

Companion Animals Fact Sheet

For urbanized Westerners, the human-pet relationship is the only real relationship that most of us ever have with non-human animals.

While pet-keeping has been practiced in societies around the world for millennia, it has only been in the last hundred or so years that pet-keeping in the West has exploded, creating multi-billion dollar industries focused on producing, feeding, caring for, medically treating, and even disposing of millions of animals per year.

The primary reason for keeping companion animals today is companionship. For example, studies show that 60% of dogs sleep with their caretakers at night in the bedroom, either in or on the bed, and while in the past, most cats lived outside, today most cats are kept indoors and are considered part of the family. Even rabbits, one of the most recent animals to be domesticated (and traditionally bred for food), are now considered by many thousands of households to be companion animals, and live indoors as house pets, many sleeping in their caretakers' bedrooms. The closeness of these animals is one testament to the major role that they play as companions to us.

In the United States alone, 65% of all American households in 2015 lived with a companion animal.¹ We also spent over \$60 billion on pet food, toys, clothing, and travel paraphernalia in that year.² But at the same time, while companion animals are clearly the most favored of all animals, many dogs, cats, rabbits and birds still suffer in the pet industry.

Scholars across the social sciences and natural sciences are increasingly conducting research on animal sheltering that can be used to improve the treatment of companion animals, as well as shed light on the problems that they are facing, and the benefits that they provide. Some of the topics that have been covered in ASI's two journals, *Society & Animals* and *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* include:

- Parrots as companion animals
- The positive benefits of dog walking
- Anthropomorphic selection in pets
- Battered women and companion animals
- Cat culture in an animal shelter
- Childhood socialization and companion animals
- Death of a companion cat or dog
- Emily Brontë and dogs
- Fads and dog breed popularity

¹ American Pet Products Association. 2016. Pet Industry Market Size and Ownership Statistics. http://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp

² Ibid.

- Black dog syndrome
- The abuse of animals and domestic violence
- Adult outcomes of childhood socialization with companion animals
- Quantifying the shelter rabbit population
- Pit bull identification
- Managing feral cats
- Dominance and the treatment of aggression in multi-dog homes
- Reasons for relinquishment of dogs and cats to animal shelters
- Impact of a subsidized spay neuter clinic
- Pet attachment and college students' behaviors toward pets
- Abnormal behavior in pet birds
- Selecting shelter dogs for service dog training
- Impact of the recession on companion animal relinquishment

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