

## **EXOTICDIRECT REPORT**

### **FUR-FREE DOESN'T MEAN CAREFREE**

**A COMPARISON OF EXOTIC PET OWNERSHIP VERSUS TRADITIONAL PET OWNERSHIP WITHIN THE UNITED KINGDOM**



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## ExoticDirect Report – Fur-Free Doesn't Mean Carefree

### 1. Introduction

New figures from ExoticDirect pet insurance reveal that the number of exotic pets being insured over the last eight years has risen steadily, with a particular increase in reptile policies. This illustrates that as a nation our love of pets is extending to encompass not only cats and dogs, traditionally the most common pets, but to also more unusual pets such as snakes, lizards, birds and tortoises.

As the ownership of exotic pets continues to increase so do the challenges faced through ownership. In order to understand this area further, ExoticDirect commissioned some research evaluating the challenges faced by exotic pet owners compared to traditional pet owners.

### 2. Research methodology

ExoticDirect examined pet policy types between 2005-2013. Pet policy types were identified as policies covering birds, mammals and reptiles (including tortoises).

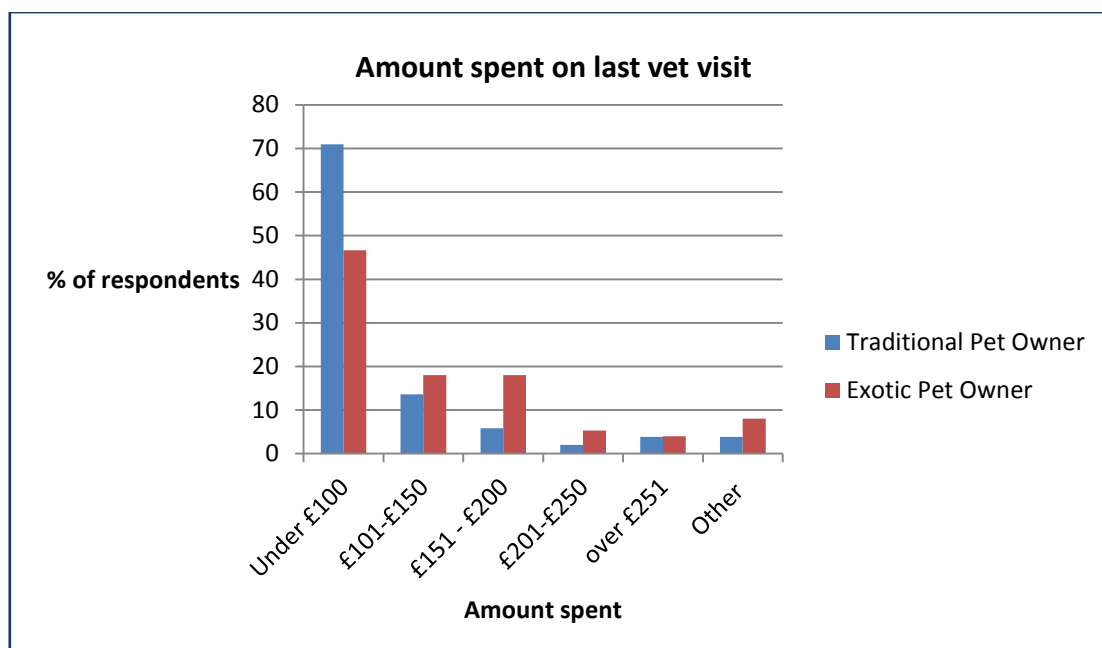
An independent survey was also conducted with a sample size of 1010 respondents. Of this 860 (85%) were traditional pet owners and 150 (15%) were exotic pet owners.

A traditional pet was identified as a cat, dog, horse or fish. An exotic pet was identified as a pet that was not a traditional pet.

Pet owners were asked a series of questions – a selection of these questions, or an adaption of them, are detailed above each graph, along with an interpretation of the results below. The percentages discussed have been rounded down to the nearest decimal point.

