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CATS Report

**Cats and Their Stats
Northern Ireland 2026**





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Methodology

For the seventh consecutive year, we have commissioned an external and independent agency, Basis Research, to conduct the research contained in the *CATS Report Northern Ireland 2026*.

An online survey was used to collect information among a nationally representative audience of adults over the age of 18 in Northern Ireland, allowing us to estimate the proportion of cat owners in this home nation. We also conducted a more detailed survey among cat owners. This was carried out between 24 February 2026 and 16 April 2026. ‘In the last 12 months’ within the report refers to the time period March 2025 to March 2026 and unless otherwise stated, comparative data in this survey uses data from the *CATS Report Northern Ireland 2025*.

The research consisted of a UK nationally representative sample of 3,511 individuals and a boost of 6,422 cat owners, including regional boosts to ensure accurate representation in these areas. Overall, 10,599 people participated in the study, including 365 cat owners in Northern Ireland.

Data presentation

We work with Basis Research to calculate estimates of the cat population annually. Three data sources are used in this calculation:

- nationally representative online survey panel to determine the percentage of UK households who own a cat (n= 3,511)
- data from the survey of cat owners on the number of cats owned by each household
- data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the number of households

Percentages throughout the report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to rounding, there will be instances in the report where percentage calculations do not total 100%. Other figures, such as the estimated numbers of cats in the population, are rounded to two significant figures. When calculating cat estimates, we have taken the total estimated cat population figure and multiplied it by the whole percentage, for example 10% of all cats are not registered with a vet, equating to 28,000 cats. Statistics and population calculations are estimates based on owner-reported responses to the online survey.

Significance testing is undertaken on the data at 99% and 95% confidence intervals. When a finding is referenced as significant within the report, it has been found to be significant at a 95% confidence interval.

Cat acquisition: Throughout this report we look at recency of cat acquisition, typically looking at all those cats acquired in the last 12 months compared to another time period, for example over a year ago. The data is sourced from the question ‘When did you acquire your cat?’ in the CATS 2026 Research Survey.

Nationally representative sample: The population of interest is the entire population of the UK. The nationally representative sample reflected its structure, including gender, age, socio-economic groupings and regions.

More information available upon request from stats@cats.org.uk

Welcome to the 2026 Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Report

I would like to welcome everyone to the *CATS Report Northern Ireland 2026* from Cats Protection, our seventh comprehensive survey looking into the fascinating world of cats in Northern Ireland. Not only does it give us insight into the ever-changing landscape of cats and how we should respond to emerging trends and challenges, but it also provides critical information for many others, including government, on which they can base their approach and policies. Animal welfare is a devolved responsibility so we have also deliberately collected data so that it can be reported on across the four regions of the UK.

I am ever proud to be a vet and am glad to see that vets remain a key source of trusted information for many owners. The increasing influence of online sources can make it more difficult for owners to access credible information. However, veterinary recommendations are still one of the most effective ways to encourage owners to take action on key areas of cat care such as preventative healthcare, neutering, microchipping and behaviour. Trusted advice from veterinary teams helps owners make informed decisions about their cats’ care, contributing to better health and welfare outcomes. I am saddened, however, by the struggles that some cat owners having in accessing veterinary support but am hopeful that ongoing developments in the profession will help make advice and care more accessible in the future.

Cat welfare remains at the heart of everything we do at Cats Protection with an increasing recognition of the benefits that cats bring to human wellbeing. Cats can make wonderful pets and are a real source of joy for many people providing daily support particularly in times of difficulty, but the relationship should always remain reciprocal, with carers thinking about how they can meet their cat’s needs; places to climb and hide for example. Looking after cats’ welfare starts with where they come from, making sure cats are sourced ethically, with the welfare needs of queens, stud cats and their kittens always paramount. When obtaining a cat we should all be aware of the welfare harms that can accompany buying online.

Thankfully, more and more owners are researching their cats’ needs with education playing a vital role in preventing many of the welfare concerns we see. However, not all information is accurate and misinformation can sometimes lead to poor outcomes for cats. Cats Protection has an essential role to play in ensuring those who care for cats have access to trustworthy, expert guidance that supports good cat welfare. Like all things, our decisions need to consider the positive and negative aspects. For example, while keeping cats indoors can reduce their exposure to dangers such as road accidents, it increases the need to provide a stimulating physical and psychological environment in the home allowing cats to display their natural behaviours. One final plea from me, when choosing a cat is to look further than skin deep, your best companion is not just about looks or social media likes, it is a cat that suits you, your home and your work life balance. For the key to a happy cat in a happy home is about giving every cat the best possible start in life, with good socialisation, responsible breeding for health and wellbeing, and having every opportunity to adapt confidently to life in their new surroundings.

Enjoy reading the report and I hope you find the insights both interesting and thought provoking.

Kit Sturgess VetMB, PhD, DSAM, FRCVS
Chair of Trustees,
Cats Protection



Key findings

State of the nation

- There are 240,000 owned cats across Northern Ireland
- The age split of cat owners in Northern Ireland skews towards younger people
- Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to be female

The cat market

- The popularity of pedigree cats continues to rise in Northern Ireland, making up almost half of recent acquisitions
- There has been no rise in cats that were bought (rather than adopted or acquired) in Northern Ireland

Veterinary care

- Microchipping numbers have risen in Northern Ireland but still lag behind the UK as a whole
- Neutering numbers have fallen again in Northern Ireland
- Cost has increased as a barrier to vet visits for cat owners in Northern Ireland

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Cat owners in Northern Ireland are researching the needs of their cats more, but almost two thirds of pedigree owners have not researched the specific health and welfare issues associated with breeds of cat
- Owner concern about harm or loss is keeping cats in Northern Ireland indoors
- More cats are experiencing stress as a result of fireworks, compared to last year

Companionship and challenges to ownership

- Companionship is still the main reason that people own cats in Northern Ireland

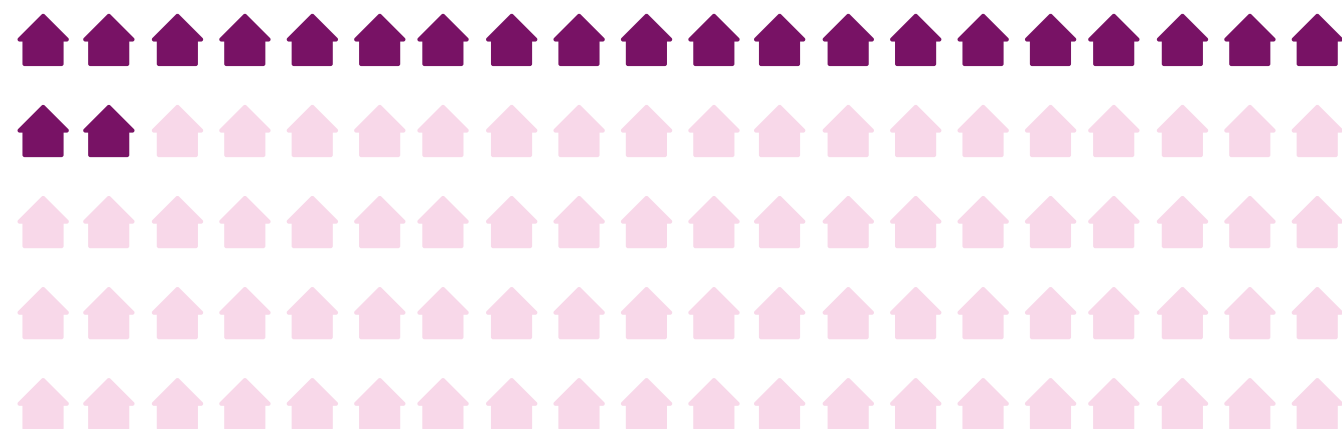
Download a sharable PDF of this page at bit.ly/NI-KeyFindings2026



State of the nation

Cat population

22% of households in Northern Ireland own a cat.



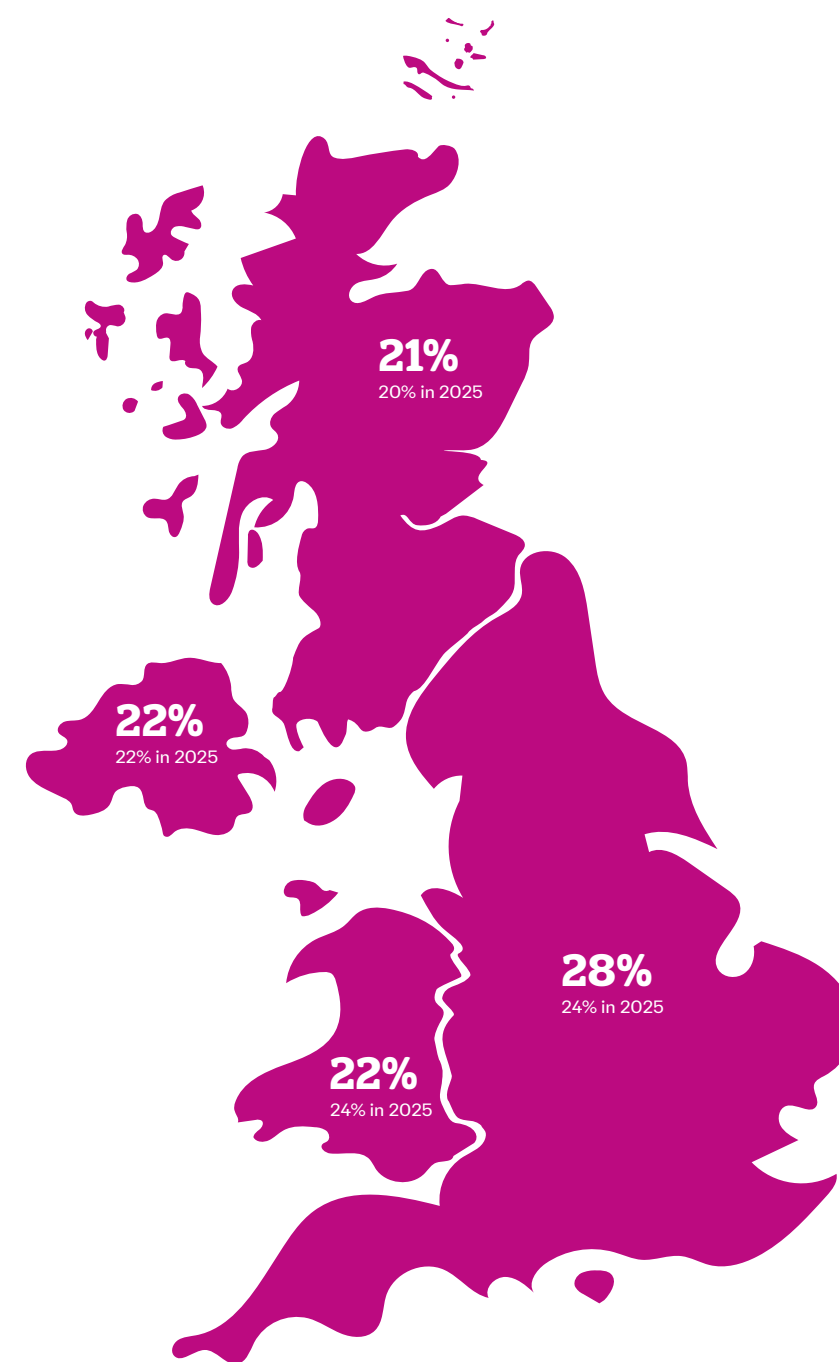
There are **240,000** owned cats across Northern Ireland.

