

# CATS Report

**Cats and Their Stats Northern Ireland 2024**

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## Methodology

For the fifth year, we have commissioned an external and independent agency, Basis Research, to conduct the research contained in the CATS Report Northern Ireland 2024.

An online survey was used to collect information among a nationally representative audience of adults over the age of 18 in Northern Ireland, allowing us to estimate the proportion of cat owners. We also conducted a more detailed survey among cat owners. This was carried out between 21 February 2024 and 12 April 2024. 'In the last 12 months' within the report refers to the time period March 2023 to March 2024 and unless otherwise stated, comparative data in this survey uses data from the CATS Report Northern Ireland 2023.

The research consisted of a UK nationally representative sample of 3,521 individuals and a boost of 7,001 cat owners, including regional boosts to ensure accurate representation in these areas. Overall, 10,522 people participated in the study, including 345 cat owners in Northern Ireland.

## Data presentation

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

- nationally representative online survey panel to determine the percentage of UK households who own a cat (n=3,521)
- data from the survey of cat owners on the number of cats owned by each household
- data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the number of households

Percentages throughout the report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to rounding, there will be instances in the report where percentage calculations do not total 100%. Other figures, such as the estimated numbers of cats in the population, are rounded to two significant figures. When calculating cat estimates, we have taken the total estimated cat population figure and multiplied it by the whole percentage, for example 10% of all cats are not registered with a vet, equating to 1.1 million 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 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 2024 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](mailto:stats@cats.org.uk)

## Welcome to the annual Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Report Northern Ireland<sup>©</sup> 2024

Welcome to CATS 2024, our fifth comprehensive survey about cats. This year also marks 75 years of Cats Protection in Northern Ireland.

Back in 2019, we were ambitious with our goal to carry out the largest annual survey of its kind. The survey represents views and attitudes from people across the UK, including those that look after or share their homes with cats and also those that don't. Over the past five years, our findings have answered some of the most important and pressing cat welfare questions. The CATS Report has become an integral pillar of information for Cats Protection, as we lead the way for cat welfare and help people see the world through cats' eyes.

The CATS Report allows us to identify trends over time and helps us understand what impacts the lives of cats across the country. The identification of trends and changes supports immediate action to be taken if necessary and, just as importantly, informs longer-term strategic planning.

This year's CATS Report has highlighted the need to engage our youngest group of cat owners, who will be carrying the torch for cat welfare into the future. We have also documented a clear trend towards pedigree cat ownership, which may present challenges to the veterinary and animal welfare sectors. As ever, we are keen to work with owners, breeders and veterinary professionals in meeting these challenges, to improve the welfare of cats across Northern Ireland.

There are still many unknowns about what lies ahead for cats, but our report repeatedly tells us loud and clear that cats remain loved and valued by society. As a charity, we must do all we can to preserve the bond we have with our cats, and ensure that cats are protected, cared for and understood by everyone.



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



**Celebrating  
 75 years in  
 Northern Ireland**



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# Key findings

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## State of the nation

- There are around 250,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland, a slight increase from 230,000 in 2023
- Northern Irish cat owners are more likely to be younger on average than the general Northern Irish population
- Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to be female, with far fewer male cat owners than in the UK as a whole

## The cat market

- Fewer cats in Northern Ireland were acquired in the last 12 months compared to the UK. This may lead to a fall in the overall cat population in Northern Ireland if cats aren't being replaced
- Northern Ireland differs from the other devolved nations and the UK as a whole, with more cats more likely to be taken in or taken on than bought
- The increasing popularity of pedigree cats across the UK as a whole and other devolved nations is not as evident in Northern Ireland, with moggies still outnumbering pedigree cats

## Veterinary care

- 54% of Northern Irish owners say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like to
- Microchipping numbers have fallen in Northern Ireland, leaving around 90,000 cats potentially without a microchip
- Northern Ireland has the highest number of neutered cats of all the devolved nations and is higher than the UK average

## Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Significantly fewer people in Northern Ireland do research before getting a cat compared to the UK as a whole
- Northern Irish owners still turn to their vet first as a primary source of information about cats
- Younger people show a particular preference for social media as a source of advice

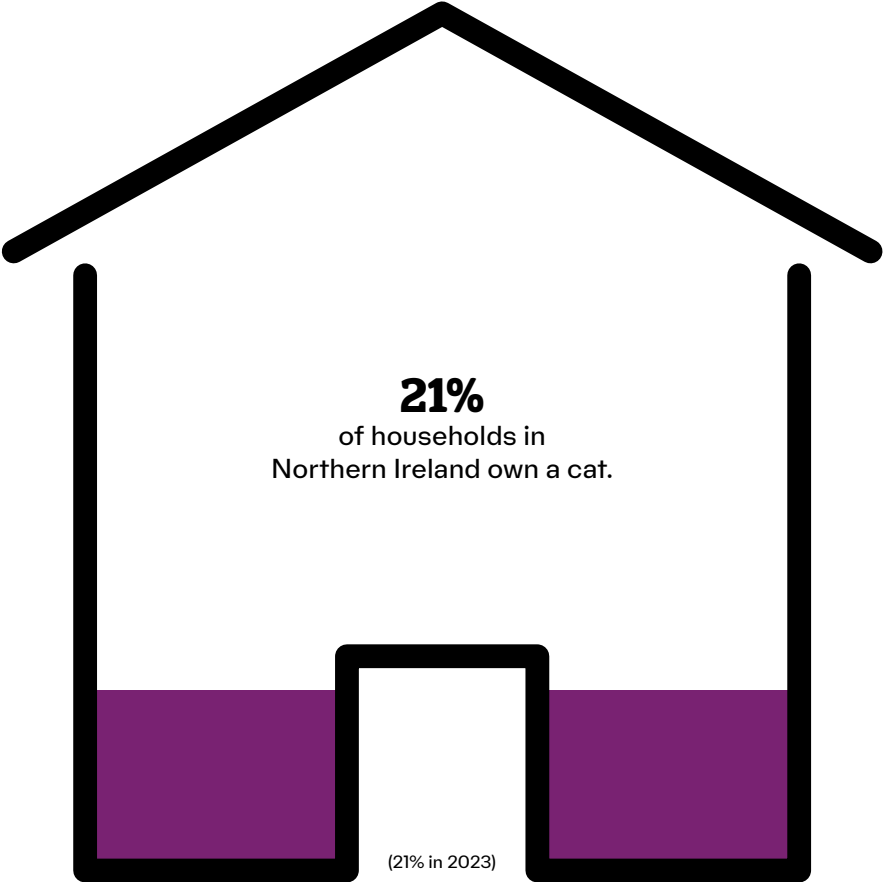
## Companionship and challenges to ownership

- The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still a strong motivator for having a cat in Northern Ireland
- The majority of Northern Irish owners spend time with their cat at least once daily
- The cost of living continues to impact Northern Irish cat owners, with over a third significantly and negatively impacted

# State of the nation

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## Cat population<sup>1</sup>



There are around **250,000 owned cats** in Northern Ireland.

(230,000 in 2023)

The average number of cats per cat-owning household in Northern Ireland is 1.7 cats (1.5 in 2023). 56% of households have one cat, and 44% own two or more cats, making multi-cat households more common in Northern Ireland than the UK as a whole.