### 3. Survey results

#### Q1. How much did you spend on your last vet visit?

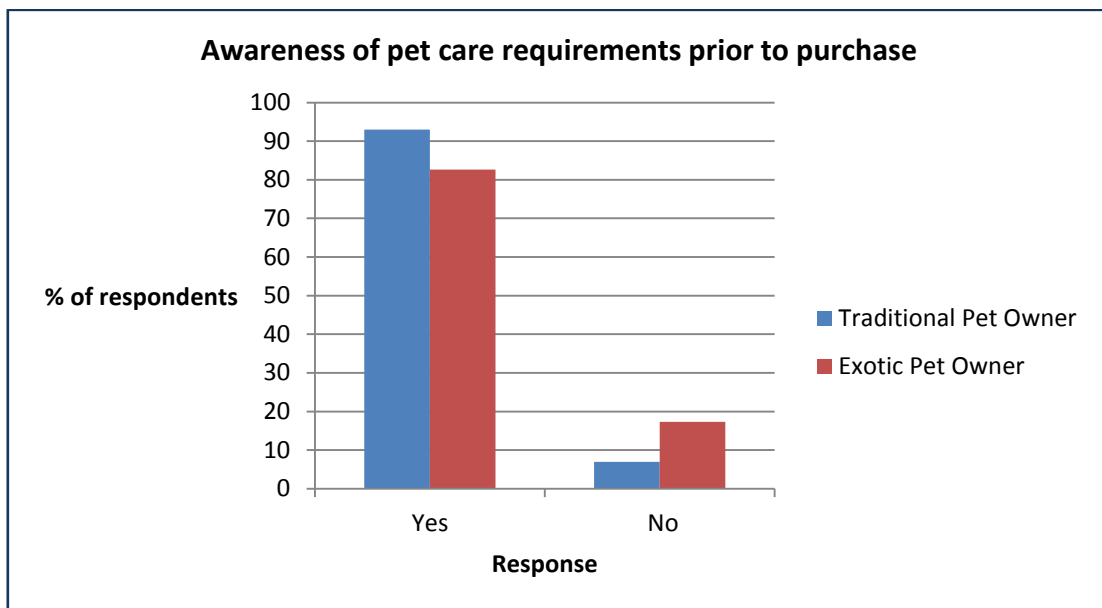


The majority of traditional pet owners (70%) spent under £100 on their last vet bill compared to 46% of exotic pet owners. Over a third (36%) of the spend for exotic pets came between £101-£200. For

traditional pet owners 19% of owners spent within the £100-£200 bracket. This data could illustrate that vet fees for exotic pets can be higher, due to the speciality of the area.

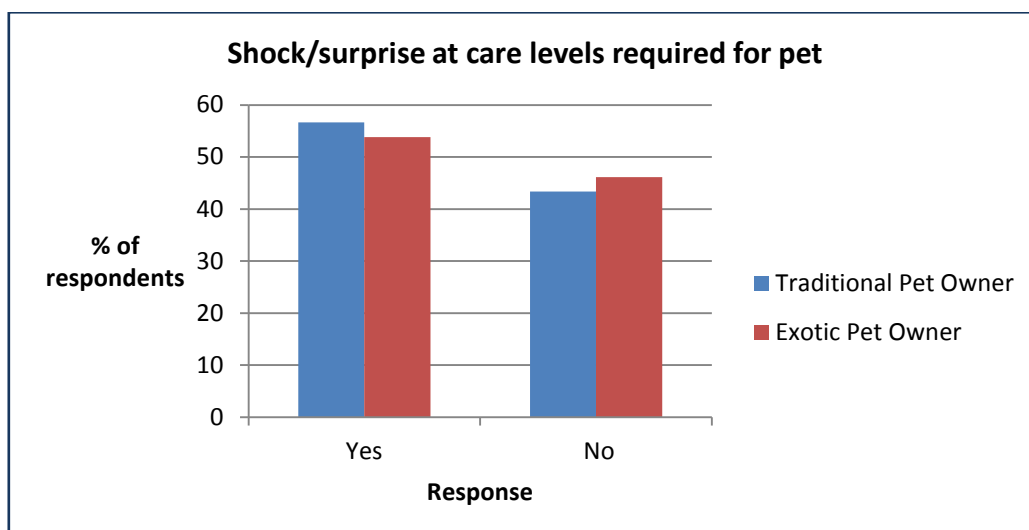
**FACT:** *The results show that exotic pet owners are significantly more likely to want to own another exotic pet. For example a snake (15%), large bird (23%) or lizard (14%) compared to traditional pet owners (snake, 1%), (lizard, 2%), (large bird, 7%). However, the number of respondents who would like to own farm animals was the same for both pet ownership groups with 11%.*

