

# RabbitingOn

A photograph of two rabbits sitting on a stone path. In the foreground, a white rabbit with long, upright ears looks directly at the camera. Behind it, a brown rabbit with long, upright ears looks slightly to the right. The background consists of a stone path and some green foliage.

The Magazine for Rabbit lovers

Spring 20 Price £6.00

## SPRING IS IN THE AIR

Spring Fever explained

## ERIN'S STORY

Why a rabbit savvy  
vet is essential

## COMPANIONSHIP

Can human company ever  
replace another rabbit?

## HOW TO MEDICATE

Medicating in as stress-free  
manner as possible

- Flystrike
- Using rabbits as therapy
- Enucleation
- Early life experience and bonding effects
- Mortality study results

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# WELCOME TO THE SPRING ISSUE OF RABBITING ON



Hopefully, spring is just around the corner, and as the days lengthen our rabbit's spring into action! Spring fever often occurs in rabbits, even those who are neutered, which can come as a surprise to some owners, so Dr Laura Dixon's feature (page 2), explaining why it occurs and what you can do, should be invaluable to everyone.

For welfare reasons, the RWF is strictly pro keeping rabbits in compatible pairs/groups, but can people ever offer sufficient company for a lone rabbit? This is a subject that is often asked. Rabbiting On Veterinary adviser, Guen Bradbury discusses the topic on page 4.

We commonly see dogs, ponies and at times rabbits used as therapy animals. Whilst the situation can be suited to some species, is it something that is of benefit to rabbits? Dr Emma Milne continues her ethics series by looking into the topic, and her feature can be found on page 16.

Many congratulations to Soda and Copper, owned by Jacqueline England, who are the overall winners of the 2019 Rabbiting On Cover Star competition. All the winners can be found on page 20, and Soda and Copper's photo is featured on the cover of this issue. Thank you to everyone who entered, and please keep an eye out, as your photo may make it into a future issue of Rabbiting On.

How do you medicate rabbits in as stress-free manner as possible? This question is never easy to answer, and there are not any set rules, but Registered Veterinary Nurse, Rachel Sibbald offers some useful tips and suggestions on page 30.

Having a rabbit savvy vet is imperative. When your rabbit goes to the vets, you need to know they will receive the most appropriate treatment. Sadly, this isn't always the case and Erin's story, on page 38, underpins why a rabbit savvy vet is so important.

Also in this issue you will find features on enucleation and what happens when a rabbit needs to have an eye surgically removed, how early life experiences may affect a rabbit's willingness to bond to another rabbit, and as spring approaches our Essentials feature focuses on flystrike and the ever-present risk this poses to rabbits.

It is always a delight to hear from you all, so please do keep sending your stories, photos, questions and comments in to us.

Happy reading...

**Claire Speight**  
Editor



Rabbit Welfare  
Association & Fund  
A hutch is not enough

Rabbiting On is the quarterly journal of the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund, which exists to improve the quality of life of pet rabbits in the UK. For further information about day-to-day rabbit health issues please visit the website at: <http://rabbitwelfare.co.uk> To join the RWF please go to the website or telephone the Helpline: 0844 324 6090



Cover picture: J England

## STAR BUNNIES

**Our Spring Star Bunnies are JoJo and Jackie, sent in by Marie-Louise Raisbeck**

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Even neutered, bonded rabbits may fall out in spring

Photo: C Speight

# SPRING FEVER

## What it is, why it happens and what to do about it

By Dr Laura Dixon, Research Scientist

**H**ave you ever noticed that as the days get longer and the weather gets warmer, you may feel more energised? Well, your rabbits may also show behavioural changes at this time of year. This phenomenon is called spring fever, and can affect a number of animals, not just rabbits. So how can you tell if your rabbit has spring fever and what can you do about it?

### Spring time

To understand spring fever, it's useful to first look at what happens in wild rabbits during this time. As the day length and temperature increases, a part of the brain is stimulated, leading to hormone secretions, which leads to sexual maturity. Adult (sexually mature) rabbits still get an increase in hormone secretions, with the longer daylight hours. With this increase, rabbits begin looking for mates (1). After identifying a potentially suitable mate, the rabbits begin courtship behaviour. This behaviour is very active and involves running, hopping and often some fighting (2). The increase in reproductive behaviour during longer daylight hours is thought to have evolved to coincide with the time when there is an increase in the growth of vegetation (food), to allow for the increased energy needs of a lactating doe, and for the babies to have easy access to food as they are weaning (3). Aside from an increase in fighting, as part of courtship behaviour, rabbits can have overall higher levels of aggression at this time too. This more general increase in aggression is also linked to the increase in hormones that occurs with lengthening daylight hours (4).

### What about our pet rabbits?

Domestic rabbits also show seasonal changes in reproductive behaviour: longer days increase the willingness of the doe to mate, increase the mating success and increase the average litter size (5). Surprisingly, even neutered rabbits can show behaviour changes with the changes in day length. Neutering removes organs that produce some of the hormones associated with reproduction (testosterone in males and oestrogen in females), but it does not remove all sources of those hormones, and the parts of the brain that are stimulated by increased daylight hours, still produce hormones. Additionally, rabbits can learn behaviours associated with mating and aggression, so may continue to perform these even after neutering (6).

### What does a pet rabbit with spring fever act like?

Your rabbits may increase their overall activity levels in the spring. They may show some reproductive behaviours, like trying to dig a burrow, or chasing and attempting to mount their fellow rabbits. They may be more aggressive with each other, and even with their

Give your rabbits a digging outlet, to increase natural behaviours



human companions. Rabbits who have been successfully bonded, even those who have been bonded for years with no problems, may have more disagreements and may chase and/or mount each other.

### What can I do about this?

If your rabbit begins to change their normal behaviour patterns or routine, it is always advisable to have a vet check them to rule out any possible health issues (4). However, if your rabbit is otherwise healthy and has changed their behaviour with the onset of spring-like environmental conditions, there are things you can do to help decrease negative behaviours.

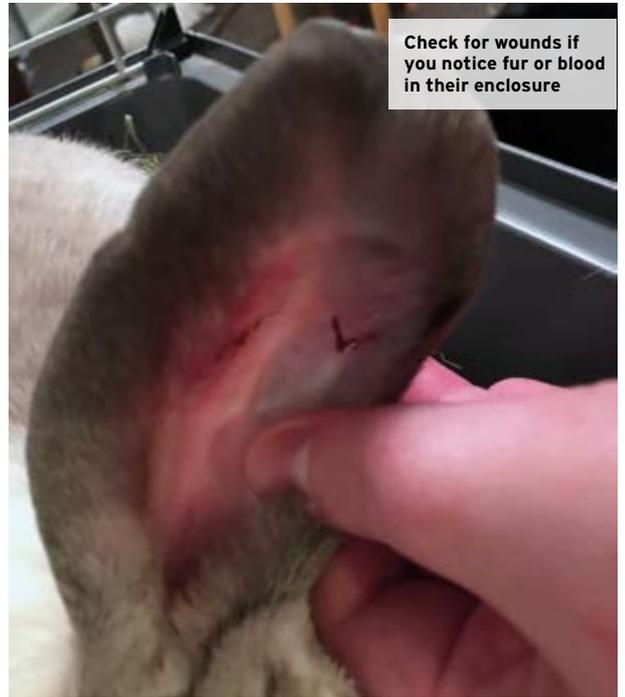
There should be lots of outlets in your rabbits' home for physical and mental stimulation. Their enclosure should be large enough for them to run and jump about and environmental enrichments, like outlets for digging and foraging, should be provided. Digging substrates can include shredded paper, straw, twigs, pinecones, sand or soil. To help contain the mess, the substrate can be given in a high sided box - but remember the rabbit still needs to be able to jump in and out of the box. Cardboard boxes are useful because they can be changed as needed, and the rabbit can dig at, and destroy, the cardboard as part of the enrichment. Wild rabbits spend a large amount of their waking hours foraging, and pet rabbits have the same need to forage as their wild counterparts. Hay or grass can be provided to rabbits, which increases their dietary fibre and promotes gut health and digestion. It also takes longer to eat these types of foods, so providing forages gives the rabbits an activity to fill their time. A normal eating pattern for rabbits is to eat off the floor and not from a raised rack, although forage trays may be used. Multiple areas/trays, each with a different type of forage, can be distributed around the enclosure to give the rabbits choice and encourage foraging at different locations. You can also hide fresh vegetables in the forages, under shredded paper or at various locations in the rabbits' home, to encourage them to search for the vegetables. The goal is to increase the time rabbits spend searching for, and eating the forages, which helps reduce the occurrence of abnormal or unwanted behaviours.

You should also reduce the need for competition over resources, by giving the rabbits a few of each resource type. For example, provide two or more shelters, water and food bowls, foraging areas/trays and so on. This

Rabbits like to forage in piles of hay for vegetables



Check for wounds if you notice fur or blood in their enclosure



will reduce competition and possible aggression over access to these items. Keep a closer eye on your rabbits as the days begin to increase, so you can intervene if there is any fighting (not just minor disagreements), and thoroughly check your rabbits if there are signs that a fight may have occurred, like scattered fur or blood drops in the enclosure. If there is a serious fight, the rabbits may need to be separated until they have calmed down. Once the rabbits are behaving normally again, they can be reintroduced, but this will have to be done slowly and carefully and may take several weeks (see the article on Bonding in the winter 2019 Rabbiting On). In general, spring/summer is not an ideal time to try to bond rabbits because there is an increased risk of fighting and aggression, and if it must be done during this time, extra care and extremely close supervision should be used (6).

In conclusion, even neutered rabbits may experience a behaviour change in the spring. You should aim to provide more mental and physical stimulation for them at this time and keep a close eye on them to ensure they are not beginning to fight or injure each other.

### References

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# CAN HUMAN COMPANY EVER REPLACE THAT OF ANOTHER RABBIT?

By Guen Bradbury, Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser

Companion rabbits are a perpetual source of interest and environmental enrichment to each other

Photo: C Eary



**M**ost rabbit owners know that rabbits are very social animals and prefer to live with other rabbits. Despite this, there are circumstances when we may wonder whether human companionship can replace rabbit companionship. In short, the answer is no. Human company is not a good substitute for rabbit company, but some rabbits are kept alone because we can't find the right rabbit companion. In this article, we'll discuss why rabbits need rabbit companions, and consider some alternative solutions for common problems.

## Lone rabbits

There are three main reasons that a rabbit owner might consider keeping a rabbit on its own - lack of care about the rabbit's welfare, lack of knowledge about the rabbit's needs, and concerns about the practical aspects of taking on another rabbit. Let's explore why rabbits need to be with other rabbits and then understand what can be done to address the barriers to owners keeping rabbits in pairs.

## Why rabbits need a companion

Rabbits need other rabbit companions to help reduce their fear and stress. Rabbits are eaten by many predator species - rabbits actually form the major source of food for over thirty different predator species in their native habitat. To avoid being eaten, rabbits live in large groups. This means that there are many more eyes and ears to spot predators, and if a rabbit lives with lots of other rabbits, the chance that a particular

rabbit will be eaten is lower. There are major survival advantages to rabbits living in large communities, and so evolution has driven them to seek rabbit company at any cost. We know that, for example, rabbits will work as hard to see another rabbit (even if it's one they don't know) as they will for food. Rabbits need to be with other rabbits.

Most people reading this article care about improving their rabbit's welfare. However, this is not the case more generally - a lot of rabbits are still kept on their own because their owners don't care about improving their quality of life.

Some owners don't understand how important companionship is to meet a rabbit's welfare needs.

Owners may be confused by old advice. In the past, some rabbit organisations would advise that you should keep pairs of rabbits outside, but that you should keep house rabbits on their own. We now understand more about rabbit welfare and we know that it isn't true, but the new message is still confused by old advice.

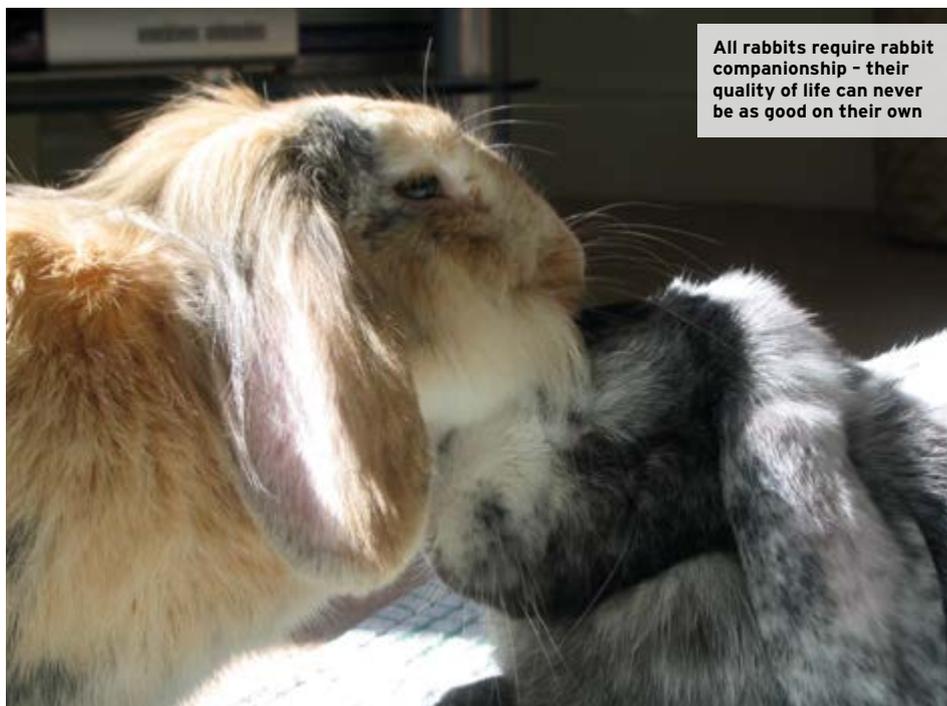
Owners may believe they can meet the social needs of their rabbit on their own - especially if they spend a lot of time with the rabbit, and they can't imagine what else

another rabbit could provide. Let's think about the life of a pair of rabbits. They will probably be able to see each other for almost every waking moment. They will eat together, explore together, toilet together. They will groom each other, cleaning each other's eyes and providing comfort. They will be a perpetual source of interest and environmental enrichment to each other - any environment, however full of toys and objects, is better with someone else in it too. They will speak each other's language, understand the slightest change in body position or eye appearance, and give the right response. And they will always be there to reassure their companion that they don't need to worry about getting eaten. However diligent an owner is, they just cannot replace the continuous source of interest, companionship, reassurance that another rabbit provides. Humans cannot replace another rabbit because our communication strategies are imperfect, and our interactions are time limited.

Owners who feel that they can meet all of their rabbit's needs themselves are typically really motivated to help their rabbit. The best thing they can do is rehome another rabbit - that way, they are making their own rabbit's life better and they are giving another rabbit a great life too.

Finally, some owners may be concerned about the practical implications of taking on another rabbit. When one rabbit dies, the owners may fear the time cost of bonding another rabbit, they may think that their current rabbit may soon die anyway, and they may be worried about the perpetual cycle of owning rabbits - they may not see a way out! These reasons are very rational and the owners may really care about their remaining rabbit. However, it is still very lonely for the rabbit that remains.

There are various solutions to this problem. If people are taking on a rabbit companion from a rehoming centre, the centre may agree to take back the companion when the owner's pet dies, thus relieving



All rabbits require rabbit companionship - their quality of life can never be as good on their own

Photo: R Thaxter

them of the burden of caring for another rabbit for the rest of its life. Alternatively, they may consider rehoming the remaining rabbit if they can't find another companion. This can be extremely upsetting - no-one wants to rehome their pet - but it may be in the best interests of the rabbit. It will give the rabbit a chance of a better life.

### Finding the right companion

Finally, how can owners find the right companion for their single rabbit? The easiest way to introduce rabbits is through a rescue centre. Most good rescue centres will offer on-site bonding - the owner will bring their rabbit to the rescue centre, where the staff will introduce the rabbit to a potential partner in neutral territory. After a few days of settling down and observation, the owner can take both rabbits home. It's much harder to do this at home (see article on 'How early experiences affect bonding' on page 28). Additionally, some rabbits just don't seem to like each other - at a rescue centre, they can try different rabbits to see which combination works, letting your rabbit choose the right friend.

