

CATS^{*}

REPORT

2022



NORTHERN IRELAND

*Cats and Their Stats



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Methodology

For the third year, we have commissioned an external and independent agency, Basis Research, to conduct the research contained in the CATS Report Northern Ireland 2022. An online survey was used to collect information among a nationally representative audience of adults over the age of 18 in Northern Ireland and across the UK, allowing us to estimate the proportion of cat owners. We also conducted a more detailed survey among cat owners. This was carried out between 3 March 2022 and 15 April 2022. 'In the last 12 months' within the report refers to the time period March 2021 to March 2022. Unless otherwise stated, comparative data in this survey uses data from the CATS Report Northern Ireland 2021.

The research consisted of a nationally representative sample of 3,466 individuals and a boost of 6,349 cat owners with regional boosts to ensure accurate representation in these areas. Overall, 10,494 people participated in the study across the UK, including 366 cat owners in Northern Ireland.

BASIS

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=3,466)
- 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. 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 eg 11% of all cat owners have not registered their cat with a vet equating to 1.2 million cats (11% * 11 million cats = 1.2 million).

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 found to be significant at a 95% confidence interval.

Due to rounding, there will be instances in the report where percentage calculations do not total 100%.

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 eg over a year ago. The data is sourced from the question 'when did you acquire your cat?' in the CATS 2022 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





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

Welcome to the CATS Report Northern Ireland 2022 – the most comprehensive survey of cat owners undertaken in Northern Ireland and across the UK.

This year's survey saw many owners returning to their usual place of work and starting to feel the effects of the rising cost of living. This may have led to some challenges for cat owners in the last 12 months, with more cat owners reporting this year that they have found cat ownership to be a substantial commitment for them.

Despite this, cat acquisition has showed no signs of slowing, with slightly more people welcoming a cat into their home compared to 2021, after a pandemic surge in pet ownership. There are now approximately 290,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland. It's heartening to see that this trend in cat ownership has lasted, perhaps indicating an increased awareness of the many benefits that owning a cat brings. That is certainly a sentiment that cat owners themselves share, with an overwhelming majority (89%) reporting that their cat brings joy to their life.

A growing population of cat owners will inevitably result in an increased demand for pet services and information, and we have seen that owners are increasingly thinking and worrying about their cat. This places considerable demand on pet service providers, and the CATS Report 2022 highlights some of the challenges that owners have encountered in accessing veterinary care and advice.

The CATS Reports provide unprecedented insight into cat owners and the perceptions they have on the wellbeing of their cats. Understanding the current challenges that cat owners face and recognising trends early is important to help charities, veterinary professionals and the wider pet industry to provide the most appropriate support to cat owners.

We want to keep making the world a better place for cats. The more we know about them and their lives, the more effective our ongoing efforts will be to maximise cat welfare.



Dr Maggie Roberts MRCVS
Cats Protection Director of
Veterinary Services

State of the nation

Cat population¹

Overall, the number of households owning a cat in Northern Ireland has increased this year, with 26% owning a cat (up from 22%).



The average number of cats per household has remained stable in Northern Ireland, 1.5 in 2021 and this year. 66% of cat-owning households in Northern Ireland have one cat (63% in 2021), and 34% own two or more cats (37% in 2021).

Proportion of cat owners by UK country¹

Cat ownership levels vary across the UK, from 24% of households in Scotland owning one or more cats, to 26% in Northern Ireland and 28% in Wales.

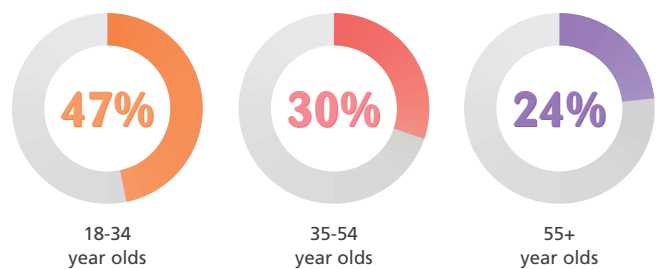
Owned cat population

	In millions		% of cat-owning households	
	2021	2022	2021	2022
Total UK	10.8	11.0	26%	26%
Scotland	0.7	0.9	20%	24%
Wales	0.7	0.6	32%	28%
Northern Ireland	0.2	0.3	22%	26%
England	9.4	9.2	27%	26%

Profile of cat owners²

There is **no such thing as a 'typical' owner**, with the profile of cat owners remaining varied.

Northern Irish cat owners by age



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

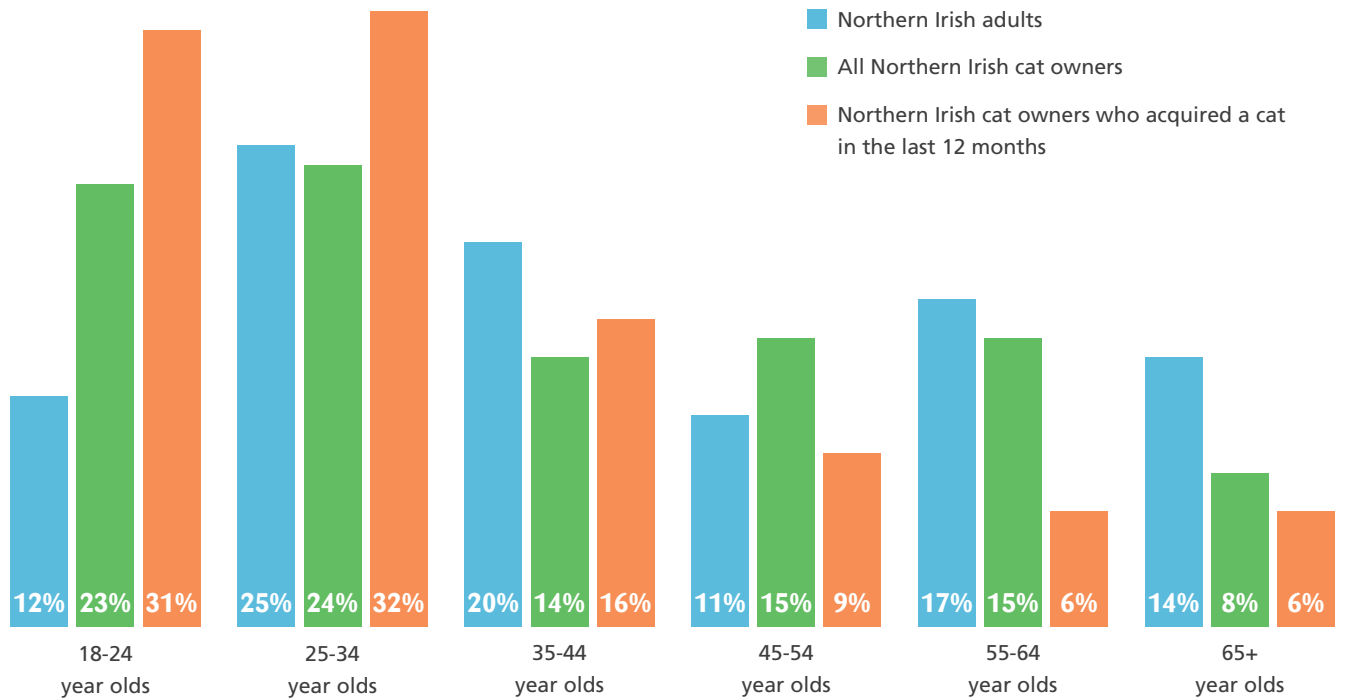
Example calculation: 26% own a cat in the UK x 28.1m UK households* x 1.5 cats owned on average = 11m cats owned across the UK.

² Questions asked: Do you currently have a cat/s (that live with you)?/How many cats do you have in your household?/When did you acquire (eg buy/adopt) your cat?

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

Those acquiring a cat in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months tend to be younger than the overall profile of Northern Irish cat owners with almost two thirds (63%) aged 18-34, compared to nearly half (47%) of all Northern Irish cat owners.

