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CATS Report

Cats and Their Stats UK 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 UK 2026*.

An online survey was used to collect information among a nationally representative audience of adults over the age of 18 in the UK, allowing us to estimate the proportion of cat owners in the UK. 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 UK 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.

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 7% of all cats are not registered with a vet, equating to 820,000 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 2026* from Cats Protection, our seventh comprehensive survey looking into the fascinating world of cats in the UK. 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 are 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. The report highlights that more people want their cat to have kittens (cited as the reason for not neutering them) but this brings great responsibility for looking after a pregnant queen and finding good homes for the kittens. 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. 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 11.7 million owned cats across the UK, a significant increase from 10.2 million in 2025
- Cat owners still tend to be younger compared to the general population, with those under 35 most likely to have recently acquired a cat
- Cat ownership has grown in rural regions

The cat market

- Specific breeds of cats make up over 50% of recent acquisitions but the rising popularity of pedigree cats may be levelling out
- For the first time in recent years, the proportion of cats that were bought has not risen
- The popularity of online sources continues to grow for acquiring cats

Veterinary care

- Microchipping numbers have not increased, despite the introduction of compulsory microchipping for pet cats in England in 2024
- Neutering numbers are falling, driven by more owners wanting their cat to have kittens
- More kittens are being given away, rather than sold

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Cat owners are researching their cats’ needs more, particularly young owners. Although vets continue to be a highly trusted and widely used source of advice, online sources are increasingly influencing owners’ knowledge and decision making
- Owner concern about harm or loss is keeping cats 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
- Cat ownership can be a valuable source of support for people with mental health conditions
- Previous cat owners choose not to own a cat again primarily for emotional reasons, such as the inability to replace their previous cat or fear of further loss

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



State of the nation

Key takeaways

1

There are 11.7 million owned cats across the UK, a significant increase from 10.2 million in 2025

2

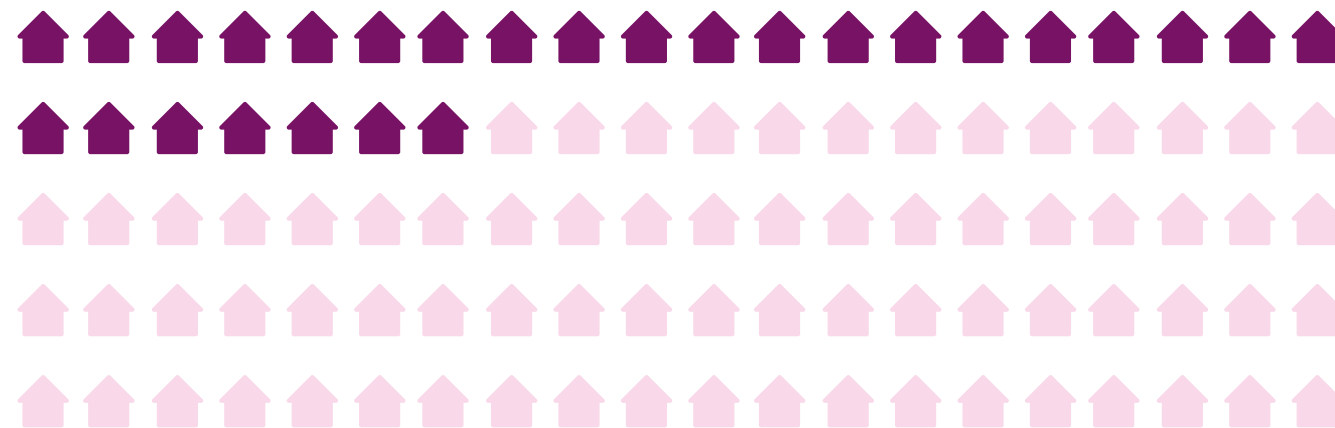
Cat owners still tend to be younger compared to the general population, with those under 35 most likely to have recently acquired a cat

3

Cat ownership has grown in rural regions

Cat population

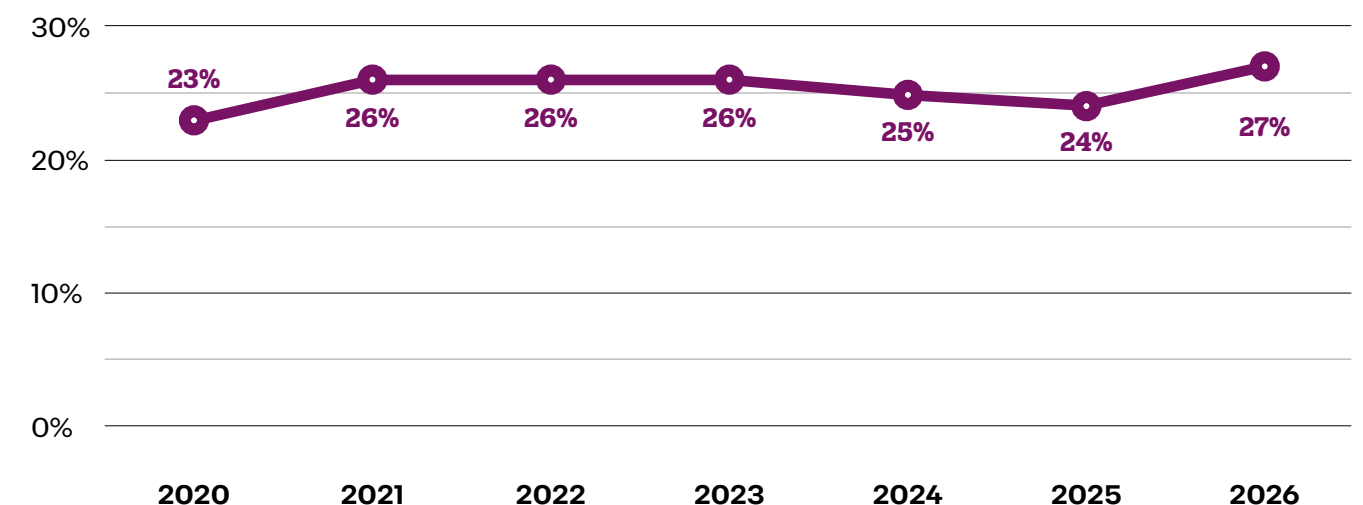
27% of households in the UK own a cat.



There are **11.7 million owned cats** across the UK (10.2 million in 2025).

Proportion of cat owners in the UK

The proportion of households that own a cat has increased since last year, reversing the declining trend in cat ownership seen across most UK regions since 2021. This increase over 12 months matches the rise in cat ownership seen at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many cats joined UK households as more people were staying at home. Observing this trend over the coming years will help establish whether ownership rates in 2021 are actually more representative of the 'norm', and this year's rise is just a return to this.

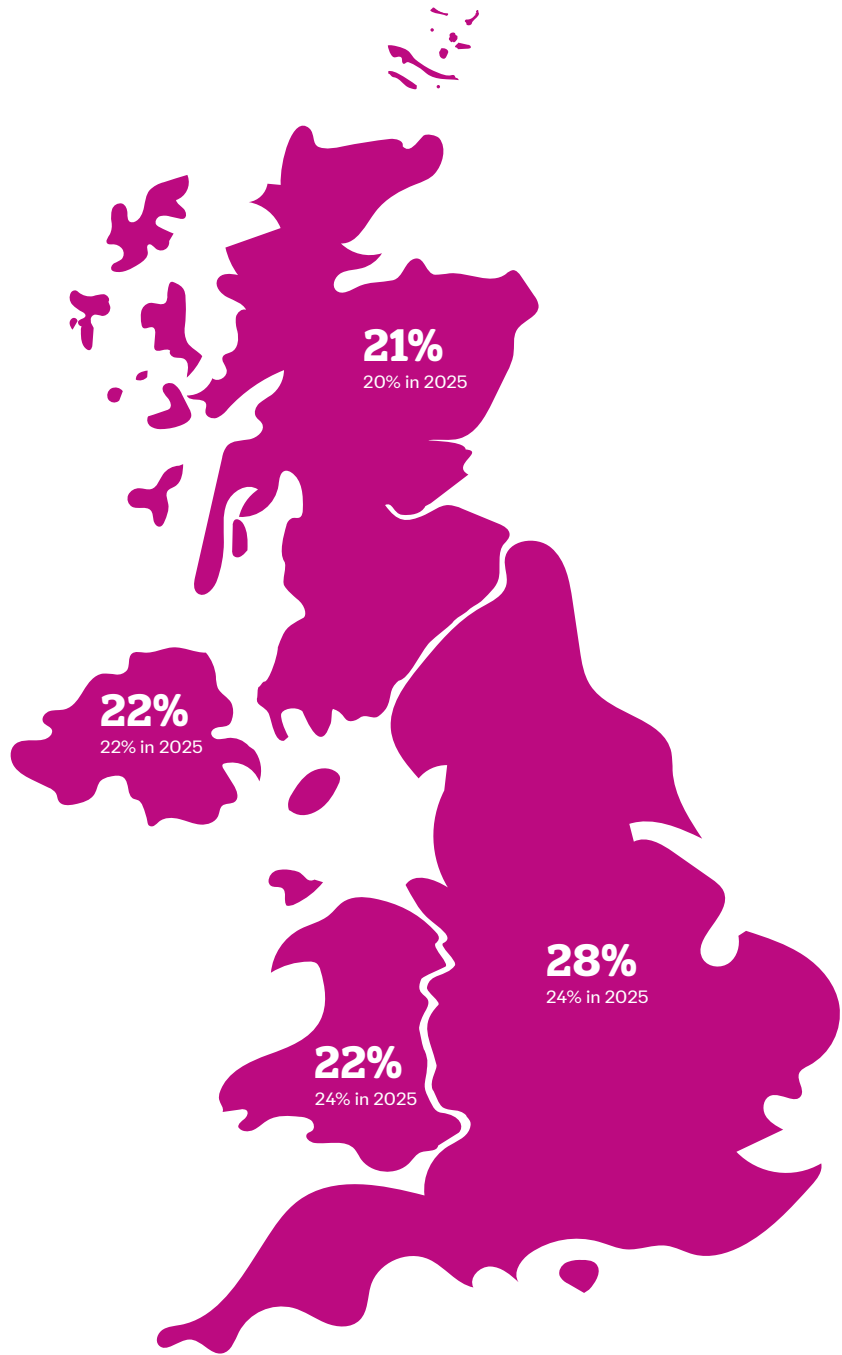


The average number of cats per cat-owning household is 1.5 cats, with 66% of households owning just one cat.



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, which demonstrate no statistically significant changes from last year's figures*.



While it is great that more people are able to enjoy the benefits of owning cats, if this trend of increasing cat ownership continues, the surrounding support infrastructure must be robust enough to ensure demand is met and cat welfare is protected. Access to veterinary care and credible information sources is vital for stable, long and healthy lives for cats.

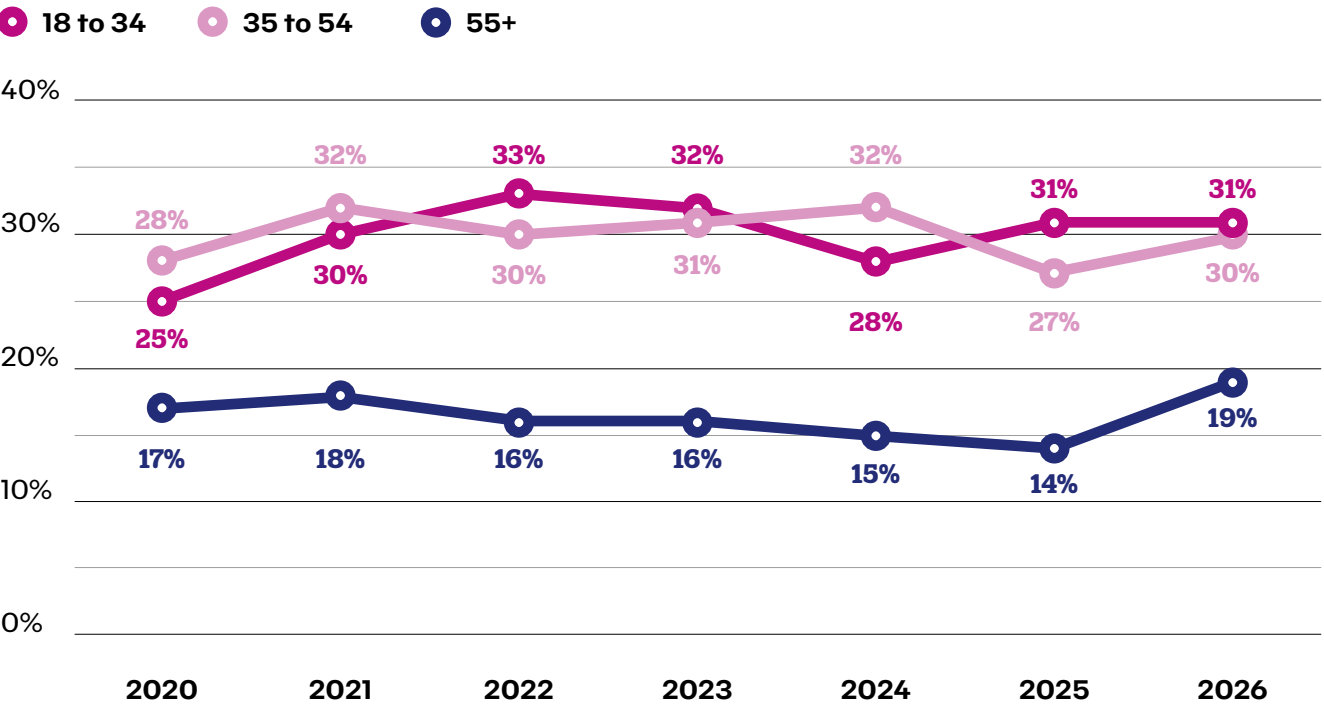
*Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds

Profile of cat owners

Cat owners are more likely to be female



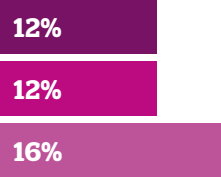
Although the over 55 age group represents the smallest proportion of cat owners, this group has seen a significant rise in ownership over the past 12 months. This appears to have been an important contributor to the overall ownership increase seen since 2025, as the proportion of other age groups has remained relatively stable.



Those under 35 years old are still more likely to have recently acquired a cat.

UK adults All cat owners Cat owners who acquired a cat in the last 12 months

18 to 24-year-olds



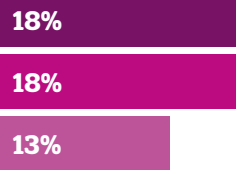
25 to 34-year-olds



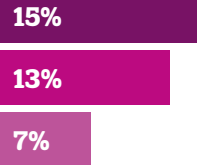
35 to 44-year-olds



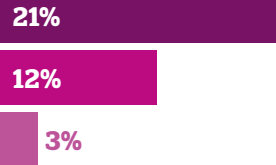
45 to 54-year-olds



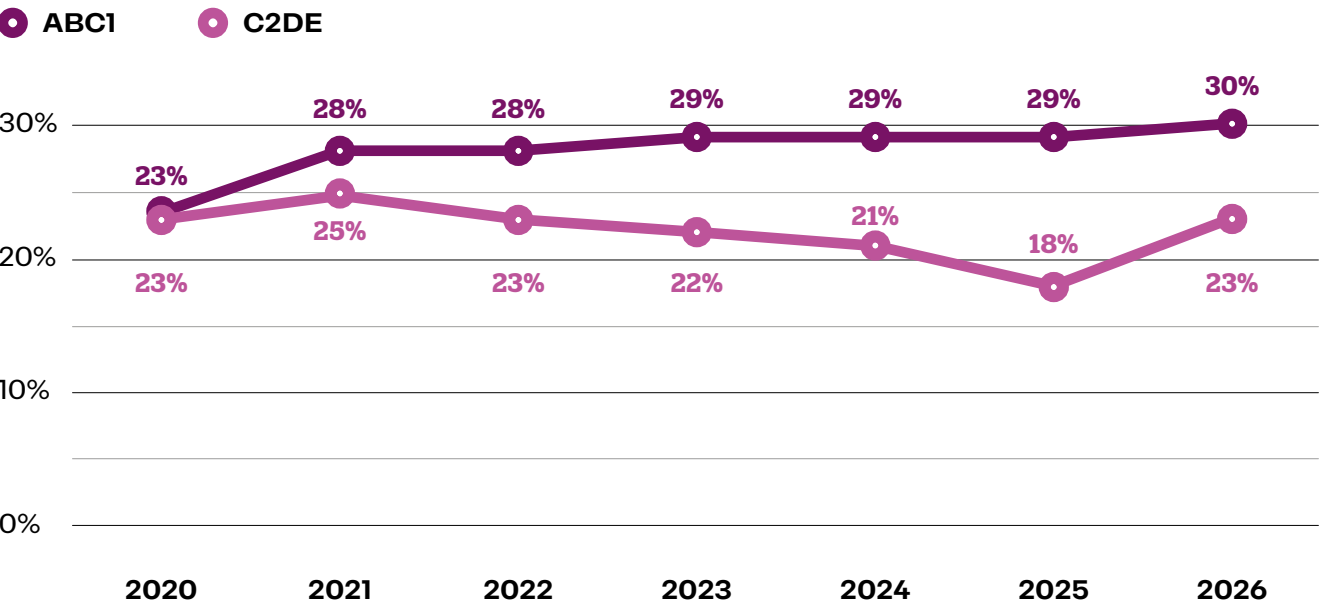
55 to 64-year-olds



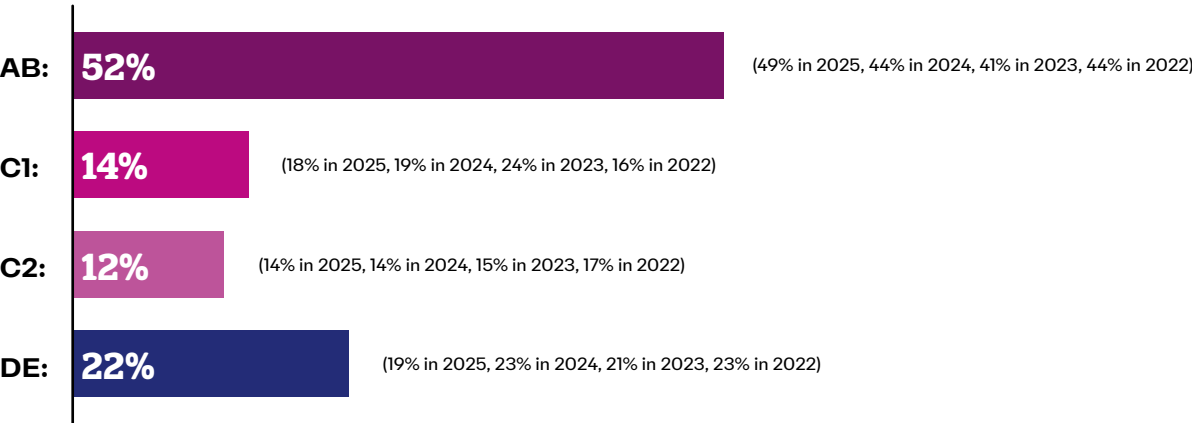
65+ year-olds



There has been a rise in ownership among those from less affluent social groups, reversing the declining trend in this group seen over recent years and returning to levels seen in 2020.