There are a very small number of rabbits that cannot be bonded to another rabbit within reasonable limits - it takes too long, or the right rabbit can't be found. This cannot be tested by trying to bond them at home - it is very hard to make the environment sufficiently unfamiliar to allow the bond to happen with a very territorial rabbit. If a rabbit is difficult to bond at home, then seek expert advice from a rescue centre. They will probably try bonding the rabbit with three or four rabbits before they decide that is not possible. If the rescue centre advises that a bond is unlikely, then the rabbit may have to be kept alone, but the owner has to recognise the welfare cost of spending a life in isolation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, all rabbits require other rabbit companionship - their quality of life can never be as good on their own. Rabbits are best bonded at a rescue centre where the environment is very unfamiliar. And finally, it can take a couple of tries before a rabbit is successfully bonded, so always try a rescue centre and seek expert advice before deciding that you should keep a rabbit on its own.



The easiest way to introduce rabbits is through a rescue centre

Photo: R Todd





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## Bumper issue... 8 extra pages...



### Don't miss the summer 2020 Rabbiting On!

Make sure your details are correct so you don't miss the summer 2020 issue

**The summer 2020 Rabbiting On will include features on:**

- **Ethical dilemmas** - Dr Emma Milne continues her ethics series, and examines the effects of tracing rabbits.
- **The Five Freedoms** - Dr Laura Dixon starts a new series, looking into the five welfare needs, commencing with the need for a suitable environment.
- **Caring for aging rabbits** - Veterinary surgeon Elisabetta Mancinelli, discusses the problems elderly rabbits may encounter, and what owners can do to help.
- **Moving house** - Behaviourist Carol Valvona, considers how to reduce stress for your rabbits and owners' tips when moving home.
- **Assessing quality of life** - Dr Guen Bradbury explores the difficult subject of deciding when a life may not be worth living.

**And much more...Don't miss out!** Ensure that your subscription is up-to-date so you can receive the issue hot off the press in May 2020.

You must make sure that your address and details are up-to-date on our database, to ensure your copy of Rabbiting On is mailed out to the correct address. Unfortunately we cannot send out replacement copies if you have failed to update your details.



Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund  
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Rabbiting On is one of the fantastic benefits of membership

# RWAF MEMBERSHIP PRICE INCREASE IN 2020

We announced a price increase in 2019, which took effect from 1st January. However, to recap, and to catch the new members who have joined since then, we are reminding everyone.

To ensure the organisation is sustainable, we are always reviewing our income and expenditure, and checking we are as efficient as possible. Recent examples of this include upgrading our Royal Mail account so that we take advantage of the better prices offered, and changing to a more cost-effective paper for the Rabbiting On magazine.

## Ever-increasing costs

Even with these savings, the cost of everything has risen steadily over the last seven years (which is when we last had to increase membership fees), and to make sure we are still here in another seven years and beyond, we need to increase the subscription rate by £1 per magazine, taking the price of UK adult membership to £24 per year.

We hate to do this, and have put it off for as long as possible, but we're unable to continue to absorb the increased overheads.

Rabbiting On is a brilliant magazine, and we pride ourselves on being a totally reliable and up-to-date source of information. Membership will continue to be fantastic value: 4 copies of Rabbiting On, On the Hop booklets, and priceless referral advice from our Expert Vet, are just a few of the fabulous benefits. We hope that everyone will continue to support rabbits by continuing to support us.

The new prices as of 1st January 2020 are:

<b>UK adult membership</b>	<b>£24</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>£30</b>
<b>Vet Practice</b>	<b>£55</b>
<b>Rescue</b>	<b>£40 (unchanged)</b>
<b>European adult membership</b>	<b>£40</b>
<b>Rest of world adult membership</b>	<b>£44</b>
<b>International Vet membership</b>	<b>£100</b>

If you have a PayPal subscription or Go Cardless direct debit set up, we will have changed the billing amount. You don't need to do anything. If you do not want to pay the slightly increased price you just need to log in to your account and cancel the payment.

## Standing order payments - take action now!

If you have a standing order set up, please cancel it and renew at the new rate from January 2020. This is important, as if you don't pay the increased amount, we won't be able to renew your subscription. It will create a whole heap of confusion and admin to have to send an additional payment for £4, for example, so please take action now!

If you prefer to pay by cheque, please use the new amount, and you can still phone and renew via the helpline.

If you are not sure how you pay or when you are due to renew please contact us via [info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk)

Thanks for your understanding; we really appreciate your support.

Ayra and Lagartha  
have both been  
healthy rabbits

All photos: R Todd

# THE RWAF SANCTUARY RABBITS

By The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund

**T**he RWAF and RWF are not a rescue. Together, they are a campaigning and educational organisation.

However, at times there are situations that we cannot ignore, and we have stepped in and taken in rabbits. In some cases, where we have acted as a rescue, we have been able to re-home the rabbits ourselves, but there are many who have stayed and become part of the RWAF 'Sanctuary'. Here we introduce three more of these rabbits: Ayra, Lagartha and Ragnar

## Early days

Ayra, who is 10 years old, is now the oldest rabbit at the Sanctuary. She arrived with us back in 2009, accompanied by Merlin, Sanza and a litter of babies, as a result of work the RWAF was doing with an awful (but legal) 'livestock' auction. We did manage to improve the standards of care at the auction, but were not able to stop it. Obviously, we were not able to leave the rabbits behind at the auction house, so we took them all with us. However, they were in poor health, and additionally had spent most of the day at the auction without hay or water, so sadly only Sanza and Ayra survived.

## Old and new friends

Sanza lived for about 2 years with Ayra, and our adorable Netherland Dwarf Toto, but eventually her many health conditions got the better of her. Ayra, however, has never needed to go to the vets, other than for her spay and vaccinations! Very sadly we lost Toto to old age.

Ayra was then very difficult to re-bond. She rejected every suitor that was tried with her at RWAF HQ, and eventually we went to see the wonderful Alice at Windwhistle, and left her there to find her new husband. Alice, of course, worked her magic and Rae collected

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Ayra, Lagartha and  
Ragnar live happily  
together

Ayra and her new love Edwin, a lovely older lop. Almost a year to the day, Edwin developed a brain tumour, and we had to let him go on Christmas Eve, of all days. This left Ayra alone once again, and we really worried about bonding her after the last time. As it happened, over the Christmas period, Lagartha joined us as a young rabbit. Someone had very quickly realised that rabbits were not for them, and we took her on. They hit it off straight away. Lagartha has also been a healthy rabbit, requiring nothing other than her vaccinations and spay. Then came little Ragnar. A phone call from a local vet: could we take him? We often take in strays and re-home them. We asked them to castrate him and to start his vaccinations, and collected him the following week. The plan was to find him a new home. At the time, we had 22 rabbits at the Sanctuary, and did not plan to take in any more. However, naming Ragnar after a Viking was obviously asking for trouble, as he kept 'invading' Ayra and Lagartha's home! This involved many unimaginable acrobatic feats, and no matter what barriers and barricades were put between them, he was determined to join them. Rae still has no idea how he managed to scale a stable wall, but he did, so when they were all found happily together in the litter tray munching hay, it seemed that it was fate. So here he stayed.

This was not what we had planned, and in 30 or so years of living with rabbits, this is the first time that a rabbit has ended up where he should not have been. We know it does happen in rescue situations, but we never thought it would happen to us! Just shows you doesn't it?

So here they are, living their best lives, and we hope they will do for many years to come.

**Next issue we introduce Santa and Nico...**

# THE 2020 RWAFF CONFERENCE - 19TH, 20TH AND 21ST JUNE 2020

2020 will see us back in Edinburgh, at the brilliant Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies.

We are once again offering world class rabbit specific CPD from a host of specialist educators.

We have the ever popular workshops on Friday - please book soon if you don't want to miss out as places are limited.

We have a mix of essential and advanced lectures on Saturday for the clinical stream, plus a stream for non-clinical professionals and rabbit owners.

Sunday sees the return of our popular Rabbit Behaviour day, which is not to be missed and was a sell out last time.

As always, this is only possible because of the sponsorship from Burgess Pet Care, who have supported RWAFF and our educational events from the start. Our most sincere thanks to them.

## Friday 19th June 2020

An afternoon with Kevin Eatwell:

13.00-15.00	Dentistry
15.00-15.30	Tea break
15.30-17.30	Airways and Ask the Expert

We are limiting this to a maximum of 20 delegates, as a small group means that delegates get more out of the session.

Vets only:

RWAFF Practice Member - £150      Non-RWAFF Practice Member - £210

## Saturday 20th June 2020

We have two clinical streams running on this day; you can switch between each stream to pick up the lecture that you prefer best. The first two lectures are the same for all clinical delegates, then after that, chose which lecture you want to attend.

**Rabbit Clinical Essentials - For every vet and vet nurse in practice**

9.00-10.00	Jenna Richardson	Clinical Exam Practice - Nose to tail clinical exam
10.00-11.00	Richard Saunders	Back to Basics - All the basics you need to know
11.00-11.30		Coffee break
11.30-12.30	Kevin Eatwell	Anaesthesia and Analgesia - A summary of current thinking and best practice
12.30-13.30	Emma Keeble	Respiratory Diseases - How to identify and treat
13.30-14.30		Lunch break
14.30-15.30	Molly Varga	How to be a rabbit friendly practice
15.30-16.30	Kevin Eatwell	Urine scalding and renal issues

**Rabbit Advanced Practice - For vets and vet nurses who are already confident in dealing with rabbits, or with a high rabbit caseload**

9.00-10.00	As Essentials Stream	
10.00-11.00	As Essentials Stream	
11.00-11.30		Coffee break
11.30-12.30	Emma Keeble	All Ears - Common diseases and treatments
12.30-13.30	Molly Varga	GI Stasis - Diagnosis and treatment
13.30-14.30		Lunch break
14.30-15.30	Jenna Richardson	CT scans and their place in practice with case studies
15.30-16.30	Richard Saunders	Emerging conditions

RWAFF Member - £240      Non-RWAFF Member - £300

## Non Clinical Stream - Try this at home!

For rabbit rescue workers, owners, and other non-clinical professionals, to help in the day to day care of our favourite animals

9.00-10.00	Networking and coffee	The chance to Rabbit On!
10.00-11.00	Emma Keeble	Respiratory problems in rabbits and care at home
11.00-12.00	Molly Varga	Vital signs of GI Stasis and care at home
12.00-13.00		Lunch break
13.00-14.00	Richard Saunders	Ask the Experts - Pre-submitted questions
14.00-15.00	Kevin Eatwell	Vital signs of renal disease and care at home
15.00-15.30		Coffee break
15.30-16.30	Jenna Richardson	Clinical exam and caring for ill rabbits at home

RWAFF Member - £60      Non-RWAFF Member - £90



THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
The Royal (Dick) School  
of Veterinary Studies



## Sunday 21st June 2020

After the success of our first Rabbit Behaviour day in 2018 we have another great day on offer. This is suitable for anyone, veterinary surgeons, veterinary Nurses, rabbit owners, rescue owners/workers and anyone that works with rabbits and wants to understand them more.

10.00-11.00	Grace Dickinson	Rabbit training for Dummies BUNNIES
11.00-12.00	Grace Dickinson	Using clicker training to help with fear and build confidence
12.00-13.00		Lunch break
13.00-14.00	Guen Bradbury	Fear free handling
14.00-15.00	Laura Dixon	Trancing and 'learned helplessness'
15.00-15.30		Coffee break
15.30-16.30	Guen Bradbury	Aggression. What causes it and what can you do?
16.30-17.30	Rae Todd	Bonding in practice

RWAFF Member - £60

Non-RWAFF Member - £90

Book both Saturday and Sunday together and get a discount

- Clinical stream and behaviour day  
RWAFF member - £250      Non-RWAFF member - £350
- Non clinical stream and behaviour day  
RWAFF member - £100      Non-RWAFF member - £150

## How to book

Booking form (please use one per delegate - photocopies accepted):

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (must provide for confirmation):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Category: Owner  Rescue worker  Veterinary Surgeon   
Veterinary Nurse  Student Veterinary Nurse  Other  (please state):  
\_\_\_\_\_

RWAFF member  Non-member  (select applicable):

Membership number if known: \_\_\_\_\_

Lecture stream selected (select all that apply):

- Friday 19th June
- Saturday 20th June: Owners  Veterinary professionals
- Sunday 21st June: Behaviour day

Amount enclosed: £ \_\_\_\_\_

Dietary needs:

Vegetarian  Vegan  Other (please state) : \_\_\_\_\_

How to book:

Fill in and post application form to: **RWAFF Conference 2020, Enigma House, Culmhead, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 7DY.**

Make cheques payable to: **The RWAFF.**

You can also book your place online at: [www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk)

**Deadline for booking 15th June 2020**

**Full terms and conditions can be found on [www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk)**

Boston is one of long-term residents due to chronic respiratory issues

All photos: L Facey

# THE LOGISTICAL STRAIN OF RUNNING A RESCUE

By Lea Facey, Manager of The Rabbit Residence Rescue

**T**he Rabbit Residence Rescue (RRR), situated in the picturesque village of Great Chishill, on the Hertfordshire/Cambridgeshire borders, was founded twenty-five years ago by Caroline Collings, and became a Registered Charity in 2012.

At one point, the rescue cared for around 300 unwanted or neglected pet rabbits, and currently cares for approximately 100 rabbits on its third of an acre site.

## Team work and challenges

We are truly fortunate to have three amazingly dedicated part-time members of staff, plus a small team of volunteers.

Our location presents many challenges. Our water supply is delivered via hose pipe and we have no electricity on site.

In winter, keeping the rabbits warm and dry is challenging. Frozen water bowls have to be thawed using water heated on our tiny camping stove.

Thankfully, our pathways are now covered in grass mats, but I shudder at the memory of pushing a wheel barrow through knee-deep mud in the pouring rain.

Without electricity, much of the work in winter is done by head torch or rechargeable lights. Our toilet is a portaloo.

We spend the majority of time in waterproofs and wellies; it's definitely not glamorous, and we don't spend all day cuddling bunnies, despite what some people may think.

## Organisation is essential

Organisation is key; we have a rota for cleaning and other daily tasks, and for weekly tasks such as health checks and ordering supplies. There's a form for almost everything, from new intake monitoring to individual diet and health care plans, and we have spreadsheets for accommodation, vet costs, and rehoming, plus a rabbit database.

Rescue is a 24/7, 365 day a year job (says the woman who was ordering a new skip an hour before she got married!). I kid you not, there is always something needing to be done, whether it's cleaning sixty-plus litter trays, bonding rabbits, updating our website with rabbits available for adoption, or dealing with the colossal amount of paperwork associated with being a charity.



Bran was born here at the rescue and lives with his two brothers

## The rabbits keep coming in

Each year we rescue, rehabilitate and rehome over 100 rabbits. This year has been our busiest yet. We've helped over 140 rabbits in need, and rehomed a similar amount to loving, forever homes that comply with RWAf guidelines on space.

Rabbit Residence is a non-euthanasia rescue: we never put a happy rabbit to sleep.

We are lucky enough to have space for over sixty enclosures that meet, or exceed, RWAf guidelines, and

several isolation units which are used for new intakes, plus a dedicated bonding area.

We run a strict waiting list policy and always ensure we have space for emergencies or welfare cases, so we often take in multiple rabbits from situations where they have inadequate care.

### Permanent and long-term residence

Sadly, some rabbits spend their entire lives with us, due to ongoing health or behavioural issues, or simply because they were never chosen due to their lack of confidence around unfamiliar people, or because they are a less 'desirable' colour or breed.

Luckily this year, we have met several incredible adoptees who have willingly taken on rabbits with additional needs. Also some of our rabbits that have spent seven to ten years with us have found experienced, forever homes, something for which we are truly grateful.

All our rabbits are available for rehoming, should the perfect home be offered, but many will stay with us for many years, so we aim to give all our rabbits as close to a forever home as possible. Fortunately we are able to offer long-term space to a limited number of rabbits from other reputable rescues.

We have a sanctuary area, consisting of groups of spacious kennels opening out onto grass 'binky' areas. Therefore we can offer long-term residents supervised garden time, which offers considerable mental and physical health benefits.

Each 'binky' area houses rabbits accordingly: we have three 'snuffles' areas for the rabbits that have respiratory issues, and an area for rabbits that are *E. cuniculi* positive. It's vital that these rabbits are housed away from others and extra hygiene measures are taken to prevent spread of disease.

### Managing medications and health care

We give approximately 120 medications each day, an enormous task in itself. Several of our rabbits need twice-daily nebulising and five of our rabbits also have daily physiotherapy.



Sponsor bunny, Patty has no incisors after a dental abscess, and arthritis, due to an old break in a leg



Bruno has severe dental disease and Darcy has a tumour on her lung

Organising vet trips is a mammoth task, with six to ten rabbits, on average, seeing our exotics vet each week. That's without additional trips for diagnostic tests, or routine neuter and vaccination appointments.

