

# Millions invested in industry's future

**THE PET FOOD industry is proving to have great prospects for business investors as a number of firms have been given significant funding to support expanded operations and new product development.**

Butcher's Pet Care last week secured a £43m funding package from Secure Trust Bank Commercial Finance and Blaze Hill Capital in a deal that Butcher's chief executive Tim Watsham called "a significant and exciting step for the business".

He said: "The executive team were clear that the company must continue to invest in our brand and manufacturing capabilities as well as our new product offerings. We are looking forward to working with Secure Trust Bank and Blaze Hill Capital as we enter our next stage of growth."

At the same time as Butcher's was

attracting new finance, raw dog food manufacturer Paleo Ridge secured a £2m investment from private equity firm Ashridge Capital to fund an expansion of activity. The new investment will fund an expansion of operations, including the opening of a new despatch and manufacturing facility. For more on this, see page 3.

## ATTRACTIVE MARKET

Meanwhile Omni, a vet-backed plant-based dog food company, has raised €1.3m from a group of investors to fuel further expansion, while food company Cranswick signalled its intention to expand into the pet food market with the acquisition of Grove Pet Foods. Cranswick chief executive officer Adam Couch said: "This acquisition represents a platform for future growth

in the attractive UK pet food market."

Similar activity is happening in markets across the world as pet food is emerging as one of the most attractive business sectors. More than 40 pet food-related mergers and acquisitions happened globally during 2021, well above the 25 that took place in 2020, according to industry commentators.

At the same time, investors in Europe and America are showing increasing interest in insect-based protein producers for development within pet diets.

French company InnovaFeed and American pet food manufacturer ADM Petfood also recently announced a strategic partnership and raised €200m to begin construction on the world's largest insect protein farm in Illinois, with the site expected to reach full industrial-scale production by 2024.

## INSIDE

### Eco supplement

FREE with this issue, how pet care manufacturers are meeting the sustainability challenge.



### Cut the red tape



Pet Industry Federation works to simplify export procedures for UK firms.

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## WOMEN CHOOSE PETS OVER PARTNERS

**WOMEN** are more likely to ditch their partner than their pet, according to a survey of pet owners and their relationships for pet store Jollies.

Asked about their relationship with their partner and their pet and which one they would ditch first, 53% said they would get rid of their partner compared to 47% who would ditch their pet. Men were more loyal to their partners, with 63% saying they would ditch their pet and 37% saying they would lose their partner.

The study was carried out by Jollies to gauge humans' attitudes to romance and relationships in the run-up to Valentine's Day.

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*There's good news and bad news on the horizon for the trade, says*

*David Rees*

## Let's make sure we retain the human touch

THERE IS PLENTY of information around showing us that pet ownership in the UK is a growing market, but it begs the question: who is going to benefit the most from the growth?

The pandemic gave a huge boost to the UK pet population, with the extended periods of time that people were forced to spend at home triggering a need in many to acquire a first, or additional, home companion. But now that the worst of the pandemic appears to be behind us, workplaces and hospitality venues are reopening and the rules on self-isolation are to be relaxed, we might need to rethink how the cats, dogs, fish, and wild birds are going to be fed and cared for.

Increased awareness of food additives and the effect of diet on health and wellbeing has undoubtedly driven premiumisation in the industry, which is good news for spending levels. And sustainability in both ingredient sourcing and packaging are going to be hot topics too – for more on this check out our Eco Pets special supplement with this issue.

### COST OF LIVING CRISIS

But balanced against all this is the looming cloud that is the so-called cost of living crisis. As food prices and energy bills soar and National Insurance contributions are increased, household budgets are going to be squeezed more than at any time in recent history.

This doesn't necessarily mean that pet owners will compromise on the quality or quantity of the food they buy, after all – but it might mean that they pay even closer attention to the cost of goods than they are already doing. This, to some extent, gives a big advantage to the large-scale retailers selling via the internet, as shoppers can easily make price comparisons between different operators. And in any case, the pandemic has driven a surge in home shopping, and for some this will be a permanent form of behaviour.

But there are still many opportunities for traditional, bricks and mortar retailers to thrive as well. After two years of purchasing via a phone or laptop, many consumers are enjoying the chance to go shopping in person once again, and are benefiting from the advice offered by staff in their local stores.

And here's the key part. Web-generated algorithms are very effective up to a point, but nothing can beat the help, advice and personal recommendations offered by a passionate and knowledgeable professional in your local pet shop.



From left to right: David Sherratt, Tyler Daly and Ton Christiaan with Rudi the dog

## Raw food firm secures £2m investment

RAW DOG food manufacturer Paleo Ridge has secured a £2m investment from private equity firm Ashridge Capital to fund an expansion of activity.

The new investment will fund the opening of a new despatch and manufacturing facility, creating more than 20 new jobs across supply chain, marketing, customer service, technical support and operations at its home base in Waterlooville, Hampshire.

Paleo Ridge has grown by more than 100% in the past two years, using ingredients that are ethically-sourced, organic, free range, and grain-free with high nutritional content and no artificial additives. It is the only UK raw dog food firm that holds the ISO 9001 accreditation, the company claims.

Ashridge Capital focuses on private equity investments of £2m-£20m. Its current investments include Red Driving School, Oakman Inns, Phoenix Learning & Care, Book My Garage and Fargro.

### LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

Paleo Ridge chief executive Tyler Daly said: "I am delighted to be working with Ashridge Capital, which shares our vision to be the UK's most trusted brand for premium, high quality and high welfare, species-appropriate pet food. The investment will enable us to expand our manufacturing capacity, provide additional local employment opportunities and meet the strongly rising consumer demand for raw pet food."

David Sherratt, founder and CEO of Ashridge Capital, added: "We are very excited to be partnering with Paleo Ridge and invest in a business that has demonstrated strong growth since inception. The brand is highly regarded and has developed a distinctive market position in a high growth market and we look forward to supporting its ongoing expansion."

## USE RATES TO LEVEL UP, SAYS BIRA

THE BRITISH Independent Retailers Association (Bira) has called on the government to reduce business rates for bricks and mortar retailers as part of its 'Levelling Up' programme.

In response to the government's Levelling Up White Paper, Bira's chief executive Andrew Goodacre said: "The government has announced its vision for levelling up and identified 12 'missions' as areas of focus for this ambitious plan. It is hard to disagree with the intentions of this plan but we do need to see more detail to better understand how it will work in practice."

"The ambition for this Government is to level up the UK. From a business perspective there is one easy thing to do, and that is to level the playing field between high streets and the internet by reducing business rates."

### PRIDE IN PLACE

"Research from last year showed that business rates have a disproportionate impact on businesses in the north of the UK, reducing investment and job opportunities."

He added: "We welcome the commitment to improving transport infrastructure because access to town and cities, and High Streets in general is very important. There is a further commitment to creating 'pride in place' – we urge the government to recognise that independent retail plays an increasingly important role. Independent retailers support communities, invest in the local economy and are integral to creating a vibrant 'place' and something to be proud of."

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## Bioarmor new-formula wipes pass the test

BIOARMOR'S RANGE of sachet wipes has been relaunched with the promise of additional efficacy against viruses and bacteria.

The product's new formulation surface coating has been tested (under ISO21702:2019) to be 99.9% efficient in reducing human coronavirus type 229E as well as E-coli and MRSA.

The ultra-thin surface coating gives protection against microbes for 90 days after each wipe, claims the company.

Both retail and B2B packs are available, including a dedicated pet accessory range. Retail packs include 10-unit shelf-ready outers and clip strips of 10 pieces.

Retail packs are priced at £4.99 including VAT, and trade discounts are also available directly from Bioarmor or the UK distributor Bluechipworld.



# Study pays off for shop owner

**A PET store owner's business is going from strength to strength following her decision to study for a business degree during the lockdown period.**

Lucy Martin-Hall studied Animal Management at college before opening Leo Libra Pet Supplies at the Dundas Indoor Market in Middlesbrough in 2018. She has now completed an Open University degree in Business and Marketing through Middlesbrough College to further supplement her business skills.

Lucy grew up surrounded by pets and, as well as her studies, did voluntary work at animal shelters and vets before opening her own business.

### CONFIDENT

She said: "I started it to be my own boss and I was confident that I knew about animals. I was less certain about running a business, but I'm not alone. The majority of businesses in the UK are small businesses and they contribute such a massive amount to the economy.

"A young family might come to



Lucy Martin-Hall with a picture of Dixie

the shop and perhaps they don't know much. I'm able to point them in the direction and I hope the children will grow up loving animals."

The additional study has encouraged her to think about wider aspects of her business such as marketing. She has also learned how to ice birthday cakes for customers' pets, as well as running a Christmas competition, which asked owners to choose the best pet pictures for a Leo Libra 2022 calendar.

David Harris, the manager of Dundas Indoor Market, said Leo Libra

provides customers with a service they can't find anywhere else. He said: "It's more than a shop, it's a real college of knowledge. Lucy is a perfect example of the type of independent trader we encourage here."

### KNOWLEDGE

"She has an incredible knowledge about animals and pet welfare and was determined to channel her passion through a business. She deserves huge credit for working so hard and the result is there to see for any pet owner who visits her shop."

## Call to review 'nightmare' licence rules

THE CURRENT licensing system is becoming a "nightmare" for small businesses, particularly breeders and owners of kennels and catteries, according to a leading figure in the pet care industry.

David Cavill, who is the coordinator of the National Register of Petcare Professionals, has written to Neil Parish, Chair of the Environment, Foods and Rural Affairs Select Committee, to ask for a comprehensive review of the 2018 regulations.

In his letter, Cavill describes the new regulations as "a nightmare for many small businesses, many of which have closed as the cost both financially and administratively of the 'improvements' required are unreasonable."

Small-scale hobby breeders – which he describes as "low-hanging fruit which have been targeted by Local

Authority licensing officers" – have been particularly affected.

The increased cost and administrative burden required to comply with the new regulations is driving small businesses out of business, says Cavill.

"Many LAs are being extremely picky with boarding kennels and the 'star' system is a total mess," he told pbwnews. "The biggest problem is the Business Test, and the knock-on effects from LAs suddenly deciding that planning applications for businesses are in order. The government now needs to act to review the impact of the legislation and how they are being enforced."

"The actual review is carried out by a select committee, but I want Defra to be put on notice, and encourage it if possible to carry out its own assessment."

## OSCAR PICKS UP CUSTOMER CARE 'OSCAR'

OSCAR PET Foods has been given the Feefo Gold Trusted Award 2022 in recognition of its achievements in customer care.

Feefo recognises the businesses who deliver exceptional experiences, based purely on feedback from real customers, to make the awards. Oscar aims to provide a complete pet care service direct

to customers' doors, including food, accessories and health care products.

Oscar managing director Richard Martin said: "We're thrilled to receive this award from Feefo. It means a lot because it's based on feedback from our genuine customers and, ultimately, providing outstanding customer care is what we strive to achieve everyday!"



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"The pandemic has helped us see how much our pets mean to us, and it's a pleasure to be able to help people and give them peace of mind that wherever they need to go with their pet, we can make it happen."



She said: "This is such an important service and a lifeline for many people who are vulnerable and isolated and their pet is everything to them, and I am delighted that the service has been so well received already."



## PIF unveils new logo with expiry dates

PIF chief executive Nigel Baker said: "We're delighted with the refreshed PIF logo. We felt that, given the work we plan to do during 2022 on membership, a revised look would help set us off on the right track."

PIF has a membership of more than 2,000 organisations across the sector. PIF membership is open to any pet business and members receive a range of business-related benefits upon joining.

## Arden Grange updates Sensitive range

The new lines are Sensitive Adult Mini, 2kg and 6kg, and Sensitive Adult Large Breed for dogs, 2kg and 12kg. Both lines have an ocean white fish & potato recipe.



## BETA SHOW SECURES MAIN SPONSOR

**"I am very optimistic that we can build on what was achieved at last**

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## Dog Lover Show returns to Scottish venues

THE DOG LOVER Show, Scotland's festival celebrating the love of dogs, is returning this spring after a hiatus due to the pandemic.

The 2022 shows will run at The Event Complex Aberdeen, on March 26-27 and also at Glasgow SEC on April 2-3.

Organisers are expecting to attract a record number of exhibitors from across the UK and claim that the Aberdeen event will be the biggest dog show ever staged in the north of Scotland, with 10,000 visitors expected.

Des Clarke will host this year's events and visitors will be able to watch a range of events such as flyball, gun dogs and duck herding on the main stage, which is sponsored by Seresto Flea & Tick collar.

Further activities are themed around vets, training and grooming as well as a children's zone and an "Insta Dogs" feature, where attendees can meet Scotland's favourite canine stars of Instagram.

Visitors must adhere to the current government guidelines while attending, and all the necessary safety measures will be in place.

