

Russell Jones: Blue Cross's first Pet Poet Laureate

Edinburgh resident Russell Jones is a prize-winning writer, editor and published poet. He's a novelist with a PhD in Creative Writing, he helps to run Shoreline of Infinity's Event Horizon science fiction evenings, and with Claire Askew he co-edited the 5* reviewed *Umbrellas of Edinburgh: Poetry and Prose Inspired by Scotland's Capital City*.



And what's he most famous for? His spaniel Pakkun, of course – 'the best dog in the world', who accompanies him almost everywhere he goes and is something of a local Facebook legend.

Which makes it all the more fitting that Russell has just been appointed by **The Poetry Society** and **Blue Cross** to be the first ever **Pet Poet Laureate**.

Russell was chosen from a shortlist of 20 following a national search to find a poet who demonstrated outstanding creativity in their writing *and* shared Blue Cross's passion for pets and their welfare. His remit is to write a series of poems, each of them about pets, and he's also going to be



inviting everyone to share their own pet-themed poems (the first topic is going to be *Heroes* – and as we all know, every pet is a hero to its owner – so start composing!)

Julia McKechnie-Burke, Fundraising, Marketing and Communications Director at Blue Cross, said;

'We are very excited to present the nation's first Pet Poet Laureate to champion the huge impact pets have on people's lives. We wanted to tap into the wonderful world of poetry, which is undergoing an exciting renaissance and reaching an increasingly diverse audience, to demonstrate our mission in a unique way....'



The Pet Poet Laureate interacts with mum, Ella, and her litter of kittens on whom his launch poem is based

Blue Cross has been helping animals and their owners since 1897. In the Balkan War and the First World War it provided essential veterinary services and supplies to the many animals who were 'called up' – horses, dogs, and even the pigeons who carried vital messages. Nowadays, its staff and volunteers look after over 40,000 pets a year, providing veterinary care for those whose owners can't afford it, rehoming abandoned and unwanted animals, helping with behavioural issues, giving talks and advice on responsible pet ownership, and supporting people whose pets have died. Russell will be investigating all of these themes as he starts his year in this new post.

Ben Rogers, Marketing and Communications Manager at The Poetry Society, which partnered with Blue Cross to judge the competition, said;

'Pets have already left a clear pawprint in bardic history, from the pens of poetry greats including TS Eliot (to) Elizabeth Barrett Browning. With pets so prominent in society and many households considering them part of the family, it is appropriate and exciting for a new poet's voice to step in and respond to how we see our furry friends today...Russell's winning poem offered striking imagery, clever leaps of language and voice, and powerful insights about pets and our relationships with them.'

Russell's first poem is called *A Tempest – for Ella* ('*Beautiful Fairy*'). It's about an abandoned cat and her kittens, and it's about love and homelessness and hope. You can hear Russell read the poem in this short video:

Commenting on his new role, Russell said;

'I'm very chuffed...I feel extremely grateful that the judges chose me as their winner and I can't wait to get started.'

And just to make sure we all know who's the real star, here's a little clip of that super spaniel. Pakkun may have failed as the gun dog he was bred to be, but since he moved in with Russell he's been top at everything a dog can be top at...what better inspiration could a poet want?

If you would like to find out more about **Blue Cross**, there's lots of information, case studies, pet advice, and an online shop selling gifts for humans and accessories for pets, on the charity's [website](#). Russell's poems will appear on the website and on Blue Cross social media throughout the year.

The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a 'more general recognition and appreciation of poetry'. Since then it

has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. It publishes the magazine *The Poetry Review*, runs the National Poetry Competition, the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry and the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award. www.poetrysociety.org.uk

All photos and video of Russell Jones (c) Blue Cross/Nigel Davies. Photo and video of Pakkun (c) Russell Jones.