PPM
Pet Product Marketing
The advantage in pet retail
November 2026

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Hello!

It was great to see so many of you at PATS, whether we were saying hello for the first time or catching up with old friends and colleagues from across the trade.

It was a fantastic show, with a great atmosphere throughout. One thing that particularly struck me was just how many younger faces there were coming into the industry. That can only be a good thing for the future of the pet trade, bringing fresh ideas, energy and enthusiasm with them.

And, as ever, there was no shortage of innovation. The pet industry never seems to run out of imagination, and PATS once again demonstrated just how inventive brands continue to be, with new products designed to solve problems, meet changing customer needs and give retailers something genuinely different to put on their shelves.

Attention now inevitably turns towards one of the busiest periods of the retail calendar. There are plenty of seasonal opportunities ahead, and hopefully this issue will give you a little inspiration along the way.

I hope you enjoy the issue, and thanks again to everyone who stopped by to say hello at PATS.

James

James Buzzel Editor, *Pet Product Marketing*

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What stood out at PATS 2026?

There were some clear product trends, plenty of fresh thinking and a noticeably international feel to the halls… *PPM* Editor, James Buzzel, offers his five takeaways from PATS 2026

1. The next generation is coming through

One of the most encouraging things about PATS was seeing the energy coming from younger people and newer businesses entering the industry.

You could see it among the award winners, start-ups and across the show floor: plenty of enthusiasm, fresh thinking and people genuinely excited about what they are bringing to the pet trade.

For such a mature market, there certainly doesn't seem to be any shortage of new ideas.



2. Licensed products are having a moment

I noticed an increase in licensed products at this year's PATS, particularly in dog toys. Rosewood's new Mr Men Little Miss range was a brilliant example of how well it can work when the product itself plays with the character. Mr Tickle has extra-long rope arms, Mr Greedy has a hidden treat pocket and Mr Strong is designed for rougher play.

Mr Men were far from alone, with Minions, Sonic, Peanuts and Hello Kitty also appearing around the show.

For me, it underlines just how emotional the pet purchase has become. The dog doesn't care whether it is chewing Mr Happy, but the owner does. Add familiar characters, nostalgia, bold colours and a bit of fun, and you have products that can be difficult to walk past on the shelf.







3. Treats with a purpose



Treats are increasingly being asked to do more than simply taste good.

Across the show, there was a continued shift towards functional treats and chews, with collagen, joint support, dental health, skin and coat benefits and added nutrition increasingly built into products.

That combination feels important. Owners still want to spoil their pets, but if a treat can contribute something to their health and wellbeing at the same time, it becomes an easier purchase to justify. The line between the treat aisle and the health aisle is becoming increasingly blurred.

4. PATS is becoming much more international

Another thing that struck me was just how international the show now feels.

The new International Pavilion made that particularly visible, but overseas businesses could be seen across the halls, bringing products, ingredients and ideas into the UK market. For independent retailers, that could become increasingly important. Finding something customers haven't already seen everywhere else remains one of the great advantages independents can offer, and international brands can provide exactly that point of difference.



5. Creativity, smiles and familiar faces





There was no shortage of creativity on the stands, from a giant ostrich attracting attention to people walking around with red arrows on their heads. Sometimes something colourful, funny or unexpected is enough to make people stop, smile and start a conversation.

And that probably sums up PATS rather well.



It remains a friendly show, with something genuinely enjoyable about meeting new people, putting faces to names and catching up with those you might only see once a year.

For all the products, trends and business being done across the three days, there was still plenty of laughter and warmth around the halls.

Pure & Natural

New Product Showcase & Awards WINNER PATS2026

Sponsored by LEOPARD PBW With media partner PBWnews

- Judge's Comment -

The natural feeding world has waited a long time for a mixed treat bag like this; it's a great product!



A mixed selection of 50 natural chews, including Chicken Feet, Duck Feet, Chicken Necks, Chicken Wings, Beef Trachea, Pork Bites, Pig Ears and Rabbit Ears

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50TH ANNIVERSARY

PATS 2026 attendance rises 8% to record 6,505



A bigger footprint, new features and strong international interest helped make PATS 2026 its largest edition to date

The three-day pet and aquatics trade show attracted 6,505 retailers, buyers and industry professionals, compared with 6,021 visitors in 2025.

More than 600 brands exhibited across Halls 3 and 3A, with organisers reporting strong engagement from visitors looking for new products, suppliers and business opportunities.

The show occupied 20% more floor space than in 2025 and introduced a number of new features alongside its established programme.

These included the International Pavilion and Hosted Buyers Programme, which brought international exhibitors and senior buyers to the show.

The Hosted Buyers Programme welcomed buyers from businesses including Fressnapf in Germany, Chewy in the US and Pet's Delight in Dubai.

Farah Al Khojai, founder and Managing Director of Pet's Delight, said, "It has been wonderful. It was a great opportunity to see what's in, what's new, discover new suppliers and catch up with old ones."

Other additions included Animal Encounters, Aquascaping and an expanded Grooming Zone programme.

Coffee & Connect also made its debut, providing an informal setting for networking and discussion around some of the trends shaping the pet trade.

The show was officially opened by television presenter and farmer, Jimmy Doherty, who also interviewed visitors and exhibitors for his new YouTube series.







He said, "It's a great place to come and find out what's new in the industry, and discover what the new trends are going to be. From the innovation in pet food to aquascaping, it's just so exciting."

The New Product Showcase and Awards once again formed a major part of the event, with the winners announced during the drinks reception at the end of the opening day.

The show also offered professional development opportunities, with SQPs able to claim self-reflection CPD points through an initiative organised with AMTRA and Vetpol.

Visitors could also access exhibitor show offers through the PATS Red Book, which this year brought together the event's special deals and New Product Showcase entries.

Laura Palmer, director of Mutleys Pet Supplies in Norfolk, said, "I have visited PATS for 17 years, and truthfully this was the best one yet. The show was busy, and the atmosphere was so upbeat.

"I loved the PATS Café in the centre of the hall. It was a real pleasure to attend the show. I could easily have stayed for all three days."

PATS 2027 will return to the NEC Birmingham from 19–21 September, 2027.

W patshow.co.uk

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PATS 2026 PET & AQUATICS TRADE SHOW
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The scale of this year's competition was bigger than ever, with more than 400 new products entered into the New Product Showcase, a powerful demonstration of the pace of innovation and creativity sweeping across the pet industry.

And the winners are...

PATS 2026
New Product Awards revealed

Sponsored by Leopard Co and supported by pbwnews, the awards celebrate the very best new products showcased at this year's PATS



Cat Accessories & Toys ▲

Pet Tee Pee – Danish Design

Judges said, "This is a great quality modern design with a neutral colour that would fit into any home. It's a great price for a very nice-looking cat bed."



Cat Food Products ►

Purrform Fresh Deli - The Nutriment Company

Judges said, "This product comes in a good variety of different flavours. Moving cat food into the fresh food sector is a good innovation."



◄ Dog Treat Products (sponsored by Law Print & Packaging)

Pure & Natural Doggy Bag (Natural Chew Variety Pack) – Su-Bridge

Judges said, "The natural feeding world has waited a long time for a mixed treat bag like this. It's a great product."



Dog Food Products ▲ (sponsored by Petfellas)

Real Simple – Naturaw

Judges said, "This product is high-quality with clear labelling and comes at a great price. It's exactly where the raw market should be heading."



Dog Accessories & Toys (sponsored by Paws Wholesale)

Booster Enrichment Toy Range – Fidelis Dog

Judges said, "This is a wonderful concept and is very well made. It comes at a good price point and should be robust for larger dogs."

Dog Harnesses, Leads & Dog Wear

Truelove Ultra-light Magnetic Top Harness – Truelove x That Dog

Judges said, "This harness is ideal for those owners with dexterity issues and is also just a cool-looking product."





Small Animal & Bird Products

Teewy Meadow Wheel for Small Animals – Chongqing Pet Union Biological Technology

Judges said, "This product is naturally produced and pleasing on the eye, and is a great boredom-buster."

Pet Care Products (sponsored by Pedigree Wholesale)

Oralade Active + – Oralade

Judges said, "If we continue to have hot summers, hydration drinks such as this great product will become ever more important for dogs and their owners."





Grooming Products

Portable Dog Washer – Hound Hose

Judges said, "This is a great innovative product. It's portable, practical and ideal for muddy walks and muddy paws."

Aquatics Indoor Products

Interpet Scape Kit Cube Aquariums – Sera Group

Judges said, "An ideal starter kit with a good range of sizes and price points."





Aquatics Outdoor Products

Pond in a Pot – Anglo Aquatic Plant

Judges said, "This product looks amazing and is fantastic value. It's super cute and is well designed."

Reptile Products

Fast Acting Reptile Calming & Emotional Wellbeing Kit – Pet Remedy

Judges said, "This is a great product for wellbeing, at a good price and something we haven't seen before."



Beaphar extends household flea range with new FLEAtec spray

Beaphar has expanded its household flea control range with an updated FLEAtec Household Flea Spray, featuring a new formulation, refreshed packaging and a new 300ml size



The spray joins Beaphar Household Flea Powder, launched earlier this year, giving retailers two formats for customers looking to tackle fleas in the home.

Containing tetramethrin, permethrin and s-methoprene, **Beaphar FLEAtec Household Flea Spray** kills fleas, inhibits the development of flea eggs and larvae and helps prevent infestations multiplying. It also kills ticks and crawling insects.

Alongside the existing 600ml pack, the spray is now available in a 300ml size, providing a lower-priced option for smaller homes.

Beaphar Household Flea Powder contains permethrin and is designed to provide immediate killing action against fleas.

Beaphar says 95% of a flea infestation is found within the home, making household treatment an important part of flea control. The company is encouraging retailers to highlight the category during autumn, when central heating can cause dormant flea life stages to become active.

Research commissioned by Beaphar in January 2026 found 80% of pet owners would consider buying a household flea treatment, with 53% considering a spray and 43% a powder.

Claire Edmunds, UK Marketing Manager for Beaphar, said, "By refreshing FLEAtec Household Flea Spray and offering it alongside our Household Flea Powder, Beaphar is helping retailers offer affordable, easy-to-recommend flea control options suited to different homes, budgets and shopper preferences."

The company also offers retailer POS materials and parasite training through the **Beaphar Training Academy.**

W beaphar.co.uk

Totoniks launches venison blood dog range in UK

New Zealand pet nutrition brand, Totoniks, has launched in the UK with a range of dog treats and food toppers made using venison blood

The range comprises Blood Buds, cold-pressed training treats, and Hydration canisters, powdered complementary feeds designed to be mixed with water or added to food.

Totoniks uses venison blood produced as a by-product of New Zealand's deer farming industry. Dried into a powder, it is used as a key ingredient across the range and provides a low-fat source of protein, iron and B vitamins.

Founder, Geoff Bowers, said, "Venison blood is one of nature's most complete proteins, and for years it has simply been thrown away.

"That never sat right with us. If the animal has already been used, we owe it to use everything we responsibly can."

Bowers previously helped bring New Zealand pet food brand, K9 Natural, to the UK and sees Totoniks as the next step in bringing New Zealand-sourced pet products to British retailers.

Blood Buds are cold-pressed at low temperatures and supplied in 50g resealable packs. The range includes Daily Boost, with venison blood and bone broth; Daily Glow, with venison blood and Hoki lipids; and Daily Leap, with venison blood, Hoki lipids and green-lipped mussel.

The Hydration range comes in 40g canisters and includes Daily Boost & Hydration, Performance & Hydration, Gut Health & Hydration and Hip, Joint & Hydration.

Additional ingredients include bone broth, green-lipped mussel, bentonite clay and manuka honey.



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From muddy dogs to a PATS award

What started with a dog walker getting thoroughly fed up with muddy dogs has developed into a new portable washing product, thousands of interested customers and a PATS New Product Award…

For six years, Maisie Osborne has run dog walking company, Walking Pawz, in the Greater Oxford area, and throughout that time one problem has followed her back to the vehicle at the end of almost every wet walk: mud.

Wet paws, filthy coats and, on particularly unfortunate days, dogs that had rolled in something altogether less pleasant were simply part of the job. But as the business grew, getting dogs clean before returning them to their owners became increasingly difficult.

"We tried everything on the market," says Maisie. "Anything tailored towards cleaning dogs, then things designed for bikes, boots, mats and cars. Nothing would keep up with what we needed.

"The pressure would be too weak, the tank would leak, or something would break or split."

Eventually, one incident proved to be the final straw.

"I had an eight-litre water tank in the passenger footwell. It split, the hose popped off and I had eight litres of water everywhere in the front of the car. I just thought, 'Right, I'm done.'"

Her response was perhaps not the obvious next step.

"I did what any normal person would do and Googled, 'How do you make a product?'"

The wrong trade show

That search eventually took Maisie to China.

After discovering that trade shows might offer a route to finding a manufacturer, she travelled to Shanghai, armed with a drawing on her iPad showing roughly what she wanted to create.

There was just one problem.

"I went to the wrong trade show."

Walking into the enormous exhibition, Maisie quickly realised her mistake.

"I knew straight away I was in the wrong place. I went and sat in the canteen and sobbed for about two hours."

Then came the chance encounter that ultimately changed the direction of the business.

A translator spotted her, asked whether she was OK and, after hearing what Maisie was trying to do, offered to help. Together they walked around the exhibition showing exhibitors the drawing on her iPad.