Additionally, several rabbits see a qualified physiotherapist on a monthly basis.

Our vets bills are enormous, averaging at £3000 a month, due to the number of rabbits requiring long-term treatment or medication, plus preparations for rehoming.

### Specialised care

All our rabbits have individual diet and care plans. Many of our elderly or sick rabbits need additional food, and some of our rabbits are on reduced-calcium diets due to kidney or bladder sludge issues. Rabbits prone to digestive upset are fed dried or fresh wild plants, instead of vegetables and herbs. Our rabbits with dental issues need grated vegetables and their pellets are softened with warm water.

We have many long-haired rabbits that need regular grooming, and also rabbits that need help to keep themselves clean due to mobility issues.

We offer a variety of different hays, in addition to meadow hay used for bedding, and use different types of hay racks, or simple things such as stuffed toilet rolls, to encourage natural foraging behaviour.

A range of enrichment is provided: multi-exited hideouts, tunnels, tables, chairs, towers, digging pits, willow, and treat balls.

Everything varies according to individual rabbit's needs, including type and location of housing, enrichment and bedding material.

Our half-wild rabbits are housed at the far end of the rescue, where it's quieter. Their housing is filled with lots of places to hide, things to climb on and lots of items to chew.

The rabbits with respiratory issues are bedded on dust-free bedding and have only dust-extracted hay.

### Heart-breaking at times

The level of commitment required to care for the RRR rabbits is huge, not only in terms of time, resources and money, but also emotionally.

When caring for rabbits over a number of months or years, you become very attached, and, even though you might try not to, you can't help falling in love with them. It breaks your heart when you can't make them better, or manage their symptoms or pain, and it's time to say goodbye.

I cannot count the times I've sobbed my heart out when we've had to let a rabbit go, and also when an ill or badly neglected rabbit comes into the rescue.

The grief is immense, but I've also shed tears of joy when, after years in rescue, a rabbit finally finds the home it deserves, and when lonely bunnies are happily bonded.

Rescue is hard, physically and emotionally, but the joy of caring for rabbits and the love they return makes it all worthwhile.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.rabbitresidence.org.uk/>

# ENUCLEATION IN RABBITS

By Nathalie Wissink-Argilaga,  
Veterinary Surgeon

Severe corneal oedema,  
secondary to uncontrolled  
Glaucoma

Photo: N Wissink-Argilaga

**R**abbits have large, prominent and laterally placed eyes, and have a visual field of almost 360 degrees. Rabbits' eyes have several peculiarities when we compare them with other domestic species, such as dogs and cats. Their orbit (eye socket), has a large venous sinus (blood vessel) situated behind the globe; this can cause significant bleeding when conducting surgery around the eyes. Rabbits blink very slowly, (5 to 6 times a minute), and this can affect healing of the eye, and change the effect of drugs applied to the eye. Rabbits only have one tear duct situated in the bottom eyelid, in contrast to dogs and cats that have two, one in each eyelid. This tear duct runs from the eye, over the reserve crowns (tooth roots) of the cheek teeth, over the reserve crowns of the incisors and exits into the nostrils. The tear ducts can get blocked, either due to inflammation or due to dental disease. In these cases we can get tears overflowing, and secondary infections and inflammation.

Treating ocular (eye) problems in rabbits follows the same principles as for other domestic species, but their peculiarities need to be considered.

## Why does an eye need to be removed?

Some ocular conditions might result in severe pain and discomfort, and may require the removal of the eye. Enucleation is a surgical procedure consisting of the removal of the eye globe. It is indicated in cases where the eye is painful, and we are unable to control this pain with any other treatment, or in cases of ocular tumours that cannot be treated in any other way. Conditions that can cause eye pain include:

- **Glaucoma:** This is a group of eye diseases, leading to an increase in the pressure inside the eye (intraocular pressure or IOP). IOP can be measured in rabbit patients using the same instrument (tonometer) as in cats and dogs. The author's preferred tonometer is the TonoVet, which is much easier to use on smaller eyes.
- **Inflammation/infection of the internal structures of the eye (endophthalmitis/uveitis):** These can be caused by trauma, infections with bacteria such as *Pasteurella*, and parasitic infections such as *E.cuniculi*.
- **Severe ocular trauma with bleeding.**
- **Non healing ulcers on the surface of the eye.**
- **Exophthalmos:** The eye protrudes out of the eyelids and becomes exposed. This can be due to masses behind the eye that push it forwards such as tumours and abscesses.
- **Intraocular tumours:** Sarcomas and lymphomas have been reported in rabbits. If medical treatments for these conditions are unsuccessful, and the rabbit is still in pain, enucleation might have to be considered. Removal of the eye, in these cases, will provide comfort and also give the surgeon access to the structures behind the eye such as tumours or abscesses in order to remove these.



Rabbits have large,  
prominent and laterally  
placed eyes

Photo: L. Staggs

## What does the surgery involve?

Enucleation is performed under general anaesthesia, and therefore we must make sure that the patient is well enough to undergo this. A full physical examination, as well as additional tests, such as blood tests might be required. If the patient is not well enough for surgery, some supportive care, including fluid therapy, nutritional support, pain relief and intestinal motility stimulants may be necessary before the surgery can take place. Once the patient is anaesthetised, the area around the eye is clipped with clippers and the eyelids and eye are prepared for surgery by cleaning and flushing with diluted disinfectants. Due to the small size of the eye in rabbits, the use of magnification (loupes) greatly helps the surgeon. The globe is dissected from the other structures inside the orbit, such as the third eyelid and the ocular muscles. Care must be taken when accessing the back of the eye, as there is a large venous sinus that can cause significant bleeding. The vessels and optic nerve are tied off and the globe is removed. At this point, pressure with a finger and a cotton swab is applied to the socket for 5 minutes to minimise the chances of bleeding. The third eyelid, conjunctiva and edges of the eyelids are also removed. Once this is done, the eyelids are sutured closed.

## Potential complications

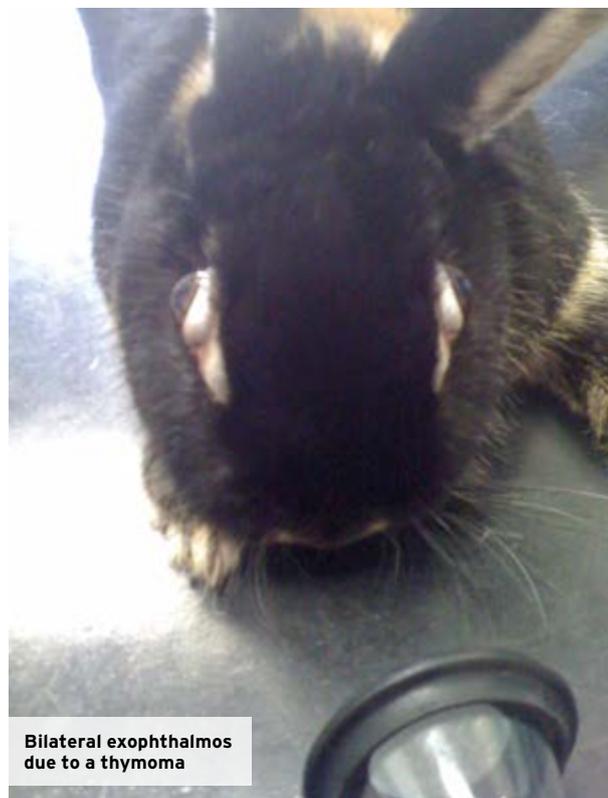
The main complications of this surgery include severe bleeding, infection, wound breakdown and orbital cyst formation if any structures, such as third eyelid, conjunctiva or glands have not been completely removed.

After the surgery we need to ensure the patient is comfortable, and prevent any potential complications. The rabbit should recover in a warm, quiet and non-stressful environment. Pain relief should be continued until the rabbit appears to be comfortable without it. Food intake and the production of faeces need to be monitored, and further supportive care needs to be started if necessary. Postoperative fluid therapy may be required, especially if bleeding has occurred.



Non-healing ulcers on the surface of the eye are painful

Photo: R Saunders



Bilateral exophthalmos due to a thymoma

Photo: C Hunt

Enucleation is a surgery that is performed fairly regularly in rabbits, but should not be undertaken lightly as complications can occur. The surgeon must be familiar with the specific anatomy of the rabbit eye and the surgical technique. Postoperative care to keep the patient pain and stress free is also paramount.

## Aftercare

Rabbits have a 10-degree blind spot just in front of their nose. They generally appear immediately more comfortable after enucleation; however, the loss of visual field must be kept in mind. They seem to tolerate this loss of visual field well, but adaptations can be made to care for a partially blind rabbit:

- Change can be difficult for partially sighted/blind rabbits, so keeping things consistent does help. Try to keep their 'furniture' in the same arrangement and have food and water containers easily accessible. If changes need to be made it can help to do these gradually.
- Try to approach the rabbit from their visual side and warn them that you are coming, by gently talking to them to avoid startling them.
- Ensure their living and play areas are safe for them. Avoid obstacles and objects that they could hurt themselves on, and always provide a hiding spot in case they want to retreat.
- With loss of vision, rabbits will rely more on their sense of smell and also can become more tactile. This can mean that they might chew, dig and shred more in an attempt to become familiar with their environment. They may rely more on their sense of smell, so it can be useful to leave some items with familiar smells in their enclosure after cleaning.
- They should have a companion rabbit, who will also provide support and comfort to them.

Rabbits that have had an eye removed can go on to live a long and healthy life afterwards, and whilst the surgery should not be undertaken lightly, it doesn't need to be a death sentence.

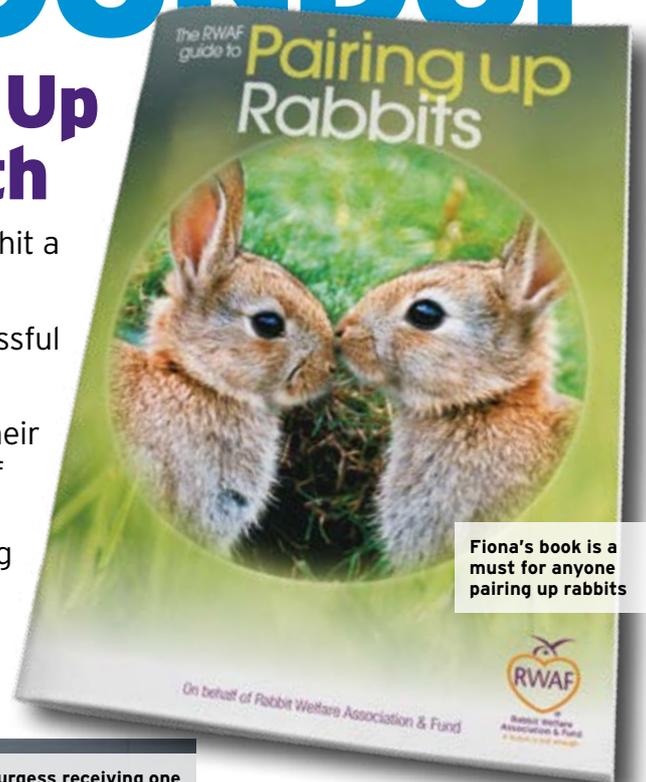
# RABBIT ROUNDUP

## RWAF guide to Pairing Up Rabbits – By Fiona Firth

Anybody who is embarking on pairing up rabbits, or has hit a brick wall in the process, needs a copy of this book.

The book gives super advice on the often tricky and stressful process of pairing up rabbits.

Being highly social animals, they need the company of their own species, but there can be problems in the process of getting them together. Fiona tackles these problems in a structured way, giving suggestions for setting up bonding areas, strategies, what to look out for, when to intervene and so much more. This all-new edition is available exclusively from the RWAF Shop for just £5.00.



Fiona's book is a must for anyone pairing up rabbits



Burgess receiving one of their awards

## Burgess Pet Care recognised for Live-Saving Animal Welfare Campaign

Attended by hundreds of well-known industry bodies and guests, the awards ceremony took place on the first evening of the PATS pet trade show, on Sunday September 22nd 2019. Burgess Pet Care received a Gold award in the 'Marketing Project of the Year' category, for their life-saving Rabbit Awareness Week campaign, as well as one other award.

Following a record number of entries from across the trade industry, Burgess Pet Care's award win is a fantastic achievement for the Yorkshire-based business, which exports its locally-made pet foods worldwide to countries such as Australia and China.

Peter Lancaster, Marketing Manager at Burgess Pet Care, said, "We are absolutely thrilled to receive not just one, but two gold awards this year, which recognise our team's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of pets living in the UK.

It's been a particularly busy year for Burgess, with expansion into new international markets and our most successful Rabbit Awareness week Campaign to date, which saw thousands of vets, rescue centres and rabbit owners join us to raise awareness around the welfare needs of rabbits."

Burgess Pet Care's Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) is a national animal welfare campaign, created 14 years ago, to help improve the lives of rabbits living in the UK. The 2019 'Protect and Prevent' campaign highlighted the importance of vaccinating rabbits against Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 2, a deadly disease of which many owners aren't aware. The disease can kill rabbits in 24 hours, if they aren't vaccinated.

The 2019 campaign helped to save the lives of thousands of rabbits. Veterinary practices, rescue centres and pet food retailers from all over the UK and Ireland held events throughout the week of RAW (June 1-9), resulting in a 25% increase in the sale of RVHD2 vaccines.

The awards were selected by a team of expert pet retailers, who all agreed that this year's competition produced a high-quality range of products and services.

# Burgess Pet Care launches the Burges Excel Vet Awards with RWAF

The Burgess Excel Vet Awards recognises and rewards the hard work of veterinary professionals, who work to improve the health and wellbeing of domestic rabbits.

Burgess Pet Care, in conjunction with the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWAF), has launched the Burgess Excel Vet Awards.

The Awards are free to enter, and open to practicing veterinary professionals in the UK, who are able to demonstrate the exceptional levels of care and professional advice they provide to rabbits and their owners.

The Awards have three categories:

- Rabbit Vet of the Year, open to all practising UK veterinary surgeons;
- Rabbit Nurse of the Year, open to all practising veterinary nurses in the UK; and
- Rabbit Veterinary Practice of the Year, open to all practices on the RWAF rabbit friendly list.

Peter Lancaster, Marketing Manager at Burgess Pet Care, said:

“The Burges Excel Vet Awards will shine a spotlight on a sector of the veterinary community that is going above and beyond to help improve the lives of one of the UK’s most misunderstood animals.

“These Awards are part of Burgess Pet Care and the RWAF’s joint commitment to improving standards of rabbit welfare across the UK. This is a key goal for both of our organisations and a natural evolution of the fantastic work that has already been achieved with Rabbit Awareness Week and the rabbit CPD (Continued Professional Development) that’s delivered to vets across the UK”.

Rae Todd, Director at RWAF said: “We’re delighted to support these Awards and to be able to recognise the rabbit friendly vet practices who treat rabbits as equal to cats or dogs. Working with veterinary professionals to help advance their knowledge of rabbit care and medicine is an essential part of improving the quality of life of pet rabbits”.



**Nominations for the awards open in March 2020**

Award nominations will open in March 2020 and can be made via the nomination form on the website, or by completing a nomination form and returning it via post. Self-nominations can also be made.

The judging panel will feature a selection of industry experts, veterinary professionals and rabbit specialists, which will be revealed at a later date.

The winners of each category will be announced at the London Vet Show 2020 and will each receive a cash prize of £500.

To register your interest in the Burges Excel Awards, to be the first to hear when nominations open, and to be kept up to date with the latest rabbit CPD, visit: [www.burgesspetcare.com/excel-vet-awards](http://www.burgesspetcare.com/excel-vet-awards)

## Thank you Carina and welcome Debbie



Carina Norris

For more years than we can properly remember, Carina has been an integral part of Rabbiting On. She has been magazine Editor, for some years alongside her late and much-missed mum, Heather, but later on her own. When Claire took over as Editor, Carina became our Copy Editor, making certain that by the time copies of Rabbiting On arrived with members, all those pesky errors were gone, and everything made sense. What a lot of articles she has read over the years! A tremendous job.

Carina is retiring now, to have some time to herself with her husband Graham, and we cannot express adequately how grateful we are to her for all she has done. Thank you Carina, you have been a diamond.

We are thrilled to announce that our new Copy Editor will be Debbie Staggs, starting with this issue. Debbie has written several articles for Rabbiting On in the past, as has her husband Leo, and they have

provided some super photos of their rabbits too!