The average number of cats per cat-owning household in Northern Ireland is 1.5 cats, with 64% of households owning just one cat.



Household cat ownership across the UK

The overall rise in cat ownership appears to be driven by England, where the proportion of cat-owning households has seen a significant increase compared to the other UK nations. The other UK nations, including Northern Ireland, demonstrate no statistically significant changes from last year's figures*.



*Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds

Profile of cat owners

Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to be female.

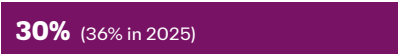


The age split of cat owners in Northern Ireland skews towards younger people.

18 to 34-year-olds



35 to 54-year-olds



55+



A higher proportion of households in rural areas in Northern Ireland own cats.

Residents in rural areas who own a cat

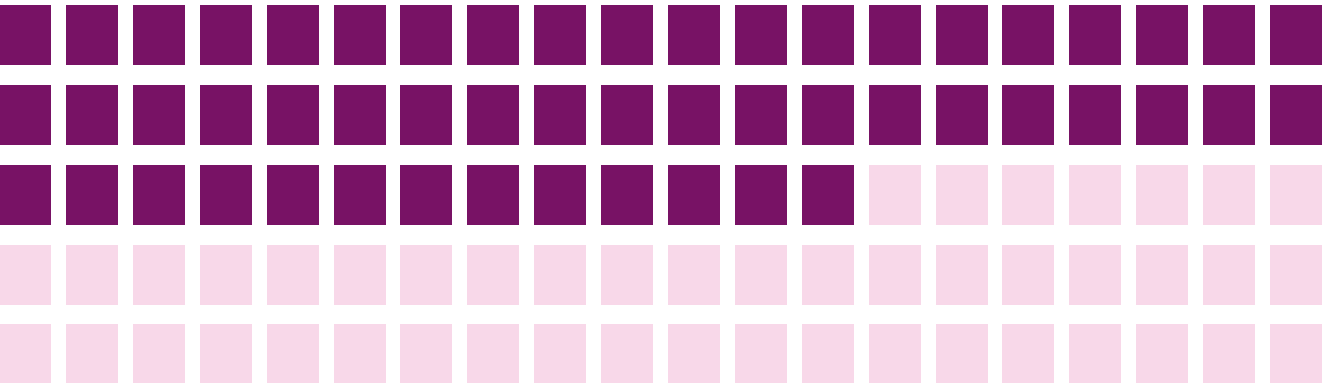


Residents in urban areas who own a cat

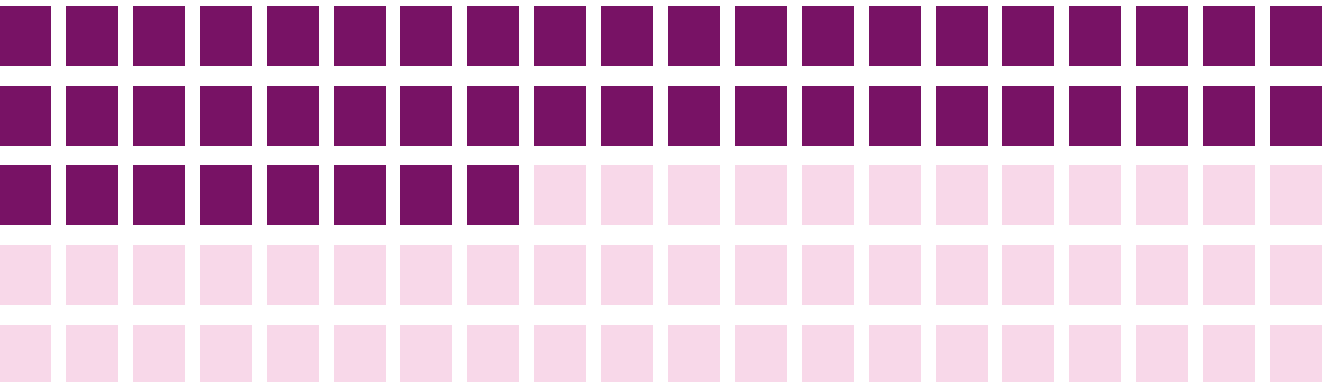


Slightly more cat owners in Northern Ireland own their home than rent.

53% are homeowners



48% live in rented accommodation



The cat market



What type of cats do people have?

Pedigree versus purebred

Purebred: A specific breed of cat produced through selective breeding and both parents are of the same breed.

Cross-breed: A breed of cat produced through breeding with different breeds, for example two different purebreds or a purebred and a non-purebred/moggy cat.

Pedigree: A purebred or cross-breed cat that is registered with a governing body, and the ancestry is recorded.

Moggy: A cat that is usually produced through non-selective breeding and is neither a purebred, nor a cross-breed.

In this report, pedigree and purebred cats are included in the description of ‘pedigree’.

The levelling out of pedigree popularity across the UK is not apparent in Northern Ireland, with ‘last 12 months’ data showing their increasing popularity.

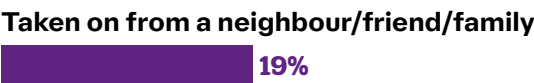


How cats are acquired

The proportion of cats in Northern Ireland that were bought remains largely in line with last year.



30% in 2025, 15% in 2024, 14% in 2023 and 2022



16% in 2025, 21% in 2024, 23% in 2023, 21% in 2022



15% in 2025, 24% in 2024, 21% in 2023, 20% in 2022



9% in 2025, 14% in 2024, 15% in 2023, 12% in 2022



7% in 2025 and 2024, 4% in 2023, 7% in 2022



15% of the total current cat population in Northern Ireland was acquired during the last 12 months, equating to around **36,000** cats.

“There continue to be three main ways people acquire cats in Northern Ireland: buying them, taking them in from friends, family or as strays, and adopting them from rescue and rehoming organisations.

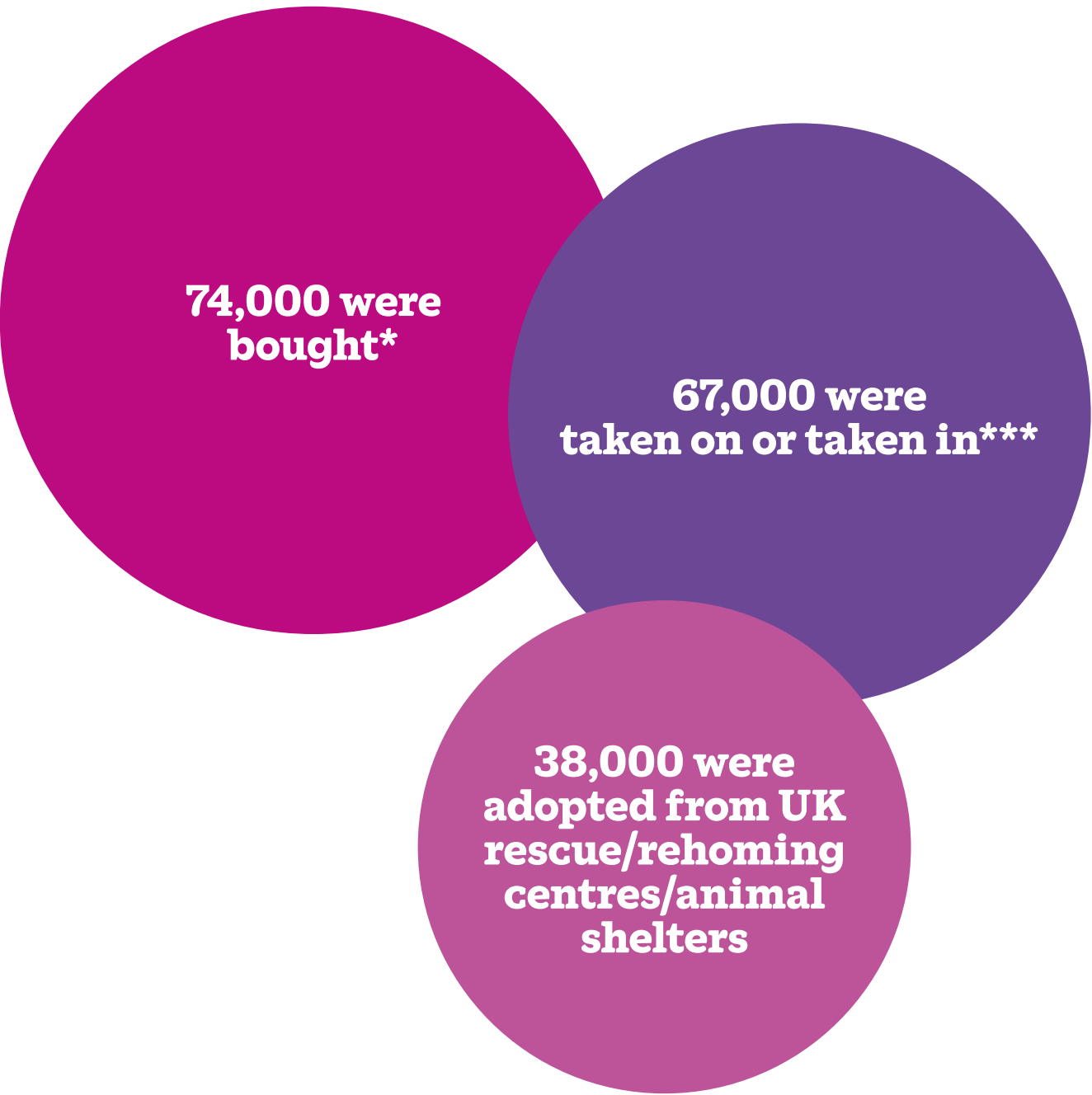
“The cat market in Northern Ireland remains largely unregulated, which leads to unscrupulous sellers and poorly equipped carers falling short of meeting cats’ welfare needs.