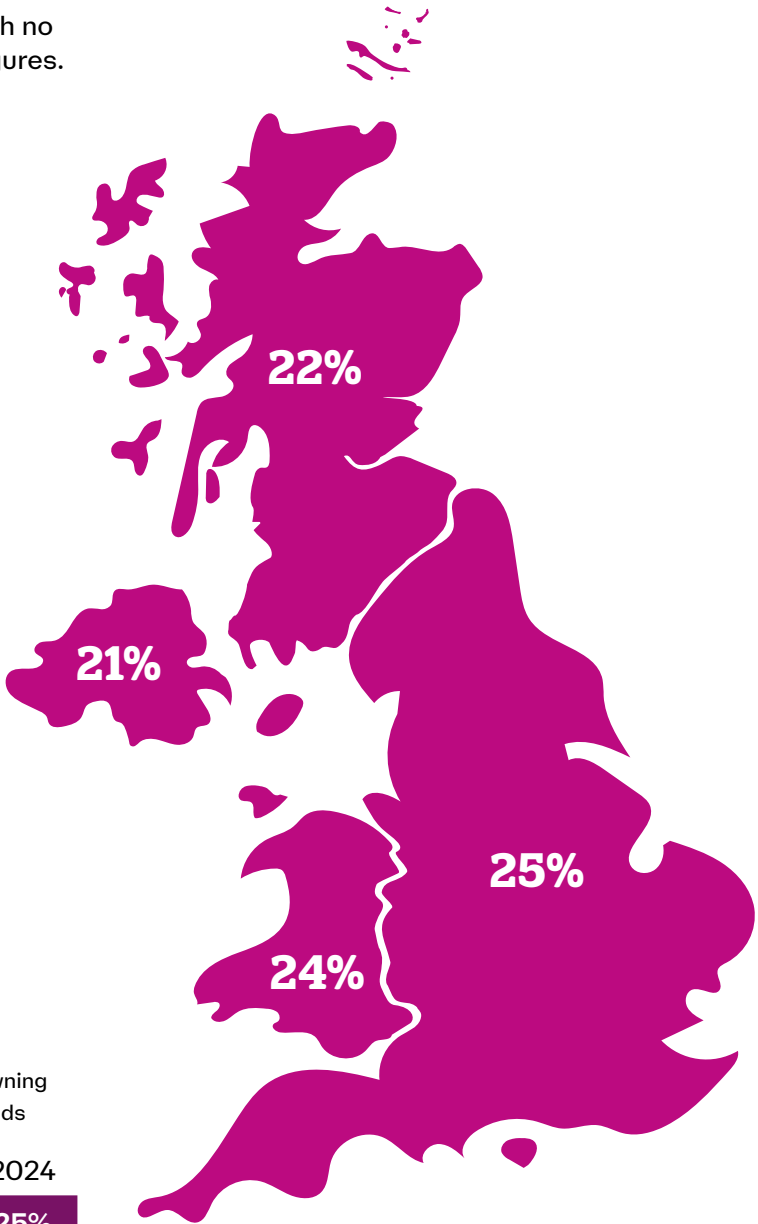
<sup>1</sup> Questions asked: Do you currently have a cat/s (that live with you)?/How many cats do you have in your household?

Example calculation: 25% own a cat in the UK x 28.1m UK households\* x 1.5 cats owned on average = 10.6 million cats owned across the UK.

\*Source: [ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds](https://ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds) England regional breakdowns only. Sample size too small for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland regions.

## Household cat ownership across the UK<sup>1</sup>

Cat ownership levels vary across the UK, ranging from 21% of households in Northern Ireland owning one or more cats, to 25% of households in England, with no statistically significant changes from last year's figures.

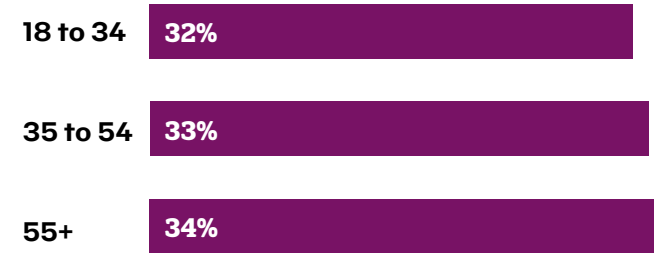


The proportions of the owned cat population remain largely the same across the UK.

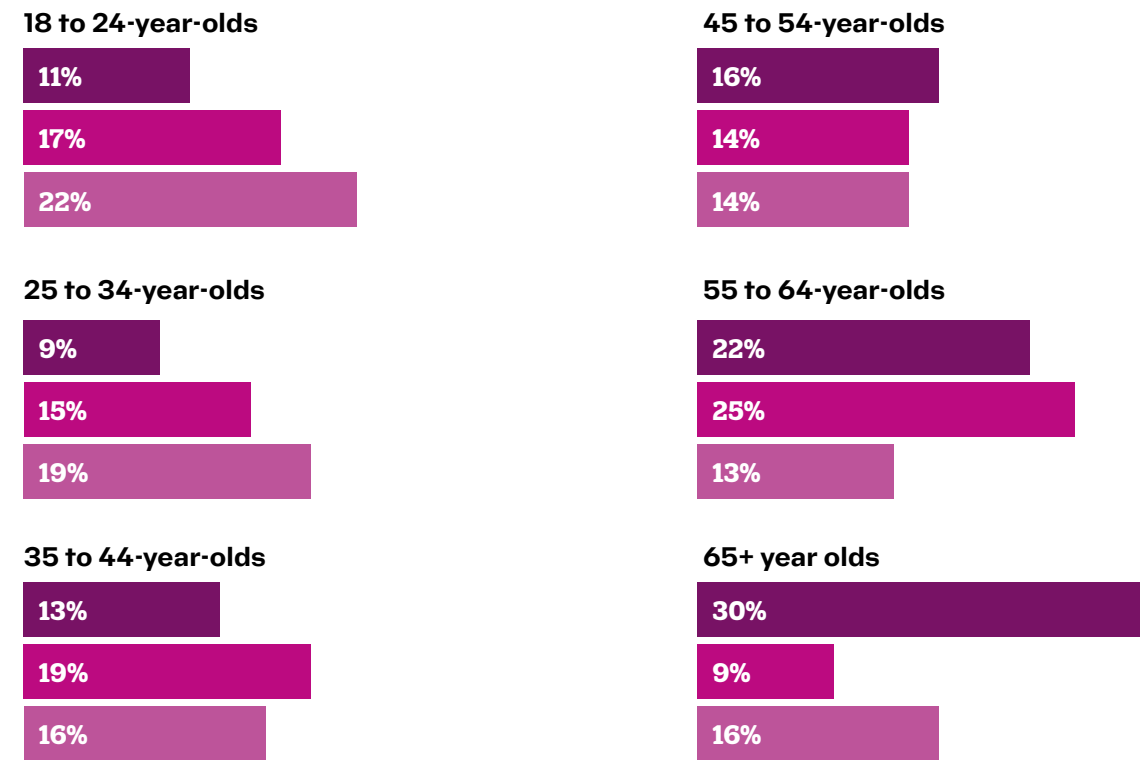
	In millions		% of cat-owning households	
	2023	2024	2023	2024
Total UK	11	10.6	26%	25%
England	9.2	9.0	26%	25%
Wales	0.6	0.5	29%	24%
Scotland	0.8	0.8	22%	22%
Northern Ireland	0.2	0.2	21%	21%

## Profile of cat owners<sup>2</sup>

### Age split of Northern Irish cat owners.



### Northern Irish cat owners tend to skew younger, compared to the general Northern Irish population.

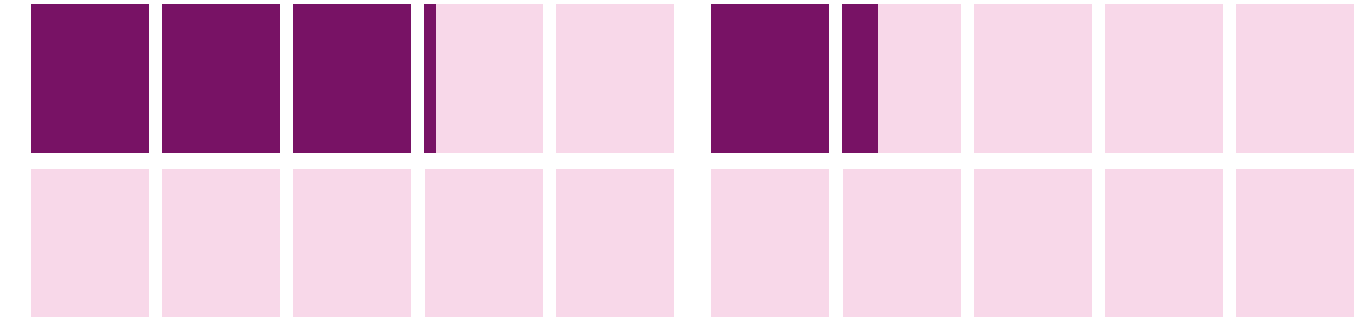


Those acquiring a cat in the last 12 months tend to be younger than the overall profile of Northern Irish cat owners, but less so than the UK as a whole and some other devolved nations.

<sup>2</sup> 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 (for example, buy/adopt) your cat?

Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to be female, with far fewer male cat owners than in the UK as a whole.

**31%** of females in Northern Ireland own a cat **13%** of males in Northern Ireland own a cat



(31% in 2023)

(12% in 2023)



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# The cat market

11% of the current Northern Irish cat population were acquired during the last 12 months, equating to around 27,500 cats<sup>3</sup>. This is lower than in the UK (15%), and may lead to a fall in the overall cat population in Northern Ireland if cats aren't being replaced.

Northern Ireland differs from the other devolved nations and the UK as a whole, with more cats more likely to be taken in or taken on than bought (data shown for all cats in current population)<sup>3</sup>.

