

Cat Welfare Research Team: Annual Review 2025

From advancing welfare assessment tools to exploring cat population challenges, 2025 was a year of research, collaboration and innovation. This review highlights some of the key projects and achievements from the year.



What does the Research team do?



We carry out ethical evidence-based research to help improve the health, behaviour and overall wellbeing of cats.



We identify the most important questions that need answering to support our organisational goals for cat welfare. We direct our time and resources into research projects that will have the greatest long-term benefit for cats.



We carefully review all research requests to ensure they are ethical, safe and aligned with our cat welfare priorities.

This approach positions the charity as a research-led organisation, making sure the care we provide for cats is evidence-based, effective and impactful.

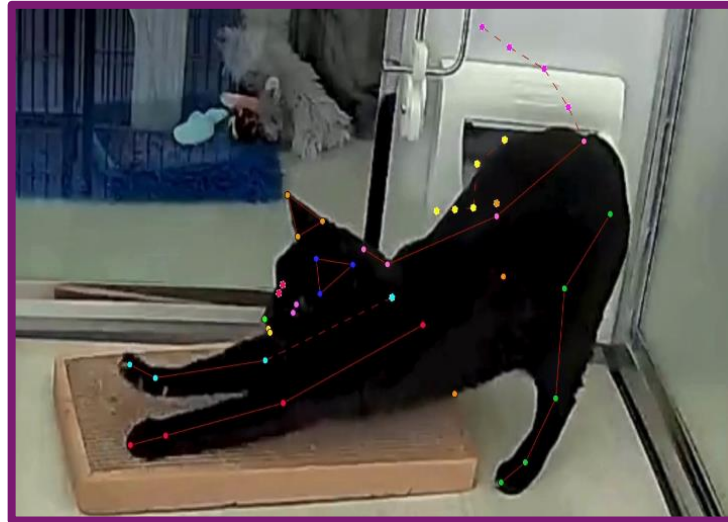


Shelter cats

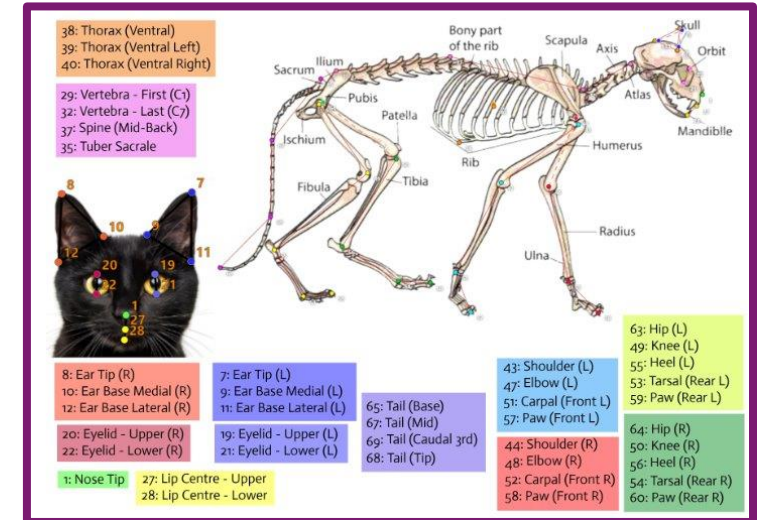
We collected data at Nottingham Cat Centre to support our work to develop an automated AI pipeline and cat-friendly accelerometers for objective behaviour and movement tracking.



This work provides the key foundational elements for welfare assessment and tool validation work.



Cats Protection employees and volunteers worked brilliantly to help analyse images collected from the study.



This data was essential to help train our machine learning models to detect cats within images and extract key information from them.

We also supported the completion of an MSc project assessing the impact of a Cats Protection training intervention on human cat interactions. The results demonstrate a long-term positive benefit of the training.

Owned cats and unowned cats

We looked at welfare assessment for both owned and unowned cats.



Key collaborations with University of Nottingham commenced to help to take forward and validate our prototype quality-of-life assessment tool for assessing welfare and wellbeing in owned cats.