“Minister Muir’s proposals to ban the third-party sale of kittens and regulate rescue and rehoming organisations are important steps that will help raise standards across the sector, improve cat welfare, protect cats from exploitation and give owners greater confidence about where their cats come from.”



Alice Palombo,
Advocacy & Government
Relations Manager for
Devolved Nations,
Cats Protection

This equates to a current pet cat population in Northern Ireland where around:



Unlike the UK as a whole and all other home nations, the proportion of bought cats is not greater for cats acquired in the last 12 months in Northern Ireland (30%). The overall proportion of bought cats in Northern Ireland is also lower than the UK as a whole (38%).

*Bought from a specialist breeder in the UK, bought from someone I know but not a specialist breeder, bought from a neighbour/friend/family, bought from a pet shop, bought from a specialist breeder overseas. **My cat adopted me, adopted from an overseas charity (outside of the UK), given to me as a gift, from an individual I did not know offering them for free. ***Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family or found as a stray and taken in.

Veterinary care

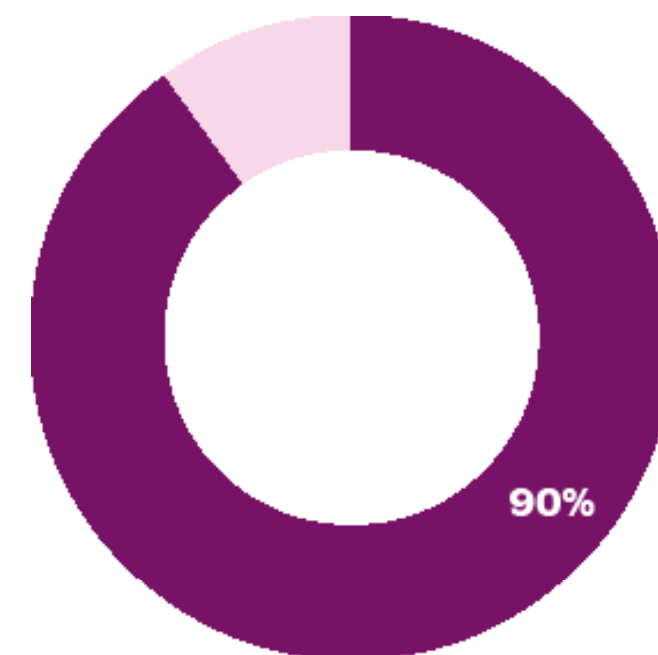
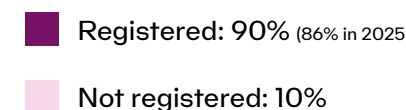
Veterinary capacity

31% of cat owners in Northern Ireland say that they have experienced difficulty accessing a vet (30% in 2025).

Difficulty accessing a vet seems to be more of a problem in Northern Ireland than the other home nations (Wales: 25%, Scotland: 25%). Problems accessing a vet are reportedly higher for owners in Northern Ireland aged 18 to 34 (44%).

Vet registration

The proportion of cats in Northern Ireland who are registered with a vet is **90%**.



While the increase in the proportion of cats in Northern Ireland registered with a vet is positive, it still means that **28,000 are not registered with a vet**. It is important that owners understand the health risks that their cat faces and are supported in seeking appropriate veterinary care to mitigate them.

Vet visits

Cat owners in Northern Ireland are less likely to take their cat to the vet routinely every year, compared to the UK as a whole (**54%** versus **67%**).



This means that over **110,000 cats in Northern Ireland may not be receiving routine vet care**.

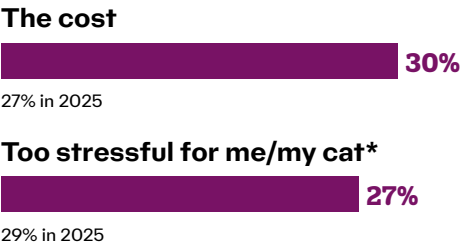
Preventing or intervening with health problems early is the best way not only to protect cat welfare but also the owner's pocket, as the cost of veterinary care is typically higher when diseases progress in severity and duration.



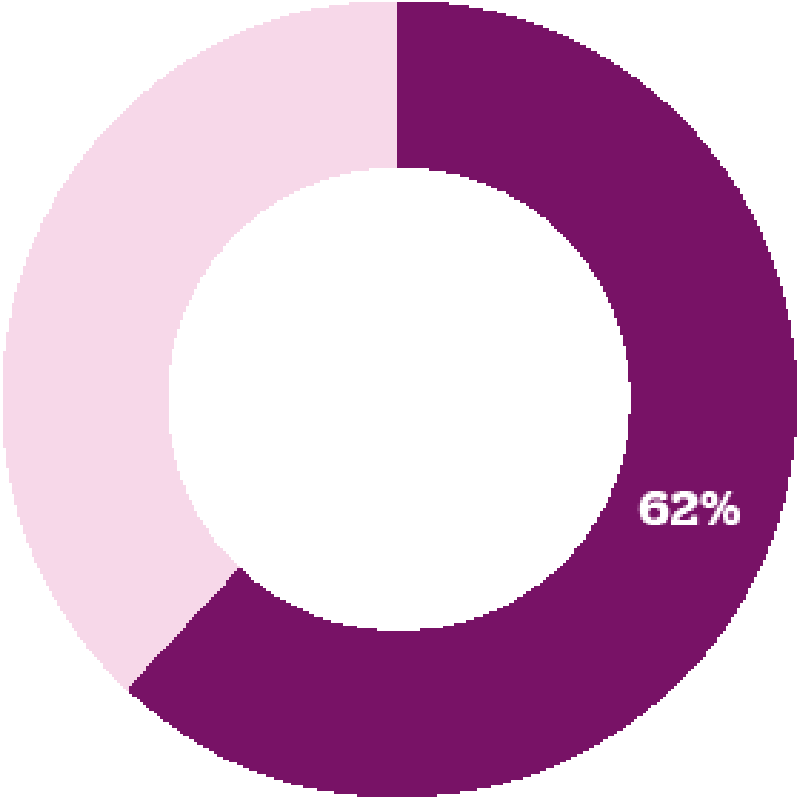
62% of owners in Northern Ireland say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like to.

(66% in 2025)

Cost and stress for cats and/or owners are key barriers preventing owners from visiting the vet as often as they would like.



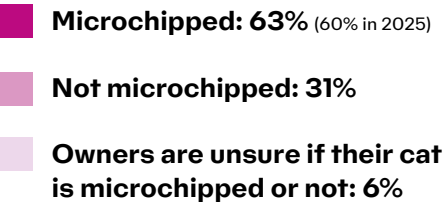
Cost has increased as a barrier to vet visits for cat owners in Northern Ireland and is higher than the UK as a whole (25%).



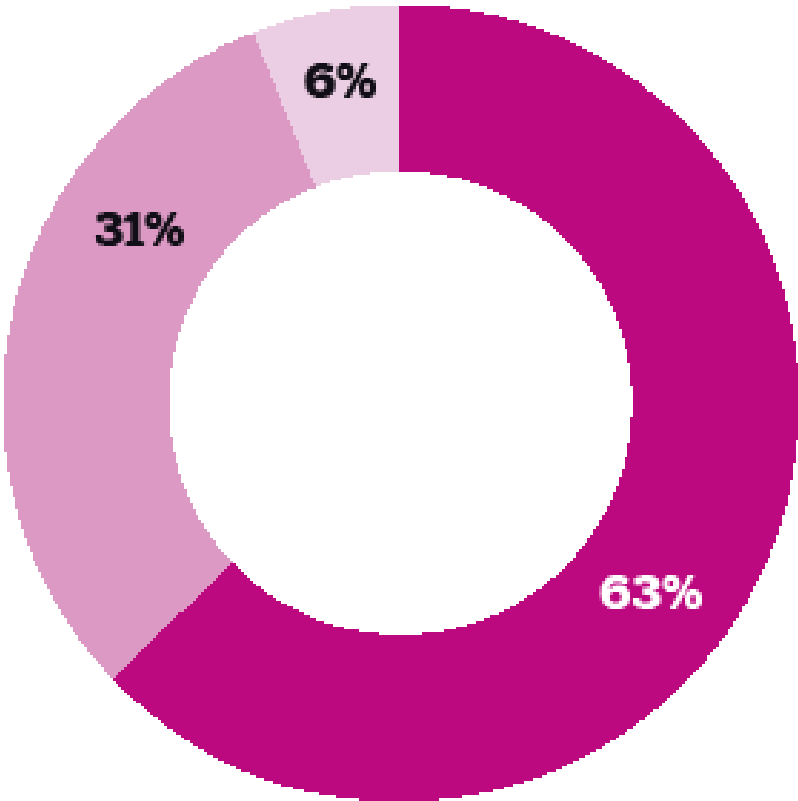
*Net of responses related to these themes.