#### Adopted from a rescue/rehoming centre/animal shelter in UK\*



#### Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family



#### Bought\*\*



#### Kitten of an already owned cat



<sup>3</sup> Questions asked: Where did you get/adopt your cat from?/When did you acquire (for example, buy/adopt) your cat? Excluding those who say they bought their cat but didn't pay anything.

\*Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family or found as a stray and taken in.

\*\*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.

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

**88,000 were bought**

**88,000 were taken on or taken in**

**60,000 were adopted from UK rescue/rehoming centres/animal shelters**

“Rehoming organisations and rescues have consistently remained one of the top sources of where Northern Irish owners get their cats. Currently, there is no legislation in place so anyone can set up their own rehoming organisation or sanctuary. Those who take animals into their care usually do so with the very best of intentions. But sometimes the standards of animal welfare in such settings can fall short, perhaps due to a lack of training, resources or equipment, or because of a desire to help more animals than the establishment can manage.

“We are calling on the government to introduce licensing of all animal welfare establishments in Northern Ireland, including rehoming centres, sanctuaries and pounds. Introducing a minimum set of standards will protect the welfare of animals that come into these organisations' care.”

**Madison Rogers, Head of Advocacy, Campaigns & Government Relations, Cats Protection**



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## 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 breed of cat that is produced through non-selective breeding and is neither a purebred, nor a cross-breed.

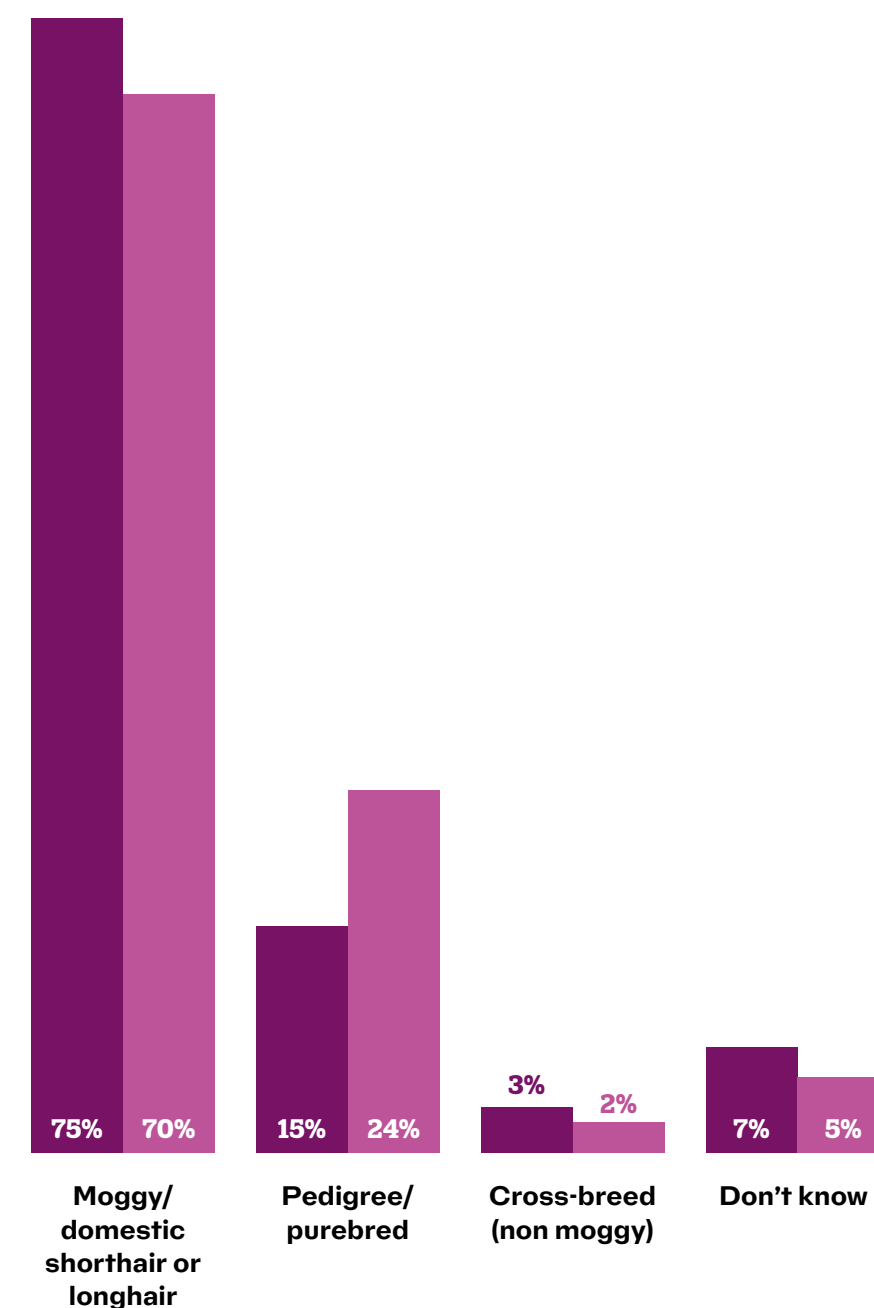
In this report, pedigree and purebred cats are included in the description of 'pedigree'.



## What type of cats do people have?

The increasing popularity of pedigree cats across the UK as a whole and other devolved nations is not as evident in Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup>.

■ Total pet cat population in Northern Ireland  
 ■ Cats acquired in the last 12 months in Northern Ireland



<sup>4</sup> Questions asked: What breed is your cat?/When did you acquire (for example, buy/adopt) your cat?



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# Veterinary care

## Veterinary capacity<sup>5</sup>

There is evidence of further easing of veterinary capacity issues in Northern Ireland.

**15% of Northern Irish owners state that they have experienced difficulty accessing a vet.**

(22% in 2023, 27% in 2022)

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

**vet has reduced opening hours**  
 **28%** (30% in 2023)

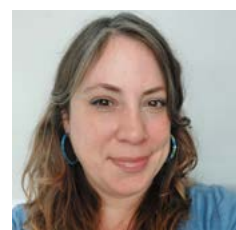
**vet too busy**  
 **20%** (42% in 2023)

**reduced service delaying booking of surgery**  
 **20%** (33% in 2023)

“The landscape for both veterinary and charity sectors is challenging at the moment, with capacity issues in the veterinary profession still relevant and the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis.

“Our work suggests that charities may be further disadvantaged by these difficulties compared to private clients, but the value the charity sector offers to improving animal welfare is still clear to vets. Cats Protection is exploring opportunities to support on some of these challenges and we aim to improve collaboration between sectors.”

**Dr Alison Richards MRCVS,  
 Head of Clinical Services,  
 Cats Protection**



<sup>5</sup> 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?

The Cats Protection Vet Capacity Report UK, published in 2023, found that<sup>7</sup>:

- of the 236 veterinary professionals surveyed, only 41% were able to meet demand and anticipated this to continue
- top reasons for difficulties meeting demand included:
  1. Staff shortages: 40% of respondents have, or have had, vacant posts unfilled by permanent or locum staff for over six months with vet surgeons being the most challenging role to fill.
  2. More pets registering.
  3. More pets needing treatment; 62% of respondents reported seeing more dogs, 53% reported seeing more cats and 27% reported seeing more pets in general.

• Issues reported as a result of reduced capacity:

**long waiting lists for routine appointments**

**45% of respondents**

**difficulty fitting in urgent or emergency work**

**45% of respondents**

**long waiting lists for elective surgeries**

**42% of respondents**

**difficulties registering new clients**

**42% of respondents**

## Vet registration<sup>7</sup>

**11% of Northern Irish cats are not registered with a vet.**

The proportion of cats in Northern Ireland who are registered with a vet is 89% (89% in 2023).

Some cats and their owners will be at a greater likelihood of requiring veterinary advice. For example, those with less experience or knowledge, or the cat’s lifestyle putting them at greater risk of injury (outdoor cats, for example). Every effort must be made to support access to veterinary care for these groups.

<sup>6</sup> The Cats Protection Vet Capacity Survey Fieldwork: Nov 2022 to Jan 2023. Sample: 236 UK vet professionals including veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses asking about their experiences in the prior 12 months.

