In graduate school I had an opportunity to build an expert system. It modeled the types of observations and decisions that nurses perform when assessing whether patients have the resources to overcome their illnesses. Patients with fewer resources to combat illness or disease were considered to be in “adaptive impoverishment.” Measurements of the patient’s blood pressure, temperature, pulse, and other physiological dimensions would all be captured as well as the patient’s social connections, emotional state, spiritual beliefs, and strength of the patient’s support network.

In modeling the system, which was based on interviews with expert nurses, what was remarkable is that factors unrelated to the physiology of the patient (e.g., their social support, emotional state, etc.) could have a greater influence on their ability to fight their illness than the physiological readings. Patients perfectly within normal ranges of most physiological measures who were impoverished in other dimensions (lacking social and emotional support) could have more difficulty in managing their illnesses. Patients with strong social support networks could have a number of physical readings outside the normal ranges, but nonetheless achieve remarkable recoveries.

One example is a woman who had battled throat cancer for two years and was in remission. She had signed up to take some classes in the hope for a future healthy life. After a recheck, her doctor bluntly informed her that her cancer had returned. Sadly, she passed away two days later for no physiological reason, as the cancer had not yet progressed to be fatal. What the doctor didn’t realize is that she was adaptively impoverished, and her resilience to deal with her illness was completely depleted.

The lesson of the importance of the non-physiological dimensions on healing always has stuck with me, so much so that when a bunny arrives at our Georgia HRS shelter with multiple medical issues I want to know the bunny’s background so I can gauge whether the bunny may need more assistance in recovery. Because rabbits are highly social, emotional, and intelligent beings, they need similar support networks. They seem to do best when fighting an illness if they have the support of a companion, or reinforcement in the form of love and attention from humans, in the least stressful environment possible.

Caeden was a rabbit at the Georgia HRS who demonstrated this concept. The first time I saw Caeden and heard his story, I assessed him as adaptively impoverished. His owner was homeless and staying in a shelter. When the shelter discovered she had a rabbit in her room, Caeden was tied outside to a tree with a leash. Caeden had suffered fight wounds, probably from a second bunny who had passed away, and he had mite infestations and other parasitic issues. The owner had no money for proper rabbit food, so she had given Caeden an apple and a can of moldy creamed corn. His diet alone should have killed him. The owner expected him to die from his injuries but when he didn’t, she took him to a vet to be put to sleep. When she found she could not afford to have the vet perform the euthanasia, she took Caeden back and tried to do it herself by feeding him her antidepressant medications/poison. Imagine the mindset of a rabbit attempting to survive outdoors with inadequate shelter, inappropriate food or no food, wounded, then having humans either abandon him or attempt to poison him.

Caeden, fully recovered and waiting for a forever home.
Fortunately, we received a call about a bunny tied to a tree, and a volunteer rushed to his rescue. In addition to his medical injuries, all of Caeden’s support networks had failed him. Although he still tried to survive, his demeanor seemed depressed and hopeless. Part of his recovery was rebuilding his trust by reassuring him, in ways that he could understand, that he was now safe: protected and surrounded by a network of people who would care for him and attend not only to his medical needs, but also to his emotional ones.

As expected, Caeden was not resilient and took a long time to recover. However, with the care of numerous Georgia HRS volunteers who became his new support network—feeding him, providing medicine when needed, and giving copious petting sessions and loving voices of support—Caeden now is fully recovered and waiting in a wonderful foster home until he can find his forever home. For HRS volunteers, it is cases such as this—that fill up your heart. It is as good for the caretaker as it is for the bunny being nurtured, and is one of the great rewards our volunteers experience.

“We always take into consideration the social and emotional factors,” says June Booth, an HRS educator and fosterer in Slidell, LA. “The ones who need special care in that area come to me. I love working with them as I do with elder buns. These bunnies give back far more than I can give to them. From the elders, I learn dignity: when one’s body changes, you have to deal with fewer physical abilities than you had as a youngster. It is the heart and soul that counts. From those needing social/emotional help, I feel privileged to help them. Being an adopted person myself, I know how they can feel and react in this strange environment.”

In addition to emotional support offered by a human, having a companion of their own kind can be invaluable in building a support network for bunnies. When I try to describe to others the value to a rabbit of having a second rabbit—even if it is not a bonded pair—I describe it as if aliens (kind, well-meaning aliens) took me to another planet. I would be terrified out of my mind, first by the fact aliens had traveled to our planet and abducted me, and second by the very nature of being alone in a bunch of weird-looking beings trying to tell whether I’m a pet, entertainment, a medical experiment, or dinner. Sadly, bunnies fill those last three roles far too frequently in our society. The aliens may feed me well and take care of all my physical needs, but I’d likely experience incredible stress from the uncertainty and fear. If they suddenly brought me a new human, I wouldn’t care what that person looked like, what language they spoke, or even if they were necessarily a good person back on Earth. I’d be clinging to that human like an over-eater clings to a bag of Cheetos.

