

American dog population rises to 77.5 million

Americans are increasingly making provisions for their pets in their will, placing their pet's medical needs over their own, and planning vacations around their pet — all signs that pets, more than ever, are considered part of the family, according to the [American Pet Products Association](#) (APPA).

The APPA has released its 2009-2010 National Pet Owners Survey, and it shows pet ownership at its highest level ever, with 71.4 million households in the U.S. owning at least one pet — 62 percent of all households.

Furthermore, during the past decade the current number of pet-owning households increased by 12 percent, up from 61.2 million pet-owning households in 1998.

According to the survey, there are 77.5 million dogs, 93.6 million cats, 171.7 million freshwater fish, 11.2 million saltwater fish, 15 million birds, 15.9 million small animals, 13.63 million reptiles and 13.3 million horses owned in the U.S.

“The findings in the survey clearly demonstrate the importance of the role our pets are playing in our every day lives. Two decades of trended data show that now more than ever people consider pets an important part of the family and are still providing for their faithful companions even in these trying times,” said Bob Vetere, president of APPA.

“As pet ownership continues to rise, so has the demand for quality products and services. This has led to an amazing evolution of innovative products and services that truly enhance the experience of owning a pet,” he added.

Since the inception of the APPA National Pet Owners Survey in 1988, dogs and cats have accounted for more than two-thirds of all households that own a pet. The actual number of pet owning households is significantly higher than it was twenty years ago, as is the overall number of U.S. households.

The survey showed 17 percent of dog owners have an electronic tracking device implanted in their dog, with the Western region having significantly more tracking devices than dogs in other regions.

The survey found dog visits to the veterinarian are up, averaging 2.8 visits a year. Thirteen percent of dogs and 21 percent of cats are considered obese or overweight by their veterinarian. When asked to indicate their priority if there was a choice between a large medical expense for themselves or their pet, 15 percent of dog owners would attend to their dog's need before their own.

Seven percent of dog, cat, bird and horse owners indicated they had made financial provisions for their pet in their will. One-third of dog, cat and bird owners and almost half of equine owners have named a caretaker or guardian for their pet in their will.

More than 20 percent of vacationing dog owners take their pet with them in the car when they travel. These owners take their dog on an average of five car trips per year. Three percent of dog owners take their dog to work at least more than once a month.

The survey showed that most pet owners said they would take action to ensure their pet was safe in the event of a disaster situation. Over half of dog, cat, bird, reptile and small animal owners say they would take their pets with them. Ten percent or fewer say they would bring their pet to an animal shelter or abandon their pet.

Giving gifts to pets continues to rise in popularity. The survey shows more than one-half of pet owners report having purchased a gift for their pets in the past 12 months, with most buying a gift for their pet for no special occasion.

The APPA also noted unprecedented growth in the number and types of products available for pets; the crossover of some products from the human side to the pet side; the proliferation of designer pet products ranging from food dishes to carriers to shampoos; vastly improved medicines for pets, particularly in the area of flea and tick control; more owners medicating and treating pets themselves in addition to the veterinarian; and pet friendly hotels or upscale boarding facilities that make it convenient for the owner to travel.

The complete 2009-2010 National Pet Owners Survey includes more than 500 pages of trended information on pets covering the past two decades and retails for \$1,695. (Yes, the comma is in the right place.) It is available for purchase at www.americanpetproducts.org.