



Delivering a better world for animals:

2024 General Election manifesto asks



In 2024 we will celebrate the RSPCA's 200th birthday and the seismic positive change introduced for animals over those two centuries.

While the UK was once a global leader in animal welfare, there is concern we're now falling behind and pets, farm animals, wildlife and animals used in science could all pay the price. 2024 gives us a fantastic opportunity to reverse that and once again establish the UK as frontrunners, setting the pace for animals for the next 200 years.

We, and the overwhelming majority of the British people, believe political parties must use this General Election to be innovative and propose solutions that will genuinely make this animal-loving nation an even kinder place, and recognise the incredible role the animal kingdom plays in all of our lives. Delivering a better deal for animals everywhere is the right thing to do and has overwhelming public support – it is better economically, for the planet and for human health. This briefing contains ideas to put the UK back on the path of global leadership for all animals.

In our 10-year strategy¹ we set out some ambitious but achievable goals, including:

- **Reduce animal neglect and cruelty by half.**
- **See more than half of all UK farm animals reared to RSPCA welfare standards.**
- **Secure a global commitment to developing, validating and accepting non-animal technologies to replace animal experiments, and put an end to 'severe' suffering for laboratory animals.**
- **See animal welfare education as a recognised and valued topic of the curriculum for schools.**

We believe governments must be equally ambitious so we can create a society where animals are treated with more respect, cruel acts which have become legitimised and institutionalised are challenged, and where the interconnectedness of human and animal wellbeing is better understood.

We have nine 'asks' that we would like to see a future UK Government deliver on:

1. Agree to a faster transition away from the use of animals in experiments in the UK

Around three million scientific procedures are carried out using animals in the UK each year². A further 1.8 million laboratory animals are bred and killed, for example so their organs or tissues can be used in research³. This means that UK life sciences currently impacts on around five million animals every year. Animals used in research and testing can and do experience pain and distress, which can be 'severe'.

Recent polling shows that 79 percent of UK adults agree that more needs to be done to speed up the development and uptake of alternatives to replace animal experiments⁴.

¹ rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/strategy

² gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals

³ gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals#additional-statistics-for-2017

⁴ Savanta ComRes polling, April 2022.

The RSPCA believes that much more could, and should, be done to avoid, or reduce, this suffering and the UK public agrees. Phasing-out animal experiments, coupled with phasing-in advanced, non-animal technologies (NATs) and new approach methodologies (NAMs), offers clear ethical, animal welfare, scientific and economic benefits. We believe that now is the time for the political parties in the UK to increase their ambitions and commit to a strategy to facilitate a faster transition away from the use of animals in experiments.

2. Develop an effective food strategy that ensures high animal welfare in England

In June 2022, the UK Government published its Food Strategy⁵ for England. The document represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recast our relationship with food and farming for the age we live in, and address big issues around food supply and security, sustainable food production, climate change, public health, and the protection of the UK's high environmental and animal welfare standards.

Unless there is a significant change to our diets, we are likely to see an unsustainable rise in the number of animals (particularly fish and chickens) farmed for their meat over the coming decades. This will place even greater pressure on already stressed environments, natural habitats and scarce resources as well as the negative impacts on animal welfare of more animals being farmed, potentially in intensive systems. The UK Government committed in 2021 to phasing out cages for laying hens and pigs, and promoting more humane methods of farming such as the Better Chicken Commitment⁶. This needs to be taken forward alongside improving transparency in the food chain through mandatory method-of-production labelling.

3. Protect UK animal welfare in trade agreements

The UK has upgraded its welfare standards over the past 40 years but now risks undermining its producers with cheaper imported products produced to lower standards. Trade agreements play a key role in ensuring UK animal welfare standards and British farming are protected by not allowing cheaper products produced to lower standards to be imported. However, sadly, in both the UK-Canada and UK-Australia agreements, concessions were given that undermine our animal welfare standards for eggs, pigmeat and beef, and will result in these products being imported, produced to standards that would not be legal in the UK. The RSPCA welcomes the Government commitments given at the May Food Summit to not undermine our animal welfare standards and set up additional control for sensitive products but waits to see further detail on how this will be achieved. Core animal welfare standards in trade discussions are our preferred route to achieving this.

