



*Check against delivery.*

A statement from Norbert Holthenrich,  
President of the  
Zentralverband Zoologischer Fachbetriebe e.V. (ZZF),  
at the **press conference** of the ZZF at **Interzoo.digital**  
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The past year has been extremely challenging - including for the pet market. In retail we all had our hands full with supply bottlenecks, a competitive commodities market and special hygiene regulations. In some European countries sales fell due to lockdowns, at times it wasn't possible to offer animals everywhere. But in most countries at least specialist pet stores remained open all the time to sell pet supplies – as was the case in Germany. Despite the challenges brought by COVID-19, the global pet market developed very well, reaching sales of over 123 billion euros in the past year. As you can see in the graphic, the market research institution Euromonitor is also forecasting worldwide growth in sales of over 7.5 per cent this year.

The largest markets are North America, with sales of over 54 billion euros, and the West European pet market at over 28 billion euros. In Europe, the British spend the most on pet supplies at about 5.6 billion euros. Germany is just behind at about 5.5 billion euros.

Covid-19 also changed the shopping behaviour of pet owners. Due to home deliveries and thanks to the wide ranges on offer, many of them decided to do their shopping on the internet. In Germany, online sales rose by 16.5 per cent. At the same time, with the help of a broad premium range and special articles, specialist retail was able to compete well with food retailers and discounters, and retained sales shares.

The good market development during the coronavirus pandemic primarily relates to the increased importance of pets. Pet owners working from home had more time to spend on their animal housemates. Animals communicate stability and comfort and – what was probably most important – physical proximity.

As a result, animal lovers bought more products that support the health of and interaction with animals, for example treats or toys. But articles that optimise life with pets, such as aquariums, garden ponds and attractive animal pens, were also in demand.

A second reason for the global market growth is that there are more pets. Many markets – for example, the USA, Australia, Asia – have reported rises in pet numbers during the coronavirus pandemic. Dogs are currently popular above all, and in some countries are being adopted more frequently than usual.

In China, the status of dogs and cats has even changed during the pandemic. Officially, they have been redesignated from *farm animals* into *companion animals*.

The number of pets has risen in Europe too. The highest number of animal housemates live in Russia, at nearly 51 million. Germany is in second place with about 35 million pets.

In Germany, there has been growth in dogs, cats and ornamental fish or aquariums. In total, there are about one million more pets than in the previous year. According to a joint survey carried out by ZZF and IVH (the Skopos Study representative of households) it is assumed that the peak reached for cats and aquariums results from acquisitions made in 2019 and is not directly related to the coronavirus situation. Cat owners and aquarium enthusiasts apparently had not acquired more new animals by late autumn 2020 than they did in 2019.

Things look different for dogs. The proportion of new acquisitions rose from 12 to 16 per cent. Initially, dogs in animal homes benefited from this. 38 per cent of the dogs in Germany were adopted from animal shelters, 33 per cent come from breeders. Ultimately, however, during the second lockdown neither animal homes nor breeders could always meet the demand.

There are many reasons to welcome the rise in interest people have in living with animals. Perhaps you heard Prof. Beetz, the President of the International Society for Animal-Assisted Therapy, today at the opening event? She spoke about the positive influence of animal contact, especially in times of crisis.

On the other hand, what is decisive for a good relationship between humans and animals is that the needs of the animals are met right at the beginning, during the acquisition process. For this reason, I would like to draw your attention to a form of abuse. Due to the special demand situation, unfortunately some dubious puppy dealers have sensed an opportunity and offer dogs from puppy farms for sale, primarily via small ads and internet portals. The cruelty to animals here is that these dealers often breed as many animals as possible in the shortest period of time and separate them from the mother too early. Therefore, we advocate that the providers of animals on internet platforms should be obliged to prove their identity to the online platform.

This will allow purchasers to know who they're dealing with, and if any problems occur regarding animal welfare, species conservation or epidemic control, the platform operators can contact the providers directly.

In addition, animal protection organisations are concerned that some pet owners might bring their dogs back to pet homes after the pandemic or may even abandon them.

In my experience, people who are able to bond do not easily abandon their beloved pets, who after all are companions and members of the family, to an uncertain fate. However, we should also ensure that they are not forced to give up their animals because, for example, they have to go back to work in the office. If we are serious that keeping pets has a positive effect on individual pet owners, on society and not least also on our health systems, we should in fact consider how to reduce possible stressors involved with pet ownership within our societies. For example, by making it possible to bring dogs into offices, or offering pet-sitting for people in hospital. In urban design, enough space should be provided to exercise dogs and pet ownership should be offset for recipients of social transfer payments. These examples are not conclusive by a long way. Ultimately, how much openness and tolerance we show and develop towards pet ownership is a question of our culture as a society.

The pet sector and breeders are responsible for advising on which animals are suitable for private ownership, and about their treatment and care. Many manufacturers and specialist animal retailers are already active here and have supported the placement of animals from animal homes during the pandemic, as well as promoting animal care charities and awareness-raising campaigns.

It is also important that specialist animal retailers are good advisors. For this reason, within the scope of our Pet Academy, founded in September last year, we provide knowledge about how to keep animals correctly and specialist advice for animal lovers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Animal welfare, sustainability, the protection of species and also protecting animal habitats - these are all important subjects for the pet sector. You will come across these again and again on our platform Interzoo.digital, in manufacturers' ranges and in our supporting programme.

May our first digital edition of Interzoo make a contribution to raising awareness for the positive role pets can play in our societies. And at the same time, may it make clear the huge innovativeness of the global pet sector in the area of professional care for our pets.

I hope you make many interesting discoveries when surfing through our Interzoo.digital.

Sources:

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