a prime time for them to hunt rodents and other small prey.

Cats Protection always recommends that cats are kept in at night. Not only does it reduce predation of wildlife but it also keeps your cat safe. Cats are at increased risk from road traffic injuries and fatalities at night. Road traffic accidents were stated as a cause of injury for 4%²⁷ of cats. They are also more inclined to fight, venturing into other cats' territories, and can come to harm by other animals or even humans.

²⁶ Question asked: Does your cat have access to the outside overnight?

²⁷ Question asked: Since having your cat, has your cat ever been injured?

Photo credit: Eduard Skorov.



Resources for cats



This year over half of owners agree that they are very confident they know what's best for their cat (56%²⁸). However, although some owners may know what's best, **there are certainly areas for improvement** when it comes to the resources they provide for their cats.

Cat owners were asked about the resources they provide for their cats. It seems that food bowls and hiding places are plentiful even in multi-cat households, with on average at least one per cat plus one extra for each of these resources²⁹. There are an average of 3.1 hiding places and 3.2 food bowls for households with two cats. **Additional litter trays are less common.** Of the owners that have two cats, 19% don't provide a litter tray and 29% only provide one litter tray. It is widely recognised that cats should be provided with one of each resource per cat plus one³⁰. Where cats are kept indoors or have restricted access to the outdoors it is essential that enough litter trays are provided to prevent unnecessary stress.

Of concern is **almost one in five (18%) of owners don't provide their cat/s with a scratching post.** For those owners that do not provide a scratching post, **unwanted scratching of furniture and carpets is more likely to occur.**

The availability of resources

Average number of resources per cat owned

		
Food bowls	2.1	3.2
Water bowls	1.9	2.8
Litter trays	1.5	2
Scratching posts	1.7	2.4
Cat beds	1.8	2.5
Hiding places	2.1	3.1

28 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s? I'm very confident I know what's best for my cat/s.

29 Question asked: How many of each of the following, if any, do you have in your home and are currently available for your cat/s to use at any one time?

30 BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine p36.

Behaviour and stress³¹

The **element of play is important to both cats and owners.** More owners are spending time playing with their cats at least twice a day (66% up from 62%). Indoor cats seem to be benefiting most as they are the cats most likely to be played with.



It's great to find more owners are spending time playing with their cats. When owners play with their cat it's a good way to bond and is important for the cat's wellbeing. Play helps elicit a cat's hunting behaviour which causes them to release endorphins or 'happy hormones'. It's very important for cats of all ages to play – it's a great way for a cat to expend energy, keep fit and healthy and keep their brain alert and active. The best games encourage cats to stalk, pounce, chase and bat objects with a paw in a safe way.

