

# Companion animals



Millions of animals in England and Wales are kept as pets, sporting athletes or working animals. Much of the RSPCA's work focuses on protecting and improving their welfare and the companion animals team helps to direct and support this work.





# HELPING OWNERS UNDERSTAND DOG AND CAT BEHAVIOUR

An animal's behaviour provides information about their needs, preferences and internal subjective state. However, not all those who come into contact or interact with animals are able to recognise or understand the behaviour which is being displayed and this can impact upon animal welfare and public safety. In 2014, we commissioned Lili Chin, an illustrator based in the United States, to develop a series of drawings for dogs and cats which shows how body language can differ depending on whether an animal is feeling pleasure, anxiety, threatened or angry. These illustrations will be used in a variety of different platforms including the RSPCA's website and published pet care guides.

We have already used the dog illustrations to produce resources for promoting safety around dogs which aim to reduce the dog bite risk to children.

In 2013, statistics from the Health and Social Care Information Centre found that the age group with the highest number of hospital admissions for dog bites was children aged between 0-9 years old.

Additional hospital injury data also shows that young children are more likely to be bitten by a family dog than one they don't know. Reducing the number of children and adults that are bitten by dogs is likely to require multiple approaches but a key factor is understanding and

recognising dog behaviour and helping parents to keep their children safe around dogs.

To achieve this, we worked in partnership with internationally-acclaimed vet and animal behaviourist Dr Sophia Yin\* to launch RSPCA materials which aim to teach children **how to interact safely around dogs**. We have published a **leaflet** which illustrates the different behaviour which dogs use depending on how they are feeling when 'happy', 'uncomfortable' and 'angry' and this is accompanied by a set of golden rules for parents to follow so that their children stay safe and their dogs stay happy.

The materials were launched ahead of the summer holidays – a time when dogs and children generally spend more time together and the frequency of dog bites increases.

“keeping children safe and teaching them how to behave around dogs.”



\*In October 2014, Dr Sophia Yin died suddenly and unexpectedly. Her loss to the behaviour and veterinary world is profound. However she has left an extraordinary legacy and has improved the lives of many pets through her advice and knowledge and created many happy and harmonious pet-owner relationships as a result.

**RSPCA How kids SHOULD NOT interact with dogs**  
It's common sense. Just imagine how people should interact with each other.

Avoid taking people's food.	Avoid bothering dogs when they are eating.
Avoid stealing other people's toys.	Avoid taking a dog's bones or toys.
Avoid putting your face right up to someone else's face.	Avoid putting your face right up to a dog's face.
Avoid bothering when asleep.	Avoid bothering animals when they are resting. Let sleeping dogs lie.
Avoid pestering.	Avoid grabbing tail/ears.
Avoid climbing on or trampling.	Avoid climbing on or trampling.
Avoid pinching.	Avoid hugging. Most dogs dislike it.
Avoid screaming around.	Avoid screaming and shouting. Use your 'inside' voice instead.

in partnership with Dr Sophia Yin, DVM MS  
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**RSPCA How kids SHOULD interact with dogs**  
Use common sense.

Be polite and kind to pets.	Learn to recognise when your dog is scared or anxious.
Play appropriate games with pets, such as:	
Fetch.	Training tricks (like roll over, shake, beg, etc.)
Walking and running with a dog.	Playing hide-and-seek.
Always remember:	
Supervise all interactions. Accidents can happen in a split second.	Train your dog to associate the kids with positive experiences so he'll be more likely to tolerate your child in case she accidentally interacts inappropriately.

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# Advice and information for pet owners

This year the RSPCA companion animals team were invited to the London and National pet shows which provided us with a fantastic opportunity to meet and talk directly with pet owners.

Held at Earls Court and the NEC, the shows combined live animals and displays, with trade stands and advice sessions. There was a diverse mix of species represented at the shows including dogs, cats, various small mammals, reptiles and ponies. A wide cross-section of people was expected, ranging from the dedicated pet enthusiast to those looking for a family day out.

Attracting a combined audience of over 40,000 pet loving consumers, these shows offered an unprecedented opportunity to engage face-to-face with large numbers of current and prospective pet owners, and provide them with up-to-date, scientifically-based pet care advice and information.

RSPCA dog and cat welfare experts made presentations on *Getting a happy, healthy dog* and *Keeping your cat happy and healthy* at both events. Our rabbit welfare expert led an interactive session: *Back to bunny basics – rabbit care made simple* at the

National Pet Show. In addition to giving these talks, RSPCA welfare experts were available throughout the shows to answer questions from the public.



