

Rabbits in Shelters

Improving Care and Adoption in the Animal Shelter



Who are Rabbits?



The Morphology of the Rabbit Ears



- Independent motion
- Heat regulation
- Sound detection
- Mites and debris can collect in base of outer ear
- Labrynth in inner ear regulates body position; damage to the labrynth causes head tilt

The Morphology of the Rabbit

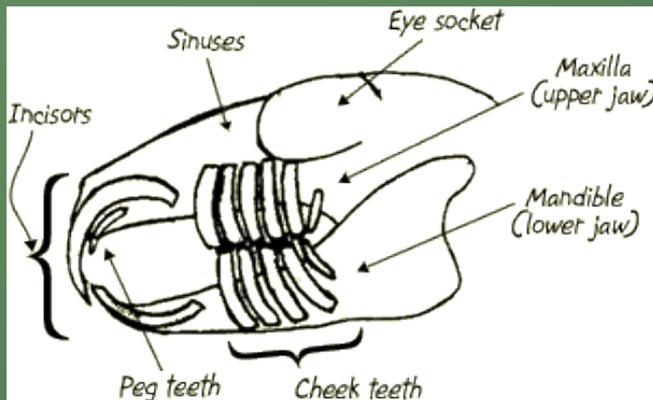
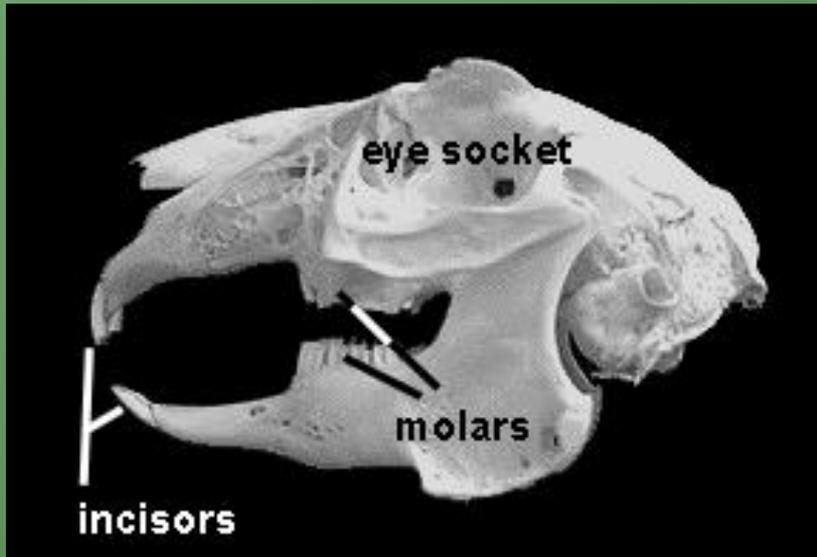


Eyes

- Large eyes
- Placement on side/top of head
- Great peripheral vision—nearly 360°
- Poor short range vision
- No real depth perception
- blind spot in front of face
- Scanning or parallax to help with vision, esp. with albinos



The Morphology of the Rabbit



Eyes

- Dental disorders often the cause of chronic runny eye
- Intruded tooth roots and molar spurs both can block tear ducts; Blocked tear ducts cause eyes to run
- Retrobulbar abscesses or intraocular infections can also be caused by impacted tooth roots
- Solutions: tooth removal, tear duct flushing; mutual grooming is a low impact way to help

The Morphology of the Rabbit



Nose

- Forward facing nostrils compensate for blind spot in front of face
- Nose wiggling indicates sniffing as well as interest in an object or situation
- Obligate nose breather: no other real option

The Morphology of the Rabbit

Teeth



- Continuous growth of teeth can cause problems when jaw is misaligned: malocclusion
- Chewing hard objects does NOT keep teeth trimmed
- Solution: Trimming, filing, or tooth removal

The Morphology of the Rabbit



Eating

- Herbivores
- High fiber, low quality diet in wild
- Prehensile lips and sharp incisors grab and cut food; molars chew it

The Morphology of the Rabbit

Evacuation



- Fecal pellets
- Cecal pellets or cecotropes pass back through the digestive tract and out
- Coprophagy

The Morphology of the Rabbit



Feet

- No footpads = no protection against hard or wire bottomed cages and other surfaces
- Result = sore hocks

The Morphology of the Rabbit



Other features

- Crepuscular
- Extreme heat sensitivity
- Cannot vomit
- Light skeleton (7-8% of body weight; cat's is 13%)
- Symptom masking
- Can give up in extreme pain
- Can die from extreme fright