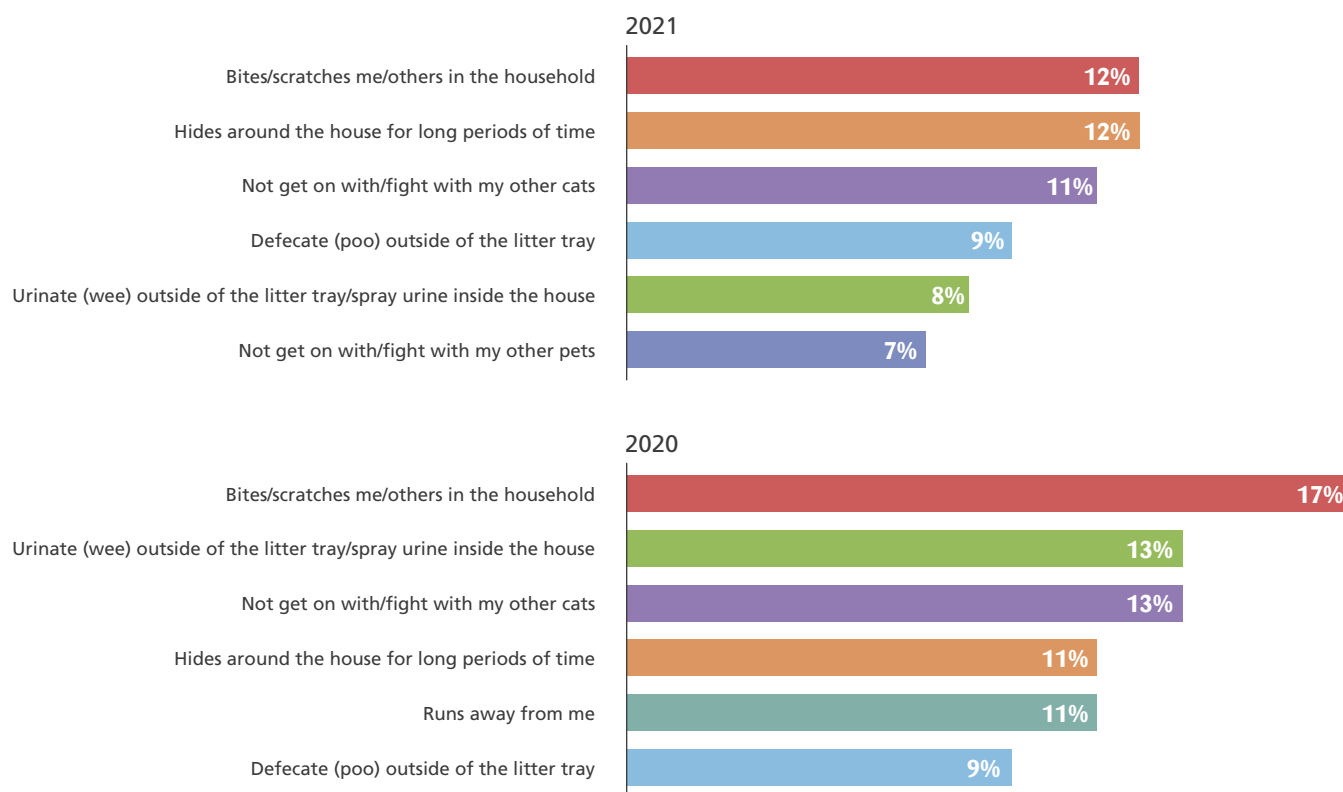
Nicky Trevorrow – Cats Protection Behaviour Manager

www.cats.org.uk/cats-and-play

³¹ Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s?/In an average week, how often do you do each of the following with your cat?

The increased time owners have spent with their cats over the last 12 months appears to have had a positive impact on cat behaviour, with fewer cats demonstrating the types of unwanted behaviours which are often seen due to stress eg urinating outside of the litter tray, or hiding around the house for long periods of time (44% of cats exhibiting at least one stress behaviour, down from 51%). Despite this, cats are still showing signs of stress.

The top six stress behaviours 2021 v 2020³²



Other cats in the household may be a source of stress and our findings indicate that although cats in the same household appear to be getting along with each other a little better than last year, 11% of owners are still reporting their cats are not getting along or are fighting.

³² Question asked: Thinking about the past 12 months, which of the following does your cat tend to do, at least some of the time?

Preventing cats from harm³³

We also asked about injuries or accidents sustained by cats. Thankfully the majority of cats (69%) have never been injured. We found that just under a third of cats (31%) have sustained significant injuries or been involved in accidents. 12% of cats were injured as a result of fights with other cats (not from the same household) and 10% in fights with other animals.



Cats Protection provides plant advice, and extensive lists of toxic and safe outdoor, indoor and cut flower plants.

www.cats.org.uk/dangerous-plants

Flower toxicity to cats³⁴

Just 42% of cat owners are aware that lilies can be toxic to cats. However, Northern Irish owners are significantly less likely to be aware than cat owners across the UK (47%).

Lilies are particularly toxic to cats. Although a cat may appear disinterested in eating them, there is always a risk that they may come into contact with the flower's pollen by rubbing up against it and absent-mindedly licking their fur. All parts of the lily plant are toxic to cats if ingested, and consuming small amounts can result in severe poisoning.

³³ Question asked: Since having your cat, has your cat ever been injured?

³⁴ Question asked: Which of the following popular cut flowers, if any, are you aware of being toxic to cats?