## Pennard vets expands

EMPLOYEE-OWNED Kent veterinary group Pennard Vets has taken over Abbotsley Vets in West Malling following the retirement of former owner Peter Foxell.

The practice, which will now be known as Pennard Vets, West Malling, employs a team of six who are all staying in their roles and have become co-owners of Pennard Vets, as part of the company's employee ownership trust.

Pennard Vets, which now has seven Kent practices, will invest in the new addition to refurbish and update the practice following the acquisition.

## Salary scheme raises funds

PAYROLL Giving schemes raised nearly £600,000 to support the RSPCA last year, according to the organisation.

The figure was released to mark Payroll Giving Week earlier this month, and the charity is using the opportunity to ask the public to consider setting up Payroll Giving as a tax-efficient way to help animals.

Payroll Giving enables people to make regular donations to a charity directly from their gross salary each time they are paid. More than 7,000 donors support the RSPCA in this way.

# Hamster to human Covid link suspected

**PET STORES in Hong Kong have been allowed to reopen following a widespread cull of hamsters and other animals linked to the Covid pandemic.**

At the same time, a paper has appeared in the scientific journal *The Lancet* suggesting that the incident showed that the virus can be passed from hamsters to humans.

Several hamsters and a member of staff at the Little Boss pet shop in Causeway Bay tested positive for Covid-19 last month, leading to a cull of an estimated 2,000 hamsters at 34 local pet shops and at a main storage facility, along with a number of rabbits and chinchillas.

The outbreak has been blamed on Syrian hamsters imported from Holland. The scientific paper maintains that the Covid infection in the affected hamsters and the pet store worker were both of the Delta variant which was not circulating in the locality at the time, suggesting that the virus had indeed been transmitted from hamster to human.

The paper is in the 'preprint' stage at *The Lancet* – it has not yet been reviewed by a scientific peer group.



The authorities in Hong Kong report that the virus was found in a number of Syrian hamsters but none of the dwarf hamsters, rabbits, Guinea pigs, chinchillas or mice that were tested at the same time.

## COMPENSATION

Pet shops in the territory have been disinfected and checked for the presence of the virus before being allowed to reopen. Five stores, including the Little Boss pet shop, remained closed as they had not yet been given the all-clear by the government. Stores forced to close temporarily will be offered compensation of up to HK\$ 30,000 (£2,800).

## FIRST-EVER BRITISH PAVILION AT US TRADE SHOW

**PETQUIP IS to host a pavilion for UK firms at the Superzoo trade show, which takes place in Las Vegas on August 22-25, 2022.**

The team from the international trade association will offer a package of export advice, market information, logistical support and promotion before, during and after the event to all UK companies participating in the pavilion. It is the first time a British pavilion has been part of the show.

Superzoo is the most-attended pet industry trade show in North America, attracting around 10,000 buyers, over 1,000 of whom are from outside the US. The exhibition area is 300,000sq ft and there are around 1,200 exhibitors in total.

The organisers also run a comprehensive entertainments package



*Petquip's UK pavilion is heading stateside*

for their visitors including networking events such as a show concert.

The US market is the largest in the world for pet products with the American Pet Producers' Association (APPA) estimating overall sales at \$103.6 billion in 2020.

Around 70% of US households own a pet, and APPA estimates the dog and cat populations at over 90 million each.

## Agria Pet Insurance gets Which? endorsement

FOUR policies from Agria Pet Insurance have been named a Which? Best Buy by the consumer association.

The endorsement is for the company's Lifetime and Lifetime Plus policies for both dogs and cats.

Agria specialises in small animal,

equine, and agricultural insurance. Founded in Sweden over 130 years ago, Agria began underwriting policies in the UK in 2009 and now works with over 40,000 vets, breeders and rehoming organisations, providing insurance for cats, dogs, and rabbits.

## Former Sky executive to lead Pets at Home

PETS AT HOME Group plc has announced that Lyssa McGowan will take over as group chief executive officer with effect from June 1, 2022.

Lyssa will succeed Peter Pritchard, who announced his intention to step down last November and who will remain with the business until May 31, 2022 to ensure a seamless transition. Lyssa will be appointed to the board as CEO designate on April 25 prior to her appointment as CEO on June 1.

Lyssa is the outgoing chief consumer officer at Sky UK Ltd. Over the last 11 years, she has led various business units to growth within Sky and has broad experience of managing product, service and subscription-led businesses, omnichannel development, and data and digital transformation.

Lyssa was also a non-executive director of the board of Wm Morrison Supermarkets until its recent sale to CD&R.

■ **More people watching news on page 30**



*Lyssa McGowan*

## Su-Bridge warehouse expansion underway

WORK is underway to create a new warehouse for wholesaler Su-Bridge Pet Supplies Ltd.

The new facilities, which are being built on the site currently occupied by the company in Norfolk, will be equipped with a new unit to boost the production capacity of Extra Select bird food and increased office space, plus 5,600 new pallet spaces to allow more product lines to be held onsite.

Managing Director Ian Manning said: "Manufacturing and holding space can prove challenging with an ever-expanding range and demand for both pet and wild bird foods. This investment will allow Su-Bridge Pet Supplies Ltd to grow effectively for many years to come."





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Clydach Farm's win is the fourth year in a row

## Great British win for Welsh dog food firm

WELSH DOG food manufacturer Clydach Farm is celebrating after being awarded the Made in the UK Award for GBEA Wales at the Great British Entrepreneur Awards.

The award was presented at a ceremony at Grosvenor House in London, which saw 159 entrepreneurs across the UK recognised for their entrepreneurial stories and achievements over the previous year. The Clydach Farm's win is the fourth year in a row the company has been recognised as a winner at the awards.

Clydach Farm uses locally sourced meat, fish and poultry to create grain-free, "real" food for dogs.

### BEST OF BRITISH

The Great British Entrepreneur Awards were launched in 2012 to celebrate the best of British enterprise, inviting founders from across the UK to apply with their entrepreneurial success stories. The awards were judged by a panel of industry experts and leaders of influential UK businesses, including some of the prize winners from previous years.

The Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2021 were held in partnership with Starling Bank. The event attracted a guest list of 1,200 entrepreneurs, judges, mentors, investors and their partners.

# Cut the crop scores campaign win

**DOG EAR cropping and ear straightening kits have been removed from two online retail marketplaces after pressure from the British Veterinary Association (BVA).**

BVA President Justine Shotton wrote to eBay UK last month to flag up three listings for ear cropping kits being sold by international retailers via the website, and to share concerns raised by vets and animal welfare organisations through the #CutTheCrop campaign.

At the same time, she wrote to Etsy UK and Amazon UK to point out vets' concerns about the easy availability of ear straightening or correcting accessories for sale on their platforms.

Etsy and eBay have taken action to remove the kits from sale, reported BVA, and also promised to update their algorithms to filter similar products out in future.

Amazon UK responded by saying it does not

support ear cropping and removed cropping kits from its site last year, but has no plans to remove straightening kits from sale.

Dr Shotton said: "We took action after being made aware by a few vets about the availability of ear cropping kits on eBay UK. Our research also found a number of listings for ear straightening accessories being sold via several other major online websites.

### SIGNIFICANT

"The swift and positive action by the two major retailers is a small but significant animal welfare win for our #CutTheCrop campaign. While Amazon has taken action on cropping kits, it is disappointing that it has declined to remove straightening kits that fuel the trend for the cropped look from sale."

## UK FIRM LANDS MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR PET MICROCHIP DEAL

**SUSSEX-BASED Global ID Marketing has signed a multi-million dollar partnership agreement with Syneroid Technology Corp to supply its Micro-ID brand chips for its GPC Smart system.**

Syneroid Technology's pet safety system is described as being the US's first wireless communication platform dedicated to pets and public safety for use by first responders.

GPC Smart is a unified system that allows first responders to securely access and share animal information on FirstNet, powered by an NFC Tag with a microchip as a reliable back-up to quickly identify lost and strayed pets in the case of emergency.

There are approximately 90 million dogs in the US, but currently less than 10% of them are microchipped,



according to the company.

Global ID will be launching the European version of the GPC Smart tag later in 2022.

Richard Fry, managing director of Global ID Marketing, said: "It has been an ambition of mine for many years to find a partner who will use RFID microchips in the most effective way to help identify lost or stray pets to help reunite them with their owners."

## Swift action saves pets and store from fire

**SWIFT ACTION** by local firefighters prevented extensive damage to a Pets at Home store in Essex last month.

A fire, triggered by a piece of electrical equipment which had been left charging overnight, started in rear of the store on the Colne View Retail Park in Colchester, according to a report by local newspaper the *Daily Gazette*.

The alarm was first raised just after 11pm when the smoke alarms went off, and three fire crews fought the blaze until after midnight. About 20% of the retail unit was in flames at one point and the room where the fire started suffered significant damage, with the adjoining Vets4Pets practice the most badly affected.

A spokeswoman for Pets at Home confirmed that no pets or staff colleagues were injured in the fire and that the pet store remains open and is trading as normal.

## productnews

**BIOARMOR**  
sales@bioarmor.co.uk or sales@bluechipworld.biz

The new formulation of Bioarmor's surface coating for pet products has now achieved 99.9% effectiveness on human Coronavirus type 229E, plus E. coli and MRSA.

The **surface protection**, which lasts up to 90 days before re-application is required, makes sure a pet's accessories are as protected as they can be with Bioarmor and is supported by marketing options, such as **shelf-ready packs** (SRPs) and ready assembled **clip-strips**. All products are priced at £4.99 (including VAT). Trade discounts are also available. Please contact Bioarmor directly by emailing [sales@bioarmor.co.uk](mailto:sales@bioarmor.co.uk) or email the UK distributor [sales@bluechipworld.biz](mailto:sales@bluechipworld.biz)

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## Glue trap ban moves closer

A BAN on using glue traps in England is a step closer after the Glue Traps (Offences) Bill completed its passage through the House of Commons.

The Private Members' Bill, sponsored by Wolverhampton North East MP Jane Stevenson, has the backing of the UK Government and would make using a glue trap to catch a rodent illegal in England, unless under licence.

Between 2016-2021, 263 glue trap incidents were reported to the RSPCA in England.

## Firm to serve wider market

DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER fresh dog food brand Butternut Box is expanding its subscription service into Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands.

Since launch, Butternut Box has served more than 34 million meals in the UK. The company's technology platform uses algorithms to work out the individual needs of each dog, and dishes are prepared using fresh ingredients and portioned according to age, breed, weight, and exercise routine.

Last year it raised £40m of funding to the help expansion into new markets.

# PIF prioritises export solutions

**THE PET Industry Federation (PIF) has postponed its international virtual trade show Virtual Petindex (VPI) in order to focus immediately on developing new solutions for UK pet businesses that want to sell their products to customers in the EU.**

The event, which was due to take place from February 27 until March 7, will now be staged later in 2022. The decision was announced following a successful webinar last week, which highlighted the need for PIF to not only deliver international customers to UK suppliers, but also to have a complementary export solution in place alongside it to enable orders made at VPI to be more easily fulfilled.

Run in partnership with DHL Supply Chain and Associated Veterinary Services, the webinar revealed a range of solutions to help companies overcome the export challenges they have been facing and to open up the European gateway

in a reliable and cost-effective way.

The event outlined three potential consolidation options – fully-managed groupage solutions with export health certificates and fiscal representation co-ordinated centrally; a solution which would allow larger companies to be part of co-ordinated consignments and handle their own export documentation; and full truckload solutions handled through DHL's network of warehouses.

## CONFUSION

PIF chief executive Nigel Baker said: "We were delighted in the level of interest from attendees in the export solutions outlined

at our export webinar.

"It is clear that exporters have been hard hit by the changes that Brexit has brought about and there are now huge levels of uncertainty and confusion around export paperwork, as well as a lack of consistency across different EU countries in terms of their requirements that make exporting to the EU increasingly challenging.

"The Pet Industry Federation is really pleased to have worked alongside DHL Supply Chain and Associated Veterinary Services to develop a range of potential solutions which we believe will enable the UK pet industry to get exporting again."





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## PET REMEDY STOCKIST OFFERS TRADE INCENTIVES

ONLINE PLATFORM Simply2 Pet Products is now stocking the Pet Remedy range of calming products and is offering its trade customers the chance to win free stock.

All trade orders of more than £100 that include at least one Pet Remedy product will be entered into a prize draw, with the winner receiving a set of three Pet Remedy plug diffusers.



The competition closes at midnight on March 1, 2022.

Pet Remedy describes its products as a natural solution to de-stress pets, containing a blend of essential oils without sedatives or medication.

Pet Remedy is designed to be easy to use, with plug-in diffusers, sprays, wipes, and shampoos to help relieve pet anxiety in all situations.

Simply2 Pet Products is a family-run online pet store supplying trade and retail customers worldwide.

## Brands huddle up for new buyers event

ONLINE B2B platform Product Guru is to host a new pet industry event next month as part of a series of boutique gatherings called "Huddles" in 2022.