"Everyone said no. Then the second-to-last person we spoke to said, 'We don't do that, but I might know someone who does.' And that's where it started."

It was far from an overnight journey from sketch to finished product.

Thirty-two samples later, Hound Hose had taken shape.

Built around the job

Rather than adapting an existing washer and simply positioning it for dog owners, Maisie says virtually every element of Hound Hose was developed around problems she had encountered while working as a professional dog walker.

Even the tank capacity involved considerable trial and error.

"We started with 10 litres, then 12 litres, and they were too small. I jumped to 20 litres and it was too big. Then I went to 17 litres. By that point the factory were basically telling me I had one more shot before they blocked my number!"

The resulting 17-litre tank has been shaped to sit neatly behind a car seat, while an integrated hose helps to avoid the type of connection failure that originally flooded Maisie's vehicle.

Water pressure was another major part of the development process.

For a professional dog walker, a portable washer needs enough power to remove stubborn mud, but it also has to remain comfortable for the dog. Maisie says around 10 different pressure samples were tested



before the final specification was reached.

The nozzle was developed with the same real-world approach.

"If you think about a normal garden hose, you often have those circular ends where you twist through the different settings," she explains. "We tried that, but when you're trying to hold a dog still it takes too long."

Instead, the Hound Hose is designed to allow the user to control the water while still dealing with the dog, with the spray adjusted depending on what is needed.

"If it's a smaller dog you can have it gentler. If they've rolled in something, you can make it more powerful."

Other details evolved in much the same way. A solid plastic storage area was changed to mesh to make carrying accessories more practical, while a battery pack was incorporated to make the system portable.

Then real life intervened again.

"If you're anything like me and you don't charge your phone, you'll understand what happened. My battery pack kept dying. I thought, 'How am I supposed to use it if it's dead?' So we added an in-car charger."

For Maisie, those small changes are what make the product different.

"Everything to do with it was made so it worked for us in dog walking. That was what I wanted."

Thousands waiting

Once the product was ready, Maisie initially tested demand close to home. Hound Hose launched in a small way to local dog owners and dog walkers in Oxfordshire, with an initial order of 250 units.

They sold out within half an hour.

The response since then has gone considerably beyond what Maisie first imagined. Hound Hose has a waiting list of around 6,500 people ahead of its wider launch at the end of November.

"I didn't buy 6,500, so we're going to have to work that one out!" she laughs.

The company also has a UK distribution partner, with stock being manufactured in China before being shipped to a distribution centre near Oxford.

Retail is firmly part of Maisie's plans.

"I'd love all of it," she says. "We currently sell through our website, but I'd love independent retailers, too! Anywhere where I know someone has had the same problem as me, I want Hound Hose to be there."

A winning first PATS

PATS 2026 was Hound Hose's first trade show, and it proved to be a memorable one.

The Hound Hose 17L Portable Dog Washer picked up the New Product Award in the Grooming Products category, adding another unexpected milestone to a journey that began with muddy dogs and a flooded car.

For Maisie, the reaction at the show was perhaps as important as the award itself. Live demonstrations allowed visitors to try the product and see the pressure and controls for themselves, while enquiries came not only from within the pet trade but from other markets, too.

"I've had people talking to me about caravanning, mountain biking, equine, remote homes, all sorts," she says.

That wider potential has only added to the sense that Hound Hose may be at the beginning of something much bigger.

For now, though, Maisie is still getting used to the response. "It's slightly mind-blowing because I'm just a dog walker who wanted a product that worked at the end of our walks.

"I basically had a strop about mud, and all of a sudden we're here at PATS."

And after a first show that delivered an award, new retail conversations and an enthusiastic response from visitors, she is already looking ahead.

"I've had such a great time. I'm on my last legs now, but I could do it again in a heartbeat.

"I think we'll be back next year."



W houndhose.co.uk

WHY STOCK...





Pawtential Collagen Chews

Combining long-lasting chew appeal with functional positioning, Pawtential Collagen Chews offer retailers a modern alternative to traditional rawhide, backed by a growing choice of flavours, sizes and formats

At a glance

What are they? Collagen-based dog chews
Hero ingredient: Hydrolysed collagen
Who are they for? Dogs of different sizes, with small, medium and large options across the core range
Key benefit: A long-lasting chew positioned as an alternative to traditional rawhide
Flavours: Includes beef, chicken, peanut, salmon and new lamb options
Also available: New Collagen Doughnuts for added variety and shelf appeal

A chew with added purpose

The dog chew category continues to evolve as owners look beyond simple occupation and increasingly seek products with an added functional story.

Pawtential Collagen Chews, exclusive to Pedigree Wholesale, have been developed with exactly that shift in mind. Made using hydrolysed collagen, the range combines the familiar appeal of a long-lasting chew with a more wellness-led proposition.



Hydrolysed collagen is positioned as being easier to digest than traditional rawhide, while collagen itself is associated with supporting areas including joints, skin and coat condition. For retailers, that creates an easy conversation around a chew that offers both enjoyment and added purpose.

The established Pawtential range already offers considerable choice, with beef, chicken, peanut and salmon flavours available across small, medium and large formats. Current RRPs start at 99p for selected small chews, providing an accessible entry point into the functional-treat category.

The range has now been expanded further with Lamb Collagen Chews and Collagen Doughnuts. Lamb gives retailers another flavour option, while the Doughnuts introduce a very different shape to the fixture, helping to break up the more familiar straight-chew format and add visual interest.

That matters in a busy category where shelf standout can be every bit as important as the ingredient story.

Why it earns shelf space

Pawtential has several useful selling points working together.

First, it gives retailers an alternative for customers actively looking to move away from traditional rawhide. Secondly, the collagen positioning taps into the wider movement towards functional pet products, giving staff a stronger story to tell at the point of sale.

The breadth of the range is another advantage. Multiple flavours and sizes make it easier to offer choice without moving away from one recognisable brand, while the addition of Doughnuts introduces a different format for customers who may already buy conventional collagen chews.

Packaging has also been developed with retail in mind. Pawtential uses bright, shelf-ready presentation designed to stand out within the chew fixture, with branded FSDU options available for retailers wanting to create a more prominent secondary display.

For independents looking to strengthen their functional treat offer, Pawtential therefore brings together several current purchasing drivers in one range: long-lasting chewing, rawhide-alternative positioning, functional ingredients and strong shelf presence.



The range

The Pawtential Collagen Chew collection includes:

- Beef Collagen Chews
- Chicken Collagen Chews
- Peanut Collagen Chews
- Salmon Collagen Chews
- Lamb Collagen Chews
- Collagen Doughnuts
- Small, medium and large options across the core chew range

W petproducts.co.uk



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Bamboodles

The glow-up… and the start of something bigger

Bamboodles has always been about big chew energy: tough, long-lasting toys that dogs actually want to keep coming back to (and that owners can trust in the home)

As the range grew, the Bamboodles' team knew it was time to make the brand work harder on shelf and online – clearer, bolder, and way more Bamboodles.

So the rebrand became a full-on glow-up: a cleaner, more premium look, stronger product hierarchy, and messaging that makes it instantly obvious what each chew does and who it's for. The goal was simple: help shoppers decide in seconds – What is it? Why is it better? Which one do I need?

One of the biggest wins of the rebrand is clarity. The updated design creates a consistent visual language across the line, so the range feels like one confident family – not a collection of random products.

For retailers, that means easier merchandising, stronger shelf impact, and a range that invites browsing. For customers, it means less guesswork and more "Yep, that's the one."

"The goal was simple: help shoppers decide in seconds – What is it? Why is it better? Which one do I need?"

Line extensions that keep the fun going…

Puppy Chew Toys: for tiny teeth and big puppy chaos

Puppyhood is where chewing habits are born… and where sofas, skirting boards, and shoelaces go to die. Puppy owners want something safe, age-appropriate and genuinely soothing for teething.

The Puppy Chew Toys extension brings Bamboodles' trusted chew DNA into a puppy-first format:

- **Softer and gentler for growing gums**
- **Easy-to-hold shapes that are "built for paws"**
- **Puppy-approved scents/flavours to keep them engaged**

It's a natural add-on for retailers alongside puppy essentials, and a reassuring first choice for new dog parents.



The Giggle range: the chew toy that offers something different

The new Giggle range is designed for dogs who like their toys with a bit of theatre. These aren't just chews… they're interactive, sensory, and made to create that "What is that?" moment in-store.

Built for enthusiastic chewers and infused with dog-loved peanut butter flavour, the Giggle range adds:

- **Giggle/chuckle sounds to encourage active play**
- **Raised, gum-massaging textures to support dental health**
- **Multi-sensory stimulation (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch)**

In other words: more engagement, less boredom, and a lot more tail-wagging.





Launching next: Poodles Poo Bags

The first product launch under the Oodles umbrella is Poodles Poo Bags, landing in November.

They're designed to bring the same "Why is this aisle so boring?" energy to dog waste bags and turns a functional purchase into something you actually want to pick up. With bold, reversible designs printed inside and out, they're made to stand out on shelf and on the lead.

And they're not just fun – they're built with a premium feel and made from 100% post-consumer recycled plastic, so customers can feel good about what they're buying.

For more information, visit W bamboodles.co.uk

The dental treat for this holiday season



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*on all Variety Value Boxes



Feeding garden birds in winter:
What retailers need to know...

Colder months are a prime opportunity for retailers to inspire responsible wild bird feeding and help customers create wildlife-friendly outdoor spaces

A challenge and an opportunity

As temperatures fall and natural food becomes harder to find, winter becomes a challenge for wild birds. For retailers, it's an opportunity to explain how customers can help ease the pressure for their feathered garden friends.

"From providing energy-rich foods and reliable feeding routines to fresh water and good feeder hygiene, bird lovers can make a vital difference to how wild birds survive the toughest months," says Sarah Kitson, Head of Marketing at Honeyfields. "Retailers can help them take the right action by having the right advice to hand."



Falling temperatures mean birds need more energy to maintain body heat, while shorter days reduce the amount of foraging time. Frozen ground can also make natural food and water sources more difficult to access.

Subsequently, feeders may empty quickly, as birds visit regularly throughout the day seeking the energy needed to get through the night.

Energy = central heating

During a cold winter's night, a small bird can lose significant body heat. To survive, it needs to replenish those energy reserves during the day by feeding, but finding natural food is more difficult. Seeds, berries and insects are less abundant, while snow, frost and frozen ground can make food that is available harder to reach. To add to the pressure, shorter winter days mean fewer hours to search for food.

Give birds an energy boost

Sunflower seeds and hearts are naturally rich in oils and attractive to a wide range of garden birds. With the husks already removed, they can also help reduce waste beneath feeders.

Peanuts are a good source of protein and

"From providing energy-rich foods and reliable feeding routines to fresh water and good feeder hygiene, bird lovers can make a vital difference to how wild birds survive the toughest months."

energy and a favourite for tits, nuthatches and woodpeckers but retailers should remind customers to always use a suitable peanut feeder.

Suet blocks, pellets and fat balls provide a concentrated source of energy for many species.

A **quality seed blend** adds further variety, offering a combination of grains, seeds and other natural ingredients to appeal to different species.

During the winter months, Honeyfields recommends:

- **Simply Sunflower Hearts**
- **Simply Premium Peanuts**
- **Simply Suet Blocks and Pellets**
- **Simply Fat Balls**
- **Simply Traditional Blend**
- **Simply No Mess**

Stock them up

Encourage your customers to check and top up feeders regularly. Remind them to avoid putting out more food than birds can eat within a reasonable period, as old or damp food can deteriorate and create hygiene problems.

Multiple smaller feeding stations can also have practical benefits. They can allow more birds to feed simultaneously and reduce pressure around a single feeder.

This is another useful way for you to broaden the conversation beyond simply selling food, by helping customers consider how their overall feeding set-up can work more effectively.

Water shouldn't be overlooked

Fresh, clean water is essential all year, but freezing conditions will limit natural supplies. A shallow bird bath or suitable container is a reliable alternative.

Customers should be encouraged to check water regularly and keep it clean and fresh. During freezing conditions, ice should be removed where possible but antifreeze, salt and other chemicals should never be added to water intended for birds.

Positioning also matters. Water should be placed in a sheltered spot where birds can access it without being exposed to threats from predators such as cats.

Winter hygiene for good health

Dirty feeders, old food and accumulated waste can cause bacteria and other contaminants to build up so regular cleaning is crucial.

Wet or uneaten food should be removed, while food waste and droppings beneath feeders should not be allowed to accumulate.

Moving feeding stations periodically can help prevent waste and droppings from building up in one location and gives the ground underneath an opportunity to recover.

The same principle applies to bird baths, which should be cleaned regularly and provided with fresh water.

"For retailers, hygiene is an important part of the responsible feeding message. Good nutrition and good husbandry go hand in hand," says Sarah. "Quality food needs to be provided in a clean and suitable environment."

Supporting birds beyond the feeder

Food and water are central to winter feeding, but retailers can also encourage customers to think about the wider garden environment.

Trees, shrubs and hedges can provide natural shelter from cold weather and strong winds, while suitable nesting boxes can offer additional refuge.

Creating a wildlife-friendly feeding area does not require a large garden. Balconies, courtyards and other small outdoor spaces can all provide opportunities to offer birds food and water.

"At Honeyfields, we believe that healthy bird feeding starts with understanding what birds need and providing the right support at the right time of year," says Sarah.