Please welcome Debbie, she is mum of 3, so already has much on her hands, as well of course as a lovely pair of lively rabbits who don't like to see her sitting relaxing and not having things to do!



Deborah Staggs

# PETS AS THERAPY - ARE RABBITS AN ACCEPTABLE CHOICE?

By Dr Emma Milne,  
Veterinary Surgeon

Facial tension and fear in the face of a rabbit that doesn't enjoy being picked up

Photo: Guen Bradbury



**D**ogs have been used as Pets as Therapy (PAT) animals for years now. Nowadays you even hear of horses being used as PAT animals, but is any of this okay, and what about when it comes to rabbits? Some of you may be as shocked as I was to learn that rabbits are being used in many places now as PAT animals. On doing a little Googling, you soon hear that rabbits are ideal for children or people who don't like, or perhaps fear, bigger animals like dogs. Then you'll see other phrases like 'rabbits work well because they tend to sit quietly for the students.' It's this that I find a little disconcerting, given what we know about rabbit behaviour.

## PAT model

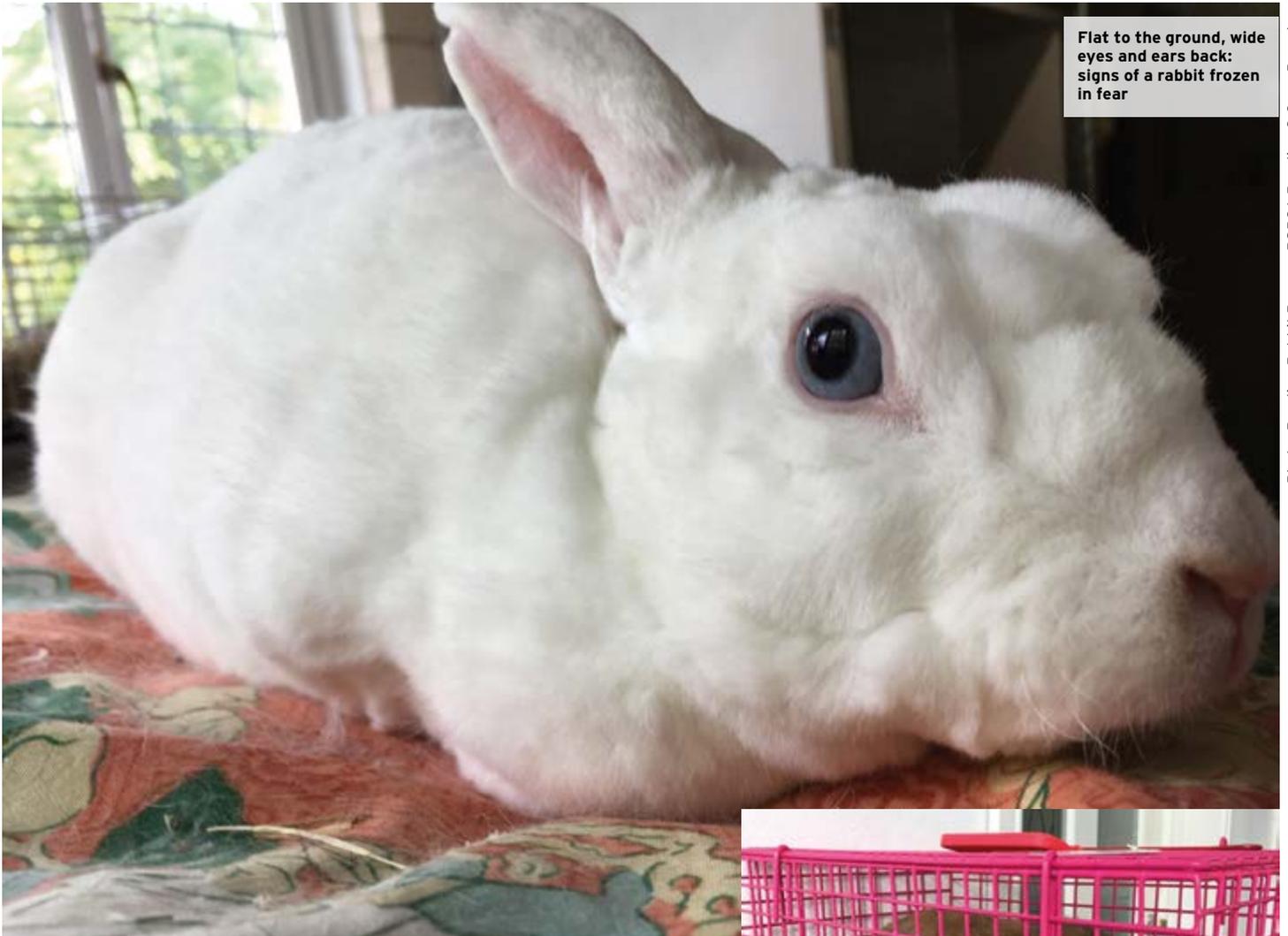
The idea behind PAT animals is sound. We know that the presence of animals in the right situations can make people more relaxed, help combat stress and, in the case of some mental health problems, help people overcome stigma and self-esteem issues. This is all great for the people, but what about the animals? It's well-known that even social, human-loving species like dogs can find new people and especially close physical contact very stressful. We work tirelessly in the welfare community to try to spread the word about the 'ladder of aggression'. There are many subtle and overlooked cues that dogs give when they are stressed or fearful. When these cues go unnoticed, as is often the case with children, the situation can quickly escalate and that's when bites can occur, usually through absolutely no fault of the dog. But rabbits are not dogs. Dogs have evolved alongside man over tens of thousands of years. They read us perfectly. They are predators so are happy to be fairly overt when it comes to telling us they're not happy or when they are in pain. Rabbits are almost the exact opposite of this.

## Prey animal

Although humans have kept rabbits as pets for hundreds of years, they have not evolved with us. Even though we have created many different breeds for our quirky pleasure, the fundamental animal underneath still has the psychology that millennia of evolution has instilled in them. They are prey animals and seek safety and comfort from being able to escape, and also from being surrounded by their own species. More eyes and ears on the lookout for danger benefits all the animals in the group. They live in burrows with many different entrances and exits so that escape is always an option.

## Handling concerns

Pet rabbits are one of the most misunderstood and neglected pets in the UK. Often they are kept in inadequate cages, unable to express natural behaviours such as digging, and all too often alone. They are classically bought as pets for children but many people in the rabbit world think that they are totally unsuitable as children's pets. Rabbits don't like being picked up, as for them this is like being taken by a bird of prey. Being held or restrained in any way can be very stressful because all means of escape are removed. This is why lots of rabbits panic when picked up and struggle to get away. At best this usually results in some nasty scratches for the children, and at worst a paralysed



Flat to the ground, wide eyes and ears back: signs of a rabbit frozen in fear

rabbit with a broken back. The vicious circle begins: the kids don't want to pick the rabbit up anymore and it's left to live out its life in a lonely hutch.

### Placed in alien environments

Imagine the scenario when these animals are put in a situation like Pets as Therapy. By definition, they are taken to different places. Other people's homes, hospitals, hostels, schools. They may have to travel long distances and might be without the company of other rabbits for those journeys and days. Once at the destination, they will be caged or, when being petted, have to wear a harness to stop them running away. (Those of you who read my last article on harnesses in the winter 2019 *Rabbiting On* will know why this isn't ideal).

### Hiding the signs

One of the interesting things about prey animals is their unbelievable ability to mask and hide pain and fear. Animals like dogs and humans love to have a good old moan when we're hurt. We limp, we whine, we seek attention from others. For a prey animal this behaviour would mean certain death. If they show weakness, they are much more likely to be singled out by a predator. At the surgery I've seen horrific cases of fly strike where rabbits are being eaten alive and usually the owner has just noticed that the rabbit is 'a bit quiet'. There are well documented cases of cows lying quietly with a broken leg and chewing the cud as if nothing is wrong. Our misconception about these behaviours has been the cause of a lot of misunderstanding and suffering among our animal companions for a very long time!

### Think back

Think back to the phrase 'rabbits work well because they tend to sit quietly for the students' and you can see now why this makes me immediately tense up. Rabbits have evolved to sit quietly when their options for escape are removed, or they are in an un-winnable situation. Hope you don't get noticed and soon it will all be over and you can run away when the danger has passed. This doesn't mean that the situation is pleasant or enjoyable. It just means the animal has no choice but to



They may have to travel long distances without a companion

tolerate it. Imagine some of your most stressful times - exams, divorce, waiting for medical results. These are unavoidable things for many humans but it doesn't mean we enjoy them. We grin and bear it and wait for it to pass, but we remember them as awful times.

### Conclusion

I know lots of people probably think I'm a real party-pooper. I don't like dolphin shows, animals in circuses, horse-racing, or zoos. In fact, I don't think animals should ever be used for human entertainment, so maybe I am a proper kill-joy. I do kind of feel the same when it comes to rabbits being used as PAT animals. It's great for humans who benefit, but at what cost to the lives of the animals? Shouldn't we be looking for ways that humans can help each other better, rather than using animals that have no choice? And shouldn't we be respecting the needs of our animal companions, above our desire to have them in our lives just because we can?

## Health



**Richard Saunders**

BSc (Hons) BVSc  
MSB CBiol DZooMed  
(Mammalian) MRCVS

Richard was the RWF's last Rabbit Resident at the University of Bristol, and is now the RWF Veterinary Adviser, as well as continuing to see rabbits and other animals in small and zoo animal practice.



**Guen Bradbury**

MA, VetMB, MRCVS

Guen Bradbury is the Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser and is a vet who runs a teleconsultancy to help rabbit owners, vets, and vet nurses with behavioural problems in rabbits. Her textbook on the subject, 'Behavioural problems in rabbits' has been available through online and high-street retailers since the end of October 2018.

## Behaviour



**Carol Valvona**

MSc (CABC)

Carol (Bonafido Pet Behaviour And Training) is a member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors and has a Masters degree in companion animal behaviour counselling. She has rescued giant breeds for a number of years.

## Houserabbit Advice



**Leo Staggs**

Experienced rabbit owner Leo Staggs lives in Kent with his wife, 3 children and 2 house rabbits.

## Welfare



**Georgia McCormick**

Georgia is the Welfare Officer for the RWF. With a law degree and a background in animal welfare she is perfect for any welfare related questions you have for her.



**Mark Dron**

Mark works on a part-time basis as a consulting Animal Welfare Officer for the RWF.

After 27 years as a Police Officer and with Local Authority Trading Standards Units, many of which were spent dealing with Animal Welfare and Wildlife Crime issues, he now provides his services as a consultant to the RWF's Capone Campaign, which identifies and gathers intelligence relating to online breeders and sellers of rabbits around the UK.

We regret that our experts are only able to answer a few questions in the magazine. If you think that your rabbit may be ill, please seek veterinary advice immediately.

# ASK THE EXPERTS



Photo: RWF

**Pet shops should promote higher welfare standards for accommodation**

## Too small for rabbits, so why are they still sold?

**Q** Why do pet shops still sell such unsuitable hutches and cages for rabbits? I thought they were all regulated by their local council, so if this is the case how come they get away with selling these tiny prisons?

**A** While pet shops are licensed by Local Authorities, this is a general licence relating to generic animal welfare standards for all animals that they sell, from fish to lizards, cats and dogs, and anything in-between.

Shops are required to consider animal welfare in everything they do under the auspices of the licence, but only so far as ensuring that the animals' five basic needs under Animal Welfare legislation are met (as appropriate to the animal).

There is no specific legislation relating to rabbit hutches or run size, only industry and welfare guidance, which is not legally binding, and as such it is perfectly legal to sell small hutches in the UK. Issues would arise if you found a trader selling a hutch or run that they claimed had been approved by an animal welfare organisation (such as the RWF or RSPCA), when this was clearly not the case, or if they were selling items that were clearly dangerous, with exposed sharp nails or metal edges. In these cases Trading Standards would have an interest in relation to Consumer Safety legislation, but unfortunately until legislation exists that prohibits the sale of certain types and size of cage, these shops will be at liberty to continue selling them.

This is frustrating especially when, as a responsible and caring rabbit owner, you can see that a hutch is unsuitable. However, where there are no specific laws in place to stipulate hutch size, local licensing authorities have absolutely no power to deal with such matters.

If you are concerned about animal welfare standards in licensed pet shops, your first port of call should be the Licensing Local Authority. However, they are unlikely to have an emergency capability, so if the matter is urgent you should contact the RSPCA via their 24hrs Animal Welfare line on: **0300 1234 999**.

**Mark Dron**

# How to keep fleas at bay

**Q** What flea treatment is safe to use on dogs and cats who share a household with house rabbits? Even though they don't really come into contact with the rabbits, I still worry that anything that I apply to them or use in the house may pose a danger to them.

**A** You are right to wonder about this - some flea treatments that are safe for cats and dogs can harm rabbits. You have two options - either treat the cats and dogs with a product that is not rabbit-safe, and keep the animals separated, or treat the cats and dogs with a product that is safe for rabbits. I'd recommend the latter, as you can then be reassured that the rabbits won't come to harm.

There are a couple of topical flea-treatment products that are licensed for use in rabbits: ivermectin (Xeno 450, Beaphar spot-ons for rabbits specifically) and imidacloprid (Advantage). However, there are unlicensed flea treatments for cats and dogs with ivermectin, so the safe option for an over-the-counter product for your cats and dogs is Advantage. **Don't use fipronil-containing products as these can be extremely harmful to rabbits.**

# Where is the least stressful for them?

**Q** We are having a rear extension built to our house in the coming months. It will be noisy and I am worried my rabbits may get upset. They live in a large enclosure, and it is not possible to move them away from the noise. What steps can I take? Would putting them into boarding for a few weeks be more stressful to them, or should I try to see if there is any way of leaving them in their enclosure but dampening the noise down somehow?

**A** This is a tricky question to answer as it very much depends on the temperaments of your rabbits.

Although you say it isn't possible to move them away from the noise, could you bring them indoors to a room away from the building works during the day?

If you do decide to keep your rabbits at home, whether inside or out, you will need to reduce the noise as much as possible. Although loud, abrupt noises can easily be dampened by closing all windows and doors, and drawing the curtains, vibrations from the drilling, hammering, and digging whilst laying the foundations will be felt through the ground, and are much more difficult to mask. The further away from the source of those deep vibrations, the better. Try to spend time with your rabbits throughout the day; your presence may reassure them that there is no immediate threat, help them feel safe, and reduce their stress. Be sure to provide them with plenty of places to hide, too.

Boarding may seem like a more attractive option, but could be just as stressful as remaining at home. The journey to the boarder, the unfamiliar environment, and change in routine will potentially have an impact on your rabbits' well-being. Should you decide that boarding is

*Disclaimer: The rabbit photos on these pages are for illustrative purposes only, and posed by 'models'. They are not the rabbits in the questions.*



Photo: Jo Hinde

The other option to treat fleas in cats and dogs is to use an oral (given by mouth) anti-flea medication - in general, the risk of exposure is then much lower. Most over-the-counter oral products are not very effective, so it would be worth speaking to your vet to get a prescription-only product. They will then be able to advise you of any risk to your rabbits.

**Guen Bradbury**

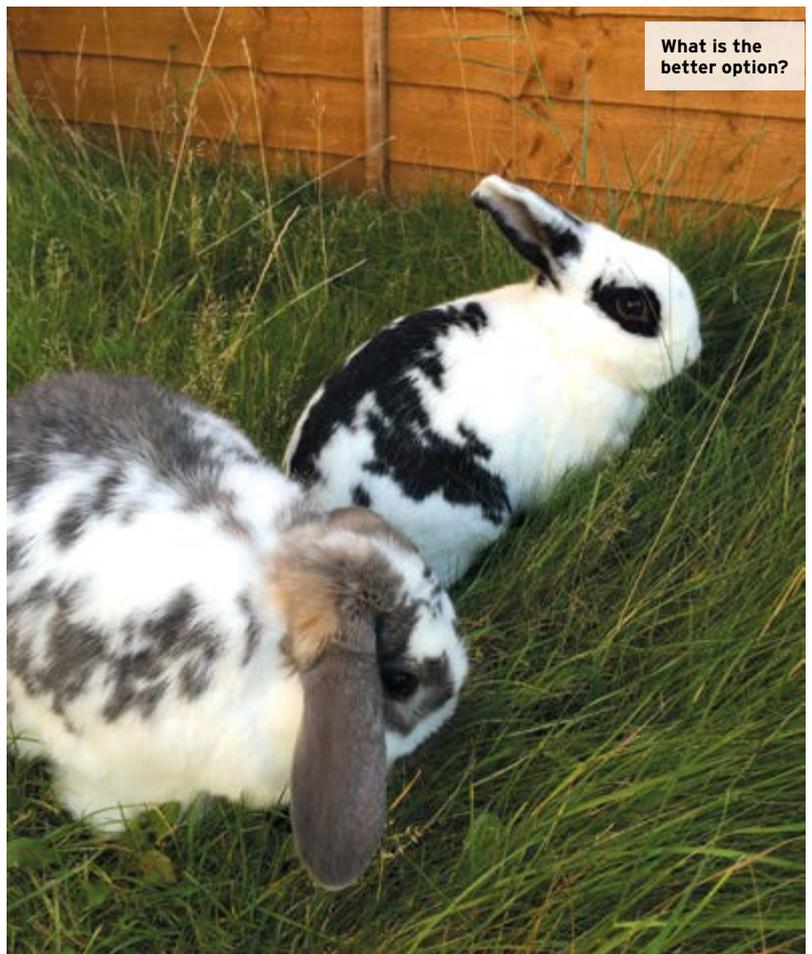


Photo: J Wright

the better option, then endeavour to find a rabbit-boarding specialist who will be able to accommodate their needs and recognise the signs of stress and illness. The RWF holds a list of boarders which members can access.