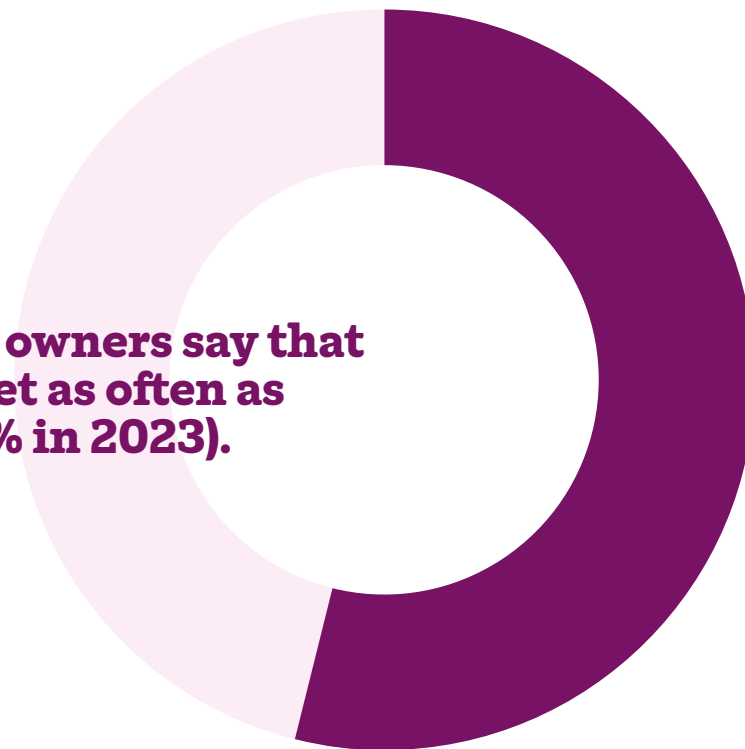
<sup>7</sup> Question asked: Is your cat registered with a vet?

## Vet visits<sup>8</sup>

**48% of Northern Irish cat owners take their cat to the vet routinely each year, the lowest of all the devolved nations and lower than the UK as a whole (62%)<sup>9</sup>.**

Regular vet visits are important to allow early recognition of disease and therefore early intervention. This risks not only affecting welfare, but also pushing up the cost of veterinary care when cats present with advanced disease or long-established health problems that could have been caught sooner.

**54% of Northern Irish owners say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like to (52% in 2023).**



Cost and stress are important reasons that stop Northern Irish cats visiting the vet as much as the owner would like.

### Too stressful for me/my cat\*



### The cost



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

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

\*Net of responses related to these themes.

Tackling the stress of vet visits, for both cat and owner, must remain a focus for veterinary practices and welfare organisations.

Almost half (47%) of Northern Irish owners say that they only visit the vet when their cat is injured or unwell, which relies on owners recognising signs of illness and pain. This can be notoriously difficult in cats<sup>10</sup>, who are also often perceived as being self-sufficient<sup>11</sup>. These factors combined may mean that some cats who require veterinary care do not receive it and is the reason why Cats Protection is working hard to provide resources and support to owners, to help them to see the world through their cat's eyes.

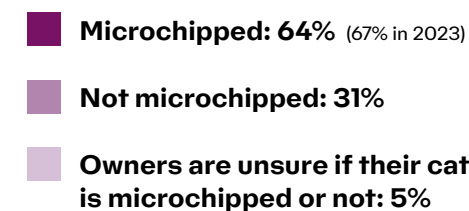
“While it’s great that more owners are taking their cat to the vet routinely, it’s disappointing to see that over half do not visit the practice as much as they’d like. Given recent high inflation and pressure on household incomes, it’s understandable that costs, including vet care, are a concern. However, deferring regular, preventative health check-ups with the vet could be storing up bigger health issues, which could cost more in the long run. We encourage all pet owners to speak to their vet if they have any concerns around cost. Vets will always prioritise the wellbeing of the pets in their care and find tailored treatment solutions that are right for both the animal and their owner.”

**Dr Anna Judson MRCVS,  
 British Veterinary Association President**

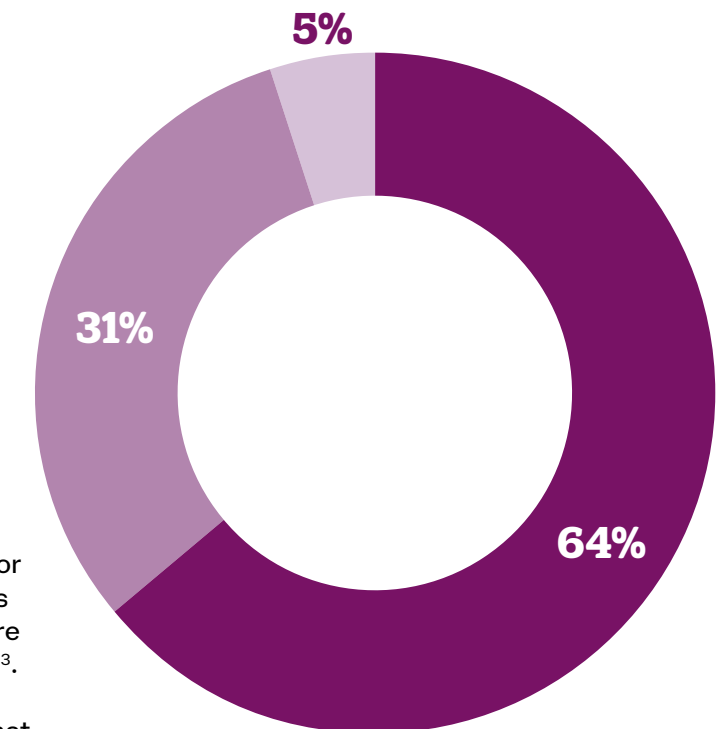


## Microchipping<sup>12</sup>

64% of cats are microchipped in Northern Ireland, less than the UK as a whole (75%).



New regulations regarding compulsory microchipping of cats have come into force in England in June 2024. Microchipping numbers for dogs rose from 75% to 92% in the first four years following similar legislative changes and signs are positive that we will see the same result for cats<sup>13</sup>. This will hopefully help encourage the devolved nations to adopt similar legislation, something that Cats Protection continues to campaign for.



<sup>10</sup> Gowan R, Iff I. Chronic pain and behaviour. In: Heath S (ed.) Feline behavioural health and welfare. St Louis: Elsevier, 2016, pp 184–212.

<sup>11</sup> 2021 AAHA/AAFP Feline Life Stage Guidelines - Jessica Quimby, Shannon Gowland, Hazel C Carney, Theresa DePorter, Paula Plummer, Jodi Westropp, 2021 (sagepub.com).

<sup>12</sup> Question asked: Is your cat microchipped?

<sup>13</sup> Microchipping your pet is the best New Year's resolution you could make - GOV.UK (gov.uk).

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“It’s disappointing to see the microchipping numbers fall this year and for the percentage of microchipped cats in Northern Ireland to remain well below the UK as a whole. Sadly, we see too many cats without a microchip. Microchips are the safest and quickest way to reunite a cat with their owner. Without one it makes it difficult for us to reunite a cat with their loving family. When an unchipped cat comes into our care it puts a burden on our team to try and find their owners, which takes up space in our pens for cats that need us the most.

“We have many success stories of reuniting owners with their beloved lost cats because they were microchipped, and the details on the chip were up to date. Cats Protection is calling on the Northern Irish Government to introduce compulsory microchipping of pet cats to help reunite missing cats with their owners.”

**Andrew Doherty, Northern Ireland  
Cat Centre Manager, Cats Protection**



Catherine Flanigan found out first-hand why microchipping is so important, after her three-year-old cat, Randall, went missing in March from their home in Moneyreagh, County Down.

She said: “We looked everywhere, put up posters, handed out flyers and put posts on local social media pages, all without success. Then one morning, three weeks later, we got a call from the Cats Protection centre in Belfast to say he’d been found, they had my details from his microchip.

“It turns out he was only about half a mile from home but obviously couldn’t find his way back. We’re pretty sure he had hopped into a delivery van outside our home, and that’s how he became lost. He’s done it before, we once got a call from a delivery driver to ask us if we had a cat, as he’d found one in his van. Sure enough, it was Randall. He’s a very nosy cat so I’m incredibly pleased I got him microchipped.

“It was only because of his microchip we got Randall back, and I’m over the moon to have him home.”

### The cats less likely to be microchipped

Around 90,000 Northern Irish cats are still potentially without a microchip, reducing their chances of being reunited with their owners, should they get lost or stolen.

Cat owners are choosing not to get their cat microchipped because they don’t appreciate the risks of their cat getting lost<sup>14</sup>.

#### My cat doesn’t go outside



#### My cat doesn’t stray/go far



Northern Irish owners perhaps don’t recognise that cats who don’t go outside or stray too far (and are therefore not used to unfamiliar places) would perhaps benefit most from having a microchip should they escape or get lost.