I’m always happy when bunnies make it out of our medical quarantine area (which I liken to the silver, metallic alien spaceship) and can at least be moved into the adoption room where they can see that they are with other rabbits. As a volunteer, I also try to spend time with those bunnies in our medical area, giving them gentle touches and talking to them softly to help them feel supported and cared for. In doing so I’m trying to build up their support network for the dimensions that I know are every bit as important to their physical recovery.

Joy Gioia, chapter manager of St. Louis HRS, also adds “Not only do buns from poor backgrounds need extra love and attention, but also we categorize some of the very happy and social buns as ‘needy,’ and make extra attempts to adopt them to people who will have a lot of time for them because we’re concerned that they will go downhill if they don’t get that social time. Some buns seem more interested in human attention and, although bond mates are wonderful, these buns really need a lot of human attention. They appeal to everyone because they’re so social, but that doesn’t mean everyone is right for them.”

(continued on page 8)
Regarding *Bunny Road Trip!* (Abé, Vol. 5, No. 11) the one big thing that’s missing is probably something Shana Abé does without conscious thought. Before allowing your bunny(s) to roam the hotel room, very carefully (with flashlight in hand) inspect all areas (e.g., under beds and behind furniture) they can access. I have found d-CON and other poisons (chocolate is one we forget) in out-of-sight places. Electric cords, sharp objects, and other physical hazards lurk in bunny-reachable nooks and crannies. I cannot state too strongly how important it is to be very diligent in your inspection. A close call with a missed rat poison container the same color as the carpet in a AAA three-star property taught me, no matter how tired I was, to make an inch-by-inch check with a flashlight.

My method is to first clear the bathroom as it is normally very easy to do and affords a comfortable and quiet area for the post-trip acclimatization. Additionally, it allows the humans to do all the checking and organizing of the rest of the room without further stressing the furry ones.

Tim Dowdle  
Member from Issue One!

*Thanks for the great additional advice. And thank you for helping HRS help rabbits for over 25 years!*

Hi Amy,

I enjoyed reading your article in the Journal about rabbit massage (Bremers, Vol. 5, No.12). I have been rescuing and fostering for House Rabbit Society since 1991. We have had very few rabbits with digestive issues but when we do, massage is one of the first things we do besides subcutaneous fluids. A gentle massage can get thing moving in their digestive tract. Some of us have found that even the movement of a car ride to the vet can get a rabbit back on track. I usually place the rabbit on a Bed Buddy, which you warm in the microwave, for a minute or more. Then, I gently place the rabbit on my lap and put both hands on the side of the stomach. I gently massage for 15 or 20 minutes. I’m not saying don’t see your vet, but sometimes the rabbit will start eating the next day. If there is a gas bubble, a gentle massage can break this up and get the rabbit back on track.

Sincerely,

Donna Jensen  
House Rabbit Society, Burrow Inn  
Northern California

*Thanks, Donna! You’re right; massage can definitely be helpful when rabbits are experiencing a little digestive trouble, especially if the trouble is gas. Massage can break that up and make a rabbit feel so much better.*  
*Thanks for all you do to help rabbits!*

Q: What can I do to try to keep my bunny’s nails shorter?

A: *The frequency with which a rabbit’s nails need to be trimmed depends on the surface they hop on. If your bunny is on carpeting or vinyl, you can try this idea. Place the bunny’s water bowl on a layer of bricks or else flip a granite tile over so the rough side is up and place the bowl on that. In theory, regularly hopping on that rough surface may result in wearing down the nails—at least a little.*

Editor: Do you have suggestions, comments, feedback you’d like to submit to *House Rabbit Journal*? We’d love to hear from you. Email us at HRJEditor@rabbit.org

Go to rabbit.org/hrj for guidelines on submitting original articles, photos, or illustrations.
By Linda Cook

When did you begin to love bunnies? It’s a personal question, and one that often has no simple answers. For me, one of my first introductions to literature started it all. My kindergarten teacher read “The Velveteen Rabbit” to us—oh! How I loved, and still love, that book.

For more decades than I care to share, I have continued to read and collect books about rabbits. Children’s books, in particular, may be the first experience any of us have with the characteristics of rabbit protagonists. Impressionable minds retain those first concepts of bunnydom in tales of whimsy, humor, and gentleness.

Here’s a look at a baker’s dozen of my favorite children’s books about rabbits. Some are silly, some are thought-provoking, and some are almost spiritual in their approach to the grace and character of rabbits. I hope this list provides some reading options for both those who have children in their lives, and those who do not. Gather ’round, regardless of your ages, and let’s read about bunnies!

**Bunnicula: A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery**, by Deborah and James Howe, illustrated by Alan Daniel. This book for grade-school children reminds me a little of the humor found in my beloved Beverly Cleary books (think “Henry and Ribsy”). The story is told by Harold, the family dog, who recounts the arrival of a bunny discovered in a theater that was showing “Dracula.” All indications, including the fact that the new member of the family sleeps all day and wakes only at night, lead Harold to believe that Bunnicula is a vampire. This story is perfect to read aloud.