The age of Northern Irish cat owners compared to Northern Irish households



Gender

63%
of Northern Irish cat owners are female

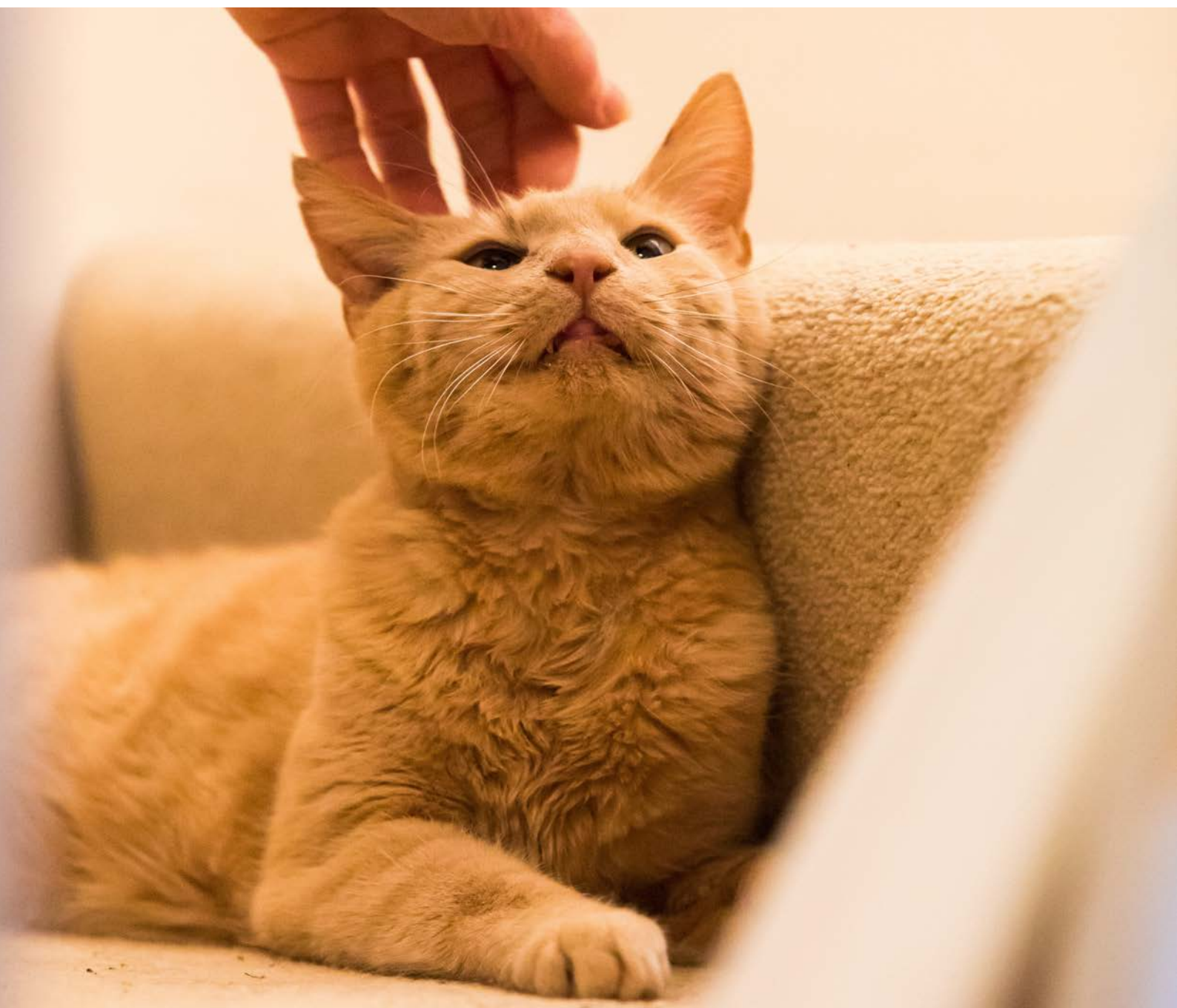


37%
of Northern Irish cat owners are male



The cat market

Overall, in Northern Ireland, 21% of cats were taken on from a neighbour, friend or family, 20% were adopted from a UK charity, rescue or rehoming centre and 14% were bought³. Northern Ireland is the only devolved nation to have not followed the trend of more cats being purchased this year, compared to other acquisition methods.



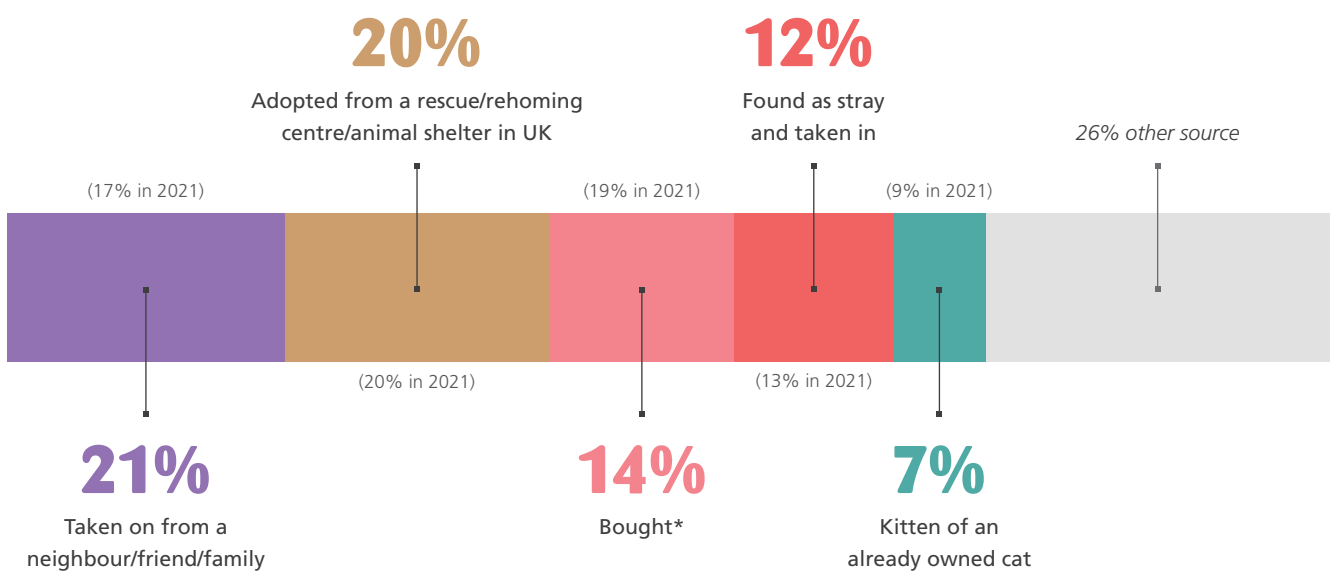
Within the Northern Irish cat population, around:

61,000 were taken on
(38,000 in 2021)

58,000 were adopted from within the UK
(45,000 in 2021)

40,000 were bought*
(43,000 in 2021)

How cats were acquired (all cats in current Northern Irish cat population)³



13%³ of the current Northern Irish cat population were acquired in the last 12 months, equating to around 38,000 cats (same as 2021).

26% were taken on

23% were adopted from a rescue/rehoming centre/animal shelter in the UK

18% were bought*

³ Questions asked: Where did you get/adopt your cat from?/When did you acquire (eg buy/adopt) your cat? Excludes those who say they bought their cat but did not pay anything.

The remaining cats were acquired in one of the following ways: given as a gift, my cat adopted me (eg started coming in for food and stayed, from an individual I did not know offering them for free, other).

*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

What types of cats do people have?⁴

Moggies vs pedigrees

64% of owners in Northern Ireland identify their cats as moggies (non-pedigree or non-purebred cats), 20% as pedigrees (v 26% across the UK), and 6% as cross-breeds. The remaining owners did not know the breed of their cat.

Percentage of cat breeds obtained in Northern Ireland⁴

	Total pet cat population	Cats obtained in the last year
Moggy/domestic longhair or shorthair	64%	54%
Pedigree	20%	24%
Cross-breed (non-moggy)	6%	10%
Don't know	10%	11%

"Prospective cat owners appear motivated to seek out pedigree cats, often with rare and unusual physical characteristics. This has no doubt been fuelled by the positive social media attention these cats often enjoy.

"The effect of breed-related health problems has received widespread publicity in the dog world – and led to the BBC pulling out of the Crufts dog show in 2009 – but many cat lovers remain largely unaware of similar problems in feline breeds. One example is the Scottish Fold, a breed that has grown in popularity in recent years. These cats suffer from a genetic mutation that is known to cause significant painful disease due to severe abnormalities of the bone cartilage (osteochondrodysplasia)⁵.

"As cat breeds become more varied and exotic, there is a risk that welfare problems will continue to rise. Breeders have a duty to sell kittens which are healthy and well-suited to life in a domestic setting, but perhaps ultimately it is the kitten buyers themselves who have the most power to effect a change in encouraging positive cat breeding welfare."

Dr Sarah Elliott MRCVS
Cats Protection Central Veterinary Officer

⁴ Question asked: What breed is your cat? When did you acquire (eg buy/adopt) your cat?

⁵ Chang, et al. 2007, Farnworth, et al. (2017), Gunn-Moore, et al. (2008), Takanosu, et al. (2008), ICC & BVA #HealthOverLooks Campaign



Pedigree vs 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.

In this report, pedigree and purebred cats are included in the description of 'pedigree', with purebred cats referred to as 'pedigree without paperwork', where relevant.

To further investigate the emerging trend for increased popularity of pedigree cats, a new question was added to the CATS Report Northern Ireland 2022 survey, asking owners that identify their cat as pedigree to indicate which breed association their cat was registered with.

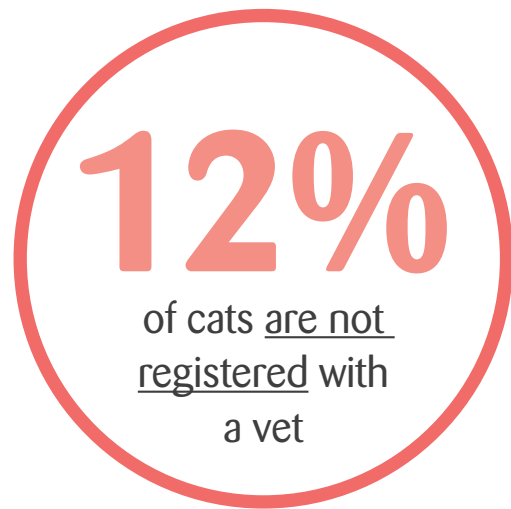
The expectation was that a significant percentage of cats claimed to be 'pedigree with paperwork' would in fact be mis-sold moggies or simply 'cross-breeds', with owners not being aware of the breed association that had provided the paperwork. 32% of owners of non-moggy cats said that they had breed registration paperwork for their cat. However, the vast majority of those that claimed to have paperwork indicated that their cat was registered with one of the top three breed associations (68%). This rises to 89% for owners who acquired their cat in the last 12 months⁶.

⁶ Questions asked: When you bought/adopted your cat were you given any paperwork or certification to confirm their breed?/And is your cat registered with one of the following pedigree registration bodies (filtered by all those who received paperwork confirming breed of cat)?/ When did you acquire (eg buy/adopt) your cat?

Veterinary care

Vet registration⁷

88% of cat owners in Northern Ireland have their cat registered with a vet, which is slightly down from last year (90%). This means that approximately 35,000 cats in Northern Ireland remain not registered with a vet.