The first "Pet Huddle" event will take place on March 31 at the Edgbaston Park Hotel in Birmingham. The gathering will bring together up to 50 challenger pet care brands and a line-up of retailers and supermarket chains.

Brands will have time slots to engage with every buyer in a series of face-to-face meetings or hybrid sessions combining video pitches with product sampling for interna-

tional suppliers who are not able to attend in person. A third option will offer brands the opportunity to reach attendees with samples of their products for buyers to give their feedback.

Product Guru will provide devices and connected technology for all buyers to log feedback and track future follow-up actions. Participants will also have the option to attend a networking evening.

Simon Coyle, CEO of Product Guru, said the new in-person events are an important step up from their previous virtual pitch events.



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## Natural Instinct backs assistance dog appeal

RAW PET food brand Natural Instinct is backing the Dog A.I.D. Pawitive Future Appeal, a fundraising campaign run by long-term charity partner, Dog A.I.D.

Dog A.I.D. assists physically disabled people to improve their quality of life and independence by training their own pet dog to become a qualified assistance dog. The pandemic presented significant challenges for the charity, as many fundraising and awareness events were put on hold.

Natural Instinct has been supporting the assistance dog charity, Dog A.I.D. for almost 10 years by helping to raise awareness of the charity's work, donating premium raw food to two dogs that have trained with Dog A.I.D. and funding key marketing materials including trainer uniforms, charity literature and more. Since Natural Instinct's partnership with Dog A.I.D. began, the charity has trained over 300 assistance dogs.

Training is delivered by more than 100 volunteers across the UK. The training takes two years on average, where both the dog and owner receive specialist education and attain a fully qualified Assistance Dog status through three distinct stages.

## Independents remain nervous about Plan A

MORE THAN 60% of independent traders will be keeping themselves and their staff masked in the shop despite 'Plan B' Covid restrictions being lifted in England, according to a new survey.

The poll, by The British Independent Retailers' Association (Bira), showed that 43% of members would still be asking customers to wear face coverings if they could. The survey revealed an even split between the traders on if they were happy or not with the plans, while 55% believed the restrictions being lifted would increase footfall and confidence in the high street.

However, the lifting of restrictions has yet to create much of an impact, with 84% of members saying they hadn't seen a noticeable increase in foot traffic since the government announced the return to Plan A.

Bira's chief executive Andrew Goodacre said: "There is certainly still some nervousness around the restrictions being lifted. Shop owners are uncertain as they want to protect employees and customers.

"It is a positive sign to see the Omicron wave abating and we hope that this continues once the restrictions are lifted."



A mock-up of how the Petco section might look

# American retail giants join forces with pet concession

**AMERICAN PET care retailer Petco is to open concession areas within stores operated by furniture and hardware store chain Lowe's in a major new retail partnership.**

The first Lowe's + Petco store-in-store concept is expected to open at Lowe's Alamo Ranch, Texas, this month, with plans to expand to 14 additional Lowe's locations in Texas, North Carolina, and South Carolina by the end of March 2022.

Petco supplies a range of pet nutrition, health and wellness products and services, including own brands and popular national brands. Lowe's + Petco locations are also expected to offer a selection of Petco's pet services, including Vetco vaccination clinics, microchipping, prescription pest prevention, and grooming.

The agreement was forged as American consumers increasingly see their pets as central to their domestic lives. More than 11 million new pets have entered US homes since the start of the pandemic, and a recent survey by Lowe's shows that 67% of respondents find their greatest comfort in their pets, compared to nearly half who found that comfort in their homes.

Lowe's stores already have a longstanding open-door policy to pets, and the new deal will allow pet owners to support their pet's health and wellness and improve the home they share in a single shopping trip, maintains the company.

Lowe's executive vice president of merchandising Bill Boltz said: "This partnership enhances the total home solution we offer them by bringing home improvement and pet care products, services and expertise together under one roof."

## EXPERTISE

Nick Konat, Petco's chief merchandising officer, added: "Bringing Petco's pet care expertise, high-quality products, and veterinary and grooming services to Lowe's helps make it easier than ever to create healthy, happy homes for pet parents and the pets they love."

Lowe's operates more than 2,200 home improvement and hardware stores in the United States and Canada with total sales approaching \$90 billion (2020). Petco operates 1,500 sites across the US, Mexico and Puerto Rico, including more than 150 in-store veterinary hospitals.

## 40 YEAR LANDMARK FOR HENLEY PET SHOP

**AN INDEPENDENT pet shop in Oxfordshire has recently celebrated its 40th anniversary of trading.**

Tim Richardson and his wife Alex, who run the Henley Pet Shop in Henley-on-Thames, marked the occasion by decorating the store with balloons and offered customers a glass of Prosecco.

Tim's father Bill originally opened the shop in 1981 and Tim took over the running of it in 1991 when his father passed away.

Alex Richardson told local

newspaper *The Henley Standard*: "The store has been through good and tough times, several recessions and the most recent covid-related issues but it is still here and ready to embrace the future.

"That is all thanks to the wonderful people of Henley, the loyal and valued customers who realise the importance of supporting a true independent business and the fact that unique shops are what make a town more attractive than finding the same old multinationals in every town centre."

## Flat faced breeds have higher eye risk

NEAPOLITAN MASTIFFS, English bulldogs and flat-faced crossbreeds such as puggles are at an increased risk of contracting cherry eye compared to other breeds, according to new research from the Royal Veterinary College (RVC).

The condition, which results in the appearance of a large pink mass in the corner of a dog's eye, is a result of the gland on the inner side of the third eyelid prolapsing, becoming red and swollen and covering part of the eye. If left untreated, the condition can cause discomfort and lead to complications such as dry eye, conjunctivitis and eye ulceration, and often requires surgery.

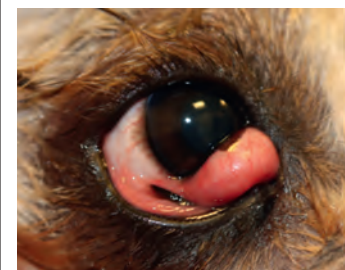
The RVC says its study was the largest exploration of cherry eye in dogs in the world. The research team followed veterinary health records of 905,553 dogs for a year and identified that one in five hundred (1,802) dogs were affected by this condition. However, some breeds were shown to be at much higher risk.

Breeds showing significantly high proportions of dogs affected with cherry eye each year include Neapolitan mastiffs at 4.9%, English bulldogs at 4.8%, puggles (pug x beagle) at 2.1% and jugs (Jack Russell terrier x pug) at 1.2%.

## AWARENESS

Dogs aged less than one year old were found to be at greatest risk of contracting cherry eye. The breeds with the lowest risk included German shepherd, West Highland white terrier, and English springer spaniel.

Dr Minna Mustikka, senior veterinary ophthalmology resident at the RVC Queen Mother Hospital for Animals and co-author of the paper, said: "Cherry eye, if left untreated, may lead to other chronic eye problems, necessitating even lifelong medications and in a worst case scenario, resulting in painful and potentially sight threatening complications. Raising awareness of this condition and its frequency in flat faced breeds is essential."



**CHERRY EYE:** if left untreated, the condition can cause discomfort and lead to complications



# Cranswick buys dry dog food producer

**DOG FOOD** manufacturer Grove Pet Foods has been acquired by food company Cranswick plc.

Grove Pet Foods is a producer of dry dog food under several private labels as well as under its own brands Vitalin (natural) and Alpha Feeds (working dog). The business operates from a purpose-built factory in

Lincolnshire, employing a workforce of 100.

Cranswick was formed in the early 1970s by farmers in East Yorkshire to produce animal feed and has since evolved into a firm producing predominantly fresh food, including fresh pork, poultry, convenience and gourmet products for human consumption.

Cranswick chief executive officer Adam Couch said: "I am delighted to announce the acquisition of Grove Pet Foods, a well-invested manufacturer of dry pet food supplying leading brands focussed on the specialist pet retail market. This acquisition represents a platform for future growth in the attractive UK pet food market and diversification into this complementary category for Cranswick. The existing facility has capacity and a footprint for further expansion."

## REPUTATION

"Grove Pet Foods has built a reputation for high quality products and service that is well aligned with Cranswick. The combined business will benefit from vertical integration opportunities within the group and particularly our fresh poultry and pork businesses. We look forward to building on this and continuing to invest in the product range, facilities and the team over the years ahead."

John Walgate, managing director of Grove Pet Foods, will remain with the company and continue to lead the business.

## PALEO RIDGE CREATES A REFRESHING LOOK

**RAW DOG** food brand Paleo Ridge is refreshing its Paleo Plus range with brand new packaging across the entire range.

The updated design completes a refresh of all Paleo Ridge lines which began 18 months ago with the redesign of the Classic and DIY ranges.

The new Paleo Plus packaging features brighter colours and sharp patterns, designed to create an eye-catching look. The updated packaging is also more

compact, making the products easier to store for customers, retailers and while in transit and occupying less space in the freezer.

Will Green, head of sales and marketing at Paleo Ridge, said: "We are delighted to be reinvigorating the Paleo Plus range with a bold, new

packaging update. The refresh makes the range more appealing and is crucially more consumer-friendly, saving space and unnecessary packaging in its more compact new form."



## In brief



## Natural balm to soothe dogs

**NATURAL INGREDIENTS** are a key component of a new entrant into the dog balm market.

Bone Shaker dog balm is designed to heal and restore dry cracked and damaged skin, and therefore help soothe distressed pets.

The product is laboratory-assessed, produced in small batches under strict quality control and contains no parabens, fragrance or petroleum.

Active ingredients include murumuru butter, mango butter, aloe vera butter, sweet almond oil, beeswax and arrowroot powder, plus essential oils chamomile, ginger and cedarwood to reduce swelling and help heal skin infections and insect bites.

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Meet buyers from major retailers...







## VetPartners makes Spanish connection

UK-BASED veterinary group VetPartners has expanded further into Europe with the acquisition of two practices in Spain.

Praxia, a referral practice specialising in various fields including cardiology and orthopaedics, based in Elche, Alicante, has become the group's founding Spanish practice.

This acquisition has been swiftly followed by a second practice after Medican Veterinary Center in Madrid also joined VetPartners.

Founded by CEO Jo Malone in 2015 VetPartners now operates 188 UK practices, employing more than 7,000 people across nearly 550 sites from its headquarters in York.

The company first expanded into Europe in 2019 with the acquisition of practices in Italy, and has since added sites in Switzerland, France and Germany before the latest acquisitions in Spain.

## Pooches pile on pandemic pounds

NEARLY A third of UK dogs are overweight, according to new research by Naturo Natural Pet Food.

Reasons for the increase in pooch pounds are mostly down to owners buying their dog's love with treats (43%), Naturo suggests, with a third (34%) admitting that their dogs are spoilt and are allowed to eat whatever they would like. And nearly one in 10 (8%) say they have treated their pets even more during lockdown.

A quarter (26%) treat their dogs with human food and others are happy to spend the cash by purchasing organic meat (14%). A further one in ten (11%) treat their dogs with their own breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Naturo has teamed up with TV personality and dog behaviourist Leon Towers to help keep dogs fit and active via an exercise video.

# High remission rates seen in feline diabetes trial

**THE ROYAL Veterinary College (RVC) is claiming disease remission rates of around 75% for cats with diabetes following a trial treatment programme.**

The trial has proven so successful that the RVC is now seeking more participants for a new wave of the study to investigate the effects of supervised calorie restriction – including a new feline prescription diabetic food – to achieve weight loss and diabetic remission in cats with the condition.

An estimated 54,500 cats suffer from diabetes mellitus in the UK, with obesity a strong contributing factor. The condition requires daily injections and frequent veterinary examinations. Many cats are currently euthanised at the time of diagnosis.

Dr Ruth Gostelow, lecturer in small animal internal medicine at the RVC, said: "The study has already proved incredibly successful. Since it began, recruited cats have recorded a diabetic remission rate of approximately 75% – an outstanding result compared to what is typically reported for diabetic cats.

"The early success of the trial means we want to expand it, and now

we need more vets and their cat owners to sign up. Although some cats will remain diabetic for the duration of their life, a proportion can achieve diabetic remission and stop insulin treatment. Achieving diabetic remission significantly increases their life expectancy, and owner and pet wellbeing."

The study will take place over 12 months, and cats joining the trial will attend between five and seven outpatient appointments at the RVC Queen Mother Hospital for Animals, near Potters Bar in Hertfordshire. Additional monitoring will also be conducted by owners at home.

### DIABETIC CARE

Cats and owners joining the trial will receive free underlying disease screening, free cat food for the 12-month period, free home blood glucose monitoring supplies, newly developed glucose monitoring cat litter for use at home and dedicated diabetic care from the RVC clinic team.