**A Bunny for All Seasons**, by Janet Schulman, illustrated by Meilo So. This book, which will be appreciated by the very youngest and the very oldest of bunny aficionados, is a work of art. Schulman’s text describes the happiness that a bunny finds in all four seasons of nature, and So’s gorgeous watercolors, which are very striking, delicately depict the transitions of nature and the bunny herself.

**A Classic Illustrated Treasury of Rabbits**, Chronicle Books, San Francisco. This delightful hardback book offers wonderful poems by different authors, as well as full-color drawings and illustrations by various artists within its 28 pages. Walter de la Mare and William Wordsworth’s poetry is included, along with the likes of Elizabeth Coatsworth’s “Song of the Rabbits Outside the Tavern,” of which I am especially fond. It refers to the rabbits being outdoors in the cold, watching the people inside who “laugh and eat and are warm.” But “they never dance as we dance....”

**The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes**, by DuBose Heyward, illustrated by Marjorie Flack Larsson. This book, first published in 1939, is about a little girl rabbit who grows up to be Mother Cottontail, the parent of 21 children. She longs to be an Easter Bunny, and finds that her skills, courage, and determination suit her well in her quest. Although this is a wonderful adventure story, it is also a female empowerment story. The illustrations are cute and the heroine is clever in this book that’s based upon a story Heyward told to his daughter.

**Guess How Much I Love You**, by Sam McBratney, illustrated by Anita Jeram. This simple, sweet story for the youngest bunnyophiles comes in a variety of editions. Regardless of its format, the tale is timeless. A little hare tries to tell his dad how much he loves him (“I love you as high as I can hop”), but the older hare always bests his descriptions. It’s the perfect book to read aloud or to hear right before you fall asleep. The fanciful drawings are charming, fun to look at, and discuss.

**Jeremy: The Tale of an Honest Bunny**, by Jan Karon, illustrated by Teri Weidner. In an effort to find the girl for whom he was made, toy bunny Jeremy, a British rabbit, is determined to complete his journey to North Carolina. The impeccably dressed Jeremy meets a variety of people and other creatures, including a parrot, an owl, and a kindly ship’s captain. The color illustrations are just lovely. Karon, author of the
“Mitford” books, wrote this storybook—a good tale to read aloud chapter by chapter—for her daughter.

**Rita Rabbit and the Runaway Pie**, by Valorie Tatum, illustrated by Tanya Stewart. This little paperback was written by a special-education teacher who wanted to provide families with a book that would help them focus on family-oriented goals. The humorous story is about the three sons of a mother rabbit who has just baked a pie. The black-and-white drawings retain the “rabbitiness” of the mischievous bunny siblings in this tale that’s just 26 pages long.

**Little Bunny on the Move**, by Peter McCarty, who also is the illustrator. In this picture book with the softest of pastels and very little text, a little white bunny is traveling. We don’t know where the bunny is going, but the bunny obviously does, and does not want to stop. One of my favorite aspects of this book is that the bunny appears only as “Little Bunny,” and is not gender-specific, so anyone can identify with this eye-catching protagonist. Each illustration depicts shimmering, delicate textures combined with moody, surrealistic beauty.

**The Little Rabbit Who Wanted Red Wings**, by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, illustrations by Dorothy Grider. There seem to be two camps regarding this picture book for little children: those who love it and those who do not. Because I read this book when I was a child, I cherished it for the themes I discovered in the story: “Be careful what you wish for” and “Be yourself.” In this wonderfully illustrated version (there are several editions of this book), a bunny yearns for red wings. But they turn out to be more of a curse than gift. Other readers see the theme of “Be afraid of what you don’t understand” in this story.

**The Velveteen Rabbit**, by Margery Williams, illustrated by William Nicholson. This long-beloved book has been updated and published in many other editions, but this is my favorite. I love Nicholson’s gentle illustrations, and the language that remains true to the period. It is a fantasy story of a toy rabbit who desperately wants to become Real. But more than that, it is a tender story about hope, and how love transforms us. I cannot read this book without crying, and have spoken to other people who tell me that the story touches something deep within their souls.

“This book, which will be appreciated by the very youngest and the very oldest of bunny aficionados, is a work of art.”

- Linda Cook

**What Have you Done, Davy?**, by Brigitte Weninger (translated by Rosemary Lanning), illustrated by Eve Tharlet. This is the delightful tale of Davy, a rambunctious bunny who unwittingly wreaks havoc everywhere he goes one day. He annoys his brothers and his sister, as well as his mother, and they all become upset with him. Anyone, regardless of age, will smile at Davy’s antics and the accidents he causes. The color illustrations are beautiful and are sure to please little readers or listeners, who may notice that Davy is the only one in his family who wears slippers.