Talk with the builders to establish how long laying the foundations is likely to take. It may be the case that you need only relocate your rabbits for a couple of days whilst this most disturbing building phase is completed.

**Leo Staggs**

**1st place in bunny posers category and overall cover star competition winners: Soda and Copper (Jacqueline England)**

forage tray; a Burgess Excel Hamper consisting of 1 x 2kg Excel nuggets (appropriate to life stage), 1 x Excel Long Stem Feeding Hay and a selection of Nature snacks; and a Pet Remedy all in one kit from Unex Design Ltd consisting of 1 x 200ml Calming spray, 1 x 15ml refillable mini spray, 1 x Plug in Diffuser and 12 individual Calming wipes.

**Second place goes to Jake and Poppy, entered by Elisa Griffin.** Their prizes are: a Burgess Excel Hamper consisting of 1 x 2kg Excel nuggets (appropriate to life stage), 1 x Excel Long Stem Feeding Hay and a selection of Nature snacks; and a Pet Remedy all in one kit from Unex Design Ltd consisting of 1 x 200ml Calming spray, 1 x 15ml refillable mini spray, 1 x Plug in Diffuser and 12 individual Calming wipes.

### **Bunny posers - Two or more rabbits posing for the camera**

**The overall winners of this category were Soda and Copper, entered by Jacqueline England.** They will receive: a medium Natural Table from the Binky Shop; a Burgess Excel Hamper consisting of 1 x 2kg Excel nuggets (appropriate to life stage), 1 x Excel Long Stem Feeding Hay and a selection of Nature snacks; and a Pet Remedy all in one kit from Unex Design Ltd consisting of 1 x 200ml Calming spray, 1 x 15ml refillable mini spray, 1 x Plug in Diffuser and 12 individual Calming wipes.

**Second place goes to Bletchley and Flopsy, entered by Nick Hudson.** Their prizes are: a Burgess Excel Hamper consisting of 1 x 2kg Excel nuggets (appropriate to life stage), 1 x Excel Long Stem Feeding Hay and a selection of Nature snacks; and a Pet Remedy all in one kit from Unex Design Ltd consisting of 1 x 200ml Calming spray, 1 x 15ml refillable mini spray, 1 x Plug in Diffuser and 12 individual Calming wipes.

We would like to extend our thanks to Burgess Pet Care, The Binky Shop, Manor Pet Housing, The Twig and Nibble Shop

# 2019 COVER STAR COMPETITION RESULTS

**W**e decided to run a Cover Star competition this year, to replace our annual Bunnies of the Year competition, and we were delighted with the response and entries that came flooding in. The competition has raised approximately £200 for the vital work the RWF undertakes.

The entries were split into two categories, and prizes were offered to first and second place in each of the categories - our judges had an extremely difficult task selecting the winners!

After much debating, they have selected some very worthy winners. Our overall Cover Star crown for 2019 goes to Soda and Copper, two adorable bunnies sent in by Jacqueline England. Soda and Copper feature on our cover and were selected from the two category winners. Many congratulations to them and our other worthy winners.

### **Most loved up pair - Two or more rabbits snuggling up together**

**The overall winners of this category are Inky and Rolo, entered by Amelia Mayes.** They will receive: a £100 Manor Pet Housing voucher; a Twig and Nibble Shop Willow Hamper consisting of a timothy grass gnawing ball, 100g Herby sprinkle mix - Dill, Coriander & Chervil, 50g Peppermint & Chamomile, 100g Dandelion root and minty



**1st place in most loved up pair category: Inky and Rolo (Amelia-Mayes)**



**2nd place in most loved up pair category: Jake and Poppy (Elisa Griffin)**



**2nd place in bunny posers category: Bletchley and Flopsy (Nick Hudson)**

and Unex Design Ltd who have all generously donated prizes for this competition.

Prizes will be posted out directly from the prize donators. If you have won a prize and have not received an email contacting you for your postal details, please email [claire@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:claire@rabbitwelfare.co.uk). Please allow up to one month to receive your prizes, and if you have won multiple prizes from different companies, these will arrive separately. Due to availability, prizes may be substituted without prior notice.

### Another chance to win

All of the photos entered that weren't fortunate enough to be amongst the winners will be considered for future Rabbiting On covers, our Pawprints pages, It's My Bunnies and Star Bunnies pages in future issues of Rabbiting On. They may also be used to illustrate features in Rabbiting On, used RWAf literature, on the website or social media.



# IT'S MY BUNNIES

**If these are your bunnies, then there is a prize waiting for you to claim**

**The owner of this issue's lucky bunnies will receive a mystery prize**

If these are your bunnies, all you have to do is send the bunnies names, along with your name and address and your RWAf membership number to: It's my Bunny, Rabbiting On, RWAf, Enigma House, Culmhead Business Park, Taunton, Somerset TA3 7DY.

In each issue of Rabbiting On we picture a different bunny (or bunnies), chosen from all of the photos sent to Rabbiting On, and that bunnies owner wins a mystery prize. So keep looking, it could be your rabbit next time. But hurry - you need to claim your prize before the next issue of Rabbiting On is published.

There's also a chance that your bunny could be chosen to appear on a future cover of Rabbiting On, or to illustrate a feature in the magazine, so keep on sending in your pictures.

### **RULES FOR PHOTO SUBMISSIONS**

We love to see all your lovely rabbit photos. You can submit prints and CDs to the address above (make sure they're labeled with your name, address and the rabbit's name).

You can also submit digital images. Unfortunately some readers send us photos that we're unable to use, because they're not high enough resolution for printing in the magazine, or the rabbit's or owner's name aren't supplied.

Please email your photos to: [rwafphotos@gmail.com](mailto:rwafphotos@gmail.com)

Also, it's vital that your camera is set up properly before you take your photos, as it isn't possible to increase the resolution afterwards. We need you to set your camera to the highest image quality. Any photo files you submit should be about 1 - 1.5MB if it's a jpeg file, and around 2.5 - 3MB if it's a tiff file (please compress tiff files before sending).

If you have difficulties with the online form, please contact [hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk), or the helpline on **0844 324 6090**, and we'll do what we can to help.

# CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Welcome to another Campaign Update, keeping you informed of our constant fight to make things better for bunnies.

## Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund - Animal Welfare Officer Update - June 2019 to December 2019



The last six months have seen a marked increase in the number of sellers identified on internet platforms

We are so very lucky to have Mark working with us. He has absolutely thrown himself into this role and is serious about improving rabbit welfare. He has undertaken training of his own accord, and turns up at locations to follow up leads. Initially this post was funded by Pets Corner, and we are very grateful to them for getting this project off the ground for us. We now fund this project ourselves, and we are always grateful for donations that can help keep this project going.

The software that Keith Hinde developed for us is now being used by many other organisations. Here is an update from him:

*"Since our little project started collecting rabbit ads from a small selection of UK sites, things have expanded somewhat!*

*"In the UK and Ireland, we are now collecting ads for dogs, cats, fish, horses, reptiles and (of course!) rabbits from no fewer than 11 different sites. To date, we have collected 2.2m adverts in the UK and Ireland, of which 208,698 are for rabbits. 2020 should see us add additional sources, as well as engage with stakeholders and enforcement agencies to broaden the depth and availability of the data.*

*"In terms of international efforts, we have run pilot projects for the EU and have active projects in both the USA and Canada, with more planned for 2020".*

Mark Dron, RWA Animal Welfare Officer, updates us on his work over the last six months:

*"This has been a busy few months with plenty of reactive and proactive work to keep me occupied.*

*"I recently received training relating to intelligence research, which will enable me to further professionalise the intelligence-handling work of the role, and I have recently made in-roads into liaison and joint-working with several South-East Environmental Health and Trading Standards Departments, which should assist the dissemination of intelligence to the right areas quickly, which can only serve to improve how we action Animal-Welfare intelligence.*

*"In addition to proactive and reactive enquiries, and attempts to identify the physical locations of 'breeders' in and around the South East, I have also been maintaining my watch on internet sales platforms; in so doing I have continued to build up a picture of the size and scale of online sales and sellers, helped by HINDESIGHT's sales monitoring software and the use of*

open source research tools.

"As well as intelligence and complaints from the public and RWAf members, I have also received information identifying restaurants in two London boroughs from which it was alleged rabbit-meat of dubious-origin was being used to create various dishes that were popular locally. This led to observations and surveillance, as well as considerable open-source research and ultimately referral of two businesses to environmental health food safety officers for further investigation.

"The last six months have seen a marked increase in the amount of sellers identified on internet platforms, which include Pets 4 Homes, Gumtree and Facebook; the amounts are so large in fact that I have had to adopt a triage system, cross-referring my records with the HINDESIGHT trawl data and prioritising investigations based on more than three advertisements a month, otherwise it would be virtually impossible to keep track of the enquiries.

"Since June, I have started over thirty full investigations, many of which are still in hand or have resulted in referrals to the RSPCA, Local Authorities, and in many instances HMRC, where it is likely that the earnings potential represents a likelihood of income suppression and tax evasion.

"My open source enquiries have also brought me into contact with some emerging animal welfare and health issues, that I have been able to highlight to HQ, which includes the presence of unlicensed Cannabis-derived animal medicines in the UK market, many of which appear to be freely available on the internet, both domestically and as postal imports.

"My current workload includes a number of outstanding Freedom of Information enquiries relating to possible breeders in various South Eastern council areas, which is where I usually start my enquiries into possible online breeders. If someone holds a licence, there is little point in continuing enquiries other than where definite welfare or health concerns exist.

"2019, as a whole, has seen an increase, not only in work relating to unlicensed sales, but also the unlicensed use of rabbits and other small

mammals for entertainment purposes. This has resulted in my first referrals to councils for this phenomenon. I suspect this sudden burst of activity relates to provisions within the revamped Animal Welfare regulations, that relates to the licensing of activities involving animals.

"My work continues to impinge upon other areas of potential criminality, and I have been involved in a referral to Action Fraud of an international fraudster offering dogs and monkeys for sale via local sales sites, which do not exist, resulting in considerable losses for some, as well as product counterfeiters, and what appears to be an illicit fuel supply site in the wilds of rural Kent, which came to light as a result of enquiries into a possible local rabbit breeder.

"It is important in this role to remember that crimes rarely happen in isolation, and that rabbit breeding could just be the tip of the iceberg.

"In other news, I have also been enlisted by HQ to assist with welfare enquiries in the 'Ask the Expert's' section of Rabbiting On, which has given me a few opportunities to exercise my grey matter and legal knowledge in the last six months.

"In closing, please remember that I welcome referrals from RWAf members and the public, and any information you may have is always gratefully received and acted upon where possible. The information you hold could well be the missing part in a bigger jigsaw, so please never think that it is too trivial; please also remember, however, that if your information relates to a crime in progress then you should always call the Police on 999".

# Getting 'On The Hop' into libraries

Our 'On the Hop' booklet, proudly on display amongst other books



In November we were contacted by one of our Bournemouth members, who had undertaken to get our 'On The Hop' booklet into her local libraries, to ensure members of the public could access accurate and correct rabbit information.

She wrote to us initially, and then set about contacting Chief Librarians in the counties around where she lives, Bournemouth, Dorset, Wiltshire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Bristol. The results have been tremendous. Copies of our 'On The Hop' booklet, which we have provided free of charge, have been placed in every branch, in those areas, so they can have their own

reference copy. Now, she has turned her attention to some other areas in the south too.

We are happy to extend this across the whole UK. If people are willing to write to the Chief Librarian in your area. Please copy us in if you email them ([info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk)), so we can keep up with progress. Let's get good, up to date, accurate and kind information out there, so that rabbit owners care for their rabbits correctly.

If you require help in writing an email or letter please visit <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/campaigns/resources/> where you can find a template to adapt.

# New projects



There are currently no legally-binding guidelines on how pet rabbits should be housed

We are kicking off the new decade with a few projects. Some we will be able to tell you about later this year, but there are two that we are delighted to tell you about now.

Firstly, we are shortly going to be launching a petition regarding rabbit housing. We have worked with Dr Laura Dixon on this (she was part of the team that conducted some research on rabbit housing for the RSPCA, and is a member of our 'RWF Expert Panel'), so we know the petition is based on the most up-to-date research and evidence. This is really important. We will be gathering signatures for this from vets and other professionals, and then asking retailers to remove anything below current welfare guidelines from sale.

Enclosures that are too small for rabbits lead to decreased activity, behavioural restriction and increased stress, and by association can also lead to an increased risk of obesity and skeletal problems. Rabbits will increase their activity levels, interact more with their environment and increase the height of rearing behaviours when provided with appropriate sized enclosures. Rabbits will also work for access to increased space, showing that larger space areas are important to them. As a result, being housed in enclosures that are too small will negatively impact a rabbit's mental and physical well-being. A survey of rabbit housing retailers found that 60.5% of one-storey hutches available for purchase did not even meet

the legal minimum requirements for meat rabbits and 91.5% of these hutches did not meet the RWF size recommendations. There are currently no legally-binding guidelines on how pet rabbits should be housed. Therefore we are asking to have these inadequately sized one-storey hutches removed from commercial sales.

The other news is that we are hosting a 'Rabbit Welfare day' in June.

Rabbits are all too often bottom of the agenda, and we want to raise their profile and raise awareness of the many issues they face. Richard Saunders and Rae Todd have worked with our lovely Patron, Dr Emma Milne, who is well known and respected for her welfare work, to put a great agenda together, to cover as many issues as possible in one day. We have a great line up and we will be inviting delegates from other welfare organisations, the pet industry, breeders and DEFRA in the hope that we can put rabbits top of the agenda and come up with some solutions to improve their welfare.

# RWAF FOCUS - WHO IS WHO AT THE RWAF

## Guen Bradbury

### Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser

I'm a vet with a special interest in rabbit behaviour and I'm the veterinary adviser for Rabbiting On. My interest in rabbits started when I was eleven - I found a stray rabbit that had been abandoned next to a dual carriageway. Bun soon became part of the family. After his death, I inherited another rabbit called Pewter. I tried to keep him in the same way that I had kept Bun, but he started to bite and scratch anyone who approached his hutch, froze when he was lifted, and tried to avoid human interaction as much as possible. He was clearly unhappy, but I didn't know how to improve his welfare. I was obviously making mistakes.

I then started at vet school. We weren't taught much about rabbit behaviour, so I read as much as I could elsewhere. When I graduated, I ran behaviour clinics for all pet species, but I didn't see many rabbits. People just weren't asking for help. I needed to find another way to engage with owners.

So, I set up a YouTube channel and posted videos of my rabbits doing trained trick behaviours. Underneath each video, I described how the tricks were trained, and I encouraged rabbit owners to post comments or send me private messages. More and more people started to contact me, and I set up a website and Facebook page (*'bunnybehaviour'*) to help me reach people. All of these interactions taught me something important: the majority of behavioural problems in rabbits occur because of the owner's inappropriate interactions with, or expectations of, their rabbits.

To get some new ideas into veterinary discussion, I co-authored various



Guen is the Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser

papers, articles and letters on the subject of rabbit behaviour in veterinary journals. While this was great for engaging with vets, owners don't often have access to this information. So, I wrote a book - a book for readers who want to understand rabbit behaviour problems, and want simple, evidence-based advice to improve them. I now write articles for owner magazines and I talk about rabbit behaviour to vets, vet students, nurses, and owners. The more people who care about rabbit welfare, the better!