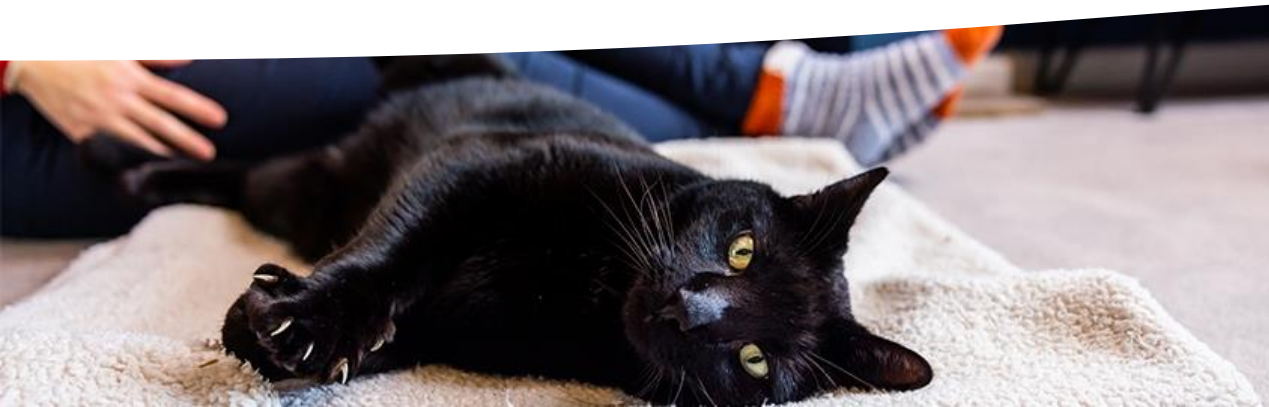
The University of
Nottingham



We worked on systematic reviews of approaches to unowned cat welfare assessments and risk factors. This work synthesises data from over 1000 academic studies to highlight current knowledge, research gaps and welfare risk factors for different unowned cat populations.



Interviews with Cats Protection employees and volunteers provided valuable insight into the challenges of assessing and managing unowned cat welfare, helping to inform future guidance and research priorities.



Balanced cat population

We have developed a definition of a balanced cat population using insight from across the organisation and continue to work to develop a practical framework for decision-making.

Impact on cat welfare		
Cat health	👍	14 0 0
Human-cat interactions	👍	13 0 0
Acquisition sources	👍	4 0 0
Husbandry	👍	4 0 0
Cat genetics	👍	3 0 0
Interactions with wildlife	👍	0 0 0
Interactions with other cats and dogs	👍	0 0 0

We held focus groups with volunteers and employees to explore what a “balanced” cat population means.



We published a UK-focused review on managing unowned cats and the first comprehensive review of purebred cat welfare.



We developed a new conceptual framework around a balanced cat population.

We also launched a national stakeholder consultation, engaging 162 experts from multiple disciplines across several survey rounds to identify priority issues for cats and communities.

Neutering and population

We have continued research into neutering and population to build an evidence base and support decision-making.



We published a longitudinal study on how neutering affects weight and body condition.



We launched the largest systematic review on neutering, to address barriers to pre-pubertal neutering.



We planned a long-term veterinary monitoring study of cats in our care to track emerging health and welfare trends.

We also supported a PhD at the University of Exeter on terminology and demographics of unowned cats and worked with University of Bristol on approaches to count cats in rehoming centres in the UK.

Publications and presentations



During 2025 four papers were published, with more than **11,000 total views and downloads**. The papers focused on purebred cats, cat management, neutering age and bodyweight, and mortality. We also delivered six presentations at various conferences throughout the year.

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Papers published in scientific journals

Links to papers



[Mortality and life table analysis in a young cohort of pet cats in the UK.](#)



[Long-term effect of neutering age on body condition score and bodyweight in domestic cats.](#)



[Domestic cat management in the UK: learnings from a global perspective.](#)



[A framework to refocus the conversation around the welfare of UK purebred cats.](#)

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Conference presentations

FEB
1

Shelter and charity veterinary association.

MAY
9

Be part of the journey: What is a balanced cat population in the UK? What are we striving for?