**While We Were Out**, by Ho Baek Lee. This whimsical picture book is inspired by a true story about the Lee family bunny. A family goes out and their inquisitive rabbit finds adventure in closets and other forbidden places while they’re away. And how do they discover where their bunny has been when they return? Well...how do you know where your rabbit has been? This is the only children’s book I’ve seen in which rabbit poop plays a significant role! I appreciate the matter-of-fact way the bunny “trail” is presented.

**Voyage to the Bunny Planet**, by Rosemary Wells, who is also the illustrator. “Far beyond the moon and stars/Twenty light-years south of Mars/Spins the gentle Bunny Planet/And the Bunny Queen is Janet.” Wells’ work is not a single book, but a collection of three, all featuring adorable bunnies and humorously illustrated by Wells herself. “Moss Pillows” stars a bespectacled bunny named Robert, who has a rough day as a visitor in his cousins’ home; “First Tomato” stars little Claire, who also has a disappointing day; and “The Island Light” stars Felix, whose illness involves getting sick in front of the whole class and a scary shot. Each wee bunny finds respite in an imaginary trip to the Bunny Planet, where Queen Janet is there to comfort them.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: While writing this article, I heard from many other readers who want to share their thoughts on their beloved books featuring bunnies! A “Part 2” of this article already is in the works. Please share your favorite rabbit-related readings from children’s literature (including title, edition, author, and publication date) with Linda Cook at linda@rabbit.org.
Respecting Rabbits
by Nancy Montgomery and Amy Bremers

Rabbits just seem to have innate dignity and self-respect. For the most part, they keep themselves groomed, they “sit up straight,” they observe their surroundings, and they are aware of what they are able to do—and get away with. They also have respect for each other: they are attuned to each other’s needs and who’s who in their “hierarchy.” Because rabbits are so vulnerable, however, it is up to us to help them maintain this sense of dignity. We can do so by respecting them and their unique personalities.

First, respecting rabbits means to take care of them. This includes ensuring they have a clean environment; a change of toys for stimulation and novelty, especially when we are away; plenty of time for exercise; fur that is brushed so that they don’t ingest it; trimmed nails; proper food and clean water; and lots of affection. Taking care of them also includes taking them to the veterinarian at least once a year.

To respect rabbits, we need to see things from the rabbits’ point of view. If they are snatched up in a hurry, or carried incorrectly or put down too fast by some giant (to them) creature, they become scared and anxious and can get hurt easily. Rabbits require support from underneath when being carried or held. They like to know when someone is coming so that they are not startled. They need to be moved carefully; talking to them and petting their sides or rear can let them know you are about to pick them up. Since rabbits like to be on solid ground, getting down on the floor with them also shows respect. By slowing down and methodically doing what makes sense for rabbits, we respect their needs for security and stability.

Sandy Parshall, Program Manager at HRS, says that (unless they’re younger than a year), “Rabbits are adults who are capable of making their own decisions—about their partners, about their belongings, about their living spaces.” Respecting them means that we should “give them enough attention and space to let them make those decisions for themselves.” Many of us like to think of them as children, she says. We give them toys and buy them cute things for their habitats. But sometimes treating them like children can lead to us thinking that we always know what’s best for them, when sometimes it’s best to let the rabbits tell us. Respect means trusting their judgment.

“Rabbits are adults who are capable of making their own decisions. Give them enough attention and space to let them make those decisions for themselves.” - Sandy Parshall

Unless it’s for their safety and well-being, respecting rabbits means not forcing anything upon them, particularly something they wouldn’t do on their own. For example, dressing them up or parading them around so that strangers can see and touch them might give us attention we want, but rabbits aren’t dolls or commodities for us to show. They are creatures in their own right and they should be respected by being provided with the routine and quiet they like. And sometimes, even though it can be difficult, respecting them also means not petting them when we can tell they want to be alone.

For special-needs rabbits, respect means making them a priority. They often require us to perform painstaking and “off-putting” additional tasks. Peggy (pictured) is missing one hind leg and has trouble standing up after using the litter box; sometimes she ends up dragging around litter and hay stuck to a clump on her rear end. This necessitates a 30-minute cleaning—gently pulling the pieces off, cleaning with a special shampoo, and blow drying on low while combing to prevent mats. Peggy’s “mom,” Nancy Montgomery, says, “In respecting Peggy and who she is, it is my job to think how Peggy feels, what she has to go through and has been through, how she lives the challenges every day.”

By meeting her needs right away and handling her extra gently, she says, “I can help her maintain her dignity though she has to have these things done to her. I must take time for Peggy to be a real priority in my life and rabbit household.”

By making time to care for our rabbits and realizing what life is like for them, we can provide opportunities for their happiness and peace. Adapting to the workings of our rabbits’ world instead of expecting them to adjust to ours shows true respect.

Photograph by Damir Galzina
Respecting rabbits also means knowing how your rabbit wants to be treated—and doing it. Match your rabbit’s personality to the type he or she most closely resembles; then, get to work.