However, a higher proportion of cat owners who have acquired a cat in the last 12 months are in the most affluent social group*.



There has been a significant rise in the number of owners living in rural regions.

Residents in central urban areas who own a cat



Residents in urban areas who own a cat



Residents in suburban areas who own a cat



Residents in semi-rural areas who own a cat

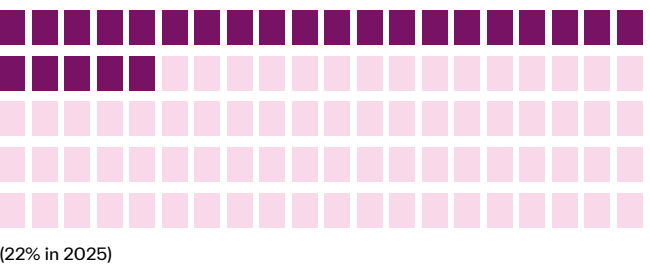


Residents in rural areas who own a cat

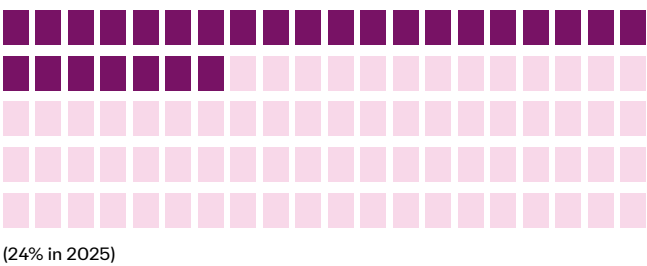


Cat owners who live in rural regions also tend to be older, more affluent and own their home.

25% of those who rent a home own a cat



27% of those who own a home own a cat



The overall increase in the proportion of those who own a cat occurs regardless of house ownership status.

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

The cat market

Key takeaways

1

Specific breeds of cats make up over 50% of recent acquisitions but the rising popularity of pedigree cats may be levelling out

2

For the first time in recent years, the proportion of cats that were bought has not risen

3

The popularity of online sources continues to grow for acquiring cats

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.

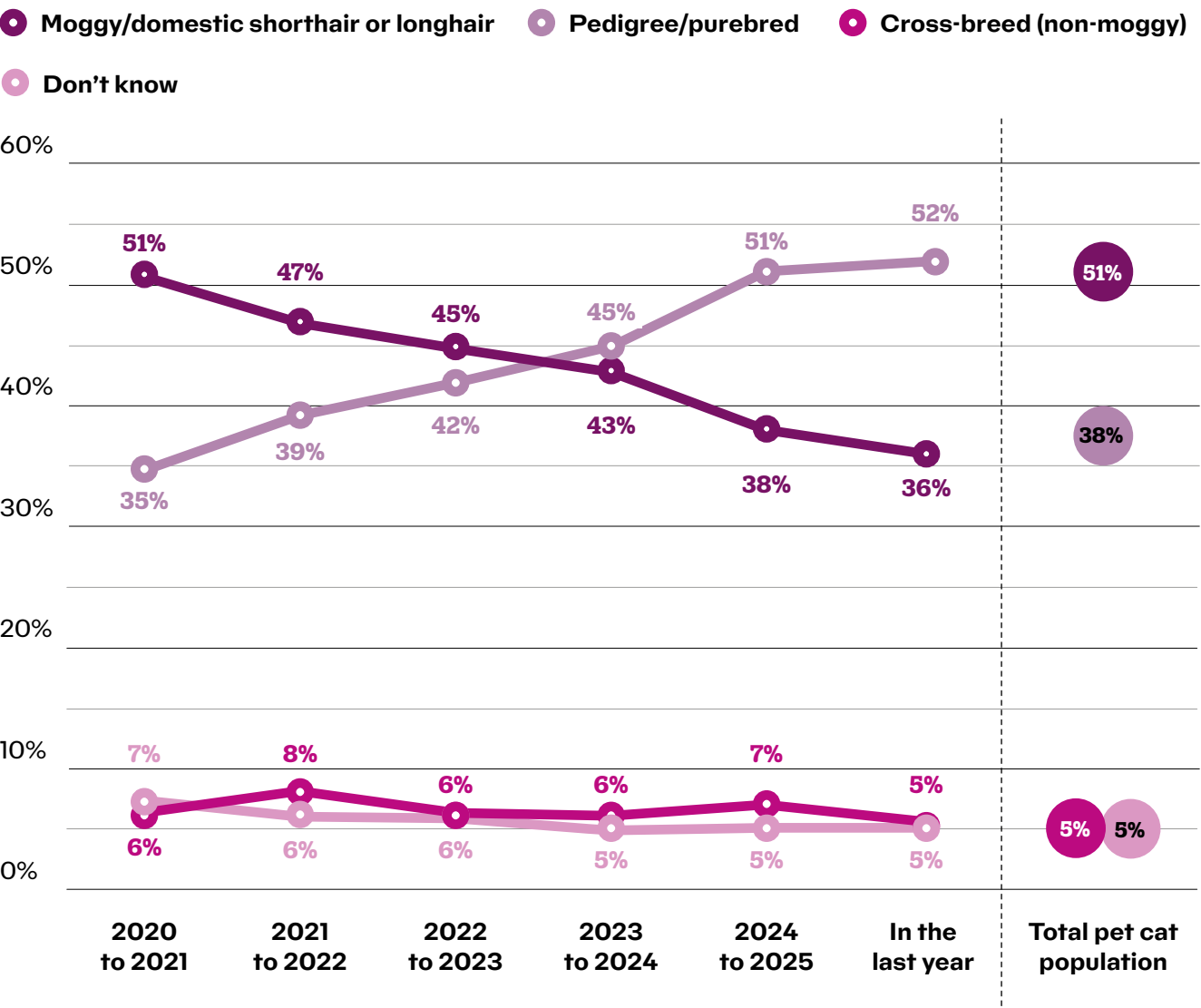
Pedigree: A purebred or cross-breed cat that is registered with a governing body, and the ancestry is recorded.

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’.



More than half the cats acquired in the last year are pedigrees and represent 38% of the total cat population.

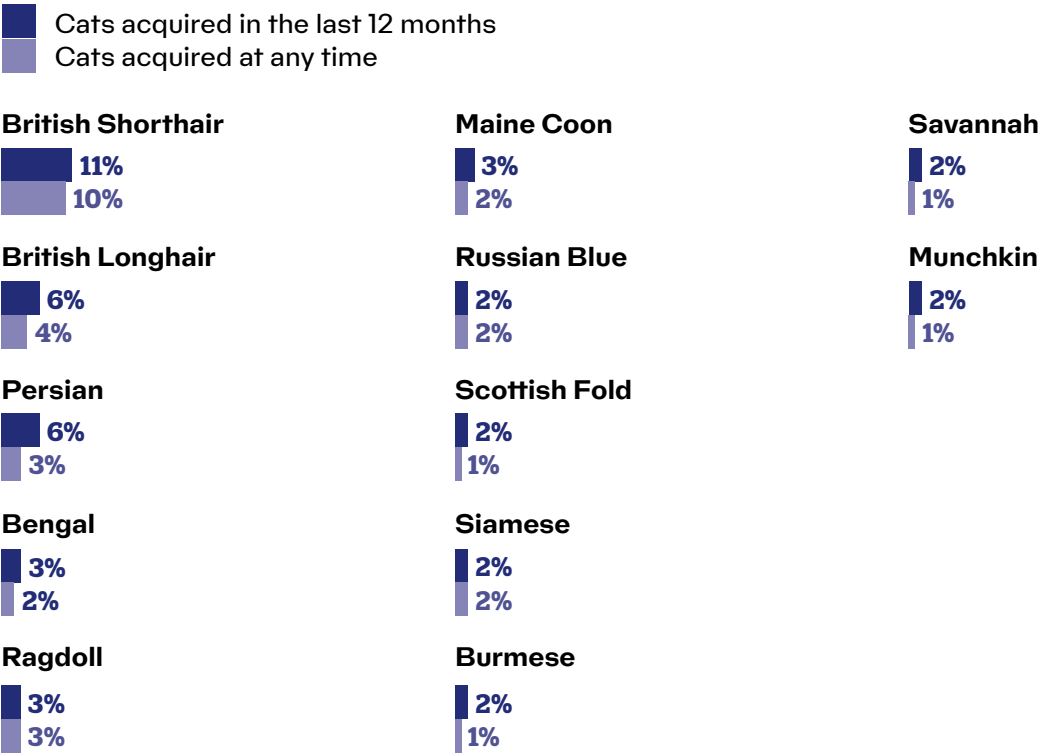


While pedigree cats remain popular, the rapid upward trajectory of this popularity since the *CATS Report* started in 2020 appears to have levelled out over the past 12 months.

This still means **over half of the cats** acquired in the last 12 months are pedigrees.

The proportion of 18 to 34-year-old cat owners that own a pedigree breed is now 53%, continuing the year-on-year increase seen in this age group (49% in 2025, 41% in 2024, 35% in 2023). Those in more affluent social groups are also more likely to own a pedigree cat (ABC1: 46%), as are those living in central urban areas (52%). Male owners (44%) and households with children living at home (47%) are also more likely to have pedigree cats.

Cats acquired in the last 12 months (data relates to all cats acquired during that period):



It is vital that owners and prospective owners understand the implications of ‘extreme characteristics’ in some breeds. These are physical features that have been deliberately bred for their appearance but may affect a cat’s health, wellbeing, or ability to behave normally. Examples include being tailless, hairless, having shortened limbs or folded ears, or having a flattened face. Cats within breeds vary in how they are impacted by the extreme trait, so rather than a focus on individual breeds, the goal should be avoiding genetic traits that compromise welfare across all cats.

Brachycephalic (‘flat-faced’) cats can have chronic problems with breathing, eye and dental health. In some cases, genetic mutations that create distinctive physical features can also cause health problems elsewhere in the body. For example, the mutation that gives Scottish Fold cats their characteristic folded ears is associated with a painful inherited condition that affects the development of cartilage, bones and joints. Cats’ health and wellbeing should always come first. Breeding for appearance should never compromise health or welfare.

“Choosing a cat should be about more than appearance. Owners may not be aware that some traits selected for their visual appeal can leave the cat in significant pain, increase the risk of disease or lead to reduced quality of life, which is why informed decision making is so important. Anyone considering getting a cat should seek advice from trusted sources, such as Cats Protection, to better understand the health and welfare implications of different breeds and find the right cat for their lifestyle.”

Dr Ben Simpson-Vernon
aka Ben the Vet



“Working in partnership with The Big Cat Sanctuary and Wildheart Animal Sanctuary, we are campaigning to end the breeding of wild cats with domestic cats. These hybrid cats can inherit the complex behavioural and welfare needs of their wild ancestors, making them difficult to care for in a domestic environment and increasing the risk of abandonment, neglect and poor welfare outcomes.”

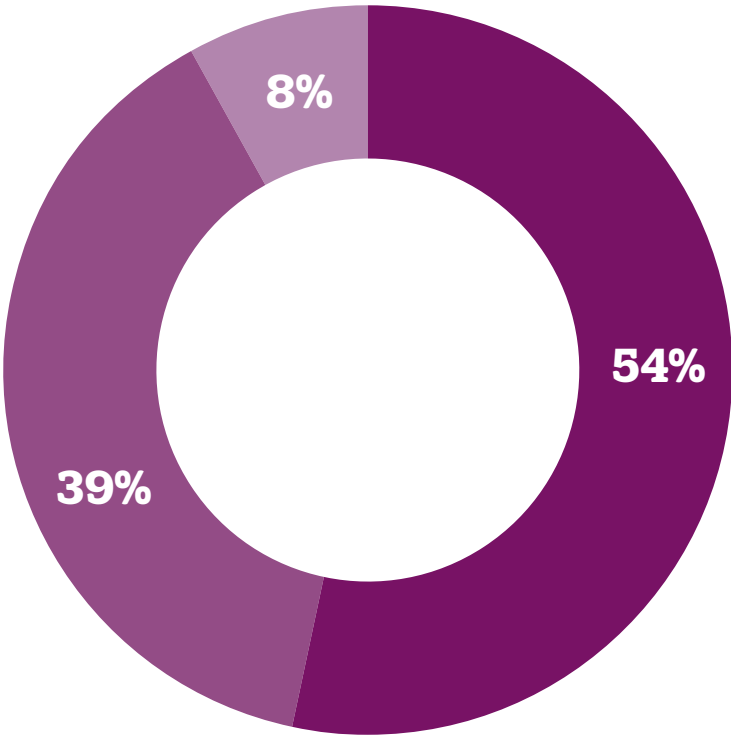
Jeff Knott,
Advocacy & Influence Director,
Cats Protection





Of those owners who say they don't have a moggy, **54%** say that they were given paperwork to confirm their cat's breed.

- **54% were given paperwork**
- **39% were not given paperwork**
- **8% don't know or can't remember**



Almost a third of cats that do have paperwork are registered with The International Cat Association (TICA).

The International Cat Association (TICA)



Governing Council of the Cat Fancy (GCCF)



Fédération Internationale Féline (FIFe)/Felis Britannica



The GCCF does not recognise certain breeds with genetic mutations and/or structural anomalies that may affect health and welfare on its register, including the Scottish Fold and Munchkin breeds. Policies like this are strongly supported by Cats Protection. It would be most beneficial to cat health and welfare for TICA and other cat breed organisations with influence to have a unified stance on this issue.

How cats are acquired

The rising trend in the number of cats in the total cat population that were bought has plateaued this year.

Bought*



38% in 2025, 34% in 2024, 32% in 2023, 29% in 2022, 28% in 2021

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



23% in 2025, 24% in 2024, 2023 and 2022, 25% in 2021

Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family



16% in 2025, 16% in 2024, 17% in 2023 and 2022, 19% in 2021

Given to me as a gift



6% in 2025, 2024 and 2023, 5% in 2022 and 2021

Found as a stray and taken in



5% in 2025, 6% in 2024, 2023 and 2022, 7% in 2021

Kitten of an already owned cat



4% in 2025, 5% in 2024, 6% in 2023, 2022 and 2021

Acquired from other sources**



18% of the total current cat population was acquired during the last 12 months, equating to over 2.1 million cats.



This equates to a current UK pet cat population where around:



The **gap between purchase and adoption is wider** for cats acquired in the last 12 months.



*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), 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.

Where people find cats to buy

Overall, where cats are purchased from has remained relatively stable compared to last year (data shown is for cats purchased in the last 12 months). However, over the last 12 months, a significantly lower proportion of cats have been bought from someone the owner didn't know, but that wasn't a specialist breeder (7%, 10% in 2025).

Bought from a specialist breeder in the UK

17% (15% in 2025)

Bought from a pet shop in person

11% (11% in 2025)

Bought from someone I didn't know but not a specialist breeder

7% (10% in 2025)

Bought from a neighbour/friend/family

7% (6% in 2025)

Bought from a specialist breeder overseas

3% (2% in 2025)

The addition of a response option relating to a physical pet shop premises this year revealed a surprisingly high response rate, considering that cats are not legally allowed to be sold in pet shops in most of the UK.

The downward trend of cats that are sourced via Facebook continues.

Bought at any time

Bought in the last 12 months

Pets4Homes

25% (22% in 2025, 17% in 2024)
31% (28% in 2025, 19% in 2024)

Word of mouth

17% (20% in 2025)
13% (16% in 2025)

Facebook

13% (17% in 2025, 20% in 2024)
10% (15% in 2025, 22% in 2024)

Gumtree

10%
9%

Other selling site

5%
6%

Instagram

4%
6%

Freeads.co.uk

3%
5%

TikTok

3%
4%

Preloved

2%
3%

Newspaper/magazine advert

2%
1%



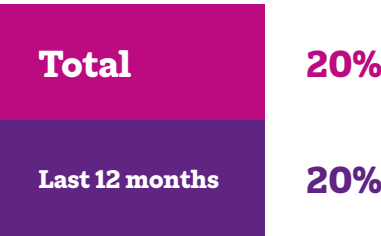
Of all cats purchased, **68%** were bought from online sources (63% in 2024)*.

76% for those cats purchased in the last 12 months (74% in 2025, 72% in 2024).



20% of all cats purchased were sourced on social media (27% in 2024).

20% of those cats purchased in the last 12 months (30% in 2025, 37% in 2024).



