

# An Unprecedented Year

Our impact  
in 2020

Pets change lives  
We change theirs

**BLUE** FOR  
PETS  
**CROSS**

# Who we are

Blue Cross is a charity that has been helping sick, injured, abandoned and homeless pets since 1897. Pets help us in so many ways and they depend entirely on us. That's why at Blue Cross we believe in helping pets because pets help us.

We help thousands of pets every month and with your support we can give back to more pets in need.

## Rehoming

We find homes for homeless and abandoned cats, dogs, horses and small pets across the UK

## Veterinary

We care for sick and injured pets when their owners can't afford private treatment

## Behaviour

We help pets with behavioural issues to have happy, healthy futures

## Education

We educate current and future pet owners by giving talks and offering advice

## Pet bereavement support

We support people struggling to cope with the loss of a much loved pet



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# Rising to the challenge

2020 was a truly unprecedented year. None of us could have expected or prepared for the changes and challenges Covid-19 would impose on our lives.

The pandemic had a huge impact on charities, including Blue Cross. It forced us to adapt the way we work and restricted our ability to fundraise – which inevitably limited the number of pets we could help. However, we will always find a way to help pets in need and support their owners. Our people around the UK have risen to the challenges of Covid-19 and adapted amazingly well to new and innovative ways of working. Their resilience, optimism and exceptional dedication to the pets in our care has been truly inspirational.

During 2020, our rehoming, veterinary and education services shifted from in-person to online wherever possible. Veterinary teams at our four hospitals continued to treat pets in urgent need, around the clock.

We couldn't have got through 2020 without you; our generous donors, supporters, volunteers, legacy pledgers and corporate partners – so **thank you!**

**Chris Burghes** Chief Executive

**4,974**  
volunteers  
(5,000 in 2019)

**267,529**  
hours dedicated  
(469,829 in 2019)

All figures quoted are 2020, unless stated otherwise

# Overcoming adversity to help pets in need



1,820

behaviour interventions and helpline calls

10 Pet Advertising Advisory Groups running across Europe with support of Blue Cross

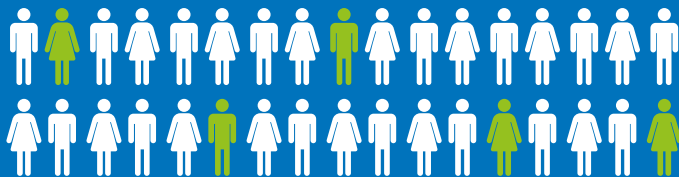


622

pets helped by the Emergency Care Fund

267,529

hours of volunteer time



56,449

people reached through education



# 27,607



**pets treated in our hospitals**

## 635

**pets helped by national rehoming network**



## 4,831

**pets helped by our rehoming services**



## 14,199

**calls and emails answered by our Pet Bereavement Support Service**



## 851

**Petwise MOTS**

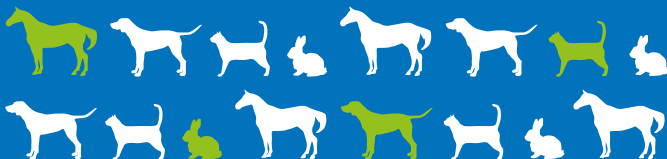


## 1,762

**pets given short-term foster care**

# 36,890

**pets helped by Blue Cross**



For information about our activities in 2020, you can read our Annual Report at [bluecross.org.uk/publications](https://bluecross.org.uk/publications)

# Helping pets in need

## Rehoming

Government Covid-19 restrictions limited the number of pets we could rehome through our centres in 2020, resulting in **46.5%** fewer pets helped than in 2019. Figures varied significantly across the species, with **68%** fewer dogs being rehomed, compared to **9%** fewer horses rehomed.

However, thanks to supporters like you, our rehoming teams continued to change the lives of homeless pets, helping **4,831** (**9,023** in 2019). A significant amount of pets were rehomed through our Home Direct scheme – which allows pets to make a smooth transition from one home to another or via a foster carer. Our network of foster carers played a crucial role in 2020 and overall figures showed a **45%** increase in the use of fosterers.

