Ozzy’s Road to Recovery: The Power of a Caring Community

By Sean Gamboa

Editor: Nancy Montgomery

Down but Not Out

Like many stories from the House Rabbit Society Rabbit Center in Richmond, CA, it started with a phone call to Executive Director Anne Martin. In December 2014, she was out Christmas shopping when an Oakland Animal Shelter volunteer called and explained that they had received a new bunny and that she was really worried about him—with good reason. He couldn’t hop normally and was covered in urine scald. All anyone knew was that he was found in a park. The volunteer worried that the shelter wouldn’t be able to provide him adequate treatment. That’s all it took to set in motion HRS and its network of volunteers and others to help a very special rabbit.

A few days later, Oakland Animal Shelter staff handed HRS volunteer Rich Sievers a bunny named Ozzy. At the Rabbit Center, Carolynn Harvey, DVM was ready to conduct the intake health exam and what she and Rich saw was heartbreaking. Ozzy’s hind legs were paralyzed, his skin scalded by urine and red with infection. On Dr. Harvey’s Body Condition Score of 1–9 (with 1 being virtually dead), Ozzy was at 3. That night Ozzy went home with Rich until space opened at the Rabbit Center.

When Anne saw Ozzy, she knew that caring for a rabbit with a spinal injury like his was going to be an enormous commitment. Caring for rabbits with hind leg mobility issues can be an around-the-clock job. There was also the very real possibility that Ozzy might not make it. Despite all of his ailments, Anne noticed some encouraging signs. Ozzy was able to urinate on his own, negating the need for frequent bladder expressions. His two working forelimbs were so strong that they were all she needed to see to know how much life he had in him. As Anne put it, “Ozzy was a trooper.”

A Brave Bun Rallies with Support

Getting Ozzy back to health would require a lot of help. Animal chiropractor Margaret Holiday, DC, who treats HRS adoptable and sanctuary rabbits with mobility issues, evaluated Ozzy’s condition and, after examining him, she was able to perform an adjustment on his spine. While there was a slight improvement, he had a long way to go. His hind legs were fully extended and unbendingly rigid, the result of a compression fracture that damaged his spinal cord and, subsequently, prevented signals from his nervous system that would help his hind legs relax. With physical therapy, Ozzy could possibly regain some form of muscle control. He might not be able to hop like a normal bunny, but he could have a chance at a better quality of life.

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Dr. Harvey suggested that a rehab therapy center for dogs and cats in Menlo Park, called Scout’s House, might be able to help Ozzy regain some mobility. I offered to take him to his appointment, some 50 miles from the Rabbit Center. As Ozzy and I sat in the waiting room, I grabbed the carrier and held it to my chest as the room filled with large dogs. I would have predicted Ozzy would be on the verge of complete panic, but nope, not Ozzy. He was a lot braver than I was. After the staff found a quiet room for us away from the barking and clatter, Leigh Stevens, DVM, and Krista Niebaum, MPT, Director of Rehabilitation, examined Ozzy—and went right to physical therapy. A few minutes in, an appreciative Ozzy began licking the doctor’s leg. Knowing that I’d have to demonstrate his exercises to Anne and the caregivers at the Rabbit Center, I took out my iPhone to document the session.

When we finished, Dr. Stevens told us that Scout’s Fund, the former charitable arm of Scout’s House, would pay for half of Ozzy’s therapy session. They had never sponsored a rabbit before, but they made an exception for Ozzy. To celebrate, we made an impromptu pit stop at the local 7-Eleven for refreshments—a soda for me and a banana for Ozzy. We then headed back to Richmond.

I showed Anne the video and relayed what the vet had told me. Starting that day, Rabbit Center staff Animal Caregivers, Anna Andersen and Celeste de Santiago, conducted daily physical therapy with Ozzy. By late February, he was finally able to scoot himself around. He was no longer dragging half his body using his forelimbs. Dr. Holiday also noticed the improvement. Considering where Ozzy had been in December, it was really encouraging.

Creative Solutions
It wasn’t great on all fronts, however. Even with Ozzy’s improved mobility, he developed pressure sores, since he was on his side so much. To keep him off his side, every morning either Anna or Celeste would put Ozzy in a stroller propped up on rolled towels and roll him into the office so he wouldn’t get lonely. As weeks went by, the pressure sores began to heal. Ozzy was now a fixture in the Rabbit Center office. Visitors would walk up to Ozzy’s stroller, gently stroke his head, and ask for his story.

