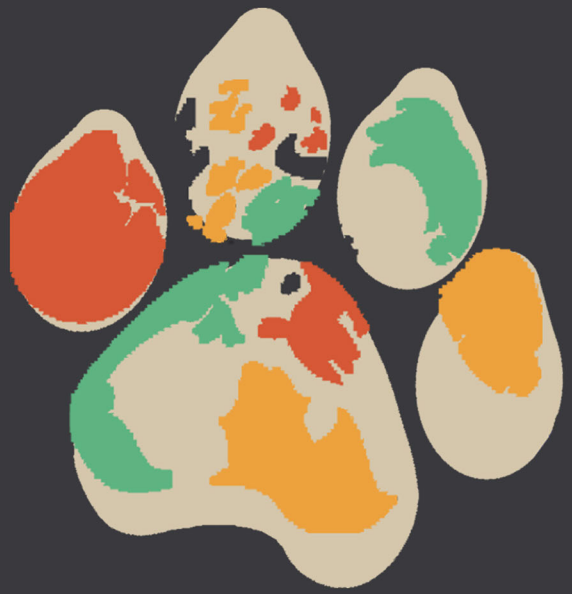
WHAT IS YOUR CARBON PAWPRINT?



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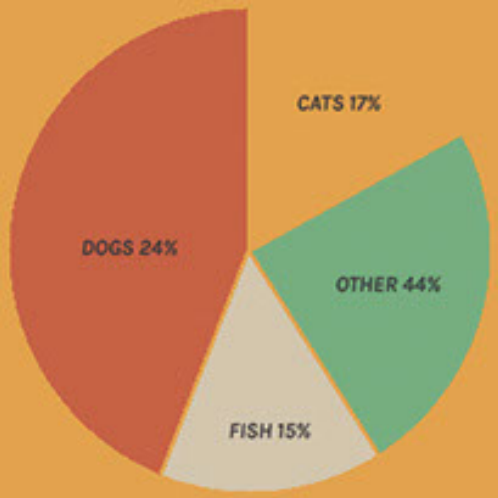
FACTS AND FIGURES

There are 7.4 million cats that are kept as pets within the UK, that means that they are present in 17% of our homes. With each cat requiring its own sufficient amount of energy and resources, this zine will explore the costs of owning a cat on the environment.



This is in no way an argument against being a cat owner, in fact its quite the opposite. This is a presentation of potential solutions, and a discussion of the possibilities of widespread change that starts within a domestic setting.

What are the environmental impacts of being a cat owner, and what are the results and implications of your behaviour in regards to their care and upkeep? This is a toolkit guide for discovering the possibilities surrounding sustainable pet solutions and whether it is desirable to change one's actions in order to support this lifestyle.

This is a question of how much of the responsibility lies with us owners, how much with the corporations who provide the services, and designers who have the abilities to provide solutions.

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HOW MUCH CO2 DOES A CAT PRODUCE?

Physicist David MacKay has proposed that the average cat in the UK produces around 0.64 kg of co2 per day, that's 233.6 kg of co2 a year. This is based on the assumption that the pet comes from a fossil fuelled home - homes run on natural gas would produce roughly half of that amount of co2. This figure has been reached through the collection of data from "British government reports regarding the energy intensity of food production and estimates of how much food these pets eat". (MacKay)

In order to properly assess and analyse the impact of cat ownership it is important to look at the amount of co2 that they create. This is in no means an exact calculation; it is an accumulation of facts that are generalised and so it has to be said that this more of a stab in the right direction. To work this out the amount of co2 that a cat releases into the atmosphere, as well as the effect of the manufacturing of their food and other necessities have been taken into account.

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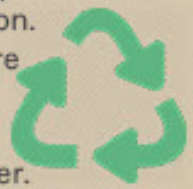
75,000 TONNES OF PET FOOD PACKAGING IS PRODUCED EVERY YEAR AND 9,000 TONNES OF WASTE IS GENERATED.

When looking at the impact of food waste it is important to take the manufacturing process into consideration. "The pet, farm animal, and human food chains are connected" (Nestle, 2008) in ways which means that it works in a kind of cycle, the by-products of one becoming a source of nutrients for the other. "In nature, there is no concept of waste. Everything is effectively food for another organism or system." (Braungart and McDonough, 2002)



This is great when you consider the levels of waste that are created in the manufacturing process of food, the meat that often goes into pet food is the waste products, parts of the animals that are considered unfit for human consumption. However, whilst this an efficient method of ensuring that all of the animal is used and less waste is generated, it does not take into account the amount of energy that goes into making the the product presentable. Pet food is required to "look and smell good enough so that pet owners want to buy them" (Nestle 2008) and doing so often involves large amounts of additives to neutralize any unwanted odors.