MAY
9

Are cats going to the dogs? The impact of cats being bred with extreme characteristics.

JUN
27-29

Developing data-driven health surveillance in rehoming centres: a holistic look at contextualised care.

SEP
19

Advances in cat research: Insights from population studies.

OCT
10-12

Prepubertal neutering in cats: evidence-based decision making.

External workshops and events



We represented Cats Protection at the **Association of Dogs & Cats Homes (ADCH) Conference, World Feline Congress**, and the **London Vet Show**. Our involvement included a demonstration of the Cat Population Model and recruiting volunteers for our Balanced Cat Population project.

In September 2025, we held an interactive workshop at **Animal Welfare Research Network (AWRN)** in Bristol, entitled *'Translation of science into application – Bridging research and practice in cat population welfare issues'*.



External working groups



Working with other people in the world of animal welfare allows the sharing of knowledge and expertise so that we can work together to improve cat welfare based on scientific evidence, as well as ensure that cats are included in wider discussions of companion animals.

The team played an active role in animal welfare discussions, contributing scientific knowledge to talks at:

- **Bristol Cats Study**
(University of Bristol)
- **Cat Breeding Welfare Sector Group**
- **CatKind**



We also worked with other charities, sharing insights and tools with organisations such as:

- **The Devon Wildlife Trust**
- **Battersea Extreme Aesthetics roundtable**



The team remains part of informal networks including:

- **Researchers in industry**
- **Scientists working with pet populations**
- **International unowned cat working group**

We hope to continue to work with these groups into 2026 and beyond as scientific advances help us to do the best for cats.

iCatConnect 2025



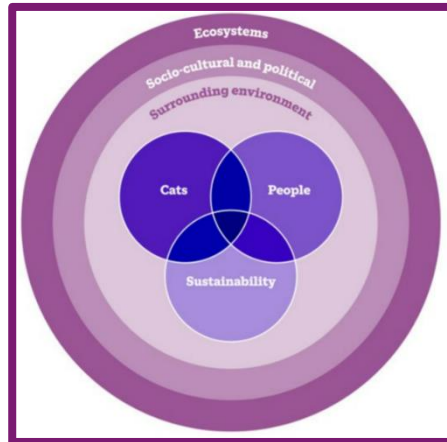
In November, we formed part of the panel at **iCatConnect 2025**, where we discussed our work and the challenges of cat population management.



You can [watch a video](#) from the event.

Internal engagement

We shared our research findings and population management framework across the organisation, helping to build understanding and support evidence-based approaches to cat welfare and population management. **The balanced population framework and document was launched on our internal knowledge platform.** We were involved in cat welfare panel discussions to discuss balanced cat population work and management to employees and volunteers.



At an internal Cat Welfare & Operations event, we presented findings from our recently published purebred paper.



We also held a student ambassador talk on alternative veterinary careers.

We delivered a presentation and workshop on the balanced population project during an internal Clinical Services meeting.