As his mobility improved, he needed more opportunities for regular exercise. Volunteer Carolyn Mosher constructed a circular race track made out of foam pool flotation noodles. With the noodles supporting Ozzy’s sides, he was able to shuffle down the makeshift track. It was both funny and heartwarming to all who watched. And, most importantly, the exercise seemed to help keep Ozzy in good spirits.

But there always seemed to be a new set of challenges for Ozzy. Possibly due to the skin infection and an (continued on page 10)

Ozzie’s hind legs were fully extended and unbendingly rigid, the result of a compression fracture that damaged his spinal cord and, subsequently, prevented signals from his nervous system that would help his hind legs relax.
Part of House Rabbit Society’s mission is to share the truth about what it’s really like to interact with real rabbits. Early on (nearly 30 ago), I was blessed that Patrick the lop changed my young adulthood by disproving everything I thought I knew. A few years later, as HRS Public Information Director (pre-internet, when the idea of rabbits in the house was new), I learned to streamline the essential “Did you know...” into the two-minute sound bite for print/radio/TV interviews. But there’s another audience that we all encounter daily: the person who hasn’t yet met a real rabbit who has been encouraged to explore his or her curiosity in the living room or under the bed. Often, these conversations last only a few sentences, such as with the person in the espresso line who comments on your “adopt, don’t shop” bunny t-shirt or the cashier who notices bunnies on your credit card.

Patrick and his bunny cohorts taught me how to blow people’s mindset on a species with three words: “Rabbits are opinionated.” However, this observation is in no way unique. It’s a conclusion reached by many others since then whose lives have also been touched by real rabbits. Joy Gioia, whose many roles include being Chapter Manager of the St. Louis House Rabbit Society as well as a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, declared from the podium at last year’s HRS Educators Conference: “Rabbits are the most opinionated [animals] I have ever worked with.”

I’d recently been considering my own interaction with my rabbit Bex, a four-year-old rescue who snatches the veggie from my hand and sprints away rather than risking the remote (but in her mind very real) possibility of being picked up. During a group session at a retreat, I mentioned that when I got home, I wanted to work on our friendship—that is, the one between me and my bunny. In response to that word choice, I saw, or imagined, the subtle cock of a chin here, a flashbulb above a head there. Previously, I had distractedly focused on my role of showing Bex trust—by giving her space rather than sitting beside her, working with her bit by bit.

Yes! I want the two-way interaction of mutual acceptance and taking time get to know one another better. Bex has concepts to teach me about herself and her species. •

Do you have suggestions or feedback you’d like to submit to House Rabbit Journal? You can mail us at HRJEditor@rabbit.org or visit rabbit.org/submissions for guidelines on submitting original articles, photos, or illustrations.
Ready, Set, Go...or Not
by Amy Bremers

It’s well known: rabbits hop. In rabbit agility courses, rabbits don’t just hop; they bound over bars, leap through tires, speed through tunnels, run along teeter-totters, and scuttle around curves. They demonstrate their versatility by negotiating a course of obstacles.

Physically, agility courses are a great form of exercise, says Susan Brown, DVM and former HRS Medical Director. “Rabbits are designed to jump and run and move in various ways,” and agility requires different body movements. Mentally, agility leads to problem-solving for the rabbits, Dr. Brown adds. “Making choices to gain something of value is very stimulating.”

Mel Goulet, co-founder of Vancouver Rabbit Agility Club (VRAC) and volunteer for Vancouver Rabbit Rescue and Advocacy, a House Rabbit Society chapter in British Columbia, explains that, emotionally, rabbits who participate in agility may be less stressed when handled and when traveling because they are used to different experiences.

Agility can also enhance the image of rabbits. Alison Giese of the San Diego Rabbit Agility Club (SDRAC), a part of San Diego HRS, points out that “when the public sees rabbits doing agility, it demonstrates to them that rabbits are intelligent, interactive animals who shouldn’t spend their lives sitting in a cage.”