Microchipping

63% of cats in Northern Ireland are microchipped (60% in 2025).



Microchipping numbers in Northern Ireland have risen this year but are still lower than that reported across the UK as a whole (73%). **Over 88,000 cats in Northern Ireland are potentially without a microchip,** reducing their chances of being reunited with their owners, should they get lost or stolen.



The cats less likely to be microchipped

In Northern Ireland, cats of male owners (54%), uninsured cats (55%) and cats living in multi-cat households (2+ cats: 59%) are less likely to be microchipped.

The main reasons that cat owners in Northern Ireland are choosing not to get their cat microchipped relate to perceived need.



Microchipping being made a legal requirement was the third most popular reason that cat owners in Northern Ireland who have not had their cat microchipped would be encouraged to get it done (18%), after lower cost and a vet's recommendation. Cats Protection continues to lobby the Northern Ireland Executive to follow the example provided by England in making these legislative changes, to help protect the welfare of more cats.



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Microchips and keeping details up to date

89% of cats in Northern Ireland with a microchip have up-to-date details.



The proportion of owners that report keeping their details up to date is lower in Northern Ireland than other devolved nations. Over 26,000 cats in Northern Ireland are potentially microchipped but with details that are out of date, significantly reducing the microchip’s effectiveness in reuniting them with their owner should they become separated from their family.

“Daisy was reported to us as an injured stray by a concerned member of the public. Fortunately, we were able to assist her in her hour of need. She was suffering from a severe cat bite abscess on her cheek and showed clear signs of the toll that fending for herself had taken. Our team provided immediate emergency veterinary treatment to address her painful injury. Crucially, Daisy’s microchip, identified through the identibase database, enabled us to contact her owner promptly and reunite her with her family.

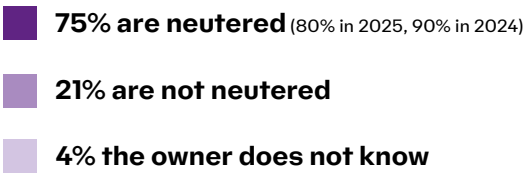
“The DAERA Minister, Andrew Muir MLA, is examining the case for microchipping. We welcomed the public call for evidence on the mandatory microchipping of pet cats and are calling for compulsory microchipping to be introduced in Northern Ireland to help reunite cats like Daisy with their owners. When a cat is microchipped they can be reunited with their family quickly, leaving our pens free for cats that need us the most.”

Andrew Doherty,
Northern Ireland Cat Centre Manager,
Cats Protection

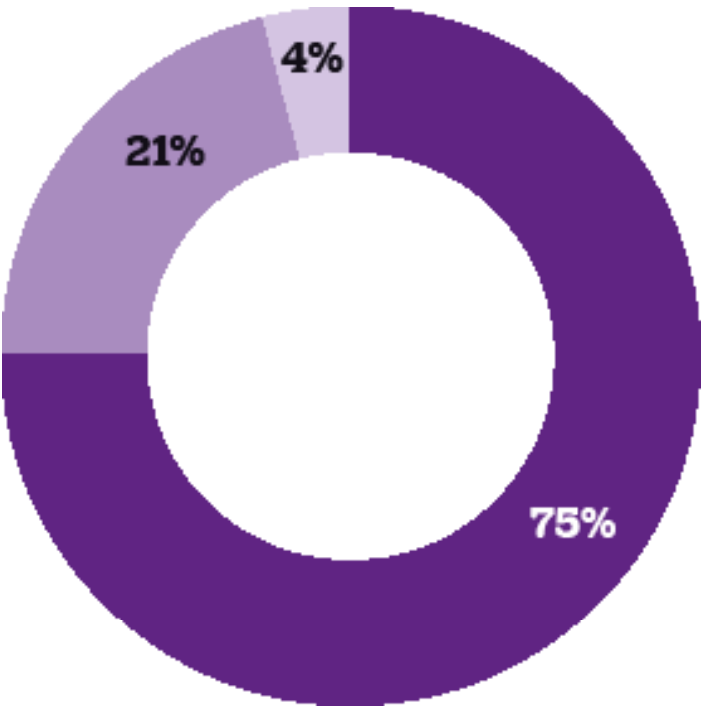


Neutering and breeding

Neutering numbers have fallen again in Northern Ireland.



Neutering numbers in Northern Ireland are lower than in the UK as a whole (79%) and continue the recent year-on-year downward trend.



The cats less likely to have been neutered

Male cat owners in Northern Ireland (70%), and those aged 18 to 34 (69%) are less likely to have neutered their cat.

Neutering, and especially ‘four-month neutering’ (at or before four months of age, when cats become reproductively active) is also important for achieving a balanced cat population, which is strongly linked with improved cat welfare*. In Northern Ireland, 18% of neutered cats had the procedure before four months of age (UK: 21%).

“Neutering plays a vital role in protecting cat welfare. It benefits individual cats while also helping to reduce the number of unwanted cats entering shelters and contributing to stray and feral cat populations. By neutering cats at four months old rather than six months, there is an even greater opportunity to prevent unplanned pregnancies, reduce the number of kittens needing homes and improve the welfare of cats across the UK.

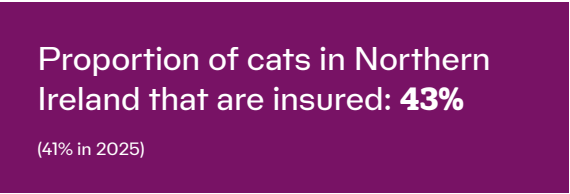
“Cat breeding remains largely unregulated, leaving little protection against cats being overbred or kittens being born in poor conditions. Cats Protection is calling for cat breeding regulations to be introduced in Northern Ireland. We believe that cat breeding regulations should be considered alongside any proposals to reform dog breeding.”



Sarah Merrett,
Head of Cat Welfare
Engagement,
Cats Protection

*McDonald J, et al. (2023) Cat: Empirical modelling of Felis catus population dynamics in the UK. PLOS ONE 18(7):e0287841. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287841>

Insurance and preventative healthcare



Flea treatment



Worm treatment



Growing concern about environmental contamination with parasiticides that are used in agriculture, pest control and also for pets, means that focus should rightly be placed on responsible and contextualised use of these products. It is important to protect cats and people from the health and welfare risk of parasites while also minimising environmental risk. This includes making thoughtful decisions about which products to use and how often to use them, tailored to each cat’s individual needs and level of parasite risk.

That risk is influenced by factors such as age, whether they go outdoors and other pets in the household. It is also important that owners carefully follow instructions for product use and packaging disposal. A vet is the best person to advise on the best approach for each cat, so it is encouraging to see that following the recommendation of a vet is increasingly the preferred approach to flea control and worming for the largest group of cat owners.

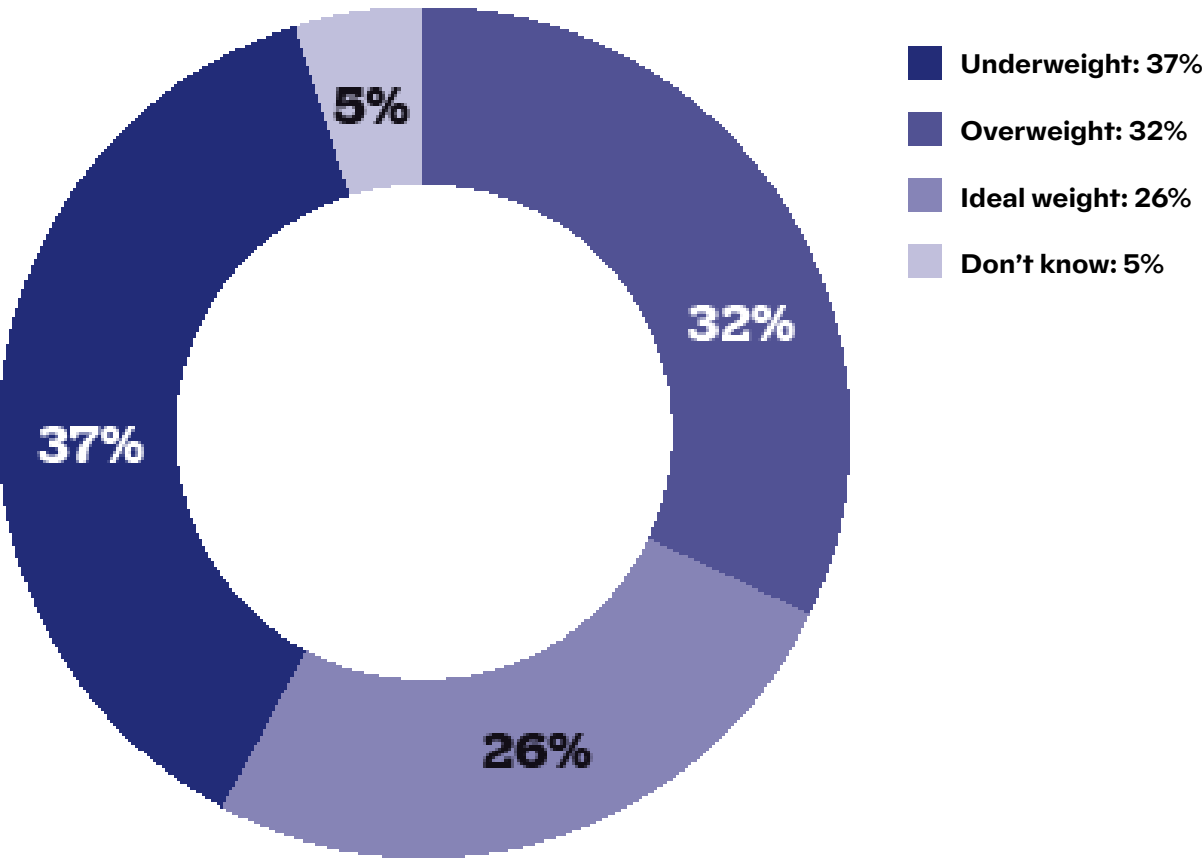
“Cats Protection has recently reviewed and updated its protocols for parasite control for cats in our care, to reflect a more individual, tailored approach, with the aim of reducing negative impacts on the environment.”