### Microchips and keeping details up to date<sup>15</sup>

## 87% of cats in Northern Ireland with a microchip have up-to-date details.

Of these:

**85%** of owners say their **phone contact is up to date**

**82%** of owners say their **current address is up to date**

**74%** of owners say their **email address is up to date**

**8%** of owners are **unsure which specific details are up to date**

For the Northern Irish cats with microchip details that are out of date, their microchip is potentially rendered useless, should they become separated from their family. To help owners and their cats receive the benefits of microchipping, it is important that microchipping databases play their part to proactively remind owners of the need to update their details, as required.

<sup>14</sup> Question asked: Which of the below best describes the reasons why your cat is not microchipped?

<sup>15</sup> Questions asked: Are your cat’s registered microchip details up to date?/Which of the following microchip details are up to date?



## Insurance<sup>16</sup>

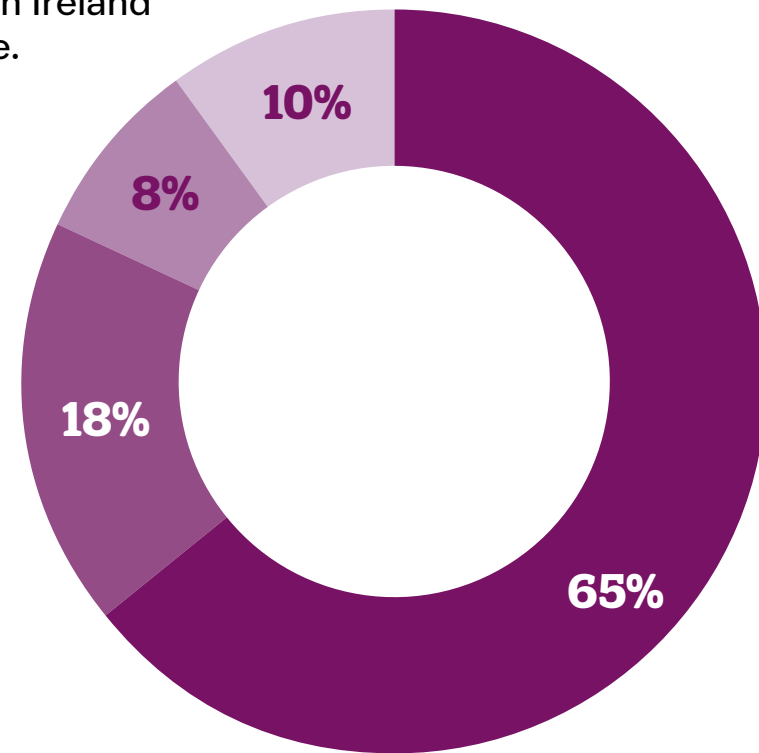
A lower proportion of cats in Northern Ireland are insured (38%), than the UK as a whole (50%).

Northern Ireland has the lowest insurance rate of all the devolved nations. The likelihood of a Northern Irish cat being insured drops as owner age increases (18 to 34: 45%, 35 to 54: 35%, 55+: 34%).

## Vaccinations<sup>17</sup>

Vaccination numbers in Northern Ireland are lower than the UK as a whole.

- **Up to date: 65%** (67% in 2023, UK: 75%)
- **Has had some, but not up to date: 18%**
- **Has had no vaccinations: 8%**
- **Don't know: 10%**



This means that many Northern Irish cats are likely unprotected against completely preventable diseases. Vaccination numbers are lower for Northern Irish cats whose owners are in socio-economic group C2DE (less affluent, 55%) and live in rented accommodation (57%).

## Parasite treatments<sup>18</sup>

60% of Northern Irish owners protect their cat against fleas and 57% protect against worms throughout the year as advised. This is slightly lower than the UK as a whole (UK: 64% and 62%).

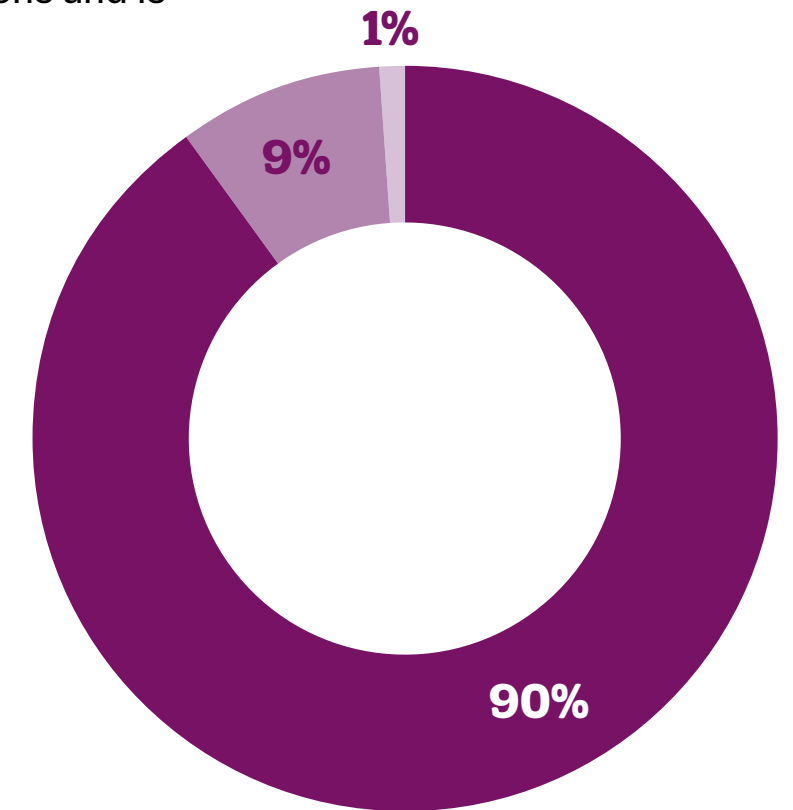
An individual cat's risk of becoming infected with parasites is strongly linked to their lifestyle, including whether they go outdoors and their diet. Parasite treatment recommendations should therefore be evaluated on a risk-benefit basis, and vets should educate owners about the best treatment protocol.

<sup>16</sup> Question asked: Do you have pet insurance for your cat?  
<sup>17</sup> Question asked: Is your cat up to date with their vaccinations (for example, has had their booster vaccinations as relevant to their age)?  
<sup>18</sup> 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?

## Neutering and breeding<sup>19</sup>

Northern Ireland has the highest neutering number of all the devolved nations and is higher than the UK average.

- **90% are neutered** (83% in 2023, UK: 85%)
- **9% are not neutered**
- **1%; the owner does not know**



Younger cat owners aged 18 to 34 are less likely to have neutered their cat (84%), compared to 87% of 35 to 54-year-olds and 97% of those aged over 55.

“Cats Protection is still seeing large numbers of cats on waiting lists for rehoming services up and down the country and significant numbers of unowned cats living on the streets in localised areas. We must consider how best to direct resources to help and reduce the number of unwanted cats, aiming for a ‘balanced’ cat population.

“As part of this, it is important for Cats Protection to understand variation across communities in terms of cat health and welfare priorities, the people they live alongside and the wider environment. That way, resources can be directed towards interventions that are bespoke and targeted, to generate the most benefit for cats. In doing so we will also be in a better position to explore a neutering offer that reaches those cats that are most in need.”

**Dr Jenni McDonald, Feline Epidemiologist, Cats Protection**

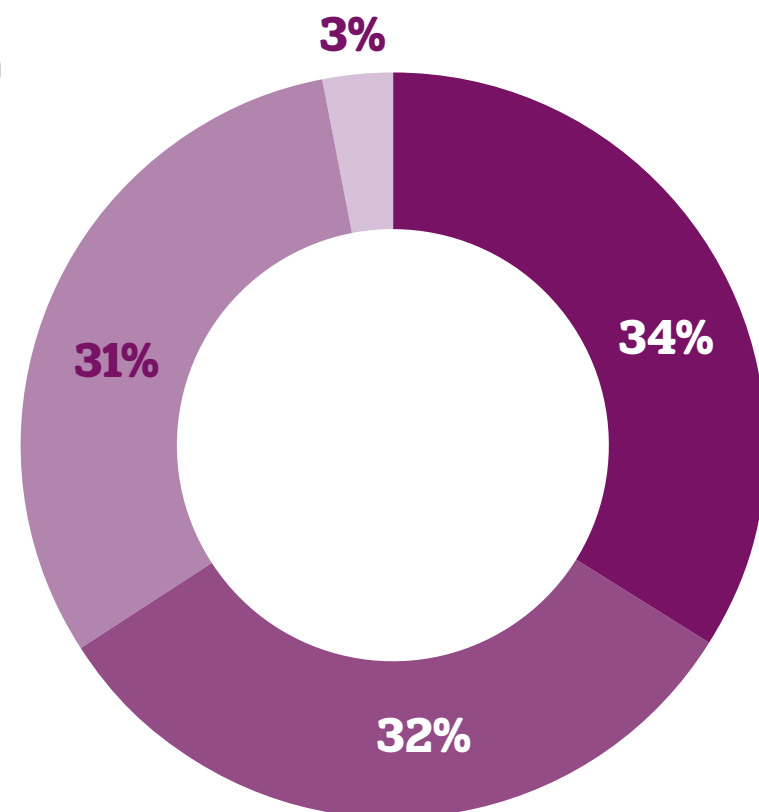


<sup>19</sup> Question asked: Is your cat neutered/spayed?