The key, emphasizes Dr. Brown, is positive reinforcement, in which the rabbit exhibits a behavior and then receives something beneficial such as praise, affection, or treats. “You build trust anytime you interact with your rabbit in a non-intrusive way.”

On the other hand—and an argument against rabbits participating in agility—negative reinforcement is not trust-building. For example, when people use their feet to guide rabbits where to go, although it does not physically hurt the rabbits, “they’re only getting back on the path because they want to get away from your feet, not because they want to do the activity,” says Dr. Brown.

One HRS member who attended two HRS-sponsored agility programs left feeling wary of the sport. “It [felt] like the rabbits [were] being coerced,” she says. The rabbits needed to be tapped on their rears in order to move, she says. “The people doing it love them, but some of the rabbits seemed really uncomfortable.”

Being coerced does not build trust, Dr. Brown says. Instead of feet, barriers should be used in training so that the rabbits see which way they need to go to get the reward. “Non-coercive methods are wonderfully bond-building.”

Another argument against rabbit agility is the competition aspect—especially when prizes have major value, because it “takes the focus away from the rabbits to...”
HRS’ Position Regarding Rabbit Agility Games and Competitions:

Rabbit agility courses should always benefit the rabbits, not the people, and should be for the fun, exercise, and stimulation of the rabbits, as well as to help create a positive relationship between the rabbit and the rabbit’s caretakers. No rabbit should be forced to enter any competition or event in which he or she does not want to willingly engage and should never be stressed or pushed beyond his or her capacity. All events should be monitored for the rabbits’ welfare above all. Caretakers should observe a rabbit’s body language for any sign that the rabbit is stressed or uncomfortable and should not let their own desire to participate blind them to the well-being of their rabbits.

ourselves,” Dr. Brown says. Mel points out that the VRAC shows don’t keep track of points. “The competition aspect is for the audience, but they also want to see the funny stuff, like rabbits knocking off bars.”

Agility itself is not negative; the negative aspect is when rabbits are made to do it and don’t want to, Dr. Brown explains. At the SDRAC, rabbits initially wander around the course until they appear to feel comfortable. “Once they get over that initial fear of the unknown, the rabbits do seem to enjoy themselves,” Alison says. Mel says that at VRAC, if people don’t realize their rabbits are uncomfortable, she will let them know.

When rabbits are having fun, it’s easy to tell, Dr. Brown says. “They are so excited: their ears are forward; they’re tracking you, ready for what you’re going to give them; they’re interacting with you; they’ll run over to the course, ready to go.”

Certain rabbits should not participate, though. According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), these include long-eared lops who could injure their ears, giant breeds who could injure their joints when landing, long-furred rabbits whose coats could interfere with vision or cause overheating, and juvenile rabbits whose bones and joints are not completely developed. Dr. Brown recommends that rabbits be examined by their veterinarians to make sure they do not have arthritis, are not obese, and are otherwise healthy. Clubs associated with HRS require the rabbits be spayed or neutered.

At a typical practice, rabbits hop the course individually unless they are bonded or are not aggressive with each other. The San Diego club meetings are low-key and low-stress, Alison says.

Shows, however, have more noise and activity. “The rabbits who participate at the shows are the ones who come to all the practices and are comfortable,” Mel emphasizes. The club decides who is going to participate in each event, including timed trials, height bars, and side-by-side races. But some days, even rabbits who usually enjoy shows may not be up for participating. “We don’t put them through any events,” and when a rabbit has had enough, “there’s no pressure to go in any others,” Mel says.

If considering rabbit agility courses, Dr. Brown recommends attending a class without your rabbit first. “Assess what methods they use, if you are comfortable using them with your rabbit, and if the rabbits there appear to be having a good time.” In addition, she notes that agility is not something that has to be done in public with other people and rabbits—it can be done at home. “You can teach your rabbits to jump on boxes and run through tunnels.” Most of all, she says, “agility should be fun.”

Murdoch hops over the height bars at a weekly practice.

Photograph by Amara Der
I

nhabit the rabbit. That’s what the cast members and crew of the independent production of Watership Down did in six sold-out shows in April 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland. Chuck Green and Douglas Johnson adapted the play from the beloved novel and Debra Lenik served as production stage manager.