## Virtual rehoming

Our teams adapted to the temporary closure of our 14 rehoming centres to visitors by introducing virtual appointments by phone or video call, which proved highly successful in matching pets with new owners.

## Space finders

We changed the way that we manage the intake of pets in need by introducing **Space finders**. Instead of being put onto a local centre's waiting list, pets are put on a new national list of all centre and foster spaces, with the aim to admit each pet as soon as possible wherever we have space.

## Veterinary

With your support, our veterinary teams continued to provide a 24/7 service throughout 2020. Government restrictions forced us to prioritise emergency cases, which meant a drop in Petwise MOTs and vaccination rates. However, we helped **32,059** pets overcome illness or injury (**32,512** in 2019), which represents a decrease of just **1.4%**.

This outstanding achievement reflects the efficiency with which teams adapted to new ways of working, such as carrying out telephone and video consultations wherever possible. Of the **76,734** consultations performed in 2020, **57%** were conducted remotely.







**4,831**  
pets helped  
by rehoming  
services (9,023  
in 2019)

**27,607**  
pets treated in  
our hospitals  
(27,698 in  
2019)

**only 11.2%**  
fewer pets  
helped overall  
than in 2019

**428**  
calls to our  
Behaviour  
Helpline

## Pet care partnerships

In partnership with 220 veterinary practices, our Emergency Care Fund helped **622** pets (**580** in 2019) who may otherwise have gone without life-saving treatment. Our six Pet Care Clinics received registrations for **3,720** pets, down **12.1%** on 2019, due to the impact of Covid-19.

We also continued our partnership with Pawsquad, enabling any pet owner eligible for our services to speak to a vet 24/7. Over **2,000** people registered for this service and **1,653** consultations were provided.

## Primetime TV coverage

We were delighted with the success of the ITV documentary **Inside Animal A&E** following our Victoria and Grimsby hospitals teams, which ran for eight episodes and was watched by an average of **2.9 million** viewers each week.

## Behaviour

There's no doubt that pets played an even more important role in people's lives during 2020. However, lockdown periods were very unsettling for many pets.

## Behaviour Helpline

Normal routines for pets were disrupted in 2020 and puppies were unable to be socialised in the usual ways, often resulting in behavioural problems. In response, we launched our **Behaviour Helpline** in April, delivered by our central behaviour team and our centre behaviourists. This new service has demonstrated the value of our behaviour expertise during unsettling times. We also worked with the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to produce guidance for pet owners on how to comply with government restrictions.

# Developing understanding

## Education

2020 got off to a very good start for our education teams. During January, February and March we delivered **983** talks in person to schools and youth groups, reaching **34,569** people. However, when the country entered its first national lockdown, our education teams needed to change their approach. Thankfully, we had already piloted virtual workshops online, so our teams were able to adapt quickly to an online offering.

Take-up was initially slow as teachers and youth group leaders adapted to new ways of working, but by December we were able to deliver **645** sessions to **21,880** young people using a variety of online video platforms.

## Online pet advice

We were also quick to produce Covid-19 related information and advice via our website, which received nearly **200,000** visits, with a spike in visits in March. Visits to our general online pet advice pages were **36%** higher (**9.4 million** page views in 2020).



## Increasing knowledge

We received significantly higher sign-ups to our Puppy and Kitten Knowhow email programmes in 2020. **39,322** people signed up to **Puppy Knowhow**, compared to **13,528** in 2019, and **15,581** owners registered for **Kitten Knowhow**, compared to **7,096** in 2019. We produced two series of online **Petcasts** which included a range of animal care topics and were listened to **12,204** times. During 2020 we also moved our face-to-face pet bereavement support training for animal professionals online.







You can read more  
at [bluecross.org.uk](https://www.bluecross.org.uk/our-stories)  
/our-stories

# Akira

Chihuahua Milly gave birth to Akira and her sister Loki at our Bromsgrove rehoming centre in February 2020. When Covid-19 restrictions forced the temporary closure of our centres, we quickly needed to find foster carers for the two pups.