The Behavior of the Rabbit

Communication



- Thumping
- Growling
- Oinking
- Teeth grinding (“purring”)
- Teeth chattering
- Scream only in dire pain or fear

The Behavior of the Rabbit

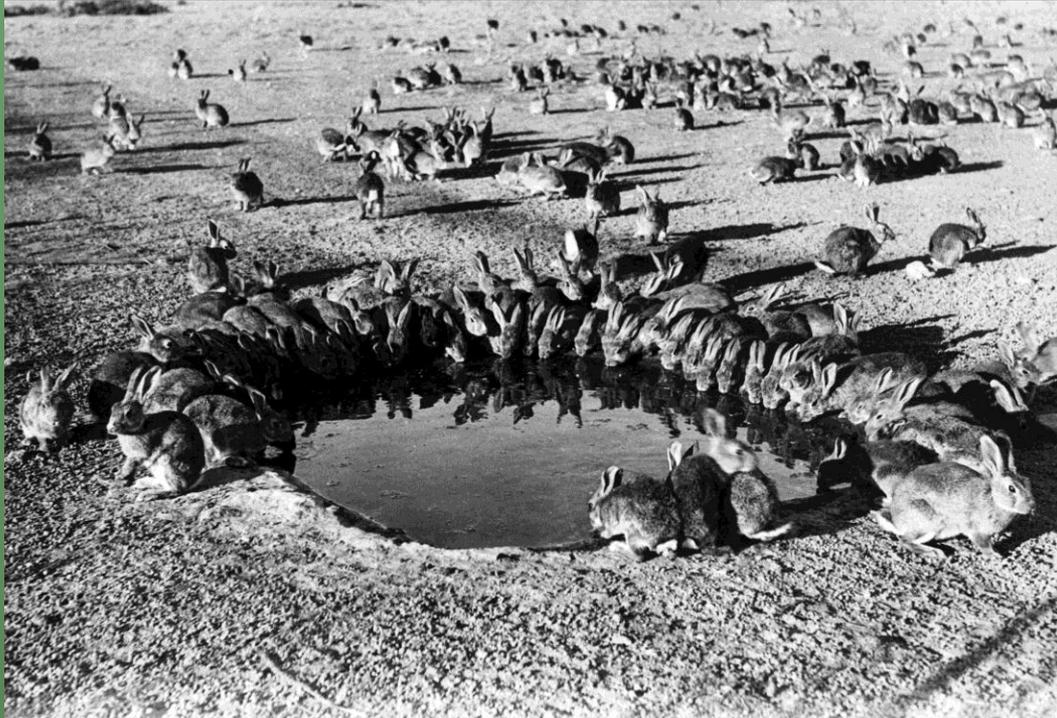


Territorial

- Scent glands under chin (chinning)
- Scent around genitals: marking with urine and feces
- Fighting



The Behavior of the Rabbit



Social Animals

- Wild rabbits live in large warrens with hundreds of rabbits
- Domesticated rabbits, too, are social and thrive on companionship

Rabbits in the Shelter



Brant Ward / The Chronicle

HRS Rabbit Center, Richmond, CA

Introduction

- Rabbits can and should be seen as companion animals; not livestock
- *They are litter box trainable*
- *They are affectionate*
- *They are playful*
- *They get along great with cats and well-trained dogs*
- They are not “starter” pets, children’s pets, and do not thrive when confined to a cage

Knowing this information will not only help you to better care for the rabbits at your shelter, but will allow you to make better adoptions.

Housing Options

Housing Options

- House Indoors!
- Cat room or separate small animal room
- Cage fundamentals: litterbox, hay, food, water, rug, toys, hidey box (if space allows), cage card to tell personality
- *How rabbits are housed at the shelter will impact whether they will be adopted, and how they'll be cared for in their new homes*

Why Indoors?



Outdoor rabbits susceptible to:

- Weather
- Parasites
- diseases transmitted by insects
- attack by predators
- poisonous plants
- lack of attention from caretaker means missed signs of illness
- Loneliness
- Sore hocks from cage floors