As part of the study, cats will be fed the test diet for the first 12 weeks, and the remaining time period will assess and monitor cats' longer-term outcomes.



## Sub-free dog tracker 'changes the game'

PET HEALTH technology firm PitPat is claiming to have "changed the game" for dog GPS trackers with the launch of its subscription-free device.

The company claims it is the first tracker to incorporate both the latest LTE-M and NB-IoT technologies, giving the tracker better power performance, coverage and network availability, as well as a long battery life. These innovations help overcome the flaws in existing trackers such as large size, short battery life, costly ongoing subscriptions and unreliable performance, argues PitPat.

The new tracker made its debut at the Consumer Electronics Show earlier this month. The device has an RRP of £149 and the accompanying app, compatible with iOS and Android devices, is free to download without a subscription. The unit is available in five colour styles.

**TELEVISION viewers got a glimpse into pet food production when raw food specialist Natures Menu featured in an episode of Channel 4's *Food Unwrapped* programme last month.**

Programme presenter Matt Tebbutt was guided around Natures Menu's Snetterton factory by the company's technical manager, Richard Hindley. Following the progress of the Country Hunter Raw Nuggets production line,

## NATURES MENU MANAGER BECOMES TV STAR

viewers were given a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how the dog food is made.

Seen by 1.3 million people, the episode communicated the benefits of feeding a raw food diet to dogs, as part of a 'Healthy New Year' theme.

Hindley said: "It was a fantastic experience welcoming Matt and the team to the factory and rewarding to see how well received the products are that we make at Natures Menu. We're delighted that the reported benefits of a raw food diet were communicated throughout the 'Healthy New Year' show, as well as the impactful imagery

used of the nutritious ingredients that go straight into our food."

Following the visit, Matt Tebbutt joined Natures Menu on The Pupcast, stating: "I was genuinely blown away by the quality of the ingredients and the process that goes into making the product – the pallets of whole salmon, fresh looking vegetables and high quality ingredients that were being turned into pet food was extremely interesting."

The episode, originally broadcast on January 3, is available to view on demand on All4.



Matt Tebbutt was guided around Natures Menu's Snetterton factory by Richard Hindley

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## FIRST AID CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES ONLINE PETITION

A CAMPAIGN calling for mandatory first aid qualifications for all UK pet professionals has gone up a level with the launch of an online petition.

The Safe Pets and People campaign aims to highlight that currently dog walkers, dog groomers and pet sitters do not have to hold a first aid qualification. It is urging the government to make such training mandatory.

The body has now set up a petition on the Change.org website to encourage members of the public to make their voices heard on the issue.

Endorsed by the RSPCA, The Groomers Spotlight and Street Paws, the campaign is led by national qualification provider the iPET Network.



The Safe Pets and People campaign is led by national qualification provider the iPET Network

## Demand grows for natural ingredients

**SHOPPERS ACROSS the world are putting increased emphasis on natural ingredients when choosing pet food, according to a new global survey.**

The poll of 2,500 dog and cat owners in the UK, USA, Brazil, Germany and China, conducted by market research company Wizer on behalf of ingredients supplier Beneo, found that products with lower or no additives makes pet food appear healthier for more than four in five pet owners.

Natural ingredient claims have a significant influence on purchasing, with 79% of pet owners checking the label for any ingredients they dislike, and three quarters of them agreeing that using no allergens makes pet food seem healthier, the study shows.

More than 90% of pet owners say that supporting digestive health improves the likelihood of them

purchasing a product. Notably the demand for prebiotics is gathering pace, with 70% of respondents agreeing that adding such fibres to pet food makes it seem healthier.

Maygane Ronsmans, animal nutrition product manager at Beneo, said: "The findings of this latest pet survey highlight the rising demand from owners for understandable, cleaner ingredients labels and for healthier nutrition for their pets."

### PLANT-BASED SOLUTIONS

"We are also seeing this reflected through the rising number of customers favouring Beneo's clean label and hypoallergenic rice starches and proteins, which are the ideal plant-based solutions for premium pet foods."

Formed in 2007, Beneo is active in over 80 countries, employing more than 1,000 people.

## Fairground-themed shop delights shoppers

AN INDEPENDENT pet store in Lancashire is bringing a sense of fun to retail with a fairground theme.

The Furground opened its doors in Leyland in December, selling a variety of pet food, accessories and live animals including reptiles, rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters.

The store, which is on the site of an old amusement arcade, has a fairground-style fascia at

the front of the store and is dressed internally with bunting and striped tents.

Speaking to the *Lancashire Post*, owner Sarah Mackay said: "I wanted something that was fun, and to give my shop that warm embrace feeling like someone walks in and enjoys it, like it's aesthetically pleasing to be in there. I didn't just want it to be a bog standard pet shop, I wanted it to be an experience as well."

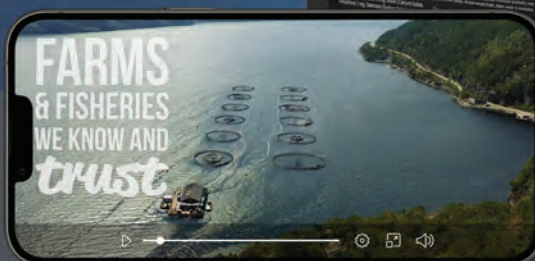
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## Vets question beaches link to dog bug

A “MYSTERY” vomiting bug affecting dogs in the North of England may be a normal seasonal illness common during spells of cold weather, vets have explained.

Media reports about dogs presenting with gastroenteritis-like symptoms in parts of North East England and Yorkshire have prompted speculation that they could be linked to visits to local beaches.

However, British Veterinary Association (BVA) President Justine Shotton said that there was not enough evidence at present to speculate on the reasons for the spike in cases, or any possible links to beaches or other environmental factors.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4’s PM programme, Shotton said: “Vets see gastroenteritis cases relatively commonly in practice, but numbers seem to be increasing and more widespread than usual.

“We’ve heard reports from vets in the area who are really far inland and they are also seeing an increase in these kinds of cases in dogs that have never been to the beach, so I’m not sure yet if we have enough information to make that link.

### NORMAL INCREASE

“While pet owners are understandably worried, the cases may be part of a normal increase in gastroenteritis that vets see during the colder months. We saw something similar a couple of years ago and the latest data from the University of Liverpool’s veterinary surveillance database points to the spike being part of normal seasonal variation at the moment.”

She added: “With gastroenteritis, most cases are mild, but some dogs may need hospitalisation with a drip. In the worst situations, it can become haemorrhagic leading to secondary complications or even death, but that is very rare.

“Our advice to concerned owners is to contact their local vet for prompt treatment if their dog shows any signs of illness, such as vomiting and diarrhoea.”

## Dog party raises funds for charity

MANCHESTER’S BREWDOG Hotel hosted a dog-friendly event last month to raise money for the Street Paws charity.

More than 35 dogs and their owners attended the exclusive ‘Brewdog Pawty’ at the hotel in Fountain Street.

Michelle Southern, founder of

## Store launches weight loss club for dogs

**OVERWEIGHT DOGS** in Southampton are being offered a three-month health and exercise programme to help them lose weight by an innovative pet shop.

Healthy Pet Store in Totton, Southampton, is inviting dog owners to sign up to The Lean Club initiative. Members of the scheme receive expert advice about meals, portion size and healthy exercise, with owners and their dogs being invited back to the store for a weekly weigh-in to review their progress and discuss next steps.

Both the owners and their animals are offered rewards for reaching key milestones along the way.

### WEIGHT LOSS

The weight loss programme was launched on January 10, but owners can sign up at any time for a three-month programme by visiting the Healthy Pet Store.

Managing director Deborah Burrows said: “We are delighted to launch the Lean Club and to help transform pets’ lives through healthy weight loss. Leaner dogs live longer with less joint pain and health complications,



Customer advisor Bianca Taylor helping Misty with Healthy Pet Store weighing scales

especially as they get older.

“The programme is to help dogs live a healthier and happier life. All we ask of the owners is to commit to coming in for a weekly weigh-in and to keep hold of their visual tracker.”



## DOG TRAINING FIRM HAS GLOBAL AMBITION

**BRITISH TRAINING** company Bark & Birch Global is expanding into several new territories in 2022 including Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong.

The company is also planning to further increase its European footprint this year to cover France and Germany.

Chief executive Nick Rijniers, who began his career training German and Belgian Shepherds in the Dutch Special Forces, started the company in 2019 in the UK with only two members of staff.

Bark & Birch now has more than 100 staff members globally and trains more than 1000 dogs a month, turned over \$8 million dollars in its second year of

business and has operations in the UK, Ireland, Portugal and the US.

The growth of Bark & Birch into Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong furthers strengthens the brands global reach and follows the official launch of Bark & Birch in Brazil in December last year.

Rijniers said: “2022 was always going to be a huge year for Bark & Birch. Expanding into Australia, New Zealand and Asia is huge for us and we have already started recruiting for staff and dog trainers in these areas.

“We have always had the goal of becoming the biggest dog services company across the world and we are thrilled to be expanding into these territories.”

Bark & Birch’s team of dog behaviourists and ex-police/army dog handlers rehabilitate animals and teach basic and advanced obedience, either as part of a residential ‘Board and Train’ programme or through a series of private one-to-one sessions. The company claims it will always strive to build customised programs around each dog.

## Pet insurance firms recognised in awards

COMPARISON website business GoCompare has produced a ranking of the most popular pet insurance firms as part of its inaugural People’s Choice Awards.

Nearly 4,000 pet owners from across the UK were asked about their pet insurance provider as part of the awards process. Respondents were asked to rate the trust they had in the company, the likelihood of being recommended to friends and family, the level of customer service and satisfaction received, rewards offered, as well as how innovative the insurer was in terms of technology and product offering.

### CONFIDENCE

The companies consumers rated ‘excellent’ or ‘outstanding’ in at least one of the categories are: 4Paws Pet Insurance; Admiral; Agria; Animal Friends; Argos; Bought By Many; Cover My Pet; DirectLine; Healthy Pets; More Than; PDSA; Petplan; Sainsbury’s Bank and Tesco Bank.

According to GoCompare’s research, 76% of consumers trusted their pet insurance provider and a similar number have confidence that their pet insurance product will protect their pets well. An average of 66% of consumers also believe the customer service of their pet insurance provider is excellent.

The average pet insurance claim is £822, reports Statista.



# Record festive sales for Pets at Home

**PETS AT Home** enjoyed retail revenue growth of 9.8% in the last quarter of the calendar year, including record sales of its seasonal ranges during the Christmas period.

In a trading statement covering the 12-week period from October 8 to December 30, 2021, the company announced that total group revenue grew by 5.8% to £319.4m, with like-for-like revenue up +8.7% compared to a similar period last year.

Like for like retail revenue was up by 9%, with store revenue up by 7.4% on the same basis. The company attributed the performance to a robust UK pet care market, with continued growth in new pet owners, and ongoing themes of long-term pet ownership, humanisation and premiumisation.

## VIP

The number of active VIP loyalty club members increased by 13% year on year to reach seven million, an increase of 1.7million within two years. Online revenues grew by 16.7% during the period, and the group also opened two new pet care centres at Brighton and Guildford, taking the estate to 455 stores.

As a result of the successful quarter, the group has revised its profit forecasts upwards, predicting that the annual pre-tax profit will be at least £140m for the full year.

Peter Pritchard, group chief executive officer, commented: "Our unique, omnichannel pet care strategy continues to deliver strong revenue growth, reflecting continued momentum in customer acquisition, engagement and spend as the benefits of our ongoing investment in capacity and capability really start to deliver. We are firmly on track to report a record year of sales and profit growth."



*Petpals is seeking a replacement franchisee who will continue Tina's legacy*

## PET CHAMPION FOR THE MIDLANDS SOUGHT

**A LEICESTERSHIRE** pet care business owner is retiring after spending more than 10 years looking after the needs of pets in Loughborough and the surrounding area.

Tina Fisher started Petpals Loughborough in November 2009 after spending 18 years in administrative roles. The franchise offers a range of services such as dog walking, pet sitting, and pet taxis for trips to local vets.

Due to ill health, Tina has made the difficult decision to retire from the business in March 2022 and the company is seeking a replacement franchisee who will continue her legacy in the local area.

Tina said: "We have a committed, determined and passionate team here

at Petpals who make a real difference to the care of pets in the local community. I am so proud of what we have accomplished, and I cannot wait to see where the business goes in the future. To be able to go beyond the important service we offer and to contribute in a wider way by helping feed vulnerable animals with our annual Christmas food drive has been a particular highlight of mine.

"With the massive rise in pet ownership in the UK it has never been more important to have experts offering services who really love pets," she added. "I want to thank everyone who I have worked with at Petpals Loughborough for their immense contribution, and I'm really keen to offer my support to the next owner of the business."