Whilst the company have made an effort to reduce their packaging this could be more motivated by the cost that would save on the packaging rather than their impact on the environment. Companies should "take advantage of continued opportunities to reduce packaging material entering the waste stream and the associated cost savings from optimisation, material reduction, volumetric efficiencies and other industry good practice." (WRAP 2009, p. 15)

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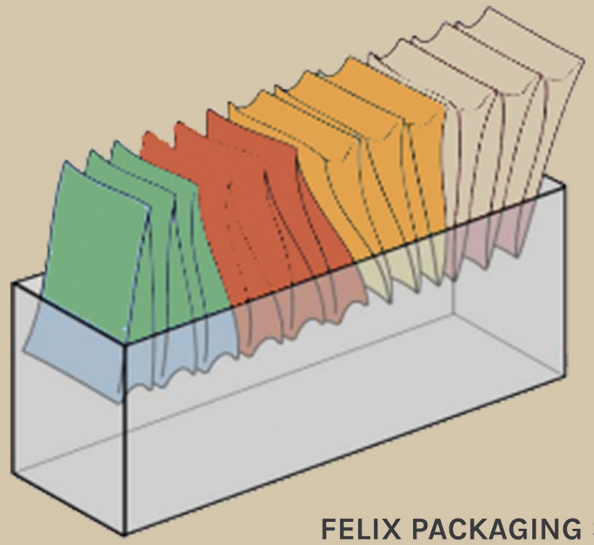
The brand of pet food that I buy for my own cat is "Felix" which is owned by Nestlé Purina PetCare Company. This particular product was the ranked as the lightest of a sample group of pouches in an analysis in regards to material reduction in the 2007 WRAP Packaging Benchmarking Study, it weighed in at 3.21g of packing for every 100g of food. It comes packaged in stand-up pouches which are not currently recyclable and cannot be resealed between uses, however they are light-weight.

This presents a conflict in regards to how to assess their environmental impact, as whilst they require less material, the material itself cannot be recycled – and as they cannot be resealed this means that they will produce a greater amount of waste product.



FELIX PACKAGING SOLUTION
(WRAP, 2009)

1,236,000 TONNES OF PET FOOD ARE SOLD IN THE UK A YEAR.

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BUT LETS NOT FORGET

It is clear that attempting to analyse the environmental impact of a cat (or any pet) is fraught with difficulties. Whilst it is possible to assemble an array of statistics that demonstrate an animals impact, it is important to remember the positives.

Plenty of research exists that demonstrates how owning a pet can increase the quality and longevity of our lives. Herzog wrote in his study that "Among 11,000 German and Australian adults pet owners were in better physical condition than non-pet owners, and they made 15% fewer doctor visits, a potential savings of billions of dollars in national health expenditures. And an epidemiological study of Chinese women found that pet owners exercised more, slept better, felt more physically fit, and missed fewer days from work than women without pets." (Herzog, 2011)

3 CATS EMIT THE SAME AMOUNT OF CO2 OVER THEIR LIFETIME AS 10 CARS DO IN A YEAR.

This shows that they reduce health problems, stress, and often inspire a healthier lifestyle - they might encourage people to go for a walk or utilise an outdoor space. If by owning a cat it means that you are less lonely and therefore eat less chocolate and drink less wine, then there is a reduction in waste, and an increase in your health.

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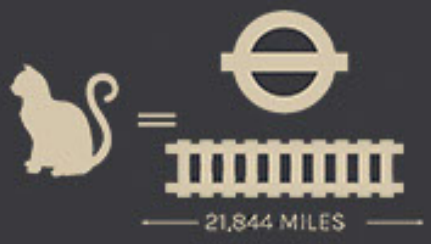
WHO'S TO BLAME?

"If a lifestyle choice uses more than 1 per cent of your energy footprint, then it is worthwhile reflecting on that choice and seeing what you can do about it" (MacKay 2009)

The responsibility in question is impossible to narrow down to one particular group or community, as it takes steps from each part of the chain for a serious impact to be had. For example, I can change the brand of cat food that I buy, but it would be simply impossible to calculate all the environmentally damaging impacts of making each product.

Overall, it is important to have some element of awareness as to where our products come from and what goes into them, but one can only do so much without serious change and reconsideration of the current systems and materials that produce the mass produced products.
There is not enough awareness raised of the small time products that can provide a kind of solution by offering a greener alternative to large named brands. Companies need to "engage with consumers through relevant communication, and assist them in achieving their personal desire to reduce waste" in order for a change to be conceivable.

Perhaps the answer is something that boils down to the responsibility of the individual – don't buy your cat a litter tray that will need constant cleaning and refilling, just install a cat flap and let your cat pee where nature intended. By becoming more conscious of our purchases and aware of the implications of our actions, it is possible to reduce the environmental impact of our homes.



A CAT PRODUCES THE SAME AMOUNT OF CO2 IN ITS LIFETIME AS RIDING 21,844 MILES ON THE LONDON UNDERGROUND.

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