An award-winning novel released in 1972, Watership Down, by British author Richard Adams, creates a world in which a group of rabbits leave their warren in search of a new home. Adams’s language and mythology about rabbits have long been embraced by House Rabbit Society members and people with rabbit companions worldwide. The rabbit characters in Adams’s book show determination, foresight, and creativity—all traits that are familiar to people who know and understand rabbits.

“We really wanted to find people who loved the book,” Debra said. “We were sold out before we opened.”

The intimate play was performed on the floor with floor-level seating so that the audience was physically close to the performers.

To prepare for their roles, actors watched videos of real-life rabbits to ensure they captured the essence of the animals’ movements. Additionally, costume designer Emily Slaughter brought her own two rabbits to a rehearsal and the actors followed the bunnies.

Movement Director Sarah Gorman also helped the actions of the stage rabbits remain realistic.

“The movement [of the actors] was very important to us,” Debra stated, adding that the performers worked to build up their fitness because they were on their haunches so much. “In this show, if you relaxed on stage, you looked like a person instead of a rabbit.”

The actors portraying rabbits wore long-sleeved thermal undershirts and leggings, which were dyed according to which warren they represented. They also wore hoods with wire ears covered in fabric. The rabbit makeup was subtle. “We didn’t want them to look [like] the Easter Bunny,” Debra said.

Fight scenes were choreographed by Sarah, who is trained in stage combat. A mattress—part of the soft, natural-looking set—gave the actors a safe place to fall. The set also included blankets, greens, flowers, and even a burrow that the “rabbits” hopped through to enter the stage area.

The myths and stories from the book, including the adventures of El-ah-rairah (the mythical rabbit who is Prince of the Forest), were portrayed with shadow puppets on a muslin screen. In one particularly emotional scene that includes the well-known “My heart has joined the Thousand, for my friend stopped running today,” a whip crack sound effect enhanced the impact of a snare. “That moment in the show was powerful,” Debra said.

Live music provided by guitar, hand drums, cello, and vibraphone rounded out the performances, which “didn’t need anything sophisticated to succeed,” Debra said.

Audience members cried during the show and shared their appreciation with the cast and crew. The performance maintained “that balance of a deep emotional connection without being maudlin,” Debra said.

Before each performance, House Rabbit Society volunteers were on hand in the venue’s foyer with real rabbits so guests could visit and learn about rabbits.

Although the show has been closed for some time, it has produced a legacy. According to Debra, “the cast and production team got really close”—so much so that they formed their own company whose productions will focus on simplicity, unique movement, and storytelling.

Its name? “Frith and Inle”—in Adams’s rabbit language, “Sun and Moon.”
Real Bunnies Steal Patrons’ Hearts
by Dresden Lackey, Volunteer Coordinator, Virginia/Maryland/DC HRS Chapter

When I learned about the production of Watership Down through the art scene in Baltimore, my first reaction, as with any public event involving rabbits, was, “Can this be an opportunity to spread the message of rescue and education?”

Debra Lenik, the stage manager, was interested but warned me it was a small space. The production itself took place on the second floor of a historical church-turned-venue known as “Church & Company.” Downstairs, where we set up and where tickets were collected, was not much more than a foyer. I decided it was more important to set up an x-pen with the rabbits than to have a proper display table—it was clear both would not fit.

The stars of our show were a bonded pair of brothers named Rip and Stratus. Everyone who entered to see the performance or waited in line for the restroom came through that foyer, so every audience member had an opportunity to pet the rabbits and ask questions. Many patrons told me stories of their own loving house rabbits. We also attracted the attention of people passing by on the sidewalk, some of whom stopped in to talk to the rabbits.

Best of all, Harvey, another of our rabbits, was adopted thanks to our outreach at Watership Down.

Watership Down Leaves Its Mark
by Amy Bremers

I first read Watership Down when I was 14, long before the idea of living with rabbits entered my mind. But even then and still now, after a couple dozen reads over almost 30 years, passages such as these take my breath away:

• “I’d rather succeed in doing what we can than fail to do what we can’t.”
• “...Silflay hraka, u embleer rah.” (Who knew rabbits could swear?)
• “My Chief Rabbit has told me to defend this run and until he says otherwise I shall stay here.”
• “It seemed to Hazel that he would not be needing his body any more, so he left it lying on the edge of the ditch...”

