

BSA^{VA}
PetSavers
Funding the future of small animal health

Impact Report 2024



**50 years of helping companion animals
and their veterinary care providers**

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Welcome

Welcome to our 2024 (50th anniversary) impact report. I'm delighted to bring you some highlights, particularly from 2024 and our last 10 years of funding clinical research into pet diseases. The advancement of veterinary medicine, like other medical fields, often happens gradually with a piecemeal build-up of research findings and clinical evidence. This can be almost imperceptible but that makes it no less important when we need a quicker diagnosis or better treatment for our pets and patients. Hopefully this summary will make those advancements that we have supported more visible.

Rosie Godfrey, Chair PetSavers Management Committee





Introduction

PetSavers is the clinical research grant awarding arm of the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA). We have been funding clinical research into companion animal disease for 50 years. We were the first UK charity set up to focus exclusively on supporting clinical research into pet animal diseases and we remain one of the few with this sole focus.

Over that time our overarching mission has been **to fund vital clinical research into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases of pets, so that vets and nurses always have the knowledge they need to counter the distress and pain caused by those diseases.**

We have done this via a number of routes, and together with our researchers and supporters we have helped change the lives of many pets and the landscape of small animal veterinary practice.



The routes we use to improve pet health:

- 1. Extending the veterinary clinical evidence base:** funding clinical research projects into small animal disease which extend the evidence base to better diagnose, manage and treat pet animal illnesses.
- 2. Funding young vets to undertake clinical residency programmes:** allowing in-depth training in a specific field of small animal veterinary medicine, building the experts of the future.
- 3. Supporting researchers in the early stages of their companion animal research career:** helping them become established researchers at a time when there is often a gap in such funding support.
- 4. Helping pilot and small research projects** get underway, enabling larger grant acquisitions in the future.

BSAVA PetSavers funds clinical research that will translate to a tangible benefit to general veterinary practice. In doing so they also provide opportunities and inspiration to the young researchers who may become leaders of their field in the future. The veterinary student doing a PetSavers-funded summer project may be the professor of the future. The postgraduate embarking on a PetSavers-funded master's or PhD may end up running a research team.

Professor Clare Rusbridge

University of Surrey and Wears Referrals
(one of the first BSAVA PetSavers-funded clinical residents)

1974-2024: 50 years of BSAVA PetSavers

We awarded our first grant of £1,225 in 1975, and since that time have funded over £2.7 million of vital clinical research and training programmes.

We have awarded over 300 grants for research projects in areas as diverse as kidney disease, epilepsy, diabetes, allergic skin and ear disease, spinal disease, cancer, arthritic disease and heart disease.

In 1990, we funded our first veterinary residency (in oncology) at the University of Cambridge.

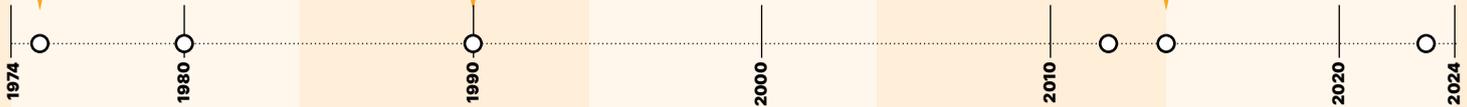
Between 1990 and 2011, 38 residencies were funded in a diverse array of disciplines, including internal medicine, oncology, ophthalmology, pathology, behaviour, ethics and law, dermatology, exotic animal medicine, anaesthesia, analgesia and critical care, diagnostic imaging, neurology, infectious diseases and surgery. These residencies were often in completely new fields such as exotic animal medicine, or were in young clinical areas where they gave significant impetus to developments in these fields in the UK.

In 2014, we introduced the Student Research Project grant for undergraduates.

In 1980, we launched an appeal into the deadly parvovirus epidemic and were able to allocate funding of £24,000 to the University of Glasgow for research into this disease.

In 2012, we awarded our first Master's Degree by Research for a project investigating infections by bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics.

In 2023 we awarded our first Research Fellowship for a project exploring early ways of detecting myasthenia gravis in dogs, which causes muscle weakness.