Cage Possibilities: Stacking

PVC Stacking Cages



Steel Stacking Cages



Albuquerque Animal Services
“Lucky Paws” Adoption Center

HRS Rabbit Center, Richmond, CA

More Stacking Cages

Metal



Escondido Humane Society

Metal



Baltimore Humane Society

More Cage Options

Bank of Cages in Hallway



San Diego Humane Society

Cages in rabbit room



Hayward Animal Shelter

Separate Rabbit Facilities

Cottage



Gazebo



Cage Possibilities: Condos from Leith Petwerks

Single, Double, Triple



Leith Petwerks

Stacked Single Units



DuPage County Animal Care and Control

Inside Cage Set Up



HRS Rabbit Center, Richmond, CA

Play Pens, Display Pens

Large Wall Units



Inside View



North Georgia House Rabbit Society

Play Pens, Display Pens

More Wall Units



Inside View



HRS Rabbit Center, Richmond, CA

Play Pens, Display Pens

Glass Display Unit



San Diego Humane Society

Glass Display Unit



Humane Animal Welfare Society

Custom Display Area



San Diego Humane Society

Custom Display Area



Humane Society of Silicon Valley

Intake Procedures

Intake Procedures

1. Find out about rabbit's previous living conditions
2. Sex rabbit
3. Make sure staff knows proper handling
4. Intake exam
5. Grooming if needed
6. Screen for behavioral issues (cage-aggressive rabbits are very common)
7. Spay or neuter rabbit prior to adoption
8. Housing pairs singly or together?

Intake Questionnaire

- How old is the rabbit?
- What sex is the rabbit? How do you know?
- Spayed/neutered?
- Has the rabbit ever had a litter?
- Has the rabbit ever had contact with any other rabbit(s)? When was the last time?
- Where did you buy the rabbit or how did you acquire the rabbit?
- How long have you had the rabbit?
- Has the rabbit been housed indoors or out? Type of cage?
- What bedding materials were used for the rabbit? Pine/cedar chips?
- Has the rabbit ever been to a vet? Name/phone number of vet?
- Who was in charge of rabbit care in your household?
- How often/hard does the rabbit usually bite?
- How often/hard does the rabbit usually scratch?
- How many kids usually interact with the rabbit; how many adults?
- Has the rabbit ever been out of his cage? How often?
- What health problems has the rabbit had? (fleas, ticks, fur mites, ear mites, dental problems, skin problems, runny eyes, runny nose, sneezing, anorexia, digestive problems)
- What kind of (commercial) food has the rabbit been eating? Has the rabbit ever had vegetables? Hay?
- How does the rabbit drink water - bowl or bottle?
- Rabbit's temperament/personality? (friendly, shy, aggressive, fearful, etc.)

Sexing Rabbits



Rabbit Handling

- Remember: light skeleton breaks easily – struggling can break back and/or bruise spinal cord, causing paralysis or hindquarter paresis;
- Handling should be aimed at not only keeping rabbit (and handler) safe, but also at minimizing stress to rabbit.
- Always control back, legs, belly. Scruff only when no other options exist, and always support hind end.
- Begin by stroking the top of the head.
- Do not offer your hand for a bunny to sniff the way you would to a dog.
- Most rabbits also do not like having the tips of their noses or chins touched.
- Their feet also tend to be ticklish.