32 percent of people believe that protecting animal welfare standards in trade agreements is the most important animal welfare issue⁷.

The UK needs to also set out a more transparent process to negotiate trade deals, include all the devolved governments in such a process and agree on a clear and fair process for legislators to agree or reject any ratification of trade agreements.

⁵ gov.uk/government/publications/government-food-strategy/government-food-strategy

⁶ hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-06-20/debates/A8711335-BF26-47F0-97B4-F6ED2471EB7F/FarmedAnimalsCages

⁷ RSPCA Animal Kindness Index 2023.





4. Protect all wild animals in England

The laws providing controls and protection of wildlife are complex and incredibly wide, with legislation dating back over a century and built up over time in a piecemeal way that does not provide for an effective holistic approach. For years many enforcement bodies have stated there is a need to update and consolidate the law in this area to make it more user friendly and provide better protection for wildlife. In 2015 the Law Commission, having been asked to review the law, produced a report and draft Bill⁸. While more work is now needed post Brexit, the RSPCA believes the time is ripe for taking this forward. It is one of the last remaining areas of animal welfare law where there has been no review or consolidation to bring the regulatory regime in line with current scientific thinking and understanding as well as public expectations.

40 percent of people believe that improving the law to protect wildlife is the most important animal welfare issue⁷.

Hunting with dogs is barbaric and has no place in a modern, compassionate society. Though banned under the Hunting Act 2004, the use of 'trail' hunting and exemptions in the Act, provide cover for illegal hunting and fines are an insufficient deterrent. We believe this area of the law should also be updated as has happened in Scotland and the loophole closed.

5. Licence animal sanctuaries and introduce a licensing scheme for kept animals in England

We believe that all rescue and rehoming centres as well as sanctuaries should be licensed under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018. A licence is needed to run a pet shop or a boarding kennels but anyone can set up a rescue or sanctuary. Inevitably many of these establishments take on too many animals and have too little money which results in animal welfare problems. Scotland and Jersey already have successful licensing systems, and the Welsh Government is consulting on licensing. If England, which has more than three-quarters of all UK rescues, commits to licensing this would ensure harmonised regulation and close the loophole of allowing unregulated rescues to undermine laws in the other devolved nations.

The keeping of animals, recognised in law as sentient beings, is a serious undertaking and one for which a licence should be required. To achieve this, the dog licence should be brought back and a positive list of animals permitted to be owned, agreed. This would act as a strong enforcement tool for improving animal welfare by attaching conditions to owning an animal and providing an income stream funding welfare initiatives. The data collected by such a scheme would be transformative in our understanding of the development of animal disease, the contribution of animals to our economy, and developing trends.

⁸ [lawcom.gov.uk/project/wildlife-law](https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/wildlife-law)

6. Restrict the use of fireworks in England

The RSPCA acknowledges that fireworks are used by people throughout the year to mark different events, e.g. Bonfire Night, New Year, Chinese New Year, Diwali, etc. While some people enjoy fireworks, they can cause significant injury, problems and fear for other people and animals. From an animal welfare perspective, aversive stimuli, such as loud noises, that are unpredictable and out of an animal's control – as is the case with fireworks – are particularly stressful for them⁹. Being unpredictable, as well as intermittent and relatively infrequent, also makes it unlikely that animals will acclimatise to noise from fireworks¹⁰.

Polling carried out in 2020 showed that only two in five (41 percent) of UK adults said they were confident that they could care for a pet, horse or other animal who was distressed due to fireworks¹¹.

In Scotland, an advisory panel set out an action plan to tackle anti-social behaviour involving fireworks¹². Its recommendations included changing the way fireworks are bought and used, for example restricting the days and times when they can be let off and also creating 'no-firework' zones. This was included in the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022. We believe England and Wales should follow suit with similar legislation and awareness-raising campaigns.