“The Love Bunny”  
Also known as the “lagomorph lap dog,” he craves and even demands love from everyone he meets. He positions himself in the middle of foot traffic. Two leggeds cannot walk by without stroking his head. He’ll hop up on the bed in the middle of the night and nuzzle skin until he is cuddled. He might kiss one hand if the other is doing a great job. He accepts being held during full bunny pets. He is easily hypnotized. When he encounters his mates, he shoves his head under their nose. When meeting a non-hostile rabbit, he’ll approach and even lean into her side. He expects her to instantly like him.
• Do: Pet, pet, pet.
• Don’t: Scare the Love Bunny while he is napping contentedly.
• Maybe: When he grunts, try pets. If grunts subside as you stroke, he has trained you.

-Gayle Kiviat

“The Type-A”  
His boldness knows no bounds. When you enter his domain—even to place water, hay, or a cardboard roll—he flies from under his loft to take a nip from an intruding hand and then disappears just as quickly. He races through tunnels and leaps over huts and houses when it’s his turn to exercise. But the other side of this adventurer soaks up affection as he climbs up your chest then turns around so that he can safely monitor the room while he snuggles under your neck.
• Do: Handle the Type-A carefully since he’s excitable and driven.
• Do: Provide stimulation for all his senses and plenty of space to run.
• Don’t: Ignore his need for rest time in a soft retreat.

-Nancy Montgomery

“The Clever Mensa Member”  
Every object is a toy to chew on, dig in, or fling about. Exercise pens are meant to be tugged open and rattled loudly to get attention from all beings. New places are fun to explore, be they rooms, stairs, chairs, or tables. She understands what you are asking her to do; when she is in the mood—because of hunger, curiosity, or boredom—she will agree. If she is domineering, it means stay out of her way. If she is playful, it means explore with me. If she is people-shy, it means tell them what “I” want.
• Do: Learn from the Clever Mensa Member and figure out which bribes work best.
• Do: Barricade her pen using heights, weights, padlocks.
• Don’t: Put a toy in her face unless you want it thrown back in yours.
• Sometimes: When you can outsmart her, still let her win.

-Gayle Kiviat

“The Boss” (or “The Diva”)  
The Boss needs to be dominant over not only her rabbit companions but also her humans. She is highly intelligent, inquisitive, and manipulative. She will do things on her terms and only if there’s something in it for her. She does not tolerate being petted or picked up. She loves to be near her people and will get very close if she trusts that they won’t touch her. Deep down she really is sweet and would never bite her humans during nail clipping or butt baths. You find out how much she trusts you when you take her to the vet.
• Do: Talk sweetly to the Boss.
• Don’t: Try to touch her.
• Don’t: Scold her, as it hurts her pride.

-Maureen O’Neill

“The Nurse”  
Her goal in life is to groom or clean rabbits in her care, and she takes this job very seriously. If a rabbit under her care has eye issues, the nurse will make sure the rabbit’s eye is kept clean and gunk-free. A rabbit who is unable to groom his rear or ear because of a disability will find that his nurse will keep him clean by taking care of those hard-to-reach places.
• Do: Find her a mate (AKA patient).
• Don’t: Stand in the way of her calling.

-Donna Jensen

“The Follower”  
The Follower is a happy-go-lucky bunny. While he doesn’t like being picked up, you can pet him on the floor all day long. He always partakes in adventures around the house, but you will never see him in the lead. He tolerates the occasional nip from his partner without retaliation. What he lacks in bravado he makes up for in charm.
• Do: Pamper the Follower with lots of pets.
• Do: Give him his treats where he can finish them before they are stolen.
• Don’t: Try to pick him up.

-Maureen O’Neill
How Do You Do?
Introducing People to Rabbits
By Beth Woolbright

Rabbit guardians who’ve overseen bunny-to-bunny introductions know that putting two (spayed/neutered) rabbits together does not instantly make a friendship, because bunnies do not give affection away freely. Friendship is something that must be eased into; it must be earned. Occasionally kisses are bestowed quickly, but usually there’s a bit of first-date awkwardness.

So, too, it can be for a person wanting to meet a bunny. Some folks come into the Rabbit Center, in Richmond, CA, expecting every bunny to run up to them and sniff their hands. Others expect rabbits to be the aloof or skittish creatures and are surprised at the bun who rises on hind legs to sniff their fingers. The truth is that rabbits come in all personalities and with very different social graces and attitudes—as do people. Over the past 12 years I’ve been an adoption counselor at the Rabbit Center, the bunnies and I have shared a technique for how to introduce new people without causing feelings of rejection on either side.

When approaching a rabbit you don’t know, do not offer your fingers in front of their face the way one does with a dog. Rabbits have flat faces with eyes on the sides of their heads. Something hovering between their eyes, in front of their nose, is threatening and liable to get forcefully boxed or bitten by the rabbit, or cause bunny to retreat.