Place the palm of your hand under the rabbit's tummy & lift



ALWAYS support the rabbit's back & hind quarters



Keep the rabbit snuggled against
your body



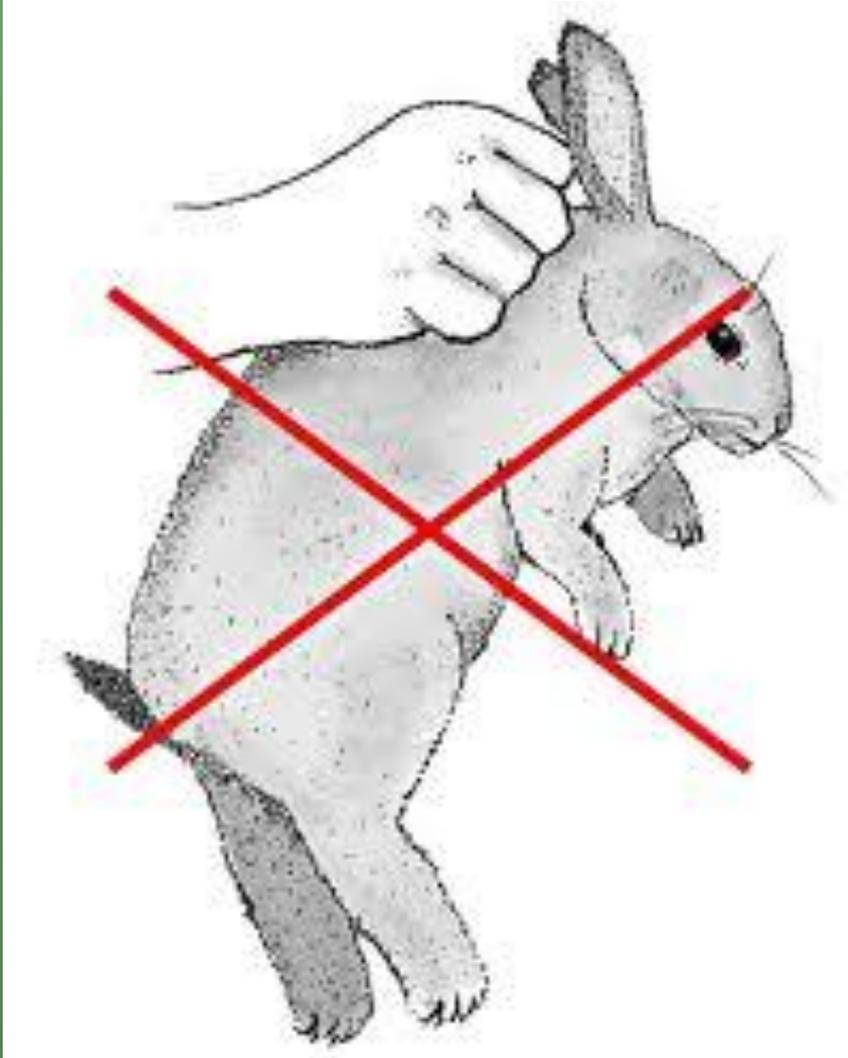
Another Hold



Backing into (and out of) the carrier can prevent struggling



Why not scruff?



- Stress
- Danger of bucking, breaking back
- Skin can tear loose from muscle tissue; body is too heavy for skin alone to carry
- Feels like what would happen if picked up by a hawk or other predator
- Moms don't scruff baby rabbits!

The Intake Exam

Use a surface with traction (towel)

- Nails – check for length and clip
- Ears – check for dirt, crust, mites
- Fur – check for mats, sores, parasites, lumps and bald spots
- Feet – check for bare patches and redness
- Teeth – check incisors for misalignment
- Rear – check for poop stuck; urine stain
- Eyes – check for discharge
- Nose – check for discharge
- Chin – check for moisture
- Paws – check for moisture, stains



The Most Common Health Problems

- Upper respiratory diseases (treat with antibiotics)
- GI stasis
- Malocclusion (trim or remove incisors)
- Abscesses (open and treat with antibiotics)
- Ear and skin mites (treat with Ivermectin, Revolution).
- Neurologic conditions
- Trauma
- Coccidia (treat with antibiotics)
- Urinary infections (treat with antibiotics)
- Arthritis
- Disability
- Sore hocks
- Outdoor rabbits: mites, fleas/ticks (Advantage, Revolution), fly strike, West Nile virus, VHD/RHD, heat stress, etc.

Grooming Basics

- Brushing to remove excess fur, especially when molting
- Long-haired rabbits need extra grooming to keep mats from developing
- Treatment for fleas and mites: Ivermectin, Advantage, Revolution
- Baths are not necessary and could be harmful
- Scent gland cleaning
- Nail trimming
- “Butt baths” for incontinent or older rabbits



Behavioral Screening

- Remember that rabbits will often behave very differently in a shelter environment than they would in a home!
- Rabbits are often cage protective, but that does not mean they are biters!
- Do not temperament test rabbits the way you do cats or dogs (most rabbits would attack the artificial hand).



Behavioral Screening

- Have the person evaluating the rabbit spend time with the rabbit outside of a cage—in an ex-pen, at the staff person's desk, or even at home over the weekend.
- Observing the rabbit over time, and working with the rabbit to make him or her more comfortable, is really your goal.
- Many rabbits, in a shelter environment, will be either shy or aggressive, and it's your job as the staff person or volunteer to help that rabbit to live up to his or her potential, and to find that perfect home.

Behavioral Screening

- Shy rabbits: in reality, rabbits are not that “cuddly” and don’t generally like to sit on laps. Manage the expectations of your potential adopters so they don’t have the wrong idea.
- Aggressive rabbits: this could be caused by hormones (spay/neuter is the solution), poor near-distance vision (approaching them correctly will solve this), cage protectiveness, lack of a “voice,” and fear or trauma. Never, ever, hit a rabbit—it won’t solve the problem and will make it worse.

Why Spay and Neuter?



Spay/Neuter

- Rabbit.org Foundation strongly recommends that all rabbit caretakers spay/neuter their companion rabbits
 - Avoid unwanted litters
 - Reduce territorial aggression
 - Reduce marking with urine & feces
 - Avoid uterine, ovarian mammary, and testicular cancers (80% risk of reproductive cancers in unspayed females)
 - Allows for companionship with another rabbit
 - Reduce numbers of rabbits euthanized at shelters
- Neutering can occur as soon as testicles descend (3-4 months); spaying 5-6 months
- Older rabbits can be safely spayed and neutered with blood panel first

What to do about Pairs?