Lucinda Alderton-Sell,
Senior Community
Veterinary Manager,
Cats Protection



Health and diet

Owner perception of their cat’s weight.

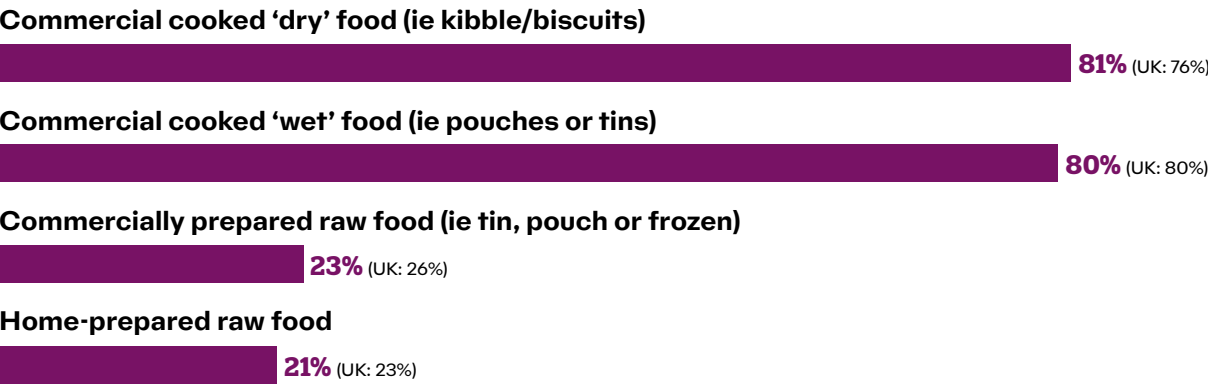


It can be challenging for owners to assess body condition in cats, which likely explains why vet and owner-reported figures for obesity often vary from each other. Reliable sources of information, and proactive demonstration and depiction of what a healthy cat looks and feels like from vets, charities and the media are useful to guide owner knowledge and attitudes.



Cats in Northern Ireland are fed similarly to cats across the UK.

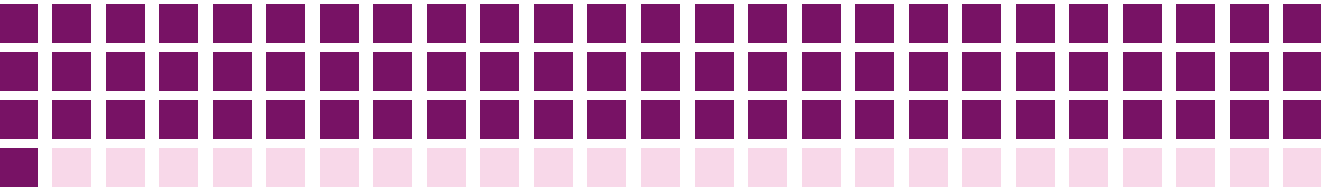
Fed always or often:



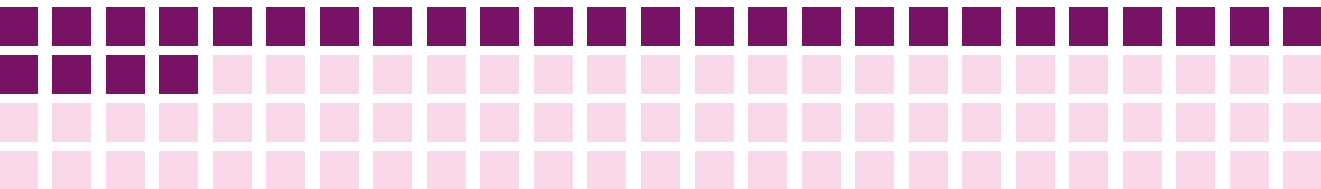
The popularity of feeding cats a 'raw diet', for example, uncooked meat, vegetables and/or eggs, has grown,^{1,2} with an explosion of commercial products entering the market in recent years. Cats Protection does not recommend feeding cats a raw diet, as it poses risks to both feline and human health. Raw pet food can contain harmful bacteria such as Salmonella and E. coli, and even antibiotic-resistant bacteria which would usually be killed during cooking. It can also be difficult to achieve an appropriate balance of nutrients with home-prepared diets, risking significant nutritional disease. Therefore, if a cat is going to be fed a raw diet, the recommendation is to use a complete, commercially prepared product specifically for cats. Owner education in this area is vitally important.

Health conditions and injury

76% of cat owners in Northern Ireland state that their cat has no diagnosed health conditions.



29% of owners in Northern Ireland said that their cat had been injured since they had owned them. The most common reason for injury is fights with other cats (17%).



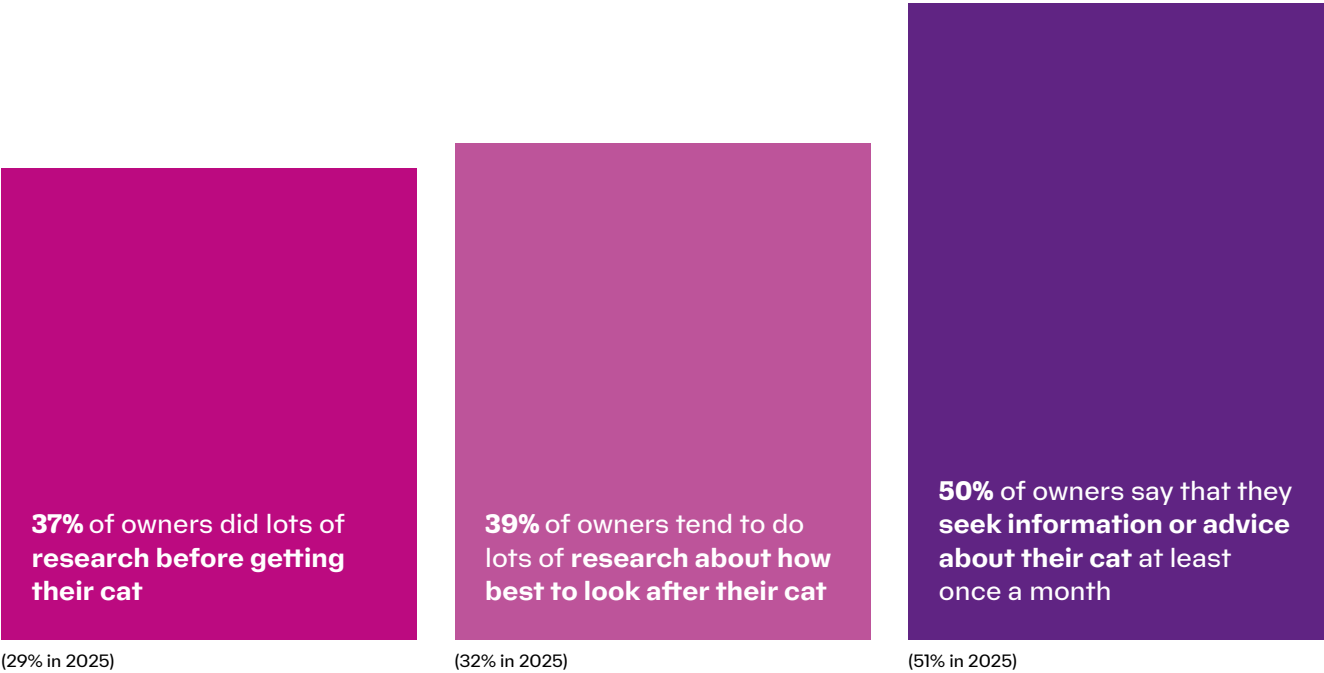
1. Hunter, A. R., & Murison, P. J. (2025). Pet Feeding Practices: A Survey of Dog and Cat Owners' Current Feeding Practices, Attitudes, and Motivations Within the UK. *Pets*, 2(2), 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/pets2020020>

2. O'Halloran, C., et al. (2024) How and why pet cats are fed the way they are: a self-reported owner survey. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, V. 26, Iss 2, Feb. doi.org/10.1177/1098612X231209894

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

Sources of cat care information

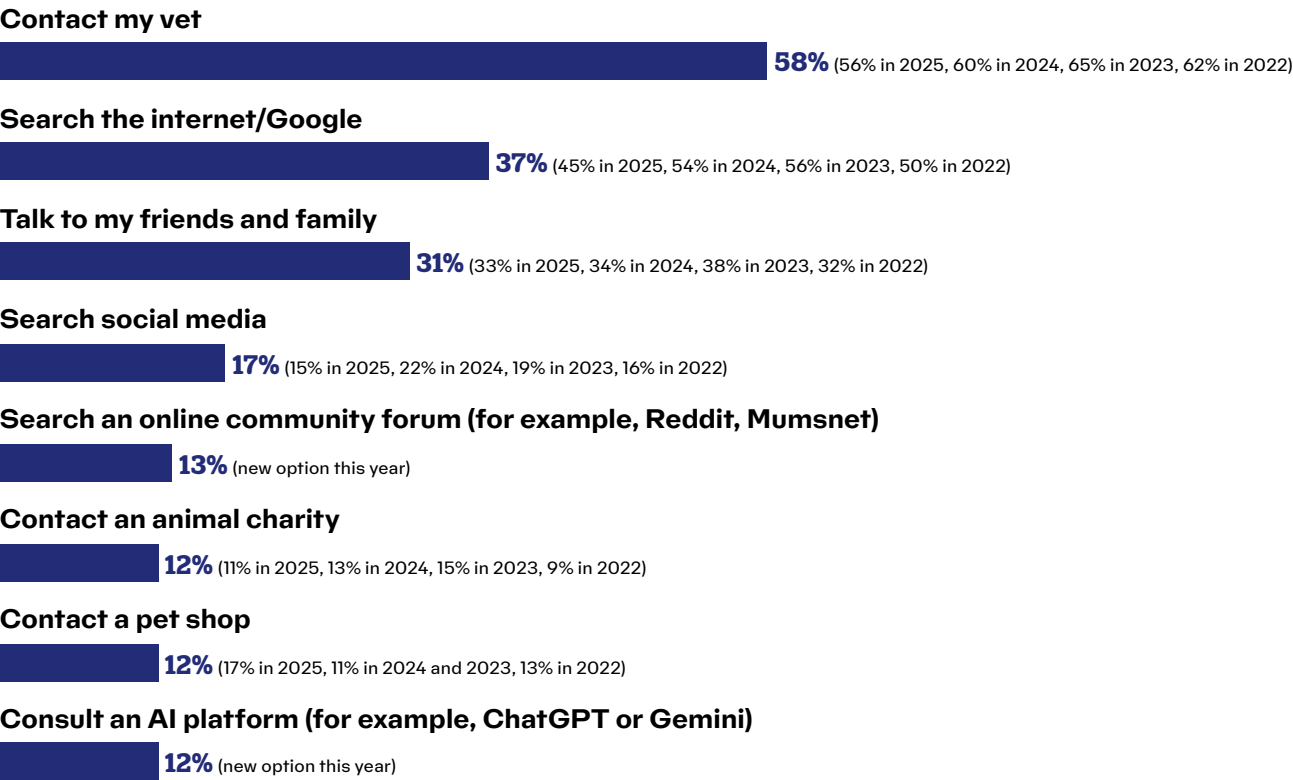
Many owners in Northern Ireland are increasingly researching their cat’s needs both before and after acquisition.