Cats and their experience of fireworks³⁵

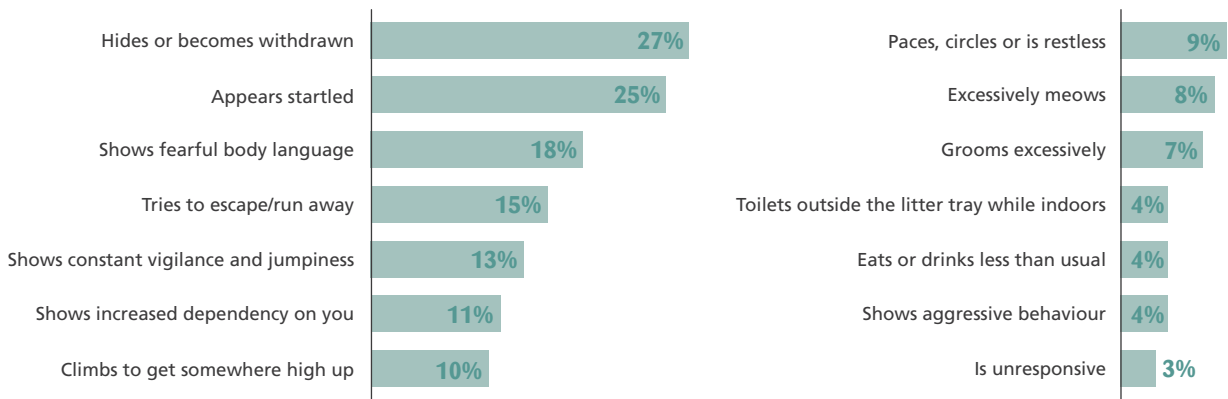
For the first time this year we asked questions about fireworks as Cats Protection is raising awareness and campaigning on this subject.

Of those who have seen their cats experience fireworks, **two thirds (67%)** state that their cat was affected by them.

Owners most commonly said their cat hides or becomes withdrawn when they hear fireworks (27%).

The impact of fireworks on cats

All of these behaviours are indicative of stress. For advice about fireworks, and stress in cats visit www.cats.org.uk/fireworks



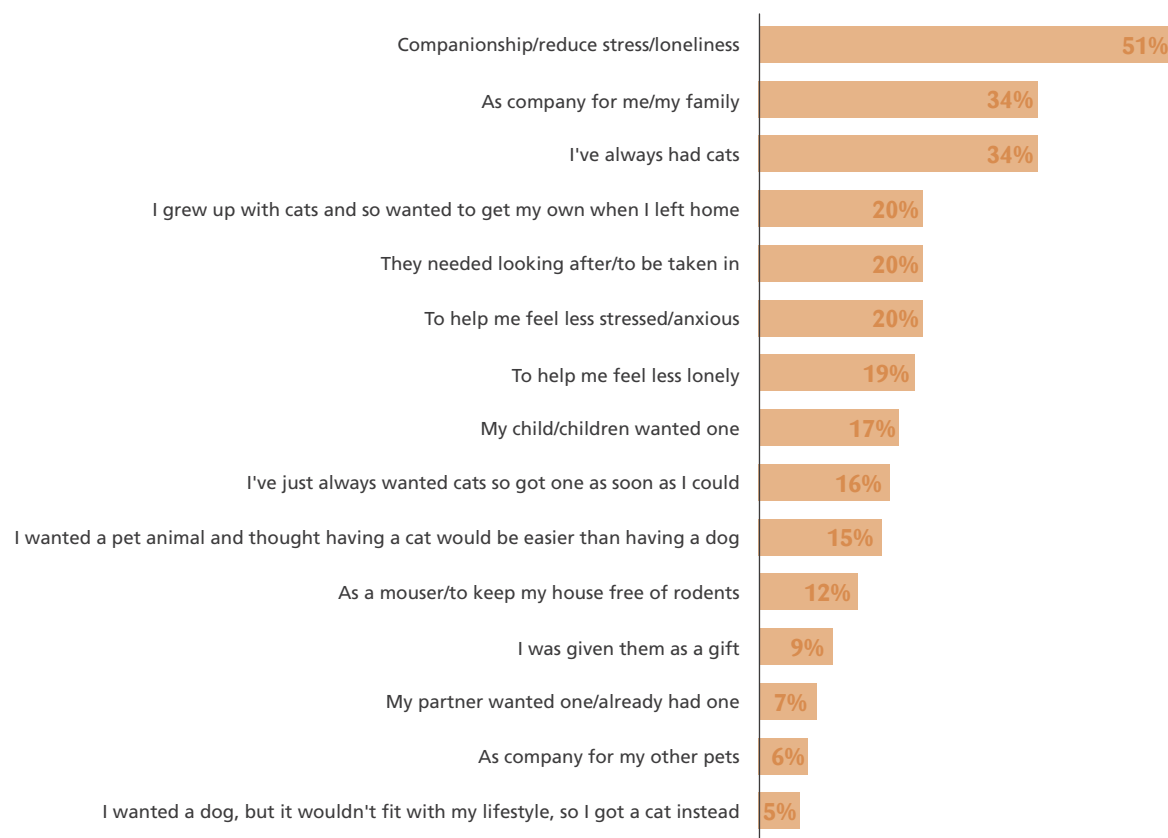
³⁵ Question asked: Does your cat tend to show any of the following signs of stress as a result of hearing fireworks?