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Rabbits who suffer with dental disease are at risk of flystrike

All photos: C Speight

# PROTECTING YOUR RABBITS AGAINST FLYSTRIKE

By Claire Speight, Registered Veterinary Nurse

**O**ur series, 'Rabbit Essentials', aims to guide new owners and focuses on an area of rabbit care each issue. In this issue we look at the serious, distressing and often fatal condition, flystrike, and what you can do to help prevent it happening to your rabbits.

## What is flystrike?

Flystrike occurs when blowflies (blue bottles and green bottles) lay their eggs anywhere on an animal's body. The eggs are small and can be hard to spot (they look like small grains of rice).

The flies are attracted to blood, urine, faeces or pus, so wounds are a target, but dirty or wet bottoms are the usual place to find the problem. Rabbits that hyper salivate (dribble saliva), often due to dental disease, or those that have dental abscesses are also at risk, as well as those with a poor diet. Rabbits who are overweight or have mobility problems are also susceptible.

## What you need to do

When checking for soiling or flystrike, you have to strike a balance between getting perfect visibility of the rabbit's anogenital area and respecting the rabbit's welfare (picking up rabbits is usually very stressful for the rabbit). If a rabbit has a low-risk of flystrike, then just monitoring its behaviour should enable you to strike the right balance between its health and welfare. Low-risk rabbits are those that are normal weight, are kept with a companion, are very active, have continuous access to a large area, and do not soil themselves. For high-risk rabbits (overweight, inactive, small enclosure or that soil themselves), you need to check more thoroughly, which means that you need to actually see the anogenital region.



Flies are attracted to dirty bottoms

For low-risk rabbits, check daily that the rabbits:

- **Are moving around normally**
- **Are eating and drinking**
- **Don't smell.**

For high-risk rabbits, check the anogenital area daily:

- **By encouraging the rabbit to stretch up on its back legs to get a treat**
- **By looking at the area when the rabbit runs away from you**
- **By looking at the area when the rabbit is lying down.**

If you have any suspicion that the rabbit is soiled or that it might have flystrike, you need to pick the rabbit up to check. The risk to its health far outweighs the risk to its welfare in this situation.

If your rabbit has faeces or urine on their fur/skin this must be carefully cleaned off. Please note you should never turn your rabbit upside down to check/clean them - see 'How to health check your rabbit' in the winter 2019 Rabbiting On, for how to handle your rabbit.

Ensure your rabbits' diet is high in fibre and low in carbohydrates. This means the main food must be hay/grass and they should eat a pile their own body size every day. They should also get a small amount of leafy greens/herbs and a level tablespoon of good quality pellets per 1kg of ideal bodyweight each day. This should be scatter fed to encourage foraging and activity.

If your rabbits are overweight, their health is in danger for many reasons and flystrike is one of these, so talk to your rabbit savvy vet/vet nurse about a healthy diet to help your rabbits lose weight safely.

If any of your rabbits seem to be having problems with movement, see your vet. Osteoarthritis is often missed in rabbits, and there are medications that can be given that will help with their mobility and discomfort, making them better able to keep themselves clean and move about.

Clean out your rabbits' litter tray/s at least once a day. A minimum of once a week, give your rabbits' enclosure a really thorough clean.

If your rabbits are at high-risk due to predisposing factors, speak to your vet about treating them with F10 Germicidal Wound Spray or Rearguard, as well as taking other preventative measures, and if possible take steps to rectify the factors which are making your rabbit high-risk.

F10 Germicidal Wound Spray can be used on a regular basis to help repel flies and prevent flystrike. Apply weekly to the rear

end or other areas of specific concern. For rabbits who are at high-risk and those who need regular cleaning, the product may need to be applied more frequently.

Rearguard comes in a ready-to-use bottle. Ensure the rabbit's fur is thoroughly wetted with the solution, from the middle of the back to the tip of the tail. Special attention should be paid to the areas under the tail and between the back legs.



**Flystrike is an emergency, day or night**

Rearguard will not kill adult maggots but works by preventing any eggs laid by flies developing and starting to eat into the rabbit. Rabbits should be treated at 10-week intervals, and bathing or washing the rabbit after application may result in a reduction of efficacy. Rearguard should not be used on rabbits under 10 weeks of age or those with broken skin.

Other preventative measures you can take include planting plants that repel flies around your rabbits' environment, and draping mosquito netting over your rabbits' enclosure.

## Houserabbits

Indoor rabbits are at risk too, so don't be complacent. They need checking, just the same as rabbits kept outdoors, and those with conditions placing them as high-risk need further preventative treatments and the underlying cause/s addressing.

## What to do if your rabbit has fly eggs or maggots?

**This is an emergency and your rabbit needs to see a vet immediately, regardless of the time of day or night: your rabbit cannot wait.**

Don't wash your rabbit. Your vet will need to clip the fur and wet fur is difficult to clip.

Pick off any maggots you can see but don't let that delay you getting your rabbit to a vet.

If you're very lucky and treatment takes place in time, it's possible your rabbit may be saved, but unfortunately in some cases euthanasia is the kindest option. Take your vet's advice on this.

**Remember, prevention is always better than cure...**

# Help prevent fly-strike

with

## F10 Germicidal Wound Spray with Insecticide

Just a few sprays will help deter flies



**PREVENTION PROTECTION TREATMENT**

**Speak to your vet for more information**



Seek immediate veterinary advice if your rabbit is suffering from fly-strike

Distributed in the UK by: Meadow's Animal Healthcare [www.meadowsah.com](http://www.meadowsah.com) 01509 265557

Rabbits that have lost their companion are usually fairly easy to bond to another rabbit

Photo: Jess Watson

# HOW DOES A RABBIT'S EARLY EXPERIENCE AFFECT THE BONDING PROCESS?

By Guen Bradbury, Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser

**R**abbits need to live with other rabbits to enjoy good welfare - this is explained more in the article 'Can human company ever replace that of another rabbit?' on page 4. However, the bonding process can be hard because rabbits are very territorial, and owners often wonder whether the process is harder if the rabbit has had previous bad experiences. This article will explore what bonding means and how this can be affected by previous experiences.

## What is a bonded pair?

Let's start by thinking about what we mean when we talk about a 'bonded' pair of rabbits. Rabbits that are 'bonded' have a stable hierarchy within their relationship (in the limited situations that domestic rabbits experience). That is, they know which rabbit is dominant and which rabbit is subordinate (dominance and subordination are two qualities of a relationship, not of a rabbit - a rabbit that is dominant in one relationship may be subordinate in another). They are familiar enough with each other that they can read each other's subtle communication. For example, the dominant rabbit doesn't have to show overt aggressive behaviour if it wants the other rabbit to move out of the way - a twitch of the ear or a slight head movement will be enough to tell the other rabbit what it wants. This means that they don't have to waste energy establishing a hierarchy; they each understand their position, and they can spend more time on behaviours that are important for health and welfare - eating, grooming, exploring, and sleeping.

So that explains a 'bonded' pair of rabbits, and the 'bonding process' is how two unfamiliar rabbits establish this hierarchy - how they learn to behave in this relationship. In order for the rabbits to be willing to establish this hierarchy, we have to put them in an unusual situation in which neither rabbit feels confident in the environment. In the wild, rabbits don't have to bond with unfamiliar rabbits - they grow up with other rabbits, live in a large warren with rabbits that they are somewhat familiar with, and defend their territory from rabbits that they don't know. So, when rabbits are establishing a hierarchy, we put them in an environment that neither of them knows so they don't show their natural territorial behaviour.



The bonding process can be hard as rabbits are territorial

Photo: J Maddy



**Bonded rabbits have a stable hierarchy within their relationship**

## Survival instincts

Rabbits always believe that they are under threat of being eaten. Therefore, in an unfamiliar environment, the rabbits will feel quite stressed - a rabbit needs to know its environment to feel relaxed. It needs to know where to hide and how to reach this shelter to avoid predators. Therefore, because they are a bit stressed, they are more likely to seek companionship (if you don't know your environment, if there is another rabbit close by, you can both keep a look out for danger and you have half the chance of being eaten). Both rabbits want to be fairly close, and want each other to stay around, so the chances of them successfully establishing a hierarchy are better.

During the bonding process, both rabbits will typically show a range of different behaviours, including threatening behaviours (like chasing), hierarchical behaviours (like mounting), or other interchanges (both rabbits with lowered heads, each waiting to be groomed). This helps each rabbit learn how the other rabbit responds. As they are increasingly better able to predict each other's behaviour, the intensity of the behaviour will lessen. In a bonded pair of rabbits, there may be some competitive behaviours, but aggressive behaviours will be very much reduced or even absent. The dominant rabbit may occasionally displace the subordinate rabbit from a food resource or may chase it. The subordinate rabbit will usually defer or withdraw if the dominant rabbit shows these behaviours - this shows that it understands the hierarchy, which will reduce the frequency that the other rabbit shows these behaviours. Usually, the dominant rabbit in a relationship will be more likely to be groomed by the other rabbit, but this varies in different situations.

## Early experiences

So now we understand what the 'bonding process' actually means, we can think about what early experiences might affect the establishment of a stable hierarchy. Let's consider four types of experience: a rabbit that has spent all its life alone, a rabbit whose bonded companion has died, a rabbit in a bonded pair in which the bond has broken down, and

a rabbit which has had multiple unsuccessful bonding experiences.

- Rabbits that have spent a long time on their own may be less familiar with normal rabbit behaviour, and they don't necessarily 'speak the right language'. Some of 'speaking the right language' is learned. This may mean that it takes longer for these rabbits to bond because they don't communicate as other rabbits expect. However, almost all rabbits will have spent time with other rabbits when they were very young, so while they may be slower to interact normally, they should still be able to do so.
- Rabbits that have lost their companion are usually fairly easy to bond to another rabbit - they have had a lot of experience interacting with another rabbit recently and they are especially sensitive to being alone because they aren't used to it. Although most rabbits pair up with the first new partner, it's not surprising to have to try two bonding processes, as some rabbit pairs don't work well first time round.
- Rabbits that have had a previous bond that broke down (because of lack of neutering, illness, pain, etc.) may have learned unhelpful behaviours to cope with their situation. These behaviours may make the bonding process more difficult, but usually the behaviours are only shown within a specific context towards a specific rabbit, so they don't transfer to a new relationship. Even so, it is worth while paying more attention than usual in the first couple of hours of a new bond to ensure everything is going smoothly.
- Rabbits that have had several bad bonding experiences may be harder to bond, but this isn't always because they've had bad bonding experiences. These rabbits are probably behaving in an abnormal way to start with (otherwise they wouldn't have had a bad experience in earlier rounds), so it is hard to know to what degree the experience alters the behaviour. Nevertheless, it is likely to be harder to bond these rabbits, and so asking a rescue centre to bond them is the best option, because the staff can try them with a number of different rabbits until they find a compatible companion. Different rabbits will behave in different ways during the bonding process, and some pairings will work better than others.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the establishment of a hierarchy during the bonding process can be affected by many factors. The major factor is the familiarity of the territory, which is why we bond rabbits in unfamiliar situations. Previous experience may slightly affect the likelihood of success, but this is not usually the reason that bonding processes are unsuccessful.



**The establishment of a hierarchy during the bonding process can be affected by many factors**

Minimal restraint can be attempted first to give eye medication

Photo: J Bourne

# OUR 'HOW TO' SERIES CONTINUES WITH - HOW TO ADMINISTER MEDICATIONS AND SYRINGE FEEDS

By Rachel Sibbald, Registered Veterinary Nurse

**F**rom time to time, our rabbits may require medication or syringe feeding at home. Rabbits can become stressed by the handling required for the administration of medication and may even injure themselves in the process. This article will look at how to administer ear drops, eye drops and oral medication/syringe feeding in a safe, efficient and controlled manner.

## Eye drops

Your rabbit savvy vet may prescribe eye drops for several conditions, and due to the rabbit's large orbit (eyeball) and position on the side of the skull, administration of eye drops is usually straight forward. Initially, attempts can be made to administer medication with no restraint. Dependent on your rabbit's eye condition and their demeanour, attempts can be made to distract with food. Someone else may want to hand feed or use a bowl of your rabbit's favourite food to distract him/her. Start by stroking their head and assess their response. If this is tolerated and they continue to eat, then one hand can be used to very gently part your rabbit's eyelids and the other hand used to administer the drops. Care must be taken not to touch the rabbit's eye with the eye dropper nozzle. If the rabbit is very averse to this process, they may have to be safely restrained. One of the easiest methods is the 'bunny burrito'.



The nozzle of ear drops should be placed at the top of the ear canal

## The Bunny Burrito technique

The bunny burrito should be reserved for more fractious rabbits that do not tolerate a 'less is more' administration technique. To perform the bunny burrito, follow these steps:

- 1 Select a large towel or blanket and find somewhere quiet, within the home or outside, where the rabbit is unlikely to be stressed or scared.
- 2 Preferably this should take place on the floor so that, in the event of struggling, risk of injury is minimised. However if the rabbit is relatively calm this can be performed on a table.
- 3 Spread the towel/blanket and place your rabbit in the middle (spraying Pet Remedy onto the towel may help to calm your rabbit).
- 4 Pull the left side of the towel/blanket over the right side of the rabbit and vice versa, leaving the head exposed.
- 5 The excess towel/blanket can be tucked underneath the rabbit.
- 6 This must be done tight enough to reduce struggling but loose enough so not to restrict your rabbit's breathing.
- 7 Most rabbits restrained in this manner will allow minor interventions.

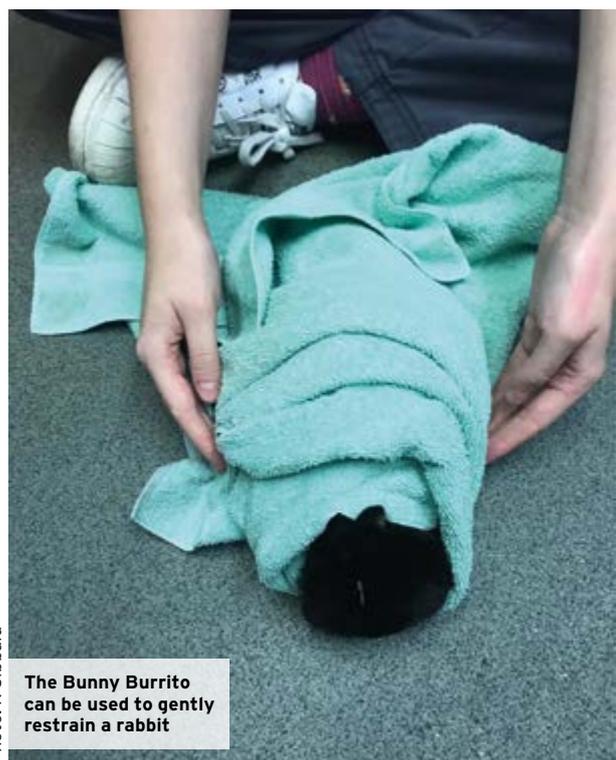
## Ear drops

Ear disease is more commonly becoming recognised in rabbits, especially in lop breeds. Touching of diseased ears and administration of medication can be painful and illicit a relatively strong reaction, with head shaking and attempts to escape. Most rabbits will resent liquid being administered into their ear canal. For this reason, it may be safer to use the bunny burrito when administering ear drops to rabbits. The nozzle of the medication should be placed at the top of the ear canal

and for lops the pinna (ear flap) will need to gently be raised to a vertical position. Never try to push anything into your rabbit's ear. Many animals with ear disease will have stenotic (narrowed) ear canals and in small mammals such as rabbits, most ear medication nozzles are far too big to be put down into the canal. The required dose of medication should be instilled at the top of the canal and the base of the ear can be gently massaged to help the medication penetrate further into the canal. Massaging should be stopped immediately if your rabbit shows signs of pain.