Vet visits⁸

55% of all Northern Irish cat owners say that they visit the vet routinely each year compared to 60% of cat owners across the UK. 42% of Northern Irish cat owners only go to the vet when they feel the need to and 4% never go to the vet. This means that over 130,000 cats are potentially not getting access to routine health checks, risking health conditions going unnoticed until they are advanced enough to seriously impact welfare.

Those cats who do regularly visit the vet are also more likely to be microchipped and up to date with their vaccinations.

Barriers to vet access

The reasons that Northern Irish cat owners do not attend the vet as much as they would like are varied, but often centre around the stress of getting a cat to the vet for cat or owner (24%). For 26% of owners though, cost was the biggest barrier to making vet visits⁹. This is the same as last year but is understandably magnified for those with greater financial concerns.

⁷ Question asked: Is your cat registered with a vet?

⁸ Question asked: Which of the following best describes how often you tend to go to the vet?

⁹ Question asked: Which of the following, if any, prevents you from taking your cat to the vet as often as you might like to?

"The CATS Report 2022 reveals owners are becoming increasingly concerned about the cost of veterinary care for their cat. More owners are relying on charitable aid in the form of neutering vouchers and food banks to help with the cost of cat ownership. As the cost of living continues to rise in 2022 and beyond, both the veterinary profession and veterinary charitable sector will be faced with increasing numbers of cat owners in difficult financial circumstances. We must develop proactive strategies to reduce the impact on animal welfare brought about by this crisis."

Dr Maggie Roberts MRCVS
Cats Protection Director of
Veterinary Services

Can't afford the vet?

Only 33% of the Northern Irish cat owners who are concerned about bills and other living costs go to the vet as often as they would like, compared to 65% of cat owners that are not concerned about living costs. A concerning minority (7%) worry that vets will 'upsell' treatments for their cat, particularly among those who are concerned about living costs (10%)⁹.

With growing concern over the cost of living, there is the risk that more cat owners will hesitate or choose not to visit their vet, or not follow their recommendations, putting cat health and welfare at risk.

Many vets already offer much-appreciated support via subsidised veterinary healthcare, and this will likely grow in importance. It is also essential that vets make clear explanations as to why veterinary recommendations are being made, to encourage compliance through reassurance.

Top reasons for not visiting the vet as much as owner would like^{9a}

The cost



My cat finds it too stressful



I find it too stressful getting my cat into the carrier/basket



I'm worried the vet will say the cat needs to be put to sleep



I'm worried the vet will recommend additional treatments on top of what I took the cat in for



Looking for advice on cat carrier training?

www.cats.org.uk/how-to-choose-and-use-a-cat-carrier



⁹ Question asked: Which of the following, if any, prevents you from taking your cat to the vet as often as you might like to?
 a) Only responses 8% and above are shown

For some Northern Irish cat owners, access to their vet is a problem, with **27% having experienced trouble accessing their vet in the last 12 months**. This is lower than the other UK nations, however. The proportion of owners that have struggled to access veterinary services over the last 12 months rises to 45% of those who have acquired a cat in the last 12 months.

The data suggests that difficulty accessing veterinary services in Northern Ireland is partly down to lingering pandemic effects, such as reduced opening hours and services. 7% of owners say they struggled to get an appointment because their vet was operating reduced hours and 3% of all cat owners had difficulty registering their cat because their vet was not taking on new customers. This rises to 5% of cat owners that acquired their cat in the last 12 months^{10a}.

Reasons Northern Irish cat owners have had difficulties accessing veterinary services¹⁰

I've had to **wait longer than normal to book** in surgeries for my cat because my vets has had to reduce service

9%

I've struggled to make appointments with my vets because **they're too busy**

7%

I've struggled to make appointments with my vets because their **opening hours were reduced**

7%

I've had **appointments cancelled** by my vets

6%

I had to wait longer than I wanted to neuter my cat because my **vets has had a reduced service**

6%

I had to wait longer than I wanted to register my cat because my **vets was not taking on new customers**

4%

I've not been able to register with my local vets because **they're not taking on new customers**

3%

10 Questions asked: Still thinking about the vet, have you experienced any of the following over the last 12 months in relation to your cat? Which of the following best describes how often you tend to go to the vet?
a) Owners indicated 'I've not been able to register with my local vet because they're not taking on new customers'



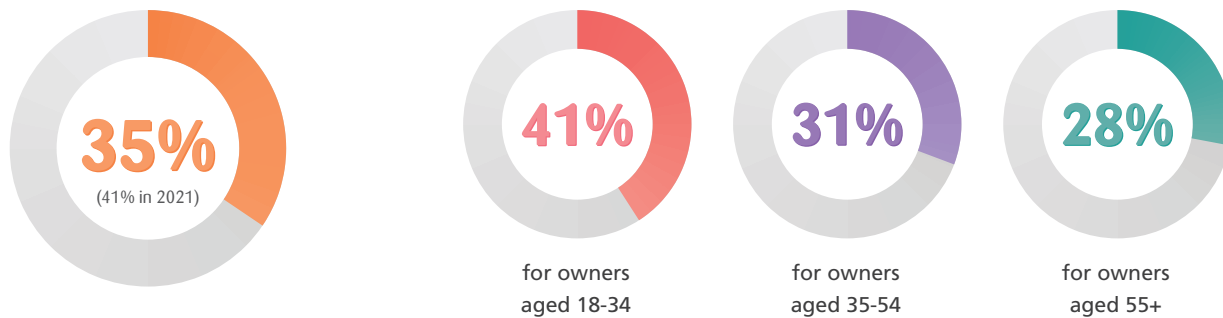
"Access to veterinary care is an essential part of cat ownership. Addressing barriers to accessible veterinary care must remain a top priority issue for the veterinary charitable sector and veterinary profession as a whole."

Dr Alison Richards MRCVS
Cats Protection Head of Clinical Services

Insurance¹¹

The proportion of insured cats in Northern Ireland has dropped slightly to 35% (41% in 2021) and remains lower than the percentage of cats insured across the UK (46%). Compared to all Northern Irish cat owners, there is a higher proportion of insured cats among younger Northern Irish cat owners.

Northern Irish owners who have taken out insurance for their cat



Vaccinations¹²

72% of Northern Irish cats (210,000 cats) are up to date with their vaccinations, according to their owners, which is up from last year (65%). It may be that more veterinary practices are once again offering preventative treatments such as vaccination, compared to last year when many practices needed to run emergency-only services under COVID-19 restrictions. 10% of Northern Irish owners say that their cat has had some vaccinations but are not up to date and 7% have had no vaccinations at all.

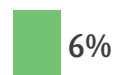
Up to 80,000 cats in Northern Ireland are not protected against diseases that are preventable with vaccination.

Northern Irish owners who have taken out insurance for their cat

Up to date with vaccinations



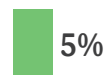
Don't know what vaccinations my cat has had



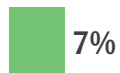
Has had some vaccinations, but not up to date



Don't know what vaccinations my cat should have had



Has not had any vaccinations



¹¹ Question asked: Do you have pet insurance for your cat?

¹² Question asked: Is your cat up to date with their vaccinations (ie has had their booster vaccinations as relevant to their age)?

Preventative treatments¹³

Less than two thirds of Northern Irish owners are protecting their cats against parasites such as fleas (61%) and worms (59%) throughout the year, as per the advice from their vet or the parasite treatment label. This is higher than last year (56% for fleas and 55% for worms).

11% treat their cat for fleas less than once a year or not at all; this figure is 13% for worms. 4% of owners only treat their cats during the summer months, yet fleas can remain in our homes year-round, thanks to central heating and soft furnishings.

There can be a variety of reasons that owners chose not to regularly use parasite prevention products. Veterinary surgeons are best placed to make recommendations on the frequency of parasite treatment for each individual cat under their care. They may recommend treating less often if the cat's risk of infection is very low due to their environment and lifestyle. With growing concerns over issues like cost of living and the environmental impact of parasite products, a careful balance must be reached to ensure cat health and welfare.

¹³ Questions asked: How often do you tend to protect your cat from fleas?/ How often do you tend to give your cat a worming treatment?



Cats should be protected against parasites according to their individual and household risk. Cats Protection therefore recommends following the European Scientific Counsel for Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP) guidelines for all cats.

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



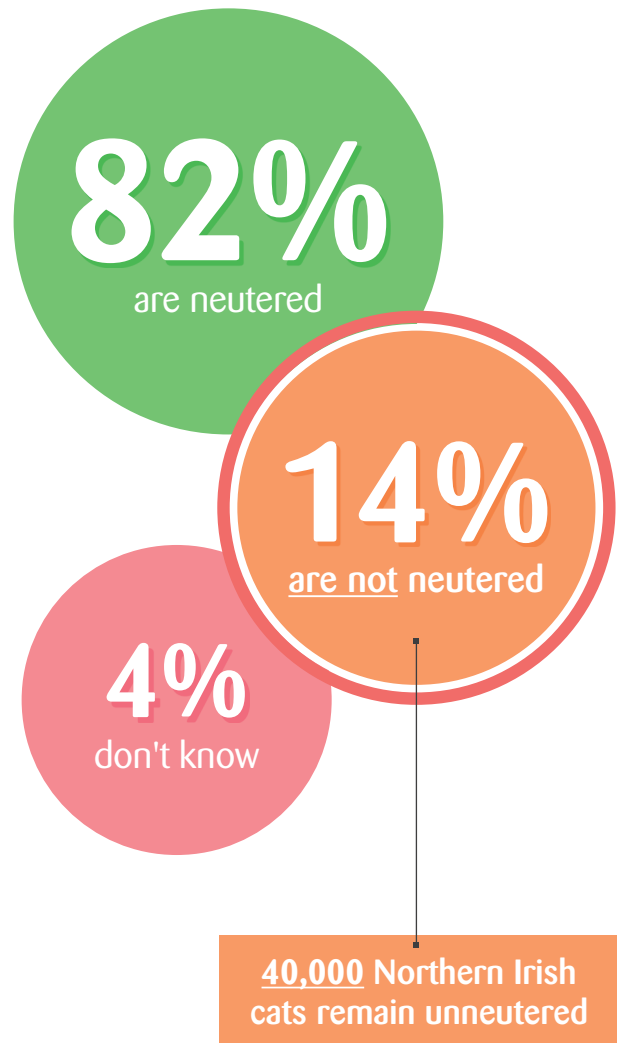
SCAN ME

Neutering¹⁴

82% of Northern Irish cats (240,000 cats) are neutered, which is a slightly lower proportion than last year (83%). The proportion of cats that are neutered is lower among cats acquired in the last 12 months (69% are neutered, 20% aren't, 10% don't know).