## Diet and body weight<sup>20</sup>

Northern Irish owner perception of their cat's weight.

- Overweight: 34%**
- Ideal weight: 32%**
- Underweight: 31%**
- Don't know: 3%**



3% of Northern Irish owners feel their cat is very overweight, placing their cat in the very highest body condition scores (8/9 and 9/9).

Veterinary professionals generally believe that the prevalence of obesity in the pet population has increased over the last five years, predicting as many as 44% of cats in the UK are overweight or obese<sup>21</sup> What is clear is that support for all groups to understand how to accurately assess the body condition of the nation's cats, as well as evidence-based advice on how to best manage a cat's weight, would be beneficial.

For example, the two factors found to be independently associated with an increased risk of cat obesity (at around one year of age) were cats with restricted/no outdoor access, and cats fed dry food as the only or major (greater than 50%) type of food in their diet<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Question asked: Which of the following descriptions and images would you say best reflects your cat in relation to their size?

<sup>21</sup> Pet Obesity Report 2019 | UK Pet Food

<sup>22</sup> Rowe E, Browne W, Casey R, Gruffydd-Jones T, Murray J. Risk factors identified for owner-reported feline obesity at around one year of age: Dry diet and indoor lifestyle. Preventive veterinary medicine. 2015 Oct 1;121(3-4):273-81.



## Health conditions and injury<sup>23</sup>

81% of Northern Irish cat owners state that their cat has no diagnosed health conditions (81% in 2023).

### Top four most common health conditions in Northern Irish cats.

Lower urinary tract disease

**3%**

Overgrooming

**3%**

Obesity

**2%**

Dental disease

**2%**

It must be noted that this is owner-reported data, following diagnosis of a health condition. Vet-reported figures for some of the conditions listed, such as dental disease, are often much higher than owners report. This could be indicative of owners struggling to recognise that their cat may be unwell or in need of veterinary care. Once again, the importance of owner education about how to spot signs of disease in cats and regular vet visits is highlighted, to identify health conditions before they become severe.

28% of Northern Irish owners said that their cat had been injured since they have owned them<sup>24</sup>. The most common reason for injury is fights with other animals, particularly cats from outside the household<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Question asked: Does your cat have any of the following diagnosed health issues/conditions?

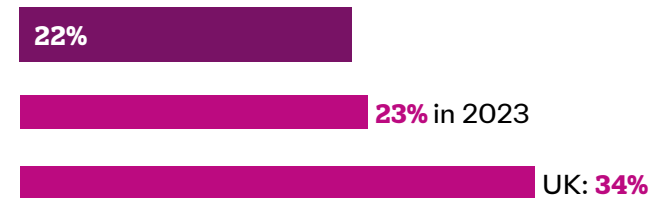
<sup>24</sup> Question asked: Since having your cat, has your cat ever been injured?

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# Cat care, welfare and behaviour

## Sources of cat care information

Significantly fewer people in Northern Ireland do research before getting a cat compared to the UK as a whole<sup>25</sup>



This may be related to the fact that fewer cats are bought in Northern Ireland, and more are taken in.

Overall, Northern Irish owners still turn to their vet first as a primary source of information about cats<sup>26</sup>.

### Contact my vet



### Search the internet/Google



### Talk to my friends and family

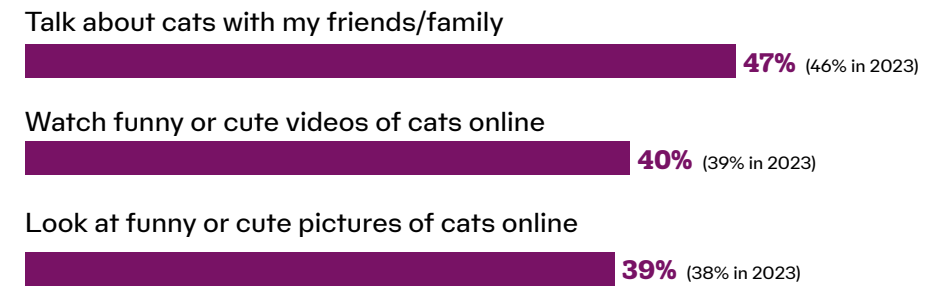


Online resources are becoming increasingly common as the first place that Northern Irish owners turn to for advice, with younger people showing a stronger preference for social media (18 to 34: 37%).

<sup>25</sup> Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statement (I did lots of research before getting my cats)?

<sup>26</sup> Question asked: Which of the following would you do if you were seeking information or advice about your cat/s?

Top three cat-related activities that Northern Irish owners engage in several times a week or more<sup>27</sup>.

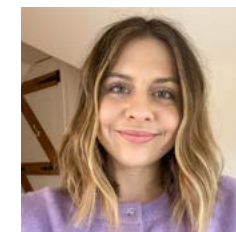


Cats continue to increasingly be enjoyed by cat owners online, particularly cute or funny content. Over three quarters (77%) of Northern Irish owners say that they look at funny or cute pictures or videos of cats online at least once a month<sup>28</sup>.

Overall, Facebook and YouTube remain popular sources of ‘fun’ cat-related content (Facebook: 38%, YouTube: 36%). As TikTok continues its general rise in popularity, it is the most popular source of fun cat content for Northern Irish owners aged 18 to 24 (71%)<sup>29</sup>.

“Ensuring good quality and accessible content for younger owners is essential, and Cats Protection is dedicated to continually growing its presence online, particularly on TikTok. This includes a continued focus on ensuring appropriate representation of cats online and keeping a careful eye on the welfare concerns associated with certain breeds/types of cat.”

Faye Shellard, Social Media Manager, Cats Protection



<sup>27</sup> Question asked: How often do you tend to do each of the following? Top two response boxes included (at least once a day, several times a week).

<sup>28</sup> Question asked: How often do you tend to do each of the following?

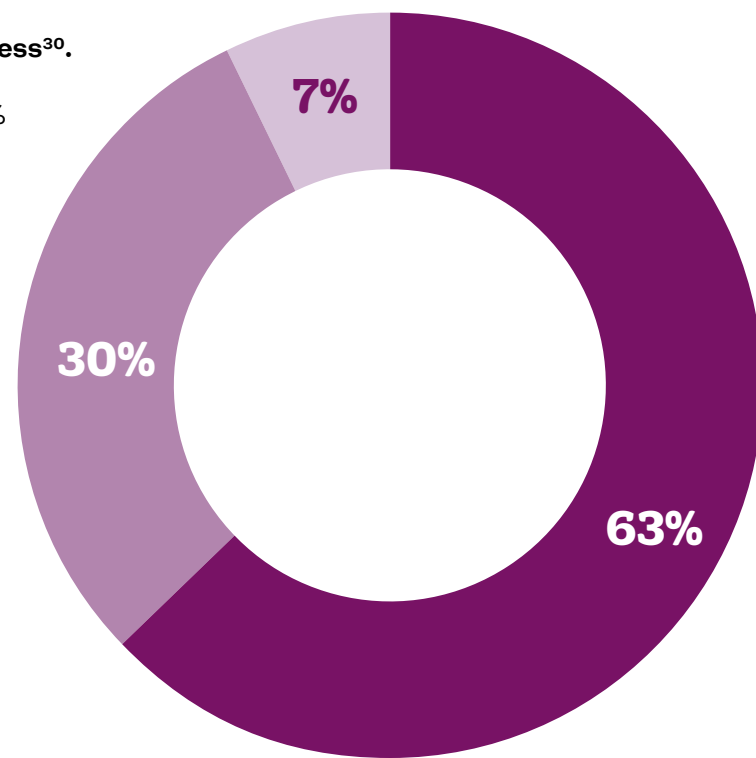
<sup>29</sup> Question asked: Which of the following would you do if you were seeking information or advice about your cat/s?

