

In 2013 it was estimated that 13 million households have a pet and that the pet population has increased from 4 million to 67 million including fish. Here in the South East cats and dogs remain the most popular pets with 21% of households owning a cat and 21% owning a dog. Indoor and outdoor fish are our region's next most popular pet animal.

It is hardly a surprise that we love our animals so much. Pet ownership is proven to bring huge benefits to our wellbeing and happiness and companion animals in particular are being used in a therapeutic way for those suffering from a range of conditions spanning autism to loneliness among the elderly.

As chair of the Pet Advisory Committee, a collection of companion animal welfare charities, I regularly discuss legislative aspects of pet ownership, which sadly is not always responsible. On Monday of this week not only was commercial dog breeding (colloquially often referred to as puppy farming) raised but also that of wild animals as pets.

Now I am a cat owner and I adore my little fur balls. Owning a crocodile, lizard or spider is not my cup of tea, nor I imagine would be welcomed by Mungo & Basil, but I recognise that responsible ownership of these animals is legal. Where I get concerned is when people find that they can no longer care for the more unusual species and think that it is OK to release them into the wild. The RSPCA recently picked up a Raccoon Dog which had been released because the owner had too many and could no longer care for them. This in turn raises issues around disease and population growth.

Pet ownership is healthy. It is good for health, wellbeing, and let's be frank the economy too. But it needs to be responsible too and there is a lot of work that needs to still be done on that score.