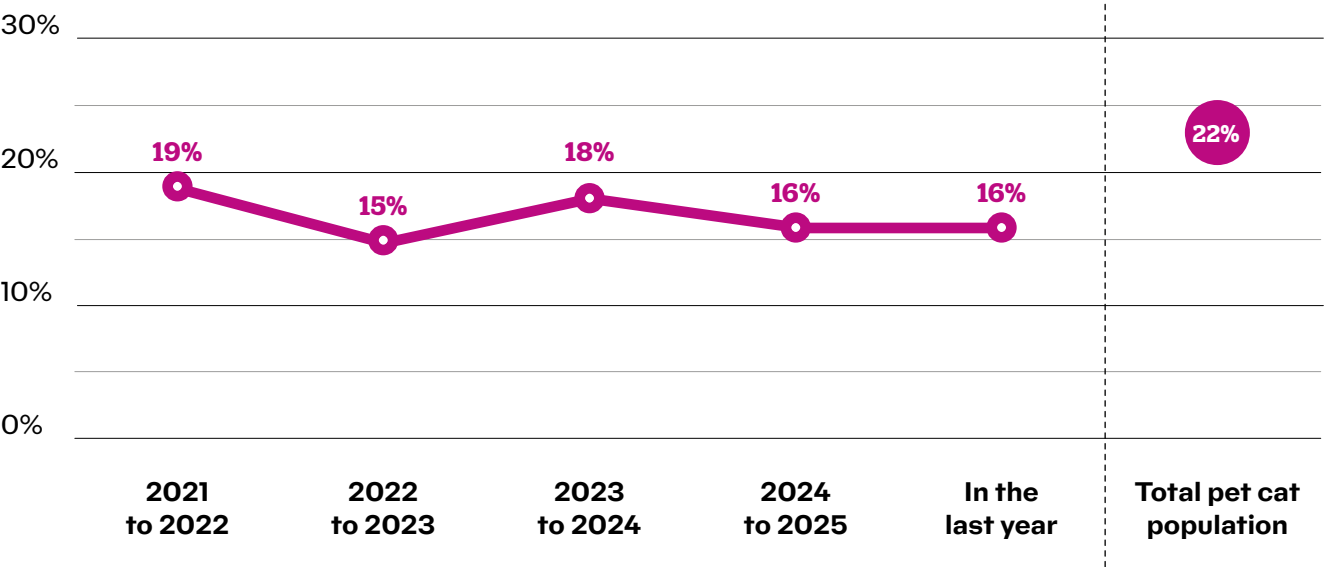
The increase in popularity of online sources for purchasing cats inevitably affects the dynamic of how more people search for a cat to buy. For example, the search function on increasingly popular website Pets4Homes asks what breed of cat an individual wants when starting their search. The prospective owner's exploration of the cats available to them is therefore led by specific breeds, rather than being presented with a range of cat types, including moggies.

The ongoing drop in popularity of Facebook as a purchase acquisition source is a positive reflection of the hard work that Cats Protection and other organisations have done to encourage this platform to tighten up on selling rules. The related shift to sites that engage with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG), a multi-organisation group that aims to ensure that pet animals are advertised for sale legally and ethically, is good news for cat welfare but still needs to be monitored.

*Figure calculated through those selecting rescue/rehoming centre website, freeads.co.uk, Pets4Homes, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, other social media, Gumtree, Preloved, other website and other selling site (new code for 2026).

Cat adoption

Adoption figures have dropped in the last 12 months.



Adopters tend to be older, but it is not easy to tell from the data if this is due to attitudes changing as people age, or a generational trend. If the latter, as the current cohort of older owners form increasingly less of the overall market over time, younger owners, who prefer to purchase, will continue to drive the shift away from adoption. This makes efforts to address the barriers to adoption among younger owners beneficial not just today, but long into the future too. Adoption rates have dropped across most demographics but have remained relatively stable in the less affluent groups.

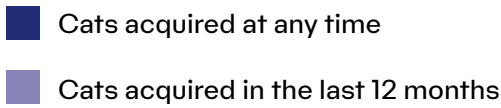
Around 7,000 stray and abandoned cats came into Cats Protection care in 2025, and the waiting list averaged 1,900 cats per month across all centres. Cats Protection found new homes for 27,000 cats in 2025 (2024: 29,000, 2023: 30,000).

*April 2024 to March 2025.

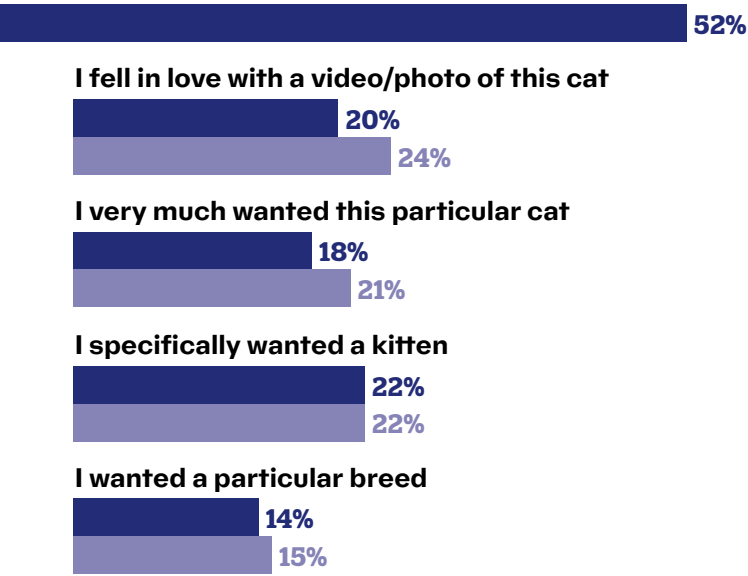


Why cats are acquired the way they are

Reasons relating to the individual cat themselves (cat factors) are predominantly why owners choose a specific acquisition source*.



Cat factors



Circumstance



Convenience



Cost



It is encouraging that for 28% of cat owners, giving a home to a cat in need influenced their decision on where to acquire their cat. It is imperative that the rehoming sector acknowledges that cats up for adoption need to ‘compete’ in an increasingly busy online space. While the types of cats that become available for adoption cannot be managed, it is important for the rehoming sector to maximise what is within their control. How cats are presented is a strong motivator for almost

a quarter of owners selecting where to source their cat from, so paying attention to how a cat is visually presented, with good-quality photos and videos on their profile, can have a real influence on the online appeal of the cats in the care of rehoming organisations. By taking this more ‘promotional’ approach, rehoming organisations can help more cats appeal to more potential new owners, helping find them suitable loving homes.

*Codes include:

The cat: I very much wanted this particular cat, I fell in love with a photo or video of this cat, I wanted a particular breed, I specifically wanted a kitten and it was the only place I could get one from.

Cost: It was the cheapest option, I didn't want to pay an adoption fee, it was free.

Convenience: It was the easiest, most hassle-free option, it was the quickest way of getting a cat.

Circumstance: The owner was moving away, the owner was moving into rented accommodation, the cat previously belonged to someone that died, to help out a friend, family member or neighbour, the cat was already neutered, vaccinated and vet checked, I was concerned about the cat's welfare if I hadn't taken them home, I was turned down by a breeder or charity.

Veterinary care

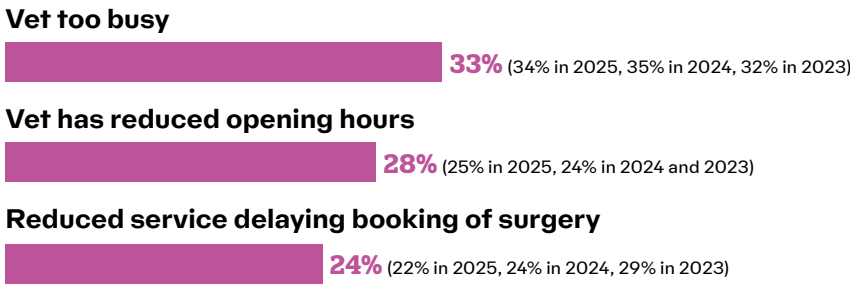
Key takeaways



Veterinary capacity

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

Of those owners who struggled to access a vet, these are the top reasons:



Problems with accessing a vet are reportedly higher in those aged 18 to 34 (46%). With this population reportedly more likely to work over their contracted hours* and more vets operating reduced opening hours, appointment availability is a potentially escalating problem. 7% of cat owners who don't visit the vet as often as they would like state that this is because the opening hours/appointments offered are too limited. 8% say that they struggle to find an appointment at a time that works for them.

*Office for National Statistics; Earnings and hours worked, age group: ASHE Table 6

Owners living in urban areas consistently report more difficulties due to factors on the vet practice's side (for example, being too busy, operating a reduced service and cancelled appointments), than those living in rural regions. Vet registration rates are similar across both area types, so this discrepancy indicates a potential veterinary service supply and demand issue across different areas.

Even those that do manage to book appointments experience difficulties, with 8% of all cat owners who visit the vet reporting that they have had appointments cancelled.

Vet registration

The number of cats who are registered with a vet continues to increase from 92% last year to 93%. This is great news but still leaves almost 820,000 cats not registered with a vet.

7% of cats are not registered with a vet.

Higher for:

Outdoor-only cats



Uninsured cats



Cats that were taken in as a stray



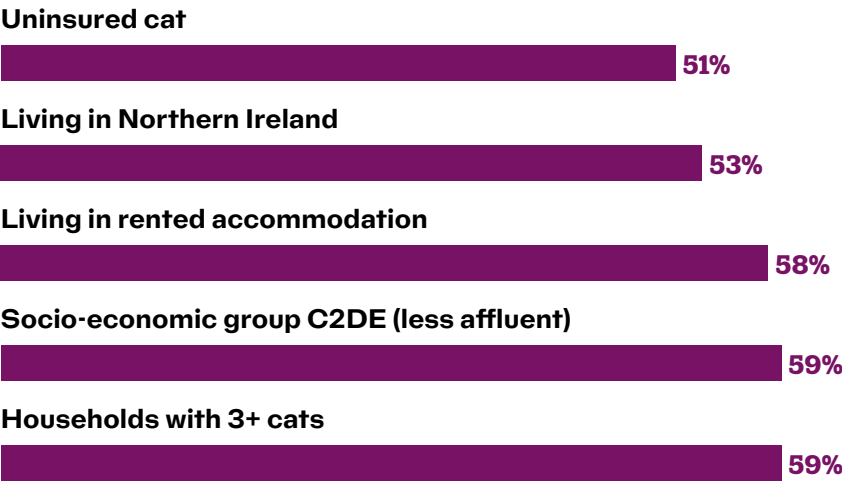
Some cats and their owners will be more likely to require veterinary help. For example, outdoor cats and those that have lived as a stray are at greater risk of injury, parasites and infectious disease due to their lifestyle. It is important that owners understand the health risks that their cat faces and are supported in seeking appropriate veterinary care to mitigate them.



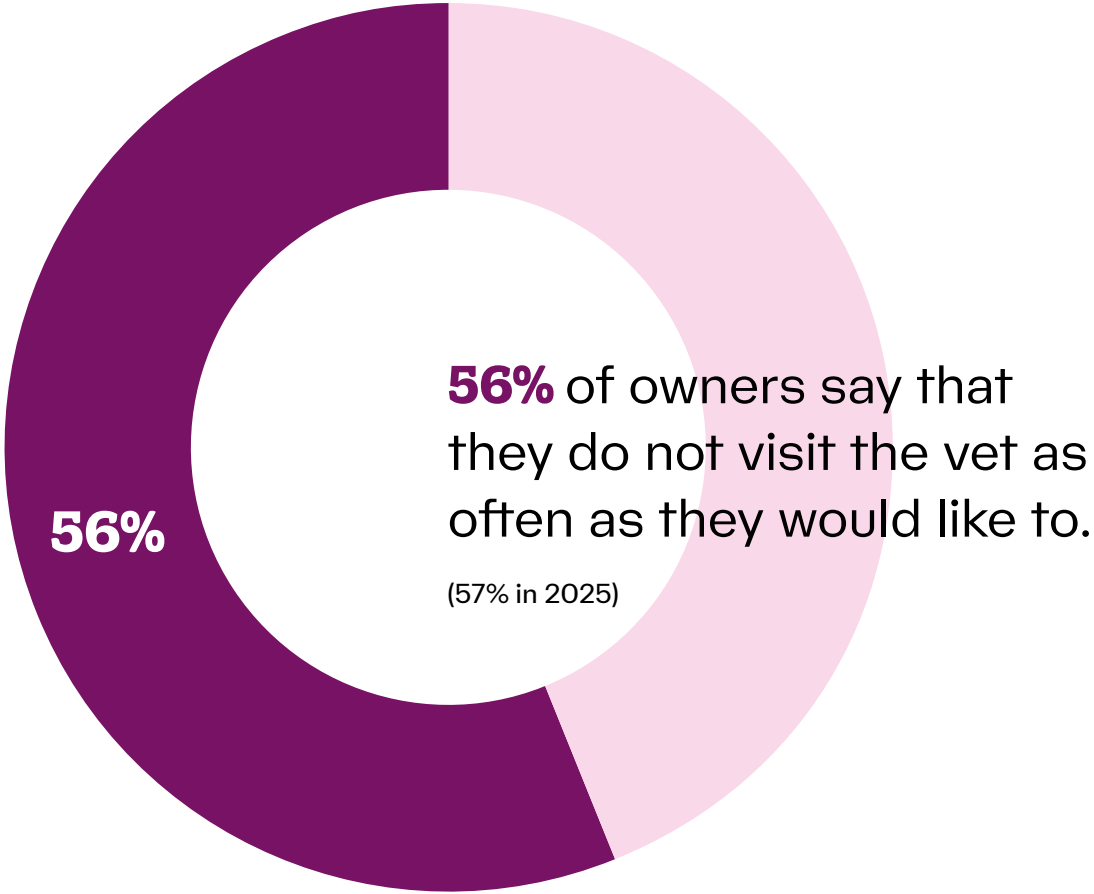
Vet visits

More owners are taking their cat to the vet routinely every year (67%, 64% in 2025). This does mean, however, that over 3.8 million cats are not receiving regular veterinary care.

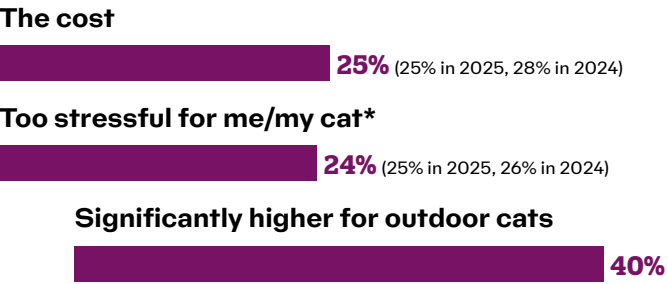
Lower than average:



Annual vet visits continue to become the norm for more cats, which brings great benefits for both cat and owner. Preventing or intervening with health problems early is the best way to not only 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.



For the first time, the stress of a vet visit is equal to cost as a barrier to visiting the vet.



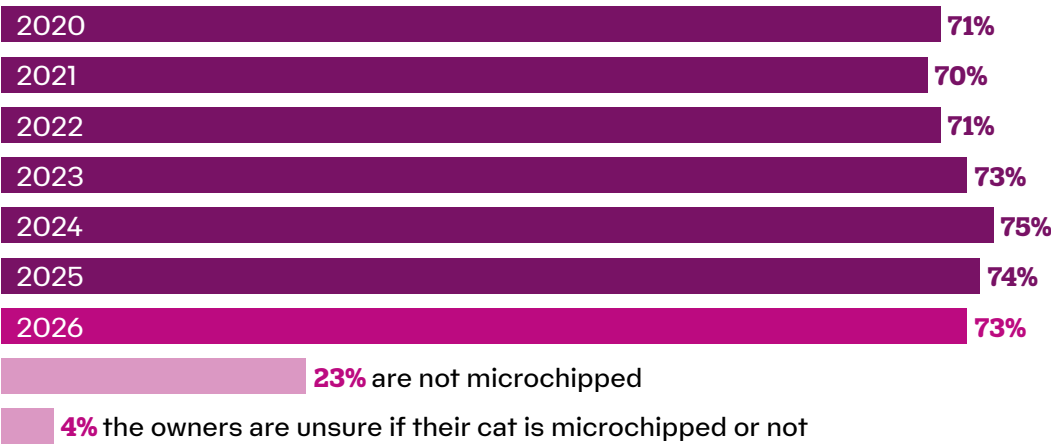
Although the cost of vet treatment has not grown in significance as a reason for not visiting the vet, it still remains a problem for a quarter of cat owners who don’t visit the vet as often as they would like. More specifically, 7% are worried about the unknown cost of additional treatments that may be recommended once they get to the vet.

Alleviating the logistical stress of a vet visit would help a large proportion of cats see a vet more regularly, making schemes such as iCatCare’s ‘Cat Friendly Practice’ initiative really valuable. This initiative advises and accredits vet clinics that proactively shape their design, practices and protocols to meet the unique needs of cats, creating a more positive experience and higher standard of care. iCatCare has a range of support and materials available about Cat Friendly Clinics and other ways to help reduce the stress of vet visits for cats at icatcare.org

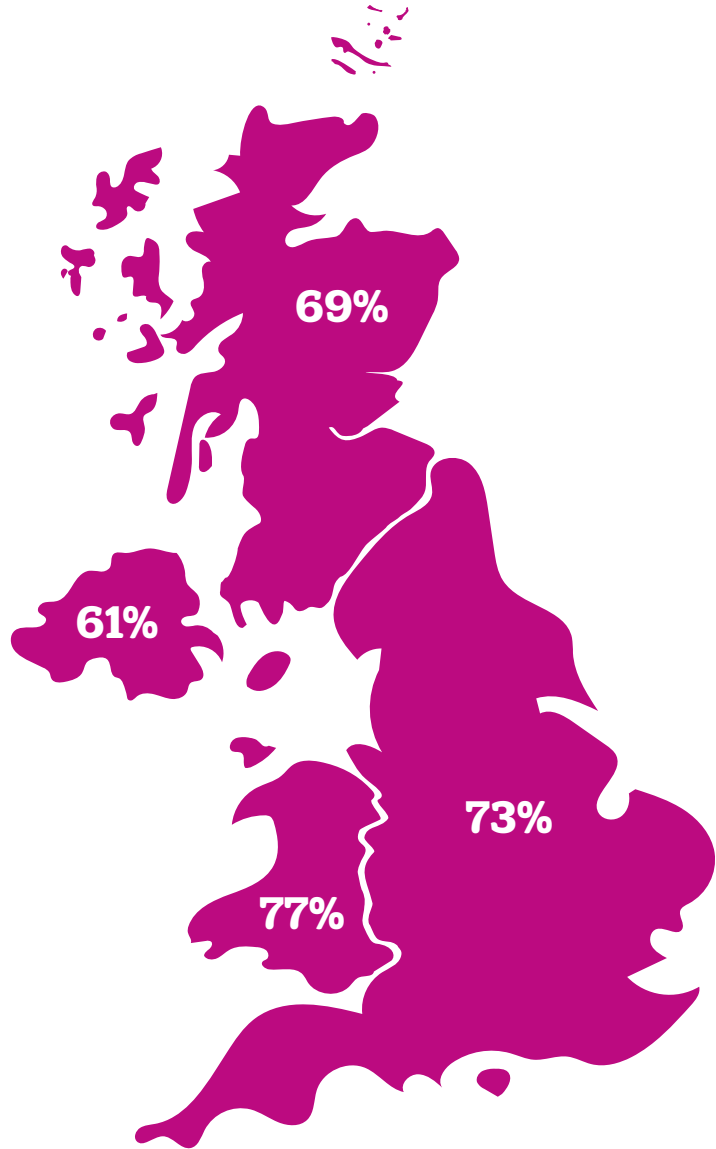
*Net of responses related to these themes.