## A cat's environment

### Indoor versus outdoor cats

**Most Northern Irish cats have outdoor access<sup>30</sup>.**

- They go both indoors and outdoors: 63%  
(62% in 2023)
- They always stay indoors: 30%  
(31% in 2023)  
– 36% for the UK as a whole
- They always stay outdoors: 7%  
(7% in 2023)



For the first time, this year owners who choose to keep their cat indoors were asked why. For Northern Irish owners, anxieties about injury and loss were the top reasons. As loved pets, while this worry is understandable, Cats Protection is concerned that cats kept exclusively indoors may not always experience the best welfare, particularly within a multi-cat household. Most cats would benefit from being allowed outside, as it enables them to get the mental stimulation and physical exercise that they need to stay healthy.

For owners that do choose to keep their cat indoors, it is essential that they go to extra efforts to provide what their cat needs. This includes the right diet and enough physical exercise to prevent obesity and its related health conditions and including toys and puzzle feeders into their daily routine to satisfy their instinctive behavioural needs.

As a charity, we are passionate about providing owners of indoor cats with information and support to ensure their cats' needs are met.

<sup>30</sup> Question asked: Which of the following best applies to your cat? Only responses over 15% shown.

## Preventing harm to cats

**28% of Northern Irish cats have been injured since being in their owner's care<sup>24</sup>.**

**Cat fights remain the most common cause of injury: 13%<sup>24</sup>.**

The high number of cat fight injuries indicates that owner education is needed on how cats interact and how to help avoid conflict. This is especially the case for the 2% of Northern Irish cats that were injured by a cat that they live with. Cats Protection is keen to build on current support for owners in tackling this issue.

"Cats are a territorial species, and it is important that owners of multiple cats put measures into place to prevent conflict. This includes a structured introduction process, appropriate placement and number of essential items around the home, and plenty of opportunities to hide and escape from each other.

"If cats are fighting in a household, Cats Protection recommends ruling out medical causes for the behaviour and to treat any injuries, before separating the cats and seeking help from a qualified behaviourist from the Animal Behaviour and Training Council. For cats fighting outside of the home, arranging a schedule with neighbouring cat owners so each cat is out at different times can be beneficial. Neutering and keeping cats inside during dusk and dawn can also be helpful to prevent cat fights."

**Sammie Ravenscroft, Regional Behaviour Officer for Northern Ireland, Cats Protection**



**Awareness of lily toxicity among Northern Irish cat owners has improved but 49% are still not aware of the risks (57% in 2023)<sup>31</sup>.**

Lily toxicity occurs when a cat eats any part of the lily plant, including pollen that ends up on their coat and the cat licks off while grooming. The toxins can cause kidney failure and, in some cases, prove fatal. Ideally owners should totally restrict their cat's access to lilies but if lily toxicity should occur, prompt veterinary care should be sought, as rapid treatment can prevent renal failure. To help increase awareness about the risks of these popular flowers, Cats Protection met with over 40 retailers of cut flowers through the British Retail Consortium to ask them to improve their labelling of lilies.

<sup>31</sup> Question asked: Which of the following popular cut flowers, if any, are you aware of being toxic to cats?

## Behaviour and stress<sup>32</sup>

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

**Runs away from people in the house**



**Shows fear towards noise**



**Hides around the house for long periods of time**



**Not get on/fight with my other cats**



**Screams/screeches**



**69% of Northern Irish cats have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months (UK: 64%).**

Behaviour can be a complicated thing to analyse in cats, with a large degree of crossover between signs of some medical conditions, 'normal' behaviours, and those that indicate that a cat is stressed. Aggression and overt fear responses are more easily recognised, but typically only seen when cats are very stressed, with more subtle signs missed or dismissed by owners. Sometimes, 'normal' cat behaviours are deemed problematic by their owners. This risks owners focusing on the wrong behaviours as concerning, which has knock-on effects for that cat's welfare.

Increased understanding of cat behaviour is important for a cat's wellbeing and maintaining the cat-owner bond. This is why Cats Protection maintains a strong focus on owner education in this area.

"Stress, particularly chronic stress, is a significant welfare issue for cats, and one that is easily overlooked, as cats are unfortunately so good at hiding it. Our report shows that stress in cats not only affects the cats themselves, but also their caregivers. The good news is there are plenty of ways to reduce stress in cats. The key thing is knowing where to get expert support and advice, which is why Cats Protection recommends seeking help from a qualified behaviourist from the Animal Behaviour and Training Council once medical reasons for the behaviour have been ruled out."

**Nicky Trevorrow, Behaviour Manager, Cats Protection**



<sup>32</sup> 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?

## Fireworks<sup>38</sup>

Fireworks can be really distressing for all animals, including cats. 63% of Northern Irish cat owners that have witnessed their cat during fireworks say that their cat has been affected by them.

"The distress caused by fireworks to wildlife, our pets and people has been recognised by the Northern Irish Government who have taken steps to minimise the effects of fireworks by introducing a licensing system. They also provide welcomed safety tips which include keeping pets indoors and mention the availability of low-noise fireworks.

"However, regulations could go further to help manage the unpredictability of fireworks. Scotland is leading the way by introducing fireworks regulations that will restrict the times and days the public can use fireworks and have introduced powers that allow local authorities to designate firework control zones. Cats Protection would like to see the Northern Irish Government restrict the unplanned use of fireworks and reduce the maximum noise levels of fireworks. This would help owners anticipate displays and take appropriate action, and ease the stress of all animals, including cats."

**Alice Palombo, Advocacy & Government Relations Officer for Northern Ireland, Cats Protection**



<sup>38</sup> 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.



# Companionship and challenges to ownership

## Why we have cats

The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still a strong motivator for having a cat<sup>34</sup>.

### As company for me/my family:

**36%** (38% in 2023)

### I've always had cats

**33%** (35% in 2023)

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

**27%** (22% in 2023)

### They needed looking after/to be taken in

**26%** (26% in 2023)

### To help me feel less lonely

**21%** (26% in 2023)

### To help me feel less stressed/anxious

**19%** (27% in 2023)

Once again, companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are collectively the top reasons that Northern Irish people choose to own a cat (49%. 55% in 2023). That said, choosing to own a cat to help alleviate stress or loneliness seems to have dropped.

Northern Irish cat owners are more likely to have a cat to help keep on top of mice/rodents (13%), compared to the UK as a whole (6%), perhaps a reflection of a more rural population.

<sup>34</sup> Question asked: What are the main reasons you have a cat/s? Multiple answers allowed. Only responses over 10% shown.

Northern Irish owners form deep connections with their cat<sup>35</sup>.

### I often talk to my cat

**73%**

### Having a cat brings me joy

**71%**

### I hate leaving my cat when I go away

**55%**

### I love spoiling my cat

**45%**

### I talk about my cat a lot

**44%**

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

**40%**

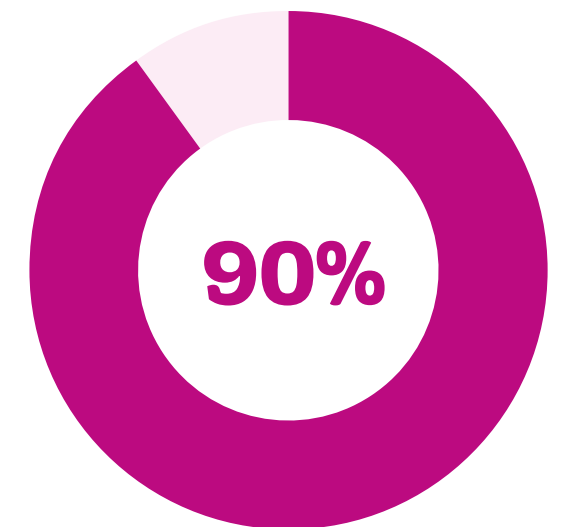
### I think about my cat a lot when I'm not with them

**37%**

### I put my cat's needs before my own

**32%**

90% of Northern Irish cat owners agreed that they consider their cat part of the family, clearly demonstrating the important position that cats hold within their households<sup>35</sup>.



The majority of Northern Irish owners spend time with their cat at least once daily<sup>36</sup>.

### Sitting with/stroking my cat

**92%**

### Actively play together daily

**61%**

<sup>35</sup> Question asked: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements about having a cat/s?

<sup>36</sup> Question asked: In an average week, how often do you do each of the following with your cat?

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36% of Northern Irish cat owners also have children living in the household, with the majority of these children being under 10 years old<sup>37</sup>.

The benefits of cat ownership are well documented in children, particularly young children, including increased confidence and improved social-emotional development<sup>38</sup>.

**“I think cats are great, my cat is very intelligent and affectionate.”**

Female, 55 to 64, Northern Ireland



<sup>37</sup> Questions asked: Do you have any children?/How old are your children?  
<sup>38</sup> Christian H, Mitrou F, Cunneen R, Zubrick SR. Pets are associated with fewer peer problems and emotional symptoms, and better prosocial behavior: Findings from the longitudinal study of Australian children. The Journal of Pediatrics. 2020 May 1:220:200-6.

