

# Pet Population and Pet Owner Trends in the U.S.: Fish, Birds, Reptiles, and Small Animals

<https://marketpublishers.com/r/P141334BC41EN.html>

Date: January 2013

Pages: 80

Price: US\$ 2,000.00 (Single User License)

ID: P141334BC41EN

## Abstracts

There is a lot more to the pet industry than dogs and cats. While research into the human-animal bond tends to focus on the special relationship between people and dogs that has evolved over thousands of years, today's pet owners do not limit their connection with animals to dogs—or cats—alone. A wide range of other animals have found their way into the households and affections of pet lovers.

American pet owners live in the company of 116 million fish, birds, small animals and reptiles. Fish tanks can be found in 7.2 million households and bird cages in 4.6 million households. Reptiles are pets in 1.8 million households. Tens of millions of adults—and their kids—enjoy the companionship of non-canines and non-felines. For example, 15.6 million adults reside in households with fish and 10.4 million take pleasure in the company of birds. Rabbits warm the hearts and engage the children of 2.5 million adults.

These pet owners represent big business for the pet industry. They groom and board their birds, buy toys for their iguanas, purchase medications for their turtles, take their gerbils to the vet, light and decorate their fish tanks and, of course, buy food for all of the tens of millions of pets that they own besides their cats and dogs. The spending power of owners of pets other than cats and dogs has a significant impact on the bottom line of marketers and retailers of pet products and services.

This all new Packaged Facts report shows why owners of pets other than dogs and cats represent a key segment for a pet industry beleaguered by the recession. After a noticeable recessionary slump, the report offers strong evidence that ownership of fish, birds and small animals is on the rebound. The report highlights how marketers can take advantage of an improving market and suggests what they can do to leverage the

connection consumers have with these pets.

The report offers timely insights into consumers who maintain a diverse and often exotic collection of pets and provides a road map that marketers can follow to connect with them. Owners of birds and fish, for example, tend to be young and multicultural and are much more likely to be urban cliff dwellers residing in apartments, condos or co-ops in large cities, especially in the Northeast. Marketers will find these Gen-Y pet owners to be highly engaged with social media. Bird owners, for example, are 37% more likely than the average pet owner to purchase products advertised on a social sharing website and are 24% more likely to place greater trust in product information they get on a social sharing website.

Another recurring theme of the report is the critical role parents and children play in this segment of the pet market. Compared to pet owners who have cats and dogs exclusively, owners of fish, reptiles and small animals are much more likely to have children under the age of 18 in their households (57% vs. 34%). Nearly 90% of households with hamsters have children, and 87% of these have children under the age of 12. Around 60% of households with fish, rabbits and reptiles have children under the age of 18. Thus, children and their parents are at the heart of the market for fish, reptiles and small animals and represent a key factor in the post-recession recovery and long-term growth prospects of the pet industry.

This report focuses on pet owners with fish, birds, reptiles and other pets besides dogs and cats. It is important to note the differences in the way the two principal primary data sources used in the report categorize data on pets other than cats and dogs.

The main source of primary data is the Summer 2012 Experian Simmons National Consumer Study (NCS), which was fielded between August 2011 and August 2012. Trend data are derived from the Spring 2007 Experian Simmons National Consumer Study and the Summer Experian Simmons National Consumer Studies from 2008 through 2012. The Experian Simmons NCS questionnaire asks respondents to identify the number of pets they own in the following categories: dogs, cats, fish, birds, reptiles, rabbits, hamsters and “other” pets. Small animals such as gerbils, ferrets and guinea pigs likely account for the preponderance of pets included in the “other” category, although “other” pets could also include animals as diverse as horses and poultry.

The report also cites data from the American Pet Products Association

2011-2012 APPA National Pet Owners Survey. This industry source uses the following categories for owners of pets other than dogs and cats: bird; fish (including saltwater and freshwater); small animal (including rabbit, hamster, guinea pig, chinchilla, ferret, gerbil, hermit crab, mouse/rat, pot-bellied pig and “other” small animals); reptiles (including frog/toad, iguana, newt/salamander, lizard, turtle/tortoise, snake, scorpion and “other” reptile); and equine.

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