Microchipping

Despite the law changing in 2024 to make microchipping a legal requirement for pet cats in England, microchipping numbers have not risen since.



Microchipping numbers across the UK nations:



The cats less likely to be microchipped

With over 3.1 million cats potentially without a microchip, it’s important to understand the barriers that stop cat owners satisfying what is now a legal requirement, as well as a positive contributor to their cat’s welfare.

Microchipping numbers are notably lower among younger owners (18 to 34: 60%), male owners (67%) and those that have only become cat owners in recent years (62%). When looking at cats acquired in the last 12 months, microchipping numbers are just 58%. Perhaps unsurprisingly, adopted cats are more likely to be microchipped than those that were bought (87% versus 69%); ensuring a cat is microchipped is typically part of the adoption process.

Microchipping and neutering is something that many vets offer, and cats that are neutered are more likely to be microchipped. 7% of owners that have not had their cat microchipped say that they plan to when their cat is neutered. This highlights the importance of a structured approach to preventative healthcare in supporting compliance with legislative responsibilities.

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

My cat doesn’t go outside



My cat doesn’t stray/go far



My cat has a collar instead



This may explain why moggies are more likely to be microchipped than pedigrees (82% versus 64%), as pedigree cats are also less likely to have outdoor access.



*nfpResearch, nfpPublic UK April 2025 | Base: 1004 respondents 16+, United Kingdom



Owners should be cautious of a false sense of security though. Indoor cats can escape, cats that don’t usually stray far can experience a sudden event that causes them to dart, and collars can be lost.

In these scenarios, the cats perceived by owners as having the lowest need for a microchip may actually be at the greatest risk of becoming irretrievably lost if they unexpectedly find themselves in an unfamiliar outside environment.

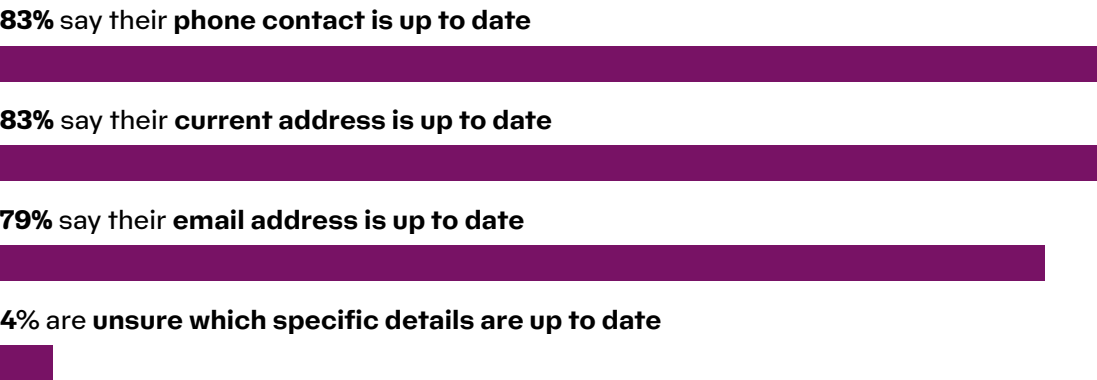
Irrespective of perceived risk, cat lifestyle or owner opinions on microchipping, legislation in England states that **all** pet cats over 20 weeks must be microchipped. Over half of cat owners in England that haven’t had their cat microchipped (52%) say that they weren’t aware that microchipping their cat has been a legal requirement for over a year though. This lack of awareness is even higher for owners aged over 55 (65%), owners who are less affluent (C2DE: 60%) and first-time owners (65%). More owners that have acquired their cat in the last year **are** aware of the law, despite microchipping numbers in this group being lower than the general cat-owning population. This suggests that barriers preventing microchipping in new cat owners are perhaps stronger than the motivation to be adherent to legislation.

For the first time, cat owners who have not microchipped their cat were asked what would encourage them to get it done. Despite factors relating to the cat’s lifestyle being a key barrier to microchipping, rather than the technology itself, more information about safety was a popular choice to motivate microchipping (22%). Clear information about the benefits was also desired by many (23%), presenting a clear education and communication opportunity for animal health and welfare organisations. Responses relating to wanting more information about microchipping were significantly higher in the 18 to 34 age group, highlighting this as a key group to target. The most common response was that a vet’s recommendation would encourage microchipping (28%), demonstrating the strong influence that vets have in making key health and welfare decisions. But although vets, breeders, shelters and sellers have a valuable role to play in ensuring cats are microchipped and details are kept up to date, ultimate responsibility lies with the owner.

Microchips and keeping details up to date

93% of cats with a microchip have up-to-date details.

Of those who say their cat’s microchip details are up to date:



Of the owners who have had their cat microchipped, the proportion that say their details are up to date remains largely unchanged. However, this leaves **over 820,000 cats who are microchipped 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.

“Microchipping has so many benefits for both cats and their owners. It increases the chances of lost, stolen or injured cats being reunited with their families and helps reduce the burden on animal welfare organisations. Our cat centres regularly take in friendly stray cats that are clearly someone’s much-loved pet, yet without a microchip it can be difficult to trace their owner.

“This is especially important for indoor-only cats. Many owners assume their cat doesn’t need a microchip because they never go outside, but these cats can be particularly vulnerable if they do escape, as they may be unfamiliar with the local area and unable to find their way home. When the unexpected happens, a microchip helps to reunite them with their family.”

Izzy Hocking,
Senior Veterinary Engagement Manager,
Cats Protection



Neutering and breeding

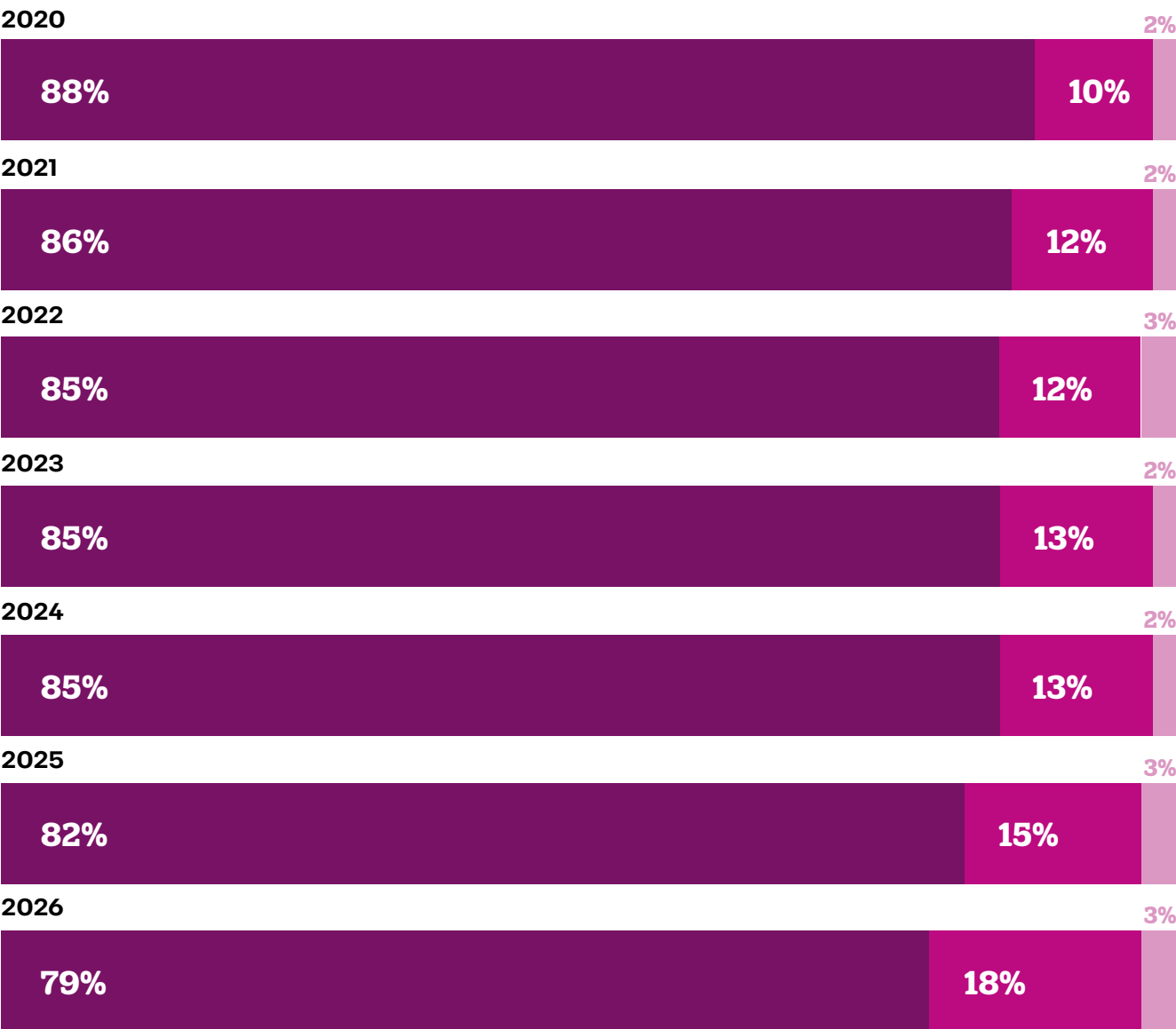
Continuing the downward trend since 2020, neutering numbers have fallen once again to 79%.

Is your cat neutered/spayed?

■ Yes

■ No

■ Don't know



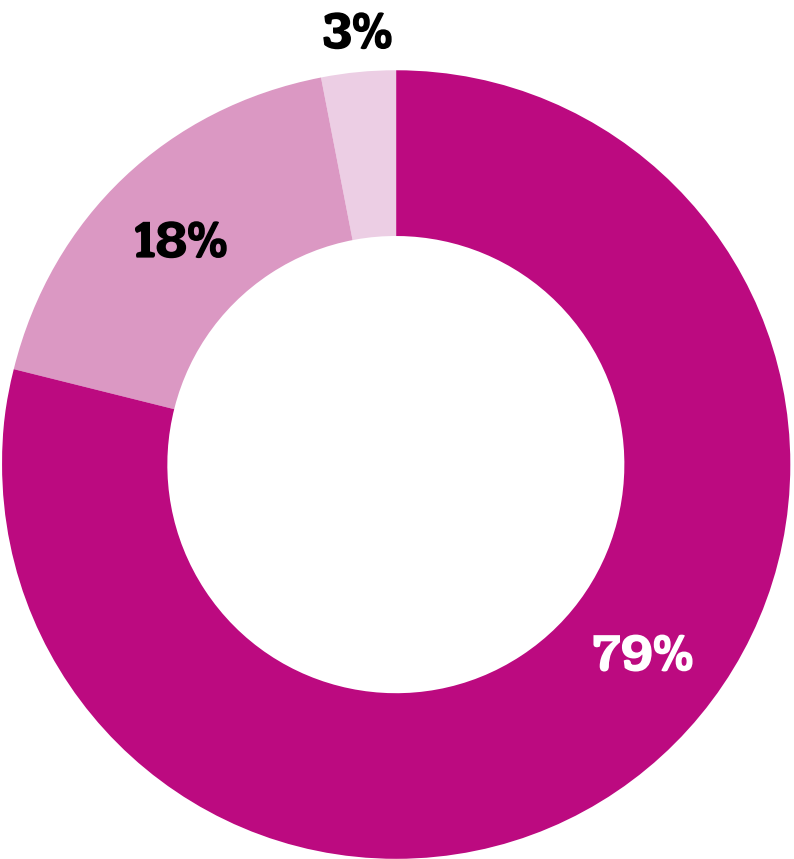
Declining neutering rates are of significant concern, as neutering plays a vital role in maintaining a balanced cat population and helping to prevent future welfare challenges. At a time when animal welfare organisations are already facing significant pressure, reversing this trend will be essential to reduce unplanned litters and help ensure fewer cats are at risk of becoming stray, abandoned or in need of rehoming.

Neutering numbers have fallen to 79% (82%) in 2025.

■ **9.2 million cats (79%) are neutered** 8.4 million cats (82%) in 2025

■ **2.1 million cats (18%) are not neutered** 1.5 million cats (15%) in 2025

■ **350,000 cats (3%), the owner does not know** 300,000 cats (3%) in 2025



The cats less likely to have been neutered

Younger cat owners aged 18 to 34 are less likely to have neutered their cat (67%), compared to 81% of 35 to 54-year-olds and 94% of those aged over 55. Pedigree cats (70%) and cats bought from a specialist breeder are also less likely to have been neutered (71%). Cats from rural areas are more likely to have been neutered (86% versus 78%) than those living in urban areas.

The drop in neutering numbers appears to be heavily influenced by the desire for some cat owners to breed their cat.

I want my cat to have kittens

■ **18%** (19% in 2025, 15% in 2024, 11% in 2023, 14% in 2022)

My cat doesn't go outside

■ **18%** (17% in 2025, 20% in 2024, 21% in 2023, 20% in 2022)

- Contents page
- Key findings
- State of the nation
- The cat market
- Veterinary care**
- The cost of owning a cat
- Cat care, welfare and behaviour
- The ripple effect of information
- Companionship and challenges to ownership
- Our bond with cats
- Cats over time
- Cats in summary
- Where do we go from here?
- Our services

More affluent owners are more likely to want their cat to have kittens (ABC1: 23% versus C2DE: 8%), which may be a reflection of these owners feeling better equipped to manage the costs and resources required for a litter. This split is also seen between those who own their house (24%) versus those that rent (11%). Owners in the 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 age brackets are also more likely to have not neutered their cat because they want them to have kittens (24% and 21% respectively). Perhaps unsurprisingly, due to the increasing popularity of pedigree cats, owners of pedigrees are also more likely to want their cat to have kittens (23%), compared to owners of moggies (12%).

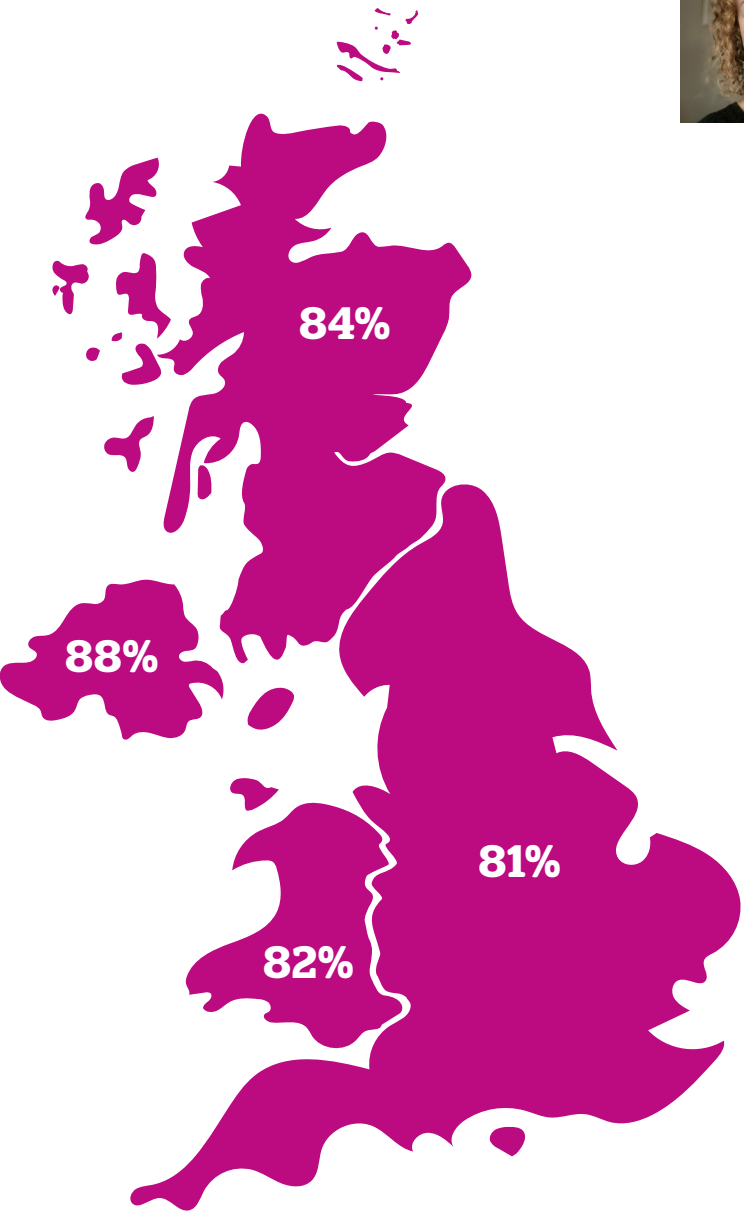
For the first time, the reason why people want to breed their cat was investigated. A third of owners (33%) stated their belief that it is good for female cats to have a litter. This is despite most vets and animal welfare organisations stating that there are no physical or psychological benefits of a cat having kittens, contrary to the well-documented risks of pregnancy and birth. Another strong motivational theme is the personal experience; 34% want to breed their cat to experience looking after the kittens and 40% want the same for their children. 55% want to breed their cat because they love them so much, that they want a kitten just like them. Less than a quarter of owners (23%) are motivated by the more transactional aspect of selling or giving away the kittens to friends or family.