Usually, we hang out at the open door of bunny’s cage or sit on the floor with the rabbit. When letting a bunny out of their enclosure, first give them time to play, run off energy, and explore new corners. When bunny has settled, it’s time for saying “hello.” In the meantime, I counsel people to sit on the floor and do absolutely nothing. Let bunny come to you.

Next, show the person how to introduce themself to the bunny. A concept that has not occurred to a lot of people is that a rabbit has a preference. I find it underscores an element of respect for the individual animal that the person may not have recognized.

Second, have the person put their fist on the floor directly in front of the rabbit’s nose. It’s important that the hand not be moving. If bunny ignores it, it can be moved closer. Next, it’s up to the bunny. If bunny makes a motion to leave, I say, it means she’s “busy.” If bunny doesn’t move, it generally means that it’s okay to pet her—on the top of the head, avoiding the ticklish nose and whiskers. Long, firm sweeps over the ears are generally okay.

That’s it. The person doesn’t feel rejected because bunny left. Bunny doesn’t feel threatened by being pursued. It’s a mutual agreement of timing, and it opens the door to a new friendship.

Many owners with multi-bunny households have witnessed how a sick rabbit rallied when given supportive care from a partner, even one of a different species such as an affectionate dog or cat. Many of our volunteers who foster rabbits also have stories about witnessing bunnies that should withdraw, given the abuse or physical mistreatment they have endured. Instead, once the bunnies know they are in a safe and supportive environment, they blossom and offer copious binkies and kisses. Their dances show pure joy.

Learning to assess a rabbit in times of illness (as well as in times of good health), much the way an “expert nurse” would a patient, gives us as caregivers an opportunity to not just focus on the physical dimensions of what each bunny needs, but to also recognize those times that a bunny needs emotional support and nurturing as well. As rescuers I often feel that we can just look at the rabbit’s attitude and behavior without knowing its history, which frequently we do not, and assess whether it is adaptively impoverished. When we can confirm that they came from a neglectful or abusive situation, then those are the ones that need a little extra attention and support, from human or animal, to recover faster from illness or loss. All bunny owners and caretakers should recognize just how valuable social and emotional wellbeing are to the overall health and happiness of our beloved companions.

P.S. Bunnies may indeed also have a spiritual dimension. We just can’t ask them. Perhaps Bunny God looks something like a large nebulous banana in the sky. Well, at least one in a lip-smacking dream...

(continued from page 2)
By Anne Martin, PhD

Bun Bun, a black and white spotted bunny, sleeps soundly on her back under anesthesia covered in a green surgical drape. Wearing a cap and mask, volunteer Gabriela Chavez opens the wrapped package of surgical instruments. Dr. Michele Kim opens the interior wrapping and takes the tools she needs. Dr. Kim carefully and quickly spays Bun Bun, while Gabriela makes notes on the medical record on a clipboard. After surgery is over, Gabriela carries Bun Bun into the recovery area to monitor her as she wakes up and her temperature returns to normal. Bun Bun is just one of the 50+ rabbits that House Rabbit Society has spayed/neutered since the February 2014 opening day of our monthly community rabbit spay/neuter clinic at headquarters in Richmond, CA!

House Rabbit Society’s Rabbit Center and international headquarters rescues over a hundred rabbits each year from euthanasia lists at San Francisco Bay Area shelters, but there are many more unwanted rabbits arriving at shelters every day. With our new community spay/neuter clinic, we are able to proactively prevent accidental litters, uterine cancer, and hormonal behaviors (and help rabbits to use the litter box!), keeping bunnies healthy and in their homes. With our spay/neuter clinic, we strike at the root of the problem.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, there are only a couple options for low-cost rabbit spay/neuter. We get calls from people who have been told by veterinary offices that it will cost $300 or more to spay a rabbit, and are deterred by the cost. At just $50 for males or females, our spay/neuter clinic is the lowest-cost rabbit spay/neuter surgery in the entire Bay Area.

We offer microchipping at the time of surgery for only $10 more. A microchip is ideal if a rabbit accidentally escapes or becomes separated from their guardian, as in the event of a fire or earthquake. If the found rabbit is brought to a vet’s office or shelter, staff can call the family immediately and the rabbit will not be euthanized. With this information, many of our clients choose to have their rabbit microchipped.

We teamed up with Fix Our Ferals, an organization that runs a spay/neuter center for free roaming and stray cats, located a mile from House Rabbit Society. We use their facility and surgery suite, which includes parking, heated surgery tables, surgery lights, anesthesia machines, autoclaves, laundry, and kitchen. House Rabbit Society provides insurance coverage for our use of the clinic, pays the Fix Our Ferals’ clinic manager’s hourly rate for the day, and donates two rolls of toilet paper. House Rabbit Society must bring our own surgical instruments, medications, supplies, and paper towels, as well as our own volunteer veterinarians, paid registered vet tech (RVT), and volunteer assistants.

Building this clinic has been an adventure! From forceps to sutures, we purchased over 250 separate items just to get the clinic up and running. We have giant storage tubs full of spay/neuter supplies. The morning of the clinic, we drive the tubs over and set up our equipment for the day, and at the end of the day, we break it all back down.