Rewild your world with Honeyfields



To find out more, please contact your Regional Sales Manager or call us on 0845 257 0232

WHY STOCK...





Trinkety Paws Celestial Range

Combining standout design with waterproof practicality, Trinkety Paws' Celestial Range gives retailers a UK-made accessory collection designed to look different on the shelf and perform on the walk

At a glance

What is it? Waterproof dog collars and leads with a distinctive hand-splattered finish
Hero feature: Each piece is individually hand-splattered
Made from: Genuine waterproof BioThane®
Colours: Including Navy Celestial and Burnt Orange Celestial
Also available: Wide-fit collars suitable for sighthounds
Made in: Northamptonshire, UK

Style that works hard

There is no shortage of colourful dog accessories competing for space in-store, which means products increasingly need to offer something beyond colour alone.

Trinkety Paws' Celestial Range combines one of the Northamptonshire manufacturer's most recognisable design techniques with the practical qualities of BioThane®. Each collar and lead is hand-splattered using several colours to create a finish that gives the range its distinctive appearance, with solid-brass hardware completing the look.

It is an important point of difference in a category where owner expectations increasingly combine fashion and function.

Founder, Nadine Berger, says awareness of BioThane® has changed considerably since she started the business six years ago. "When we started, nobody really knew about it," she says. "Now people are actively looking for it."

The appeal is easy to understand. BioThane® is waterproof, wipe-clean, odour-resistant and designed not to stretch, while retaining a soft, leather-like feel. That makes it particularly suited to customers looking for attractive accessories that can cope with muddy walks, wet weather and everyday use.

For Trinkety Paws, however, the material is only part of the story.

"One thing we've done really well is the splatter," says Nadine. "Every collar and lead is hand-splattered from start to finish. Retailers like it because it's a little bit different."

That individuality gives independents an opportunity to offer something less easily replicated by mass-market ranges while still selling on practical benefits customers can immediately understand.

Why it earns shelf space

Trinkety Paws manufactures its BioThane® accessories in its Northamptonshire workshop and positions itself firmly as a small business working with other independent businesses.

For stockists, that brings a degree of flexibility. Retailers can access curated collections and smaller bundles rather than having to commit to a large display, while established accounts have no minimum value on top-up orders.

Nadine says that direct relationship is an important part of the offer.

"When we work with a small independent, it's nice for them to know we're also a small business," she says. "They deal with me directly, and then what I filter through to the guys in the workshop is what we do."

Trinkety Paws has also refined its retail bundles using its own sales data. Having found that more than 75% of collar sales were in medium and large sizes, the company reduced the emphasis on slower-selling size extremes within its displays. The aim is simple: give retailers a more productive mix of stock and make reordering easier.

With its combination of distinctive design, everyday practicality, UK manufacture and retailer-friendly ordering, the Celestial Range has a strong story to tell both on the shelf and at the till.



Nadine Berger, Trinkety Paws founder

The range

- Celestial BioThane® collars
- Celestial BioThane® leads
- Wide-fit Celestial collars
- Navy Celestial colourway
- Burnt Orange Celestial colourway
- Solid-brass hardware
- Hand-splattered finish

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When a customer asks about their dog's behaviour... a new service has the answers



Laura Foster, Head of Owner Support Services at Dogs Trust (pictured with her Golden Retriever, Mabel)

Pet retailers are often a trusted first port of call when owners have questions about their dogs. Dogs Trust's Behaviour Support Line gives retailers an easy way to signpost customers towards free, expert help when those conversations turn to behaviour

Pet retailers are part of a dog owner's everyday support network. Customers trust your advice about food, toys, equipment and all things dog-related. Sometimes, a simple question opens a wider conversation about dog behaviour. A customer asks about the best lead or harness for their dog, and it quickly turns into a conversation about preventing barking on walks. Someone else mentions that their dog struggles when left alone. In that moment, knowing where to point them can make a real difference.

Dogs Trust Behaviour Services offers practical, compassionate support for dogs and the people who care for them. The free Behaviour Support Line is a simple place to start. Customers can call to discuss a concern, however small it may seem. The team of expert behaviour advisors will listen, offer guidance and help them find an appropriate next step. You don't need to diagnose the problem or have the answer; a warm recommendation can connect someone with qualified help.

A first step that's easy to share

Laura Foster, head of Owner Support Services at Dogs Trust, explains, "Last month, the Behaviour Support Line dealt with 5,000 calls from worried dog owners. Behind each conversation is someone struggling with their dog's behaviour, trying to understand their dog better and decide what to do next.

"Owners may have noticed a subtle change or lived with a difficult behaviour for months or even years. Whatever the behaviour issue, reaching out to Dogs Trust for support is a positive, responsible first step."

The Behaviour Support Line provides free advice by phone and can send helpful resources by email. If more in-depth support is needed, Dogs Trust provides several options, including low-cost and discounted services for customers on a low income or receiving benefits.

One-to-one behaviour training is available as a 60-minute practical session with a behaviour coach, either in person or online. The session provides practical training and management tips, giving customers the tools they need to continue progress at home.

Reactive Dog Package combines individual support with a small group course, in person or virtual, to help reactive dogs and their owners handle tricky situations.

Specialist Behaviour Package is for dogs with more complex behaviour challenges. Customers receive in-depth support from a qualified Clinical Animal Behaviourist,

followed by a practical session with a behaviour coach.

The right route depends on the dog, the owner and their circumstances.

This range matters in a retail setting. A customer asking about enrichment might mention that their dog becomes distressed when left alone. Someone choosing a lead may reveal that passing other dogs feels impossible. The purchase may be only one part of the story. You can offer the product advice you know, then signpost the behaviour question. It is a straightforward way to support your customer without stepping outside your comfort zone.

When household budgets are under pressure

When budgets are tight, cost can stop owners asking for help. However, Dogs Trust wants qualified behaviour support to be within reach and affordable for all dog owners. The Behaviour Support Line is free. Low-cost or discounted support is also available for customers on a low income or receiving benefits.

If a customer is worried about cost, encourage them to explain their circumstances when they get in touch. The team can discuss the most suitable support and any low-cost or discounted options that may be available. Cost doesn't need to be a barrier.

'We've heard it all'

Behaviour worries rarely arrive in neat categories. A dog may bark at visitors, lunge on walks or seem frightened by unfamiliar people. Another may guard food, toys or space. Some owners worry about tension between dogs at home. Others struggle with a dog who barks around a child or panics when left alone.

These can be difficult things to say aloud. A calm response helps customers feel able to seek support.

Put the poster where conversations happen

The poster enclosed with this issue is designed to make signposting easy. Please display it where dog owners will see it and where your team can point to it. The dog aisle, counter or community noticeboard could all work.

Check that customers can reach and scan its QR code. If space is limited, place it near leads, harnesses or enrichment products. Those shelves often prompt questions about walks, settling and daily routines.

As the nights draw in, the fast-approaching firework season and Christmas period may be a natural prompt for customer conversations. Many dogs find fireworks frightening. Christmas can also bring more visitors, disrupted routines and less quiet time.

These changes can bring new behaviour worries or make existing ones more noticeable. A customer might mention barking, fear or difficulty settling while shopping for their dog. Listening and encouraging them to reach out for support alongside their purchase could make all the difference.

You might say, 'That sounds hard for both of you. Do you know that Dogs Trust has a free Behaviour Support Line? Would you like the details?'

There is no need to promise a quick fix. Behaviour can have many contributing factors, and each dog's needs are different. What you can offer is a clear, kind next step. If a customer is unsure whether their concern is serious enough, encourage them to call. They do not have to wait for a crisis.

Expert help is just a click or call away. This festive season, help more dogs and their people find the support they need.

Luna's story

Luna's family found themselves in a difficult place. Luna was nervous around strangers and struggled with the family's other dog. Walks and having visitors to their home had become hard to manage. Her owner feared they might have to give Luna up.

The Behaviour Support Line offered advice and referred the family for further behaviour support. Their specialist set small, achievable goals around daily life. Later, Luna's owner reported that walks and life at home had become more manageable.

Laura Foster adds, "Luna's story is one example of the types of calls our behaviour experts deal with on a daily basis. It shows why an informed conversation can matter. Someone who feels out of options may discover a manageable way forward. For a retailer, the first step can be as simple as pointing to a poster."



The Behaviour Support Line was able to offer Luna's family much needed help and advice



W dogstrust.org.uk/get-help/behaviour-support-line

WHY STOCK...



Ovo Pals Collection

Bright, playful and packed with personality, Ovo Pals combine natural rubber, character-led design and plenty of squeaky fun in a range that gives retailers lots to play with



At a glance

What are they? Characterful natural-rubber dog toys
Hero feature: Distinctive hand-painted designs
Who are they for? Dogs of different sizes, with formats available across the range
Play value: Designed for throwing, rolling, bouncing, catch and fetch
Material: Natural rubber
Key selling point: A large choice of colourful characters and designs

Toys with character

Dog toys are increasingly expected to catch the owner's eye as well as the dog's, and Ovo Pals certainly understand the assignment.

Available from Totally Pawsome, the collection takes a simple play concept and injects it with a hefty dose of personality. At its heart are the distinctive Ovo eggs, transformed into colourful characters through bold, hand-painted designs, but the range now extends far beyond its original egg shape.

Retailers can choose from animal characters, sports-themed toys, food-inspired designs and a growing cast of quirky personalities, giving stores plenty of scope to create a display that feels fun, colourful and easy to browse.



Behind the playful appearance is a straightforward product proposition. Ovo toys are made from natural rubber and are designed to be lightweight enough for interactive games of catch and fetch, while their shapes make them suitable for throwing, rolling and bouncing. An air squeak adds another element of entertainment.

The toys are hand-painted using food-grade dyes and are non-toxic, PVC and BPA free, giving retailers a useful set of product credentials to talk through with customers.

That combination of strong visual appeal and easily explained benefits can make the collection particularly useful for independent retailers. Customers can immediately understand what the toy does, while the large variety of characters provides the opportunity to encourage repeat purchases and build a display that feels very different from a conventional wall of dog balls and bones.

Why it earns shelf space

Ovo Pals offers retailers something increasingly valuable in the toy category: choice without everything looking the same.

The range spans different shapes, characters, themes and sizes, allowing stockists to select designs to suit their customer base or build a larger, high-impact display. Original Ovo-style toys are particularly suited to small and medium dogs, while larger formats broaden the appeal to bigger dogs, too.

The character-led designs also lend themselves naturally to gifting, making the range particularly relevant as retailers move into the Christmas trading period. Their bright colours and novelty appeal can help create eye-catching displays and offer customers an easy add-on purchase for the dog under the tree.

Most importantly, Ovo Pals combines the fun factor with practical product credentials. Natural rubber, lightweight construction, squeakers and distinctive hand-painted finishes give retailers several easy talking points when helping customers choose a new toy.



The range

The Ovo collection includes:

- Original Ovo character eggs
- Small and large Ovo eggs
- Animal characters
- Balls and sports-inspired toys
- Food-themed designs
- Larger novelty toys
- Seasonal designs
- Multi packs

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Behind the brand: **Morganics Hemp UK**

From an idea inspired by one rescue dog to a range built around UK-grown hemp, Morganics Hemp UK is on a mission to change perceptions of one of the pet care market's most misunderstood ingredients

For Morganics Hemp UK, the story began not with a business plan, but with a dog called Yogi.

Founder, Nathan McLaren, rescued the Japanese Tosa when his skin and coat were in poor condition. As Yogi settled into his new home, his coat began to deteriorate further, prompting a search for something that might help.

"I started looking at different remedies for skin conditions in dogs, but wasn't making much progress with the traditional shampoos available at the time," Nathan explains.

At the time, he was already using human-grade hemp-based shampoos and body washes himself and had been impressed by them. That experience prompted him to investigate hemp seed oil and consider whether it could have a place in canine grooming too.

After seeing an improvement in Yogi's skin and coat, the idea behind Morganics began to take shape.

"That really inspired me to look at creating hemp seed oil products as a versatile, plant-based alternative for dog grooming and care," he says.



Hemp, but not CBD

One of the biggest challenges for Morganics is also one of the reasons the company believes there is an opportunity for retailers: confusion around hemp.

Hemp seed oil and CBD oil are very different products, but Nathan says the two are still frequently grouped together by consumers.

"Hemp seed oil is made from hemp seeds and it doesn't have the psychoactive or intoxicating properties people sometimes associate with cannabis," he explains. "There is still a huge amount of misunderstanding around the terminology."

For Morganics, hemp seed oil is valued primarily for its nutritional and cosmetic properties. It naturally contains essential fatty acids, including omega-3 and omega-6, and can be incorporated into grooming products as an emollient and conditioning ingredient.

That versatility has allowed Morganics to make hemp central to a range spanning shampoos and topical products through to nutritional supplements.

"Hemp can perform very differently depending on the product," says Nathan. "In a shampoo it can work as a conditioning and moisturising ingredient, whereas in a nose and paw balm we're looking more at protecting and moisturising dry skin."

The company particularly positions its grooming range towards dogs with sensitive skin, dry coats, matted fur and everyday skin and coat care needs.

More than one ingredient

Although hemp sits at the heart of the brand, Nathan stresses that putting hemp oil into a bottle is only part of creating an effective product.

Formulation, ingredient compatibility and pH all play an important part.