Neutering, and especially ‘four-month neutering’ (at or before four months of age, when cats can become reproductively active), is also important for achieving a balanced cat population by reducing the number of unowned and stray cats*, which in turn supports improved cat welfare. While four-month neutering numbers are up (currently 21%), this rate has been achieved before, so it does not represent an overall upward trend, which is the ultimate goal. In the UK, the impact of overpopulation or imbalance in cat populations isn’t always felt by the general public, which can lower the sense of urgency to consider neutering.



A small but notable group of owners have concerns relating to the neutering procedure itself, including worries about aftercare (9%) or ethical concerns (neutering is against my beliefs: 7%, I don’t agree with neutering: 9%). 7% don’t think there are any benefits to neutering cats. Just 21% of those who have chosen to neuter their cat have done so because of the health benefits to their cat, including reduced risk of cancer and other diseases. This highlights an important education opportunity for animal welfare organisations and vets, particularly among male owners, where these attitudes are universally more prevalent.

Neutering numbers across the UK nations:



“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.”

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>

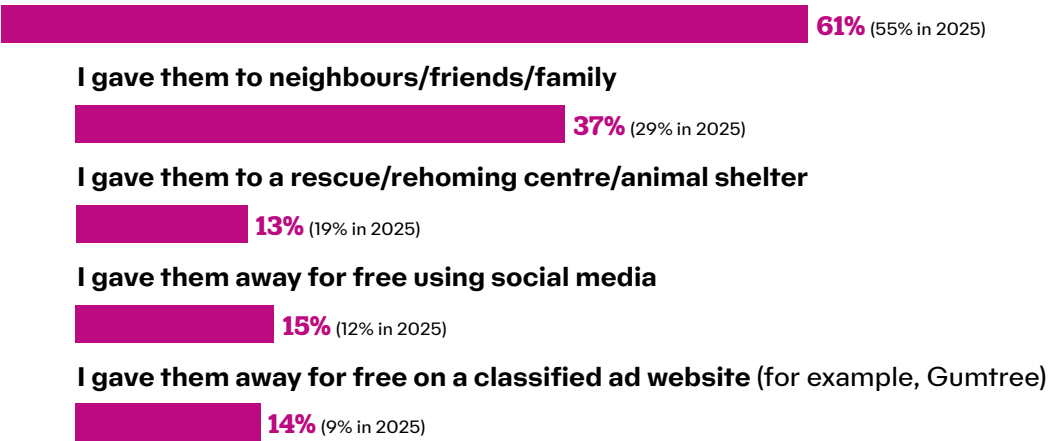
Litters and kittens

Around **8%** of owners of female cats say that their cat has had a litter in the last 12 months. This figure has been slowly but not significantly increasing since 2024.

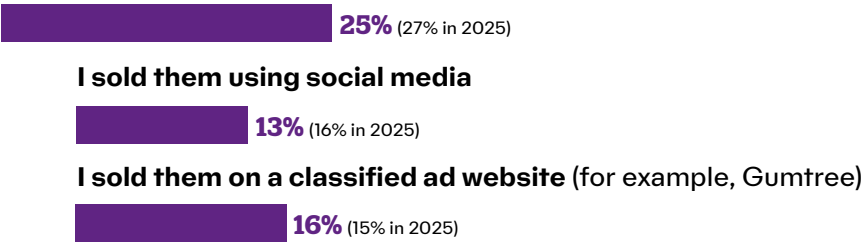
62% of litters born in the last 12 months were planned. This proportion increases for litters from pedigree cats (73%) and those that were bought from a specialist breeder (75%).

Most kittens born and rehomed in the last year were reported as given away, particularly to family and friends, rather than sold.

Gave away



Sold

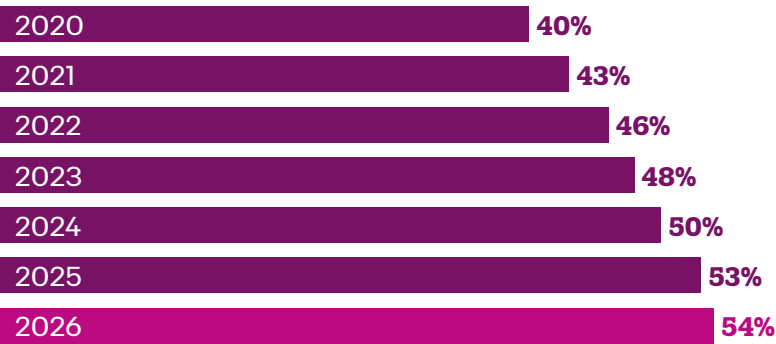


These figures correlate with more intentional breeding. The Canine & Feline Sector Group (CFSG), a coalition of leading UK animal welfare organisations, has established guidelines to ensure the welfare of breeding cats and kittens which can be found at cfsg.org.uk/code-of-practice-on-cat-breeding/ This data also supports the intention of owners that breed their cat for reasons relating to the experience of owning a cat and sharing this with their loved ones, rather than financial gain. Irrespective of the motivation to breed a cat, it is important that the welfare of that cat and any kittens are prioritised.

Nearly 9,000 kittens were relinquished to Cats Protection in 2025, demonstrating a possible mismatch between kitten supply and demand, even when deliberate breeding is well-intentioned. With rescue and rehoming organisations already operating at full capacity, a continued increase in kittens being born is a potentially significant problem for the charity sector.

Insurance

The proportion of cats insured continues to increase.



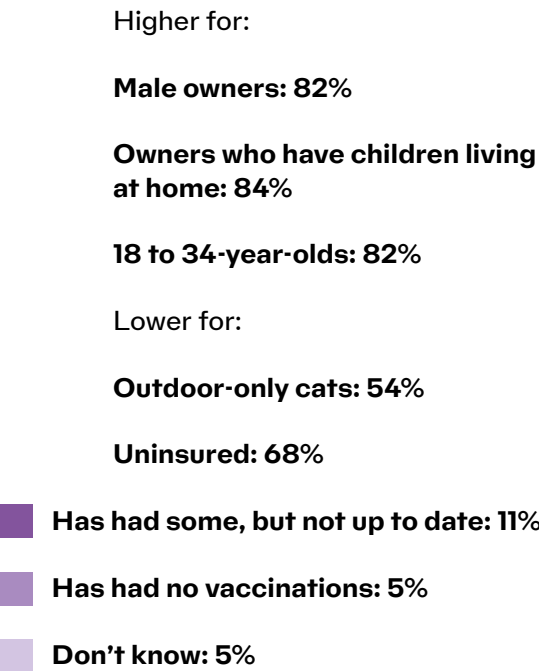
Higher for:



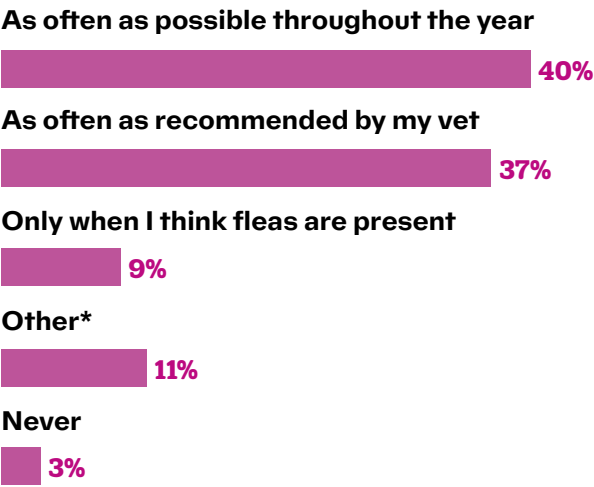
Preventative healthcare

The proportion of cats that are up to date with vaccinations continues to rise.

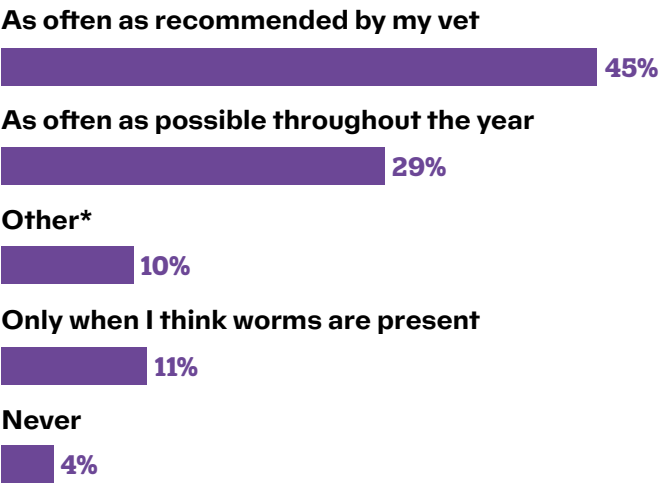
Up to date: 79% (77% in 2025, 75% in 2024, 72% in 2023, 71% in 2022, 69% in 2021)



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.

“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

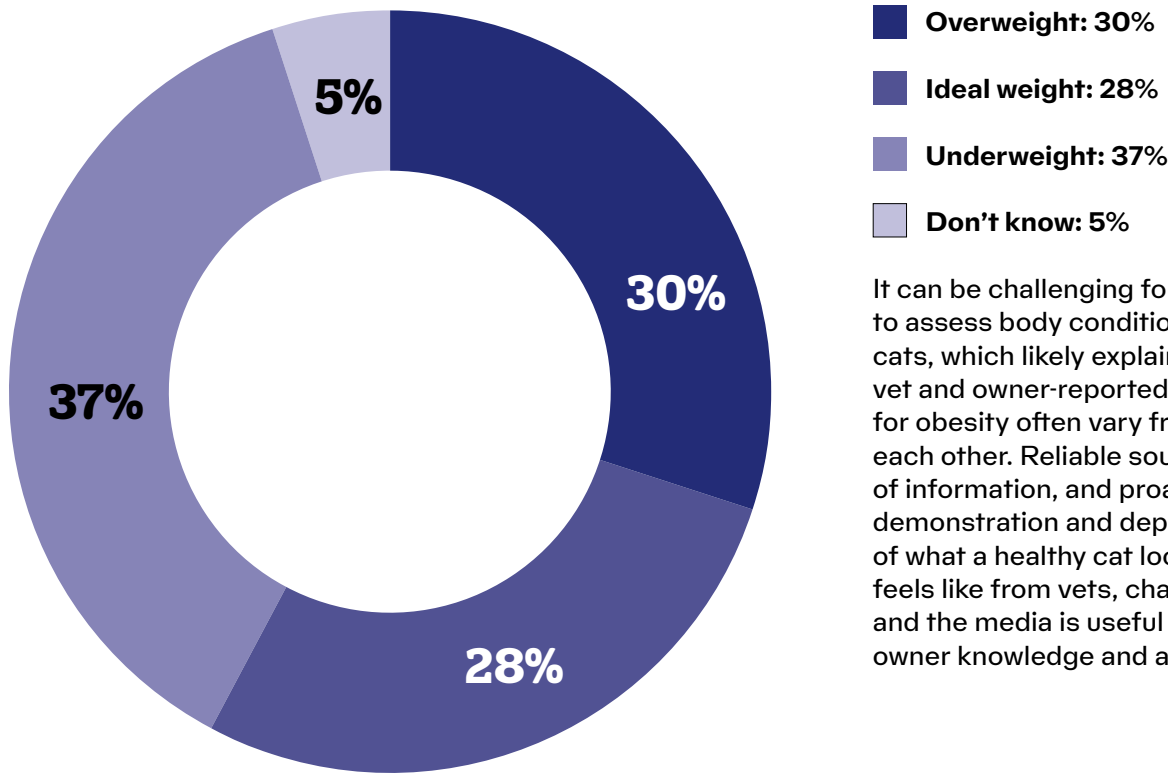


A vet is the best person to advise on the best approach for each cat, so it is encouraging to see that following the recommendation of a vet is the preferred approach to worming for the largest group of cat owners.

*Options include: Only in summer, when I remember, once a year or less, don’t know and other (please specify).

Health and diet

Owner perception of their cat’s weight.

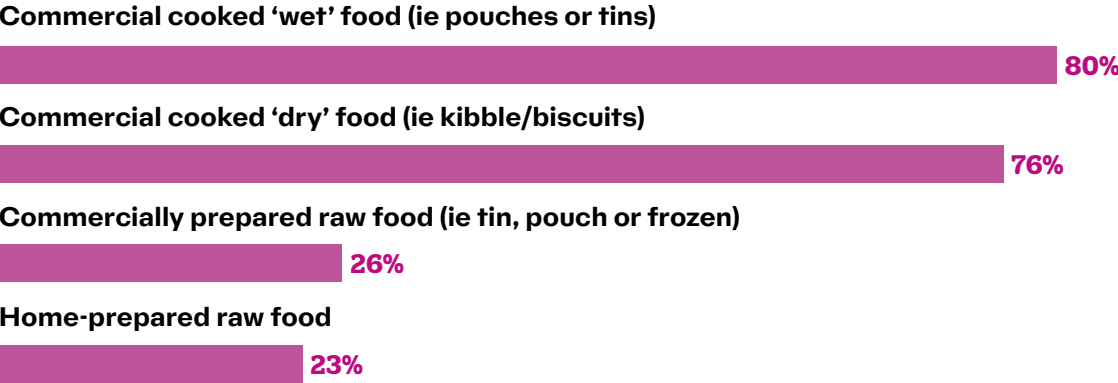


It can be challenging for owners to assess body condition in cats, which likely explains why vet and owner-reported figures for obesity often vary from each other. Reliable sources of information, and proactive demonstration and depiction of what a healthy cat looks and feels like from vets, charities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



For the first time, cat owners were asked what they feed their cat, to gain insight into the typical diet of UK cats.

Fed always or often:

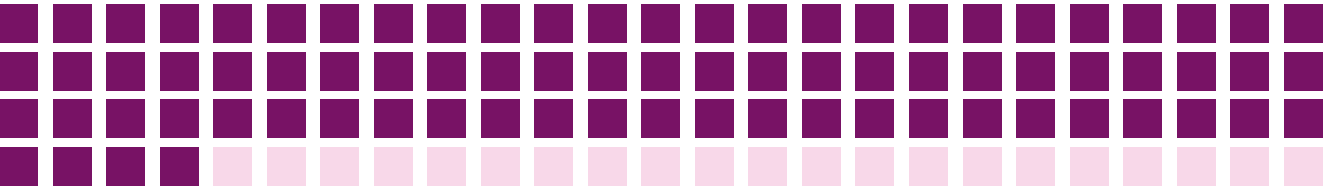


The popularity of feeding cats a 'raw diet', for example, uncooked meat, vegetables and/or eggs, has grown,^{2,3} with an explosion of commercial products entering the market in recent years. Cats Protection does not recommend feeding cats a raw diet, as it poses risks to both feline and human health. 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.

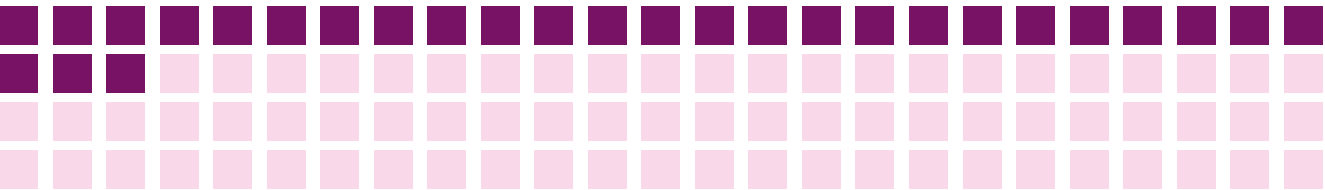
Therefore, if a cat is going to be fed a raw diet, the recommendation is to use a complete, commercially prepared product specifically for cats. Education in this area is vitally important, particularly for younger owners, and owners of pedigree cats for which home-prepared raw diets are more popular (36% of 18 to 34-year-olds, and 36% of owners of pedigree cats feed their cat home-prepared raw food always or often).

Health conditions and injury

79% of cat owners state that their cat has no diagnosed health conditions, matching last year (79%).



28% of owners said that their cat had been injured since they had owned them. The most common reason for injury is fights with other cats (16%).



2. 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>

3. 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



The cost of owning a cat

With various world events over the past few years affecting the economic status in the UK, the impact of rising cost of living is a prominent concern for everyone, including cat owners. **Over a quarter (26%) of cat owners say that the cost of owning their cat has increased** and 11% are concerned that this is going to make it difficult for them to meet their cat's needs in the future.

CATS Report data suggests that the pressure of rising costs is felt disproportionately across various demographics, with some groups seemingly experiencing a more significant impact of the same pressures we all face as a nation.

Expected discrepancies exist between different socio-economic groups, with those in the C2DE group almost universally reporting cost as a greater barrier to things like veterinary care.

A quarter (**25%**) of cat owners don't take their cat to the vet as often as they would like due to cost, but this rises to almost a third (**31%**) of those in socio-economic group C2DE.