### Oral medication and syringe feeding

Some rabbits may willingly take some types of oral medication. Owners could try using a syringe as a treat giver, to desensitise their rabbit and allow easy administration of medication. If this has not been done before, it is always worth attempting to give oral medication via syringe by allowing your rabbit to sniff/lick at the end of the syringe. Adding a very small amount of natural fruit juice to the syringe can help them to become used to this. Medications such as meloxicam are often sweet flavoured, and some rabbits will willingly take it from a syringe. If delivering oral medication onto food, ensure your rabbit is receiving the correct prescribed dose and that it will not be ingested by a companion rabbit. This is more easily achieved by putting medication onto a specific piece of food and hand feeding the rabbit individually. When you're trying to encourage a rabbit to take medication, the normal rules about rabbit foods don't apply. You want to give something that the rabbit really likes - it's very important that they take the medication. Fenugreek Crunchies and Burgess Excel Parsley Pieces or even Shreddies and Cornflakes are good because they have a large surface area to hold the medication and rabbits usually really like them. Start by putting a tiny bit of the medication on a piece of cereal and then gradually increase the amount you put on - that will help the rabbit get in the right mindset about taking the food. Unfortunately, many will be averse to oral medication and become wise to medication on food very quickly. If this is the case, your rabbit will need to be gently restrained so oral medication can be given safely and accurately. Administration of liquid syringe feeds are often required when your rabbit has reduced food intake or has stopped eating and has been assessed by



The Bunny Burrito can be used to gently restrain a rabbit

Photo: R Sibbald



Some rabbits take syringe feeding more willingly than others

a vet. Never begin to syringe feed a rabbit without consulting a vet as this is dangerous in cases of intestinal obstruction.

To syringe feed your rabbit:

- 1** Ensure your rabbit is as relaxed as possible. This may involve sitting on your lap, being on the floor or being wrapped in a bunny burrito. The bunny burrito has the added advantage of acting like a bib to catch any dribbles of food. If you are not wrapping your rabbit, a baby's bib can be placed loosely around their neck to keep their face, neck and paws clean.
- 2** Make sure you have all the medication/syringe food prepared and ready to give before you restrain your rabbit. If you are syringe feeding, ensure you have pre-filled the amount you would like to administer before beginning. Liquid preparations of food should be made up fresh at each feeding.
- 3** Gently insert the syringe into the diastema (the gap between your rabbit's incisors and cheek teeth). Rabbits resent anything approaching from the front of the mouth/nose as this is a blind spot. If resistance is felt, do not advance the syringe, take it out and try again.
- 4** Aim to syringe the medication/food into the middle of the mouth and not towards the back of the throat.
- 5** Allow the rabbit to have enough time between mouthfuls to chew and swallow. Give no more than 1ml (less for small/baby rabbits) during each compression of the syringe.
- 6** Your rabbit's head can be stroked between mouthfuls to encourage chewing/swallowing.
- 7** Always ensure your rabbit is upright and in a normal position when syringe feeding - NEVER administer oral medication whilst your rabbit is on its back and do not use 'trancing' as a method to restrain your rabbit. This state exhibited by the rabbit is the result of an extreme stress response and in this altered state swallowing may be compromised, resulting in aspiration of fluid.
- 8** As your rabbit's health improves, they may become more resistant to medication/syringe feeding. Never stop medication without consulting your vet, but if your rabbit is beginning to eat on their own, syringe feeding can be reduced accordingly.

If your rabbit is receiving unpleasant tasting medication (often antibiotics are unpalatable to rabbits), this can be mixed with vegetable-based baby food/fruit juice (apple or pineapple for example) to attempt to make it more palatable. Some rabbits will voluntarily lap from bowls of liquid feeds, so a small bowl can be made available. Always consult your vet or veterinary nurse if you would like a demonstration on how to perform these tasks, as each rabbit is an individual and some techniques will work better than others.

**NEW**

Lots of other bunny style jewellery available on our website so please have a look.

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### Dr Twigs Way

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## Gardening for Rabbits

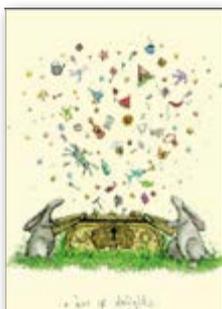
### Dr Twigs Way

Brand new and exclusive to the RWF, the new essential book for rabbit owners, Gardening For Rabbits. Esteemed horticulturist and rabbit owner Dr Twigs Way has written this especially for the RWF. It can't be bought anywhere else.



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## 2 BAD MICE CARDS



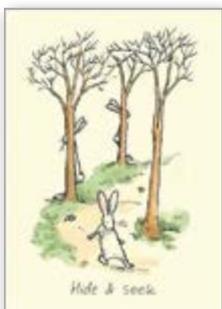
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Hide & Seek



You're the best



Awesome



Some - bunny to Love



Sleepy afternoon



You're gorgeous!



Cloud watching



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# READERS' LETTERS

## Birthday fundraiser

I held a fundraiser for my birthday and raised £100 for RWAF.

I had a little English rabbit called Pie. She was born in South Africa, and travelled around the world with me to live in Belgium for a year and finally the UK. She passed away in November 2018 after being diagnosed with cancer.

She was my best friend through thick and thin, and I miss her every moment of the day. I did this for her, and I know she's looking down from heaven and smiling at all the wonderful work you do.

**Cornell Kortenhoeven**



Pie inspired Cornell to raise funds for RWAF

## 'On the Hop' booklet thumbs up

I am writing to you to say thank you for such a great, informative booklet. This came as such a handy tool to use when I lent it to my friend whose daughter wanted a rabbit.

She is 20 years old with learning disabilities, but she was adamant that she wanted a rabbit to cuddle and care for. Her mother (my friend) was concerned about the amount of care that was needed when owning a rabbit, and asked me to speak to her. I own two rabbits and am always talking about them! I lent her the booklet and her daughter changed her mind.

Although the internet is to hand, most people do not research their pets before getting them. This booklet could help prevent rabbits from having a lonely or neglected life.

**Amy Herridge**



## Wild bunny

Bunny has taught Di lots about wild rabbits

All of my bunnies and hares are wonderful characters, but there is one who is not like the others, in more ways than one. That little one is imaginatively called Bunny! Bunny is a tame wild bunny!

I received a call from a friend on a farm where a nest of wild rabbits had been disturbed. Bunny and one of her siblings were found tiny, blind and helpless by one of the farm dogs, who fortunately barked at them and didn't touch them.

When I arrived, I was shocked at how tiny the two babies were. They were so small,

their little ears hadn't even started to grow long and their tiny eyes were still tight shut. I'd raised wild babies before but none had been this young. Sadly, the sibling was too badly injured, probably by the farm machinery, and was euthanised by my bunny savvy vet, but Bunny came home with me. She became my constant companion and took to being bottle fed brilliantly. She even slept next to me!

So there started the most wonderful relationship. The bunnies I'd hand raised before had either been domestic breeds or wild and subsequently released. However, Bunny decided that she was staying! She had no fear of my dogs and made herself at home. It was apparent that I was definitely her 'mum'.

Bunny has taught me that wild rabbits are far from the mindless destroyers of land that they have been made out to be. She is incredibly intelligent and can figure problems out easily; she can climb like a squirrel, dig like a JCB and she is by far the most affectionate bunny friend I've known. She is so excited to see me every day, binkies when I appear, and spends hours being stroked and snuggled. However, she does not do the whole being picked up thing, but then most rabbits don't!

Wild rabbits are an important part of our wildlife and are incredible and wonderful creatures.

**Di Leslie-Veal**

## Rabbit artwork

I noticed in the autumn 2019 issue of Rabbiting On that you were asking if there are any more bunny artists reading the magazine.

I keep an illustrated journal, which I find very therapeutic and a lovely way to wind down at the end of a hectic day, and also a great way to start the day when I wake up too early (usually by house rabbits demanding food!). My house bunnies feature often in my journals (I even have one journal that is a 'Book of Bunnies' dedicated to them alone), and the wild bunnies, in my horse's paddock, make an occasional appearance too, along with the

local crows and ravens who give me very interesting gifts in return for the food that I offer them!

Also, if I am unfortunate enough to suffer a bunny bereavement, I find that the drawings are a comforting reminder of a departed friend.

**Karen-Anne Chudley**



Karens 'BFG' drawing

Beautiful wildlife scene by Karen



# PET RABBITS - THE VETERINARY PERSPECTIVE

By Dan O'Neill, Senior Lecturer Companion Animal  
Epidemiology, Royal Veterinary College

There are an estimated 1 million pet rabbits in the UK which often bring great joy to their owners' lives<sup>(1,2)</sup>. Although the keeping of rabbits as pets has a long history in the UK and elsewhere, welfare issues are increasingly recognised relating to three key aspects: 1. how we feed, house and meet the behavioural needs for these rabbits; 2. selection towards extreme conformation; and 3. veterinary care that is provided to both prevent and manage ill-health. In reality, these are all inter-linked issues within a web of welfare problems for many of our pet rabbits, but also they offer many opportunities for the enlightened and enthusiastic owner to greatly enhance the lives of this special species. With this in mind, this article will explore rabbit health from the first opinion veterinarian's perspective, to describe the types of rabbits seen in veterinary general practice and what conditions are treated in these animals. This information can then help us to develop better strategies to keep our rabbits happy and healthy.

## Vetcompass™

First opinion veterinarians provide care to millions of individual animals every year in the UK. With the advent of Big Data analyses, we can now extend this care from the individual animal to the wider population by collecting and analyzing anonymized veterinary clinical data to answer the bigger welfare questions that require information on hundreds, thousands or even millions of animals<sup>(3-5)</sup>. VetCompass™ at the Royal Veterinary College in London is the world's largest university-based research programme on veterinary clinical records, sharing information with over 30% of UK vet practices and covering over 15 million animals<sup>(6)</sup>.

## What was done

Using veterinary clinical data from VetCompass™<sup>(6)</sup>, this study characterised the common breeds, commonly diagnosed disorders and common causes of death of pet rabbits as recorded by veterinarians in primary-care practice in England. The full paper is freely available to download and read<sup>(7)</sup>. The study included all rabbits under primary veterinary care at clinics in England participating in the VetCompass™ Programme during 2013. Information on all diagnoses recorded during 2013 and all deaths at any date was extracted for a random subset of animals.

## What was found

### • Demography

The study included 6,349 rabbits from 107 clinics during 2013. The average age overall was 3.2 years. The average age of males (3.3 years) was higher than for females (3.1 years). There were 3429 (54.7%) male rabbits and 2,830 (45.3%) female rabbits. Average adult bodyweight overall was 2.1 kg. The average adult bodyweight of males (2.2 kg) was similar to females (2.1 kg). The most common breed types recorded were "domestic" (2,022, 31.9%), lop (1,675, 26.4%) and Netherland dwarf (672, 10.6%).

### • Deaths

The average age at death of 370 rabbits that died during the study was 4.3 years. The average age at death of males (5.2 years) was older than for females (3.7 years). The most common causes of death recorded were flystrike (10.9%), anorexia (4.9%), recumbency/collapse (4.9%) and gut stasis (4.3%). Among the 8 most common causes of death recorded, the average age at death varied widely, ranging from 1.7 years for myxomatosis up to 6.4 years for anorexia.

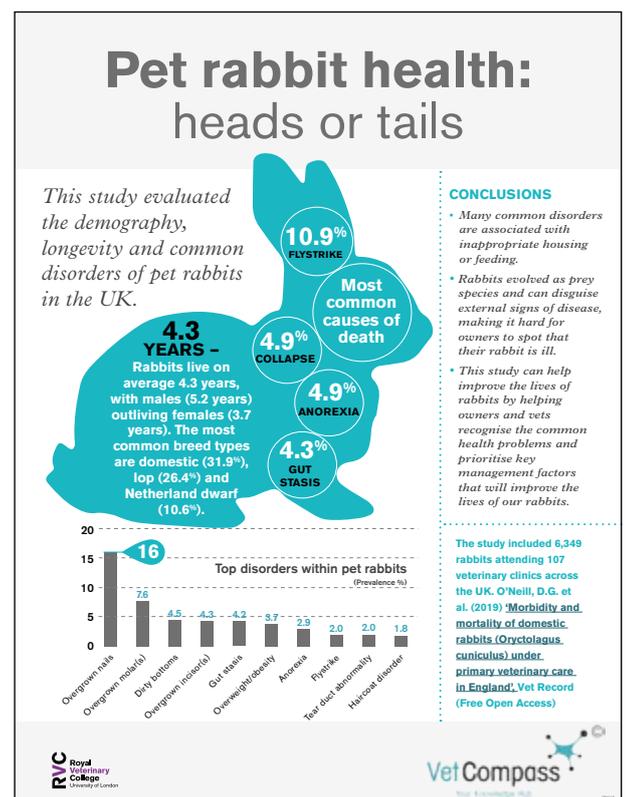
### • Common Disorders

Of the 2,506 rabbits randomly sampled, 1,433 rabbits (57.2%) had at least one disorder

recorded during 2013 while the remaining 42.8% either presented for preventive care only or were not seen at all during 2013. The most common disorders recorded were overgrown nails (16.0%), overgrown molar(s) (7.6%), dirty bottom (4.5%), overgrown incisor(s) (4.3%) and gut stasis (4.2%). Males were more frequently affected than females for 4/24 common disorders (overgrown nails, overgrown molar(s), overgrown incisor(s) and dental disease). The average age of rabbits affected with common disorders varied from 1.6 years for bite injury up to 5.4 years for flystrike (see table).

## Let's discuss

In order to get a fuller understanding of the overall healthcare needs of our pet rabbits, we need to see the evidence from several angles. There have been some useful recent reports about the perceptions of owners on rabbit health<sup>(8)</sup> and also some targeted



The study revealed some interesting findings



**Overgrown nails were a common reason for rabbits to attend the vets**

studies of specific diseases<sup>(9-11)</sup>, but this study of over two thousand animals is the largest analysis to date on the health status of pet rabbits under primary veterinary care.

The most commonly recorded breed types were "domestic", lop and Netherland dwarf. Given that "domestic" is not a formally recognised rabbit breed, it appears that the true breed status is frequently loosely recorded in veterinary clinical records or may even be unknown by the owner or veterinary personnel.

The average age at death was 4.3 years but some rabbits lived up to 14.4 years. These findings support many textbooks that state that rabbits can live up to 10 years<sup>(12)</sup> and published studies based on owner surveys that have reported average longevity for pet rabbits from 4.2 - 5.4 years<sup>(13,14)</sup>. The most common causes of death recorded appear to be end-stage clinical signs (for example flystrike or collapse/recumbency) that are secondary to underlying disease processes. Many causes of death represent disease processes which could potentially be prevented by improved husbandry, vaccination and parasite control, and therefore highlight the value of regular veterinary care and developing suitable preventative medicine protocols<sup>(15)</sup>.

Overgrown nails were the most common disorder in our study, recorded in 16% of the rabbits. Although nail clipping is often seen as a routine procedure, nail elongation can indicate underlying husbandry deficits including lack of space to exercise or inappropriate substrate. Dirty bottom was the second most common skin disorder (4.5%) and is important for the pet rabbit because affected animals are predisposed to more serious disorders such as flystrike<sup>(16)</sup>. Dental disorders including overgrown incisors, overgrown molars and generalized dental disease were identified in 10.9% rabbits in our study. However, despite this apparently high frequency of diagnosed cases, not all rabbits may have had a full oral examination so the true proportion affected with dental disease may be up to 40%<sup>(11-17)</sup>. Gastrointestinal/abdominal disorders, including gut stasis, were reported in 10.9% rabbits. Gut stasis can result from multiple factors including pain, stress, inappropriate diet and dental disease<sup>(18)</sup>. Ocular disorders were reported in 7.3% of rabbits. Ocular discharge is another non-specific sign that could be linked with underlying dental or respiratory disease<sup>(19)</sup>. Parasitic disorders were reported in 7.1% of rabbits. Flystrike was the most commonly recorded parasitic disorder, affecting 2% of rabbits.

## Conclusion

Although this study represents the largest ever practice-based study of rabbit health in England, it is noteworthy that only rabbits under veterinary care were included. Therefore, we cannot assume that the findings will generalise equally to all pet rabbits. The wisest approach is to combine the findings from this study together with those from other studies in order to increase our understanding of the health overall in this species.



**Flystrike was the most common cause of death**

## Table

Frequency of the most common disorders recorded in rabbits attending primary-care veterinary practices in England participating in the VetCompass™ Programme from January 1st, 2013 to December 31st, 2013.

