

Editorial Board

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Kate is a Senior Clinical Fellow in Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging for the University of Bristol/Langford Veterinary Services.

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Iain is an RCVS recognised Advanced Veterinary Practitioner in Zoological Medicine. He runs his own practice at Newmarket Vets4Pets.

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Sam Woods BSc (Hons) MA VetMB CertSAS Dipl.ECVS MRCVS

Sam is a European and RCVS Registered Specialist in Small Animal Surgery and is currently a Senior Lecturer in Small Animal Surgery (Soft Tissue and Orthopaedics) at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh.

Ian Wright BVMS BSc MSc MRCVS

Ian has a Master's degree in Veterinary Parasitology and is a member of the European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP UK and Ireland).

Pet ownership trends during lockdown

Over the past year there have been positives and negatives arising from the behaviour changes necessitated by the lockdown and restrictions on our daily lives. One such factor is the rapid increase in pet ownership.

It is common knowledge that many people across the UK found lockdown the perfect opportunity to bring a new pet into their home. There was an exponential rise in the number of pets being bought and rescued, likely a result of the widely renowned mental and physical welfare benefits of pet ownership, people finding themselves with more time available to settle and socialise a new pet, as well as the desire to combat loneliness and boredom in isolation.

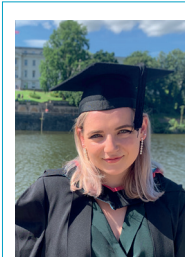
According to the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals' (PDSA) Animal Wellbeing Report 2020 (<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/10540/pdsa-paw-report-2020.pdf>), the first month of lockdown saw a 175% increase in Google searches for 'getting a dog', leading to concerns that people were impulse buying puppies with little regard for the potential consequences. In fact, an August 2020 report from the Kennel Club found that 2 in 5 new dog owners bought their dog as a 'COVID-19 Companion'. The report also found that a staggering 1 in 4 admitted that they may have inadvertently bought their dog from a puppy farm without knowing, and 1 in 5 didn't know whether their newly acquired dog would suit their lifestyle after lockdown, citing worries about behaviour, time and cost (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/media-centre/2020/august/the-covid-19-puppy-boom-one-in-four-admit-impulse-buying-a-pandemic-puppy/>).

While many owners cite the noticeable benefits of having or acquiring a pet during lockdown, many have struggled with the demands of caring for and training a new animal. As a result, an estimated 5% of those who had bought a new pet in lockdown have already given it up (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56362987>). Research from Battersea Cats and Dogs Home (BDCH) predicts that the UK as a whole is likely to see an increase of up to 27% more dogs being abandoned or left as strays in the next 5 years (<https://www.battersea.org.uk/about-us/news/battersea-research-reveals-imminent-animal-welfare-crisis-lockdown-pets>). So far, with no other option, vets have been forced to manage the influx of new puppies and are currently bracing themselves for the potential behavioural problems that will be arising in pets as life returns to normal.

A further consequence of the boom in pet acquisition is the rising cost of pets, driven by rising demand. As a result, animal-related crimes such as puppy smuggling and pet theft have increased as a result of the rising profits available from black market pet sales. The BDCH study into the impact of COVID-19 on companion animal welfare in the UK (<https://bdch.org.uk/files/BATTERSEA-Covid-Research-Report.pdf>) found that legal imports of puppies and kittens rose by 94% to meet UK demand, indicating that illegal smuggling may have risen at an alarmingly similar rate. As a result, the importation of parasites and exotic diseases is inevitable, and cases of *Brucella* spp. coming in to the UK are now becoming significant.

The BDCH report also found that theft of dogs and cats rose by 6% which, while a significant increase on previous years, was less than generally anticipated given the rising media coverage of pet theft.

The author, Ella Mackenzie, is a passionate animal lover and is excited to be the new Editor of Companion Animal.



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