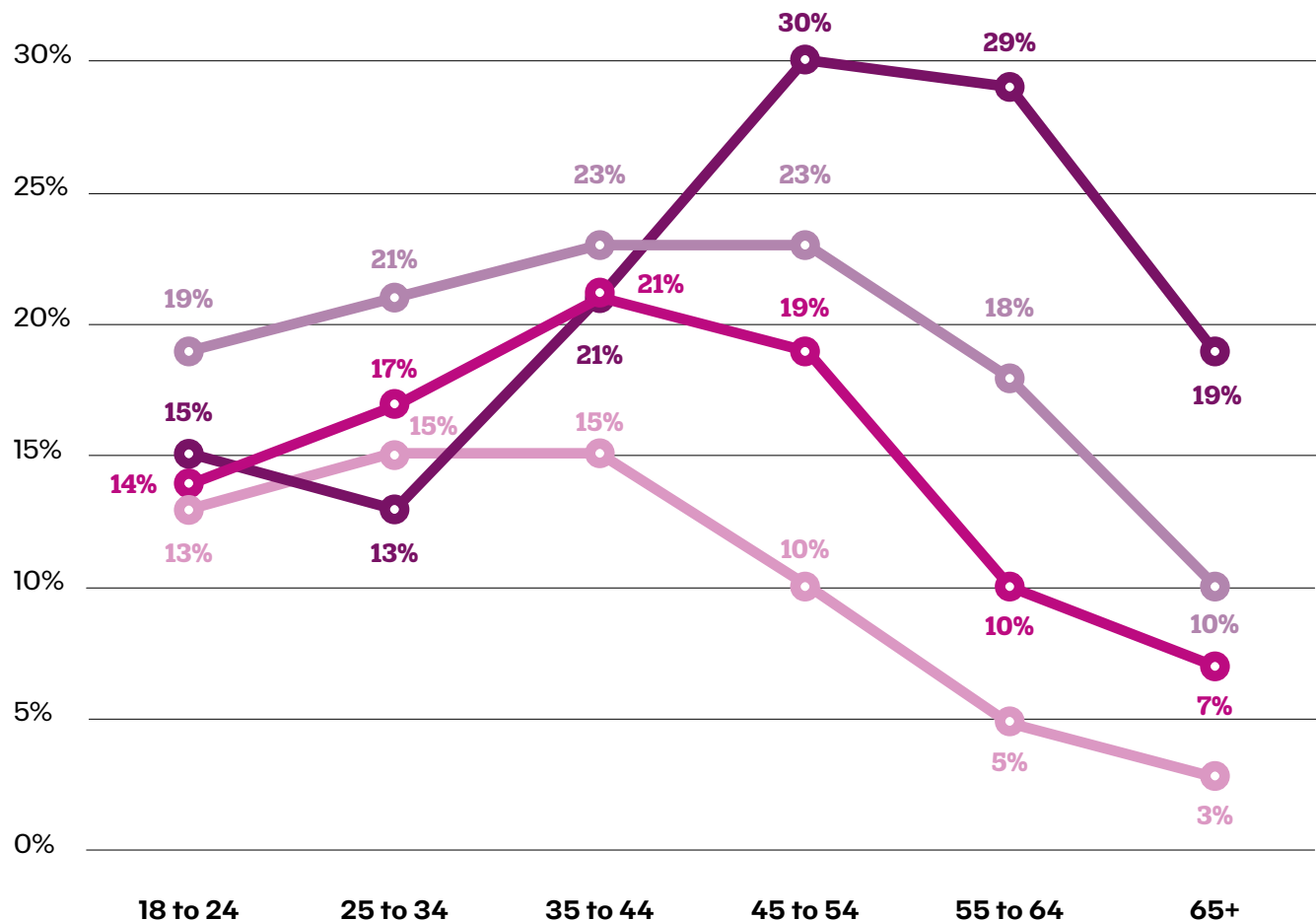
The impact of this is clear to see in some areas of healthcare, for example, vaccination numbers for owners that cite cost as a barrier to visiting the vet are significantly lower compared to the general cat-owning population (69% versus 79%).

Insurance numbers are also lower for lower income households (C2DE: 43%, all cat owners: 54%) who might benefit the most from the protection it offers. When splitting out the socio-demographic groups further, it is the C2 group that has seen the most significant decline in cat ownership. This may be reflective of a 'squeezed middle' group who are stuck between really feeling the pressure of cost-of-living but perhaps not being eligible for some of the charitable support available.

The emotional toll of this financial pressure must not be underestimated. Owners who are concerned about being able to pay their bills are also less likely to view their cat's quality of life as good. These same owners are twice as likely to report that having a cat is a lot of hard work. This suggests that financial pressure comes with a significant degree of overwhelm and emotional burden relating to a person's role as a caregiver to cats.

Indicators of the degree of financial pressure that people feel seem to follow a fairly predictable age curve. This likely reflects the changing pressures of the typical life cycle of work, financial responsibilities and raising a family, and gives a good insight into who would likely benefit the most from financial assistance.

- I feel like I have less income than a year ago
- I am concerned about how I'll pay vet bills if my cat becomes sick or injured
- I am concerned that I won't be able to pay the bills because of price increases
- I am concerned that I won't be able to meet my cat's needs in the future due to rising costs



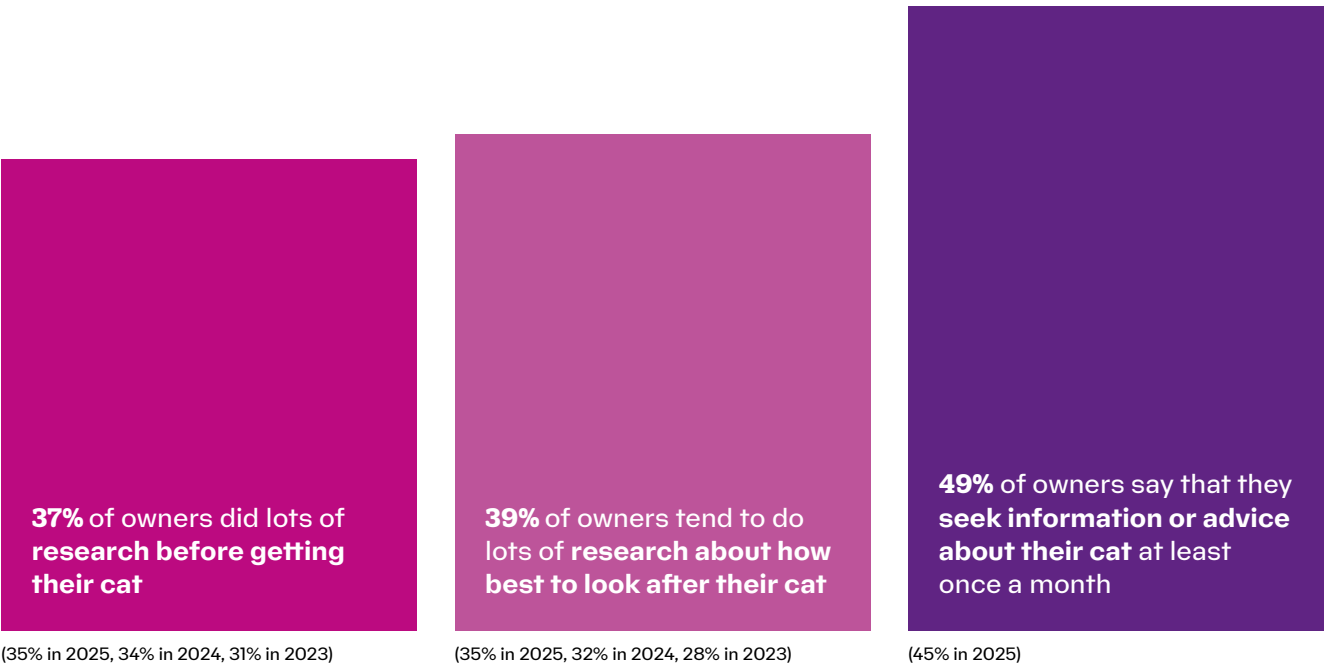
Cat care, welfare and behaviour

Key takeaways



Sources of cat care information

Cat owners are increasingly researching their cats’ needs both before and after acquisition.

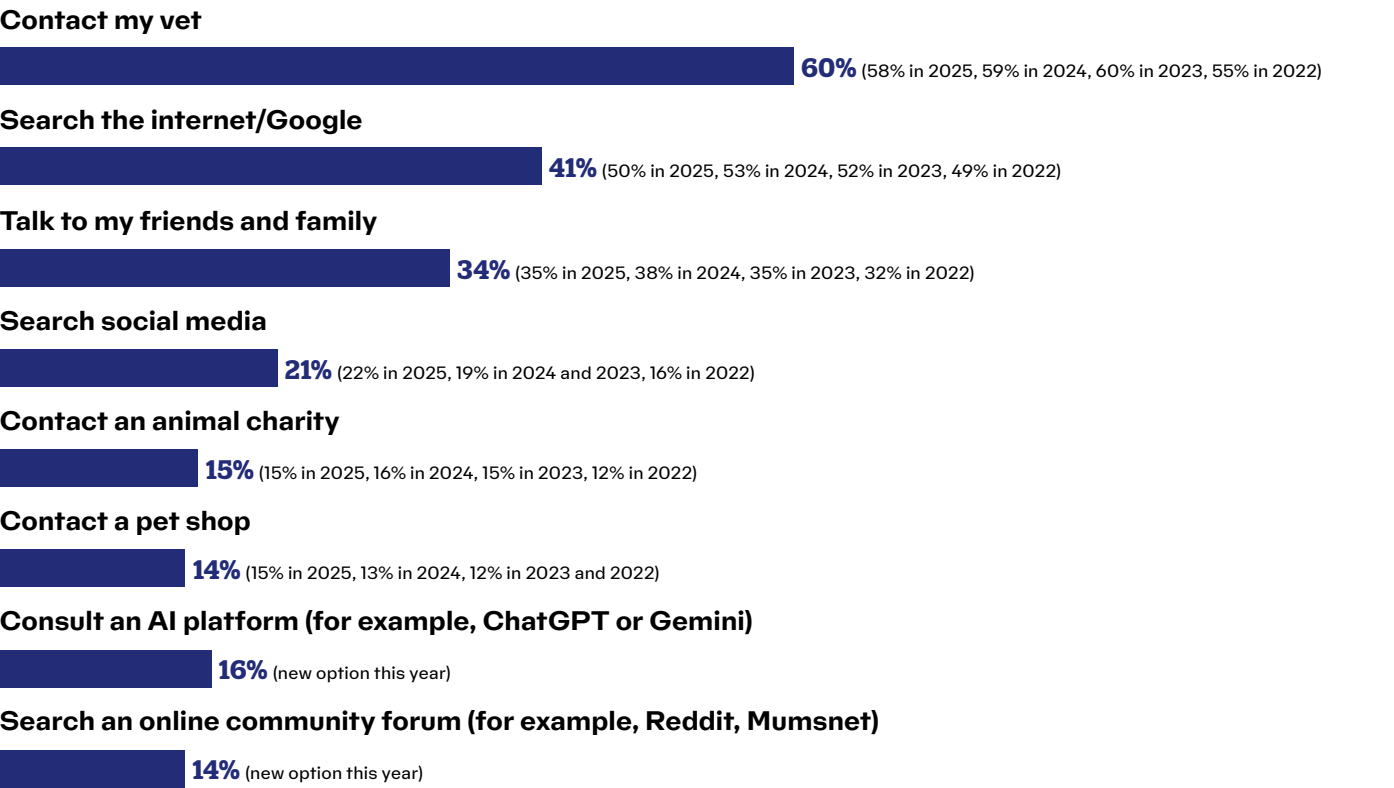


This seems to translate into more confident cat owners, with 66% saying that they are very confident that they know what is best for their cat (65% in 2025). With misinformation a constant threat, this confidence may not necessarily translate into better welfare for their cat.

The likelihood of an owner researching their cat’s needs decreases with age (18 to 34: 52%, 35 to 54: 40%, 55+: 18%) and increases with affluence (ABC1: 45%, C2DE: 30%). Owners of indoor cats (45%) and those who have only started owning cats in the last few years (45%) are more likely to research the needs of their cat.

For the first time, cat owners were asked about whether they have researched the specific health and welfare issues associated with different breeds of cat. Just over a third (34%) said they had, rising to 48% of those who acquired their cat in the last year and 51% of those who own a pedigree cat. Although these rates are higher than for dogs (only 21% of UK dog owners check hereditary health risks before choosing a breed),⁴ the fact that around half the owners that chose pedigree cats did not look into any health concerns beforehand is concerning. Many pedigree breeds have well-documented association with various health problems, but misinformation is also frustratingly common, so it can be really difficult for those owners that do try to educate themselves, to do so accurately.

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



4. Opinium online survey conducted with 1000 cat or dog owners from 3-6 March 2026. For those owning both a cat and dog, owners were asked to answer questions based on the one they took ownership of most recently. Rescue and Animal Care, May 2026, issue 214, pg 26. ISSN: 2050 0572.

For the first time this year, cat owners were asked more specifically about their online search habits for information, including options relating to AI and online community forums. Inclusion of these answer options may explain why general internet searches appear to be decreasing as a source of information.

Social media platforms being used as sources of information about cats continues to grow.

YouTube (38% in 2025, 35% in 2024, 34% in 2023, 33% in 2022)



50% for 18 to 34-year-olds (47% in 2025)



Facebook (32% in 2025, 30% in 2024, 29% in 2023, 29% in 2022)



TikTok (24% in 2025, 19% in 2024, 16% in 2023, 12% in 2022)



46% for 18 to 34-year-olds (40% in 2025)



Instagram (24% in 2025, 20% in 2024, 19% in 2023, 16% in 2022)



Reddit (new option this year)



22% for 18 to 34-year-olds



X (13% in 2025, 10% in 2024, 11% in 2023, 12% in 2022)



Pinterest (9% in 2025, 9% in 2024, 8% in 2023, 10% in 2022)



Snapchat (8% in 2025, 7% in 2024, 7% in 2023, 8% in 2022)



LinkedIn (7% in 2025, 7% in 2024, 6% in 2023, 8% in 2022)



Video-based platforms, including TikTok and YouTube, have also grown in popularity once again, particularly for younger owners. This highlights the growing importance of video content as an effective way to reach cat owners. Community-based social media platform Reddit is also much more popular with younger owners. Facebook and Instagram have seen significant increases in popularity among the 35 to 54 age demographic, which matches general age-based popularity for these platforms. YouTube remains pretty universally popular across all age demographics, making it a potentially preferred outlet for reaching a broad range of cat owners with information.

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

Talk about cats with my friends/family



Watch funny or cute videos of cats online



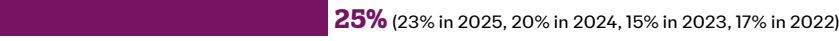
Look at funny or cute pictures of cats online



Look at cat-related social media profiles



Watch informational videos of cats online



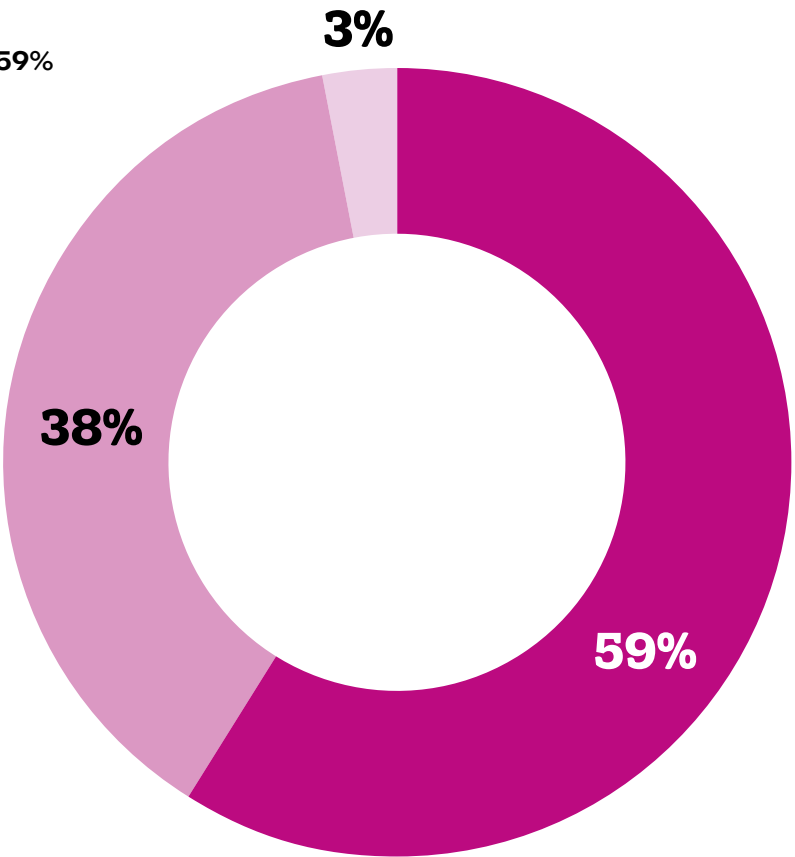
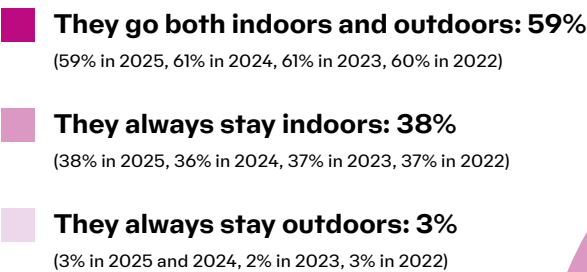
Overall, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram are the most popular sources of ‘fun’ cat-related content. For younger owners aged 18 to 24 though, Facebook is much less popular (23%, all cat owners: 41%), with TikTok being strongly favoured (68%, all cat owners: 39%).



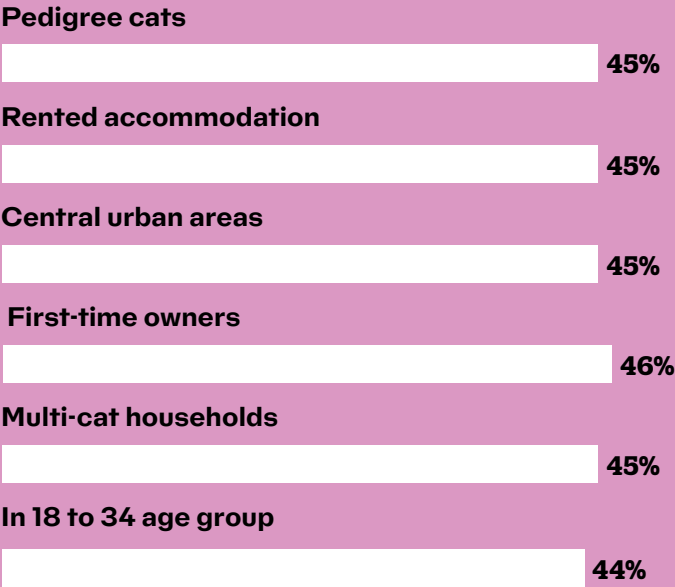
A cat’s environment

Indoor versus outdoor cats

Most cats have outdoor access.