## New veterinary referral clinic to serve the Scottish Highlands

CROWN VETS, a long-standing veterinary surgery in Inverness, has received planning permission to open a new state of the art referral practice, which will serve pet owners across the Highlands and North of Scotland.

Highland Vet Referrals, which will see the existing Crown Vets referrals service relocate from its current site on Argyle Street to a brand new building in the Culduthel area, is due to open

during the summer of 2022, creating six new jobs.

The centre will accept patients referred from veterinary practices across the Highlands, particularly pets which need more dedicated or surgical treatment. Crown Vets will then offer an expanded first opinion veterinary service for pets at its Argyle Street premises.

Highland Vet Referrals will be headed up by clinical director Bruce Nevill.

## In brief

### Boris falls out of favour as a puppy name

ON TOP of the prime minister's troubles, Boris has also suffered a fall from grace among puppy names, according to data from Agria Pet Insurance.

Boris's popularity as a pet name has proven to be short-lived, the company says, with registrations dropping by 39% year-on-year. National affection for Captain Tom Moore, however, has been reflected with over 1,000% more puppies named Captain and over 350% more named Tom registered in 2021 compared to before the lockdown. Pandemic-influenced new additions to the list included Pfizer and Zeneca, Agria reported.

The popularity of fashion brands for female puppy names continued with 48 pets named Fendi listed in 2021. At the same time Chanel appeared to fall completely out of favour, dropping from 28 puppies in 2020 to zero in 2021.

Over the last five years, puppy names in the UK's top ten have largely stayed consistent with Bella, Willow, Daisy and Lola maintaining their popularity for female pets, whilst Teddy, Milo, Buddy and Reggie maintain the top spots for male dogs.



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***Staying afloat as an independent pet shop isn't getting any easier over time, but Adam Chapman of Wolfit in Kent keeps a close eye on sales and margins, and focuses on key points of difference over larger competitors***

Owner Adam Chapman (centre) with store team members Richard and Vicky

**A**DAM CHAPMAN, owner of Wolfit The Pet Shop in Tunbridge Wells, Kent and a second store in nearby Tonbridge, describes himself as “the last man standing” in the town.

As an independent store in a high street location, the business is facing a set of challenges familiar to many in the trade, with rising costs and falling footfall. But he's been running the business for 14 years now, and makes sure that it operates in business-like fashion.

“Margins are dwindling, so you have to focus on stocking the things that the big guys don't do and the things that will make money for you,” he says. “Where once we had RRP's we now have SSP's from a lot of the big manufacturers, and you know you can't sell it for that price and stay in business for very long.”

He continues: “I think the independent trade as a whole should focus on margin rather than sticking to

# Standing up for independents

the RRP all the time. I need to achieve a margin of around 30% to keep the store going, so I select and price items based on that rather than the manufacturers' RRP's or SSP's.

“You don't have to stock any one particular product, after all but there are certain things customers expect to see in a pet shop, so it's a balance.”

Adam maintains that the store's regular customers don't mind paying a little more for the experience of visiting the shop in person. “After Covid, I think a lot of shoppers came to realise that the high street is in danger of dying and they don't want that to happen. They like going shopping, they like the interaction, and they value the advice we give.”







Although you can find some big brands on shelf at Wolfit, the eye is drawn to products with a point of difference, such as the store's own brand range.

Comprising around 20 lines covering dog food, dog treats and wild bird food, the products are a mixture of generic lines with a Wolfit label applied and some created specifically for the store with a bespoke recipe.

While own label products are good moneyspinners, raw food is also proving to be very lucrative for Wolfit.

"Right now, raw is huge," says Adam. "It's good for small stores because only homes with a large amount of freezer space would be able to get direct deliveries so shoppers need to come to the shop and don't mind paying a bit more per piece.

"Three years ago we just had a single freezer, now we have seven! We've added three extra cabinets in the last year, with some additional ones installed in the basement.

"We now make more money on raw than we do on dry food. A year ago that wouldn't have been the case."

While raw food is an ongoing success, loose items sold from a dedicated display unit are also popular.

## SHOPPING AROUND

"A lot of people just want to buy one item, and you generally can't do that on the internet," says Adam. "Selling the things that you can't find online is a big part of what we do."

To achieve this, Adam does a lot of shopping around, using several different wholesalers and also buying direct from smaller manufacturers in order to source good products with the right margins. Adam also spends a lot of time going through sales data to make sure that products are paying for their keep in store.

"You need to calculate how much money per sq ft you need to make, and if a product is not earning that, then you need to replace it with something else.

"I'm a big believer in epos, and I look at the data on a weekly basis.

"I think the only way for the trade to survive is to use epos. Suppliers are constantly adjusting their prices and you need to keep on top of it – if the cost price of a product moves from £1 to £1.25 then that's your margin gone, and it's much easier to spot these changes using the system than going through all the invoices line by line."

Adam's embrace of technology includes a smart website for both stores, which has been live for four years and includes an online sales service. But he is selective here as well, only listing a limited range of products where he can be competitively priced.

"The pet trade is very traditional, but we need to make sure we move with the times without losing the



friendly feel," says Adam.

This friendly feel is embodied by store manager Vicky and team member Richard, who are always on hand to give advice to customers.

"Vicky is naturally interested in raw feeding, she feeds it to her dogs and she does a lot of research, she's a real raw expert and is passionate about it.

We sell more raw food in Tunbridge Wells than we do in our other shop in Tonbridge, and I think having a real expert lifts sales above where they would otherwise be," says Adam.

## NATURAL AMBIENCE

The most common questions asked by customers in store these days concern natural ingredients and additives in food. "Natural and eco is the right way to go for the future," says Adam, and the store is well placed to capitalise on this trend with its natural ambience and wooden shelving, including a central merchandising stand constructed from old pallets.

"We are always following the trends, and chasing the right product that the big boys can't do as well as us," he adds. ■





## Boom predicted for pet insurance

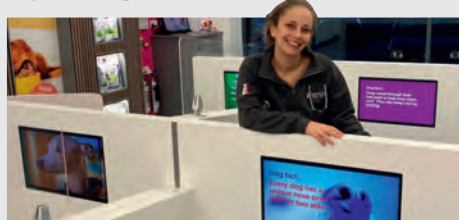
THE PANDEMIC pet boom is one of the key factors expected to increase the market value of pet insurance over the next few years according to a new report.

With the increasing pet adoption, the global market is forecast to grow with an anticipated CAGR of more than 10% between 2020 and 2026.

The report from ResearchAndMarkets.com – ‘Global Pet Insurance Market Overview, 2020-26’ – categorises the market to forecast the revenues and analyse the trends in each of the following segments: based animal type (cat, dog and others), by insurance type (accidental and illness and accident-only endorsement) by the end-user (agency, broker, bancassurance, direct writing) based on region, countries and major companies.

In the year 2015, the value of the pet insurance market was at US\$2.9bn. As healthcare costs for pets are going through the roof with innovations and rising demand, pet owners are increasingly adopting pet insurance schemes.

## Midlands vet group opens high-tech practice



*The Kingswinford practice is headed up by Rosie Levene-Barry, who brings more than 15 years' experience to the role*

INDEPENDENT VETERINARY group Harrison Family Vets has opened a state-of-the-art practice at Kingswinford near Dudley, as part of a £330,000 investment that has initially created six jobs.

The practice at Gatehouse Retail Park has been designed around the pets it will treat. The waiting area features bespoke pods to shield pets from the stresses of facing other animals. Each pod has its own screen displaying pet jokes and facts through to information about pet welfare and nutrition.

There are also four high-tech consulting rooms, an on-site laboratory, x-ray suite, operating theatre and ultrasonography. The practice has separate dog and cat wards that have been designed with mood lighting, aromas, and music to create a calming atmosphere.

## Logistics firms set for full recovery

THE MAJORITY of UK logistics and supply chain organisations are confident of a full recovery from Brexit and covid disruptions within the next 12 months.

A survey completed by corporate members of The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in the UK found: 62% of respondents noted major supplier challenges; More than 50% cited warehousing and distribution challenges; 63.5% experienced staffing and employment difficulties; More than 70% now have processes in place to mitigate the risk of similar issues arising in the future; More than 70% of respondents are expecting a full recovery from covid and Brexit in 2022.

Survey results were gathered by LogMark to get a picture of the future of supply chain following the recent disruptions.

## Ask the expert...

### Advice on how to maximise sales and profits in the current marketplace



**Mars Petcare category and market activation director ZOE TAPHOUSE explains how independent retailers can take full advantage of the opportunities created by the expanding new generation of British pet owners**

### GOOD TIMES FOR THE TRADE

IT IS an exciting time for petcare. Britain is in the midst of a pet population boom, driven partly by the pandemic and growing understanding of the benefits of pet ownership on our mental and emotional wellbeing. This, in turn, is driving an acceleration of growth and presents big opportunities for retailers.

With the new generation of pet owners and a growing preference for certain breeds that tend to live longer than others, retailers can maximise opportunities by ensuring availability of well-known trusted brands and offering the right products for the right pets at the right life stage. Pet parents are also continuously turning to products inspired by nature and science, as well as sustainability, therefore retailers should prioritise these offerings.

### MAKE IT EASY FOR NEW SHOPPERS

Good signposting and secondary positions for treats are invaluable, helping to elevate shopping trips to a more valuable transaction. Premium brands, such as Cesar and Sheba, are key to driving spend too as well as products with purpose and sustainability credentials.

### KEY LINES TO DRIVE SHOPPER SPEND

Providing trade-up options is key to driving premiumisation and shopper spend, especially in luxury wet single serve dog and cat food. Shoppers are also trading up in terms of pack size, with shopper penetration of single serve wet cat food in seven to 15-pouch multipacks seeing growth, as well as 101g to 200g packs of dog treats. By increasing distribution of larger packs, retailers can increase spend. Mars Petcare is helping retailers capitalise on growth with the ‘Dream Sixteen’, a reinvigorated range of must-stocks, including bestsellers from Pedigree, Whiskas, Sheba and Cesar.

### QUICK WINS AND PROVEN SUCCESSSES

It's particularly key that retailers stock well-known brands, such as Whiskas, Pedigree, Sheba and Dreamies, as that will help reassure shoppers of a range they can trust. Utilise social media within your local community, highlighting product offerings and

availability. Stores should focus on placing pet treats prominently, such as close to the till, that tempt shoppers to buy on impulse.

### HELPING RETAILERS REACH NEW CUSTOMERS

This year we have launched a new initiative in partnership with James Wellbeloved called ‘trusted partner’ to help drive new shoppers into stores. Retailers signed up to the programme have access to packs and vouchers to attract new customers, plus receive training on products and nutritional advice. We have assets available that can be utilised on social media channels and stores are listed as a stockist on the James Wellbeloved website.

### ROOM FOR FUTURE GROWTH

We expect to see some further growth in pet ownership and will be doing our own studies into this. We also expect to see petcare category growth. This will be achieved by delivering natural, healthy treats and meals for cats and dogs that have been developed in line with rigorous scientific research. These products will cement the ever-closer bonds consumers have with their pets by providing moments of enjoyment and indulgence. ■

For more information on the future of petcare, read Mars Petcare's latest report at [www.gbr.mars.com/news-and-stories](http://www.gbr.mars.com/news-and-stories)



## BURNS BACKS 5KM RUN SCHEME

BURNS PET Nutrition has partnered with travel platform Dog Furiendly to encourage dog owners to take part in a free exercise programme.

The two companies have joined forces to create the Tail Wag to 5k event. From the week beginning January 23, the 12-week programme will encourage complete beginners to become more active and will seek to improve participants' stamina as they train to complete a 5km run with their dog.

Participants are also being encouraged to raise money for dog charity Broken Biscuits, the disabled animal advocacy organisation that works to treat and rehabilitate injured animals and restore their mobility.

### EXERCISE

As part of the charity campaign, both organisations have collaborated with human running experts RunWales and canicross (cross country running with dogs) experts Pawrunner to ensure the programme is tailored to support human fitness as well as maintaining the health and welfare of the canine participants.

John Burns, founder of Burns Pet Nutrition said "We believe that the key to feeling good and staying healthy for both dogs and humans is exercise. That's why we're thrilled to be teaming up with Dog Furiendly to create this exciting programme which will hopefully inspire owner and dog to both improve their stamina and overall level of fitness so that they can run a 5K together!"



## ADVICE FOR WILD BIRD NESTING SEASON

PEDIGREE WHOLESALE has issued advice to shoppers about wild birds in support of its Walter Harrison brand.

Wild bird nesting season generally takes place from March until August, but varies from species to species. During this period, birds of all varieties travel to and from their nest sites searching for twigs, sticks and materials to make their nests. While most birds will build their nests in trees, gardens can also be a great place for birds to nest with the right help, the advice explains, recommending that garden owners minimise any vegetation work, hedge trimming and cutting down

# High success rate for feline diabetes study

THE ROYAL Veterinary College (RVC) is claiming disease remission rates of around 75% for cats with diabetes following a trial treatment programme.