Akira was naturally anxious, so Blue Cross animal behaviourist, Claire Haynes, decided to foster her. Claire worked hard to gain Akira's trust, build her confidence and teach her the behaviour she needed to be happy. During this time Akira became the star of **Puppies in Lockdown**, our series of online videos for people who were struggling to socialise a puppy during lockdown.

Thanks to a combination of Claire's loving care and professional expertise, little Akira found the perfect home with a local couple.

**21,880**  
young people  
reached through  
education  
online

**8,050**  
PBSS calls and  
**6,149**  
emails  
answered

## Pet bereavement support

Calls to our Pet Bereavement Support Service (**PBSS**) helpline dipped during the first lockdown in 2020, but by the end of the year we'd responded to a very similar number of calls and emails as in 2019, **14,199** in 2020 compared to **14,209** in 2019.

Many of the calls to our **PBSS** team were from distressed owners who had experienced pet euthanasia during lockdown, but hadn't been able to stay with their pets at this very emotional moment due to government restrictions. Sadly, 40%\* of pet owners who had to have their pet put to sleep during lockdown were unable to be with them.

\*National research commissioned by Blue Cross, completed by YouGov in the summer of 2020.

# Supporting pets by supporting owners

## Recognising the value of pets

The joy and companionship of pet ownership provided much-needed solace to people during lockdowns, helping to curb feelings of loneliness and anxiety. A survey featured in our **Covid-19 pets and pet owners** report showed that **89%** of respondents who struggled with anxiety said their pets had benefited their wellbeing during lockdown.

## Larry

Larry was left in a cardboard box outside our Merton hospital during lockdown in April 2020. After bringing Larry inside, our team were shocked to discover that he was completely blind. Cristina was the vet on call when he was transferred to our Victoria hospital and he soon won her over, so she decided to foster him until he could be rehomed.

**// Larry is such a sweet, friendly little boy and loves affection. Fostering a blind pet would be a challenge for anyone, but at least as a vet I have a good understanding of his behaviour and needs."**

Cristina, Vet at Victoria hospital



You can read more at [bluecross.org.uk/our-stories](https://bluecross.org.uk/our-stories)



## **Affordable and accessible vet care**

We already assist vulnerable pet owners who are struggling financially. However, the rising cost of private veterinary services, coupled with the financial impact of Covid-19, has brought greater hardship to many pet owners. With your help we want to do as much as we can to support people who struggle to afford everyday veterinary treatment, or the pet insurance necessary to provide that care.

That's why in 2020 we began to look at potential new affordable services which can be provided in partnership with private veterinary practices, offering the veterinary services that are most needed and can have the greatest impact.

## **Food bank pilot**

Blue Cross research showed that most food banks don't supply pet food and other pet products for their clients. To address this need, we began a three-month food bank pilot scheme in November 2020, with initial food distribution starting in December. We will evaluate the impact of this pilot and potential next steps. We also supported pet owners by distributing several pallet loads of donated pet food to 16 rural food banks across a number of counties.

# Responding to challenges

If 2020 has taught us one thing, it's that we have the teams, volunteers and supporters we need to overcome whatever challenges are in our way. These are a few of the ongoing challenges we are facing.

## Financial pressures

The temporary closure of our 55 shops and the cancellation of many fundraising events contributed to a significant loss of income during 2020. However, thanks to our supporters, and the tireless work of teams to bring in income and minimise costs, we managed to stay financially solvent. The success of our emergency coronavirus appeal in April was just one example of people's incredible generosity.

Moving forward we need to work even more cost-effectively, using your support efficiently, whilst ensuring we don't compromise the welfare of pets. One of the ways we're doing this is by talking to the RSPCA. A joint initiative being explored by the two charities is the purchasing of supplies, medicine and other essentials, where there may be additional savings to be made through greater economies of scale.

For every  
**£1** invested  
in fundraising  
we received  
**£6.52\*** back  
(2019 **£5.38**)

## Technology

Our computers, mobile phones and tablets have had an even more crucial role in our lives over the past year. Covid-19 heightened the need for us to offer our animal welfare services effectively online – and we delivered.

We expanded our website and quickly provided specific Covid-19 content. We also reacted effectively by switching services we would normally offer in person to online. During the year our veterinary teams carried out thousands of telephone and video consultations. We introduced virtual rehoming and delivered thousands of online education sessions.