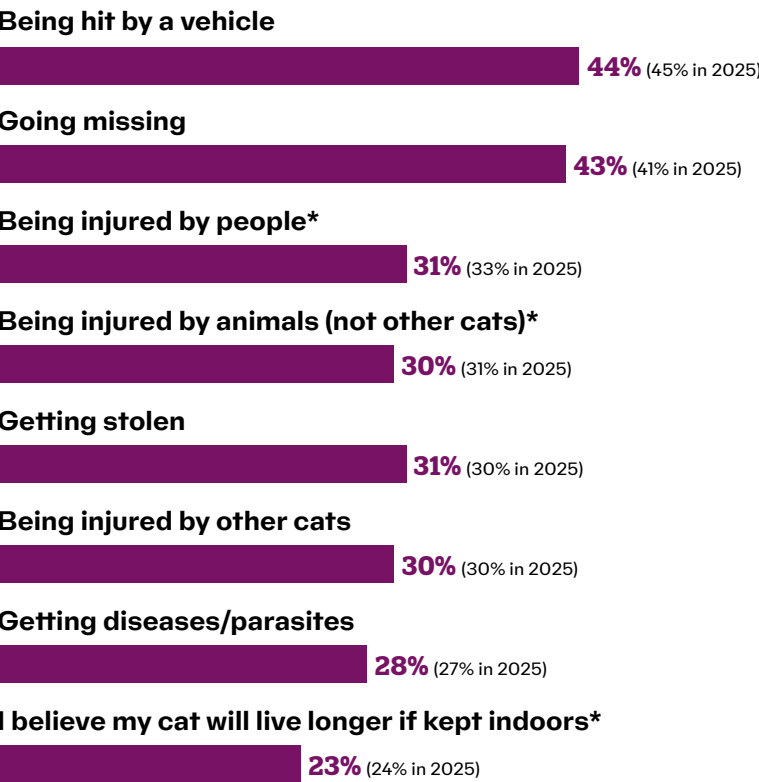


The number of cats that always stay indoors is higher for:



Owner concern over harm or disappearance keeps cats 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.



*New response option for 2025.

**Mata F. 2025. Life expectancy of cats in Britain: moggies and mollies live longer. *PeerJ* 13:e18869 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.18869>

Cats out and about

The use of accessories to take cats out is increasingly popular.

A cat harness



A cat backpack



Cats are a territorial species and prefer to be allowed to choose how they roam, whether indoors or out. 30% of cats have unrestricted indoor and outdoor access and 32% have outdoor access during the day but are kept in overnight, 18% are allowed outdoor access via an outdoor enclosure and 11% only go outdoors on a lead and harness. This rises to 16% in central urban areas, perhaps reflecting owners with limited options proactively trying to improve their cat’s welfare with safe outdoor access. 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. It has also been known for cats to escape while wearing harnesses. Restricted outdoor-access lifestyles are more common among younger owners and cats living in urban areas.

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 Protection has seen a rise in videos of cats being taken on the London Underground with harnesses and backpacks. In response, we have worked with Transport for London and RSPCA to update guidance on how to travel safely with a pet to minimise stress and protect safety.”

Madison Rogers,
Associate Director of Advocacy,
Campaigns & External Affairs,
Cats Protection



*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. 27% say that their cat has a standard collar, while only 19% wear a quick-release or snap-opening collar, which are much safer in the event of the collar getting caught on something. 14% of owners use a GPS tracker attached to their cat’s collar or harness. 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.

“Cats Protection is calling on the government to urgently ban electronic shock collars which inflict pain, fear and distress on cats in the name of training. These abhorrent devices compromise welfare, risk damaging the bond between cats and their owners, and have no place in a humane society.”

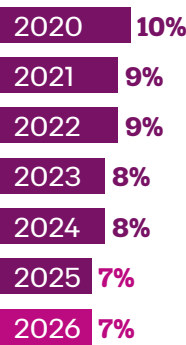
Annabel Berdy,
Advocacy & Government Relations Manager,
Cats Protection



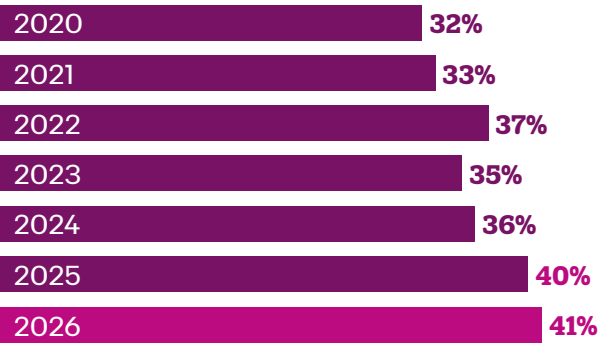
Perhaps alarmingly, 7% of owners report using electronic devices such as shock collars which act as an invisible boundary. These devices are designed to exert their effect through a sudden, negative experience, which can cause significant stress for cats.

Cats and other members of the household

35% of cat-owning households have more than one cat living there. The proportion of multi-cat households with more than three cats living together appears to have decreased over time.



There is a gradually increasing trend for cat owners to also share their home with a dog



Almost half (49%) of cat-owning households also have children (aged under 18 years old) living at home

(51% in 2025, 46% in 2024, 45% in 2023, 44% in 2022, 41% in 2021, 42% in 2020)



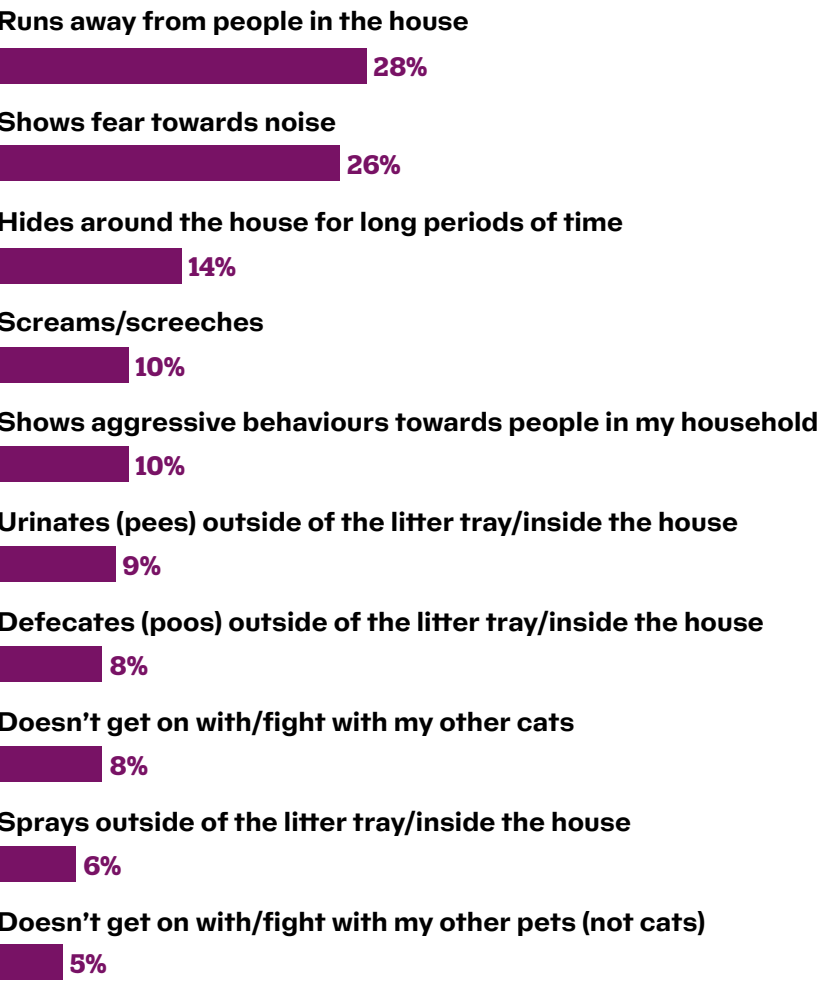
Normal social interaction is very different for cats than humans and dogs, even with other cats. Cats do not require social interaction to be psychologically happy, so forcing this upon them can be a significant source of stress. To maintain a harmonious multi-inhabitant household and avoid upset or 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.

*Pet Education Partnership (PEP) Children & Pets Survey 2025.

Behaviour and stress

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



66% of cats have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months (65% 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.

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 becoming larger, harder to manage and potentially damaging to relationships between cats and their human companions.

Fireworks

An increasing number of owners say that their cat has been adversely affected by fireworks.



Top five behaviours in response to fireworks:

Hides or becomes withdrawn 25%

Appears startled 21%

Shows fearful body language 15%

Tries to escape/run away 15%

Shows increased dependency on owner 12%

“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 government 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

Fireworks can be really distressing for all animals, including cats. Cats Protection is a member of the Fireworks Impact Coalition, which brings together 19 charities campaigning for stronger fireworks regulation to better protect people and animals. The Coalition’s call to review current fireworks legislation has widespread support, both from the public and within government. Public petitions have been numerous over recent years, attracting hundreds of thousands of signatures. An event held in November 2025 saw an incredible 95 MPs in attendance to discuss possible legislative changes including lowered decibel limits for consumer fireworks and limiting the days and times when they can be set off. It is with delight that The Coalition received the news of the launch of a public consultation on the sale and use of fireworks. Cats Protection eagerly awaits the outcome of the consultation and hopes that it will create meaningful change to better protect animals and people from the impact of fireworks.





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The ripple effect of information

Sources of information about cat care are becoming increasingly fragmented, as more people move online. Even in the digital space, the range of information sources and ways to access them has never been more varied. What might have once been a simple search engine query can now be performed using a social media platform, AI tool or online community website post.

Traditional written information webpages now exist alongside video content from influencers and content creators. With some sources having a disproportionately loud voice online, and certain viewpoints being amplified by community websites such as Reddit and Mumsnet, misinformation can quickly spread, and finding credible information can be challenging for cat owners. But, while the opportunities for any individual to publish their thoughts publicly has never been greater, there is an equal opportunity for charities and expert organisations like Cats Protection to produce meaningful, useful and expert-driven content that resonates with cat owners and increases their understanding of cats and their needs.

The interactive experience of information-seeking tools that use a more ‘conversational’ approach (for example, AI search tools that automatically encourage users to refine their search in their response, chatbots and online community sites) seem to be increasingly popular. Advice can feel more personalised and the ability to ask further questions deepens trust in the information provided.

Community websites facilitate conversation between people with common interests and are a popular source of advice for cat owners. They seem to be particularly popular with younger owners when seeking information about their cat (18 to 34: 19%, all cat owners: 14%), the group that is also acquiring the most cats. The same is true for the use of AI platforms (18 to 34: 21%, all cat owners: 16%). Because AI is so integrated into many search engines, many cat owners may not even realise that the information they are getting from their online search is actually as a result of AI, so statistics for the use of AI may be even higher.

The risk of this ever-evolving landscape of search is that AI bots can create the sense of a trusted advisor by encouraging further questioning and confidently providing results that feel individualised but are just curated, rather than fact checked and contextual. With the learning capability of AI, any misinformation can be further perpetuated. Community sites can quickly operate as ‘echo chambers’, perpetuating a narrow view that is often based on anecdotal advice, rather than referring to proven evidence and best practice from trusted sources.

The best way to get truly personalised, credible and evidence-based advice is to speak with a vet, so it is encouraging that most cat owners (60%) said that this is where they would turn for information about their cat. Vets are the leading preferred source of information specifically about cat behaviour too. The influence of the ‘vet voice’ is clear to see, with vet recommendation being one of the top reasons that cat owners chose to have their cat neutered, as well as being the most likely thing to encourage those that haven’t already to get their cat microchipped. With more people visiting the vet with their cat, exposure to vet advice is growing, further increasing the potential for vets to influence how people care for their cats.

Animal charities are also a great source of information, however just **15%** of owners chose this option when asked about where they seek information about their cat.

In this world of information bombardment, it is worth remembering that we can all be influencers in our own circles. Over a third of owners (34%) say that they talk to friends and family when seeking information about their cat. This level of interpersonal advice-giving means that information can travel far and wide via interlinked personal social networks, so making sure owners are well informed about cat care is a powerful way to improve knowledge and therefore cat welfare.

The effect of online influencers

It was via vlogs from former *Love Island* contestant and social media influencer, Molly-Mae Hague, that Adele Cullum from Southend first became aware of Scottish Fold cats. Presented as a loving breed with a distinctive look, Adele became interested in owning one herself.

None of the content Adele was viewing discussed the health concerns associated with Scottish Folds though, something that Adele only learned about after she purchased a Scottish Fold kitten called Bella.

When Bella was unable to bear weight on her hind legs without crying, Adele took her to the vet, who informed her about how Bella’s distinctive folded ears were a result of a genetic mutation that caused painful problems elsewhere in the body. Further research online enlightened Adele about the likely future of caring for Bella, one filled with constant concerns about her quality of life and costly veterinary interventions to manage her pain.



Adele and her cat, Bella

“I had no idea that Scottish Fold cats had a congenital deformity. They are beautiful cats and very loving, that’s exactly what Bella is, but there is also the negative side that you aren’t told about.”

Like so many people, Adele trusted the ‘picture perfect’ impression that was presented to her online by influencers, something that she thinks needs to change.

“I don’t think there is anywhere near enough information from influencers about the problems that come with breeds like Scottish Folds. Some of them have such a big platform, it would be good if they used that to spread awareness.”



Companionship and challenges to ownership

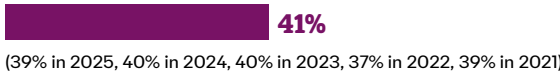
Key takeaways



Why we have cats

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

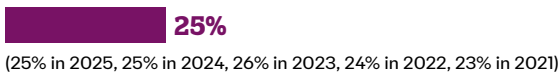
As company for me/my family



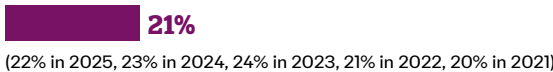
I've always had cats



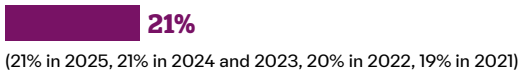
I grew up with cats and so wanted to get my own when I left home



To help me feel less stressed/anxious



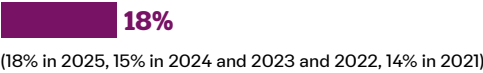
To help me feel less lonely



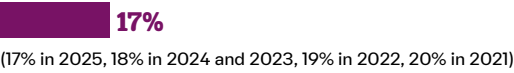
I've just always wanted cats, so got one as soon as I could



My child/children wanted one



They needed looking after/to be taken in



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



My partner wanted one/already had one



The reasons for owning a cat have not changed significantly overall since last year, with companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress still collectively the top reasons that people choose to own a cat (56%, 55% in 2025, 54% in 2024, 55% in 2023, 51% in 2022 and 2021). Owning a cat for personal wellbeing is much more likely for younger owners, who are more likely to report that their cat helps reduce loneliness (26%), stress and anxiety (24%). For older owners however, owning a cat is more likely to be due to cat-centric reasons, such as them needing to be taken in (55+: 22%).

92% of cat owners agree that they consider their cat part of the family.



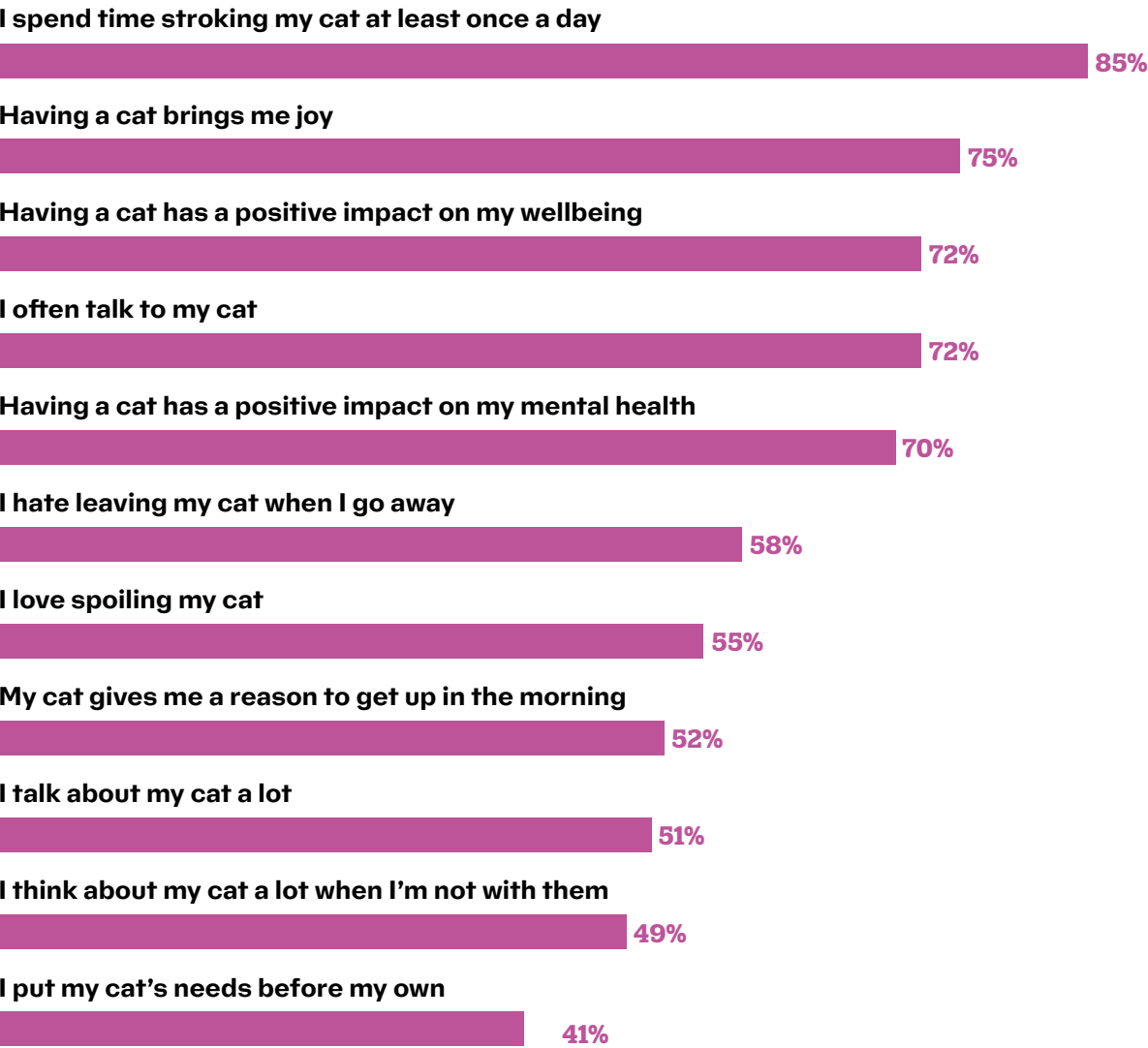
“Cats make my life complete.”