"The pH balance is extremely important when you are developing products for a dog's skin and coat," he explains. "You need to formulate specifically for canine skin rather than simply transferring something that has been made for humans."

Morganics combines hemp with selected botanical ingredients, while avoiding ingredients the business considers unnecessary.

"We believe good grooming and healthcare starts with good ingredients," says Nathan. "Our products are developed using selected botanicals alongside hemp oil, and we try to keep formulations purposeful and straightforward."

Each new product starts with a specific requirement, whether that is skin and coat care, paw protection, grooming or nutritional support. Ingredients are then selected around that purpose, with the company looking at stability, compatibility and how the finished product will be used by the owner.

It is an approach that has also helped

Morganics build a clear identity in an increasingly crowded natural pet care market.

Winning over the sceptics

While natural products are now commonplace across the pet sector, hemp can still require more explanation at the point of sale.

Nathan says initial scepticism often disappears once customers understand what the ingredient actually is.

"A lot of the controversy or uncertainty comes from misunderstanding and outdated assumptions," he says. "People hear the word hemp and immediately think of CBD or cannabis, when hemp seed oil is something quite different."

That makes education an important part of the Morganics proposition.

For retailers, Nathan recommends keeping the conversation simple rather than trying to explain the entire science of the hemp plant.

"Talk about why the customer has come into the store," he suggests. "They might have a dog with dry paws, sensitive skin or a coat that needs some extra conditioning. Start with that need and then explain what the product is designed to do."

Customer feedback has helped reinforce that benefit-led approach.

Nathan says users of the company's shampoo frequently comment on softness, shine, manageability and the overall condition of the coat, while the nose and paw balm has proved popular with owners looking after dry or cracked skin.

"People are often curious when they first try hemp products," he says. "Then they are surprised by how useful an ingredient it can be within an everyday grooming routine."

Grown closer to home

Another important part of the Morganics story is where its hemp comes from.

The company champions UK-grown hemp and sees local sourcing as central to both the brand and its environmental ambitions.

"Using UK-grown hemp isn't simply a sustainability detail for us, it reflects our whole philosophy," says Nathan. "Our approach is local first, low impact and transparent from field to shelf."

By sourcing closer to home, the company aims to shorten its supply chain and support British growers, while reducing its reliance on imported plant oils and ingredients.

Hemp itself is attracting increasing interest as an agricultural crop because of its relatively fast growth and range of potential applications, from oils and extracts to fibres and materials.

For Morganics, that versatility fits naturally with its wider ambitions.

"We want to support UK agriculture and know as much as possible about where our ingredients have come from," Nathan says. "Traceability is becoming more important to consumers and retailers, and it is something we want to continue building on."

The company also believes hemp has potential beyond the products themselves. Hemp fibres can be used in paper, packaging and alternative materials, areas Nathan would like the business to explore further as those technologies become more readily available.



An opportunity for retailers

Nathan believes specialist pet retailers are particularly well placed to introduce hemp-based grooming products because they can provide the explanation that customers may not get when shopping elsewhere.

Rather than presenting hemp as a novelty ingredient, he recommends merchandising it alongside familiar grooming requirements.

"If somebody has come in looking for something for sensitive skin, dry paws or coat condition, that's the conversation," he says. "Hemp doesn't have to be presented as something strange or completely new. It is another natural ingredient that can be used to address familiar grooming needs."

Clear signage and straightforward staff education can then help remove any lingering confusion between hemp seed products and CBD.

Looking ahead

Morganics is continuing to develop its hemp range while also taking an interest in the developing conversation surrounding cannabinoids and veterinary care.

The company supplies a holistic veterinary practice with a separate CBD product, but Nathan is keen to stress that this sits within a very different regulatory environment from its mainstream hemp seed oil grooming and nutritional range.

In the UK, CBD products intended for animals are regarded as veterinary medicines and require veterinary oversight. As a result, they cannot simply be marketed alongside general pet supplements or grooming products.

For Morganics, the wider ambition is therefore as much about education as product development.

"We want to keep raising awareness of hemp, support UK-grown hemp and show people what a versatile plant it can be," says Nathan.

W morganicshempuk.co.uk





One of the landmark expansions that helped Su-Bridge increase its capacity as the company developed

From local kennels to national wholesaler

What began alongside a Norfolk boarding kennels in 1976 has grown into one of the UK pet trade's best-known family businesses. As Su-Bridge celebrates its 50th anniversary, *PPM* looks back at five decades of growth, innovation and partnership with independent pet retailers

When Brian and Sheila Manning built their boarding kennels in Norfolk in 1976, few could have predicted that they were laying the foundations of a business that, 50 years later, would be supplying pet retailers across the UK.



Su-Bridge's original premises pictured against the business as it looks today

The beginnings of Su-Bridge Pet Supplies were modest. In 1979, Brian sourced 25 bags of Valu-Dog mix from Gilbertson & Page, initially to feed the dogs staying at the kennels and to supply local pet owners.

It was the start of a wholesale operation that would grow steadily over the following decades.

By 1985, the company had introduced its first own-brand dog food, Su-Bridge Supreme, supplying customers across the local area. Two years later, Brian and Sheila's son Ian Manning joined the business and began expanding van sales throughout Norfolk and Suffolk, taking Su-Bridge Supreme and other brands, including Webbox, to a growing network of customers.

The business was gaining momentum.

Su-Bridge acquired its first 7.5-tonne lorry in 1990, while 1997 brought two important developments. The company opened the Su-Bridge Country Store on its site and completed the first of what would eventually become four major depot expansions.

It was also around this period that Su-Bridge began strengthening its own-brand capabilities through the creation of an on-site packing production unit.

That investment ultimately paved the way for Extra Select, which has become one of the company's cornerstone brands. And today, Extra Select spans dog food, treats and biscuits, wild bird food, suet mixes, aquatic and wildlife feeds, cat and small animal products, bedding and toys, with products available across numerous pack formats.

Among its most recognisable developments was the Extra Select bucket range, launched in 2015 and subsequently becoming a popular part of the portfolio.

For Managing Director Ian Manning, the company's growth has always gone hand in hand with listening to the trade. "The independent pet trade is vital to our success and remains a cornerstone of the entire industry," he says. "Our independent retail partners play a crucial role in shaping our own-brand innovation. We listen to their feedback, insights and product ideas throughout the development process."

That influence can be seen across the Su-Bridge portfolio, from new Extra Select products and pack formats to the development of the Lovejoys range.

Responding to change

One of the most significant turning points came in 2012, when changes to the distribution strategies for James Wellbeloved and Royal Canin created considerable disruption for specialist pet retailers and wholesalers.

Su-Bridge responded by creating something of its own.

Lovejoys launched towards the end of 2012 and within two years had grown into a million-pound brand. The range has continued to develop and now includes wet and dry foods across different life stages, alongside grain-free options.

Lovejoys is also an example of how retailer conversations can directly influence product development. Feedback from customers helped lead to the introduction of the Pure & Simple grain-free wet tray range, while another emerging trend would eventually create one of Su-Bridge's largest ranges.

As demand for natural, single-ingredient dog treats accelerated following the Covid pandemic, retailers reported growing interest from customers. Su-Bridge responded by sourcing and developing its Pure & Natural range. Today, the range contains more than 500 SKUs and includes the Pure & Natural Doggy Bag, a curated

selection of 50 popular natural treats which was named New Product of the Year at PATS this year.

For Ian, that relationship between supplier and retailer remains fundamental. "Retailers are often the first people to spot changes in what customers are asking for," he says. "Their feedback has influenced everything from new product concepts to pack sizes and entirely new ranges."

Growing alongside its customers

As Su-Bridge's portfolio increased, so too did the scale of the operation needed to support it. Further depot expansions began in 2010, eventually creating storage capacity for around 1,500 pallets. A major extension in 2018 increased that figure dramatically to 7,500 pallets and added a dedicated goods-in bay. Then, in 2022, Su-Bridge opened a new production warehouse, taking the company's total capacity to 17,500 pallets.

Its distribution network has evolved alongside it.

A dedicated delivery fleet now serves customers across the northeast, northwest, midlands, southeast and southwest, supported by a courier network for customers further afield. It means the business can service its nationwide customer base from one centralised operation.

Another major step arrived last year with the acquisition of United Petfood Ltd's brand portfolio, including Autarky, Gelert, Gusto and Chudleys. The acquisition expanded Su-Bridge's portfolio while introducing the company to another group of retailers and customers across the UK.

Yet despite the scale of today's operation, Su-Bridge maintains that personal relationships remain just as important as logistics. Long-standing customers in Norfolk may remember Nobby and Chris visiting stores during the early 2000s, armed with the latest monthly offer books and talking retailers through new lines and manufacturer promotions… the names and geography may have changed, but the principle has not. Today, a national field sales team of key account managers and area sales merchandisers works alongside a dedicated telesales operation, representing Su-Bridge brands including Extra Select, Lovejoys, Second Nature and Pure & Natural, exclusive international brands such as Dogsee and Ziwi, and products from many of the industry's leading manufacturers.



An early Su-Bridge delivery vehicle, reflecting the expansion of the company's distribution operation

Digital convenience, personal service

The way retailers interact with wholesalers has inevitably changed during Su-Bridge's five decades in business. Digital ordering has become an increasingly important part of the relationship, with retailers expecting to be able to place orders online, check current prices and see promotions quickly. But Ian believes technology has complemented rather than replaced traditional customer service.

"Retailers increasingly rely on trade websites because they make ordering efficient, but they still want that human relationship," he says. "They want regular contact with their sales manager, whether that's to review their business, discuss commercial terms or look at new product opportunities. And if there is ever a service issue, they want to know there is somebody they can speak to who can resolve it."

For all the technological and operational change, he believes the fundamentals of wholesaling remain remarkably familiar. "Retailers want high-quality products at competitive prices, delivered reliably and consistently. Striving to deliver that every day remains at the heart of what we do."

Still a family business

Perhaps one of Su-Bridge's greatest achievements has been growing from a small family operation into a national supplier without losing its original identity. The company is still run day to day by Ian and continues to operate according to the principles established by Brian and Sheila. Quality, value and service remain at the centre of the business.

"At its heart, Su-Bridge is still a true family business," says Ian. "The principles are the same ones we started with: delivering quality products at fair, competitive prices and doing what's best for our customers."

Among many milestones, one recent achievement stands out particularly strongly for the company. Su-Bridge was named Pet Industry Federation Wholesaler of the Year for three consecutive years, in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

"Being recognised in that way by our peers, customers and suppliers is a tremendous honour," says Ian. "It's a real testament to the dedication of the entire team."



Managing Director Ian Manning outside Su-Bridge's Norfolk headquarters, continuing the family business founded by his parents 50 years ago

A year to celebrate

The company's anniversary year has provided plenty of opportunity to reflect. There is another family milestone to celebrate, too, with founder, Brian Manning, turning 90 during Su-Bridge's 50th year. Celebrations began with a family party in July before moving into the trade at PATS, where Su-Bridge marked its anniversary alongside customers and suppliers.

The company will also bring its employees together for a 50th anniversary party later this month.

After half a century, however, attention is already turning towards what comes next. Su-Bridge plans to continue developing its established brands, sourcing new products and strengthening the partnerships that have taken it from those first 25 bags of dog food to the nationwide operation it is today.

"Our focus is to build on our established brands, work closely with our customers to drive mutual growth and keep innovating," says Ian. "That means continuing to bring new, exciting brands to market."

Fifty years after Brian and Sheila Manning began the business alongside their boarding kennels, the scale may have changed considerably but the philosophy behind Su-Bridge remains reassuringly familiar. Listen to the trade, look after customers and keep finding ways to move forward.

SU-BRIDGE PET SUPPLIES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

To work with Su-Bridge, contact Lynne Hopwood on 07500 905739, or email lynne@su-bridge.co.uk



Playing the long game

Donald Cooke Ltd has remained a family business for more than 125 years. Managing Director, Andrew Cooke, talks to *PPM* about taking the long view, and the importance of giving customers something they cannot find everywhere else

Few businesses can say they have been trading since 1900. For Donald Cooke Ltd, surviving for more than 125 years has meant navigating fires, floods, compulsory purchases, changing markets and successive generations of the same family taking responsibility for the business.

Andrew Cooke, Managing Director and the fifth generation of the family to join the company, believes its longevity has come not from resisting change, but accepting that change is essential.

"We have overcome many challenges along the way," he says. "Each generation coming through to run the business has been given time to learn, make mistakes and make changes.

"The constant evolution isn't a special thing, it's a necessity. Otherwise, the business wouldn't keep growing at a steady pace and eventually it would wind down."

The company has never been anything other than family owned, something Andrew believes naturally influences how decisions are made.

"We work with long-term plans," he says. "A friend in the trade once said to me, 'You are more like a custodian than an owner.'"

It is an approach that appears repeatedly when Andrew talks about the pet trade. Short-term gains matter less than relationships, reliable service and making decisions that will still make sense several years down the line.

Seeing both sides

Donald Cooke today spans manufacturing, packing and distribution, while the family also operates four pet shops in South Yorkshire.

That combination gives Andrew an unusual view of the relationship between supplier and retailer. "Having that breadth helps us understand the challenges and gives us a full picture of the supply chain," he explains. "We know what is possible and we don't pretend we can do more than is achievable."

One area the company has concentrated heavily on is fulfilment. Andrew says 96% of orders now leave Donald Cooke within 24 hours of being placed. Packaging and distribution have also been a focus. "I don't think there is much more frustrating for both suppliers and retailers than issues during transit," he says.