**Q2. When you first purchased your pet, were you fully aware of all its care requirements?**



Overall the majority of pet owners were aware of the care requirements prior to purchasing their pet. However, of those who had no awareness prior to purchase, more than double were exotic pet owners (17%), compared to just 6% of traditional pet owners.

**Q3. Have you been shocked/surprised by the level of care your pet needs?**

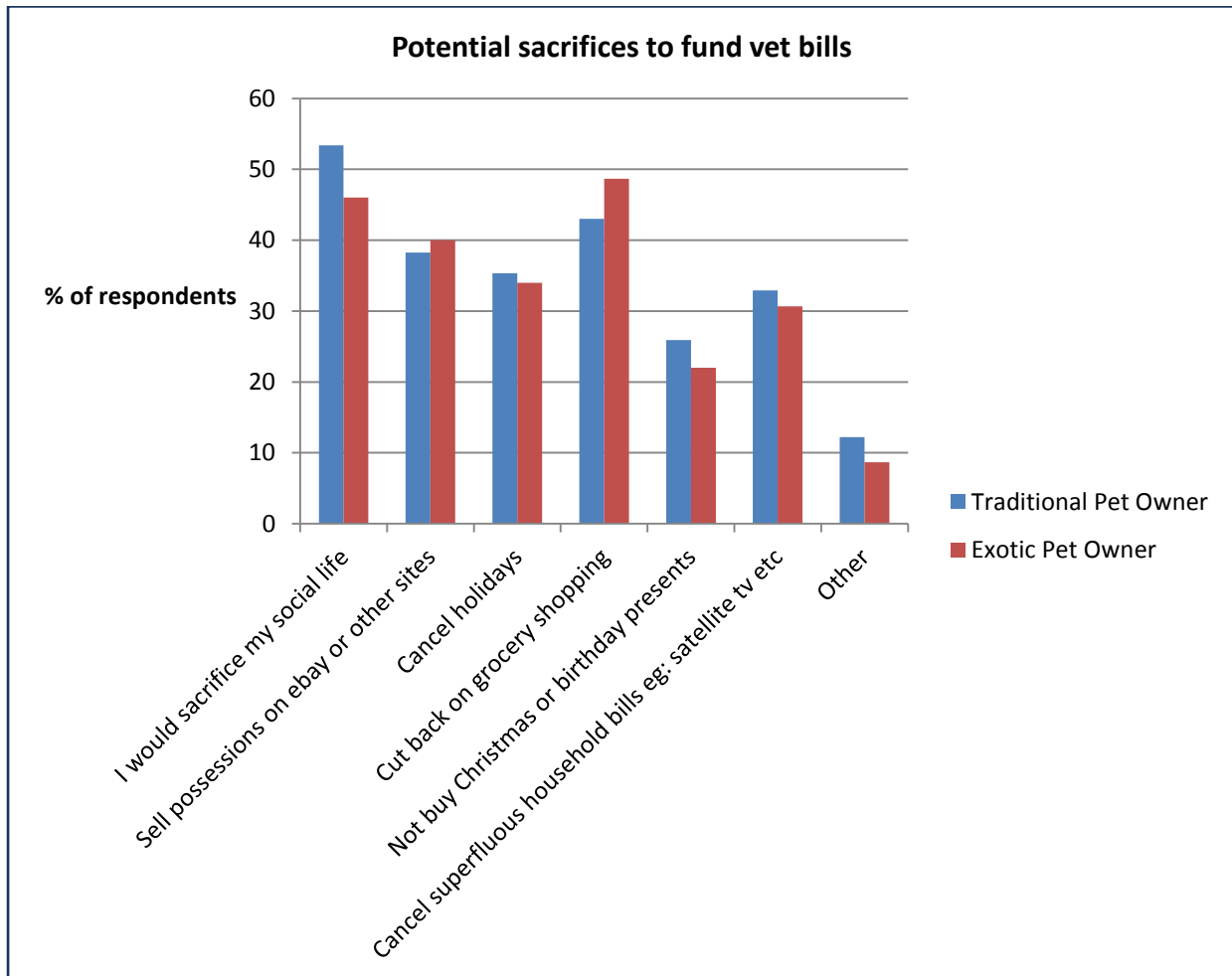


Even though the majority of pet owners were aware of their pet's care requirements when they bought their pet, over half (55%) have continued to be shocked by the level of care required. This