Rabbits arrive at House Rabbit Society the morning of surgery between 7-8am, in carriers. Guardians pay, fill out a surgery release, and provide information.
Spay/neuter clinic volunteers prepare medications, examine rabbits, and prepare for surgery day.

on their rabbit. Staff weigh the bunnies and look them over for injuries or illnesses. They drive the rabbits over in full car-loads to the clinic, where volunteers are waiting at 8:30am to start administering medications.

Veterinarians Dr. Carolynn Harvey and Dr. Michele Kim volunteer their valuable surgery time, wearing bunny-print scrubs that peek out from under their surgery gowns. Melinda Reed, RVT, induces anesthesia under the supervision of our vets and preps rabbits for surgery. Our wonderful crew of volunteers shepherds each rabbit individually through the entire anesthesia, surgery, and recovery process. Volunteers closely monitor each rabbit’s temperature, heart rate, and respiratory rate, and complete the medical record form. Fix Our Ferals Clinic Manager Michelle Jewell washes instruments when they come out of surgery and runs the autoclave continuously during the day, so we can reuse the instruments as quickly as possible.

While our staffing costs are low, surgical supplies are surprisingly expensive. One box of sutures costs $50, and we need several boxes for every clinic day. Add that to all of the medications, sterilization supplies, and surgical supplies needed for 15-20 surgeries for each surgery day, and it really adds up. We also keep our volunteers and surgeons fueled and happy by providing a vegan lunch, snacks, and coffee.

As of May 2014, we have performed just over 50 surgeries—all in only four months! We have a 100% success rate, sending bunnies home a little groggy, but no worse for wear. Each guardian is personally counseled when they come to pick up their rabbit, both with aftercare instructions and bunny lifestyle recommendations. For rabbits with fleas or mites, we treat with Revolution at the clinic and discuss the benefits of indoor living. With obese rabbits, we discuss diet and exercise changes that will improve their rabbit’s health. For bunnies with long nails, we trim the nails, but also let families know we offer $10 nail trims at House Rabbit Society where we can teach them how. We call and follow up with each guardian a day or two after surgery, making sure every bunny has a smooth recovery.

Where do all of these unfixed rabbits come from, you might ask. When the appointment is scheduled, we ask where they got the rabbit originally. Our growing dataset shows that rabbits are being purchased directly from breeders, county fairs, pet/feed stores, flea markets, as well as found stray and acquired from other people who have had accidental litters. We can use this information to both target future outreach for the spay/neuter clinic, and better understand where shelter rabbits may be originating.

Our clinic is a valuable service to rabbits and to the community. It not only helps the individual rabbits served, but it helps the entire region by reducing the burden of accidental litters on our shelters. Simply put, our clinic saves lives. There is huge demand for low-cost rabbit spay/neuter. We are booked solid two months in advance and refer people who need to get their rabbits fixed sooner to other clinics. Every rabbit we can keep in their home through spay/neuter, and every accidental litter prevented, is a rabbit House Rabbit Society doesn’t have to rescue from the local shelters.

If your chapter is interested in starting a clinic in your region, we would be happy to tell you more. Please contact anne@rabbit.org, if you have the time and resources to devote to starting a clinic and want more information!

Your support of House Rabbit Society makes it possible for us to take on innovative new projects, like our spay/neuter clinic. Your donations enable us to buy the instruments and equipment we need to run a state-of-the-art rabbit surgery clinic, available to the public at very low cost. To everyone who has contributed to getting our clinic off the ground, thank you!

Volunteer Susan Kennedy monitors rabbits recovering from surgery and makes a note on a rabbit’s chart.
Please join us in thanking House Rabbit Society’s Bunny Brigade members!