Cat companionship and challenges to ownership

What are the reasons people have cats?

The top reason given for owning a cat remains for companionship and to reduce stress and feelings of loneliness (51%)³⁶.

Companionship remains a key driver of cat ownership



³⁶ Question asked: What are the main reasons you have a cat/s?





"In lockdown I wanted something to add to my life. I enjoy looking after cats."

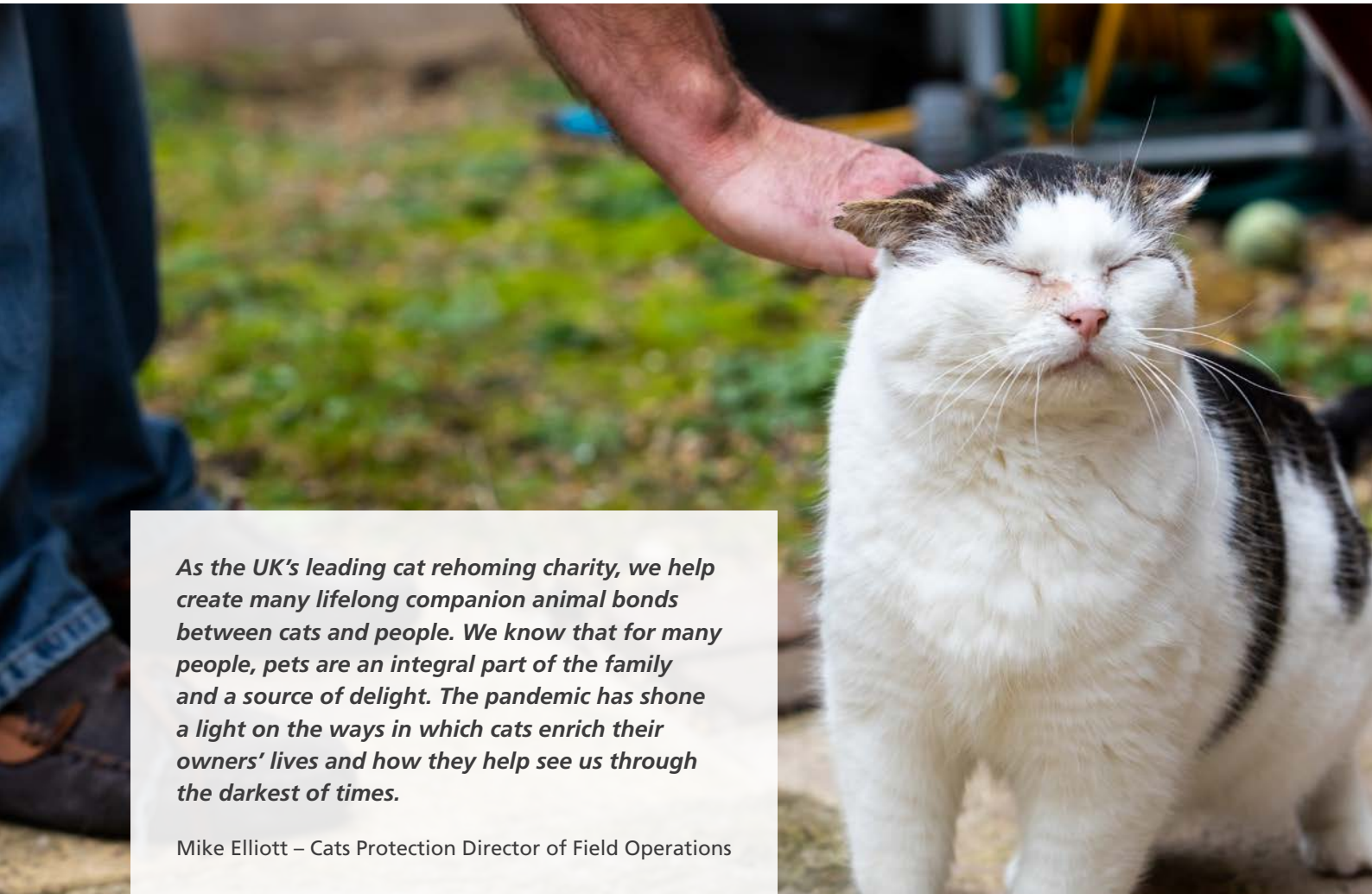
Age 76, Northern Ireland

Cats really did come to our aid during the pandemic

20% of cat owners say that the main reason for having a cat in their life is to help them feel less stressed/anxious. During the pandemic finding ways to alleviate stress has been vital for wellbeing.

