

Pampered pets

Jenny Moffett presents news stories from around the world showing just how much we're prepared to spend on our animal companions.

An expensive drumstick

A woman from South Wales has spent £3,000 to save her pet chicken's injured leg. Lily the Rhode Island Red trapped her leg in a barbed wire fence earlier this year. Her owner, Vicky Mills, contacted a vet and urged him to do everything he could to save the injured limb. Although the vet warned Mrs Mills that the costs involved in trying to save the leg could be substantial, she was adamant that the surgery should go ahead. Despite huge efforts, the treatment failed and Lily required amputation of the limb. However, Mrs Mills says that the three-year-old bird is doing well and, despite having to take a bank loan out, she believes the money was well spent. Speaking in the *Daily Mail*, Mrs Mills said: "She's worth every penny. I've not had a holiday this year because of the vet's bills. But I love her to bits and it would break my heart if anything happened to her."

Dog billionaire

An American billionaire has left \$12 million (£8.7 million) to her dog in her will. Trouble the Maltese Terrier has inherited a trust fund for the amount by the late hotelier and real estate developer Leona Helmsley. Although Mrs Helmsley also left money to human relatives, Trouble received by far the largest amount. According to the will, which was made public in August, two grandchildren failed to receive anything. The will also left directions that Trouble should live with Mrs Helmsley's brother until her death, when she will be buried

alongside Mrs Helmsley and her husband Harry, who died in 1997. Leona Helmsley was nicknamed 'the Queen of Mean' after her 1988 indictment and subsequent conviction for tax evasion. One employee had quoted her as snarling: "Only the little people pay taxes."

Rent-a-dog

A company in London is offering 'rental dogs'. FlexPetz, which already has several branches in the US, allows people to hire a dog for days, weekends or extended periods of time. Designed for those who cannot commit to owning a dog, the venture was described by a company spokesperson as "a unique concept for dog lovers who are unable to own a full time doggy pal and miss spending time with a canine friend." FlexPetz customers get to spend time with a four-legged companion from a choice of fully house-trained Afghan hounds, Labrador retrievers and Boston terriers. Customers pay a registration fee and a monthly retention fee, as well as a charge for each time they want to 'borrow' a dog. The cost of hiring a dog for one weekend, once all of the costs have been taken into account, can be anything up to £300 (£450).

The UK Blue Cross, however, has expressed its concerns at the service. Blue Cross animal behaviourist Ryan Neile said: "Dogs are dependent on meaningful lifelong relationships with their human owners. Both parties of the human dog partnership develop a strong bond which is underpinned by both trust and understanding. The more deep-rooted a relationship becomes, the more stable and secure the dog will be." "The opposite effect occurs when a dog is passed around from one person or home to another," he explained, "They may become confused, distressed and unpredictable – something we sadly see all too often in dogs that come to The Blue Cross."