The cats less likely to have been neutered

Younger cat owners aged 18-34 are less likely to have neutered their cat at the time of reporting (72%), compared to 90% of 35-54-year olds and 91% of owners aged over 55.



"Unwanted litters result in the suffering of many thousands of cats and puts a huge strain on charitable resources. The number of unneutered cats continues to be concerning for charities like Cats Protection, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis, when owner relinquishment rates are predicted to rise.

"The timing of neutering is crucial in preventing accidental and unwanted litters of kittens. CatKIND (of which Cats Protection is a founding member) is calling for all vets to embrace pre-pubertal neutering as standard neutering practice."

Jane Clements
Cats Protection Head of Neutering

www.cat-kind.org.uk

¹⁴ Question asked: Is your cat neutered/spayed?



Microchipping

60% of Northern Irish cats are microchipped, 35% are not microchipped and 5% of owners do not know if their cat is microchipped¹⁵. This is similar to last year's figures (60% were microchipped, 33% were not and 6% did not know). It is lower than the overall UK figure for microchipped cats (71%).

Top reasons Northern Irish cat owners choose not to microchip their cat¹⁶

My cat doesn't stray/go far

29%

I just hadn't thought about microchipping my cat

25%

My cat doesn't go outside

17%

My cat finds it stressful going to a vet

13%

I don't agree with microchipping

12%

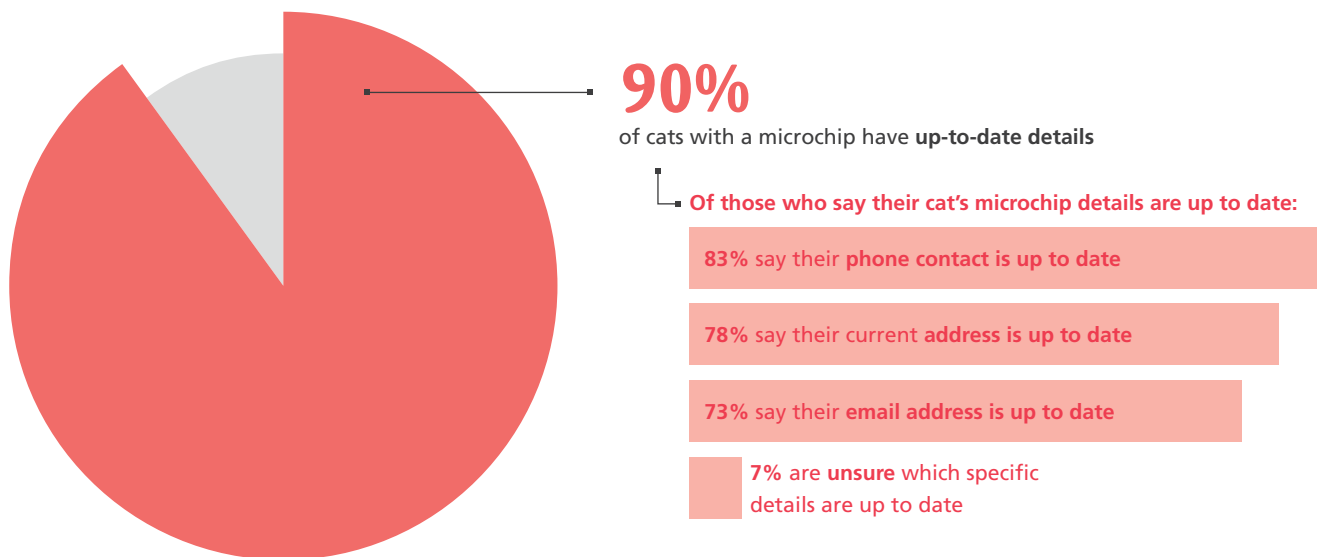


15 Question asked: Is your cat microchipped?

16 Question asked: Which of the below best describes the reasons why your cat is not microchipped? Only responses 8% and above shown.

Microchips and keeping details up to date¹⁷

Reassuringly, 90% of Northern Irish owners that have microchipped their cat say that their cat's microchip details are up to date. This is really positive, as it means that in most cases of a cat being injured or lost, their owners will be contactable.



"It is disappointing to see that Northern Ireland's cat microchipping rates remain the lowest in the UK for a third year running. Sadly, due to their free roaming and inquisitive nature cats can easily get lost – including house cats who can escape from open doors or windows. Over a third of cats remain unchipped, giving them only a small chance of being identified and returned to their owners if they are lost or stolen.

"Microchips are safe, easy to implant, effective and a permanent method of identification. Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Irish Government to introduce compulsory microchipping of pet cats."

Madison Rogers

Cats Protection Acting Head of Advocacy & Government Relation

¹⁷ Questions asked: Are your cat's registered microchip details up to date?/Which of the following microchip details are up to date?

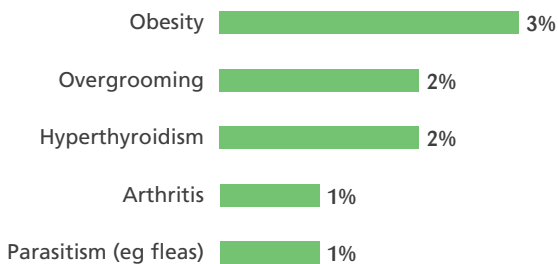
Health and diet

Health conditions¹⁸

The level of diagnosed disease in the nation's cats (as reported by their owners) remains relatively stable. 83% of Northern Irish cat owners say that their cat has no health conditions at all, compared to 79% in 2021. This is higher than the UK average (76%) and may be due to the fact that cats in Northern Ireland are 5% less likely to visit the vets regularly than cats across the UK, so diseases are potentially less likely to have been diagnosed.

Obesity is the most commonly reported health condition (3%), followed by overgrooming (2%) and hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid gland) (2%). Northern Ireland is the only devolved nation to not have dental disease in the top five reported health conditions.

Top five health conditions



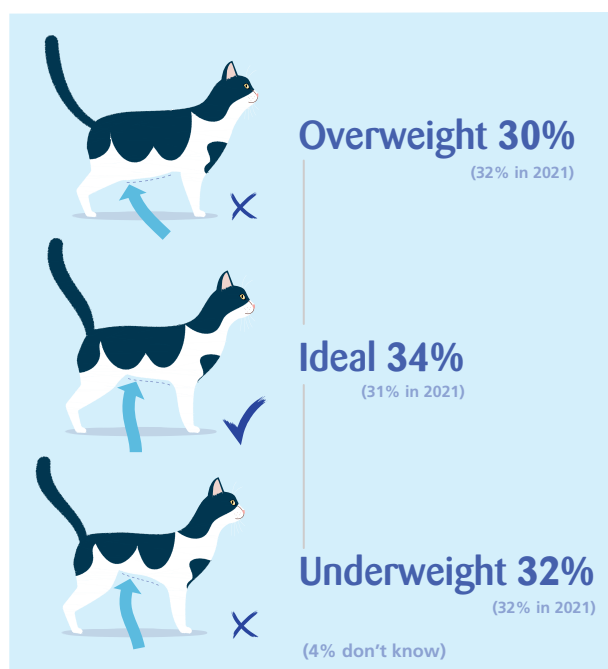
¹⁸ Question asked: Does your cat have any of the following diagnosed health issues/conditions?

Diet and body weight¹⁹

How Northern Irish owners view their cat's weight has remained largely unchanged since last year, with a small drop in the number identifying their cat as overweight. However, Northern Irish owners are more likely to believe their cat is the ideal weight than owners from across the UK (34% NI v 26% UK) and are less likely to believe they are underweight (32% NI v 38% UK).

As well as diet, exercise is a key component of managing body weight and male owners are more likely to actively play with their cat regularly (71%) than female owners (60%)²⁰.

It must be emphasised that the CATS Report 2022 data is owner reported. Vet-reported figures for feline obesity in the UK vary, with some studies finding that up to 44% of cats are overweight^{21,22}. It is also noted that obesity is likely dramatically under-reported in primary care vet practices²².



¹⁹ Question asked: Which of the following descriptions and images would you say best reflects your cat in relation to their size?

²⁰ Question asked: In an average week, how often do you do each of the following with your cat (Actively play together - eg with toys, balls, treat balls, fishing rod toy etc)? Top two box responses shown

²¹ Horwitz; BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine, chapter 4

²² O'Neill (2014)

²³ Food Foundation, Food Prices Indices Tracker, 2022

²⁴ Question asked: And thinking about the last 12 months, which of the below, if any apply to you?

The rising cost of food

Food prices rose 6.3% between April 2021 and March 2022²³, and based on economic predictions, this trend is set to continue. Although the full impact of the cost-of-living crisis likely won't be seen in this year's report, 6% of Northern Irish cat owners have had to reduce spend on cat necessities such as cat food and litter to save money and 3% of owners have used a food bank or charity to help them feed their cat in the last 12 months²⁴.

Having to make difficult decisions about how to feed their cat can come with complicated emotions for an owner. It is vital that cat owners feel able to make the best choices for their cat, and have access to practical and emotional support, regardless of their individual circumstances.