Cats are the perfect antidote to stress: 88% of cat owners say they spend time stroking their cat or sitting together every day and evidence shows that human-animal interactions provide mental and physical benefits³⁷.

³⁷ Beetz et al, 2012 Psychosocial and psychophysiological effects of human-animal interactions: the possible role of oxytocin.



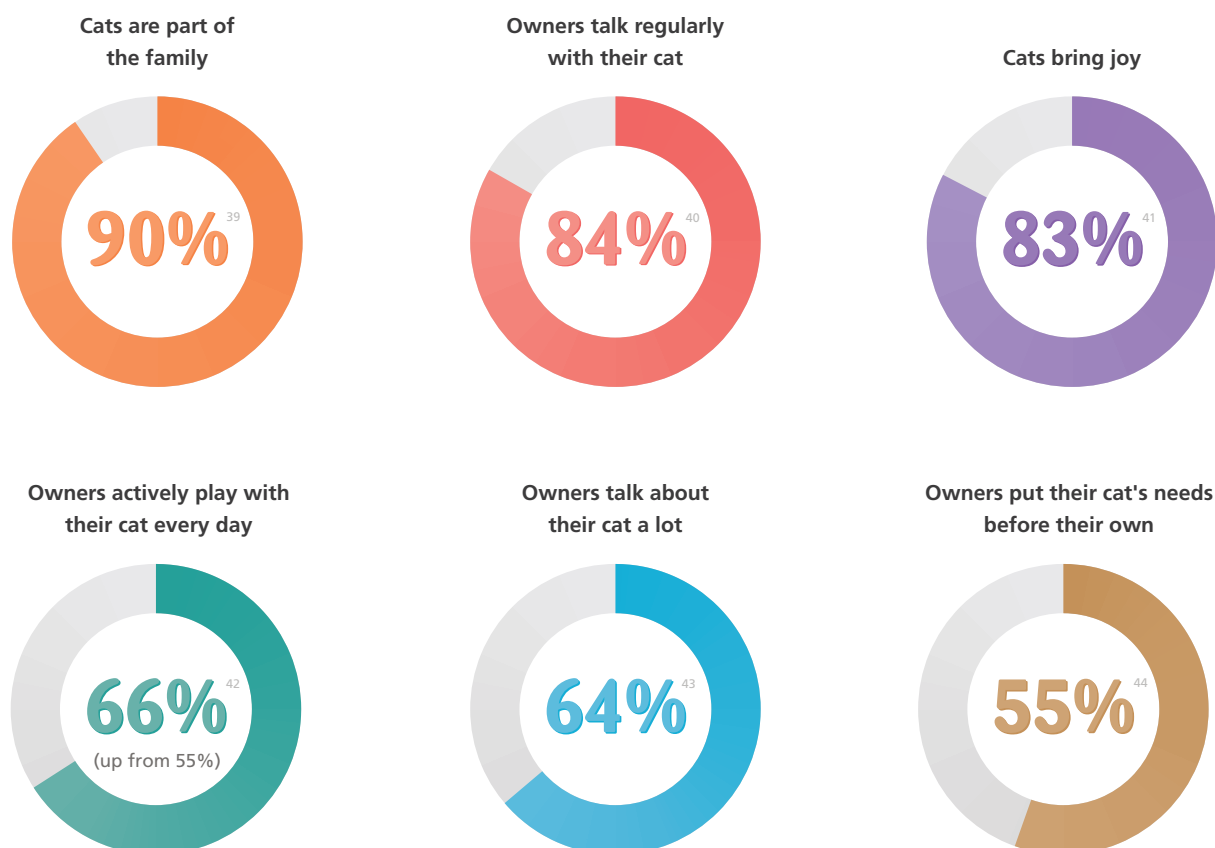
As the UK's leading cat rehoming charity, we help create many lifelong companion animal bonds between cats and people. We know that for many people, pets are an integral part of the family and a source of delight. The pandemic has shone a light on the ways in which cats enrich their owners' lives and how they help see us through the darkest of times.