Watership Down is arguably one of the most impactful pieces of literature for animal lovers. Although Richard Adams (who is still alive and writing as of press time!) has maintained that the book is not an allegory or statement, it certainly seems full of commentary on humans’ lack of compassion for animals:

• “It was just because we were in their way. They killed us to suit themselves.”
• “Animals don’t behave like men...they don’t sit down and set their wits to work to devise ways of spoiling other creatures’ lives and hurting them.”

Watership Down depicts how all of us—humans, rabbits, animals—experience grief and joy, injustice and compassion, fear and love. While reading, we weep, we laugh, we pause to absorb the wisdom in both the rabbits’ speech and Adams’s narration. Drawn in, we see ourselves reflected in the lives of the rabbits and are moved to contemplate our own relationships and our interactions with the natural world. We remember what we have read and are changed by it—that’s the power of this book.

One of the play’s performers goes to Rabbit School to learn how to move like a real lagomorph.

Photographs by Doug Johnson and Dresden Lackey
As one of the pioneering spirits behind the creation of House Rabbit Society, Amy Espie helped shape the direction of HRS in its early and middle years. By sharing her keen perceptions of how to better comprehend the world as seen by house rabbits and other rescued animals, her work continues to influence attitudes of people all over the planet. She was an animal rescuer and foster parent, humane educator, shelter staff behaviorist, House Rabbit Journal Behavior Editor, and one of the founders of HRS. She was also a photographer, writer, and artist. We were individuals incorporating as a nonprofit rescue group, and Amy’s alternative perspectives on how to interact with and think about companion rabbits, as well as how she shaped our role in working with shelters, helped provide HRS with a vision that was somewhat unique to our organization at that time.

Amy was there at the start of HRS in the Bay Area, then moved to Virginia. After Amy passed away, Marinell Harriman compiled a number of her Zen-like, black-and-white photographs and video clips of bunnies, dogs, cats, and guinea pigs at home with each other. They are studies of rabbits and other companion animals doing ordinary things at home and, as such, capture some of the quiet magnificence of house rabbits. Her subtle work showed the world a new concept: that rabbits (and friends) can be our everyday roommates. To watch the video as well as reexperience (or visit for the first time) Amy’s incredibly incisive Journal articles on bunny behavior, volunteering, and the experience of working at a shelter, please visit rabbit.org/espie. The page also includes memorial tributes sharing what it was like to know this quiet woman whose legacy still broadcasts loudly on behalf of house rabbits and other special beings.

-Beth Woolbright
**FLOORSCAPES**

Sharing Amy’s Wisdom with a New Generation

“Enjoy her exuberance, laugh at her mischievousness, ponder the complexity of the rabbit psyche. Allow yourself to be infected by her joy at being alive and obnoxious and pushy. Once you’ve seen a rabbit kick up her heels, shake her head, leap straight up in the air and make a 180-degree turn before landing, you’ll know you’ve been initiated into a very select society.”

- Rebel with Paws

“Words hold a powerful magic. Invoke it often. One day someone will come up to you and say, ‘We had our rabbit spayed because of what you told us.’ Somewhere a rabbit you’ll never meet will have another chance at life. The spell may be cast at any time. You never know.”

- You Never Know

“Everything we do at House Rabbit Society must pass a simple test: the rabbit comes first. We adapt ourselves and our environment to meet their needs, because we love and respect them—and because the reverse ethic prevails out in the wide world. Our rabbits don’t have to earn their keep by popping out of a magician’s hat, or sitting on our laps. They have only to be themselves, cranky or affectionate, lively or spud-like.”

- Clicker Training Your Rabbit

“The animal care technicians at the shelter are the bravest people in the world ( . . . ) And every now and then I force myself to witness what they must face every day. That same dog who they cared for, petted, and talked to must finally be given the only thing we have left to offer: a gentle, respectful death. What have we come to when the best we can do is to kill them kindly?”

- Saying Goodbye Every Day

“Creating a place where cats and rabbits can live together peaceably is a satisfying endeavor. It makes you think, if this predator can snuggle with this prey animal, maybe there’s hope for a compassionate world, after all. It’s a start, anyway.”