The jump in the proportion of owners in Northern Ireland that are researching their cats’ needs before acquisition brings these figures to match the UK as a whole. 60% of owners in Northern Ireland say that they are confident that they know what’s best for their cat. With misinformation a constant threat though, this confidence may not necessarily translate into better welfare for their cat.

For the first time, cat owners were asked about whether they researched the specific health and welfare issues associated with different breeds of cat. 34% of owners in Northern Ireland said they had, but 61% of pedigree cat owners in Northern Ireland didn’t specifically research the health and welfare issues associated with breeds of cat, the highest of all the home nations.

Owners in Northern Ireland still turn to their vet first as a primary source of information about cats.



The inclusion of AI platforms and online community websites as new options this year may well explain the drop seen in the popularity of internet searches. Use of AI appears to be less popular among owners in Northern Ireland than across the UK as a whole (16%). Younger owners in Northern Ireland are still less likely to turn to their vet first for advice (18 to 34: 53%).

Using social media platforms as sources of information about cats continues to be popular among owners in Northern Ireland.

YouTube (33% in 2025, 34% in 2024, 39% in 2023, 35% in 2022)



Facebook (27% in 2025, 30% in 2024, 35% in 2023, 31% in 2022)



TikTok (25% in 2025, 20% in 2024, 21% in 2023, 16% in 2022)



Instagram (23% in 2025, 17% in 2024, 16% in 2023, 18% in 2022)



Reddit (new option this year)



X (12% in 2025, 4% in 2024, 9% in 2023, 14% in 2022)



Snapchat (8% in 2025, 5% in 2024, 8% in 2023, 9% in 2022)



Pinterest (7% in 2025 and 2024, 13% in 2023, 11% in 2022)



LinkedIn (8% in 2025, 3% in 2024, 5% in 2023 and 2022)



YouTube and TikTok continue to grow in popularity, with the latter being the preferred platform for younger owners (18 to 34: 46%). This, and the continued popularity of YouTube across all age groups, is a good reminder of the importance of video content as an effective way to reach cat owners.

Top five cat-related activities that owners in Northern Ireland engage in several times a week or more.

Watch funny or cute videos of cats online



Talk about cats with my friends/family



Look at funny or cute pictures of cats online



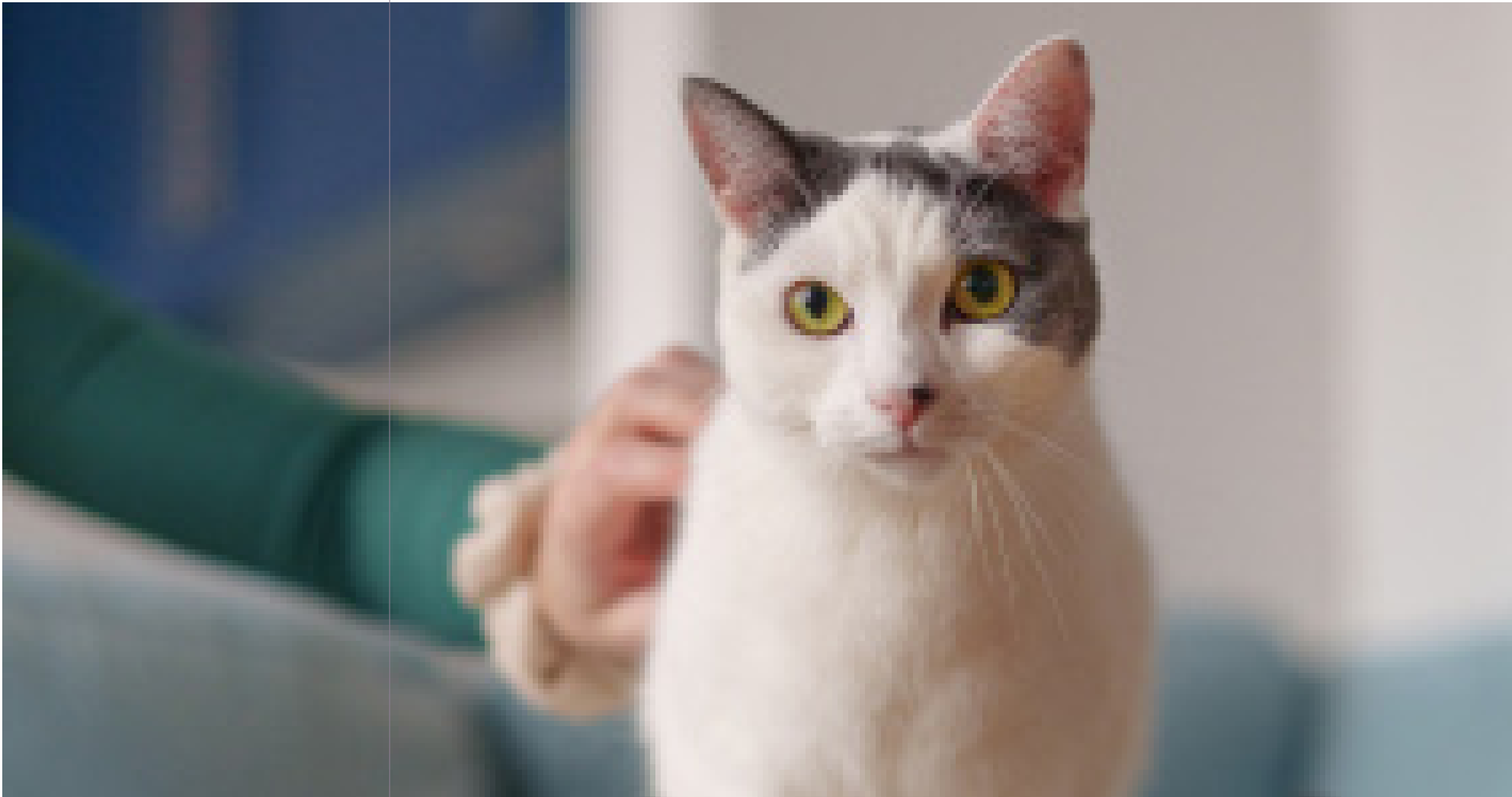
Look at cat-related social media profiles



Watch informational videos of cats online



Overall, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram are the most popular sources of ‘fun’ cat-related content for owners in Northern Ireland. For younger owners in Northern Ireland aged 18 to 24 though, Facebook is less popular (34%, all cat owners in Northern Ireland: 40%), with TikTok being significantly favoured (60%, all cat owners in Northern Ireland: 48%).

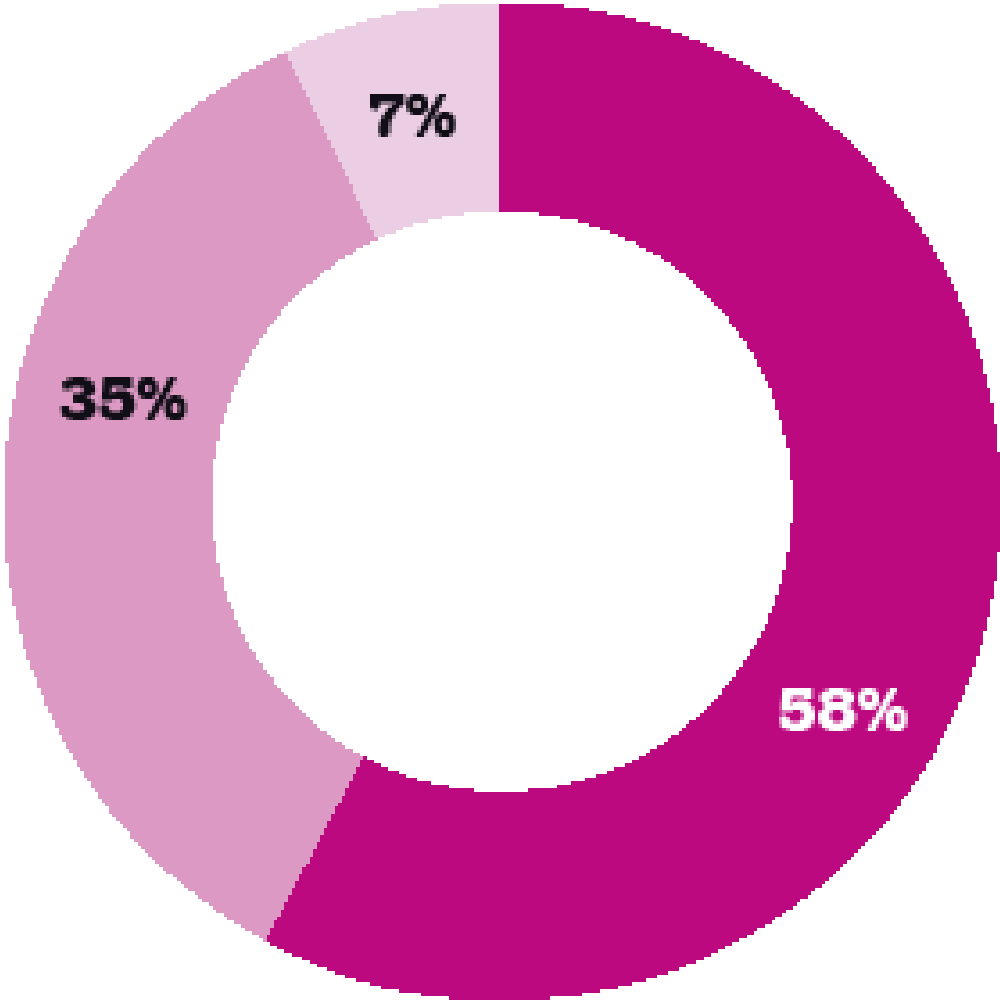


A cat’s environment

Indoor versus outdoor cats

Over a third of cats in Northern Ireland appear to be living an indoor-only lifestyle.