The trial has proven so successful that the RVC is now seeking more participants for a new wave of the study to investigate the effects of supervised calorie restriction – including a new feline prescription diabetic food – to achieve weight loss and diabetic remission in cats with the condition.

An estimated 54,500 cats suffer from diabetes mellitus in the UK, with obesity a strong contributing factor. The condition requires daily injections and frequent veterinary examinations for affected cats, resulting in significant financial and social costs for owners. Many cats are currently euthanised at the time of diagnosis.

### SUCCESSFUL

Dr Ruth Gostelow, lecturer in small animal internal medicine at the RVC, said: "The study has already proved incredibly successful. Since it began, recruited cats have recorded a diabetic remission rate of approximately 75% – an outstanding result compared to what is typically reported for diabetic cats.

"The early success of the trial means we want to expand it, and now we need more vets and their cat owners to sign up. Although some cats will remain diabetic for the duration of their life, a proportion can achieve diabetic remission and stop insulin treatment. Achieving diabetic remission significantly increases their

life expectancy, and owner and pet wellbeing."

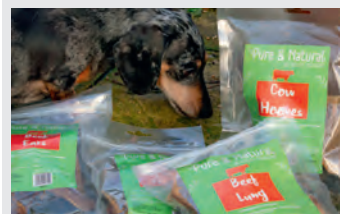
The study will take place over 12 months, and cats joining the trial will attend between five and seven outpatient appointments at the RVC Queen Mother Hospital for Animals, near Potters Bar in Hertfordshire. Additional monitoring will also be conducted by owners at home.

### DIABETIC CARE

Cats and owners joining the trial will receive free underlying disease screening, free cat food for the 12-month period, free home blood glucose monitoring supplies, newly developed glucose monitoring cat litter for use at home and dedicated diabetic care from the RVC clinic team.

As part of the study, cats will be fed the test diet for the first 12 weeks, and the remaining time period will assess and monitor cats' longer-term outcomes.

## In brief



## New natural treats range from Su-Bridge

SU-BRIDGE Pet Supplies has introduced a natural treats range under the Pure & Natural label.

The Pure & Natural range consists of 46 products including treat lines such as Lamb Ears, Beef Pizzle, Paddywack, Dried Camel Skin, and Chicken Feet. Products in the range are supplied in clear hanging packs and 1kg display boxes, designed to give the shopper a range of options to suit dogs of all breeds and sizes without taking up too much space on shelf.

National sales manager Lynne Hopwood said: "We have produced an incredible range of high quality, natural, and superior choice of treats that meets everything required for the needs of our customers, and their customers."

Pure & Natural dog treats have trade prices starting from £1.04, with an RRP of £1.89.

## YOUR LABEL, OUR FOOD

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trees during the nesting season as well as helping wild birds to find food.

The Walter Harrison's brand has a 100-year history of creating wild bird feed and nest boxes.





## Felix brand hopes for great things

CAT FOOD brand Felix has launched a new marketing campaign entitled 'Felix – it's Great To Be A Cat' in order to connect with shoppers and drive them into stores.

A new television advertisement has been on air since January backed by a campaign spend of £3.7 million and encompassing TV and VOD, radio, shopper and social media. As part of the campaign, shoppers will also be given the chance to participate in a Felix-inspired social challenge and AR game later this year.

In addition, the brand will launch limited-edition versions of 12 and 40 packs for As Good As It Looks Ocean Feasts and As Good As It Looks Mixed Selection in Jelly, featuring the new identity, available from mid-2022.

Felix is the UK's number one cat food brand, with a 38% share of the wet cat single serve market, brand owner Nestlé Purina states.

## Stylish urn for chihuahua owners



CHIHUAHUA OWNERS can mourn the passing of their pets with a new figurine urn from Pettributes.

The new figurine adds to the company's growing collection of breed-specific dog urns. The statuette's hollow interior allows owners to store a pet's ashes discreetly. The urn also includes a memory capsule for a photo and small keepsake mementos such as a collar tag or lock of hair. It can also be personalised with an engraved name or short message.

Adam Masters, managing director at Pettributes, said: "Chihuahuas have grown in popularity in the UK in recent years, and they are now the third most chosen breed in the UK. As a result, more owners are keen to ensure that they have a fitting tribute after the loss of this lovely pet and our Chihuahua urn provides a perfect resting place for their ashes."

# Jollyes enjoys record Christmas sales

**FOOTFALL AND sales at pet retailer Jollyes reached a record high in December, including its busiest ever Christmas Eve, the company reports.**

December sales broke all company records, driven by a surge in demand for dog toys and dog treats.

The announcement came as the company reported its results for the half year to November 30, 2021. During the period, revenue increased to £42 million, a 12.5% rise in like-for-like sales against a year earlier and a 30% uplift on the same period in 2019.

During the six-month period, membership of Jollyes' PetCLUB rewards scheme rose by over 20% and sales of its exclusive Lifestage dog food rose by 60%, along with an acceleration in sales of frozen food raw feeding products. The top performing stores included Enniskillen, Skegness, Maidstone and Gloucester, which all achieved like-for-like growth of over 30%.

In the half-year, Jollyes gave makeovers to stores at Totton, Wakefield and North Harbour and completed the purchase of two businesses – The Pet Store, with three stores at Barnsley, Denby Dale and Wakefield in October 2021, and



Bannerbrook Pets in Coventry in November. The acquisitions took the number of company stores above 70 for the first time.

### TESTIMONY

Jollyes has 20 new store openings in the pipeline for the next 18 months. In the first half of 2022, the company will open new stores in Edinburgh, Glenrothes and Stirling in Scotland, a new Welsh store in Wrexham and also at Cookstown in Northern Ireland. In England, it will open new locations in Bristol and Stockton-on-Tees.

Richard Cotter, executive chairman

of Jollyes, said: "To come through the pandemic and all of the challenges it has presented to retailers in such good shape is testimony to the hard work of everyone at the business.

"The tremendous half year sales and record December numbers show how much customers appreciate the work we've done to develop our ranges and invest in our people. We're well placed to push ahead with our ambitious growth and investment plans with an exciting pipeline of new stores and refurbishments and keen to look for acquisition opportunities across the UK."

## PANDEMIC CREATED SAFETY CONCERNS FOR VETS

**AROUND 40% of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses say they have experienced concerns for their personal safety during the Covid pandemic, according to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS).**

These safety concerns extended beyond catching the virus, and mainly related to client interactions at the practice either during the day or out-of-hours, two recent surveys by the RCVS has found. Many respondents experienced conflict between their personal wellbeing and their professional role, and found it difficult to juggle their work and caring responsibilities. Many clinical staff also said their mental health was adversely affected by the experience of working during the pandemic.

A large majority of respondents said they had seen an increase in caseload due to new animal ownership, while 49% of veterinary nurses and 40% of veterinary surgeons worked additional hours due to others being furloughed. According to the

surveys, 23% of vets and 37% of nurses were enrolled in the furlough scheme.

In addition, 38% of veterinary surgeons and 40% of veterinary nurses had to self-isolate at some point during the pandemic, while 7% of vets and 8% of nurses had to shield at some point during the pandemic due to being clinically vulnerable.

The polls of the two professions were carried out between July and August last year by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the RCVS. Over 6,000 vets and 3,000 nurses completed the surveys.

Lizzie Lockett, chief executive of RCVS, commented: "The surveys make it clear it has been a tough time for the professions. However, a good

proportion of respondents also acknowledged that positive developments have come from the past two years, including the way the profession has demonstrated remarkable resilience, flexibility and adaptability, as well as forging a stronger team spirit under such difficult circumstances."



## Top doggy venues for holidays named

HOMEWOOD Hotel & Spa in Bath, Somerset, has been hailed as the most dog-friendly holiday venue in the UK.

Holiday operator PetsPyjamas named the hotel as the overall winner of its annual Dog-Friendly Travel Awards late last year.

Judges paid tribute to the luxurious 13th-century property as guests can take their dog almost everywhere in the hotel including sitting rooms the bar and dining facilities, which includes a specially-curated doggie menu. Staff can also recommend local walks and pubs in the area that welcome dogs.

De Vere Cotswold Water Park in South Cerney, Gloucestershire was named as Best New Dog-Friendly Stay, while Belmont Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, in Great Milton, Oxfordshire was named as best place for a dog-friendly Gourmet Getaway.

The Three Blackbirds in Newmarket, Suffolk, was named as the Best Dog-friendly Pub with Rooms, while The Mill End Hotel Chagford, Devon was voted as the customers' favourite getaway location.



# 10 questions with...

JAMES LANGAN

Managing Director, Natures Menu



## 1 Has the increase in pet ownership during the pandemic helped to drive growth in your business?

Whilst 2021 was challenging for many UK industries, one industry that has seen continued growth is the dog food industry. The PFMA reported that there's an astounding 24.7 million pet dogs and cats in the UK alone, which is largely down to the increase in pet ownership during lockdowns with consumers spending more time at home enabling them to welcome a dog or cat into the family. As a result, Natures Menu has reported impressive double-digit growth in sales, showcasing that raw feeding really is on the rise.

## 2 Has there been a move towards more pet owners feeding their animals with natural products?

Yes, this is a key macro trend in the pet food market as it is in human food. Consumers are recognising the benefits for the animal of feeding them a high quality, natural, minimally processed diet. Over the years we've noticed owners becoming more engaged with the health of their pets and therefore spending more time researching how a diet can improve overall wellbeing – which is incredibly encouraging to see the raw category benefit as a result.

## 3 There have been cases of raw pet food from other companies being recalled because of salmonella concerns, for instance. How do you maintain high level of food standards?

Natures Menu maintains high levels of food standards through careful sourcing of raw materials, a comprehensive, ongoing testing programme, and high hygiene and quality control standards throughout our supply chain.

Natures Menu is committed to promoting good hygiene practices for raw feeding and has worked closely with the PFMA on producing guidelines for the safe manufacture of raw pet food in the UK. The raw pet food industry is also carefully controlled by the relevant authorities and Natures Menu submits to all testing required, as well as abiding by all relevant EU legislation. As with handling any raw meat products, it should be stored separately and food preparation areas, hands and utensils kept clean.

## 4 How much emphasis do you put on sustainability throughout your business?

This is an increasing area of focus for us across all functions within the business and the wider group. We have made good progress on increasing the level of recyclability in our packaging, with Nature's Variety on course to being fully recyclable by 2024.

We have also invested in solar panels on our site that generate over 10% of our energy and, in addition, we are currently investing in a new water polishing plant that will clean and reuse our wastewater. Also, the types of ingredients we use – high-quality meat, fruits and vegetables often meant for consumption in restaurants – is actually a

form of upcycling, as they may have been thrown to waste if they weren't used within pet food.

Moreover, our Especially for Cats range has now shifted from pouches to recyclable cans, helping us on our sustainability strategy. The improved packaging aims to clearly communicate the simple, natural ingredients to owners whilst offering a great visual impact on shelves.

## 5 Are the ingredients for your raw pet food sourced locally or do you have to get them from further afield?

We source locally, and from within the UK wherever we can. However, consistent supplies from British sources cannot always be guaranteed, so we do have to source certain items from our European neighbours.

## 6 Has Brexit helped or hindered your export sales?

Brexit has unfortunately hindered our export business. As a result of the regulations now imposed, we are no longer able to export our raw pet food to the EU – it is simpler for us to export to Dubai than Dublin! Even exporting to Northern Ireland is no longer simple, but we do continue to export our food where we can. Despite the challenges, we're still recording double-digit growth as we focus on other areas of our business.

## 7 With the pet food sector being such a crowded marketplace, how do you manage to make your products stand out from the rest?

We have completed a lot of work to update and develop our branding over the last couple of years to make it as distinctive as possible, including the Natures Menu Especially for Cats range now featuring its own distinctive brand assets and revamped packaging. We also ensure that we communicate the quality and breadth of our range in an innovative way. Most recently this has been through our multimedia Get the Raw Food Look campaign, which

highlighted fantastic examples of raw-fed dogs through a photography competition.

## 8 Has your home delivery service set you apart as a pet food supplier?

An effective D2C e-commerce channel has become a must since the start of the pandemic. Many other players in pet food industry, both manufacturers and retailers, have D2C operations too, so it would certainly be a major gap for us if we didn't have a strong offering in this area. For Natures Menu, all our channels are important, and we make sure that we continually invest in these D2C channels as well as our independents and trade shops customers. We currently operate over 70 vans ourselves and make many thousands of deliveries each month to our customer base.

## 9 Has the Nature's Variety brand done as well as expected?

Yes, the relaunch of Nature's Variety has been successful. However, there's work to be done to unleash the full potential of the brand. We need to continue to educate customers in order to encourage them to convert to our high-quality dry dog and cat range and also our highly innovative Freeze Dried range of dog food. As a sister brand to Natures Menu, we think that Nature's Variety sits appropriately alongside, and increases our wider scope and market share.