- Cats and Rabbits

“House Rabbit Society fosterer Amy Shapiro [Espie] rescued a partially paralyzed rabbit who required nursing care. When he died six months later, I reminded Amy that she had given him six months of happiness. ‘No,’ Amy corrected. ‘He gave me six months of happiness.’”

- Marinell Harriman

Photographs by Amy Espie
over-reliance on his fore-limbs, Ozzy developed abscesses on both his front paws. Exercise and physical therapy had to be put on hold. It seemed like Ozzy could not catch a break. Although he was better in some regards, he still looked terrible. Half-shaven and covered in greasy ointment as a result of the skin infection, his paws were wrapped in bandages. None of the oral or topical antibiotics were working on his abscesses. Ozzy’s health was once again in a state of limbo.

As the daily supportive care continued, Anna became increasingly worried for Ozzy. However, despite the medical challenge that Ozzy was, she never forgot his personality underneath. She said to me, “He was always happier than he was suffering. I think he was the most uncomfortable when I was applying ointment or washing him; but when he was in the office with his people, he was really happy. He still loved his food, his friends, being petted; and then you remember that he’s still a bunny and he’s enjoying a life of his own.”

Finally, after months of treatment, Ozzy’s skin infection began to heal and there was just enough healed skin around his abdomen for him to be neutered, which was great news. During the procedure, Dr. Harvey took a sample of his abscesses to culture. Now, knowing that they were from a drug-resistant strain of bacteria, targeted antibiotics helped the abscesses to finally begin to heal.

**Home at Last: The Chance They All Deserve**

Under the close care of both Dr. Harvey and Dr. Michele Kim, Ozzy followed. He had, in fact, become a celebrity. Visitors increasingly recognized the rabbit in the stroller and marveled at his resiliency. He was making a lot of friends and getting lots of affection. Ozzy loved all of it.

Yet, despite his celebrity status, Ozzy was still a special needs rabbit who required specialized care. His physical therapy sessions were no longer productive. Anna told me that “he got fed up with it,” and he would begin nipping at her during the sessions. It was time to accept that Ozzy’s mobility would not improve any further. Despite all the progress already made, it was still a little hard to hear. What we all worried about the most was who was going to adopt a special needs rabbit like Ozzy.

HRS foster parent Donna Jensen had always given Ozzy extra attention when she was at the Rabbit Center, sharing helpful suggestions to increase his comfort and happiness. When she offered to adopt Ozzy into her home, it was a significant milestone for all of us involved in Ozzy’s journey. With Donna’s years of experience taking care of special needs rabbits, Ozzy couldn’t ask for a better adopter. Ozzy now has a great home, a loving caregiver, and hundreds of followers.
House Rabbit Society Members Save Lives (And Get Discounts)!
by Anne Martin, PhD, Executive Director

Today a bunny will arrive at House Rabbit Society headquarters. Thousands of House Rabbit Society members will be there for her. She will be a little scared, arriving from a local shelter’s euthanasia list. Our members will provide fresh food, blankets, and toys, and help HRS staff in giving her daily care. She may have been in a home where she was misunderstood, did not get spayed, or did not get needed medical care.

HRS members give her—and other bunnies like her—as much time as she needs to find the perfect home. Members fund her spay, the antibiotics or surgery she will need to get better, supplies for her foster home, and support to sanctuary foster homes for rabbits who need lifelong special care. Members help our small staff and many volunteers provide education so her adopters know everything they need to give her a wonderful home. HRS also provides Emergency Rescue Grants to HRS chapters and rescues that aid many rabbits in a crisis. For everyone who has seen a photo of a rabbit in need and felt the ache of wanting to help one more rabbit, your membership with House Rabbit Society is a way that you can directly save the lives of thousands of rabbits, through rescue, spay/neuter, and education.

HRS members receive our highly anticipated publication, House Rabbit Journal. In 2016, we will bring you everything you love about the Journal—wonderful health information, behavior insights, stories of rescue, discussions of rabbits in culture, activism updates, and more—in full color!