data illustrates that pets can be very demanding and can continue to surprise even prepared owners.

**FACT: The biggest problem faced by traditional pet owners was that they felt their pet had the run of the house with 38% of traditional pet owners admitting this was a problem compared with only a quarter of exotic pet owners.**

**Q4. What would you sacrifice to pay for vet bills?**



Over half of traditional pet owners (53%) said they would sacrifice their social life to pay for their vet bills followed closely by 43% saying they would cut back on grocery shopping.

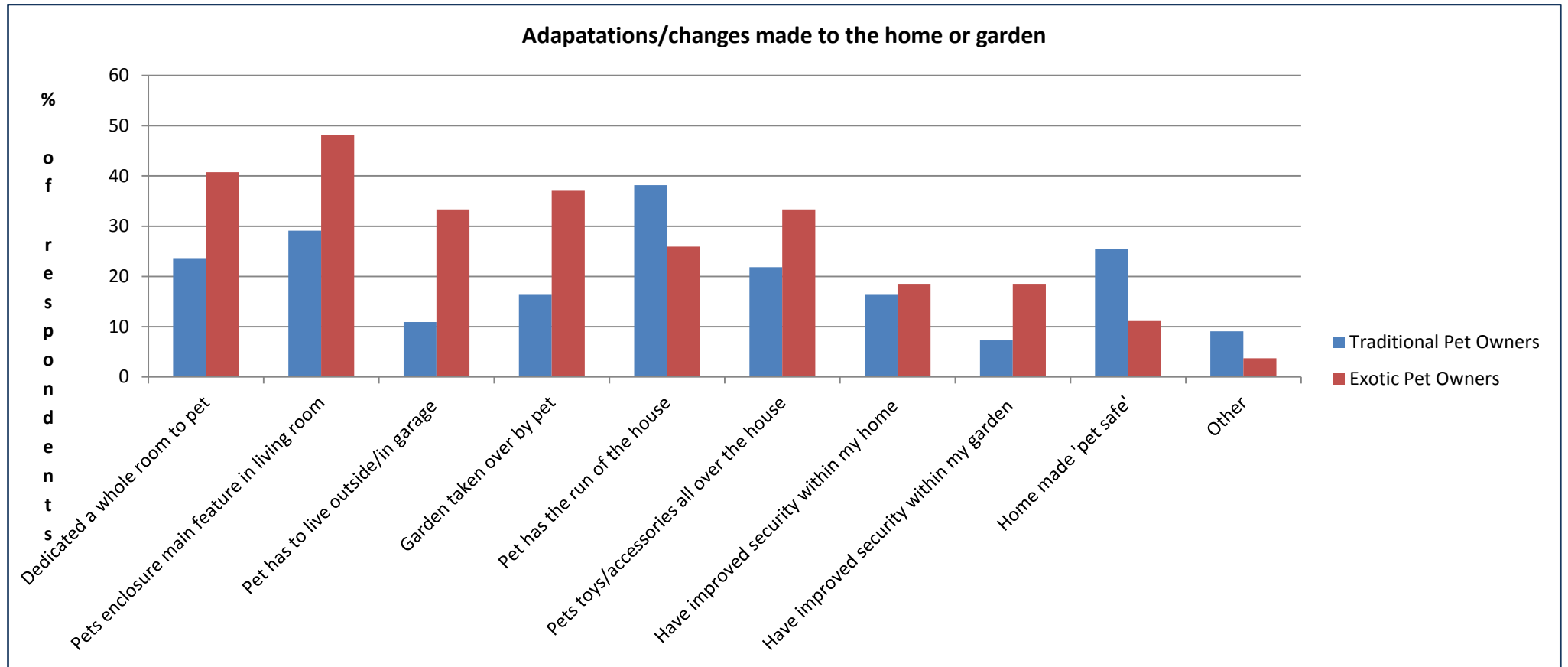
Exotic pet owners had an opposite opinion and would cut back on grocery shopping primarily (48%), followed by sacrificing their social life (46%).