7. Improve the welfare of animals when slaughtered in England

Farm animals are sentient beings – they have the capacity to suffer and feel pain. This must be taken into account throughout their life, including at the time of slaughter. Stunning before slaughter ensures animals are unconscious and therefore do not feel pain or suffer unnecessarily at the time of killing. According to the Food Standards Agency in 2022, 17,000 cattle, 2.5 million sheep, and 22.1 million poultry birds were slaughtered without pre-stunning in England and Wales¹³. Scientific evidence clearly shows that slaughter without pre-stunning can cause animals unnecessary suffering. The current legal derogation states that animals that are not stunned before slaughter should be slaughtered in accordance with religious rites, for consumption by Jews or Muslims. Stricter measures are needed to ensure that the supply of meat not stunned before slaughter matches the demand from the local communities that the derogation is intended to serve.

High concentration CO2 stunning causes pain and distress in pigs from first exposure to the gas to loss of consciousness, which can take up to a minute to occur. The European Commission is now looking for alternatives so that CO2 stunning can end by 2025. The UK Government should also undertake similar work, particularly as the UK has a shortage of CO2 as shown by the closure of several production plants in the past two years that required government intervention. To provide for food security and improved animal welfare, the UK Government should set a date to end the use of CO2 in slaughtering.

9 Bassett L & Buchanan-Smith HM (2007). Effects of predictability on the welfare of captive animals. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 102: 223–245.

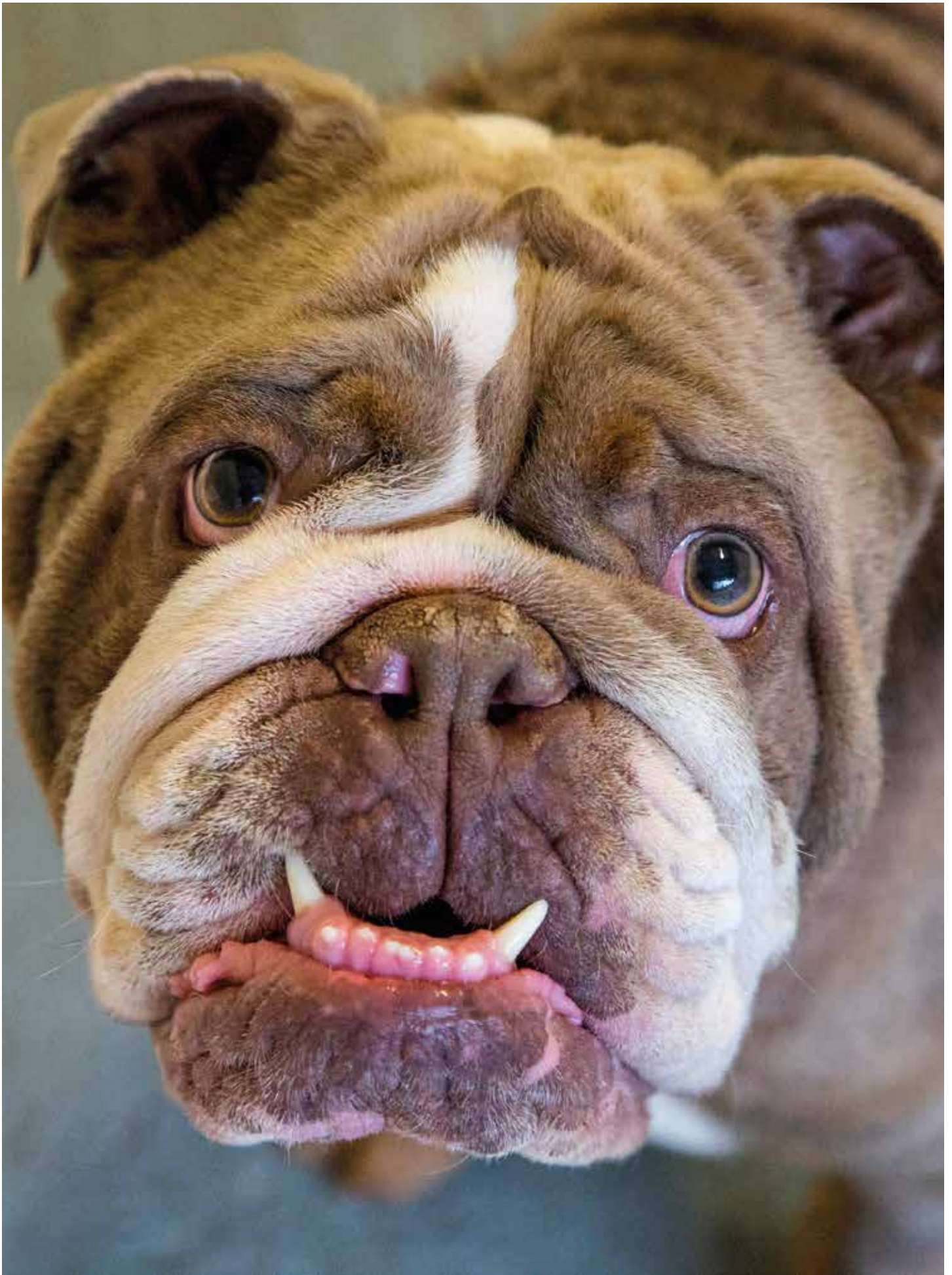
10 Wright AJ, Soto NA, Baldwin AL, Bateson M, Beale CM, Clark C, Deak T, Edwards EF, Fernandez A, Godinho A, Hatch LT, Kakuschke A, Lusseau D, Martineau D, Romero LM, Weilgart LS, Wintle BA, Notarbartolo-di-Sciara G & Martin V (2007). Anthropogenic noise as a stressor in animals: a multidisciplinary perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* 20: 250–273.

