

I write regularly about various awareness months but we are midway through my favourite – National Pet Month.

National Pet Month is a registered charity, unique in bringing together animal welfare charities, professional bodies, pet businesses, schools, youth groups and pet lovers. The trustees are National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) and Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) and the charity's key aims are to promote responsible pet ownership, make people aware of the mutual benefits of living with pets, increase public awareness of the role of pet care specialists and raise awareness of the value of working and assistance companion animals.

Now to me this is all a no brainer! Apart from the time I lived in London, I have always had pets. Mostly cats but at various points throughout my childhood we also had rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, fish and even at one point stick insects. When I was suffering from depression and I said in a consultation with my doctor that I was thinking of getting cats again he actually clapped with excited approval.

There are huge benefits of pet ownership and research has shown that it can be particularly beneficial for children: from teaching them responsibilities and about the cycle of life, to providing companionship and building confidence. Further work has been done on the benefit to older people and the work I am doing at ministerial level on loneliness will definitely ensure that pets feature. We see the struggle that many face when they are forced to give up their animal, sometimes their only sense of family, in order to live in a care home. My two moggies drive me bonkers but I would be devastated to lose them.

So I love National Pet Month, as a simple celebration of all things cuddly, fluffy, sometimes stupid but ultimately unconditionally loving.