Behaviour and welfare

Sources of information

Pre-acquisition research

The proportion of Northern Irish cat owners that are claiming to have done lots of research before getting a cat is increasing (32% this year, up from 25% in 2021)²⁵.

"With the increased demands on veterinary practices, not every owner feels able to approach their local veterinary practice when they have questions or concerns about their cat. Veterinary practices may not be the primary source of advice for many owners, yet veterinary professionals are the very people owners should be able to turn to first when they have questions about the health, safety, comfort, nutrition and overall welfare of their cat."

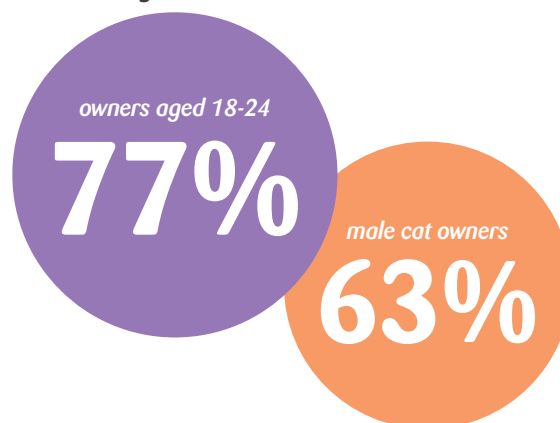
Dr Kit Sturgess PhD, FRCVS
Cats Protection Chair of Trustees

Cat advice

Over half of Northern Irish cat owners (51%) agree that quality, reliable information about cats is increasingly accessible²⁶.



Higher for:

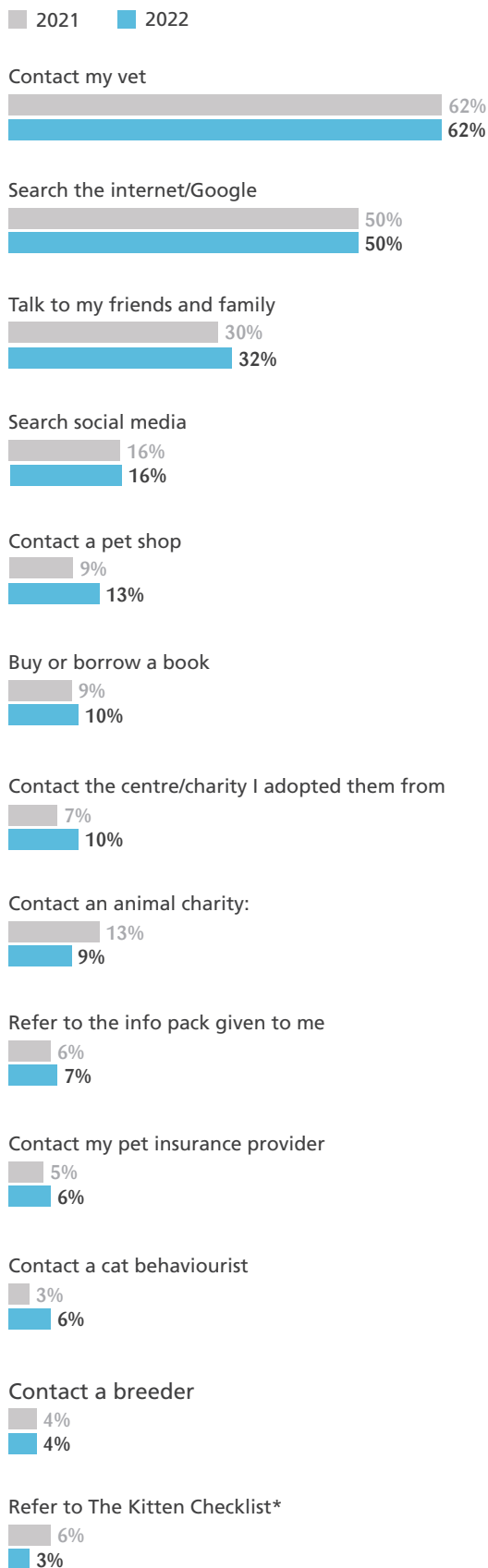


25 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statement (I did lots of research before getting my cats)? Top two response boxes included (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree)

26 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statement (I find it easy to find high quality and reliable information about cats)? Top two response boxes included (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree)

27 Question asked: How often do you tend to do each of the following?

Where are people seeking their cat advice?²⁸



Social media continues to be an important source of cat information for many people, with 16% of Northern Irish owners choosing to source information about their cat here (same in 2021)²⁹. Almost all social media platforms have seen increases in popularity for this purpose, but Facebook and YouTube continue to be the most popular social platforms as a source of information about cats (FB: 31%, YT: 35%)²⁹. This high level of engagement with social media as a source of information about cats makes it important that a variety of social media platforms continue to be utilised by animal welfare organisations as a way to disseminate accurate and reliable information.

Social media is also a popular source of 'fun' cat content for many Northern Irish cat owners, with 40% heading to Facebook and 41% visiting YouTube to get their fill of cat videos, memes and cute photos³⁰.

"While there is plenty of great cat content on the internet, there are certain trends that blur the lines between victimless candid moments and very real pet abuse. Cats Protection is aware of 'pet challenges' on social media that involve cats having tape stuck to their feet, being dressed up in human clothing, their ears forced into headbands, owners donning masks to deliberately scare their pet, and even worse...

"Animals are not here for our entertainment and should not be inflicted with psychological trauma and extreme stress for a laugh. Cats Protection urges social media users to educate themselves about the signs of animal stress to ensure they are not consuming, or creating, content that is cruel and causes distress to animals."

Nicky Trevorrow
Cats Protection Behaviour Manager

²⁸ Question asked: Which of the following would you do if you were seeking information or advice about your cat/s?

²⁹ Question asked: Which of the following, if any, do you use/visit on a regular basis when looking for the following content related to cats (information/advice)?

³⁰ Question asked: Which of the following, if any, do you use/visit on a regular basis when looking for the following content related to cats (fun content)?

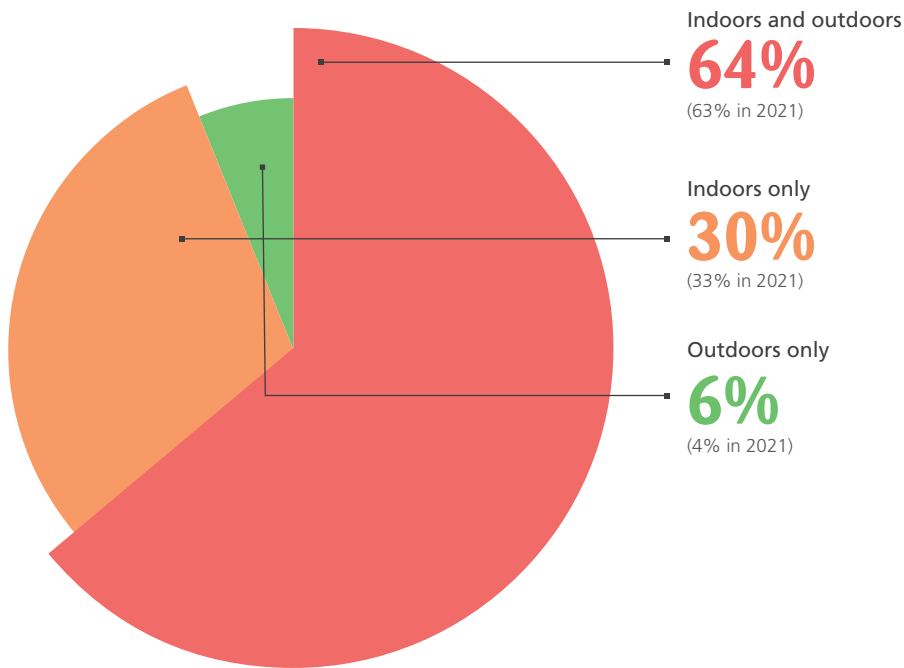
*www.thecatgroup.org.uk/pdfs/The-Kitten-Checklist.pdf

A cat's environment

Indoor vs outdoor cats

The proportion of Northern Irish cats that have an indoor/outdoor lifestyle (64%) remains similar to last year (63%) and is higher than all other UK nations.