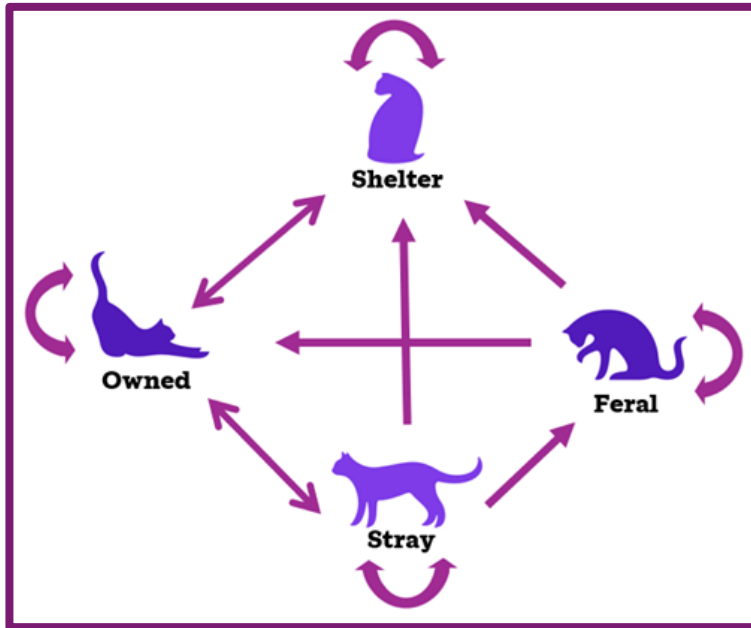


Cat Population Model

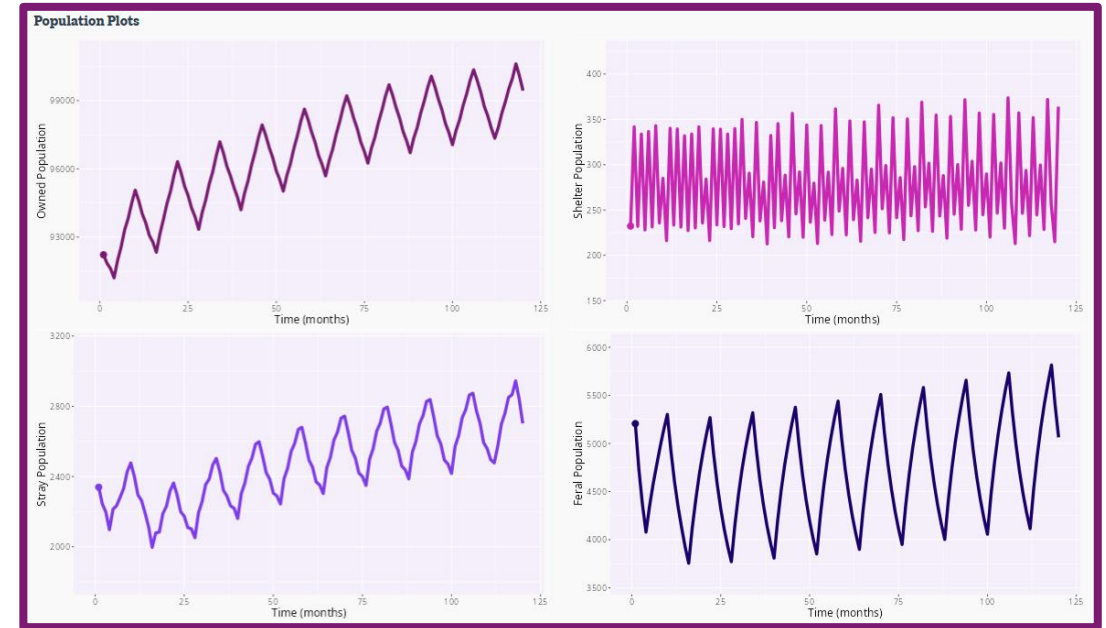


We developed and launched the Cat Population Model, a tool that helps explore how different interventions may influence cat populations over time, supporting evidence-based decision-making.

It works to predict changes in all types of cats, including owned, stray, shelter, and unowned, by looking at how they are connected and move between these groups.



By looking at all types of cats, the model helps us to see the bigger picture and understand how actions for one group can affect others.



We also created demonstration videos and held an employee and volunteer training session to inform teams on how to use the model.

Some of what's in store for 2026 and beyond



We are working on four papers summarising current **approaches across the shelter sector regarding cat care, housing husbandry and assessments**. This provides us with an important base line to benchmark current practices and identify opportunities to promote best practice.



We have submitted our **balanced population framework paper** for review. This paper lays the groundwork for more integrated decision-making around the population management of free-living companion animals. We are also undertaking a **Delphi Study**, a structured process to generate expert consensus, as part of the Balanced Cat Population project.



We are working on an unowned cat paper which looks at **stakeholder perspectives on unowned cat management and resource needs**.



Some of what's in store for 2026 and beyond



In collaboration with the University of Bristol, we are working to help shape the **first UK-wide shelter census**. The project aims to enable us to fully understand this understudied population.



We are working on the **Neutering Systematic Review**, where we look at the outcomes associated with cat neutering.



Work is underway on the **development of a feline physiological monitoring collar**, which forms part of our Welfare Assessment Tools work.