**Dr Jane Tyson –**  
Scientific Officer

“Both pet shows gave us an exciting opportunity to disseminate current welfare advice, which will hopefully be used to enhance the lives of many animals”.

## Influencing the veterinary profession

The companion animals team, alongside the RSPCA's Senior Campaigns Manager and veterinary staff from the RSPCA animal hospitals in Manchester and Birmingham attended the annual **British Small Animals Veterinary Association Congress** in April. This event provided the opportunity to raise awareness amongst vets of the crisis facing RSPCA centres and branches, as well as other charities.

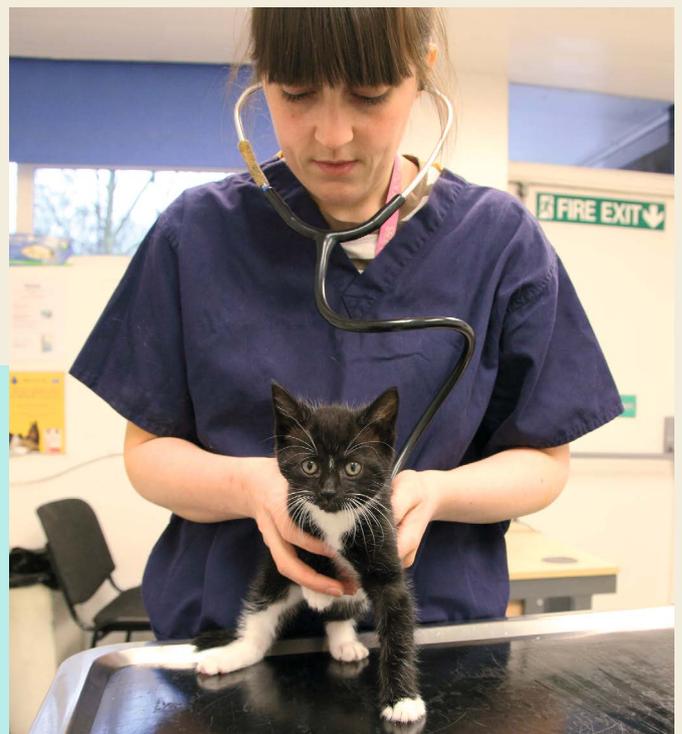
The numbers of cats admitted into the care of the RSPCA increased by eight percent in the period 2010-2012 – from 29,269 to 31,556. The RSPCA is full to capacity and having to rely heavily on private boarding establishments to house unwanted and abandoned cats – at considerable cost. The main focus of our attendance was to increase the awareness of timely (pre-pubertal) neutering in female cats as a means of reducing the overall cat population.

Historically, the timing of neutering has been six months for owned cats. However, many cats reach sexual maturity at four months so the RSPCA believes **neutering** at this time is vital to reduce the number of unplanned litters. Whilst a proportion of veterinary practices already neuter cats at four months of age, there are many that don't. We also spoke with vets about other ways in which they could play a part in tackling the high population numbers, for example, by getting involved in community outreach to engage with the 15 percent of cat owners who are not currently registered with a veterinary practice.



**Alice Potter –**  
Scientific Officer

“With our centres and branches full to capacity, we need to educate owners and work collaboratively with vets to increase timely neutering, prevent unplanned litters and reduce the cat population”.





# Providing guidance for enforcement bodies

During 2014 the RSPCA has produced and contributed to a number of resources for practitioners working within enforcement bodies:

- **Contingency planning and animal welfare: a guide to good practice** – as well as providing guidance for local authorities and local resilience forums, this booklet highlights key principles that will help ensure good animal welfare in emergency planning. It also features practical examples of the importance of considering animals such as pets and livestock in contingency planning. An advice sheet on flooding and animal welfare for constituents was also produced.
- We provided information and advice to the Association of Chief Police Officers Vehicle Standardisation Project working group on the transportation welfare needs of police dogs to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. This has included the provision of guidance on the cage size, design, materials, ventilation and temperature systems.
- We have updated the **RSPCA's good practice guide for enforcement bodies** which provides advice to kennel managers and owners about ensuring the welfare needs of dogs seized under the

Environmental Protection Act (1990), the Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) and the Animal Welfare Act (2006). The guide sets out the minimum standards required to ensure compliance with relevant legislation as well as suggestions for best practice.

- **Dealing with irresponsible dog ownership: a practitioner's manual** (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) – the RSPCA has contributed to the content of this manual which provides guidance for those enforcing the **Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill (2014)**. This legislation, which came into force in May 2014, provides powers for dealing with dog-related incidents including prohibited types of dog, dogs that have bitten and those which stray. The RSPCA chaired a working group of representatives from the Canine and Feline Sector Council to ensure that the behavioural and welfare information within the manual, and specifically **Annex B**, which relates to the powers available for dog related incidents, is evidence-based and protects, wherever possible, dog welfare and public safety.