- Recommend that rabbits who come in as pairs stay together as pairs.
- Some caveats, however:
 - They must be spayed and neutered first
 - Pairs are harder to adopt, so more creative marketing is needed



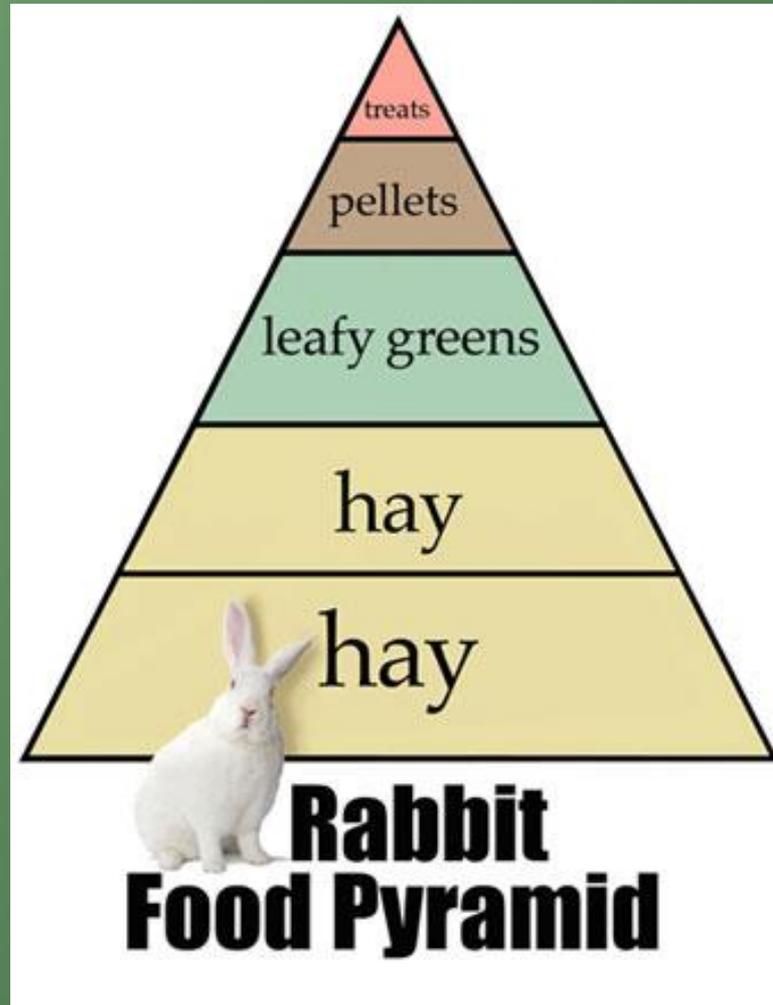
Ongoing Care

Ongoing Care

- Daily Feeding
- Litterbox cleaning
- Put litter in litterbox, not on floor of cage
- Toys
- Medicating when necessary
- Socializing and exercise time: utilize volunteers!



Diet: The Food Pyramid



Diet: Hay

- Alfalfa OK for juveniles
- Timothy Hay
- Orchard Grass
- Oat Hay



Diet: Vegetables

- Daily
- Herbs
- Leafy greens
- Carrots, broccoli
- Watch calcium



Diet: Pellets

- Originally designed for quick growth and convenience
- Gourmet=high fat
- Timothy is good for older or fat rabbits

Ideally:

- 14-15% protein
- 1-2% fat
- 22-28% fiber



Diet: No Human treats!



- Carbs difficult to digest
- Obesity a serious problem
- High fiber most healthy

Why Use a Litter Box?

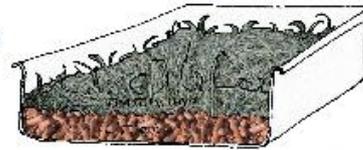
- Litter training a rabbit at the shelter ensures that the rabbit gets to go to an indoor home
- Easiest when spayed or neutered
- Hay in litter box (or right next to it)
- Safe litters (no pine shavings, no clay)



Safe Litters

YOUR RABBIT'S LITTERBOX

Litterbox Setup



Corner Litterboxes

Too Small, Even for Small Rabbits

Rabbit-Safe Litters

Straw Pellet Litters



Cat Country



Critter Country



Oxbow Eco-Straw

Paper-Based Litters



Carefresh



Cell-Sorb Plus

Compressed Sawdust Pellet Litters

(Phenols removed in processing)



