Are we all mistaking friendly felines for missing moggies?

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Battersea Dogs & Cats Home is encouraging cat owners to microchip their moggies after their YouGov survey today revealed one in five people (22%) would assume a cat roaming in their garden was a stray and immediately take it to a rescue centre, the vets, into their home or even keep it as their own pet.

Almost 3,000 cats a year are brought to the world renowned animal charity – 46 per cent of which are classed as "strays" – and Battersea's London cattery is pushed to capacity because many of these suspected strays have owners but they're not microchipped with their details.

In the new YouGov survey conducted for Battersea, over one fifth (22%) of people said that if they saw a cat roaming in their garden they would be likely to either take it to a rescue centre, bring it into their home, take it to the vet to see if it is microchipped, or keep it as their own pet. Vets and animal charities like Battersea will always scan a lost animal for a microchip, but without a chip it becomes very difficult to reunite pets with their owners.

Lindsey Quinlan, Battersea's Head of London Cattery, said: "It's heart-breaking to see so many cats come through our doors which we truly believe have loving owners out there, but we have no way of contacting them. Only 15 per cent of the cats brought into Battersea have microchips. Cats that look like a healthy weight, have clean coats and are confident around people are usually not strays and are just out wandering around the neighbourhood."

Battersea's YouGov survey also revealed that a quarter of the population would assume a cat was a stray if it didn't have a collar, over one in four people (28%) would think a cat was homeless if it ate food quickly, and over half (56%) of the people surveyed chose options that Battersea would not recommend as good indicators of a cat being a stray.

Lindsey added: "The only way to truly tell if a cat is a stray is if it's malnourished, dirty or seen living in your garden. Sadly, cats with homes don't always wear collars or have microchips, and will very rarely turn down a free meal. So, animal charities across the UK must tackle this problem to make sure there is space for cats which are genuine strays or whose owners can no longer care for them. We're asking owners to get their pets microchipped because this survey has revealed concerned, but well meaning, people are literally taking cats off the streets and bringing them to us to find them new homes."

One-year-old Ella is a classic example of a cat Battersea staff believe had an owner and was mistaken for a stray before being brought to the rescue centre. The friendly and healthy tabby cat – who arrived at Battersea's London centre on 14 October – was found under a bush near a block of flats in Kennington. Ella does not have a microchip, so Battersea cannot contact her owners.

To reclaim or enquire about rehoming a cat from Battersea's London cattery, please call us on 0843 509 4444 or visit www.battersea.org.uk

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For more information and images please contact 020 7627 9332 or email press@battersea.org.uk

Notes to editors

- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,022 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 12th - 14th September 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).
- In answer to the question in the survey:

For the following question, if you do not have a garden, please imagine how you would feel if you did. Please imagine that you were to see a cat that didn't belong to you or anyone that you know, without a collar, spending a significant amount of time in your garden for one day...In general, which, if any, of the following do you think you would be likely to do? (Please select all that apply)' 22% answered either 'take it to a rescue centre', 'take it to a vet to see if it is microchipped', 'take it into my house' or 'keep it as a pet'

- In the same YouGov survey, when asked the question: 'In general, which, if any, of the following do you think would indicate that a cat is a stray/ does not have an owner? (Please select all that apply)',
    - A quarter of the population (25%) answered, 'if it did not have a collar'
    - Over a quarter (28%) answered, 'if it ate food quickly when I fed it'.
    - Over a half (56%) of people answered either 'if it did not have a collar,' 'if I were to see it regularly in my garden', 'if it ate food quickly when I fed it,' If I discovered it did not have a microchip,' or 'if it tried to enter my house,'.
- Established in 1860, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home aims never to turn away a dog or cat in need of our help. We reunite lost dogs and cats with their owners through our Lost Dogs & Cats Line or care for them until new homes can be found for them, giving them shelter and the highest standards of kennelling and veterinary care.
- Since it was founded, Battersea has rescued, reunited and rehomed over 3.1 million dogs and cats.
- Battersea cares for an average of 400 dogs and 250 cats across its three centres at any one time.
- There is no time limit on how long an animal can stay at the charity but the average stay for a dog is 29 days and 25 days for a cat.
- In 2013 44% of dogs and 47% of cats arrived as strays.
- It costs £12.7 million to care for Battersea Dogs & Cats Home's animals each year.
- In addition to the site in South West London, the Home also has two other centres based at Old Windsor, Berkshire and Brands Hatch, Kent.
- Battersea Dogs & Cats Home rehomes dogs and cats all over the UK.
- For further information on Battersea Dogs & Cats Home please visit www.battersea.org.uk.
- Follow Battersea on Twitter @BDCH or facebook.com/Battersea

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