But when asked what independent retailers increasingly expect from their suppliers, Andrew returns to something much simpler: getting the basics right.

"The best suppliers are always good at the basics, and they are often overlooked," he says. "Having stock, being easy to talk to, prompt delivery and, when mistakes do happen, having the ability to deal with them swiftly."

There is another question he believes retailers should be asking, too.

"Is the supplier here for the long term, or are they just trying to get shelf space to increase awareness and then sell direct to the consumer?"

For an independent retailer trying to differentiate itself from supermarkets, major chains and online competitors, that distinction can matter.

Choosing what earns its space

Natural treats and chews have become an increasingly significant category for specialist retailers and Andrew believes there is still plenty of room for growth. "Customers demand different and more interesting products," he says. He points to Garden Bites as an example of taking an established concept and developing it in a different direction, while Brothies, which Donald Cooke is distributing in the UK for This & That, represents something new again.

"The most exciting part of innovation is the next brand-new idea and not yet knowing what that is," he says. "There is still room for both growth and innovation."

For retailers facing an ever-increasing number of brands competing for limited shelf space, however, more choice also means becoming more selective. Donald Cooke has an advantage here because products can first be seen through the eyes of its own stores. "As a supplier, we only distribute what works in our stores," says Andrew.

The company's K9 Pick N Mix concept is a good example. Andrew says the large pots used within the display rank among the stores' top 10 treat lines by retail sales value.

That experience has also changed the way the Cooke stores themselves buy. "As independents, we are getting attacked from every angle and are often overlooked by the biggest brands," he says. "In our stores we now buy mainly from companies that support the independent sector, and we spend more with other family businesses.

"There are some great suppliers and brands out there that are on the same wavelength."

Before committing space to a new line, Andrew says the first question should be whether the product offers genuine value to the customer. Only after that come margin, availability and how effectively it can be presented in store. "We all need to be more selective," he says. "Promote products where there is a future and look at who owns a brand and its history before giving too much space to it."

Be somewhere worth talking about

So what are the independents performing particularly well getting right?

Andrew is cautious about prescribing a single formula. "There are many great stores across the country, from smaller high street shops to large destination stores," he says. "Every store and area is slightly different, so there is no one size fits all." However, he sees some common strengths: a substantial loose-treat offer, a good accessories selection and food brands supplied by businesses retailers can rely upon.

Differentiation is becoming increasingly important, too. "It's more important than ever," he says. "Loose treats illustrate the point perfectly. I can't imagine a supermarket having a row of animal feet on display."

He recalls standing at one of his children's football matches when another parent began telling him about a pet shop his family jokingly called "the gruesome shop" because it was full of animal body parts.

The shop happened to be one of Cookes' own stores.

"To him, it was worth telling a fellow dog owner about because it was something different," Andrew says. "When advertising budgets are limited, word of mouth is the best thing."

That distinctiveness can be reinforced by choosing brands that customers will not immediately find discounted through every online marketplace. "If a customer is happy with a specific product and it isn't discounted online either direct or through marketplaces, why do they need to look around?"

Making products work harder

Andrew sees staff knowledge as particularly important with food, while categories such as treats benefit heavily from merchandising, presentation and sampling.

The K9 Pick N Mix displays again provide an example. "We use the treats in store to give directly to dogs that visit us," he says. "At about 1p per treat, it is a great way to start a conversation and show how palatable they are."

Sampling is particularly useful when introducing an unfamiliar brand or changing customers' expectations of an established category, he adds.

Retailers also need to think carefully about value as shoppers continue to watch household spending. "There is a difference between price and value," Andrew says. "There are not many of us who should try to go up against the national discounters. We will lose."

Instead, he believes specialists should concentrate on the expertise and product selection that justify customers choosing them in the first place. "We are specialists, we have knowledge, and therefore the product mix in store is so important. If you have a store that is just supermarket brands or brands discounted heavily on the internet, are you really showing off your knowledge as a first impression?"

His advice is simple: offer customers the best product available at the level they can comfortably afford.

What comes next?

Andrew gives two answers when asked about the company's priorities for the next 12 months. The first is perhaps the one most consistent with a business that has been around since 1900.

"Get better at a little thing every day and, at the end of the year, we will have made a big step forward," he says. "Small incremental improvements which add up to big results."

Then there are the developments that are rather easier to put in a headline.

Donald Cooke has recently added another 15 products to its K9 treat range, with a rebrand of the K9 packs planned during 2027. The company is also working with This & That to distribute Brothies in the UK, while the Garden Bites range is expanding with new display options.

Behind the scenes, a new barcode picking and dispatch system is due to be installed in the warehouse this winter, while an additional warehouse with capacity for around 500 pallets is at the planning stage.

And the business is preparing to move into another growing area of the pet market.

"We are launching a range of treats for cats very shortly," says Andrew.

After 126 years, standing still clearly isn't part of the Cooke family plan.

"We won't be getting bored anytime soon."

Donald Cooke LTD
A Family Business

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Pet parents love treating their pets during the festive period

Festive sales strategies for 2026

Driving footfall and basket value during peak season

With pets firmly established as part of the family, many owners naturally want to include them in seasonal celebrations. And that includes the Christmas shopping list, writes Claire Hamblion-Jennings

Research from Pets at Home found that UK pet owners could collectively spend up to £1.1 billion on their pets at Christmas, with 68% prepared to spend up to £50 to ensure their pet had a special day (Pets at Home, 2021). Festive spending isn't limited to owners themselves, either. The same research found that 43% of 'grandpets' were expected to receive a present from their owner's parents, while 29% of owners expected friends or family to buy their pet a gift.

For retailers, this creates opportunities across everything from treats and toys to accessories, enrichment and everyday essentials. However, increased seasonal spending doesn't automatically translate into increased sales. With online marketplaces, supermarkets and other retailers all competing for Christmas spend, specialist pet stores need to give customers a reason to visit, browse and add more to their baskets.

Give customers a reason to visit

During November and December, consumers are surrounded by promotions, so simply stocking a festive range may not be enough to stand out.

In-store events, Christmas shopping evenings, competitions or loyalty incentives can all help drive footfall. Independent retailers can also use their local connections to their advantage by partnering with nearby businesses, supporting a local animal charity or running a festive donation drive.

Whatever you choose, promote it well in advance. Email, social media and in-store signage can work together to build awareness, while regular reminders as Christmas approaches can help keep your store front of mind.

Your window display is important, too. An eye-catching festive display featuring products available inside can capture passing traffic and immediately demonstrate that pets of different species are included in your Christmas offering.

Make festive shopping easy

Christmas is a busy time for customers, many of whom will be shopping for several people and pets at once. Making the

"The festive period lends itself particularly well to cross-selling."

experience as convenient as possible can therefore help turn browsing into purchases.

Rather than expecting customers to search throughout the store, create a clearly defined Christmas area bringing together treats, toys, accessories and giftable products. Within this, consider organising products by species, recipient or price. Simple sections such as 'Gifts under £10', 'Small pet stocking fillers' or 'Gifts for the pet that has everything' give customers an immediate starting point.

Price-led displays could be particularly useful given that 68% of owners surveyed said they were prepared to spend up to £50 on their pet at Christmas . Grouping products into simple bands, such as gifts under £10, under £25 and under £50 gives customers an immediate sense of what is available within their budget.

Turn one purchase into a bigger basket

Once you've encouraged customers through the door, thoughtful merchandising can help increase the value of each visit.

The festive period lends itself particularly well to cross-selling. A customer buying a rabbit a Christmas treat might also be interested in a new enrichment toy, while someone picking up their regular bag of food could be prompted to add a festive extra.

Christmas traditions themselves provide inspiration. Almost a quarter (24%) of pet owners surveyed by Pets at Home planned to give their pet a Christmas stocking, while 14% were preparing a Christmas Eve box (Pets at Home, 2021). Dedicated stocking-filler displays and ready-made gift bundles can tap into these behaviours while making purchasing easier for customers.

A small pet gift bundle, for example, could combine treats with a chew or enrichment product, giving customers a convenient present while encouraging the purchase of more than one item.

Don't overlook everyday essentials, either. Customers will still need food, hay and bedding throughout December. Positioning suitable festive extras alongside these staples creates an opportunity to generate additional purchases from customers who may not have originally visited for Christmas shopping.

Give seasonal lines their moment

Limited edition and seasonal products can bring excitement to categories customers already purchase from throughout the year. Festive packaging and formats also make familiar products feel more giftable, making them well suited to Christmas displays and impulse-purchase areas.

Small pets shouldn't be forgotten. Rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters and other small animals are just as much a part of family celebrations, yet Christmas ranges can sometimes be dominated by products for cats and dogs.

Supreme Petfoods' Christmas offering gives retailers an opportunity to bring some festive interest to the small pet aisle. Tiny Friends Farm festive treats, including Russel Rabbit Christmas Trees and Harry Hamster Christmas Hearts, can provide fun stocking-filler options, while seasonal Selective favourites, such as Selective Naturals Berry Loops with Timothy hay and cranberry, can also be incorporated into Christmas displays and gifting selections.

Extend your festive shop window online

Your Christmas shop window no longer stops at the front door. Social media, email and your website can all help showcase what's happening in-store and encourage customers to visit.

Short videos showing Christmas stock arriving, staff gift picks, product demonstrations and gift-guide carousels provide plenty of opportunities for seasonal social content. You could even create species-specific posts such as 'Five stocking fillers for rabbit owners' or 'Christmas gift ideas for guinea pigs' to make recommendations more relevant.

Where possible, make it easy for customers to take the next step by tagging products, linking directly to relevant website categories and clearly communicating whether products are available online, for collection or exclusively in-store.

As Christmas gets closer, urgency can also be useful, but it should always be genuine. Communicating final order dates, Christmas opening hours or limited availability on genuinely seasonal lines gives customers helpful information while encouraging them to act.

Turn Christmas shoppers into year-round customers

The commercial value of Christmas doesn't have to end in December. Every new shopper who discovers your store during the festive period represents an opportunity to build a longer-term customer relationship.

Encourage customers to join your loyalty programme, sign up for marketing communications or follow your social channels, making sure appropriate marketing consent is obtained where required. A January incentive can also give festive shoppers a reason to return after Christmas.

Once the peak period is over, take some time to review what worked. Which products sold out first? Which displays encouraged additional purchases? Did bundles perform better than individual items? Which social posts or emails generated the most engagement? Recording these insights while they're fresh can help inform buying and campaign planning for Christmas 2027.





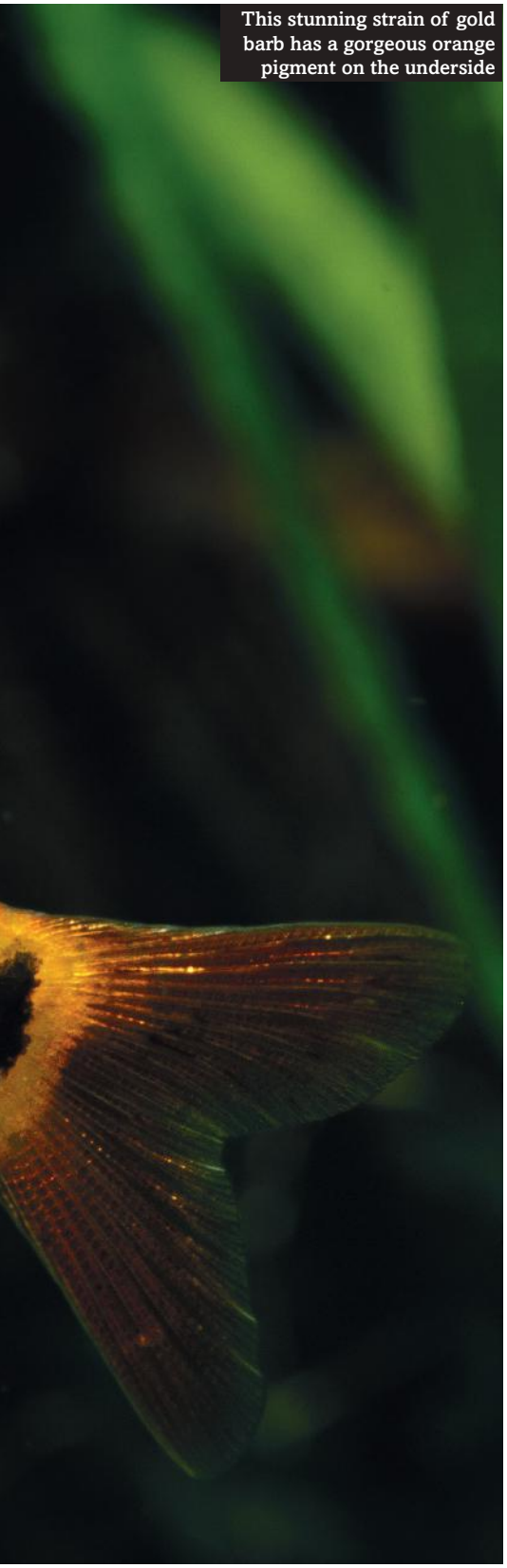
Claire Hamblion -Jennings
Marketing Director at Supreme Petfoods



A golden alternative

If you're looking for a splash of gold in a temperate aquarium but don't have the space for goldfish, the gold barb could be the perfect alternative. Hardy, peaceful, and easy to keep, it's one of the hobby's most underrated fishes

All images by Gabor Horvath unless otherwise stated



This stunning strain of gold barb has a gorgeous orange pigment on the underside

If, during a quiz, a question asking for a yellow fish that can live in a temperate aquarium was posed, I can almost guarantee that 90% of the participants would have identical responses: "goldfish". Only a handful, if any, would remember that there is actually an equally bright fish that rivals the classic goldfish and – thanks to its smaller body size – is more suitable for smaller indoor fish tanks. Enter the poor man's goldfish – the gold barb – a fish which should be on the shopping list of every aquarist with a temperate fish tank.