## Welfare concerns

A rise in demand for puppies during the pandemic, at a time when less rehoming could take place, fuelled a rise in unscrupulous breeders in the UK and abroad.

We monitored the situation and raised awareness of the high number of puppies available to buy online. Over **400** adverts were placed daily during the initial lockdown and prices for some breeds increased by **40%+** due to high demand. As the unregulated pet market continues to thrive, more people are unwittingly buying unsuitable, ill or poorly bred pets. Many of these pets end up needing to be rehomed or treated by Blue Cross, placing additional pressure on our services.

We are also concerned the financial hardship many families may face in 2021 as a result of Covid-19 could lead to an increase in pets being neglected and abandoned.

## Managing uncertainty

Covid-19 has created a great deal of instability and uncertainty. We know that many of our people and volunteers are feeling anxious about the future, or what measures the charity will need to take to continue its financial sustainability. It has also been a very uncertain time for those who rely on us, both pets and people, and for our amazing supporters who we rely on to continue to help pets in need. It's crucial that we learn from the unprecedented events of last year and work together to find the best way forward.

\*Provisional figure pending the audit of our financial statement.

†Blue Cross **Covid-19 pets and owners** report.





## Plans for the future

In 2020 we developed a new three year strategy which will give us the opportunity to reach more pets and people – and enhance our reputation as a leading UK pet charity.

Key to achieving that goal is making our rehoming, veterinary and advice services even more accessible. We also want to explore ways to increase awareness amongst the public of who we are and what we do.

2020 highlighted the importance of being agile and efficient in how we respond to a changing environment – so we will continue to develop processes and invest in technology that allows us to do this. At the heart of our new strategy is the further development of an inclusive and collaborative culture, where we think and act as **One Blue Cross**.

Our ultimate aim is to help and support more pet owners across the UK and to achieve our vision that every pet enjoys a healthy life in a happy home.







## Reducing our environmental impact

Our emissions reduced dramatically in 2020, primarily due to the impact of Covid-19 on our ways of working. We took positive steps to reduce our emissions and we aim to do as much as we can to reduce our environmental impact in future years. One example is the increasing transition to energy efficient lighting and heating, including the use of renewable energy. Solar panels at our Burford, Suffolk and Bromsgrove sites should generate a total of **40,000 kWh** of electricity each year.



## Macaroni & friends

When we rescued 120 guinea pigs last July, it was the biggest number of small pets we'd ever taken in. It was going to be a mammoth rehoming effort for our team, but first they had to tackle an outbreak of ringworm.

**“Some owners don’t realise that a guinea pig can become pregnant at just a few weeks of age and can give birth to litters of up to eight pups. Sadly the owner was an animal lover who had just got overwhelmed, but they did the right thing by coming to us for our help.”**

Kayleigh Hill, Blue Cross

Teams and foster carers from across the charity have helped to care for and find the small animals new homes.

You can read more at [bluecross.org.uk/our-stories](https://bluecross.org.uk/our-stories)

# Dove & Rainbow

It has been a happy ending for five rescued mares who have given birth to foals at our Rolleston centre. The mares were amongst 11 ponies the centre took in following a multi-charity operation to save 43 abandoned horses from flooded fields in February 2020.

Many of the ponies were very thin, covered in fleas and lice and most had little experience of being handled. Unfortunately, none of them were microchipped, so the owner couldn't be identified to hold them responsible.

Since then, our team have nursed the ponies back to health and all the ponies and foals can now look forward to a happy future in new homes.



You can read more  
at [bluecross.org.uk](https://www.bluecross.org.uk/our-stories)  
**/our-stories**

# Thank you

We are very grateful for your vital support during one of the most challenging years in our history.

Whether you donate, volunteer, raise money in the workplace or have pledged a gift in your Will – you're part of something special. Together we change the lives of thousands of pets. **Thank you!**

If you would like further information about our work, please call our Supporter Care Team on **0300 790 9903** or visit **[bluecross.org.uk](https://www.bluecross.org.uk)**

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**We change theirs**