Female owner, 45 to 54, Wales

“He makes me so happy!”

Female owner, 55 to 64, NW England

Cat ownership is a hugely important part of people’s daily lives and wellbeing.



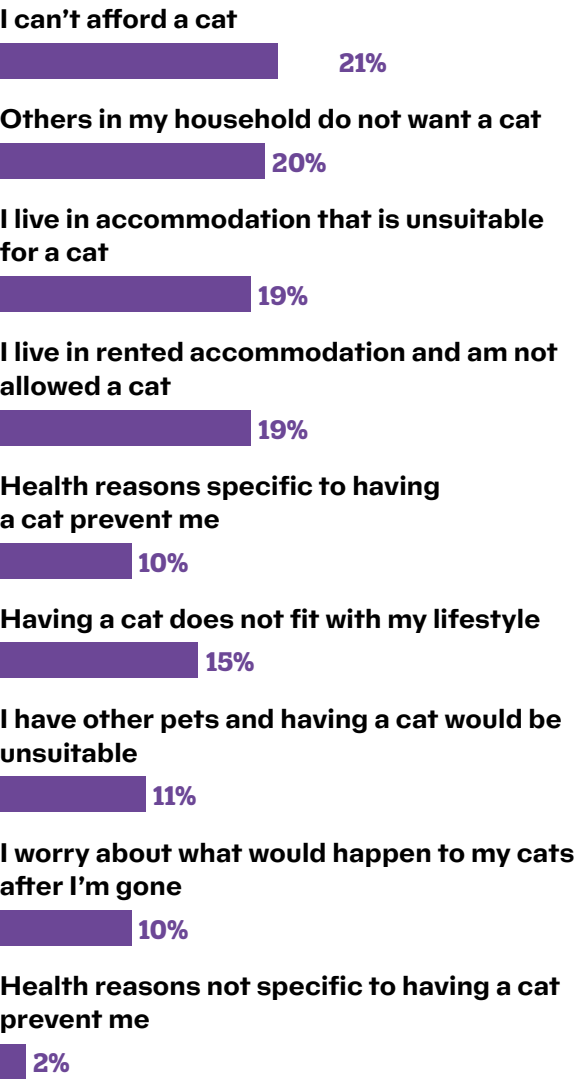
The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are growing across the board, with more and more people reporting how sharing their life with a cat improves it. This is particularly the case for female owners, those who currently live alone, and those with disabilities or health conditions. Agreement with statements relating to how a cat improves life was universally higher for cat owners with self-reported mental health conditions, highlighting the important support that cats may provide for people that are perhaps facing the greatest challenges to their own wellbeing. It is always important to remember that our relationships with cats should bring reciprocal benefit, and the cat’s needs must always be met.



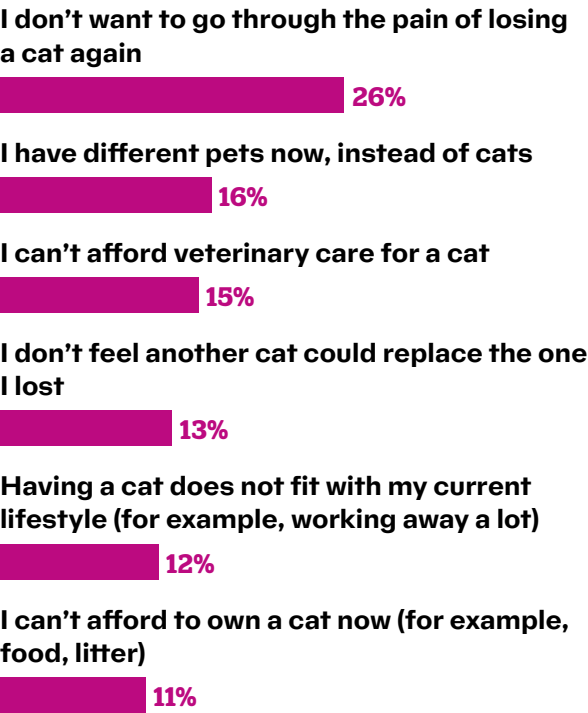
Barriers to cat ownership

Over 1.5 million households don’t currently own a cat but would like to.

The reasons that people who want to own a cat but can’t right now, are varied.



Previous cat owners are choosing not to own cats again for both practical and emotional reasons.



In 2025, 1,000 cats were taken into Cats Protection because of issues relating to landlords not allowing them in their properties. Over 600,000 people want to own a cat but currently don’t because of issues related to living in rented accommodation. Hopefully, the recent abolition of blanket ‘no pet’ policies for rental properties in England through the Renters’ Rights Act will improve the situation for many people and cats.

Our bond with cats

With more cat owners than ever reporting the benefits of cat ownership, our relationship with cats is clearly important to wellbeing. That’s why this year, the CATS survey delved a bit deeper into how sharing life with a cat can have holistic positive impacts, especially for people who perhaps face more challenges than others.

Tackling loneliness

NHS data⁵ reveals that 22% of UK adults admit to feeling lonely some of the time, with 6% reporting that they often or always feel lonely. Perhaps surprisingly, loneliness seems to affect younger people more than older people, with 29% of those aged 16 to 24 feeling lonely at least some of the time compared with 15% of those aged 65 to 74. Pets can be a hugely important source of company for many people, and 35% of people who live alone own a cat to help them feel less lonely. Indeed, reducing loneliness is the main reason that more than one in five cat owners (21%) own their cat. This rises to 26% of the 18 to 34-year-old group.

Loneliness is also more of a problem for those with health concerns, with 49% of UK adults who say they are in bad health also reporting feeling lonely at least some of the time. This is compared to just 17% of those that say they have good health. 26% of cat owners that live with a disability or health condition say that the main reason they own their cat is to help them feel less lonely (21% of all cat owners). More of these owners also say that having a cat brings joy to their lives, compared to all cat owners (79% versus 75%).

5. Health Survey for England, 2024 – Loneliness and wellbeing. NHS England. Jan 2026

A positive effect on mental health

Mental health conditions are increasingly diagnosed across the adult population in the UK, particularly in young people. 22.6% of UK adults were identified with a common mental health condition in 2023/4, up from 18.9% in 2014. This increases to 25.8% of young adults (aged 16 to 24).⁶

There is a lot of evidence about how caring for a pet can benefit mental health. One aspect of this is creating a strong sense of purpose, something that many relevant organisations agree is a powerful anchor for good mental health. Over half (52%) of all cat owners say that their cat gives them a reason to get up in the morning, rising to 60% of those with a diagnosed mental health condition.

Another important factor is the proven physiological effect that interacting with a pet has on things like anxiety and stress. Both conditions are at record high levels in the UK, with 60% of UK adults saying that they have experienced anxiety that interfered with their daily lives over the last two weeks.⁷ Spending time with a pet has been shown in multiple studies to meaningfully reduce both self-reported and physiological markers of stress and anxiety in people.⁸ This is particularly so for interactions that are more common with cats than other pet species, such as stroking.⁸ Many cat owners have recognised this benefit of cat ownership, with 21% stating that the main reason that they own a cat is to help reduce anxiety and stress. This increases to 24% of 18 to 34-year-olds. This group is also less likely to spend time stroking their cat regularly, however (78%, all cat owners: 85%), whereas those with a diagnosed mental health condition are more likely to engage in this type of interaction (92%).

Overall, **72%** of cat owners agree that having a cat improves their wellbeing and **70%** say it has a positive impact on their mental health.

This rises to 75% and 76% of those with a diagnosed mental health condition, indicating just how powerful cats can be in improving mood and wellbeing. It must be noted that this is not the case for everyone though, and there is an important balance between enjoying the benefits of cats and them not being used as a therapeutic aid.

A more emotional understanding

The increased societal focus on human mental health may be spilling over into how people view their cat, with many proactively seeking advice to better understand their cat. 88% of cat owners say that they have sought advice about their cat’s behaviour, with many turning to their vet (46%). With the title of ‘behaviourist’ unprotected in the UK, meaning anyone can call themselves one, regardless of training, a vet is a great way to gain access to animal behaviour professionals with credible qualifications and experience.

Perhaps most importantly, we must remember that cats bring the most benefits to our lives when they are happy and healthy. This is best achieved by just allowing them to be cats, with the freedom to express their normal behaviours. Ignoring social media trends and avoiding dubious advice from influencers to instead focus on gaining credible information about cat behaviour and how to best meet their needs will only further enhance the relationship with our cats so both sides feel the benefits.

6. Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England. NHS England. 2025.
7. Uncertain times: Anxiety in the UK and how to tackle it Report. Mental Health Foundation. 2023
8. Beetz A , et al. (2012). Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: The Possible Role of Oxytocin. Frontiers in Psychology, Vol 3.



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Cats over time

Since the establishment of what was then called ‘The Cats Protection League’ (CPL) 100 years ago, many things have changed for cats in the UK. Advances in medical care and how people share their lives with cats have had a hugely positive impact on cat welfare but there is also so much more that we ask our cats to adapt to. Digging through the Cats Protection archives reveals just how far some attitudes and practices have changed, and how some have not!

Then, now and the future

How to address the problem of too many kittens being born has been a perpetual discussion point since the creation of Cats Protection a century ago. Advice of the time to try and control cat numbers was to only keep a single male cat of any litters born, with the rest being “humanely disposed of”. By 1960, however, neutering was firmly included in the guidance about how to manage cat populations, helping shift attitudes towards it being an important aspect of good cat care today. Even back then, the recommendation was to neuter cats between three and five months of age, but today, less than half (45%) of neutered cats were neutered before six months of age and just 21% were neutered by four months.

Since the *CATS Report* started in 2020, neutering numbers have steadily fallen from **88%** to **79%**.

While ‘humane disposal’ of kittens thankfully feels antiquated, the problem of too many kittens may not, if this trend continues.

There is now a ticking time bomb for feline welfare. The continued trend towards pedigree cats means that it’s not just quantity of kittens that is a problem. Increasingly, concern is turning to the types of kittens being bred, with demand growing for cats with extreme characteristics such as flat faces, short legs and folded ears. Sadly, extreme characteristics can result in lifelong health and welfare challenges, from breathing difficulties and chronic eye problems to mobility issues. Without greater awareness among prospective owners, regulation of cat breeding and a renewed focus on health over appearance, we risk repeating past mistakes in a different form. The challenge for the next century may not be preventing unwanted kittens being born, but ensuring that the cats we deliberately bring into the world are able to live healthy, comfortable lives.



Parasite control

Parasite control is another health problem that has plagued cats and the people that share their lives with them over time. Today’s tablet, spot-on and even long-acting injectable treatment products seem so convenient when compared to what cat owners in the 1950s were expected to do. Messy flea powders and advice to simply burn all bedding in an attempt to control infestations were the norm.

But although we have enjoyed great advances with parasite control in recent decades, concern over environmental contamination with active ingredients may mean that the future of parasite control looks very different again. A shift towards a more risk-based approach helps better balance the needs of everyone, ensuring that cats and humans are adequately protected from the dangers of parasites and that ecosystems are not affected by attempts to control them.

How we feed cats

How we feed cats has also seen huge changes over time, with 1960s advice focused strongly on home-prepared diets. Brief reference to proprietary tinned or dry diets then is in stark contrast to today, where hundreds of different commercial cat food brands exist to feed the majority (94%) of cats. Although home-prepared diets for cats are potentially increasing in popularity once again, one major difference is the preference to achieve this with raw food, whereas advice in the 1960s was that everything should be cooked.

Identifying cats

Identifying cats is another evergreen topic that has seen the introduction of new advances over the years. As far back as the 1930s, advice regarding collars included the recommendation to use elastic (ie ‘safety’) collars. Today, just 41% of the collars worn by cats are safety collars. With the rise of technology in all areas of our lives, GPS trackers are perhaps just the start of a ‘smart collar’ revolution. Microchips became commercially available in the late 1980s and since then, have become the benchmark for reliable identification, to the point of recent legislation change in England making them mandatory for cats. Advances in microchip technology have already introduced microchips that can measure temperature. With exciting promise for implantable devices that can measure biochemical markers of disease, maybe the cats of the future will be walking with personal mini laboratories in their microchips!

“Another method is to dust the powder well into the cat’s fur and then put the cat in a linen bag with drawstring top with its head out. The bag and cat should then be held in someone’s arms for about a quarter of an hour.”

Parasite Treatment:
Cats Protection League
leaflet No. 18, 1958

Cats across a lifetime

Some cat owners included in this year’s report data may remember a time when some of these Cats Protection leaflets were in circulation; their habits maybe even shaped by the advice on offer. The *CATS Report* data shows us that those aged 55+ are more likely to have their cat neutered, microchipped and protected against parasites as advised by their vet. This may be related to the fact that those aged over 55 are more likely to turn to their vet for information about their cat, compared to younger cat owners. However, they are also more likely to do an internet search than younger owners, who prefer searching social media for cat information. This older group of cat owners are more likely to say that they own their cat for company or because the cat needed looking after or taking in than their younger counterparts.

Younger people are still the group most likely to acquire a cat, and as representatives of the next generation, their habits are most indicative of what the future of cat care might look like. 18 to 34-year-olds are more likely to own a cat for the benefits to their own wellbeing but are also much more likely to research their cat’s needs, and do so more often, to try and improve their wellbeing too. This is also seen by their increased likelihood to seek advice in response to concerns about their cat’s behaviour. Reflecting other areas of life, younger cat owners are more likely to embrace technology in the care of their cat, but interestingly, are also more concerned about the potential risks of technology such as automated, programmable and tracking devices.

Those aged 18 to 44 are more likely to be working and have children living at home. They are also more likely to state that having a cat is a lot of work, and that they often feel annoyed at their cat. The same is true for those who say that they are concerned about paying the bills or covering living costs.

What cat owners need varies across their lifetime. Younger owners are hungry for information but face real challenges accessing credible advice through their preferred means of access. Those who are facing the increased pressure of ‘life’, work, health, children, relationships and financial hardship, are perhaps feeling their responsibility as a cat owner as more of a burden than a benefit. Targeting support to different groups appropriately starts with understanding these individual challenges.

Consistent care

What hasn’t changed over time is the mission of Cats Protection to advocate for all cats. Many of today’s advice and support services are rooted surprisingly far in the past but have ongoing relevance today. Whatever changes over time, it is important to understand cats as a species, and prioritise their needs and welfare over our own desire for companionship. The *CATS Report* gives valuable insight into the attitudes and behaviours of cat owners, informing interventions and activities that help achieve the Cats Protection vision of a society where every cat has their best possible life because they are protected, cared for and understood by everyone.

Source CPL leaflets:
• CPL leaflet no. 25; Control of cat population will help solve the problem of too many kittens, 1960
• CPL - Some facts about cats, 1960s
• CPL. Feeding your cat or kitten, 1966
• CPL leaflet no.9; Collars for cats, 1930



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%

- 66% of households own just one cat
- Those under 35 are more likely to have recently acquired a cat
- A higher proportion of cat owners who have acquired a cat in the last 12 months are in the most affluent social group
- There has been a significant rise in the number of cat owners living in rural regions

The cat market

- More than half the cats acquired in the last year are pedigrees, but the rapid upward trajectory of this popularity since the *CATS Report* started in 2020 appears to have levelled out over the past 12 months
- The rising trend in the number of cats in the total cat population that were bought has plateaued this year

	Cat was acquired...					
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Bought	28%	29%	32%	34%	38%	38%
Adopted	25%	24%	24%	24%	23%	22%

*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.

Veterinary care

- 7% of cats are not registered with a vet
- 56% of owners say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like
- Despite the law changing in 2024 to make microchipping a legal requirement for pet cats in England, microchipping numbers have not risen since. Across the UK, 73% of cats are microchipped (74% in 2025)
- Neutering numbers have fallen once again to 79%, continuing the downward trend since 2020
- The proportion of cats insured has increased again to 54% (53% in 2025)
- The proportion of cats that are up to date with vaccinations continues to rise steadily, and is now at 79%

Companionship and challenges to ownership

- The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still a strong motivator for having a cat. Companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are still collectively the top reasons that people choose to own a cat (56%)
- Over 1.5 million households don't currently own a cat but would like to

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Cat owners are increasingly researching their cat's needs both before and after acquisition
 - 37% of owners did lots of research before getting their cat (35% in 2025, 34% in 2024, 31% in 2023)
 - 39% of owners tend to do lots of research about how best to look after their cat (35% in 2025, 32% in 2024, 28% in 2023)
 - 49% of owners say that they seek information or advice about their cat at least once a month (45% in 2025)
- Most cats have outdoor access; 38% always stay indoors (38% in 2025)
- The popularity of accessories to take cats out continues to rise
 - cat harness: 17% (15% in 2025, 10% in 2024)
 - cat backpack: 13% (11% in 2025, 8% in 2024)
- 66% of cats have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months (65% in 2025)
- An increasing number of owners say that their cat has been adversely affected by fireworks: 69% (65% in 2025)





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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 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.

Lifeline (support for people fleeing domestic abuse)

Lifeline is a specialist fostering service that provides temporary care for cats belonging to people escaping domestic abuse, helping remove a major barrier to seeking safety. In 2025, the service supported 340 owners and cared for 620 cats until they could be reunited with their families.

Find out more about Lifeline at cats.org.uk/cp-lifeline. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline can be contacted via nationaldahelpline.org.uk or on 0808 2000 247.

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, 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, 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.
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