Feline Pine



Wood Stove Fuel Pellets



Horse Bedding



Yesterday's News



Eco Bedding

Unsafe Litters



Pine/Cedar Shavings
Causes Liver & Respiratory Damage



Silica-Gel Crystals
Toxic if Eaten



S'wheat
Causes Problems if Eaten



Corn Cob
Causes Lethal Blockages



Clumping or Clay Litters
Causes Lethal Blockages

Toys

- Outlet for normal bunny activities
- Mental stimulation
- Physical stimulation
- Keeps destruction down
- Makes rabbits in the shelter look “livelier”



Medicating Rabbits

- Many conditions can be safely and easily treated in the shelter with antibiotics.
- To prevent aspiration when giving oral meds keep the rabbit's head in a neutral position.
- Shoot into the diastema
- Some oral meds can be crushed & mixed with baby food
- Pills can be disguised in raisins, cranberries, banana.
- Sub-Q injections can safely be given



Socializing Rabbits

- Putting rabbits in ex-pens or other spaces, with volunteers or staff, can not only give the rabbits needed exercise and play time, but can get them used to being with humans.





At HRS,
we use the
“magic
hallway”
to exercise
the rabbits

Promoting Rabbits

Promoting Rabbits

- Rabbits need to be seen!
- Showcase individual rabbits in lobby
- Rabbits should be named!
- Personality cards on cage
- Cage and pen set up should show how fun rabbits are
- Litterboxes and toys are important models for potential adopters
- Merchandise sales help promote rabbits
- Posters and flyers are good promotional devices
- Use Petfinder and your website!



Posters and Flyers

Donnie & Jimmy



Hi everyone! Our names are Donnie and Jimmy and we're a rascally, skittish duo. We are brothers who came from the Tri City shelter. We were the last of a very sick litter of kits. No one wanted us at the time so the good people at Harvest Home decided to take us into their sanctuary. Both of us are a year and a half neutered Florida White rabbits. We are not very good with our litter box and probably need a more experienced bunny person to take us into their home. Will that someone be you? If so, please contact **Karen at the Harvest Home Animal Sanctuary at 209-465-2985 or email her at KLCourt@aol.com**. A quick note: Jimmy has a bit of teary eye and Donnie has a slight head tilt.



HE'S NOT A CHILD'S TOY. HE'S A REAL, LIVE, 10-YEAR COMMITMENT.

It's that time of year again. Pet store windows are filled with adorable baby bunnies. Your kids are begging you to buy one. It's so hard to resist. After all, you think, wouldn't this be the perfect, low-maintenance "starter pet" for a young child?

Think again! Every year, many thousands of rabbits are abandoned to shelters or released outdoors (a sure death sentence for a domestic rabbit), often because of misunderstandings on the part of the parents who bought them for their kids.

Rabbits are prey animals by nature. They are physically delicate and fragile, and require specialized veterinary care. Children are naturally energetic, exuberant, and loving. But "loving" to a small child usually means holding, cuddling, carrying an animal around in whatever grip their small hands can manage — precisely the kinds of things that make most rabbits feel insecure and frightened. Rabbits handled in this way will often start to scratch or bite, simply out of fear. Many rabbits are accidentally dropped by small children, resulting in broken legs and backs. Those rabbits who survive the first few months quickly reach maturity and are no longer tiny and "cute." Kids often lose interest, and the rabbit, who has no voice to remind you he's hungry or thirsty or needs his cage cleaned, is gradually neglected.

Parents, please help! If you're thinking about adding a rabbit to your family, think about this: pet rabbits have a life span of 7-10 years. Don't buy on impulse. Wait until after the holiday. Make an informed decision by learning about rabbit care first. Consider adopting a rabbit from your local shelter or rescue group. For the rabbit's health and well-being (as well as for your child's) make sure an adult will be the primary caretaker and will always supervise any children in the household who are interacting with the rabbit. Domestic rabbits are inquisitive, intelligent, and very social by nature. A rabbit is a delightful companion animal as long as you remember: he's not a child's toy. He's a real, live, 10-year commitment!



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RABBIT CARE AND ADOPTIONS
IN YOUR AREA, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HUMANE SOCIETY OR
VISIT THE HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY AT WWW.RABBIT.ORG

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More Posters and Flyers



You bet she can... once she gets a little extra room and a smell of hay.

New Zealand Whites (BWBs) are the rabbits most often used for food and research. The fact that they are warm, friendly and outgoing personalities is often overlooked.

This gal is from a group of healthy, 12-pound New Zealand Whites.

She needs room to binky. So if you have some space and know how enjoyable grown-up New Zealand rabbits can be, it's our guess she'll pay you back in kicks.

The Rabbit Center currently has several bonded pairs of adult BWBs—healthy, spayed, neutered—ready for adoption.

