



Companion animals

Companion animals offer us friendship, love and joy. Around 60% of households in the UK are home to at least one animal¹ and we spend billions of pounds on them every year. The estimated number of companion animals in the UK includes 13 million dogs, 12 million cats, 3.7 million birds, 1 million rabbits, 900,000 guinea pigs, 600,000 hamsters, 600,000 reptiles and 600,000 horses². Having a pet is clearly very popular.

Sadly, despite considering ourselves a nation of pet lovers, many of these animals are exploited, neglected and forced to endure suffering.

Unloved and unwanted

Many people buy pets without understanding what a big responsibility they're taking on or how difficult and expensive animals can be to care for. The RSPCA receives a call reporting animal abuse or neglect every 30 seconds. In cases of severe animal cruelty, animals are rescued from harmful situations.



Each year, around a quarter of a million³ unwanted pets are taken in by animal shelters across the UK; that's almost 700 a day. While some fortunate animals find new homes through adoption, many others cannot be rehomed. This means thousands are euthanised (killed) every year. Globally, millions of dogs and cats remain homeless.

Commercial Breeding

With animal shelters overrun with abandoned animals desperate to be rehomed, it is essential that people adopt an animal in need from a rescue centre rather than shopping for pets. Sadly, most people still buy pets from breeders or shops instead of offering homes to animals who so urgently need one.

Where do people get their dogs from?⁴

32%
FROM A
BREEDER

23%
FROM A
PRIVATE
SELLER

14%
FROM A UK
RESCUE
CENTRE

In puppy farms (or puppy mills) dogs are intensively bred for the pet trade. Females are made pregnant and have their young puppies taken away from them, again and again. It goes without saying that this causes them huge physical and emotional pain. The UK government has introduced laws to crack down on puppy farms. Sadly, farms still exist due to a rising demand for puppies.



The growing demand for “designer breeds” means individuals can profit from exploiting these animals. Some people unknowingly purchase animals from puppy farms which portray themselves as ethical and legal operations.



In reality, these farms cause immense suffering to countless animals.

In addition, many popular breeds suffer serious medical problems from selective breeding for “desirable” features. The flat faces of pugs and bulldogs might look cute to us, but they cause painful and dangerous breathing difficulties and skin fold infections for the dogs.

Ultimately, the breeding of any animal for profit is never in the animal’s interests, but to make money for the breeder. For every new animal bred into existence, we condemn another animal to continue living a life abandoned in a rescue centre or be killed. So, the ethical choice is to adopt from a rescue centre and not to buy from a breeder, shop or seller.

Neutering

Neutering is a safe medical procedure which prevents the birth of more puppies and kittens. It is important to neuter your pets to help reduce the number of animals in need. There is also strong evidence that neutered animals enjoy longer and healthier lives.

The Pet Trade

Globally, the pet trade is worth around £23 billion⁵, ranking alongside weapons and drugs as one of the largest forms of illegal trade. In fact, it is often run by the same criminal groups. Countless “exotic” animals, including parrots, turtles, snakes, tropical fish and spiders are taken from their natural habitats to be sold as pets. They are forced to endure long, stressful journeys. Tragically, many do not survive the ordeal. Those who do survive are condemned to a lifetime in captivity.

No matter how thoughtfully designed their enclosures may be, these “exotic” pets are denied the space and freedom of their natural habitat. Snakes and lizards often attempt to scale the walls of their tanks in a desperate attempt to escape. But they remain trapped, deprived of their freedom.



Thinking of adopting an animal?

- **Pets are sentient beings, meaning they are individuals with their own needs and feelings. So, adopting an animal is a serious commitment and a big responsibility. People thinking of giving a home to a companion animal need to think carefully about what is involved:**
- **Can you afford their food, vet visits, medication, toys, etc.?**
- **Do you have time to look after them? Many animals require a lot of care. Small animals need their homes to be cleaned every day or two, dogs need to be walked, rabbits need the company of another rabbit. Every animal’s needs are different, so do your research!**
- **Will you be there for them? Just like people, lots of animals get lonely if they are left alone for too long. What will you do when you go on holiday?**
- **How long will they live? This is how long you will need to feed, clean, exercise and care for them.**



What can you do?

- **With so many unwanted animals in need of loving homes, it is important to adopt from rescue centres rather than buying from shops or breeders.**
- **Some animals don’t make good companion animals – never buy “exotic” animals such as birds and reptiles. They belong in the wild, not in your house.**
- **Always have your animals neutered to prevent unwanted babies being born.**
- **Visit www.animalaid.org.uk for more information on how to help animals.**