- ✔ We have produced valuable resources for owners and veterinary professionals such as our Ageing Canine Toolkit which aims to improve the care of senior dogs.
- ✔ We have recognised and promoted excellence in our profession through our BSAVA PetSavers Awards.
- ♥ To everyone who has helped us over the last 50 years, we say a big thank you for your support and hard work.



In 1997, I was the recipient of a BSAVA PetSavers award to fund an anaesthesia residency at University College Dublin (UCD). The resident was Dr Luis Campoy. Luis trained and worked in UCD for seven years, gaining his Certificate in Veterinary Anaesthesia and the European Diploma in Veterinary Anaesthesia. He then took up employment in Cornell University, College of Veterinary Medicine (USA) where he has made his home. He has published numerous peer-reviewed papers and has gone on to co-edit the very popular book: Small Animal Regional Anesthesia and Analgesia. He is Clinical Professor of Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine

Lynne Hughes

Associate Professor of Anaesthesia, University College Dublin



Highlights from the past 10 years

Not surprisingly, there have been many changes in 50 years of clinical research, and even in the last 10 years, worldwide technological advances have greatly influenced companion animal clinical research.

During these 10 years, we have seen an increasing focus on the use of 'big data', with databanks such as the Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network (SAVSNET) which allows researchers to more easily analyse how diseases or treatments affect large populations of pets. There have also been more studies looking at what veterinary professionals are doing in practice.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

Recently published PetSavers-funded research by Ivo Fins and colleagues from the Universities of Liverpool and Bristol used electronic clinical records to study the growing area of concern around AMR, examining antimicrobial prescriptions surrounding gastrointestinal clinical presentations in dogs and cats.¹

The researchers found that systemically administered Highest Priority Critically Important Antimicrobials (HPCIA) were prescribed in less than 1% of dog consultations presenting with gastrointestinal signs, but prescribed in 5% of cat consultations with this presentation. The HPCIA prescribed in these feline cases were most frequently third-generation cephalosporins. They felt that “In the absence of other authorised long-acting formulations, it seems likely that compliance may still be influencing prescribing behaviour towards third-generation cephalosporins”, and concluded “although a veterinary formulation of third-generation cephalosporin (cefovecin) is authorised for use in small animals in the United Kingdom, its use should be carefully considered”.

Another AMR-related study was a 2022 Master’s Degree by Research at the University of Edinburgh looking at the potential of phage therapy in treating canine *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* infections. This showed promising results with some isolated bacteriophages being able to kill canine otitis isolates, suggesting phage therapy may be an antibiotic sparing therapy of the future.



Canine epilepsy and other important diseases



Research by Matt James and colleagues² investigated the initial management of canine generalised epileptic seizures by primary care clinicians in the UK.

They found that “primary care clinicians rarely prescribed anti-seizure drugs (ASDs) following

a single epileptic seizure in accordance with International Veterinary Epilepsy Task Force (IVETF) recommendations; despite being significantly more likely to get prescribed anti-seizure drugs at their first consultation, less than half the dogs presenting with cluster seizures received ASD medication or referral to a specialist which is an expectation of IVETF. The reasons for this were generally not recorded in the clinical notes; monotherapy with imepitoin, rather than phenobarbital, was the most frequent choice of intervention for dogs initially presenting with cluster seizures. Imepitoin and phenobarbital have a comparable efficacy to reduce seizure frequency of single recurrent seizures by half. However, imepitoin is not currently recommended or authorised for cluster seizure treatment due to lack of evidence for its use in this

situation.” The authors hoped that their findings “may ultimately contribute to improved cohesion in the management of canine epileptic seizures between primary care and referral institutions.”