Mike Elliott – Cats Protection Director of Field Operations

Cats are part of the family and important in our everyday lives

Even more owners report that their cat gives them something to get up for in the morning³⁸ (60% up from 53%).

Younger owners in particular find their cats a real benefit. 69% of 18-34 year olds agreed that their cats give them a reason to get up in the morning.



38 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s? It gives me something to get up for in the morning.

39 ...My cat/s are part of my family.

40 ...I often talk to my cat.

41 ...Having a cat/s brings joy to my life.

42 Question asked: In an average week, how often do you do each of the following with your cat? Actively play together (eg with toys, balls, treat balls, fishing rod toy etc).

43 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s? I talk about my cat/s a lot.

44 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s? I put my cat's needs before my own.

Cats Protection provides many services to cat owners including cat care and welfare advice; subsidised neutering and microchipping; curriculum-linked school and community talks; grief support and rehoming of cats after their owner's death.

For further details please see page 42 of this report.

Sadly, for some people, cat ownership is not possible

Although the sample size specifically for Northern Ireland was too small to report we feel that the following UK-wide stat still resonates with many potential cat owners in Northern Ireland.

It is estimated that 1 million UK households who would like to own a cat cannot because they live in rented accommodation that doesn't allow pets (5.2% of non-owners⁴⁵). Cats Protection is campaigning to change this, so that everyone can enjoy the companionship of a cat.

1.6 million more cats could be rehomed in the UK if ALL landlords allow pets.



⁴⁵ ...I live in rented accommodation and am not allowed to have a cat.



Purrfect Landlords

"Finding rented accommodation that allows cats was really difficult. It would be a case of searching every day, looking at what was available and then looking into the fine print, did they allow pets? A lot of the time it was just a no, straight away⁴⁶."

Laura, private renter from Wrexham

Cats Protection provides resources for landlords considering allowing cats and tenants wishing to rent with a cat at www.cats.org.uk/purrfectlandlords

⁴⁶ p10 Purrfect Landlords report.

Where do we go from here?

What is clear from our report is that our national passion for cats remains as strong as ever – with many of us becoming even more reliant on our pets for emotional support.

There are 22,000 cats not registered with a vet and the pandemic has seen a fall in the number of owners visiting the vet for routine treatment. While this is in part due to the pandemic and a lack of vet capacity, concerns such as cost still play a significant role.

The changes seen in how people are acquiring their cats is also of concern, with the general shift to buying pets online. The online market can provide unscrupulous sellers with the opportunity to exploit both pets and people in the pursuit of profit. With owners saying a higher percentage of cats obtained are 'pedigree', the potential for this problem is exacerbated.

CATS NI 2021 sets a baseline at an extraordinary time; as we enter the new normal, we must recognise the impact major societal shifts have not just on people, but also cats. While some of the findings of CATS NI 2021 may be COVID-19 linked aberrations; others may be the continuation or start of a trend.