Interestingly over 30% of both exotic pet owners and traditional pet owners would cancel their holiday to pay for fees.

The data suggests that pet lovers would be willing to make personal sacrifices to ensure their pet receives the vet care required. It also highlights the kind of future sacrifices that new pet owners may need to consider when they are purchasing their pet.

**FACT: On average the largest vet bill was £360 across all pet owners.**

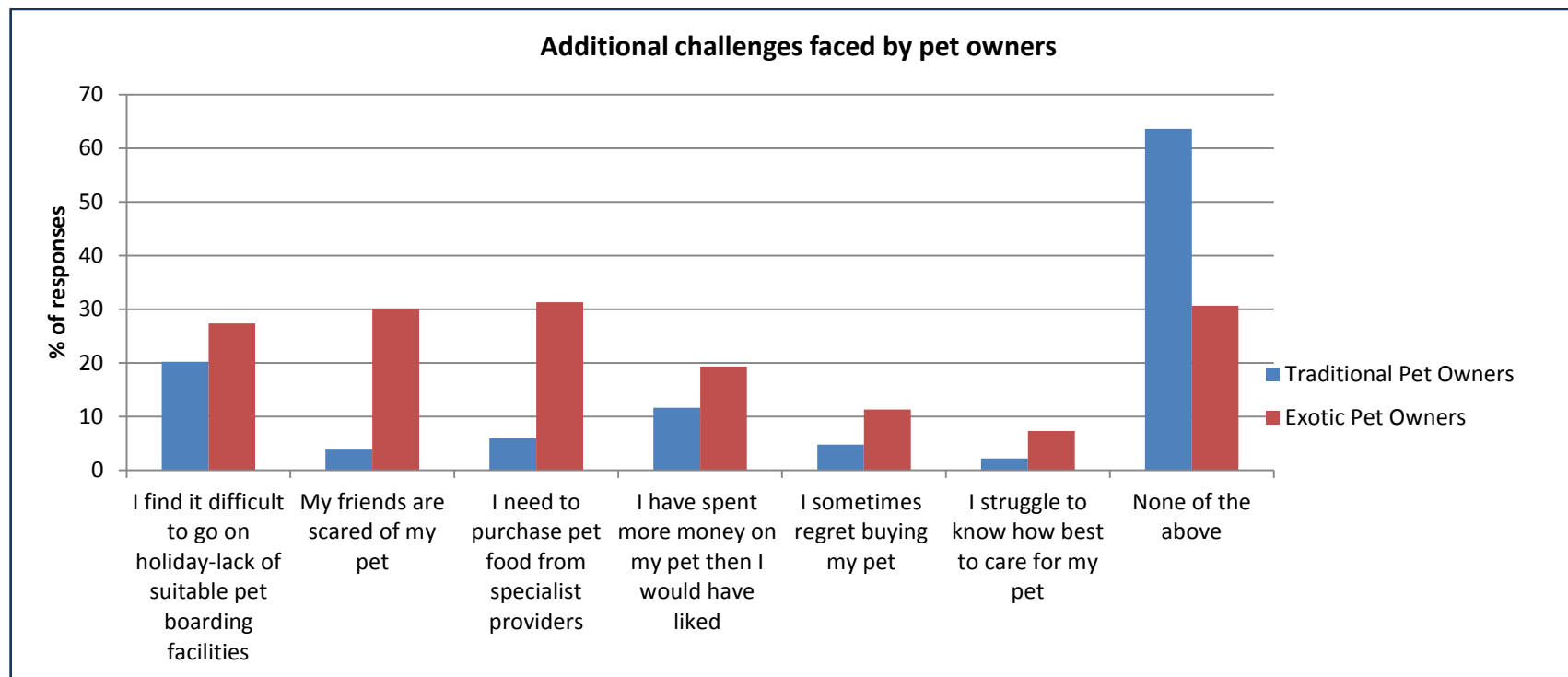
**Q5. Have you had to make any changes to your home/garden for your pet?**