If you can't adopt a Big White Bunny, you can sponsor one. The Rabbit Center sponsors a bunny for \$25 each. There they live together in space large enough for their personalities to shine.

Adopt or Sponsor a Big White Bunny

Call Sara at the Rabbit Center
510-970-7672



Did you know?



Rabbits make great housepets.
Rabbits are intelligent, affectionate, sociable animals. Their personalities range from laid-back, gentle rainbows, and all points in between.

Rabbits can be litterbox trained.

Feeding a rabbit with organic litter topped with hay in the corner of the rabbit's cage is the best way to train a rabbit. Once he gets used to the regularity, his space can be expanded until he is comfortable in an area with one or two litterboxes.

Rabbits can live with domesticated cats and well-behaved dogs.

Most rabbits are friendly and curious about other animals. Rabbits can live with cats and dogs if they are well-behaved and supervised.



Rabbits are better pets for adults than for children. Rabbits are not for every one. The ideal "rabbit parent" is a quiet, gentle individual who is open to petting rabbits on their own terms. Many households and people who are looking for something they can carry in their arms and cuddle for hours and hours are likely to be disappointed by the wild nature of the rabbit personality. The natural exuberance and dancelike level of even the quietest young child is essential for rabbits. Further, children's behavior change very rapidly, and it may not occur to the child that their rabbit friend may be in his. When adopting a rabbit, families with children should ensure that an adult will be the rabbit's primary caretaker and can make a long-term commitment to the rabbit's wellbeing.

Rabbits should live indoors.

Rabbits are prey animals. Even the most urban areas are not safe habitats, including common lawns, parks, and dogs. Domestic rabbits who are kept outdoors are also subject to fleas, ticks, parasites, predators of various kinds, and other dangers. Rabbits are not "outdoors" animals.

Rabbits need more than just rabbit pellets for their diet.

The primary component of a rabbit's diet that should be available year-round is unlimited fresh hay or good grass. Fresh water and fresh leafy greens need to be provided. Commercial rabbit pellets, as well as treats such as fresh fruits, should be given only occasionally.

Most rabbits don't like to be picked up and carried around. As generalizing creatures, rabbits are most comfortable on the floor. Rabbits can be taught to accept routine handling, but there is nothing abnormal about a bunny who prefers to sit beside you rather than on your lap.

Rabbits should be spayed or neutered. Spaying and neutering your rabbit is a responsible and humane choice. It can help reduce the risk of certain cancers and prevent unwanted litters.

Rabbits can live 10 years or more. Domestic rabbits can live a long life. Many rabbits live 10 years or more. Some rabbits live 12 years or more.

Rabbits need a stimulating environment and like to explore by chewing. Rabbits are physical and curious animals. They should be given lots of time to explore their environment. Rabbits should be given lots of time to explore their environment. Rabbits should be given lots of time to explore their environment.

Rabbits should be adopted from a shelter or rescue group, rather than bought from a breeder or a pet store. Rabbits are often adopted from shelters and rescue groups. They are often adopted from shelters and rescue groups. They are often adopted from shelters and rescue groups.

Ask us about adopting a rescued rabbit!



Rabbits need to see specially trained veterinarians. Most general veterinarians are not rabbit-savvy, and it can be hard to find a skilled rabbit practitioner.

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Photos of Adoptable Rabbits



- Make sure that the photos are taken in such a way as to highlight the rabbit's best characteristics.
- Don't photograph them in their cage!



...unless you can
make it cute

Educational Materials

Provide handouts and care packets



Educational Materials

Educational Materials need to address:

- Diet
- Housing
- Litterbox training
- Behavior
- Rabbit Proofing
- Chewing
- Toys
- Medical Issues
- Grooming