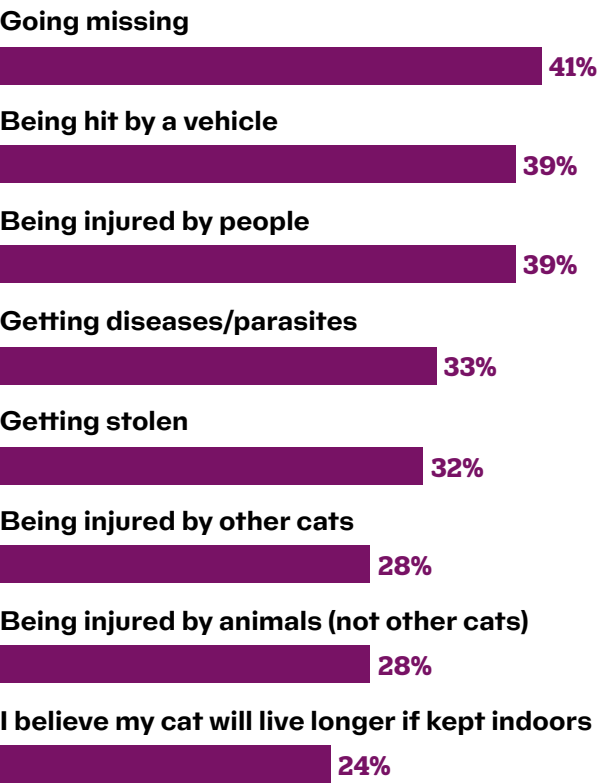
- They go both indoors and outdoors: 58%**
(67% in 2025)
- They always stay indoors: 35%**
(28% in 2025)
- 38% for the UK as a whole**
- They always stay outdoors: 7%**
(4% in 2025)





Concern over harm or disappearance keeps cats in Northern Ireland indoors.

Concerned about them:



Other response options related to spending more time with their cat, risk to wildlife and practicalities such as age or health issues keeping them indoors were much less popular. It is important that if a cat is kept indoors exclusively, their needs are carefully considered and met by their owner. This includes the psychological aspect of cats needing to have opportunities to express normal behaviours, such as scratching and vertical exploration of their space. Cats are animals which would typically establish a core territory and home range that would span acres. Keeping cats indoor-only may result in some individuals becoming frustrated, bored or depressed because they are unable to meet their natural preferences. Significant misinformation is spread around cats having outside access, including the prevalence of cat theft per the cat population and the risk of other animals. Cats have no natural predators in the UK.

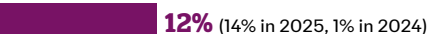
Cats out and about

A notable proportion of cat owners in Northern Ireland use accessories to take their cat out.

Cat harness



Cat backpack



Cats are a territorial species and prefer to be allowed to choose how they roam, whether indoors or out. A quarter (25%) of cats in Northern Ireland that have both indoor and outdoor access do so in an unrestricted way, less than the UK as a whole (30%). 37% have outdoor access during the day but are kept in overnight (UK: 32%), 18% are allowed outdoor access via an outdoor enclosure (UK: 18%) and 10% go outdoors on a lead and harness (UK: 11%). Harnesses can be uncomfortable for cats and prevent the flight response (for example, when encountering dogs out and about). Feeling trapped can significantly escalate stress in cats. Cats have also been known to escape while wearing harnesses.

When a cat does need transporting (for example, for a vet visit), a top-opening, safe and sturdy cat carrier that is easy to clean should be used. Cat backpacks are often not big enough to allow a cat to sit or stand comfortably, and viewing windows tend to increase stress for cats*.



*cats.org.uk/cats-blog/what-type-of-carrier-is-best-for-my-cat

There are many devices that are designed to help owners feel more confident allowing their cat out of the house, including collars and trackers. 26% of owners in Northern Ireland say that their cat has a standard collar, while only 18% wear a quick-release or snap-opening collar, which are much safer in the event of the collar getting caught on something. 9% of owners in Northern Ireland use a GPS tracker attached to their cat’s collar or harness (UK: 14%). While perhaps useful for offering reassurance as to their cat’s movements, because they can be lost, malfunction or run out of battery, no device replaces a microchip for assisting reunification with a lost cat.

“While many owners use collars and tracking devices to help keep their cats safe, equipment should never come at the expense of welfare. Cats Protection welcomes DAERA’s consultation on proposals to ban electronic shock collars and other aversive training devices for cats and dogs. These devices work by causing pain, fear or distress and can compromise cat welfare while risking damage to the bond between cats and their owners. There is no justification for using punishment-based devices on cats, and we support measures that promote humane, welfare-friendly approaches to training and management.”

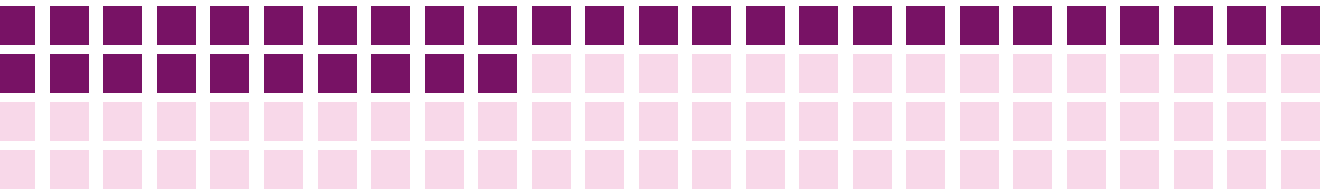
Daniel Warren-Cummings,
Senior Behaviour Engagement Manager,
Cats Protection



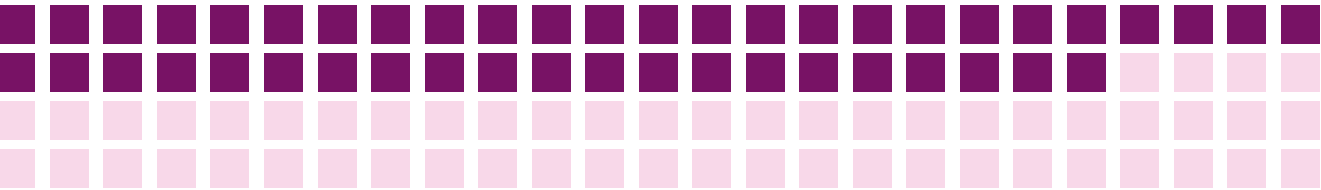
Cats and other members of the household

Of the cat-owning households in Northern Ireland:

35% have more than one cat living there.



46% also own a dog



43% also have children (aged under 18 years old) living at home



Of these households, 56% of the children are aged under 10 years old



Normal social interaction is very different for cats than humans and dogs, even with other cats. Cats do not require social interaction to be psychologically happy, so forcing this upon them can be a significant source of stress. To maintain a harmonious multi-inhabitant household and avoid stress or injury, it is important that a cat’s needs are always considered. This includes protecting a cat from unwanted social interaction from other pets and teaching young children how to interact with pets safely. It is also important to be able to recognise the early signs of stress in cats and proactively monitor for them.

With the rehoming sector under continued pressure, it is important that rehoming decisions are based on the individual needs, experiences and welfare requirements of each cat. Providing adopters with appropriate support and guidance on introducing cats to new homes and existing household members can help more cats find suitable homes. An individual assessment of each cat is often more effective than relying solely on broad rehoming criteria, while recognising that some cats may have specific requirements that are important to meet.

Behaviour and stress

Many cats in Northern Ireland have shown potential signs of stress in the last 12 months.

Runs away from people in the house

32%

Shows fear towards noise

29%

Hides around the house for long periods of time

14%

Screams/screeches

11%

Urinates (pees) outside of the litter tray/inside the house

10%

Doesn't get on with/fight with my other cats

9%

Shows aggressive behaviours towards people in my household

8%

Defecates (poos) outside of the litter tray/inside the house

7%

Sprays outside of the litter tray/inside the house

5%

Doesn't get on with/fight with my other pets (not cats)

4%

64% of cats have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months (69% in 2025).

It can be challenging for owners to analyse cat behaviour, as many behaviours that they may view as problematic are completely normal for cats. This includes scratching around the house and jumping onto elevated surfaces. Things are further complicated by the fact that some signs of stress, such as toileting accidents, can also be signs of medical problems. Aggression is often a last-resort response in cats, with many cats displaying more subtle signs of fear, stress, discomfort, or conflict before resorting to aggressive behaviour. It is therefore concerning that cat fights remain the most common cause of injury to cats in Northern Ireland.