## 10 What exciting plans have you got for 2022 and beyond?

2022 will be another busy year! We will be increasing our investment in our brands to keep growing the business and to keep driving consumer penetration for raw pet food. We will also be investing heavily in our factory to enable us to keep driving the business hard and keep building on our market leading position. Finally, we are continually investing in the people in the business with an ongoing programme to strengthen the team in all functions and at all levels – so we have a lot to look forward to! ■



Reptile specialist Tony Jones writes for specialist magazines in the UK, Europe and America. In this column, he gives news and views on the industry

Tony Jones

## Rescued and rehomed reptiles

THE NATIONAL Centre for Reptile Welfare (NCRW) has reported that 1,508 animals were received for rehoming in 2021 – a more than 30% increase from the 1,148 animals received in 2020.

NCRW's chairperson, Chris Newman explained, "Many of the animals we have received in the last year have been as a consequence of the Covid pandemic. Keepers who have lost their income or had to move home have found themselves unable to care for their animals. Similarly, many have become ill or died, so their animals have arrived here."

Some species are received more frequently than others. "Common boas have the biggest challenge since the centre opened and we have reached a point where can now only take in the most urgent cases," said Chris. "We've also seen an increase in the number of bearded dragons and tropical tortoises, which we expect is because these are relatively expensive species to keep."

Sadly, the centre has also seen an increase in the number of abandonment cases. Most of these are animals left anonymously at pet stores, veterinarians or other non-specialist shelters. A Burmese python was also recently dumped in a box at the roadside, but cases such as this are apparently rare. "Usually we'll see one or two abandonment cases a month, but this year we've seen five such cases in January already."

Reassuringly, the number of animals leaving the centre is also high and the situation seems largely sustainable. "For example, we currently have very few corn snakes on site because we did a social media push featuring this species. We're about to do the same with royal pythons to rebalance the numbers we currently hold of that species."

## How big should a snake's enclosure be?

Currently this is an impossible question to answer as there is no conclusive research to work with. However, a study conducted by students at Hadlow College may provide data to work with.

Four cameras were set up to observe and record the behaviour of seven reticulated pythons, day and night, for 30 days. The study took place at four UK zoos – London Zoo, Paradise Wildlife Park, Crocs of the World and West Midlands Safari Park – each of which had retics housed in enclosures with enough space for the snake to stretch out their full length completely. Students retrieved the cameras and are currently studying the recordings, taking observations every 10 minutes to note: whether the snake was moving, how much of the available space the animal used and how frequently the snake was completely outstretched.

At the same time the students are also conducting similar research with a small group of royal pythons to determine the extent of this species' arboreal behaviour. The students are currently processing the recordings, so no conclusions or data have been released as yet, but watch this space. Results from both studies should be available sometime later this year.

## MBE for Mark O'Shea

Congratulations to renowned herpetologist Professor Mark O'Shea, who was awarded an MBE by the Princess Royal for his services to snakebite research. I was pleased to hear that Mark was wearing a tie patterned with lizards, crocodiles and snakes to the award ceremony. Keep up the good work Mark!



# Arden Grange on screen with new TV ad

PREMIUM PET food brand Arden Grange is celebrating 25 years of trading with the launch of a new national TV advertising campaign.

The campaign, which will be screened on ITV, Channel 4 and Sky networks, began on February 1. Under the banner of 'Arden Grange – The Home of the Range,' the campaign uses digital technology to animate still photographs of pets in a number of different domestic settings, intended to show the suitability of the food for a wide range of cats and dogs.

Arden Grange specialises in hypo-allergenic dog and cat food with products suitable for all breeds and life stages. Most common dietary allergens are excluded, making the products particularly suitable for pets with sensitivities.

Marketing manager Joanna Simmons said: "Our new 'The Home of the Range' campaign



has turned a long-awaited vision into an imaginative and unique reality – bringing Arden Grange to life as a place where all dogs and cats, regardless of their size, shape, age or dietary requirements, are taken care of."

The ad was created by Brighton-based creative agency, Designate, who worked with animation company Blind Pig and post-production house Absolute.

## DOG REHOMING CENTRES FACING 'PERFECT STORM'

NEW RESEARCH is showing that many dog rescue centres are reaching crisis point as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns.

A study of more than 500 UK dog rehoming centres has revealed that factors such as reduced funding, dwindling donations and fewer volunteers - combined with a sharp increase in dogs being abandoned and more dogs suffering from lockdown-related behavioural problems - means that over a quarter of rescue facilities now face having to turn dogs away due to lack of space.

The research, conducted by UK dog adoption platform dogsblog.com on behalf of Direct Line Pet Insurance, found that 27% of rescue centres are running out of space, with rescues in Wales and the South West the worst affected.

Over a third (36%) of rescues say the Covid-19 pandemic has had a "worse than expected" impact on them. And over half (55%) say they are now in a worse position than they were during the peak of the pandemic in 2020.

More than three quarters (77%) of UK rescue centres say they've seen an increase in 'pandemic pups' being handed in for rehoming and the same proportion say they're bracing themselves for

things to get worse in 2022 as more people are expected to give up their pets. Three quarters of centres also say that dogs are becoming harder to rehome due to separation anxiety and behavioural issues linked to lockdown.

The research surveyed 512 dog rehoming centres in the UK between 8th July 2020 and 16th July 2020, with a follow up survey between 18th of August 2021 and 23rd September 2021.

Ryan O'Meara, a former professional dog trainer and co-founder of dogsblog.com, said: "Many of the rescues we've spoken to are saying there's a pattern at play. People who got a pet during lockdown experienced a change in their circumstances, often due to being furloughed or losing their main source of income, and they had to move as a result."

Madeline Pike, Veterinary Nurse at Direct Line Pet Insurance, added: "What we're unfortunately seeing now is a 'perfect storm' of factors, including a reduction in donations and volunteers, an increase in people giving up their pets and a very noticeable spike in behavioural issues making dogs more likely to be given up and harder to rehome."

## Regulator to investigate vet group acquisition

THE COMPETITION and Markets Authority is investigating the completed acquisition of Quality Pet Care Ltd (trading as The Vet) by CVS Group.

The CMA said it was considering whether the transaction had led to a substantial lessening of competition within any market or markets in the UK for goods or services. To assist it with its assessment, the CMA is inviting comments on the transaction from any interested party.

Quality Pet Care, which has eight practices

across the UK, was bought by CVS for a reported £20.4m. CVS recently published its annual accounts, which showed a strong financial performance by the group.

The company, which owns more than 500 veterinary surgeries in the UK, Netherlands and Republic of Ireland, saw full year revenues rise by 19.2% to £510.1m, achieved through strong organic growth and also contributions from nine acquisitions. Pre-tax profits soared from £9.9m to £33.1m.



# EHEIM dials up innovation award

EHEIM HAS been named as the Most Innovative Company in Germany for its application of digital technology to the aquatics industry.

The Award was presented at The Grow's annual convention in Munich on December 8 last year. In the innovation category, EHEIM was voted the winner ahead of eCommerce platform Westwing and audio equipment manufacturer Bose.

EHEIM supplies aquariums, technology and filter systems for aquariums and garden ponds as well as fish food and care products, plus shopfitting equipment for specialist pet shops.

The company is developing an expanding portfolio of products with digital controls, including aquarium filters, lighting and heating elements and automatic feeders. The range includes several Wi-Fi-capable products that can be configured and monitored wirelessly via smartphone, tablet, or PC.

## POTENTIAL

EHEIM managing director Ibrahim Mefire Kouotou said: "Aquatics offers a lot of potential for digital technology. What many people don't know is that fish are the third most popular pet in the world, and an aquarium needs a pump, filter, light, heater, automatic feeder, fertiliser, and water treatment. With our technology, you will be able to change settings on the go and have lamps that mimic the hours of



The winning team from EHEIM

sunshine in tropical fish territories, filters that signal when they are too dirty, and food dispensers that indicate when they need to be refilled."

The Grow is an entrepreneurial club that connects medium-sized companies and start-ups in the German-speaking regions of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The organisation aims to make its members stronger for future challenges through cooperation, and to further advance Europe as a location for innovation. Members include leading personalities from politics, business, and science.

A statement from the organisation said: "EHEIM has proven that digitalisation does not stop at pet supplies and aquatics."

## CORAL REEF DISCOVERED OFF COAST OF TAHITI

MARINE EXPLORERS have discovered a new coral reef in the south seas, described as being in a "pristine" condition.

The 3km reef sits 30m below the surface off the coast of Tahiti and is one of the largest ever discovered at that depth, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), which led the mission.

The reef was found in November as part of a global mapping operation called the Seabed 2030 Project.

Coral reefs are highly vulnerable ecosystems, threatened by pollution, rising sea temperatures and carbon dioxide dissolving in the water.

## UNUSUAL DEPTH

There are no signs that this newly-discovered reef had been damaged by those pressures, and Unesco's Dr Barbieri told *BBC News* that the reef's unusual depth was one reason it remained in such a good state, as deeper waters take longer to heat up.

Dr Barbieri said: "Generally we find reefs at shallower depths because the algae that lives within the bodies of corals needs light. But we're in a part of the ocean that is [further] from land, so there is less sediment that ends up in the ocean here."

Around 25% of the Earth's marine species is found in coral reefs.

## Tank cleaners take over Texas

THE US STATE of Texas is facing a catfish plague after an invasive species used to clean aquarium tanks has been growing and multiplying in the state's system of waterways.

Texas Parks and Wildlife reported that researchers from Texas A&M and Texas State universities pulled 406 suckermouth armoured catfish from the San Marcos River last month.

The catfish, also called plecós, are native to Central and South America, and are popular among aquarists because they eat algae in tanks.

However, they are frequently dumped into natural lakes and rivers and, because they have armoured skin and no natural predators in Texas, their numbers are exploding in the wild.

The fish can grow up to two and a half feet long and take over the natural habitats of native species, as well as causing damage to native vegetation and river banks.

According to *Newsweek*, the 400 fish collected from the San Marcos River will be euthanized using a fish anaesthetic and used for research into population control methods.

## AQUATICS STORE CREATES MINI SEAWORLD...FOR CAT

AN AQUATICS store owner in Ohio, USA, has a couple of very satisfied customers as a result of a specially-adapted tank.

Jason Hering of Aquatics and Exotics in Cincinnati was asked if he could create a solution so that Melissa Krieger's cat Jasper could get a close-up view of her tropical fish. The Siamese cat used to spend hours entranced by the fish, including parrotfish, angelfish, cory catfish and a spotted plecostomus, as he watched from a dining room chair. When Jason was cleaning the tank late last year, Melissa suggested creating a 'mini SeaWorld' so the intrigued feline could feel he was underwater too.

The tank now features an acrylic cube set into the bottom of the tank large enough for Jasper to put his head



Picture credit: Kennedy News

inside. Jason, who cleans Melissa's multiple tanks every fortnight, spent 16 hours moulding the tank's see-through acrylic panes and building its wooden base before fitting it in December.

The adapted 4ft x 2.5ft, 125-gallon saltwater tank cost \$2,500 (£1,800) but Melissa insisted "it's definitely been worth the money" to keep her "easily bored" pet occupied.

Melissa said: "You spend that much on a TV and this is like a TV for cats. As soon as we feed the fish, he comes running. It's great to see him so happy because you've got to stimulate their brains. It's definitely been worth the money."

Jason added: "Jasper was apprehensive at first, but it's great to see they love it. I have to shoo him away when I'm there cleaning the tank now."

Melissa shared a video of Jasper and the tank on Facebook last month and it racked up more than 10million views and almost half a million likes within a week.

## Close encounter of the otter kind leaves trail of destruction

AN OTTER broke into the garden of a Lincolnshire couple and went on a killing spree.

Karl Wilson and Gina Crampton, from Newark, woke to discover fish remains in their back garden. A review of CCTV footage showed that an otter had arrived around midnight and spent about an hour teasing the fish before

catching and eating them. The animal damaged the couple's pond as well as eating two koi and three goldfish.

Karl told local newspaper the *Newark Advertiser*: "We looked out and there were two bits of dead fish on the netting."

"The boards we have on top of the pond were all moved to one side and

as soon as I saw it I thought 'something like an otter has done that'."

Karl said: "What he did was quite upsetting. I think he ate two fish on the lawn and then caught another two. Then he goes back into the pond and starts playing with them. Although I like otters, I don't like them in my garden destroying my pond."

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CATS

## Impromptu gastric band for greedy cat



POE THE cat pushed the boundaries of contortionism, after squeezing through a five-inch wide tube to get at some kitten kibble put out for hedgehogs; only for the tube to get lodged around her waist.