Ann Yanagi
Donna McKnight
Stephani Jenzen
Sapphira Wang
Anthony Cimino
Louise Auray- Pepin
Nicole Rubio
Andrew Revak
Kimberly Kris Chen
Alicia Brosterhous
Jean Silva
Christine Podhora
Stacy Schmidt
Susan Trimble
Peter Zapp
Paul LeVasseur
Debra J. Carron
Laili Goahartaudje Samori
Reiko Narita
Heather G. DeNoia
Kirsten Lodge
Robert Smith
Sepida P. Szagor
Tonita Penkrot
Richard & Nancy Haseman
Charlotte M. King
Becky & Ron Jorgensen
Claire Jordan
Lisa Connolly
Blake Grauerholz
Brandy Abernethy Downing
Roseanne M. Niccolucci
Isla Brown
Anthony Zepeda
Melina Verbeek
Brigette Zacharczenko
Nancy Jane LaRoche
Nancy Jane Perkins
Marcia L. Suarez
Kateri Anderson
Marie Arrowsmith
Sandra A Martin
Tamara Matheson
Amy C. Deitchley
Joanne Hayashi
Lynne Lee
Catherine Ann Faver
Tammy Nogles
Brenda Moot
Kate McKinlay
Maureen Loza
Deborra Terlet
Debbie Culver
Monica Lin
Han-Yu Lo
Jim Tom Bordelon
Janet Glessner
Elizabeth Ayala
Bowen Cho
Kelli Hepler
Laura Leff
Margarite Carter
Pilar Mendoza
Sean Gamboa
Mark McClure
Diane & Jason Suen
Ernest & Bonnie Selke
Helen J. Dong
Joel Borden
Carolann Koplak
Joyce Chee
Cynthia Gong
Gail & Charles Jennings
Jason Wiener
Joyce E. Lively
Ronald Kardon
Susan Friday
Luke McGuire
Raymond Bayes
Jessica Socse
Susan Simms
Linda Chestnut
Alanna M Ward
Lisa Marie Adamo
Gerard Jacobson
Heather Andrus
Jean Reinsys
Samantha Fisher
Kimberly Farrell
Shawn Elyce Taylor
John Pound
Christine Sinnette
Melanie & Timothy Pocoke
Kathy Merritt
Kenix Yu
Erin White
Kathy Bolton
Kim M Casolari
Kathleen Rossa
Stephanie Wiley
Lia Germain
Christian Zmasek
Christopher Amaya
Coleen-Marie Hanson
Susan Mullen
Jo Anne Ellis
Melody Wang
Carol Whitehurst
Dan Chapman
Patty M Higgin
Lois M. Veeder
Stacey Jonasen
Darcy Feuerstein
Katrina Cepeda
Cheryl Jeanne Gehrke
Julie Behm
Eliote Durham
Dan Barton Kane
Tanya Eakes
Allegra Roberts
Annie Shiu
Tracy Reeb
Kyna Morgan
Julie Ann LaGuardia
James Driver
Cecily Harris
Robert Massey
Benita & Dennis Moore
Donna Goyette
Marlene A. Larkin
Stacey Ho
Jacqueline Ednah MacKay
Karen A. Trapani
Jeannie Taylor

Twenty-five years of eleventh-hour rescues. When their time is up at animal shelters, rabbits with your support are placed in foster care until adoptive matches are made. Membership enrollment in House Rabbit Society and all other donations continue to help provide needy rabbits with food, housing, veterinary care, and enough time to find them permanent homes.

House Rabbit Society Membership
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.

NAME
STREET
CITY
STATE/PROVINCE  ZIP
EMAIL

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:
  http://www.rabbit.org/bunnybrigade

House Rabbit Society
148 Broadway, Richmond, California 94804
www.rabbit.org/ 510-970-7575
An Hour Before Midnight: Buying a Bunny a Little Time

By Anne Martin, PhD

In April, I received an urgent email from the director of the animal shelter in Berkeley, CA. A fluffy black lionhead named Midnight had a “very bad eye” and was at risk of euthanasia—I told her House Rabbit Society would take him. The next day, Midnight was transported to House Rabbit Society.

Dr. Serena Brenner, a rabbit-savvy veterinarian, found the bad eye had a large cataract and an abscess. She got him started on medications and recommended a visit with a specialist. We took Midnight to see a veterinary ophthalmologist, Dr. Deborah Friedman, who recommended removal of the eye to prevent painful glaucoma from developing. In May, his abscessed eye was removed by veterinary surgeon Dr. Michele Kim, and Midnight is making a swift recovery. He is doing great as a one-eyed bunny, and we expect he will be adopted quickly. The Berkeley shelter’s staff thanked us and said, “I’m excited that HRS can do so much. We are entering a new (overdue) era for shelter rabbits!”

House Rabbit Society was able to unhesitatingly say “yes” and jump into action to help a bunny with medical needs because of the support of our Bunny Brigade members. Our Bunny Brigade members have joined House Rabbit Society’s monthly giving club at a level that works with their budgets. Municipal shelters do not have the resources to seek specialist veterinary care and complex surgeries to aid a rabbit in need like Midnight. But together, over one hundred members strong, the Bunny Brigade allows House Rabbit Society to help these most vulnerable rabbits.

Every month, House Rabbit Society spends thousands of dollars on veterinary care, including spay and neuter, medications, x-rays, blood work, and vet visits. Every month, new rabbits come to House Rabbit Society and get the veterinary care and TLC they need to find their forever homes. And every month, we have the support of the Bunny Brigade members.

A heartfelt thank you to each of our Bunny Brigade members for their ongoing support of House Rabbit Society and our rescue and education work.

When you join the Bunny Brigade today at $30 a month or higher, you receive an engraved House Rabbit Society pendant as a token of our appreciation. When you join the Bunny Brigade, at any level, you receive a $10 gift certificate for bunny toys from our friends at Busy Bunny, and you give the gift of lifesaving care for rabbits like Midnight.

Join the Bunny Brigade today. Visit: rabbit.org/bunnybrigade

Photograph by Sandy Parshall