Disorder	Overall %	Female %	Male %	Median age (years)
Overgrown claw/nails	16.0	14.3	17.4	3.6
Overgrown molar(s)	7.6	5.5	9.5	4.4
Dirty bottom	4.5	4.2	4.9	4.7
Overgrown incisor(s)	4.3	3.2	5.3	4.2
Gut stasis	4.2	4.3	4.1	3.3
Overweight / obesity	3.7	4.4	3.2	3.6
Anorexia	2.9	2.5	3.3	4.4
Flystrike	2.0	2.2	2.0	5.4
Nasolacrimal duct abnormality - dacryocystitis	2.0	1.5	2.5	4.7
Haircoat disorder - matted fur	1.8	2.1	1.7	4.5
Mite infestation	1.8	1.6	2.1	4.2
Underweight / weight loss	1.8	2.2	1.4	5.0
Diarrhoea	1.8	2.3	1.4	3.8
Skin disorder - dermatitis	1.8	2.1	1.6	4.8
Bite injury	1.7	1.5	1.8	1.6
Upper respiratory tract disorder	1.7	1.7	1.7	3.1
Dental disease - malocclusion	1.6	1.4	1.8	4.4
Head tilt	1.6	1.6	1.6	3.5
Conjunctivitis	1.5	1.3	1.6	5.5
Ocular discharge	1.4	1.4	1.4	4.4
Cheyletiellosis	1.2	1.1	1.4	4.0
Wound injury	1.2	1.2	1.1	2.1
Skin disorder - alopecia	1.1	1.3	0.9	2.4
Dental disease	1.0	0.4	1.5	4.9
Other	29.8			

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Mallow contains vitamins C and E



## A - Z OF HERBS

By Belinda Francis of Galen's Gardens

# Our Back to Nature series continues with the 'M and N' of common herbs

### Mallow - *Malva Sylvestris*

**Common Names:** Common Mallow.

**Constituents:** Mucilage, flavanoids (mainly in the flowers), terpenoids, phenolic compounds, coumarin, the enzyme Sulphite Oxidase, fatty acids and a trace of tannin.

**Cultivation:** Plant seeds in the spring when the soil is warm. Wild Mallow grows to anywhere between 60cm and 120cm high.

**Feed:** Leaves, stems and flowers. Picking the flowers and leaves encourages further growth. Mallow contains vitamins C and E.

**Traditional uses in humans:** Mallow has traditionally been used for its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties in mouth infections and problems with the digestive tract. It is considered a valuable herb in the care of mucus membranes and skin. Combined with *Alcea digitata*, Mallow has been successfully used in a herbal alternative for artificial saliva to relieve dry mouth.

Scientific study has shown that although Mallow has little impact on a number of bacteria, it does have a moderate effect on *Staphylococcus aureus* and its biofilm. An extract from the leaves was also found to be effective against a wide range of fungal organisms, with the exception of candida (thrush).

Mallow is an important wound healing plant in human herbal medicine and is also used to reduce hair loss.

**Drying:** Dry leaves, flowers and stems separately as they require different drying times. The pink flowers dry to a stunning deep purple.

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Marshmallow grows very tall and benefits from the support of a wall, fence or cane

### Marshmallow - *Althea officinalis*

**Common Names:** Marshmallow.

**Constituents:** Pectins, starch, mucilage and flavonoids.

**Cultivation:** Seeds are best sown fresh from the plant in late summer/early autumn. Dried seeds can be sown in spring or autumn but cold stratification of the seeds prior to planting in the spring is advised. The plant grows very tall and benefits from the support of a wall/fence or canes.

Although it will tolerate dry soil, it prefers moist ground.

**Feed:** Leaves, stems, flowers and root. Only take roots from plants which are at least 2 years old.

**Traditional uses in humans:** As with Mallow, Marshmallow is traditionally used for conditions affecting the mouth, throat and skin. Marshmallow also has a long history of use to relieve coughs, a use which has been scientifically tested.

**Drying:** Separate the various plant parts before drying. Crush stems to reduce drying time. Roots should be washed, optionally peeled, and split. Dry roots at the highest dehydrator temperature or in a low oven to ensure they are completely dry before storing.



Meadowsweet likes wet, clay soil

### Meadowsweet - *Filipendula ulmaria*

**Common Names:** Meadowsweet, Mead Wort, Bridewort, Meadow Queen, Meadow Wort, Pride of the Meadow, Queen of the Meadow and Lady of the Meadow.

**Constituents:** Flavanol and phenolic glycosides, volatile oil and polyphenols.

**Cultivation:** Plant seeds or split plants in spring. Meadowsweet likes wet, clay soil. It grows naturally in damp meadows and alongside watercourses.

**Feed:** Consult your vet if your rabbit is undergoing veterinary treatment. Meadowsweet has anti-inflammatory properties, making it a useful plant in some cases but possibly contra-indicated in others.

**Traditional uses in humans:** A natural source of salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin, meadowsweet's tannins and other ingredients act to protect the lining of the stomach and intestines against ulceration. Meadowsweet is mainly used for pain and inflammation in humans.

**Drying:** Separate flower, leaf and the stem, as they have different drying times.

**Caution:** Meadowsweet's salicylic acid content makes it an unsuitable herb for people and animals that are intolerant of aspirin.

## Nettle - *Urtica dioca*

**Common Names:** Stinging Nettle.

**Constituents:** Rich in minerals; vitamins A, B, C, E and K, coumarins, flavonoids, organic and phenolic acids, tannins, water-soluble silicates and chlorophyll.

**Cultivation:** Nettles like to grow in moist soil in full sun. Like many plants they accumulate minerals from the soil in which they grow, so make sure you do not forage for them on land where the soil might have previously been used for industrial purposes.

Sow seeds in spring or autumn. Clumps can be divided in the spring and replanted.

**Feed:** Dry nettles before feeding. Dried nettles lose their sting and nettle 'hay' is a great supplementary feed for the winter months. Like all wild plants, nettle should be fed as part of a mixed diet.

**Traditional uses in humans:** Nettles have a long history of use both as a food and as medicine. The young leaves can be used instead of spinach in recipes. Nettle fibre can be used to make fabric, rope and paper. The long fibres are similar to those of hemp and flax.

Chlorophyll in nettles is both a valuable nutrient and a natural dye.

Medicinally the herb has been used for allergic rhinitis, arthritis and type II diabetes. More recently nettle root has



found a role in the treatment of prostate disorders.

Nettle leaves have been used to stem the flow of blood. Nettle is one of the ingredients in the Turkish styptic product Ankaferd Blood Stopper, which is licensed for external haemorrhages.

Nettle juice is a useful hair conditioner and the antifungal properties of nettles make them a good choice for helping to control dandruff.

**Drying:** Pick nettle tops for drying as they have the most nutritional value. Either separate the leaves and dry flat or ensure good air circulation during the drying process.

**Caution:** Do not feed to excess. Nettles contain vitamin K which improves blood clotting. If your rabbit needs surgery, you will need to tell your vet if your rabbit has recently eaten nettles.

### ADVICE NOTES

Most of the wild plants which can be safely fed to rabbits are commonly found in ancient meadows or sown as beneficial herbs for grazing animals. Many have also been used traditionally as human herbal medicines.

Certain chemicals, for example tannins, salicylic acid or coumarins, which have led to the plants being used in traditional human and veterinary herbal medicine, may cause harm if fed in isolation, to excess or if your rabbit has specific conditions which require veterinary attention.

If your rabbit is being treated, or is due to be treated, by a veterinary surgeon you should seek the vet's advice on the suitability of any plants, including culinary herbs, before feeding.



  
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# HOW MUCH IS A RABBIT SAVVY VET WORTH?

By an RWF member



Erin and Vanilla enjoying each other's company

**A**t the RWF, we are often asked about neutering and if it is worth paying a bit more for a rabbit friendly vet or driving a bit further to see one? Our answer is always yes. If your rabbit is ill, you don't want to be ringing around for a rabbit savvy vet at this time. You need a rabbit savvy vet already on speed dial, and to know how to get there, where to park, who to see and what to expect.

So we thought we would share this story, from one of our members, and then you can make up your own mind.

## You live and learn

About 11 years ago, we used a local vet for our rabbit's veterinary care. I took a mum and litter of babies into a rescue after seeing them advertised. I adopted 3 of the babies myself - 2 males and 1 female, and called them Eric, Ernie and Erin. I took them all to this local vet to be neutered when they were 16 weeks old.

The morning of their surgery, I made sure they had eaten, were passing droppings and were bright and alert. I had everything ready for them at home to spend a few days indoors, so that I could keep an eye on them, keep them warm, and make sure they were all eating. I drove them the short distance to the vet together in their carrier, with a picnic of their favourite foods for when they came round from the anaesthetic. I did everything right.

Ernie died very shortly after I dropped them off, before they even started to give any pre-medication to him. When I asked what had happened, I was told there was a very noisy dog in the kennel next to him. So at 16 weeks old, and to the best of my knowledge fit and well, he died of stress shortly after he arrived. This was preventable, and something that still horrifies me now.

As far as I was aware, however, for Eric and Erin things went much more smoothly and I picked them up and brought them home. I kept them indoors, checked their wounds, made sure they were eating, took them for their post-operative checks and then returned them to their lovely shed and run outside a few days later.

## Behavioural questions

Erin used to nest throughout her life, and she was often carrying hay around in her mouth, but I took her to be spayed. I saw the spay wound, so I didn't take too much notice of her nesting behaviour.

When Erin was 11 years old, I found her hiding in her enclosure. She didn't approach me for food as she usually would, and refused the dandelion I placed in front of her. By now I had changed vets and was using one who was widely known to be rabbit savvy. I rushed her straight to our rabbit savvy vet; there was a lot of blood in her urine, so she was started on antibiotics, pain medication, gut motility drugs and syringe feeding. I brought her and Vanilla (her new companion, as Eric had very sadly passed away the previous year) inside, administered the medications at regular intervals, and provided her with all her favourite foods. It was a huge relief when she was eating and pooing normally again, and well enough to return to her enclosure. It was puzzling what might have caused this, but at 11 she was becoming an old rabbit. A few weeks later it happened again, but she had to be admitted, and after 2 days was



Having a good rabbit vet is essential

not really improving. You know when you get a phone call at 7am from the night vet that it is not good news, and despite everyone's valiant efforts she was struggling to breathe. I had to let her go and very sadly she was put to sleep.

### Finding a cause

Later that day, when our rabbit savvy vet had finished consulting, she called me and we agreed that we would do a post mortem to see what had gone wrong for Erin. It is always a difficult decision to opt to have a post mortem performed, but I have found that it usually gives me peace of mind, knowing that there was nothing I could have done to prevent the death. When my rabbit savvy vet, called me, she told me that Erin had tumours and that they had spread to her lungs. The tumours were most likely because she was not spayed and the uterus had developed a suspected adenocarcinoma (tumour), and that explained the blood in her urine previously, and also her difficulty in breathing. "Hang on, what do

you mean not spayed, she is spayed," I said. The rabbit savvy vet repeated her findings: she was not spayed!

I remember taking them to be neutered, I remember Ernie dying, I remember nursing her spay wound, so how could she not be spayed?

### The truth is revealed

When we received the history from the practice that 'spayed' Erin, sure enough we discovered that they had not been able to find her uterus, decided she was a hermaphrodite, so stitched her up and sent her home. I presume because they had already had to break bad news to me about Ernie they did not want to address the fact that she had not been spayed, but I was totally unaware of this until I saw the history 11 years later. I cannot explain how shocked I was, and in all honesty still am.

The uterus of a 16 week female will look quite different from that of a 6 month female, and had I known that she was not spayed I would have had this checked when she was older.

Erin lived a good long life and would have died of something, but she died of a disease that more than likely could have been prevented.

The vet who operated on her is no longer at that practice, so I did not raise it with them; I think this cautionary tale is more useful.

So, when I am asked, is it worth paying extra for a rabbit savvy vet, or travelling a bit further, the answer is always yes, and this is a really good example of why.

If you need to find a rabbit savvy vet, check out the RWF list - <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-friendly-vets/rabbit-friendly-vet-list/>



Suitable facilities, away from dogs, are imperative

# PAW PRINTS

We'd love you to contribute to Rabbiting On, and how better than with photos of your own rabbits? We know there are some gorgeous bunnies out there, and we'd all love to see them. Please share your favourite photos with us, and we'll choose the best shots for our regular Paw Prints feature.

We also choose photos for Star Bunny (on the Contents page) and our It's My Bunny! Competition from your Paw Prints pictures - and there are prizes to win!

Pictures submitted to Paw Prints may also be chosen to illustrate features in Rabbiting On.



**Ruby**  
ANNE-MARIE RHODES



**Cinnamon and Clove**  
FIONA CAMPBELL



**Florence and Dylan**  
KATE ETTIE



**Rossi and Ra**  
TAYLOR CORNES



**Binky**  
ED AND KELLYANNE  
O'CALLAGHAN



**Oscar**  
TONI TRICKETT



**Rufus**  
TARA HALL



**Lori and Lenny**  
JULIE SKIDMORE



**Reggie**  
GEMMA STOCK



**y**



**Theo and Bea**  
ABI NELL

**RULES FOR PHOTO SUBMISSIONS**

We love to see your photos of your rabbits, and we're delighted to be able to feature them in Paw Prints, as well as It's My Bunny, and the Star bunny on the Contents page. Remember that one picture on Paw Prints wins a mystery prize. And we also choose our cover pictures from the photos you submit, so your bunny could even become a cover star! We also use photos in advice leaflets, on our website and on our Pinterest boards, so your rabbits could become Internet stars too! If you aren't familiar with Pinterest, you'll find our boards here, courtesy of one of our wonderful volunteers, Jo Hinde <http://www.pinterest.com/rwaf/> But unfortunately some readers send us photos that we are unable to use, because they're not high enough resolution for printing in the magazine, or the rabbit's or owner's name aren't supplied.

Please email your photos to: [rwafphotos@gmail.com](mailto:rwafphotos@gmail.com)

Also, it's vital that your camera is set up properly before you take your photos, as it isn't possible to increase the resolution afterwards. We need you to set up your camera to the highest image quality. Any photos you submit should be about 1-1.5Mb (or more) if it's a jpeg or jpg file, and around 2.5-3Mb (or more) if it's a tiff (please compress tiff files before sending)

If you have difficulties, please contact [hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk) or the helpline on **0844 324 6090**, and we'll do what we can to help.

You can also send print photos or photo CDs to: **Rabbiting On Photos, RWAf, Enigma House, Culmhead Business Park, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 7DY.**

*We're looking forward to seeing lots more lovely bunnies!*

# CAN WE HELP?

## Contacting the RWF

- Members can ring the **RWAF telephone helpline: 0844 324 6090**, for general rabbit advice, help with locating a rabbit friendly vet, finding the nearest rescue centre and bereavement support.
- Log on to the website at [www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk) for advice and articles on many rabbit related topics.
- To contact the RWF by post please write to:  
**RWAF, Enigma House, Culmhead Business Park, Taunton, Somerset TA3 7DY**  
Please include an SAE if you would like a reply.
- To contact the RWF by e-mail, please send e-mails to:  
[hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk)

## RWAF departments

### BOARDING YOUR RABBIT

If you are looking for someone to board your rabbit while you are away from home, or offer this service yourself, please call the RWAF telephone helpline 0844 324 6090 or email [hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk)

### ON THE HOP

The quickest way to process bulk orders of On The Hop may be found online at [shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk) in the 'Books and Leaflets' category. Alternatively, call our helpline 0844 324 6090 or email [hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk)

### FIRST ALERT SERVICE

We run a First Alert e-mail service which notifies subscribers of Myxomatosis and RVHD outbreaks as we are informed of them, as well as other information we think you will be interested in, such as new vaccine information.

In accordance with The General Data Protection Rules we want you to be aware that you can sign up to our First Alert service by e-mailing us at [info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk). If you are already on the First Alert service you can leave at any time by e-mailing us at the same address and asking to be removed from the list.

## Rabbiting On

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If you have enjoyed reading Rabbiting On, and are not already a member of the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund, why not join now to be sure of receiving the next issue, packed full of interesting and informative features?

Cut out or photocopy the form below and send it to: **RWAF, Enigma House, Culmhead Business Park, Taunton, Somerset TA3 7DY** or for instant membership simply phone the RWAF Helpline: 0844 324 6090. Or you can join or renew online at [shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk) in the 'Memberships' category.

As a member of the RWF you will receive 4 copies of Rabbiting On each year along with the RWAF Members Handbook, On The Hop (a complete guide to rabbit care), an RWAF car sticker, and a sticker for your rabbit's carrying case. You will also receive details of how to find your nearest rabbit friendly vet, access to the RWAF's team of expert advisers, an information pack on rabbit resources local to you including Hopper Groups in your area and loads of other benefits.

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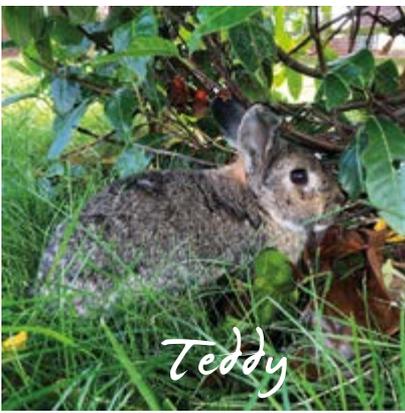
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