Helen Branscombe-Davies had built a box for hedgehogs to safely tuck into their dinner, however, after noticing that rats and foxes had been helping themselves, Helen added two plastic pipes with 90-degree bends, to prevent the larger animals getting inside the box.

But Helen awoke one morning to see the entire pipe missing, she went back and looked at her camera footage to discover a cat walking away from the hedgehog haven with the pipe wedged around its middle.

Helen then posted on a local WhatsApp group to make sure that the cat was ok, and to ask for her pipe back, which was when Poe's unsuspecting owner realised what her cheeky mog had been getting up to during the night.

Not content with her midnight snack, owner Dawn Kane found Poe the next morning eating her biscuits, minus the pipe, which was later found in another neighbour's garden having been seemingly shrugged off.

Dawn said to the *Metro*: "I couldn't believe it was my cat in the footage, I have no idea how she got out of that pipe."

But Dawn added: "there's a lot of apologising which goes on around Poe," who is "always up to something and thinks she is a kitten despite being 13".



## DOG-CTOR DOG-CTOR

PET ADOPTIONS increased during the Covid-19 lockdowns, as many people sought comfort in animal companions; though consequently, the number of pet-related accidents also surged.

NHS figures for 2020/21 showed that 7,386 people were admitted to hospitals in England after being bitten or struck by a dog, 60 visited after having encounters with venomous spiders, and a 90-year-old lady was treated after being "bitten or struck by a crocodile or alligator". No further details were given.

WILD ANIMALS

## Salsa takes saucy trip to France

A SEAL pup named Salsa was photographed by Jean-Luc Bourgain, looking very content, laying on a beach with his flippers in the air.

Jean-Luc is a member of the National Stranding Network, which monitors marine animal sightings. Having researched the seal's tag number, he realised that he was once in the care of the RSPCA, so, he got in touch with the charity "in the hope of finding out a little bit more about the seal."

The staff at the East Winch Wildlife Centre were delighted to receive news of the seal (named Salsa). Salsa was cared for by the RSPCA from June 2021, when he arrived as a young orphan from a beach in Norfolk, weighing only 12kg, until October when he was released at

the healthy weight of 39.5kg.

Evangelos Achilleous, centre manager of East Winch, said: "we remember Salsa in particular as he was very cheeky, we are delighted that he is enjoying his newfound freedom."



## FRUITY FEAST LEAVES SQUIRREL DRUNK AS A SKUNK

A WOMAN from Minnesota, USA, admitted to accidentally getting a squirrel drunk after feeding it a fermented pear.

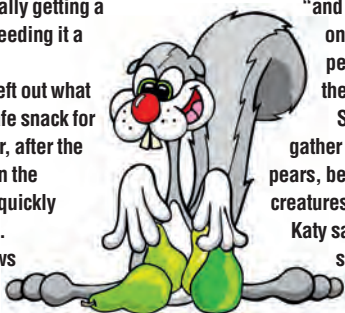
Katy Morlok had left out what she thought was a safe snack for the squirrel, however, after the animal gobbled down the fermented fruit, she quickly realised her mistake.

Katy told Fox9 news that after eating the

pear, the squirrel appeared a bit wobbly, "and then it kind of dawned on me...oh no, those pears were so old I bet they were fermented!"

She then rushed out to gather up the remaining pears, before any other creatures fell prey.

Katy said that the squirrel soon recovered with a decent breakfast.



FARM ANIMALS

## Chicken stopped at hen-tagon security peck-point

A ROGUE chicken has been taken into custody by The Animal Welfare League of Arlington (AWLA), Virginia, after it was found running loose near the US Department of Defence headquarters.

The hen was discovered early one Monday morning, at a Pentagon security check point, although her exact location cannot be disclosed, according to AWLA spokesperson Chelsea Jones.

How the hen arrived at the headquarters remains unclear, and where she came from is still unknown.

Chelsea said that the bird is 'sweet' but 'nervous,' although she is now allowing some people to pet her.



## Sweet dreams sugar

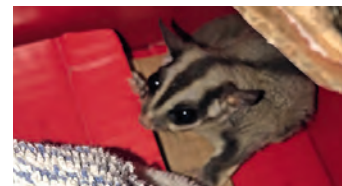
IT WAS more than sweet dreams for John Zou, 27, when a sugar glider flew into his bedroom at 5am on a Monday morning last month.

Speaking to the RSPCA, John said: "I was asleep and woke up to the noise of something running around the bedroom. I was scared it might be a rat but when I went to investigate, I found this little creature."

John trapped the creature in his sixth-floor London flat. He then sent a picture of the animal to some friends who helped him identify it as a sugar glider, before he called the RSPCA for help.

Inspector Francesca Tambini collected the little glider, native to Australia, New Guinea and parts of Indonesia, from John's flat.

John believes that the glider flew into his flat through an open window on his balcony, having escaped from a neighbouring flat where it may have been kept as a pet. However, the glider's owner could not be found.



Francesca said: "Sugar gliders look incredibly cute, and this little guy is adorable. It's easy to see why people might be tempted to buy them as pets but we would urge them to reconsider; these animals need very specialist care, and we don't believe they are suitable as pets."

Sugar gliders are small, nocturnal gliding possums, who love sugary foods and are arboreal, meaning they spend their lives up in the trees and can glide for 50 metres or more; the kind of space which is difficult to provide in a typical home.

These creatures are also sociable animals and shouldn't be kept on their own, in captivity they require a UVB light to prevent metabolic bone disease, and they must be fed an appropriate diet.

The possum now resides with a specialist and experienced keeper in Cambridgeshire.

DOGS

## Hunt is on for UK's high-maintenance pets

HOME AND contents insurance provider So-Sure has been running a nationwide competition to find the UK's most destructive pet.

UK pet owners have been sending in pictures of their riotous pets, from

wallpaper-stripping hamsters to bin-raiding Labradors, for a chance to win a £200 prize.

Entries, and votes for the best picture, have been logged via the So-Sure website.



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www.globalpetexpo.org

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email: gordon.thomas@impact-exhibitions.com

31 March 2022

**Pet Huddle**

Edgbaston Park Hotel, Birmingham  
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petcareinnovationsummit.com

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National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham  
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From left: Gerard Lovell with Bo, David Cox, Chris Brooking and Pip

● PET FOOD manufacturer **Forthglade** has appointed **David Cox** as its new CEO.

Original investors Chris Brooking and Gerard Lovell, who have helped shape the business over the last eleven years, have stepped down as joint Managing Directors. They remaining investors in the business alongside Forthglade's senior management team.

Prior to joining Forthglade, Cox was at food manufacturer Symington's, where he was CEO for three years. He is a former MD of Fox's Biscuits and has also worked at General Mills, Tesco and Unilever.

He said: "I'm delighted to be joining the Forthglade team at such an exciting time for the business."

"Forthglade has doubled turnover in the last four years and we plan to build on that momentum doubling again over the next three years. With an extensive range of NPD launching this year, we're looking forward to continuing to partner with our trade customers to help bring our natural recipes to life for pet owners."

Forthglade employs over 170 people in the UK, most of which are based at the factory in Okehampton, Devon.

● **THE BRITISH Horse Society (BHS)** has chosen **Dominic Watson** as its Veterinary Student Champion (VSC) for 2022, continuing its successful partnership with University of Surrey's School of Veterinary Medicine.

Dominic, a current veterinary student at the university, takes over from previous VSC Bryony Lovegrove. He was selected from a large pool of candidates because of his enthusiasm for equine welfare, experience and motivation to help educate horse owners on best practices.

The Stewart Hastie Veterinary Student Champion scheme aims to develop links between veterinary students, horse owners and the work of the BHS. The programme, named in memory of veterinary surgeon and longstanding supporter of the BHS, Stewart Hastie, was first launched in 2016 and strives to disseminate research from the university and information from the BHS to veterinary students, building the foundations of support for when the students go into practice.

Dominic said: "The main thing that drew me to the role of VSC is to bridge the gap between the equine community and the future vets branching into it and being able to highlight the day-to-day things owners can be doing to improve the welfare of their horses."

● **LINTBELLS**, owner of veterinary joint supplement brand YuMOVE, has announced that chief commercial officer **Fiona Hope** has become chief executive officer with effect from the beginning of February.

Fiona is an experienced commercial leader, and has been chief commercial officer at Lintbells for the last three and a half years. Prior to Lintbells she held several senior positions at brands including Coca-Cola, Greene King, Whirlpool and a five-year tenure at SodaStream as managing director.

Her focus will be to continue the growth of Lintbells' brands across key markets, including the UK and the US.

Lintbells co-founder and former CEO Dr John Howie has stepped aside to take up an innovation role focused on the company's pipeline of new products, as well as longer term sustainability goals.

John has steered the business since the company's inception in 2006. He said: "Fiona is a super-talented individual, as she has proved with the exceptional success of the company over the past couple of years, so I had no hesitation in recommending Fiona succeed me as CEO of Lintbells."

"I have absolute trust that Fiona is going to do a brilliant job leading Lintbells into an exciting future, and I'm looking forward to working with her on the next phase of the Lintbells journey."



Fiona Hope with John Howie

● **PREMIER Nutrition**, the specialist nutrition consultancy and premix division of AB Agri, has appointed **Chloe Poolman** as a pet nutritionist.

Chloe initially joined Premier Nutrition's technical team as a support nutritionist, working across all the species, following the completion of a degree in bioveterinary science at Harper Adams University.

In her new role she will be providing tailored support and advice to customers in the pet food industry, analysing the latest research and looking into developing premix formulations for a variety of diet formats, including treats.



Chloe Poolman

*If you would like your news featuring in our people watching column, please email words and high-resolution images to editor@pbwnews.com There is no charge for this service.*



# BEHIND THE COUNTER

## True tales of everyday life in a pet shop

### Healthy Hogmanay

IN SCOTLAND, the new year, or Hogmanay as it's known here, is seen as a big, if not a bigger, celebration than Christmas. That's why we have an extra public holiday. In fact, within living memory, Christmas day was a normal working day. So, while some shops close early on Christmas Eve, most are looking to close by 3 pm on New Year's Eve so everyone can get ready for the celebrations.

At midday on New Year's Eve, we get a phone call asking if we can deliver dog food before we close as the customer had none and he should not be going out as he has just tested positive for Covid!

We eventually came to a compromise that if he paid over the phone I would leave a box of dog food on the doorstep for him to collect, therefore there would be no contact between us. Halfway through giving me his credit card details, the phone went dead and he did not phone back. Strange, but what could I do?

Just before 3 pm, he appeared at the shop window brandishing his credit card to conclude payment – apparently, his phone had run out of battery halfway through paying me. Eventually, with the transaction cleared I went to put his box of food on the doorstep only to find him coming towards me ... No, I put the box on the doorstep and walk away, then you approach the doorstep and collect food!

I do not want to get near anyone with Covid, I work six days a week in the shop to serve the public and am so far lurgy-free, and I want to keep it that way, thank you.

### Vet fees

We've noticed quite an increase in people using us for advice on minor ailments and conditions in their pets and almost universally we conclude any advice with the caveat that if whatever is wrong does not clear up quickly or they are the least bit concerned then consult their own vet. We don't want to fall foul of the Veterinary Surgeon's Act!

One of the main reasons cited by people is the increase in vet fees, especially consultation fees. We had to take our own dog to the vet recently because he had a sore eye and whatever it was jumped from one eye into the other eye, so he obviously needed stronger medication that we possess in the shop. Of the £93 fee, £45 was just for the consultation, which lasted less than five minutes. I don't begrudge a professional earning a good wage but that rate of £50 an hour for my motor mechanic looks very cheap in comparison.

Phoning around other vets the average price in our area appears to be £35 to £45 for consultation, which for most people is a lot of money and which may put people off getting a pet. But much more worrying is that it could make people think twice before taking a sick pet to the vet in the first place, and that's not good for animal welfare. In the case of smaller pets, it could be the case of parents taking the decision that it's cheaper to let the pet die and replace it than get the required veterinary treatment, which is not how we should treat our pets in the 21st century.

To my mind, pet insurance is nowadays as important as car or house insurance and should be seen as an integral part of pet ownership.

Whether that insurance should be the in-house variety or one of the national insurers is debatable, but not insuring a pet is a real risk.

### Personal thanks

As I write this, I'm confined to the house on doctors orders. Nothing serious just something that needs a few days of not moving about too much and a few pills.

However, it really shows what good friends and customers we have, who are more than happy to offer their help when needed.

Firstly, I was stuck in our local hospital thirty miles away with no means of getting home until three customers all offered to come and get me. Three days later, I had to return to the hospital on the Saturday for a scan and once again customers offered to be my chauffeur. Driving is out for a week so we obviously cannot do deliveries but every customer who wanted a home delivery, when told the problem, immediately offered to come and get their stuff. It just goes to show that while you think you're seen as just the man behind the counter, in fact, you're appreciated as a person, which makes me feel very humble.

*Newshound,  
February 2022*

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