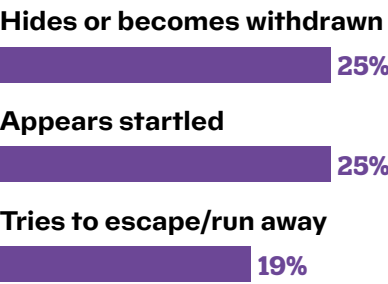
By understanding cat behaviour and signs of stress, and providing resources such as scratching posts and cat towers or shelves, owners can strike a balance between allowing their cat to express normal, healthy behaviour, while protecting household items and their own sanity! It is important that owners seek advice to help either reframe their perspective on their cat's behaviour, or intervene early and prevent small problems from becoming larger, harder to manage and potentially damaging to relationships between cats and their human companions.

Fireworks

Fireworks can be really distressing for all animals, including cats. 78% of cat owners in Northern Ireland say that their cat has been affected by fireworks, the largest increase from last year (71%) across the home nations, and the UK as a whole.



Top three behaviours cats in Northern Ireland show in response to fireworks:



“While we recognise that many people enjoy fireworks as part of celebrations, the public sale of fireworks causes significant and often unpredictable distress to cats, other pets, wildlife and people. Cats Protection is calling for the Northern Ireland Executive to limit the sale of fireworks to the general public to Category F1 fireworks (such as sparklers), while encouraging people who wish to enjoy larger fireworks to attend organised displays instead. Organised events allow people to celebrate responsibly, while reducing the sudden and unexpected use of fireworks that can cause fear, stress and anxiety for animals and other members of the community.

“Cats Protection also supports a reduction in the maximum noise levels of fireworks to further lessen the impact on cats, other animals and indeed many humans. We want to see a balanced approach that protects animal welfare while still allowing communities to come together to mark special occasions.”



Charlotte Broad,
Advocacy & Campaigns
Manager,
Cats Protection



Companionship

Why we have cats

The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still a strong motivator for having a cat in Northern Ireland.

As company for me/my family



To help me feel less lonely



I've always had cats



To help me feel less stressed/anxious



I grew up with cats and so wanted to get my own when I left home



They needed looking after/to be taken in



My child/children wanted one



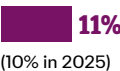
I've just always wanted cats, so got one as soon as I could



I wanted a pet animal and thought having a cat would be easier than having a dog



To keep my house free of rodents



Once again, companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are collectively the top reasons that people in Northern Ireland choose to own a cat (53%. 55% in 2025, 49% in 2024, 55% in 2023).

89% of cat owners in Northern Ireland agree that they consider their cat part of the family.

Cat ownership is a hugely important part of the daily lives and wellbeing of people in Northern Ireland.

I spend time stroking my cat at least once a day



I often talk to my cat



Having a cat brings me joy



Having a cat has a positive impact on my wellbeing



Having a cat has a positive impact on my mental health



I hate leaving my cat when I go away



I love spoiling my cat



My cat gives me a reason to get up in the morning



I talk about my cat a lot



I think about my cat a lot when I'm not with them



I put my cat's needs before my own



The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are increasingly being reported, with more people reporting how sharing their life with a cat improves it. It is always important to remember that our relationships with cats should bring reciprocal benefit, and the cat's needs must always be met.

Cats in summary

State of the nation

- Cat ownership:

	In millions		% of cat-owning households	
	2026	2025	2026	2025
Total UK	11.7	10.2	27%	24%
England	10.2	8.5	28%	24%
Wales	0.4	0.5	22%	24%
Scotland	0.7	0.7	21%	20%
Northern Ireland	0.2	0.2	22%	22%

- There are 240,000 owned cats across Northern Ireland
- 64% of households in Northern Ireland own one cat, 35% have more than one cat

The cat market

- The levelling out of pedigree popularity across the UK is not apparent in Northern Ireland, with ‘last 12 month’ data showing their increasing popularity

	Total pet cat population in Northern Ireland	Total pet cat population in Northern Ireland in 2025	Cats acquired in the last 12 months in Northern Ireland	Cats acquired in 2024-2025 in Northern Ireland
Moggy/ domestic shorthair or longhair	53%	52%	30%	32%
Pedigree/ purebred	31%	30%	48%	42%
Cross-breed (non-moggy)	6%	11%	13%	10%
Don't know	11%	7%	9%	15%

- 31% of cats in Northern Ireland were ‘bought’ (30% in 2025, 15% in 2024, 14% in 2023 and 2022)
 - Lower than the UK as a whole (38%)

Veterinary care

- 31% of cat owners in Northern Ireland say that they have experienced difficulty accessing a vet
- 10% of cats in Northern Ireland are not registered with a vet
- 62% of owners in Northern Ireland say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like
- 63% of cats in Northern Ireland are microchipped, leaving over 88,000 potentially without a microchip
- Neutering numbers have fallen again in Northern Ireland to 75% (80% in 2025, 90% in 2024)
- The proportion of insured cats in Northern Ireland is 43%
- The proportion of cats that are up to date with vaccinations in Northern Ireland has risen to 76% (71% in 2025)

Companionship

- Companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are collectively the top reasons that people in Northern Ireland choose to own a cat (53%)

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Owners in Northern Ireland are increasingly researching their cat’s needs both before and after acquisition
 - 37% did lots of research before getting their cat: (29% in 2025)
 - 39% tend to do lots of research about how best to look after their cat: (32% in 2025)
- Over a third (35%) of cats in Northern Ireland have an indoor-only lifestyle (28% in 2025)
- A notable proportion of cat owners in Northern Ireland use accessories to take their cat out
 - cat harness: 18%
 - cat backpack: 12%
- 64% of cats in Northern Ireland have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months
- 78% of cats in Northern Ireland are affected by fireworks – an increase from last year (71%)





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Where do we go from here?

A message from John May, Chief Executive, Cats Protection

With the Cats Protection centenary in 2027, there will be plenty of opportunities to look at how life for cats has changed over the past 100 years. But we should also look forward. The world in which cats and people live is changing quickly, and our challenge is to understand those changes and make sure they work for cats, not against them.

At the heart of that is what does a healthy, balanced cat population actually look like? For me, it is where cats can experience good welfare, with a focus on preventing problems rather than dealing with their consequences.

Neutering remains important, and declining rates deserve our attention. We continue to recommend that owned cats are neutered at or by four months, and ensure help is available for people who might otherwise struggle to access it. But neutering is not enough. A balanced cat population also requires responsible breeding, good preventative healthcare, appropriate management of unowned cats and, above all, people who understand what cats need.

But there must be balance. We don't want a future in which almost all breeding of cats is confined to an increasingly narrow pedigree population. The moggy matters. Keeping the gene pool broad and resilient is important for the future health of cats as a species.

We must also urgently tackle the breeding of cats with extreme characteristics. Features which might look cute or unusual on social media can cause very real health and welfare problems. Similarly with some wildcat hybrids, whose needs may be difficult to meet in a domestic home. We must challenge these trends before today's fashion becomes tomorrow's welfare problem. Breeders, owners, vets, charities, the media and influencers all have a part to play in shaping what becomes acceptable or desirable.

Our approach to everyday cat care will continue to change. For example, rather than automatically using the same parasite control for every cat, future recommendations are likely to reflect individual lifestyle, risk and environmental considerations.

Technology is another fascinating area. Smart cat flaps, feeders and water fountains and can genuinely help people meet their cats' needs, but convenience does not automatically equal good welfare. Electronic shock collars, for example, are cruel and have no place in cat care. Trackers can be useful, but batteries fail and devices get lost. When it comes to permanently identifying a cat, nothing beats a microchip.

Perhaps the biggest change, though, is how people find information. Many now rely on online communities, influencers or AI tools. That curiosity should be welcomed, but the challenge is ensuring quality answers. Echo chambers and repetition can make poor advice seem credible, despite limited evidence.

Organisations like Cats Protection cannot simply put good information on a website and hope people find it. We need to be curious about new technology ourselves and work with responsible influencers and others who can help reliable, evidence-based information cut through.

As we approach our 100th anniversary, there is much to celebrate. But the best way to honour our history is to use what we've learned to shape what happens next. Technology and fashions will change and our knowledge will continue to develop. We need to keep asking one simple question: **what does this mean for the cats?**

If we keep that question at the heart of what we do, there is every reason to be optimistic about the next 100 years.

**John May CVO OBE DL,
Chief Executive,
Cats Protection**



Our services

Support from Cats Protection

Cats Protection supports cat owners through a range of services, education initiatives, campaigns and advocacy work designed to improve the welfare of cats and the people who care for them. The charity continually monitors the needs of cats and owners, using research such as its annual CATS Report to help shape effective support.

Education

Cats Protection delivers talks, online resources and targeted campaigns to help current and future owners better understand cats' needs and improve welfare standards. Through its work in schools and as part of the Pet Education Partnership, the charity is helping make animal welfare education accessible to children and young adults across the UK. Find out more at cats.org.uk/education

Campaigning and Advocacy

Cats Protection campaigns for legislative and policy changes that improve the lives of cats and support responsible ownership. Its advocacy work includes promoting pet-friendly housing policies and calling for stronger regulation of cat breeding. Find out more about our advocacy campaigns at cats.org.uk/campaigning

Paws to Listen

Paws to Listen is a free, confidential service offering emotional support and practical guidance to people affected by the grief or loss of a cat. In 2025, across the UK, trained volunteers responded to 1,500 calls and emails from owners seeking support. Find out more about Paws to Listen at cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen

Cat Guardians

Cat Guardians is a free service that gives owners peace of mind by ensuring their cat will be cared for and rehomed if they die before their pet. In 2025, across the UK, the service made arrangements for and cared for 244 cats following the death of their owners, supporting 173 people. Find out more about Cat Guardians at cats.org.uk/catguardians



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Making a better life for cats, because life is better with cats



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

Cats Protection is a registered charity 203644 (England and Wales), SC037711 (Scotland) and is listed as a Section 167 institution by the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland.
Registered office: National Cat Centre, Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, Sussex, RH17 7TT

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