First experiences

I have a long history with this fish, so before getting into the particulars about the origin and care requirements of the gold barb, let me take you back 25 years – to the time when I first became heavily involved with them. I had just moved into a new flat and found out that there was an unused, so-called "pram storage" room on the ground floor. I decided to rent the space and convert it into a fish room, obviously.

The room was quite cold in the winter and very hot in the summer, so I surrounded my aquarium stands with polystyrene boards and covered them with thick plastic sheets in the hope of being able to maintain some stability in the temperature of the aquariums. Having a very low budget – my daughter was only a few months old so a lot of our money was needed elsewhere – I couldn't afford to heat every block of tanks. Instead, I had to search for species that could thrive at temperatures as low as 16°C (61°F). I also wanted something that I could breed in the very hard liquid rock (a GH of over 25°, and a KH of 20-30°) that came out of my tap so that I could earn some cash from the offspring to help with the running costs.

I considered all of the usual suspects – variatus platies (Xiphophorus variatus), zebra danios (Danio rerio) and suchlike – but when I saw a tank full of bright yellow barbs at my local fish shop I knew that they were the ones I needed.

I only had money for a pair (they were ready-to-spawn young adults) but within a few months my livestock increased to hundreds. I could see forint (the Hungarian currency) signs in front of my eyes and I was already thinking about the various ways I could spend the money earned. However, I was quickly brought back down to Earth when I learned that it was almost impossible to shift that many juveniles locally. In the end I managed to sell the lot to a travelling wholesaler, but the money received for them was way below the price I expected. It was a valuable lesson to learn; fish breeding is not an easy and quick way to make money. However, by breeding gold barbs and raising a large amount of fry, it helped me to better understand the needs of egg-laying species and gave me a sound foundation for breeding more difficult fishes later in my life. Therefore, the gold barb will always have a safe space in my heart.

Wild origins

But what is this glorious fish? The gold barb doesn't actually exist in the wild; it wouldn't last long in nature if it did with such bright colours that would quickly attract the attention of potential predators. As you may have guessed by now it's a tank-bred strain, created some eighty years ago by an American fishkeeper called Thomas Schubert. It's not known for sure what species he selectively bred to create this golden fish, but the present general consensus is that it probably was the Chinese barb (Barbodes semifasciolatus). This wild barb is quite widespread in ▶



Gold barbs remain at a more manageable maximum size than goldfish


This captive bred gold strain of B. *semifasciolatus* is incredibly beautiful


The true B. *semifasciolatus* is also a gorgeous fish, but are less commonly traded in the hobby

Images: Shutterstock

nature, inhabiting various waterways across Southeast Asia. They have a greenish-brown colour, giving them the perfect camouflage in their native waters. They do have their own special charm, though, and – especially the emerald sheen on sparring males – can be incredibly eye catching when kept in a natural-style aquarium.

You have to be incredibly lucky to encounter the wild coloured B. semifasciolatus in stores (try specialised stores or ask the staff if they've seen them on their import lists), but the yellow form is readily available everywhere. Despite the unsure origin, the gold barb proved to be an instant hit and became very popular among fishkeepers. Even after eight decades it's still favoured, loved, and kept by many aquarists. During this time, this fish has been renamed several times, so if you see labels like: Puntius schuberti, Barbus schuberti or Barbodes semifasciolatus var. "Schuberti" – it's all the very same fish.

Hardy and adaptable

The name may have changed but the fish itself is more or less the same. In the case of many fish species, line breeding degrades the fish (causing severe health issues) over time, but the gold barb remains relatively strong despite a long history of living in captivity. It's true that you can sometimes see individuals with a deformity amongst the shoal (make sure that you only buy the individuals that have the correct body shape) but their hardiness has remained unchanged. The only other thing which may have suffered is the colour intensity, as some of the strains are rather pale.

When I was looking into rekindling my relationship with the gold barbs, I struggled to find the dark yellow (almost orange) versions that I wanted. Luckily, I remembered that one of my fishkeeping friends had a very strong strain, so I quickly enquired if I could purchase a beautiful group from him. He agreed, and I soon had a delightful group of eight. These are the fish you can see in the photos within this feature – but more about them later.

Regardless of the colour intensity, the gold barb is a very hardy fish. They can live and thrive in almost any conditions – the above-mentioned breeding success in liquid rock proves that nicely. The original wild fish inhabit a variety of rivers and waterways with neutral to slightly alkaline water and moderate hardness. However, we're talking about the tank-bred variety, which has adapted well to a wide range of aquarium conditions. They are equally undemanding when it comes to water temperature. They can thrive in an unheated temperate aquarium, provided the temperature doesn't remain below 16°C (61°F) for extended periods, just as readily as they do in a tropical tank maintained at a stable 24-26°C (75-79°F). As long as the aquarium is equipped with a mature, adequately sized filter and receives regular water changes, these barbs should remain healthy and trouble-free.

Feeding them is a breeze, too. Being opportunistic feeders in nature – meaning that they eat whatever they can find – they are not fussy at all, and will eat everything you offer them. For peak condition give them a varied diet with good-quality flakes, granules, and toss in regular feedings of frozen or live food.


Gold barbs are hardy, adaptable, and peaceful community fish

Spawning gold barbs

If you keep them well then you will soon see some spawning activities, even in

community tanks. It's easy to tell whether you've got both sexes, because the males have a very conspicuous row of black patches on their sides. Depending on the strain, some of the better-looking males also sport a strong reddish-orange colouration on their lower flanks. This colour is especially beautiful when sparring or trying to get their partner-to-be's attention. The females are much chunkier, and have less of these marks on the flanks – which tend to be much paler in colour. When carrying eggs, they can get very, very plump. The ladies are frequently chased around by two or three males in the hope of finding a suitable place – usually a bunch of fine-leaved aquarium plants or a clump of moss – to lay their eggs. The nutritious caviar is usually eaten by other fishes in a community tank (or even by the parents) so if you want to raise some fry you need to set up a separate breeding tank.

The breeding tank itself doesn't need to be a big one, but you will need a large grow out tank to hand to house the fry after they become free swimming. A 10-litre (2.2 gal) tank would be suitable for spawning them. I chose to use a slightly bigger aquarium, though, because I wanted to keep the fry in this tank for a little longer. As the adults often consume the eggs after (and often during) spawning, I placed an egg protecting plastic mesh on the bottom of the tank. I added a few clumps of Java moss and an air-driven sponge filter. The heater was set to 26°C (79°F) – two degrees higher than my ambient fish house temperature.

I moved the best coloured male and the plumpest female into the tank in the evening before the lights went off. Apparently they knew exactly what I expected from them, because they began spawning the very next morning. The female scattered her eggs all over the fish tank and the male fertilised them by releasing his milt. Within two hours the floor of the aquarium was covered by hundreds of small eggs. After the spawning activities ceased, I removed the breeding pair and the wait for the eggs to hatch began. They typically take between 24 and 48 hours to hatch, depending on the temperature – higher temperatures reduce the hatching time.

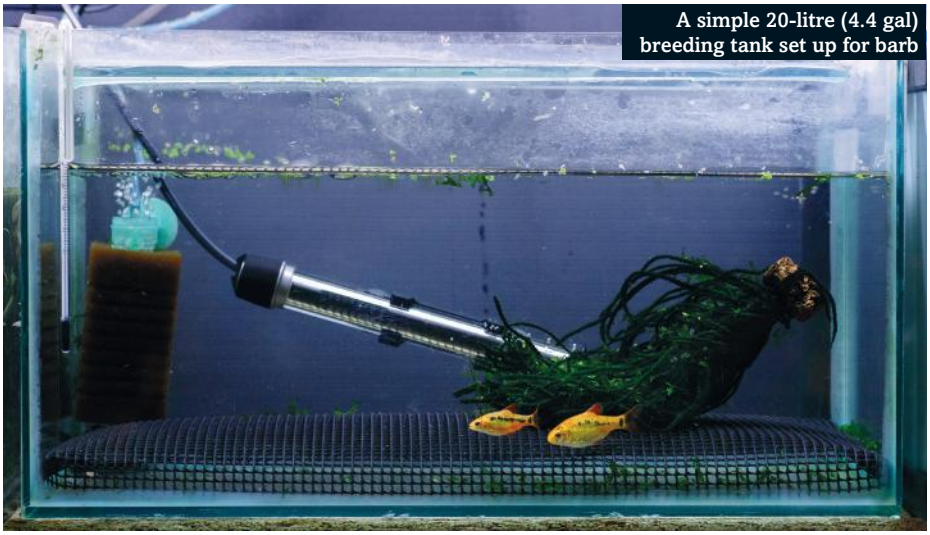
As my tank was relatively warm the eggs hatched after 28 hours, but it took a couple more days for them to become free swimming. In the beginning, the newly hatched larvae kept hanging around, attaching themselves to everything they could reach – from tank décor to plants, from aquarium side panels to the spawning mop – only moving when it was absolutely necessary. At this point, it's difficult to see how many fry you've got, but when they become free swimming, you realise the huge number of offspring you can get from just one breeding pair.



The barbs are unfussy omnivores, which will happily scour the substrate for morsels

Once at this stage you should begin feeding your tiny gold barbs. As a first food they need something very fine to eat. Paramecium is ideal but if you don't have any at hand then you can use any quality powdered or liquid fry food. As an emergency first food you can also try a tiny piece of mashed hard-boiled egg yolk, but be careful not to spoil the water by feeding too much. They can also take microworms. If you have small-type Artemia you can try to feed the fry on newly hatched nauplii from day two. If you only have larger brine shrimp then you need to grow the fry for a couple of days before you start to introduce it.

When fed twice a day on quality live food, they grow relatively quickly. Soon there will be hundreds of juveniles crowding the tank, making it increasingly difficult to maintain pristine water conditions – even with daily water changes. This is the time when you have to move them into a larger grow out tank. You will need at least a 100 litre (22 gal) tank with efficient filtration to raise them all, as a successful spawning can easily result in over 300 babies. The question is whether you really want to raise that many, because it will be quite a burden to feed them all, let alone find them homes. Only if you have a guaranteed way to rehome the hundreds of juveniles should you keep them all. This advice stands for any other prolific species, too. Always make sure that you have a market for your fry, otherwise you may end up with a tank full of hungry, but unsaleable fish. ▶



A simple 20-litre (4.4 gal) breeding tank set up for barb


The newly hatched fry remained attached to the spawning mop for a couple of days after hatching


The stomachs of the little barbs glowed orange after being fed *Artemia*

Compatibility is no problem

Besides being undemanding and easy to breed, gold barbs are also extremely peaceful. Although there is often a bit of chasing involved between conspecifics, it's mainly for fun or for spawning activities. I have never observed any injuries occurring whenever I have kept these beautiful fish. They usually don't bother the other species in a community tank, either, and they won't usually nip at fins, unlike some other barbs. Smaller fishes are also usually safe, although, like with any adult fish, tiny newborns are not safe with them. I even dare to say that in a densely planted tank they peacefully co-exist with shrimp as well. I know this from experience as a few years back I set up a temperate fish tank for one of my friends. It was a very simple aquarium housing eight gold barbs and a dozen mixed Neocaridina shrimp. For the latter, clumps of Lomariopsis were added to provide them plenty of cover. Over the past five years since the tank was set up, the community has thrived. There are now plenty of baby shrimp, and the barbs continue to thrive in the unheated tank.

The gold barb is a perfect fish for beginners and experienced fishkeepers alike. As opposed to goldfish, the barbs – because they grow much smaller and are not nearly as messy – won't need huge fish tanks. They usually grow to just over 7cm (2.8") so tanks of around 90cm (36") are ideal for a good-sized group long term. They are undemanding, adaptable, and will thrive in a range of conditions, but on top of all that, they are incredibly beautiful. That bright yellow colour really is hard to beat.

No surprise that in many European countries – including Hungary – the gold barb is known as a brocade barb. This moniker refers to the scattered sparkling scales you can see at the dorsal region of certain specimens, resembling the metallic threads often woven in the name-giving noble fabric. So, if you want something shiny and golden in your tank then you won't need a goldfish. Instead, just get a barb.

FACT FILE

Gold barb

- **Scientific name:** Barbodes semifasciolatus var. "Gold"
- **Size:** Usually around 7cm (2.8") although some individuals may grow larger
- **Origin:** A captive-bred strain of the Chinese barb which originates in southwest China, Laos, Taiwan, Vietnam
- **Habitat:** Typically found close to dense plant growth, whether aquatic or marginal, in slow-flowing streams and still water bodies like irrigation ditches and swamps
- **Tank size:** 90x30x30cm (36x12x12")
- **Water requirements:** Hardy and adaptable thriving in water with a pH of 6 to 8 and a hardness up to 20°
- **Temperature:** 16-26°C (61-79°F)
- **Temperament:** A peaceful fish well suited to a researched community tank, males may squabble and display to one another but this is usually harmless and is actually fascinating to watch
- **Feeding:** An unfussy omnivore accepting a wide range of foods. Offer a varied diet including some live or frozen foods to see them in their best condition
- **Availability & cost:** A staple of the hobby, expect to pay around £3 each depending on size



About Gabor
Gabor Horvath has an enviable, eco-friendly fish house where he breeds a huge range of species.