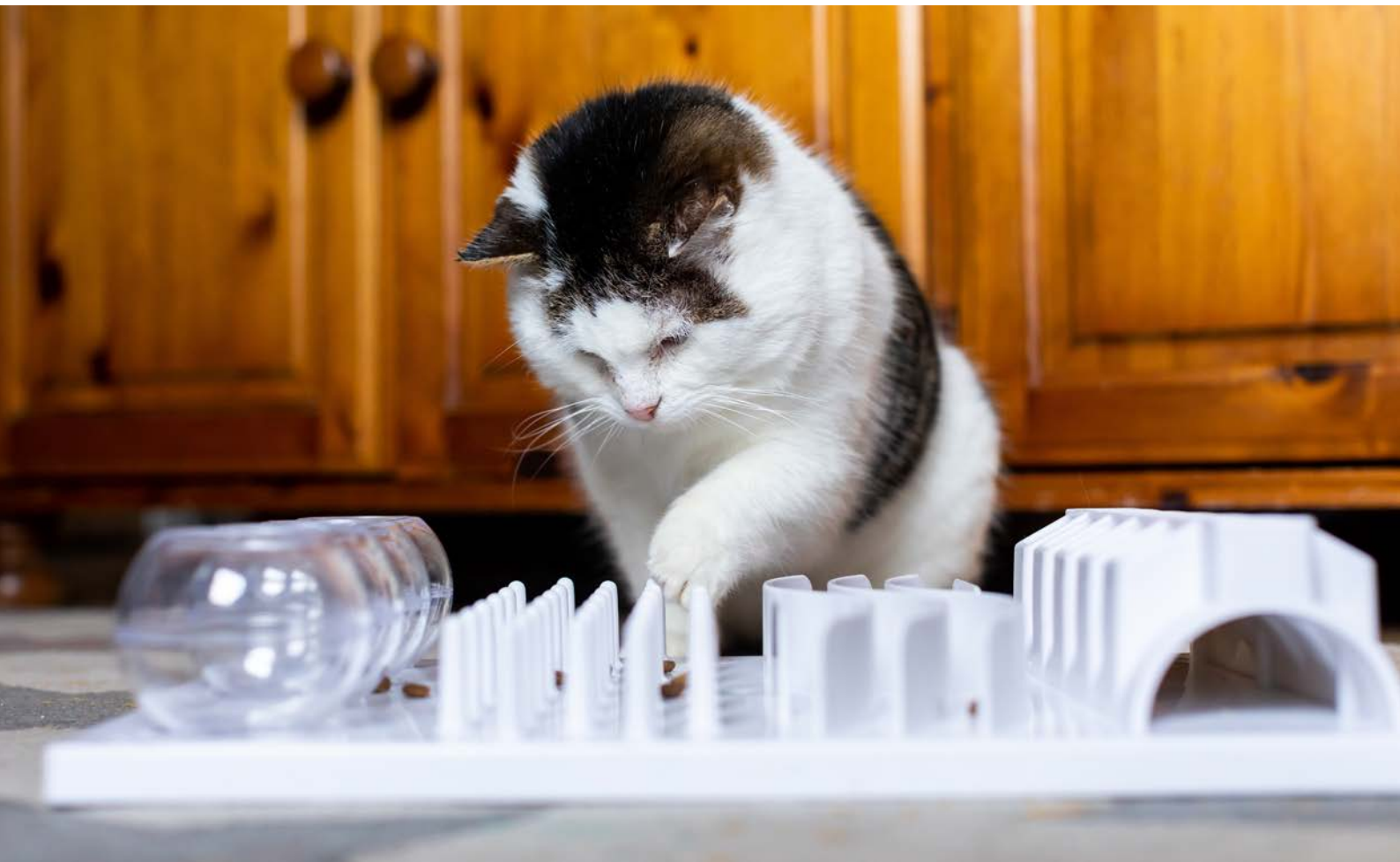
Cat living arrangement³¹



"The CATS Report Northern Ireland 2022 suggests that nearly a third of cats in Northern Ireland are being kept as indoor-only pets. Owners often make this choice to reduce the risk of accidents outdoors or to protect the health of their cat. However, a life lived exclusively indoors brings its own risks, particularly to the emotional wellbeing of the cat. Cats may be more at risk of experiencing boredom and frustration, and cats experiencing these negative emotions are more likely to display unwanted or stress-linked behaviours such as scratching, inter-cat aggression in multi-cat households and aggression towards people. This can have negative implications for the cat-owner bond."

Rae Foreman-Worsley
Cats Protection Feline Welfare Associate Researcher

³¹ Question asked:
Which of the following
best applies to your cat?



Cats at night

For those cats who do have outdoor access, 31% are able to come and go freely at night, down from 39% in 2021³². Cats are most active at dusk and dawn, choosing this time to hunt, explore and venture into other cats' territories.

Cats Protection recommends that cats are kept in overnight, to reduce the risk of injury from road accidents, fights with other cats/animals and predation of wildlife. However, and especially for 'high energy' cats or those that are most active at dusk and dawn, it's very important that the cat is provided with sufficient cognitive and physical enrichment (ie toys and feeding puzzles) to prevent boredom and frustration during these periods of confinement.



³² Question asked: Does your cat have access to the outside overnight?

Resources for cats³³

Adequate resource provision for cats is a hugely important part of meeting their physical and emotional needs. This is also a very important aspect of promoting harmony and reducing conflict within multi-cat households.

In single-cat households, resource provision seems to have increased since last year. In multi-cat households, where inadequate resource provision can generate inter-cat aggression, the decreases seen this year in the provision of some resources are concerning.

Average number of resources per household

				
	2021	2022	2021	2022
Food bowls	2.1	2.6	3.2	3.0
Water bowls	1.9	2.3	2.8	2.6
Litter trays	1.5	1.8	2.0	1.7
Scratching posts	1.7	2.0	2.4	1.8
Cat beds	1.8	2.4	2.5	2.4
Hiding places	2.1	2.7	3.1	3.0

³³ Question asked: How many of each of the following, if any, do you have in your home and are currently available for your cat/s to use at any one time?

Resources matter - Gimli's story

Gimli was on a waiting list to be relinquished into a rehoming centre because she had been urinating outside of her tray. Her owners were incredibly reluctant to rehome Gimli but felt they were running out of options.

As is always essential, Gimli was taken to her vet and any underlying medical causes of the toileting behaviour were ruled out. The Cats Protection Behaviour team then assessed Gimli and discovered she was an anxious cat who shared her home with another cat (Frodo). As well as putting in measures for stress reduction, one of the key pieces of advice for resolving Gimli's issues was to increase the number of litter trays from two to three. Placement of these trays was also essential, it was recommended that the cats be set up with their own different 'territories' within the house so they could avoid each other and use their resources in peace should they want to.

Although the owners were already doing well by providing one litter tray per cat, having that additional tray made all the difference. It gave Gimli more opportunity to choose to toilet where she felt most comfortable.

Three months after implementing the recommended changes, Gimli's owner got back in touch and said: "Gimli has become a completely different cat! It's unreal, (touch wood) she has been using her litter box every time with no little accidents since creating her safe place where her litter tray is."

Gimli's owners were able to keep their beloved pet but more importantly, Gimli was clearly more comfortable with her toileting options. So, with some simple stress reduction measures, increase in resources and owners who were really willing to listen to advice, it all ended positively.



Preventing cats from harm³⁴

30% of Northern Irish cat owners said that their cat has been injured in the time that they have owned them. Just under a quarter (23%) of these injuries were sustained during fights with other cats or other animals – 12% were with cats from another household. 5% of injuries were sustained due to a road traffic accident.

Behaviour and stress

70% of Northern Irish cats are reported to exhibit at least one behaviour that may indicate stress. This is a concerningly high proportion of cats, acknowledging that identifying stress in cats can be challenging, with context often required to properly analyse behaviours.

Due to the use of a more comprehensive and representative list of behaviours this year, it is hard to draw direct comparisons with last year's data.

70%

of cats exhibit at least one stress-associated behaviour

26%

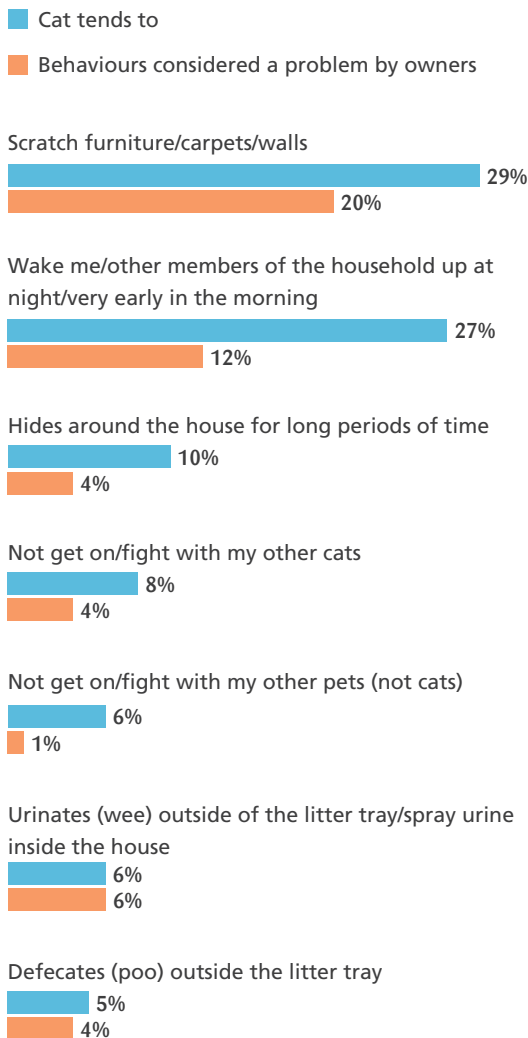
of cats exhibit 3+ stress-associated behaviours



³⁴ Question asked: Since having your cat, has your cat ever been injured?

The behavioural stress indicators that owners tend to be most aware of and consider a problem are those that are more overt and which negatively impact them. More subtle stress-linked behaviours may go unrecognised by owners, so it is possible that more cats are exhibiting stress-linked behaviours than reported. This is why owner education and awareness about how cats exhibit stress, and even better, how to avoid stress for cats in the first place, is key to ensuring cat welfare.

Cat behaviour and owner concern³⁵



Seeking help for 'problem' behaviours³⁶

Only 28% of owners that identified their cat's stressed behaviour as a problem have sought professional help for these behaviours, and 53% have self-sought information or advice themselves.

³⁵ Questions asked: Thinking about the past 12 months, which of the following does your cat tend to do, at least some of the time? Which of the following do you consider problem behaviours that you would like to change?

³⁶ Question asked: And have you or someone in your household sought help for these behaviours? (Professional help/ Self-sought info)?