## Paws to Listen: Where grief finds understanding

In recognition of the importance of cats to their owners, Cats Protection provides a range of services that aim to support owners, especially when they are at their most vulnerable. One example is Paws to Listen grief support. It was established for owners facing one of the most challenging aspects of cat ownership, losing their cat. This free, confidential service puts grieving owners in contact with trained volunteer listeners who are ready to offer emotional support and practical information when their cat passes away or goes missing.

“We know that the bond between people and their cats can be an incredibly strong one, and that the loss of a cat can be devastating. So much so that for some, fear of experiencing this intense grief again in the future can be a barrier to having another cat in their lives. Our Paws to Listen grief support service offers a sympathetic ear to those experiencing the loss of their cat, to help them navigate this difficult time.”

**Catherine Joyce, Paws to Listen Team Leader, Cats Protection**




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**Find out more about Paws to Listen at [cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen](https://cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen)**

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## The impact of cost of living on cat owners

The impact of cost-of-living increases has not eased, with 34% of Northern Irish owners saying that they have been significantly and negatively impacted by the rise in living costs<sup>39</sup>. 19% of Northern Irish cat owners are very concerned about being able to pay bills and other living costs over the next 12 months (UK: 20%).

This concern translates across to care for cats too, with 16% of Northern Irish owners seriously worried about how they will meet their cat's needs in the future<sup>40</sup>. 8% say that they have already had to reduce their spending on necessities such as cat food and litter and 4% have had to rely on food banks to feed their cat<sup>41</sup>. Almost a third of Northern Irish owners (30%) have doubts about how they would pay vet bills if their cat became sick or injured<sup>40</sup>.

**In 2023, across the UK, 1,700 cats were given up to Cats Protection for financial reasons, representing 6% of all cats given up.**

Cost concerns are also preventing many cats from entering loving homes in the first place. Across the UK, 16% of people who would like to share their lives with a cat, say they can't right now because of affordability<sup>42</sup>.

“Unfortunately, we see again that the cost-of-living-crisis continues to affect cat owners. Costs present a huge issue for cat welfare with owners having to make difficult decisions about giving up their beloved pet or how to feed their cat. Our centre and volunteer teams in Northern Ireland proudly work with community partners to provide donated food for cats in need.”

Jules La Roche, Operations Manager, Northern Ireland, Cats Protection

<sup>39</sup> Question asked: To what extent have your household finances been negatively impacted by the rising cost of living since January 2022?

<sup>40</sup> Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

<sup>41</sup> Question asked: And thinking about the last 12 months, which of the below, if any, apply to you?

<sup>42</sup> Question asked: You said that you were planning to buy/adopt a cat soon; why have you not done so before?

# Cats in summary

## State of the nation

- Cat ownership:

	In millions		% of cat-owning households	
	2023	2024	2023	2024
Total UK	11.0	10.6	26%	25%
England	9.2	9.0	26%	25%
Wales	0.6	0.5	29%	24%
Scotland	0.8	0.8	22%	22%
Northern Ireland	0.2	0.2	21%	21%

- 21% of households in Northern Ireland own a cat (21% in 2023)
- There are around 250,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland (230,000 in 2023)
- The average number of cats per cat-owning household in Northern Ireland is 1.7 cats (1.5 in 2023). 56% of households have one cat, and 44% own two or more cats, making multi-cat households more common in Northern Ireland than the UK as a whole

## The cat market

- 11% of the current Northern Irish cat population were acquired during the last 12 months, equating to around 27,500 cats. This is lower than in the UK (15%), and may lead to a fall in the overall cat population in Northern Ireland if cats aren't being replaced
- Northern Ireland differs from the other devolved nations and the UK as a whole, with more cats more likely to be taken in or taken on than bought (data shown for all cats in current population)

	Cat was acquired...			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
Adopted	20%	20%	21%	24%
Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family	17%	21%	23%	21%
Bought	19%	14%	18%	15%

- The increasing popularity of pedigree cats across the UK as a whole and other devolved nations is not as evident in Northern Ireland

	Cats acquired in the last year	Total pet cat population
Moggy/domestic shorthair or longhair	70%	75%
Pedigree/purebred	24%	15%

## Veterinary care

- There is evidence of easing of veterinary capacity issues in Northern Ireland
- 15% of Northern Irish owners state that they have experienced difficulty accessing a vet (22% in 2023)
- 11% of Northern Irish cats are not registered with a vet
- 48% of Northern Irish cat owners take their cat to the vet routinely each year, the lowest of all the devolved nations and lower than the UK as a whole (62%)
- 54% of Northern Irish owners say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like to (52% in 2023)
- 64% of cats are microchipped in Northern Ireland (67% in 2023), than the UK as a whole (75%). Around 90,000 cats are still potentially without a microchip
- A lower proportion of cats in Northern Ireland are insured (38%), than the UK as a whole (50%)
- Vaccination numbers in Northern Ireland are lower than the UK as a whole. Up to date: 65% (67% in 2023, UK: 75%)
- 60% of Northern Irish owners protect their cat against fleas and 57% protect against worms throughout the year as advised. This is slightly lower than the UK as a whole (UK: 64% and 62%)
- Northern Ireland has the highest number of neutered cats of all the devolved nations, higher than the UK average. 90% of cats are neutered (83% in 2023). 9% are not neutered

## Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Significantly fewer people in Northern Ireland do research before getting a cat compared to the UK as a whole: 22% (UK: 34%)
- Most cats have outdoor access; 63% go both indoors and outdoors, 30% always stay indoors (36%: UK)
- 69% of cats have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months (UK: 64%)

## Companionship and challenges to ownerships

- The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still the main driving force behind having a cat:
  - companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are collectively the top reasons that people choose to own a cat (49%)
- 90% of Northern Irish cat owners agreed that they consider their cat part of the family, which clearly demonstrates the important position that cats hold within their households

## Cost of living

- The impact of cost-of-living increases has not eased, with 34% of Northern Irish owners saying that they have been significantly and negatively impacted by the rise in living costs
- Almost a third of Northern Irish owners (30%) have doubts about how they would pay vet bills if their cat became sick or injured
- 16% of owners seriously worried about how they will meet their cat's needs in the future

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# Where do we go from here?

## A message from John May, Chief Executive, Cats Protection

In its fifth year, the CATS Report continues to shine a light on the changes we are seeing for cats, providing vital insight for the animal welfare sector, the veterinary profession and government.

Undoubtedly, one of the biggest shifts we are seeing is a new generation of cat owners coming through, who are drastically changing the feline landscape. This younger generation of cat owners care greatly for their beloved companions, spending more time searching for advice about how to best look after their cat and ensuring they have insurance.

Adoption remains one of the most popular ways owners are getting their cats. This provides us with an important interaction point with cat owners, helping to educate and support, particularly those new to cat ownership.

Cats Protection does everything we can to prepare cats in our care for a new start in life. This includes veterinary treatment, neutering and microchipping. This should be the minimum standard for all cats who are taken in by a rescue organisation. However, as there are no specific regulations for animal welfare establishments, this is not always the case.

This is a vital time to consider how the animal welfare sector communicates with this new generation of cat owner. If we get it wrong at this crucial moment, the sector's expertise risks being drowned out by other, potentially less reliable, sources.

This is why Cats Protection is focussing efforts on reviewing our communication channels, ensuring the right information for cat welfare is available and accessible. We are also calling on the veterinary profession to stand up for cats, to make welfare a priority, and to support cat owners, particularly those new to cat ownership, in making the right decisions for cats.

The government also has a key role in addressing these challenges. Cats Protection welcomes the government considering regulation of animal sanctuaries, rehoming charities and dog pounds in Northern Ireland. We will continue to focus efforts on highlighting these challenges with government and hope to see swift action to make a better life for cats, because life is better with cats.

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




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# Services

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**General advice and rehoming cats.** A helpline for those with any questions regarding their own cats, or cats in general, and for those looking to adopt a cat or to have theirs rehomed.

[cats.org.uk/contact-us](https://cats.org.uk/contact-us) or **03000 12 12 12**

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

[cats.org.uk/neutering](https://cats.org.uk/neutering)

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

[cats.org.uk/education](https://cats.org.uk/education)

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**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.

[cats.org.uk/catguardians](https://cats.org.uk/catguardians) or **01825 741 291**

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**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.

[cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen](https://cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen) or **0800 024 9494**

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

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For further information contact [stats@cats.org.uk](mailto:stats@cats.org.uk) or visit [cats.org.uk/stats](https://cats.org.uk/stats)

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

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