PUZZLE ANSWERS

CROSSWORD

Across: 7 turn a blind eye 8 memorise 9 Soho 10 soulful 12 watch 14 étude 16 duopoly 19 bell 20 three-ply 22 wattle and daub

Down: 1 sure 2 unroll 3 obvious 4 bidet 5 Odessa 6 mythical 11 on the way 13 currant 15 dilate 17 pseudo 18 utter 21 loud

WORDSEARCH

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WHY STOCK...



Dragon Grub Adult and Dragon Grub Juvenile (both available in 125g and 250g packs)

Exo Terra Dragon Grub

With insect protein at its heart and separate recipes for juvenile and adult reptiles, Exo Terra Dragon Grub offers retailers a convenient way into the specialist reptile nutrition category

For retailers looking to develop their reptile nutrition offer, Exo Terra Dragon Grub brings together several strong consumer talking points in one range, including insect protein, life-stage nutrition, convenience and sustainability.

Designed particularly with bearded dragons in mind, Dragon Grub combines black soldier fly larvae with plant and fruit ingredients, plus added vitamins, minerals and trace nutrients. Exo Terra positions it as a daily food for bearded dragons, other agamid lizards and a range of insect-eating reptiles.

The black soldier fly larvae provide the central animal protein element, but there is a broader ingredient story, too. Timothy hay contributes fibre, peas provide a carbohydrate source, and mango is included as a natural flavour ingredient. Exo Terra also highlights the addition of calcium, beta-carotene and Vitamin D3 as part of the nutritional formulation.

One of the strongest retail talking points is the use of separate juvenile and adult recipes. Young bearded dragons require a greater proportion of protein as they grow, while adults naturally shift towards a diet containing more plant material. Dragon Grub reflects that change rather than taking a one-formula-fits-all approach.

In the EU juvenile recipe, black soldier fly larvae make up 39% of the formulation, with protein at 25% and crude fibre at 7%. The adult recipe contains 14.5% black soldier fly larvae, 20% protein and 15% crude fibre. Both contain 1.5% calcium and 0.9% phosphorus. Mango makes up 3% of both EU formulations.

The pellet format gives retailers another straightforward benefit to explain. Exo Terra says the extrusion process combines the various ingredients and nutrients throughout each pellet, helping to reduce selective feeding where an animal picks out preferred ingredients and leaves others behind. The pellets can also be moistened with water or fruit or vegetable juice where a softer texture is preferred.

At a glance

What is it? An insect-based pellet food for bearded dragons and other insect-eating reptiles
Hero ingredient Black soldier fly larvae
Life stages Juvenile and adult
Pack sizes 125g and 250g
Key selling point Combines insect protein with plant and fruit ingredients in a convenient pellet format
Made in Canada

There is a sustainability story, too. The black soldier fly larvae are reared in Canada under controlled conditions and fed pre-consumer fruit and vegetable material that would otherwise become waste. According to Exo Terra, the insects have short reproduction cycles, require comparatively little space and can convert organic material into animal protein.

What's it made from?


The black soldier fly

Black soldier fly larvae The central insect ingredient and natural source of protein. Exo Terra also highlights their calcium content, digestibility and amino acid profile
Timothy hay A natural source of fibre and an important part of the plant component of the recipe
Peas Included as a natural carbohydrate source, with Exo Terra also highlighting palatability
Mango Included as a natural flavour enhancer and source of flavonoids, with mango listed at 3% in the EU formulations
Added nutrition The formulation includes nutritional additions such as calcium, beta-carotene and Vitamin D3, alongside other vitamins, minerals and trace nutrients

Why stock it?

Clear life-stage proposition Separate juvenile and adult recipes make the range easy for staff to explain
Strong ingredient story Insect protein sits alongside recognisable plant and fruit ingredients
Convenient feeding format A dry pellet that is easy to store, portion and serve
Sustainability angle Black soldier fly larvae are reared using pre-consumer food material that would otherwise become waste

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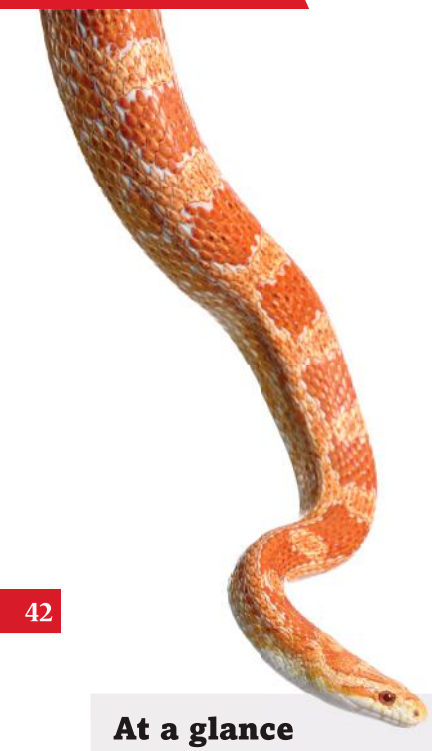
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Species spotlight:

Corn snakes

Colourful, generally placid and relatively straightforward to care for, corn snakes have become one of the best-known snakes in the pet trade



At a glance

Scientific name: Pantherophis guttatus
Origin: USA
Adult length: Around 150cm
Diet: Carnivorous
Activity: Mainly dawn and dusk
Temperament: Generally placid
Housing: Secure, well-ventilated vivarium

Native to the USA, the corn snake, Pantherophis guttatus, is found across a variety of habitats and is particularly associated with areas around barns and farmland, where rodents provide a ready source of food. In the wild they are mainly terrestrial, although they are capable climbers, and tend to be most active around dawn and dusk.

Their manageable size is part of the appeal. Adults can reach around 150cm in length, while captive-bred animals are available in an enormous variety of colours and patterns, known as morphs. From the familiar orange and red markings of the classic corn snake to much paler and more unusual varieties, this is a species with plenty of visual appeal for enthusiasts.

Creating the right environment

A corn snake's enclosure should be secure, well ventilated and appropriately sized to allow the snake to move around comfortably and express natural behaviours.

Temperature is particularly important. Like all reptiles, corn snakes rely on their surroundings to regulate their body temperature, so the enclosure needs a warmer basking area and a cooler end, allowing the snake to move between the two as required. Appropriate lighting and careful temperature monitoring form an important part of the set-up.

Hides are equally important. Providing at least one at both the warm and cool ends means the snake does not have to choose between feeling secure and maintaining the temperature it needs.

And although corn snakes spend plenty of time at ground level, they will climb when given the opportunity. Branches and other secure climbing features can therefore add useful enrichment to the enclosure. Research referenced in current welfare guidance also suggests corn snakes show a strong preference for enriched housing over less complex environments.

Don't forget the substrate

Substrate is another opportunity to encourage natural behaviour.

Suitable loose substrates allow corn snakes to burrow and create additional cover. Natural leaves and other appropriate furnishings can also help make the enclosure more interesting, while giving the snake more choice over where it spends its time.

Fresh water should always be available in a bowl large enough for the snake to soak in if it chooses.

What's for dinner?

Corn snakes are constrictors and naturally eat animal prey. In captivity, good-quality dead mice form the main diet, with the size and frequency of feeding changing as the snake grows.

Young snakes generally eat smaller prey more frequently, while adults can be fed at longer intervals. Keeping an eye on body condition and weight helps ensure the animal is receiving an appropriate amount.

Why are they so popular?

For many keepers, the corn snake offers an appealing combination: striking looks, a wide choice of morphs, manageable adult size and a reputation for being relatively placid.

Part of the appeal for many keepers is creating and developing the enclosure itself. Hides, branches, substrate and other furnishings can all give the snake opportunities to explore, climb, burrow and retreat, while creating an attractive display in the home.



Setting up for a corn snake

A new corn snake owner is likely to need:

- **Secure, well-ventilated vivarium**
- **Appropriate heat source**
- **Thermostat**
- **Digital thermometers for the warm and cool ends**
- **Hygrometer**
- **Appropriate UVB lighting**
- **At least two hides, one at each end**
- **Humid hide**
- **Suitable loose substrate**
- **Branches or other climbing opportunities**
- **Water bowl large enough for soaking**
- **Feeding tongs**
- **Frozen mice appropriate to the snake's size**
- **Reptile-safe cleaning products**

The RSPCA recommends an enclosure large enough for the snake to fully stretch out, with a temperature gradient, hides at both ends, loose substrate that allows burrowing, climbing opportunities and fresh water.

The cats are in charge

In our house, the dog may be bigger, louder and more enthusiastic, but she is not the one running the show. That honour belongs, very firmly, to the cats, writes James Buzzel

There is a myth that dogs chase cats. This may well be true in some homes. In ours, however, the cats appear to have formed a small but highly effective management team, and the dog is somewhere between unpaid intern and security guard.

She is bigger than them. Much bigger. She has stronger legs, a louder bark, and the general size of a dog who could, if required, run full pelt through a hedge without asking too many questions first.

And yet she is absolutely not in charge.

The cats know this. The dog knows this. I know this. The only person still pretending otherwise is possibly my wife, and even then she finds it difficult to defend.

Their power is not obvious. It is not all hissing, swiping and dramatic stand-offs on the stairs. That would be too crude.
No, the cats operate with far more subtlety. They are not playground bullies. They are more like two glamorous villains in a film, sitting in the shadows while someone else does the running around.

Take breakfast.

At around 5am, one of the cats will decide it is time to eat. Not officially time, you understand. Not the time agreed by the humans, the clocks, or any reasonable interpretation of morning. Just cat time.

Rather than come upstairs and make the request directly, they send Peggy (the dog).

I do not know how this instruction is issued. I have never caught the meeting itself. But the pattern is suspicious. The house is quiet. The cats are downstairs. Then, suddenly, here comes Peggy, padding up the stairs with the slightly confused urgency of someone who has been told this is very important but not why.

She appears at the bedroom door. She breathes. She shuffles. She may place a paw on the bed. She gives the look.

And downstairs, no doubt, the cats are already waiting by the food bowls.

Not pacing. Not panicking. Just waiting. Like the mafia.

The dog has done the work. The cats reap the benefits.

It happens elsewhere, too. The sofa, for example. The dog loves the sofa. She likes a proper sprawl, ideally with one leg pointing in a direction nature probably did not intend. But if the cats are there first, she will not get on.

She will stand there, hopeful and tragic, staring at a perfectly good patch of cushion that could easily accommodate everyone. The cats will not move. They will not even properly look at her. They simply occupy the space with the sort of confidence usually seen in people who put towels on sun loungers before breakfast.

Eventually, she gives up.

Her own bed is no safer. This is the part that really baffles me. The cats have chairs. Blankets. Windowsills. Human beds. Laundry baskets. Boxes they were not invited into. The entire house, basically. And yet, if they decide the dog's bed is the place to be, then the dog's bed it is.

Never mind that it smells of dog. In fact, perhaps that is part of the appeal. Perhaps they enjoy sitting in her actual headquarters while she stands nearby looking mildly betrayed.

If they were human, they would be 'mean girls'.

I do intervene, of course. I am not a monster. I move cats. I encourage fairness. I defend the dog's right to sit in her own bed, which is not a sentence I ever expected to form in adult life.

But here is the confession: I also find it very funny.

I should probably be more outraged on her behalf. Instead, I find myself watching the whole thing unfold with a mixture of sympathy and terrible amusement. The poor dog, bless her dear paws, is so honest. So hopeful. So completely unaware that she is being outmanoeuvred by two creatures who can communicate entire paragraphs with one slow blink.

And then, just as I begin to think they are entirely heartless, they ruin it by being sweet.

Sometimes one of the cats will brush against him as they pass, not with claws out or that little sideways swipe they pretend was an accident, but gently. Sometimes she will lower her head and give a small lick, and they will allow it, which from a cat is practically a handwritten letter of affection.

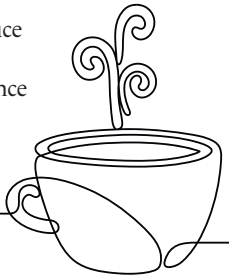
Every now and then, if the moon is full and the house is warm and nobody is prepared to admit what is happening, they will even sleep near each other.