Merchandise

Selling
good
quality
rabbit
supplies
encourages
good home
care



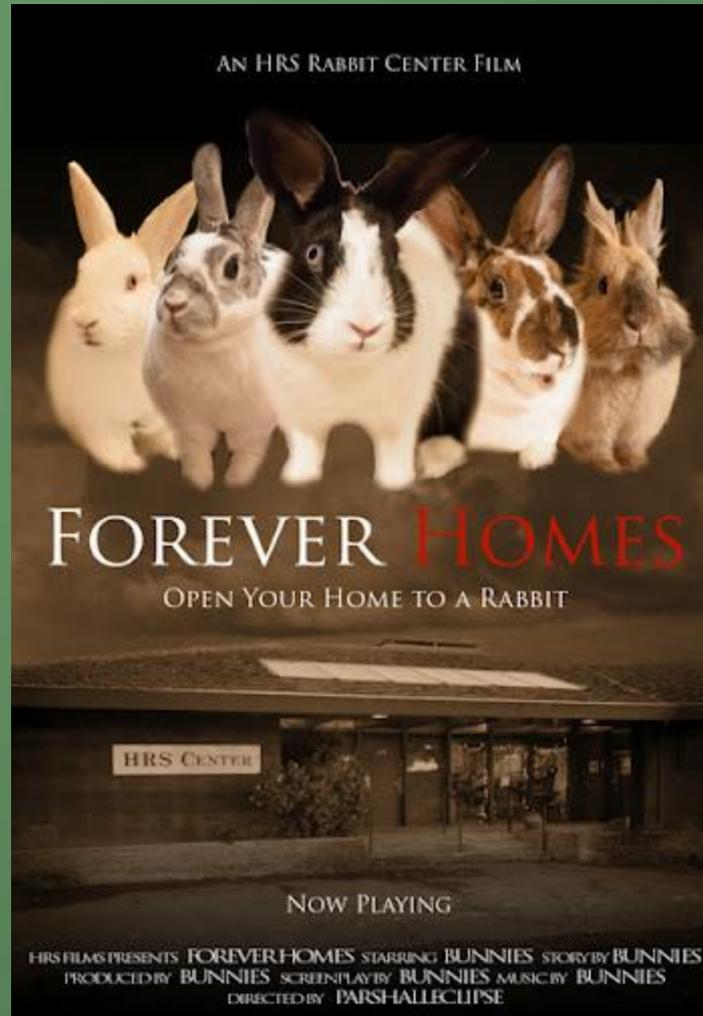
Classes

Offering free care or behavior classes will let the public know about rabbits



Videos

Making videos of your rabbits will attract public attention



<http://vimeo.com/36917753>

More Tips on Promotion

- Post photos of your rabbits in your main office.
- Put up some rabbit posters where they are visible to the public as they wander through your offices.
- Find a spot in the front area where a rabbit can get play time and “public time” daily
- Advertise your rabbits
- Hold regular rabbit care events and include rabbits in your other events.
- Learn how to trim teeth and remember that rabbits with malocclusion make great pets
- New rabbits should be groomed to look (and feel) their best: nails should be trimmed, fleas should be attended to, and long-haired rabbits should get a hair cut.
- Provide free care packets from Rabbit.org Foundation to all potential adopters.

Adoptions

Why are Rabbits Surrendered?

- The kids aren't taking care of him any more
- My child is allergic; I'm allergic
- I have a new cat/dog/baby, so I can't keep the rabbit any more.
- I'm too busy/ I didn't realize how much work a rabbit would be; he doesn't get the attention he deserves
- My landlord says I can't keep him/ I'm moving to a place that doesn't allow pets.
- He got "too big."
- He's aggressive (scratches/ bites), and/or destructive, and/or he makes the whole house smell.
- We're going on vacation and can't take him with us.
- He's sick/injured; we're not going to pay \$50 for a vet visit for a pet that costs \$15.
- The school year has ended and nobody wants him.

Making Adoptions Work

The previous slide should give you a sense of not just why rabbits are surrendered to shelters, but how to keep them from coming to you in the first place:

- Rabbits should not be adopted as children's pets
- Adopters should be screened for potential allergies
- Adopters should be screened to see if rabbit will fit into future plans: will there be a baby, a dog, a move?
- Adopters need to know about potential health care costs.
- Adopters need pre-adoption education on rabbit care rabbit behavior. Unrealistic expectations lead to returns.
- Adopters need to be educated about key concepts like litterbox training, bunny proofing, rabbits and other pets. Education packet is **CRITICAL** and must be given with each adoption and handouts should be available for all potential adopters as well
- Spay/neuter and reasonable adoption fee assure better care, fewer returns

Adoption Screening

1. Are you looking for a rabbit for yourself?
2. Who is in your family (who lives with you?)
3. Do you have any pets? What kind?
4. What kind of rabbit are you looking for?
5. Have you had a rabbit before?
6. What happened to your previous pets?
7. Where will the rabbit live?
8. What do you expect from a pet rabbit?

The answers to these questions will tell you whether the person is a good candidate for adoption, a poor candidate, or whether they will need more education.

Permanent Adoptions



The goal here is not to make the process onerous for either adopter or staff, but to create permanent adoptions.

Second (or third) Adoptions



When carefully introduced, rabbits thrived on contact with other rabbits; encourage your adopters to come back and adopt a companion for their rabbit

Conclusion

Conclusion

- Housing and care directly impact adoptions
- Rabbits are complicated animals and should be adopted with care
- Education is critical
- Goal is for the rabbits to be house pets
- Contact HRS: we are here to help.