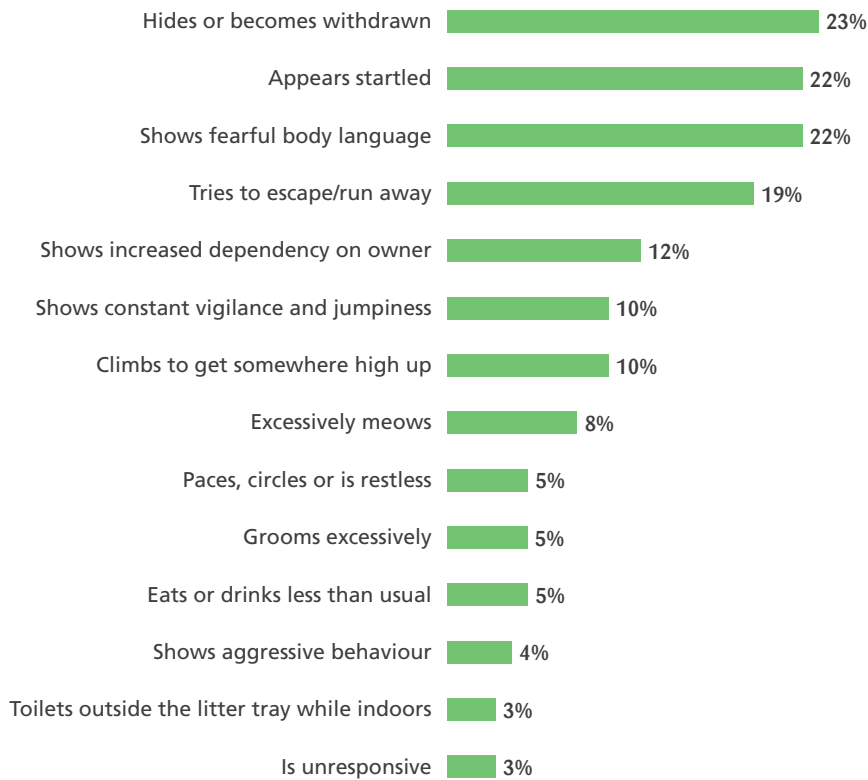
"The CATS Report 2022 suggests that when asked about the prevalence of a range of behaviours that are potentially associated with stress, owners are most likely to report their cat displaying overt behaviours and those that owners might find 'problematic' or 'undesirable', such as obvious signs of fear or scratching of furniture. Many stressed cats may display their stress in much more subtle ways though, and it's important that we are aware of and pay attention to these subtle indicators, even if they don't necessarily cause a problem for us per se."

Dr Lauren Finka
Cats Protection Feline Welfare Scientist

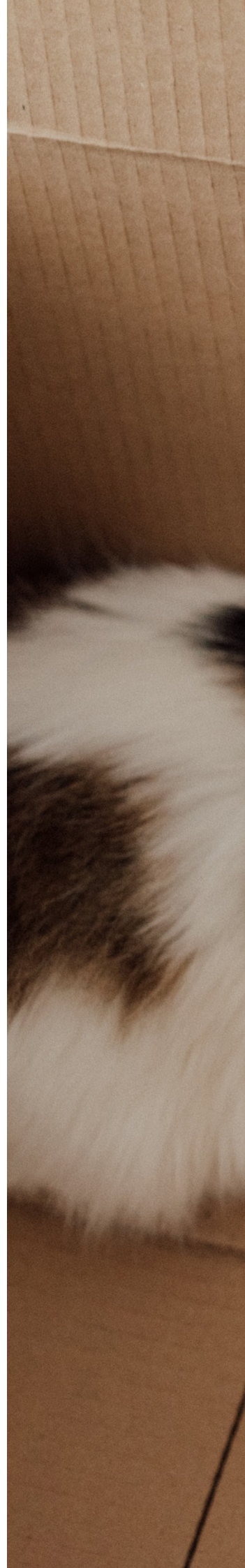
Fireworks³⁷

Fireworks can be hugely distressing for many animals and of those cat owners who have seen their cat experience fireworks, 68% say that their cat is affected by them. Considering many cats may be outside and therefore unobserved by their owners, the actual figure for cats affected may be higher. Reactions can be varied, from aversive behaviours, to appearing extremely fearful.

The impact of fireworks on cats, as reported by owners that have witnessed their cat experience fireworks



³⁷ Question asked: Does your cat tend to show any of the following signs of stress as a result of hearing fireworks?
Filtered for owners that have seen their cat experience fireworks





All these behaviours can be indicative of stress in cats. For more advice about fireworks and stress in cats, visit:

www.cats.org.uk/fireworks



scan me

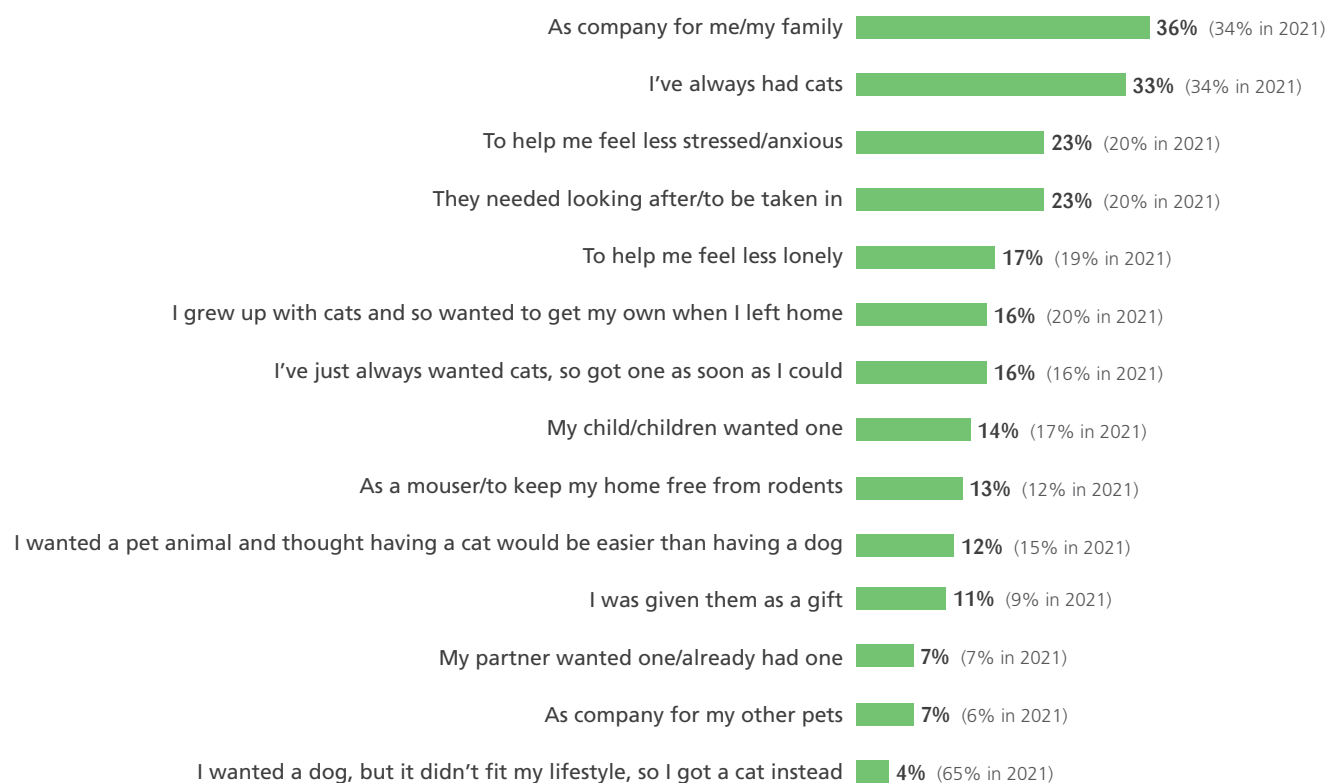
Companionship, challenges to ownership and cost of living

What are the reasons people have cats?³⁸

For the third consecutive year, companionship, reducing loneliness, and reducing stress were collectively the top reasons for owning a cat (50%). This highlights the continued importance of pet cats for the wellbeing of their owners.

Cat ownership for companionship has grown, with those owning a cat as company for them/their family increasing from 34% in 2021, to 36% in 2022. Females are more likely to primarily own a cat as company for them/their family (39%).

Reasons for owning a cat



³⁸ Question asked: What are the main reasons you have a cat/s? Multiple answers allowed



"It's no surprise that cats continue to be important companions for people, bringing associated benefits for everyone. As the UK's leading cat rehoming charity, we are proud to help create strong companion animal bonds that are more important than ever in times of uncertainty.

"To achieve this, we carefully match cats and new owners by considering everyone's needs. It's not just the cats and their new owners that we want to have a life-long relationship too – we stay in touch post-adoption, offering support when needed, and love receiving updates."

Mike Elliott
Cats Protection Director of Operations

What are the benefits of cat ownership?

23% of Northern Irish cat owners say that the main reason that they have a cat in their life is to help them feel less stressed³⁸. Research supports that owning a cat has a positive effect on the emotional state of their owners^{39,40}. 89% of Northern Irish owners spend time stroking their cat or sitting together every day⁴¹. Studies have shown that simply stroking a pet can lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels³⁹.

39 Question asked: What are the main reasons you have a cat/s? Multiple answers allowed

40 Hodgson (2015)

41 Nagasawa (2020)

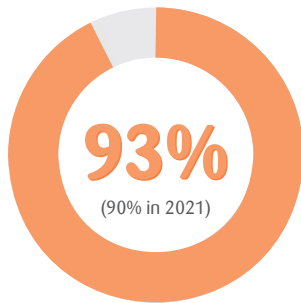
42 Question asked: In an average week, how often do you do each of the following with your cat (Spend time stroking your cat/sitting together)? Top two box answers included (A few times a day, Once or twice a day)

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

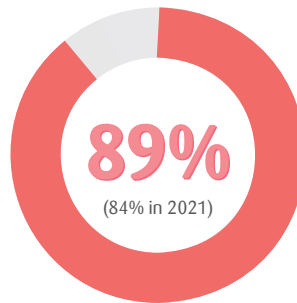
More Northern Irish cat owners than ever say that their cat is part of the family (93%, up from 90%) and brings them joy (89%, up from 84%). 59% say that they put their cat's needs above their own (55% in 2021). These increases over the last 12 months suggest a heavier reliance by owners on their cats for emotional wellbeing and further reiterates the strength of their reciprocal bond.