The results illustrate that the most significant adaptation for 40% of exotic pet owners was that they've had to dedicate an entire room to their pet - which will come as a surprise to the three-quarters of traditional pet owners who have never had to consider this as an option. The most significant adaption for traditional pet owners is that their pet has the run of the house with 38% of respondents.

More exotic pet owners have made changes to their home and/or garden to improve security than traditional pet owners with over 37% having made security adaptations, compared to 23% for traditional pet owners. Considering required adaptations to the home and garden is important, some pets such as large birds and tortoises can easily escape if security is not sufficient. Furthermore, some pets require large enclosures, and these can dominate the room they are in.

### Q6. Additional challenges faced by pet owners



Exotic pet owners overall have faced more additional challenges compared to traditional pet owners. The greatest adaptation was in the purchase of food, where 31% of exotic pet owners stated they needed to buy food from specialist providers, compared to 5% for traditional pet owners.

Almost a third of exotic pet owners (30%) stated that their friends are scared of their pet compared to just 3% for traditional pet owners. Finding appropriate holiday boarding was also a problem identified by exotic pet owners, with 27% responding, compared to 20% for traditional pet owners.

More than double the number of exotic pet owners (7%) stated that they struggled to know how best to care for their pet, compared to 2% of traditional pet owners. These statistics highlight the unique needs that exotic pets can present to owners.

**ExoticDirect offer insurance for birds, mammals and reptiles. Visit [www.exoticdirect.co.uk](http://www.exoticdirect.co.uk) to request a quote.**

***FACT: Just over two thirds (67%) of pet owners said they were fully aware of the changes they had to make to their homes to accommodate their pets.***

***However of this, 18% of exotic pet owners said this caused problems for them, compared to only 6% of traditional pet owners.***

#### **4. What the results tell us**

The results illustrate that the care requirements for exotic pets can be different to those for traditional pets. They suggest that people who are considering purchasing an exotic pet should conduct lots of research to understand their pet before they purchase it.

The results highlight the contrast in veterinary bills, with a greater proportion of exotic pet owners having paid between £101-£200 on their last vet bill (36%) compared to traditional pet owners (19%). This could be due to the specialism of the area. Vets specialising in the care of exotic pets require additional training in order to be able to treat the pets.

Respondents were generally aware of their pet's care requirements before purchase. However, non-awareness of care requirements prior to purchase was more than double amongst exotic pet owners. Once their pet was home, the majority of pet owners were shocked by the level of care required. This data illustrates the importance of research in order to fully prepare and minimise unexpected care requirements.

Pet owners were also willing to make sacrifices for their pets to pay for vet bills. Both traditional and exotic pet owners stated that they would sacrifice either their social life or cut back on grocery shopping to pay for the bills.

Home adaptations have also been required with 40% of exotic pet owners having needed to dedicated a whole room to their pet compared to 23% for traditional pet owners. Furthermore more exotic pet owners have needed to improve security within their home or garden (37%), compared to 23% of traditional pet owners.

Additional challenges faced by exotic pet owners are with the purchase of food from specialist food providers. Traditional pet owners do not find this as much of a challenge.