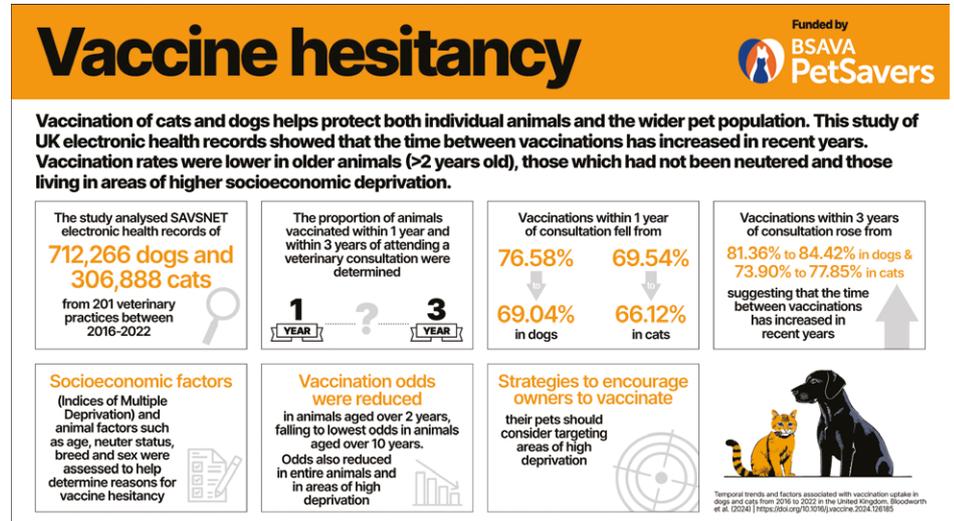
We have supported many studies looking at other important diseases for our pet population such as feline hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in cats, canine myxomatous mitral valve disease, canine ear and skin disease and osteoarthritis. Examples include the study entitled ‘Effectiveness of low-level laser therapy for the treatment of osteoarthritis-associated pain in client-owned dogs’ at the University of Cambridge funded jointly with The Debs Foundation and our first joint-funded PhD, funded with the RVC in 2024: ‘The role of thymosin beta 10 in feline chronic kidney disease’.

Owner decision-making

We have funded 'big data' research looking at pet carer approaches and attitudes to their animals and their veterinary care; for example, the Old Age Pets project behind the Ageing Canine Toolkit (see below) and Shona Bloodworth and colleagues' 2024 study at the University of Liverpool into trends and factors associated with vaccination uptake in UK dogs and cats.³

We also fund research that investigates trends in pet care such as the increased feeding of raw diets. In a student project completed by Elyn Groat at the University of Liverpool,⁴ antimicrobial-resistant, multidrug-

resistant and third-generation cephalosporin-resistant *E. coli* were significantly more likely to be detected in raw-fed dogs compared to non-raw-fed dogs, while *Salmonella* species were isolated from raw-fed dogs only.



Artificial intelligence (AI) technology

The last 10 years has seen researchers keen to investigate using new AI technology to enhance the care of our veterinary patients and improve diagnoses.

We have funded a number of studies using AI assistance including a 'Comparison of the performance of a smartphone facilitated manually adjusted target-controlled infusion of propofol in comparison with a conventional variable rate infusion in dogs undergoing elective surgical procedures' being undertaken at the University of Surrey and a multi-centre study 'An intelligent stethoscope for detecting hypertrophic cardiomyopathy in cats' at the University of Cambridge, the RVC and Davies Veterinary Specialists.



Sphinx cat being assessed for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy at the University of Cambridge.

Improving diagnoses

Advancing clinical and pathological diagnostic tests by searching for appropriate biomarkers and genetic analyses to help identify disease and injury has been another focus for our researchers. In 2022, we funded a Master's Degree by Research exploring acute phase protein and microRNA signatures for the diagnosis and prognosis of feline infectious peritonitis at the University of Edinburgh, and more recently a study examining the prognostic value of flow cytometry for determining Ki-67 expression in canine cutaneous mast cell tumours at the University of Cambridge.

Findings from our study at the University of Liverpool by Christine Pye and colleagues⁵ on biomarkers in canine cranial cruciate ligament rupture identified "an increase in nuclear magnetic resonance mobile lipids in the synovial fluid of dogs with meniscal injury which are of

interest as potential biomarkers of meniscal injury." We have also supported work to find new therapeutic options, including a Clinical Research Project funded at the University of Nottingham in 2020 examining beta-adrenergic receptor expression in canine haemangiosarcomas.



Changes in primary veterinary practice

A major focus of ours is to fund research that brings about useful change in primary practice. Therefore, several of our funded studies have explored ways to improve point of care diagnosis and treatments.

For example, work by Fernanda Camacho and Karen Humm from Willows Veterinary Centre and the RVC used a randomised controlled trial to investigate complications associated with different feeding tube placements in dogs and cats.⁶ This 2024 study concluded that “misplacement of nasoenteric tubes is uncommon but a consistent alternative test to radiography for checking correct nasoenteric tube placement was not demonstrated”.