The emotional relationship that owners enjoy with cats⁴²

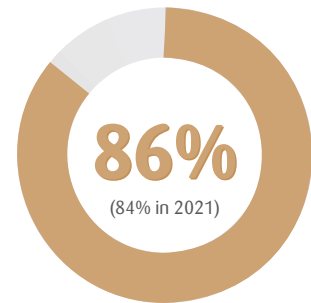
Their cat is a part of the family



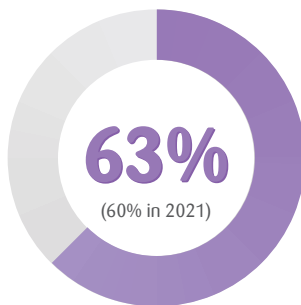
Their cat brings joy



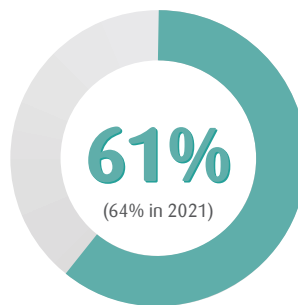
Talks regularly with their cat



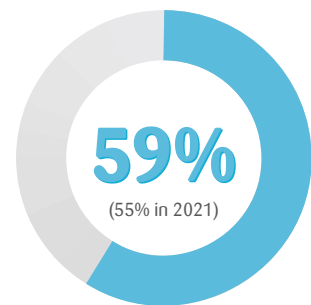
Their cat gives them something to get up for in the morning



Talks about their cat a lot



Puts their cat's needs above their own



⁴² Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s? Top two response boxes included (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree).



Cats Protection provides a range of services that aim to support cat owners. These include subsidised neutering and microchipping, support with cat behavioural problems, curriculum-linked school and community talks, grief support and rehoming of cats after the death of their owner.

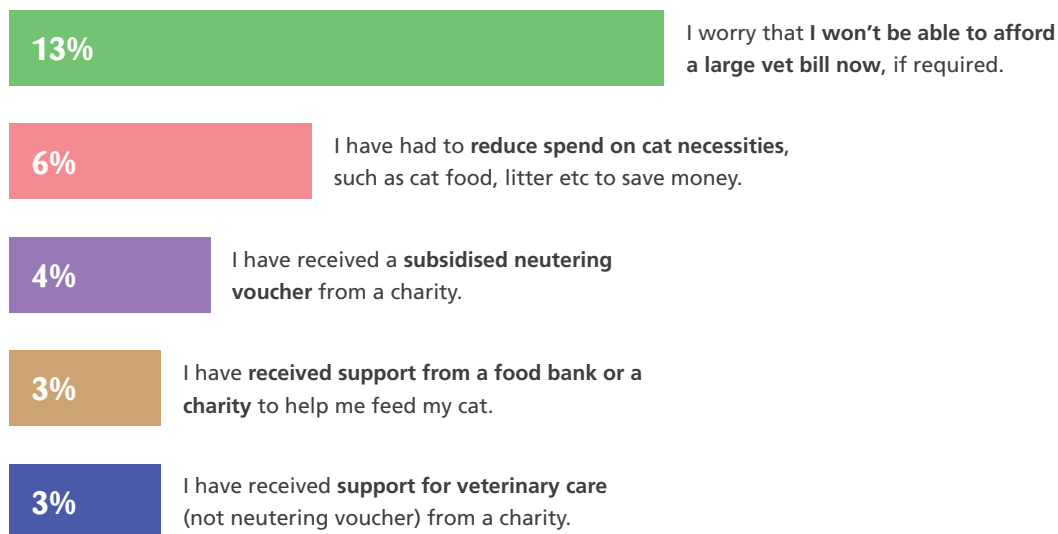
For further details, please see **page 43** of this report.

The affordability of cats

Spiralling costs are affecting almost all aspects of people's lives and although the cost-of-living crisis was still in its infancy between March 2021 and April 2022, aspects of this year's data suggest that the effects are being felt by cats and their owners.

31% of Northern Irish cat owners expressed considerable concern over being able to afford bills and other living costs over the next 12 months due to price increases⁴³.

Cost concerns for cat owners⁴⁴



43 Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statement (I am concerned that I won't be able to pay bills/living costs over the next 12 months because of price increases)? Top two response boxes included (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

44 Question asked: And thinking about the last 12 months, which of the below, if any apply to you?

Where do we go from here?

This year, we've seen a continuation of many of the trends that were seen through the pandemic, with more people now than ever enjoying the benefits of cat ownership. This demonstrates that Northern Ireland is still very much a society of cat lovers, with the majority of cat owners motivated to provide the best life they can for their much-loved pet.

While it is fantastic that more people than ever are enjoying the many benefits of cat ownership, an increase in the overall number of cats does present some challenges. An increased demand for veterinary services puts pressure on veterinary practices, at a time when many may not yet have recovered from pandemic staffing losses. Many of the owners surveyed have started to feel the pinch of the rising cost of living, with substantial numbers reporting concerns around the affordability of veterinary care.

As the cost-of-living crisis looks set to continue, the sector must do all it can to support the pet-owner relationship through this difficult and demanding time. Understanding the specific pinch points for cat owners helps better direct support interventions. Cats Protection will continue to review ways in which the charity can help support cat ownership wherever this can be achieved, and to ensure as many owned cats as possible experience good welfare.



Summary of statistics

Cat population

- There are around 11 million owned cats in the UK
 - Almost 290,000 are in Northern Ireland
- Over one in four Northern Irish households (26%) own a cat
- Each cat-owning household has an average of 1.5 cats
 - 66% have one cat
 - 34% own two cats or more
- According to owners, 64% of Northern Irish cats are moggies, 20% are pedigrees and 6% are cross-breeds. The remaining owners did not know the breed of their cat
 - 32% of owners of non-moggy cats have breed certification for their cat, 58% do not and 10% do not know

Cat owners

- Almost two thirds (63%) of Northern Irish cat owners that acquired a cat in the last 12 months are aged 18-34, compared to nearly half (47%) of all Northern Irish cat owners
- 37% of owners are male and 63% of owners are female

The cat market

- Northern Irish owned cats tend to be taken on from a neighbour, family member or friend (21%), adopted from a UK rehoming charity (20%) or bought (14%)
 - For cats acquired in the last 12 months, 26% were taken on from a neighbour, friend or family, 23% were adopted from UK rehoming charities and 18% were bought

Neutering and microchipping

- 82% of Northern Irish cats (240,000) are neutered, 14% are not neutered. The remaining 4% of owners don't know if their cat is neutered
- An estimated 40,000 cats remain unneutered
 - Cats Protection recommends that cats should be neutered from four months of age, which is when they reach puberty and are capable of reproducing
- An estimated 170,000 cats are microchipped (60%), 100,000 (35%) are not microchipped. The remaining 5% of owners do not know if their cat is microchipped
- 90% of cat owners that have microchipped their cat say that their contact details are up to date

Health

- 83% of Northern Irish owners say that their cat has no diagnosed health conditions at all
 - The most commonly reported health condition is obesity (3%)
- 88% of owners have registered their cat with a vet
 - Approximately 35,000 cats remain unregistered with a vet
- 55% of cats go to the vet for a routine visit every year, but 42% only go when their owner feels they need to, or never go to the vet (4%)
 - Over 130,000 cats are potentially not getting access to routine health checks
- 27% of cat owners have experienced trouble accessing their vet in the last 12 months. This rises to 48% of those who have acquired a cat in the last 12 months
- 35% of all Northern Irish owners have insured their cat
 - The UK average is 46%
- 72% of owners say that their cat is up to date with their vaccinations, up from 65% in 2021
 - Up to around 80,000 cats are not fully protected against diseases that are preventable with vaccination

- Less than two thirds of owners are regularly protecting their cats against parasites such as fleas (61%) and worms (59%). This is higher than last year (56% for fleas and 55% for worms)
- 30% of owners identify their cat as overweight, 34% think their cat is an ideal weight and 32% worry that their cat is underweight. 4% say that they do not know
- Of those owners who have seen their cat experience fireworks (74%), 68% say that their cat is adversely affected by them, including hiding (23%) or trying to escape/run away (19%)

The role that cats play in our lives

- For the third consecutive year, companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress were collectively the top reasons for owning a cat in Northern Ireland (50%)
- 89% of owners spend time stroking their cat or sitting together every day
- 93% of owners consider their cat part of the family
- 86% of owners regularly talk to their cat
- 63% of owners say their cat gives them something to get up for in the morning
- 61% of owners talk about their cat a lot
- 59% of owners put their cat's needs above their own

Threats to the safety of cats

- 30% of Northern Irish cat owners said that their cat had been injured in the time that they had owned them
 - Just under a quarter (23%) of injuries were sustained during fights with other cats or other animals – 12% were with cats from another household
 - 5% of injuries were sustained due to a road traffic accident

Cost-of-living concerns

- 31% of all Northern Irish cat owners expressed significant concern over being able to afford bills and other living costs over the next 12 months due to price increases
- 6% of owners say that they have had to reduce spend on cat necessities such as cat food and litter to save money in the last 12 months
- 3% of owners have used a food bank or charity to help them feed their cat in the last 12 months
- For 26% of cat owners, cost was the biggest barrier to making vet visits as often as they would like
 - 13% worry that they wouldn't be able to afford a large vet bill right now

Cats Protection services

Rehoming cats – For those looking to adopt a cat or to have theirs rehomed.

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

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

www.cats.org.uk/neutering

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

www.cats.org.uk/education

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

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

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

www.cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen or 0800 024 9494

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

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



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

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