11 Savanta ComRes poll for the RSPCA, October 2020.

12 gov.scot/news/tackling-anti-social-fireworks-use Scottish Government. Tackling anti-social fireworks use. 3 November 2020.

13 FSA (2022) **Farm Animals: Survey of Slaughter Methods** 2022 (accessed 22/08/22)





8. A better deal for dogs with legislation prioritising their health and welfare in England

Animal welfare legislation covering dogs has existed for nearly 190 years. However it has failed to keep up with: new ways of breeding dogs which prioritise looks over health; illegal methods to import dogs; and the rise in mutilations such as ear cropping. This latter issue was going to be addressed in the Welfare of Animals (Kept Animals) Bill, however this has now been scrapped by the UK Government and we therefore want to see a commitment to taking this forward after the election.

84 percent of people believe that breeding animals with genetic health problems is unacceptable⁷.

The number of hospital admissions due to dog bites in England has increased and we believe there needs to be a new approach to dog control. The present Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has not significantly reduced the number of dog bites. There is no evidence to suggest that prohibited types are more likely to be involved in dog bite incidents or fatalities than any other breed or type of dog. We believe breed specific legislation is outdated and a new approach to public safety around dogs is required, prioritising interventions focusing on safe behaviour educational support around dogs with effective enforcement.

We now believe it is time to call for an end to greyhound racing. There are serious challenges for greyhounds' physical and mental health at all stages of their racing career. Greyhound racing is inherently dangerous for the dogs involved and the number of tracks is declining. The RSPCA wants to see an end to greyhound racing announced as soon as possible across the UK.

9. Include animal welfare teaching in schools in England

We believe that teaching animal welfare in schools would ensure far more children leave school with a basic understanding of how to care for and respect the natural world, resulting in a step-change improvement in some of the animal welfare and other environmental issues which impact society today. Teaching animal welfare in schools would contribute to the development of crucial life skills, such as compassion and empathy for other living things. The RSPCA and many other education experts believe that teaching children to care for and respect animals from an early age can bring about positive change for animals, the environment and society as a whole.

72 percent of people believe that teaching animal welfare in schools will help pupils understand their impact on animals⁷.

In England, the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum is evolving, continuously responding to the needs of young people growing up, with areas such as financial literacy and first aid having been added. We hope to see animal welfare on the curriculum too. Wales introduced a new curriculum in September 2022 which has a module on empathy and animal welfare. We also believe that animal welfare and laws about animal protection could form part of the syllabus of the new GCSE in Natural History being developed by exam board OCR.



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