## IMPROVING STANDARDS WITHIN THE GROOMING INDUSTRY

**The grooming industry is unregulated at present, and there have been several recent cases that have highlighted the need for owners to think particularly carefully when choosing a groomer. Dogs have suffered severe burns in grooming establishments which has resulted in prosecutions under the Animal Welfare Act (2006). To ensure that the health and welfare of animals is protected whilst at a grooming establishment, the RSPCA has started working on an accreditation scheme which will be launched in 2015.**

A set of brand new rigorous standards developed by the RSPCA's Head of Companion Animals and the RSPCA Chief Veterinary Officer is at the core of the scheme. The standards cover everything from intake,

handling, grooming, washing, drying and accommodation to protect an animal's health and welfare. The standards take into account legislation, animal welfare codes of practice, scientific research, veterinary advice and the knowledge and practical experience of those in the grooming industry.

In addition to the standards, we have also developed a series of assessments for the establishment owner or manager and the staff. Staff must undergo RSPCA tests of competence which will test their knowledge about health and welfare in relation to the grooming environment. Each establishment will also be inspected by an RSPCA officer. As well as improving standards within the grooming industry, the scheme will provide confidence to owners about the knowledge, ongoing training and the care provided for their pets.

## DEVELOPING WELFARE FRIENDLY PRODUCTS

Pet owners looking for cat toys, dog beds or even pet insurance can shop online at the [RSPCA's store](#). The RSPCA believes it is important to sell and promote products that help owners to meet the needs of their pets and the companion animals team play an essential role in achieving this. Working closely with RSPCA Enterprise, the companion animals team review products and labelling to ensure they are safe, act in accordance with law and do not contravene RSPCA policy or compromise welfare.

As well as reviewing existing products ranging from food enrichment toys for dogs to comfortable hiding places for cats, the companion animals team have also provided advice on the development of the [RSPCA pet food](#) products and have provided technical information and advice to external companies who are considering which pet products to manufacture.

These are some of the products we have worked on this year:

### Motorola Scout 83 HD camera

With a recent study showing that 85 percent of dogs may show some kind of reaction when they are left alone, being able to monitor your pet's behaviour when you are not at home is a valuable tool for pet owners. If an owner knows their dog is not coping when they are left alone, they can then take steps to help them feel more relaxed. A licensing partnership with the RSPCA and Motorola's Scout 83 HD camera was an excellent opportunity for the companion animals team to help owners meet their pets' needs and make sure they are able to cope if they have to be left alone for short periods. Four videos promoting the camera and different aspects of pet care were promoted via social media in December 2014.

### HarperCollins pet care guides

Our understanding about companion animal behaviour and welfare has advanced greatly in recent years, so we welcomed an opportunity, alongside RSPCA Enterprise, to update the RSPCA range of HarperCollins pet care books on caring for puppies, kittens, rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs.

Pet ownership can be incredibly rewarding and studies have demonstrated the benefits it can provide. For example, growing up with pets offers health benefits and caring for an animal can help improve a child's social skills – encouraging the development of compassion, understanding and a respect for living things.

Having a pet is, however, a huge responsibility and requires long-term commitment in terms of care and finances. There is a legal

requirement under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 for owners to care for their pets properly, and an important part of the work of the companion animals team is to provide owners with the information they need to be able to do this.

The books are based on up-to-date knowledge of companion animal behaviour and contain information on the biology and behaviour of the species, and information and advice to help owners meet the welfare needs of their pets. There is also advice on things to consider before getting a pet and how to source a happy, healthy animal. These updated guides will be published in early summer 2015.



**Lisa Richards –**  
Scientific Officer

“Being able to offer a range of products that allows dogs and other pets the opportunity to play, interact with their owners and perform other natural behaviours is a positive way for us to be able to improve the lives of many animals.”



motorola



# In the media spotlight

**A key role of the companion animals team is representing the RSPCA's views on companion animal welfare in press, radio and television interviews.**

This year we have provided views and advice on a range of companion animal issues including the suitability of small

breed pigs as pets, providing for a rabbit's welfare needs, the welfare of pedigree dogs, dealing with aggressive dogs, how best to train dogs, poisoning of cats and dealing with abandoned animals. Interviews have been featured on Radio Two, Radio Wales, many local radio stations and ITV Meridian news.