Both exotic and traditional pet owners identified pet boarding as a challenge during holiday periods. The number of responses from exotic pet owners was higher for this question with 27% compared to 20% for traditional pet owners. A significant proportion of exotic pet owners also stated that their friends were scared of their pet (30%) compared to 3% for traditional pet owners.

A concerning statistic could be that more than double the number of exotic pet owners (7%) stated that they struggled to know how best to care for their pet, compared to 2% of traditional pet owners. This again highlights how important researching your pet's needs is.





Exotic pets can be very rewarding; they are interesting and unique and can bring love and warmth into the family. However, their needs can be very complex, and as the research suggests, pet owners have had to make adaptations to their home and lives in order to accommodate their pets. Research into pet requirements is essential. Within this report we have provided a list of recommendations for when purchasing a pet. In addition, we have included a list of organisations who can offer advice.

***FACT: Three in ten exotic pet owners said their friends are scared of their pet, and one in ten say they sometimes regret buying their pet.***

## **5. Recommendations**

So, you're considering purchasing an exotic pet, or you already have one? Below is a list of recommendations to help you to be as prepared as possible:

- a. Research your pet's dietary requirements and subsequent food retail outlets. Consider how and where you will store the food once purchased, and how the food should be prepared for your pet.
- b. Research housing requirements including the appropriate size, temperature, lighting, heating and humidity levels required. It is important to ensure that your pet lives in the right environment to help maintain happiness and health.
- c. Research pet entertainment and substrate requirements; Birds particularly require more entertainment, and can be prone to psychological and health problems should they become bored. Particular substrate may be required for your pet in order to help maintain happiness and health.
- d. Conduct research into any legal requirements as some pets may require a license. This can range from a CITES (Convention [on] International Trade in Endangered Species) licence, a Dangerous Wild Animal Licence or a Pig licence etcetera.
- e. Consider who will look after your pet if you choose to go away on holiday. Research animal boarding establishments, and ask friends and family whether they would be able to look after your pet if you were to go away.
- f. Conduct research into pet insurance and obtain a quote. Pet insurance can provide peace of mind against those unexpected vet bills, and can mean that should your pet become poorly, you have one less thing to worry about. **ExoticDirect offer insurance for birds, mammals and reptiles. Visit [www.exoticdirect.co.uk](http://www.exoticdirect.co.uk) to request a quote.**
- g. Research local vets who specialise in exotic pets. If there are none locally, consider whether you would be happy to travel to a practice further away. You can visit the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) website in order to find a practice that specialises in exotics. Register with the practice as soon as possible once you have purchased your pet. There's nothing worse than having a poorly pet, and no vet to treat it. Referral fees from general vets can be expensive, so it makes sense to get organised in advance.

- h. Ensure you know the history of the pet, and that you trust the breeder or seller. Ask about whether the pet has had any previous problems, such as temperament issues or illnesses, and ask about previous owners.
- i. For expensive pets it can a good idea to consider microchipping if appropriate, or having your pet rung if it's a large bird. You can ask your vet for more details.
- j. Finally, visit the website for the relevant charity or organisation for your pet type. We have provided a list of these below. Links to a selection of the organisations can be found on the ExoticDirect website. The organisations can provide a wealth of accurate information and can really help inform your knowledge.

### **Animal Societies and Organisations**

*For birds:* The Parrot Society

*For Tortoises:* The British Chelonia Group

*For Reptiles:* British Herpetological Society

*To find a vet that specialises in exotic animals visit:* The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons website.

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### **6. Conclusion**

Ensuring you understand your pet's requirements is important to help contribute towards a happy, healthy pet. Owning an exotic pet can mean unexpected home and life adaptations, imposing time and cost constraints. Even traditional pets can present unexpected challenges.

Conduct lots of research, and get in touch with the relevant organisations. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Even if you've had your pet for years, get involved! The information and pet organisations are available for pet lovers to use and can contribute towards a happy, healthy environment for your pet.

The research within this report details some of the common challenges faced by pet owners, and has hopefully lifted the lid on some of the adaptations required for exotic and traditional pet owners.

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