Starting November 2015, your HRS member card will feature coupon codes with members-only online discounts. Our partners include:

- BunnyRabbitToys: Enrich your rabbit’s living space with chewable and durable wooden furniture and hayracks.
- Busy Bunny: Satisfy your rabbit’s urge to chew and play with willow and wooden toys.
- Cats & Rabbits & More: Provide your rabbit with a cardboard playhouse for hiding and chewing fun with Cottontail Cottages and Hopper Hideaways.
- Small Pet Select: Provide your rabbit fresh hay for digestive and dental health with high-quality orchard grass, Timothy hay, and pellets.

Members in the San Francisco Bay Area enjoy discounts on rabbit boarding at our international headquarters (visit rabbitcenter.org/boarding).

For those able to make a monthly gift, join the Bunny Brigade, and your membership will renew automatically. You receive our member benefits, plus a $10 Busy Bunny gift certificate. With a monthly gift of $30 or more, you also receive a handmade House Rabbit Society necklace. Ongoing support allows HRS to deepen and expand our life-saving efforts.

Join the HRS Bunny Brigade!
By pledging to make a monthly donation, you will become a member of the very special HRS BUNNY BRIGADE MONTHLY GIVING CLUB of members who sustain our daily operations and put food into our rabbits’ mouths. A pledge of $30 per month or more qualifies you to receive our thank you gift, an official House Rabbit Society necklace. Join online:

rabbit.org/bunnybrigade

House Rabbit Society Memberships
United States: $20; International: $28
House Rabbit Journal is included. Support your local HRS chapter and visit our website for chapter information. Enroll online or mail in the form below.

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Whole Foods Gets It; We Made a Difference

by Margo DeMello, PhD, House Rabbit Society President

Countless groups and individuals have been working since last summer to convince Whole Foods Market to stop selling rabbit meat. HRS members and rabbit lovers from across the country—many under the rubric of Rabbit Advocacy Network—have been protesting at their local stores, calling and emailing Whole Foods representatives, educating their friends and coworkers, and much more. With all of this activity, as well as a national petition generating over 50,000 signatures, it should have been clear to Whole Foods that rabbit lovers and animal lovers alike would not sit by while animals who we consider to be pets are slaughtered. In September 2015, an HRS member and Whole Foods shareholder addressed the Whole Foods shareholders meeting, speaking eloquently on behalf of us all, and asked when Whole Foods planned to stop rabbit meat sales. To all of our surprise, Whole Foods’ Chief Operating Officer announced for the first time in public that Whole Foods had decided to cease the sales of all rabbit meat by the end of 2015 (when their final shipments are complete).

We couldn’t be more thrilled. Rabbit lovers have been celebrating since, but also have been gearing up to put more pressure on other retailers selling rabbit meat, such as Kroger. We hope that they will follow in Whole Foods’ footsteps.

What One Person Can Do

by Lois M. Emmens

In 1999, I went into a pet shop for tropical fish and walked out two hours later with a bunny. A couple of months after that, I got my second bun, and my love affair with rabbits had begun. I became an HRS member, writing a yearly check.

After reading about the Make Mine Chocolate!™ (MMC) campaign in 2006, I decided to make some calls to the media. I didn’t think I would get far, but MMC was the right message at the right time with the right materials, and an article about it ran in the Philadelphia Inquirer. It was subsequently picked up by other papers and eventually led to a live radio interview with my veterinarian. I like to think my efforts changed a few minds about buying a live rabbit for Easter that year.

Through House Rabbit Journal last year, I learned about Whole Foods’ surprising and disappointing decision to sell rabbit meat. I wrote emails to the company and talked to my local store manager; I made the most impassioned plea possible. During my travels to different cities this year, I used every opportunity to express my disappointment to local store and meat managers. I took my business elsewhere. I signed the petition and asked everyone I know for their support. After reading in this summer’s Journal that the sales were ongoing, I sent more emails to the decision-makers at Whole Foods. I received a reply from someone in the company, but not the answer I was looking for—until the wonderful news revealed last week.

Whether it’s sending an email, signing a petition, rescuing or fostering, helping at a shelter, making phone calls, educating the public about bunnies as pets, biking or walking to raise money—or even being a vocal shareholder—anyone can make a contribution. Listen to your heart; you never know what impact you’ll have until you try. A collaboration of many people and many tactics accomplishes goals. If nothing else, write a check to your nonprofit of choice to help do the right thing for bunnies. →