We also funded work which demonstrated that N-proBNP concentrations in pleural fluid from dyspnoeic cats, being removed for therapeutic and diagnostic reasons, could be used to distinguish

between cardiac and non-cardiac causes of dyspnoea in primary practice.^{7,8} This removes the need for blood sampling and aids rapid diagnosis and treatment without referral.

Environmental impacts

The last 10 years has seen growing concern about the environmental impact of veterinary medicines and treatments, and a huge surge within the veterinary community to do our part to combat this.

Though on the border of our current funding remit, which is focused on improving small animal veterinary care, we have supported a number of projects in this area including a 2021 study at the University of Sussex entitled 'Pathways to waterways for imidacloprid in Seresto collars' and the study 'Reusable vs disposable drapes: does their use affect post-operative wound complication rates in routine surgeries?' currently underway at VetPartners practices.

We have funded university researchers, general practitioners, collaborations between GPs and specialists and between practitioners and academia, studies in private referral clinics, and vet, RVN and bioveterinary science students. **Some studies are jointly funded and we would like to thank our funding partners to date including The Debs Foundation, the Veterinary Cardiovascular Society, SAMSoc, and the RVC.**



The Debs Foundation





We are very grateful to all our researchers for their curiosity, hard work and dedication to extending the companion animal veterinary evidence base.

Please keep telling us about your findings, research presentations and publications so we can continue to highlight them.

“

It is difficult to obtain funding for small clinical studies of relevance to daily clinical practice and, BSAVA PetSavers is an ideal point of contact for that support.

Professor Ross Bond
RVC

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Our past 10 years in numbers (2014-2023 inclusive)



£1.18 million
awarded in grant funding



£615,590
received from gifts in Wills



More than 30
peer-reviewed publications

117 projects funded

Of these:

- › 31% of grants have been awarded to researchers within veterinary practice (rather than a veterinary university)
- › 81% of Student Research Projects have presented an abstract at BSAVA Congress. Since 2020, 100% have
- › 74% of all completed projects have written an article for BSAVA's *Companion* magazine
- › 28% have published in the BSAVA's academic journal the *Journal of Small Animal Practice* with a further 6% in preparation
- › 6 of 10 recent master's students are progressing to a PhD

2024 numbers

£150,000+

awarded in grants

8 grants awarded

- › 1 joint-funded PhD
- › 1 x Master's Degree by Research
- › 4 x Student Research Projects
- › 2 x Clinical Research Projects

£24,250 received

from gifts in Wills

11 peer-reviewed

publications



Grants awarded in 2024

Joint funded PhD

To the RVC

£80,000

(partial funding, with remaining funding provided by the RVC)

Investigating the role of thymosin beta 10 in feline chronic kidney disease

This studentship aims to improve understanding of the factors modifying the progression of kidney disease in cats. It may also identify novel biomarkers to identify cats that are likely to develop advanced kidney disease and new areas for therapeutic intervention to slow disease progression.

Master's Degree by Research

To the University of Cambridge

£39,411

Identification of the genetic variant that causes spongiform leukoencephalomyelopathy (SLEM) in the Border Terrier dog breed

This master's project aims to identify the causal genetic variant of SLEM in Border Terriers, and to understand how and why this variant is pathogenic. This will improve our understanding of the aetiology and pathophysiology of SLEM, and enable a validated genetic test for SLEM to be offered to breeders.

Clinical Research Projects

To the University of Edinburgh

£19,321

Analysis of morphological and inflammation-related phenotypic changes in peripheral blood mononuclear cells of dogs with immune mediated haemolytic anaemia and their correlation to therapeutic success and outcome

This serious autoimmune condition destroys red blood cells. While steroids are typically used in treatment, not all dogs respond, and some may need additional medications.

This study aims to examine changes in monocytes before and after steroid treatment, comparing them to healthy dogs, to better identify which patients might benefit from alternative therapies.

To the RVC

£5574.68

FGF-23 and TGF- β 1 in cats with acute kidney injury secondary to ureteral obstruction

This life-threatening condition is treated with subcutaneous ureteral bypass (SUB), but it can impact kidney function. By investigating biomarkers TGF- β 1 and FGF-23, which are linked to the progression from acute to chronic kidney disease in humans, the study aims to improve therapeutic decision-making by identifying cats likely to recover kidney function after SUB placement.

