



UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

# Characterising the un-owned pet population in the UK

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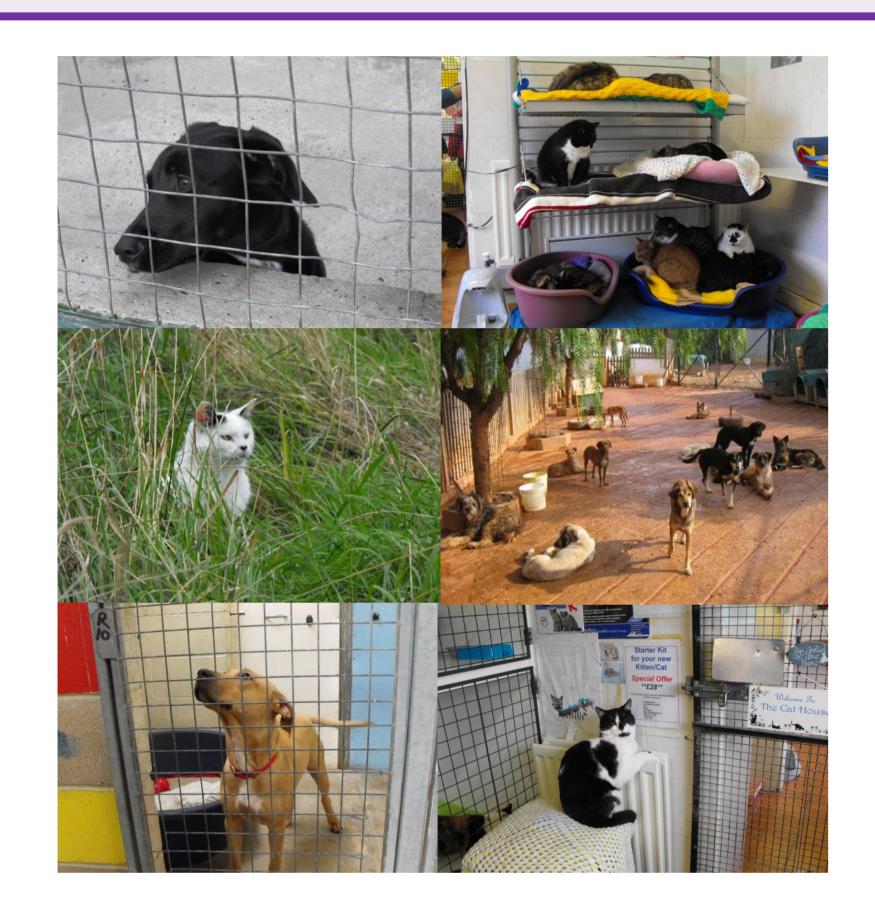
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### **Background**

Currently the number of dogs and cats in the UK is unknown, although estimates suggest the number of owned dogs and cats to be in the region of 8-10 million for each species (Murray et al., 2010; PFMA, 2010). However, the extent of the un-owned population, comprising strays, ferals and those in shelters and foster care, is currently unknown.

The relationship between the owned and un-owned population is dynamic, with strays and shelter animals being adopted into households, and pet animals being relinquished or abandoned. Un-owned dogs and cats can exist in a variety of environments (Figure 1). These animals may have an increased risk of disease due to stress, poor nutrition, lack of veterinary care and, when housed in shelters, proximity to other animals. It has been suggested that domestic animals may be important in the spread of diseases such as rabies if introduced to the British Isles, and un-owned animals could provide an important reservoir and route of transmission in such circumstances.