Cats Protection and the wider animal welfare sector have a duty to respond proactively, supporting the vet profession who are struggling with serious capacity issues and ensuring good quality information reaches cat owners and potential cat owners, who may inadvertently end up funding a trade in cats bred for a quick profit.



Summary of statistics

Cat population

- There are around 10.8 million owned cats in the UK in 2021, which is an increase of 600,000 from 2020. 220,000 of these owned cats are in Northern Ireland (down from 290,000, a decrease of 70,000 cats)
- Over a fifth of Northern Irish households (22%) own a cat
- Each cat-owning Northern Irish household has an average of 1.4 cats, a decrease from 1.7
- According to owners, 67% of cats are moggies, 20% are pedigrees, 5% are cross-breeds. For the remaining 9%, the owners were not sure of their cat's breed
 - Over time, the percentage of cats that owners are obtaining and believe to be pedigrees has increased:
 - 9% of cats obtained more than five years ago are considered pedigrees compared to 30% of cats obtained in the last 12 months
 - 78% of cats obtained more than five years ago were moggies, compared to 53% in the last 12 months

The cat market

- Owned cats are generally adopted from a UK rescue (45,000), bought (42,000), or have been taken on from a neighbour, family member or friend (39,000)

Neutering and microchipping

- 83% of all owned cats are neutered
- We estimate 30,000 cats are not neutered
- Cats Protection recommends that cats should be neutered from four months of age, which is when they reach puberty
- Encouragingly, the number of cats neutered under four months of age rose from 17% in 2020 to 21% in 2021, a welcome increase in the uptake of pre-pubertal neutering by the veterinary profession
- An estimated 135,000 owned cats are microchipped (60%) and 74,000 cats are not microchipped (33%). Owners of the remaining 6% of cats were unsure if their cat was microchipped
- 89% of owners of microchipped cats told us the contact details registered to the chip were up to date however this is significant drop from 94% in 2020

Health and diet

- 79% of owners say their cats don't have any specific diagnosed conditions. 18% of owners say their cat has at least one health condition. Obesity is the most prominent condition (4%)
- 90% of owned cats are registered with a vet. Whereas 52% of owners say they go for a routine visit to the vet every year, this fell to 45% during the pandemic, meaning approximately 100,000 cats are not routinely visiting the vet
- 41% of cat owners have taken out pet insurance, compared to 27% in 2020
- 65% of owners say their cat is up to date with their vaccinations compared to 68% in 2020, which may be linked to the limited access to veterinary practices during the pandemic
- 32% of owners think their cats are overweight, while vets think that around 44% of cats are overweight

The role that cats play in our lives

- The top reasons people gave for adopting cats were to provide companionship, to reduce stress and to reduce loneliness (51%)
- 60% of owners say their cat gives them something to get up for in the morning
- 84% of owners regularly talk to their cat
- 66% of owners play games with their cat each day
- 55% of owners say they put their cats' needs before their own

Threats to the safety of cats

- Just 42% of cat owners are aware that lilies are toxic to cats
- 67% of owners say their cat is adversely affected by fireworks in some way, including hiding, running away or increased jumpiness

Rental issues

- It is estimated that 1 million households across the UK would like to have a cat, but can't because they are in a rental property
- Based on the average number of cats per household, this means there are 1.6 million cats that could be given homes in the UK if all landlords allowed pets

Cats Protection services

Cat Guardians – a free service aimed at giving peace of mind to cat owners concerned about what might happen if they were to pass away before their cat.

www.cats.org.uk/catguardians or 01825 741 291

Paws to Listen – a free grief support service run by trained volunteer listeners, for those dealing with the loss of their cat whether through death, going missing or separation.

www.cats.org.uk/what-we-do/grief/paws-to-listen or 0800 024 94 94

Education talks – free curriculum-talks to schools, and community groups, advising both adults and children about cat behaviour and responsible pet ownership.

www.cats.org.uk/education

Neutering support – providing thousands of people each year with financial assistance for neutering.

www.cats.org.uk/neutering

General advice – a helpline for those with any questions regarding their own cats, or cats in general.

www.cats.org.uk/contact-us or 03000 12 12 12



For further information contact stats@cats.org.uk or visit www.cats.org.uk/stats

Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)