Student Research Projects

To the University of Edinburgh

£500

Comparing the perception and attitudes of different groups of people (e.g. veterinarians, animal shelter staff, and feline-owning public) towards feline immunodeficiency virus in cats against published literature

On its discovery, feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) was represented as a disease of high mortality and morbidity. This undergraduate project aims to investigate whether the perception of and attitude towards FIV in different groups involved in feline care has changed alongside increased scientific understanding of the disease to determine whether stigmatisation of FIV infection remains in the cat-care community.

To the University of Nottingham

£1200

Investigating the peri- and post-operative outcomes of neutering female dogs by ovariohysterectomy or ovariectomy

Neutering by ovariohysterectomy (OVH) is reportedly the most common procedure and the one taught in vet schools; however, laparoscopic techniques and neutering by ovariectomy (OVE) are increasing in frequency. This undergraduate study will examine differences in the perioperative and post-operative outcomes when surgical neutering is performed by laparoscopic OVE compared to an OVH by celiotomy.

To the University of Liverpool

£1250

Evaluation of cognitive function in a prospective ageing and welfare study in cats (Cat PAWS)

Little is known about feline cognitive dysfunction (FCD) and it is thought to be underdiagnosed. This undergraduate project aims to use neurological and behavioural signs to identify reliable tools for assessing feline cognitive function. This will help FCD to be recognised earlier and differentiated from other neurological conditions, and for management strategies and treatments to be implemented.

To the University of Liverpool

£2800

Exploring the dog microbiome for therapeutic potential in the treatment of canine bacterial pyoderma

This undergraduate project aims to identify and characterise commensal bacteria with therapeutic potential against *Staphylococcus pseudintermedius*, the most common cause of bacterial skin infections in dogs, to help identify mechanisms of inhibition and determine their potential for clinical application.



PetSavers offers a means to financially support clinically applicable veterinary research that will hopefully make a difference to the health and welfare of our pets. Unfortunately, not many other funding bodies offer this, and government funding through research councils will not usually fund research into companion animal diseases; therefore, PetSavers really is vital for ongoing research in these species.

Dr Tim Williams

University of Cambridge

Papers from PetSavers-funded studies published in 2024

Pye C, Green D, Anderson J, Phelan M, Fitzgerald M, Comerford E, Peffers M (2024) Determining predictive metabolomic biomarkers of meniscal injury in dogs with cranial cruciate ligament rupture. *Journal of Small Animal Practice* **65 (2)**, 90–103; doi.org/10.1111/jsap.13688

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PetSavers is a fantastic institution that supports clinical research with a clear potential positive impact in companion animal health, so applying for PetSavers' funding comes with a great chance of getting all those great clinical research project ideas out of the drawer and contributing to improved companion animal health.

Ana Ortiz

Veterinary Pathologist, RVC, and Marta Pereira,
Resident in Veterinary Anatomic Pathology
at the time of the study

The Ageing Canine Toolkit

Derived from research that we funded carried out at the University of Liverpool, this owner leaflet with traffic light colour-coded checklist and supporting poster is being successfully rolled out across UK veterinary practices, and now forms part of The Dog Friendly Clinic Scheme, in the older dog module. This is a joint initiative between Dogs Trust and the British Veterinary Behaviour Association.

We have also partnered with IDEXX to include the Ageing Canine Toolkit contents in their UK release of the Veterinary Content Cloud, a library of customisable content within Animana practice management software. This further increases its reach to veterinary professionals and senior dog owners across the UK. The toolkit has also started to gather interest internationally.

The toolkit leaflet and poster are available to download free from our website: <https://www.bsavalibrary.com/content/cilgrouppetsaversact> and can be ordered by veterinary professionals from the BSAVA Store. We ask for a donation to support us to continue to produce paper copies.



PetSavers awards



PetSavers Veterinary Achievement Award 2024

Sponsored by Hill's Pet Nutrition

Winner: Matt James (as the 1st named author) for his paper ***Approach to initial management of canine generalised epileptic seizures in primary-care veterinary practices in the United Kingdom***. This paper highlights some important points about epilepsy treatment compliance by primary care practitioners and suggests ways in which they can work more effectively with neurological specialists to improve care for their patients.



