



Rehoming a rescue cat

Emily Fowler looks at the journey of a rescue cat, from the moment they arrive, to health checks, to finding a forever home

Each year in the UK there are, sadly, hundreds of thousands of cats and kittens in need of homes and rehoming centres, cat rescues and animal sanctuaries all put an amazing amount of time, love and effort into finding a forever home for them. If you've ever adopted a cat from a rescue, you probably already know at least part of the process but what happens before you meet your new cat?

Why cats go into rescue

There are a variety of reasons for cats going into rescue and a lack of understanding around the importance of neutering certainly plays a part. Not getting pet cats neutered only adds to the feline overpopulation problem and the results of unplanned pet pregnancies mean rescues are often full of unwanted kittens during 'kitten season', between April to November.

I spoke to Tania Marsh, the Deputy Manager at Cats Protection's National Cat Adoption Centre (NCAC), and she explained that 95% of the cats that come into their centre for adoption come from loving homes, with the other 5% made up of stray and abandoned cats. When circumstances change, for example an owner dying or going into a care home, financial troubles, or owners having to move into rented accommodation where pets aren't allowed, it's not always possible to work around the situation and many cats end up being taken to rescues.

When cats are being brought into rescue by their current owners they'll usually have to go on a waiting list. No matter how big a rescue is

(the NCAC has the capacity for 500 to 600 cats when full), there are always so many cats in need of homes, so in the interest of fairness their needs have to be prioritised.

"In an ideal world we'd like to say yes to everyone," said Tania, "but unfortunately we can't, because it all comes down to available pen space."

The initial stages of rehoming

When owners contact the NCAC about rehoming a cat, their details are put on the waiting list and as soon as an empty pen is available, the centre lets them know and arranges an appointment for them to come in.

It's at this point that owners are asked to complete admittance paperwork, which gives the staff an opportunity to get as much information as possible about the cat, including the cat's health, behaviour, likes and dislikes, because the more information the rescue has, the easier it is for them to find the right home for that cat.

This part of the process can be very tricky for the reception team at the NCAC, Tania explained, because the

owners are often distraught at having to give up their beloved cats.

"They're saying goodbye to their cat, forever, so it can be pretty tough on the team," she said. "There's a good bit of counselling going on there to make the process as nice as you can."

Once the paperwork is all completed, the cat really starts its rehoming journey.

Health checks

At the NCAC all staff are trained to do a complete nose to tail examination to get a basic overview of the cat's health on the day of arrival, and this will be the case at any rescue. Not all rescues, however, are lucky enough to have the NCAC facilities

"We're very fortunate because our centre is so big that we have our own vet surgery on site," said Tania.

Other Cats Protection adoption centres and branches, as well as most other cat rescues, large or small, across the UK have to take cats in their care to local vet surgeries for treatment. With the sheer volume of cats in the NCAC's care, however, it wouldn't be practical to take cats en masse to local vets, so the surgery there is set up to be able to perform operations, take x-rays and ultrasounds, and basically do anything that the cats in their care need.

Essential treatments and procedures

When cats go into rescue they're given all essential and routine treatments, which includes flea and worming regimes, vaccinations, regular health checks and weigh-ins, and neutering if they're not already neutered. Microchips



are another essential part of cat ownership, so if a cat isn't already microchipped, the rescues will get that done.

"We do that straight away," said Tania, "except with stray cats, as they have a two week hold on them."

Apart from vaccinations, which the NCAC have to do straight away for obvious reasons, and any urgent veterinary treatment, they hold off when it comes to cats that have come in as strays, just in case they're owned by someone. They have a 'missing' list that the reception team run and add to when anyone calls to report their cat is missing, and this is checked whenever a 'stray' comes in. If the stray seems to match a cat on the missing list, the owners are called in for an 'ID parade'. If not, the finder of the cat is encouraged to put up posters in the area the cat was found and contact local vets, although the NCAC team will do all that if, for whatever reason, the finder can't. Everything possible is done to find an owner if a cat's brought in with no microchip or has a microchip with out of date details.

This really highlights the importance of getting your cat microchipped and making sure your contact details are always correct and up to date with the microchip company. If your cat does go missing without being microchipped, you should contact all rescues and vets in the area with a description of your cat.

Settling in

Once a cat has been checked over, it's bedded down in its allocated pen. At the NCAC this comes in the form of a two part pen with a cat flap leading into an exercise area but different rescues have different set-ups; some use foster families who look after cats in their own home but all will have the essentials – toilet facilities, beds, food, water and toys.

Once a cat has been monitored and assessed as 'fit to home' (at the NCAC this period is a minimum of seven days), the rescue will start advertising the cat as looking for a home and allowing members of the public to visit.

Finding a new family

A good rescue will always consider the suitability of the cat to the potential owners, and vice versa. At the NCAC potential adopters complete a form straight away about who they are, where they live, what



sort of cat they're looking for and details about their home. This starts the conversation and means the centre staff can assist in choosing the cat that most suits their needs. This is so important in making sure each cat is rehomed in a forever home.

If there's a good match, a homing interview takes place where centre staff talk through what the potential adopters are going to get from adopting from Cats Protection, plus advice on how to settle the cat into their home in the best possible way.

"We want to do it in a way that means the cat's going to settle as easily as possible," said Tania, "and hopefully go forward to be a nice, happy family unit."

It's also an opportunity for potential adopters to ask any questions they have and bring up any concerns. It's at this point that a physical home visit is often arranged, although not all rescues do them each and every time.



All reputable cat rescues will ask for an adoption fee for the cats they rehome but this only goes a very, very small way towards the actual costs of rescuing and caring for that cat. What adopters get with that payment is the assurance that their new cat has been checked by the vet, has a medical history, has been flea'd, wormed, vaccinated and neutered. 🐾

Avoiding the need to rehome

- Adopt from a reputable rescue to make sure your cat is the best match for your home and lifestyle.
- Neuter (both male and female) to avoid unplanned pregnancies.
- Be patient with behavioural issues – Look at what could be causing them. How can you help?
- If you're moving into rented accommodation, have you asked the landlord if you can bring your cat? They'll often be flexible if you speak to them directly and make guarantees, like a professional clean on departure or a higher deposit.
- Understand that all cats are individuals (which is part of what makes them wonderful!) - have too high an expectation of the 'perfect' cat and you might be disappointed.
- New baby on the way? Children benefit greatly from growing up around pets so look into the recommended ways of integrating babies and cats.