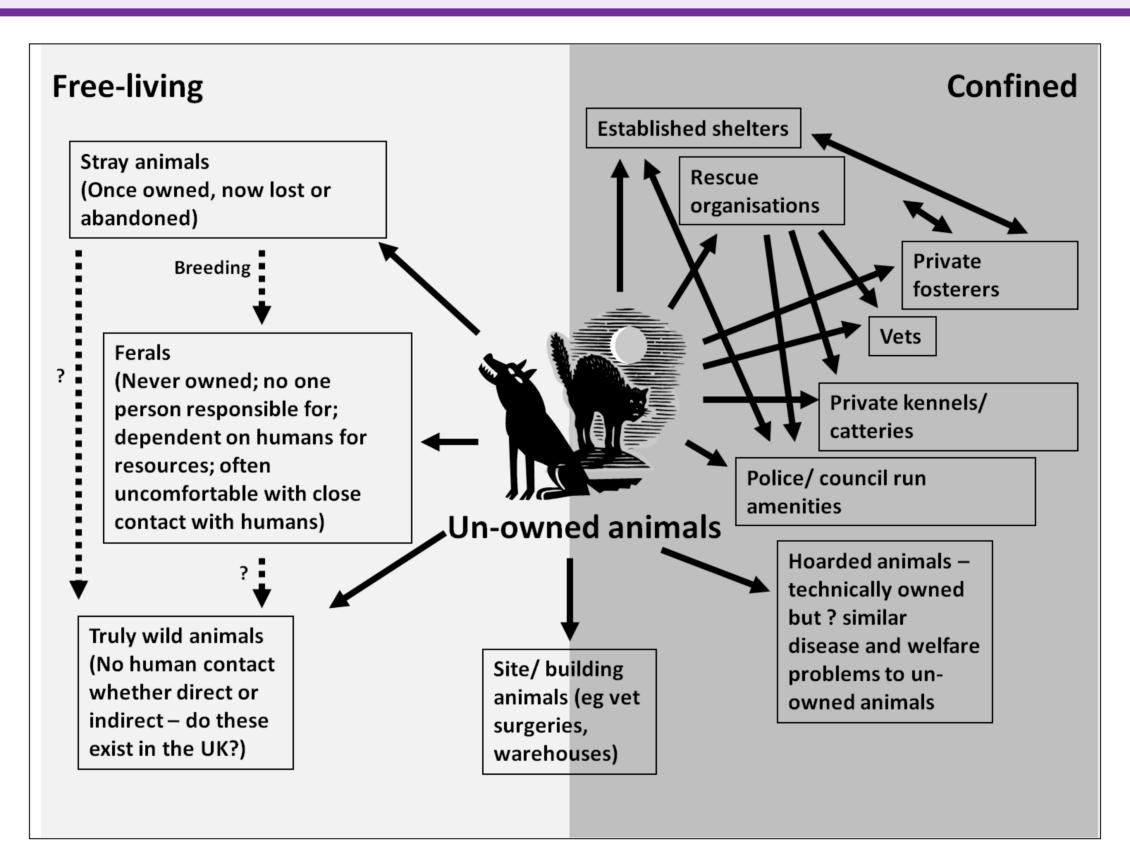




Figure 1: summary of different un-owned dog and cat populations in the UK

## Aim

The study aim is to estimate the number of un-owned dogs and cats in the UK. A secondary aim is to foster a working relationship between the research group and the 'shelter' community, in order to promote the possibility of future research.

# **Materials and Methods**

# 1. Sampling frame

- England and Wales Charity Commission
- Scottish Charity Commission
- Catchat
- The Dog Rescue Pages

# 2. Questionnaire

- Designed using automated reading software (Cardiff Teleform)
- Piloted with a variety of shelter professionals and volunteers (n=7)
- Distributed by post for 2025 organisations for which postal addresses were available
- Telephone calls and emails to 561 others to obtain postal address

### 3. Compliance

- Visits to shelters and umbrella organisations to publicise project
- Articles in Veterinary Times, Veterinary Record, Veterinary Business Journal
- Website with downloadable PDF of questionnaire and prepaid return envelope
- Facebook profile for project, with links to main project website
- Incentives included with questionnaire (chocolate and pen)

# The Postal Un-owned Pets Survey (PUPS) Who are we? We are the Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine, within the University of Nottingham School of Veterinary Medicine and Science. Our remit is to look at ways of improving the health and welfare of animals, particularly pet animals, by using information observed in the real population. We do not perform any research which involves experimenting on or harming animals. What is this survey about? We have set up this survey (PUPS) to collect information on un-owned pet animals, in order to help those working with them to improve their health and welfare. As a starting point, we're trying to answer some basic questions, for example how many un-owned animals are there in the UK? We are initially focusing on cats and dogs for the first part of the project. Ultimately we hope to establish a program for sheller medicine, where people with an interest in un-owned animals are there in the UK? We have compared to a first of organisations that care for unwanted cats and dogs using resources which include the Charity Commission records and internet animal welfare directories. We hope to contact as many organisations as we can in order to get as accurate a picture as possible of the situation. What happens to the data? To maintain confidentiality of all information, all of the data collected will be pooled and analysed together. A summary of the data will be made freely available to all interested parties. All information will be kept completely anonymous, and no organisation, or branch, will ever be identified in any report (unless specific additional permission is given). No personal information will be passed on to anyone else. Lhave filled in a similar survey earlier this year — do Lstill need to fill in this questionanier, as we are collecting information from 2010. Having both sets of results will be extremely helpful, and we plan to work together to make the best possible use of both is curveys. What if I have more questions? Please tops completed awa

Database (~2500 organisations)

Rescue, shelter, fostering, sanctuary and care of ferals/ strays

Snowball sampling

(links from identified sites)





### **Conclusion**

Database of UK cat and dog 'shelters' compiled using available sampling frames and a modified snowball sampling technique

This will be used to carry out a census of the un-owned cat and dog population in the UK

Both the methodology used and data collection to be a springhoard for further work involving this important, population of animal

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### **Acknowledgements:**

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### References

Murray, J. K., Browne, W. J., Roberts, M. A., Whitmarsh, A., Gruffydd-Jones, T. J.. (2010). "Number and ownership profiles of cats and dogs in the UK." Veterinary Record 166(6): 163-168

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