PetSavers Clinical Abstract Award 2024

Winner: Shauna Creamer, a University of Liverpool vet student for her presentation of ***An investigation into the antimicrobial properties of canine skin microflora*** at BSAVA Congress 2023.



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Celebrating the 50th Anniversary year

Our anniversary year has been a busy one for celebrating and fundraising as well as research. 2024 events began with some of the BSAVA affiliate groups holding raffles on our behalf during their pre-Congress meetings.

Once BSAVA Congress started, we ran a whole-day module on evidence-based veterinary medicine (progressive care) aimed at the advanced veterinary practitioner. Speakers included Clare Rusbridge, Karen Humm, Rachel Dean, Martin Whitehead and

Kit Sturgess from RCVS Evidence, who provided an excellent day's learning and discussion on using the veterinary evidence base to inform veterinary care in practice. They also inspired practitioners to consider undertaking research whilst in practice. Recordings of

the sessions can be found in the BSAVA Library.

BSAVA staff and volunteers were very busy on the BSAVA PetSavers stand at Congress, talking to those interested in undertaking research, promoting the Ageing Canine Toolkit, and gathering survey entries to determine the level of interest in research training among primary care vets and vet nurses and the barriers to undertaking research in general practice. The cycling competition fundraiser was very popular – who knew vets and vet nurses were so competitive! Clare Rusbridge and Karen Humm spoke about their PetSavers-funded research during our alumni talks, which were followed by clinical abstract presentations from our students and rounded off with our PetSavers alumni reception and anniversary cake.

Thanks to Summit Veterinary Pharmaceuticals for sponsoring the reception.



On Saturday 11 May, our supporters donned their walking boots, topped up their water bottles and headed off to take part in the Chair's Challenge to walk a 9-mile stretch of the Malvern Hills.

Eighteen people, two very important canine companions and one feline masquerading as the then BSAVA Vice President, braved the heat to complete the challenge and also raise an amazing £3,200.

May also saw our new Fundraising Manager Allie Selby join us. She hit the ground running and ensured the autumn and winter of 2024 has been full of fundraising events and the start of new

fundraising initiatives. **We would like to thank the Mrs DM France-Hayhurst Foundation for their grant of £3200 for a student research project and the Renishaw Charities Committee for their grant of £500. We are also grateful to SAMSoc and The Reed Foundation for helping match-fund donations during the Christmas Big Give event which raised £5,800.**

Huge thanks also go to the BSAVA regions who took part in their own fundraising events for us, including the very popular 'Cocktails and Cytology' event run by the North East region.

On Thursday 19 September, BSAVA staff, volunteers and supporters came together for a presentation to mark the 50th anniversary of BSAVA PetSavers. Fundraising and Grants Manager Sarah Williams spoke about our history and the interesting and vital clinical research projects that have been funded through the years. Lunch was followed by a lively and informative quiz and some delicious 50th anniversary cupcakes.

Our new Fundraising Coordinator Lucy Rathbone joined us in September and completes the strengthened BSAVA PetSavers staff team, putting us on a sound footing to move forward into the next 50 years of funding the future of small animal health.



Having sat on GAC for the last 3 years, I have seen 'behind the scenes' of how and why funding decisions are made.

I feel very reassured that the process is fair, transparent, and ethically sound.

The quality of applications continues to increase, and we are very much in a position of wanting to fund more projects than we have funds for. There are so few charities dedicated to funding work that is dedicated to pets but also has important One Health implications; I would have no hesitation in recommending PetSavers as a worthy cause.

Dr Nina Rzechorzek

DipECVN MRCVS MRC Clinician Scientist Fellow and volunteer Grant Awarding Committee (GAC) Member

Conclusions

It is impossible to describe 50 years, or even 10 years, worth of activities and achievements in one short document, so please take a look at our other articles, our website and social media posts for further information about what we do and how you can help support us.

Like all charitable organisations, our work is made up of an amalgamation of many people's hard work including our supporters, staff, volunteers, fundraisers, donors, sponsors, alumni and of course our researchers. Thanks to all of you.

Rosie Godfrey

Chair PetSavers Management Committee

To help us fund more clinically relevant research into diseases and conditions affecting pets, please donate here:

www.bsava.com/petsavers/donate





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