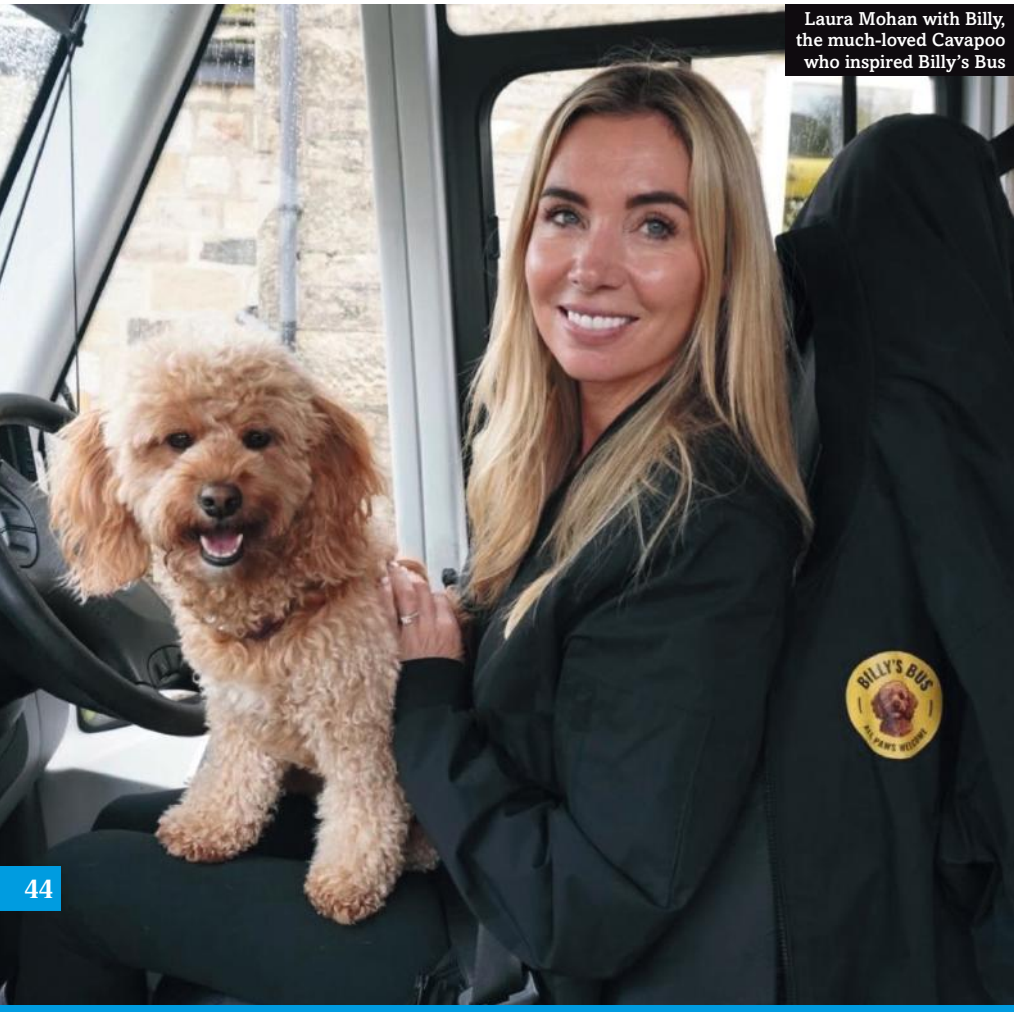
Not cuddling. Obviously.

But close enough.

A paw near a tail. A cat curled at the edge of the dog's bed while the dog pretends not to notice. A brief domestic truce between species, negotiated in silence and probably withdrawn by breakfast.







Laura Mohan with Billy, the much-loved Cavapoo who inspired Billy's Bus

All aboard Billy's Bus!

Doggy day care to make everyone smile is a dream come true for Laura Mohan, reports Andrea McHugh

Laura Mohan, from Rawdon in Leeds, is a true force of nature. A single mum and dog lover with a background of working in property and volunteering with vulnerable adults, Laura has created an innovative new doggy day care concept with a huge waiting list. Billy's Bus launched just one year ago, but a lot has happened since then, including a live call out on stage from Harry Styles at Wembley Stadium. Even Laura finds it hard to believe the success of her idea.

Laura began by buying and converting a former school bus to make it look like a traditional yellow American school bus. Billy's Bus is now a popular sight around Leeds and Bradford, making everyone smile as its canine passengers travel in style, eagerly looking out of the windows on their way to Laura's Bark Park. Branding along the side of the bus invites road users to 'beep for Billy's Bus', which they most certainly do, and in return receive a wave and a warm smile from the driver. All the dogs are carefully selected to ensure they get on with each other, and part of their enjoyment is the anticipation and socialisation of waiting at various bus stops along the route with their 'pawrents' ready to be picked by the team for a few hours of non-stop fun.

Overnight success

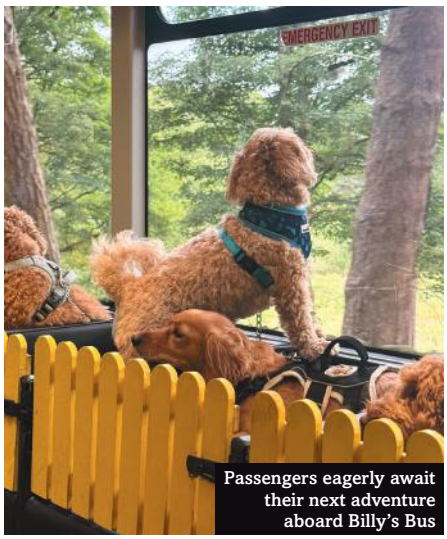
Billy's Bus has been an overnight success, with TV appearances, podcasts, interviews and national press coverage quickly following. So, what gave Laura the idea in the first place?

"My four-year-old Cavapoo, Billy, is my absolute world," explained Laura. "I'm absolutely besotted, and just want the very best for him. I couldn't find doggy day care that he enjoyed, which was very frustrating. He went somewhere from 9am to 5pm but I never knew what he was doing all day apart from sitting on a leather sofa. I then tried using a dog walker, but a one-hour walk wasn't enough, and he hated being picked up in a van with no windows or heating and put in crates alongside dogs he didn't know. None of it seemed good enough.

"For a couple of years, I'd been watching TikTok videos of a lady in Canada called Hope Mehlberg who owns K9 Konvoy. She picks up dogs in a converted bus every day and takes them to a park to have fun. I started researching if there was something similar in the UK, but there wasn't. Somewhere along the way I decided to do it myself!

"My kids thought I was mad, but I was determined. I wanted to offer a service that was really different and gave the dogs a brilliant time from the minute they were picked up until the minute they were dropped off. I began to imagine the branding and how it would work. The idea for Billy's Bus was born, but I just needed to find a bus.

"At first, I wanted to import an authentic yellow American school bus, but it wasn't possible. I really tried, but the fact it was left hand drive, and the insurance said no meant I had to come up with another idea. In the end I bought a British school bus at auction that had been used to take disabled children to school. It was perfect, and my



Passengers eagerly await their next adventure aboard Billy's Bus

carpenter did an amazing job converting it and making beautiful pods to keep the dogs safe and comfortable when travelling. We then painted the bus yellow and branded it with #BeepforBillysBus. Now nobody can miss Billy's Bus when they see it!

"From the very start I knew Billy's Bus would create magic, stopping people in their tracks and making them smile. Who wouldn't smile at the sight of all those dogs on a bus? To generate interest, we went out in the dead of night, putting up posters telling people to look out for the little yellow bus that was coming. People got really curious! I put an advert on Facebook asking for bus drivers who must love dogs and had about 70 replies. The team of drivers we've got now, who are all self-employed, are absolutely incredible and I feel really blessed.

"I'd never run my own business before, and there were times when I've felt like I've been completely winging it, but I've been incredibly lucky. Billy's Bus went live on 1 October, 2025, and we were inundated with hundreds of enquiries from people keen to use the service. It's been nothing short of surreal.

Not-for-profit

"We have a maximum of 15 dogs on board, plus the driver and three other people to look after the dogs. Because of my work with vulnerable young adults, I know how hard it is for them to find jobs, and many of them feel a bit lost. I was keen to give these young people a chance by working on the bus and helping to look after the dogs when we arrived at the park. I wanted to create a not-for-profit eco-system and knew that being around the dogs and riding on Billy's Bus would help bring these young people to life. I'm now able to pay most of them, and seeing how much confidence they now have, and how happy they are - I think that's my biggest success.



Four-legged passengers travelling in their specially designed bus pods; Bobby ready for another day of fun

"Billy's Bus is such a happy place to be, every single day. The dogs are with us for three hours, for which we charge £25. We have classical music playing on the bus and after the park the dogs can enjoy a Billy's Ice Cream. We've just started collaborating with Yorkshire Dales ice cream, who have swapped all the sugar for healthy enzymes and branded it as Billy's Ice Cream. I'm working 20 hours a day sometimes, as we do a lot of community work that we don't charge for, such as a drive by of nursing homes. It's lovely to make the residents smile.

Happy dogs

"We work very hard to assess the dogs so that they all get on with each other. If we think a dog would be better on a different day, with different dogs, that's what we do. We also ensure we always have the same team members on board when a dog travels so the dogs know who to expect and get to know them. It helps to give them confidence. One dog we picked up was a rescue called Hector who was very nervous at first, but now he pulls his mum to the bus when he sees it, jumps on board and can't wait to go!

"A friend let me rent a couple of acres of farmland, which has become our Bark Park and is the first one of its kind in Ilkley. Bark Park is where we take the dogs, and



The unmistakable yellow Billy's Bus transports dogs to the Bark Park for a few hours of fun and enrichment

For more information visit billysbus.co.uk



All aboard! Two of Billy's Bus passengers settle in for the journey

they absolutely love it. We have agility equipment, sunken trampolines, sniffer trails, swings, paddling pools – you name it, we've got it! As well as the young people who travel on the bus with the dogs, there are more volunteers at the Bark Park. So many people want to volunteer, and we even have bereaved dog owners who come up to just get a 90 minute dopamine hit from playing with the dogs. The dogs are usually all asleep on the way home and that's when we know we've done a good job.

"Importantly we always take hundreds of pictures and videos for the pawrents of the dogs and post them on WhatsApp groups, so they know exactly what their dogs are doing. Today there are over 2,000 dogs enrolled for a place, so there is a huge waiting list. A second Billy's Bus has just launched in County Durham through a charity called Bridge Creative, which was set up to give young adults with physical and learning difficulties more opportunities. I always dreamed that Billy's Bus would create magic, and it definitely has. When we arrive at our designated pick-up points to get the dogs, and see the people waiting and the dogs all getting to know each other it really makes us happy.

"I always wanted to deliver a safe, happy, world class dog day care service for the dogs, that would give pet owners peace of mind. I believe our dogs deserve the very best. As for Billy, he loves it! I've always said that if he was a human he would have a huge ego, seeing his name on the bus and on ice creams, and soon we are launching a Billy's Bus app. It's hard to believe how much has happened in a year, but dreams can come true and mine certainly has. I would love to see Billy's Buses all over the country!"



About Andrea
Andrea McHugh is a freelance journalist and author of several dog-related books. She competes in agility and heelwork to music

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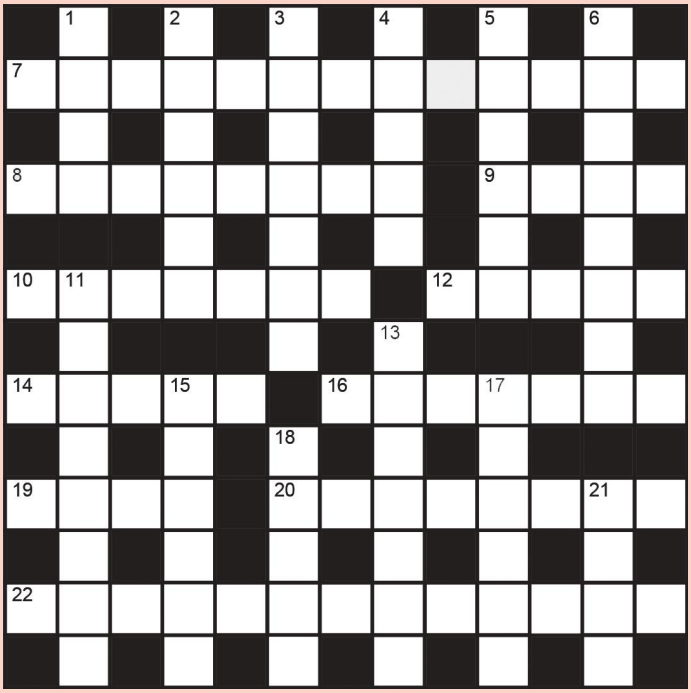
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C	O	C	E	W	C	I	D	E	R	Q
O	U	O	R	H	X	L	L	P	C	U
A	T	L	O	I	R	A	M	N	H	A
B	P	A	H	S	T	O	N	I	C	S
U	S	O	D	K	H	V	S	W	L	H
B	W	A	R	Y	L	A	G	E	R	K
B	I	X	K	T	P	U	N	C	H	M
L	N	S	H	E	R	R	Y	D	U	R
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Punch
Rose
Rum
Sake
Shandy
Sherry
Squash
Stout
Tea
Tonic
Whisky
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Across

7 Ignore deliberately (4,1,5,3)
8 Learn by heart (8)
9 London district known for nightlife (4)
10 Deeply emotional (7)
12 Timepiece worn on the wrist (5)
14 Musical study piece (5)
16 Market shared by two firms (7)
19 Device that rings (4)
20 Layered with three thicknesses (5-3)
22 Ancient wall-building method (6,3,4)

Down

1 Certain (4)
2 Open out from a rolled state (6)
3 Plain to see (7)
4 Bathroom fixture for washing (5)
5 Ukrainian port city (6)
6 Existing only in legend (8)
11 En route (2,3,3)
13 Small dried fruit (7)
15 Widen, as pupils (6)
17 Not genuine (6)
18 Complete and total (5)
21 Noisy (4)

See page 38 for solutions.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Can you spot the five differences between these two pics?





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