

# RabbitingOn

The Magazine for Rabbit lovers

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## **BONDING**

How to introduce a new companion

## **HARNESSES**

Happiness or hell?

## **CHOKING DANGERS**

Choking, choke and what to do

## **LAWN FEEDS**

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# WELCOME TO THE WINTER ISSUE OF RABBITING ON



Where has 2019 gone? Very soon it will be Christmas and 2020 will be upon us! If you would like to be in with a chance of seeing your rabbits photo on the cover of the spring 2020 Rabbiting On, then make sure you enter our cover star competition. Details can be found on page 13 and there are also some fantastic prizes to be won.

If you are ever unfortunate to have a rabbit choke on something, acting quickly and correctly can mean the difference between life and death. Veterinary surgeon, Molly Varga looks into why rabbits can choke and what you should do if this happens to one of your rabbits. Her advice can be found on page 2.

Lop eared rabbits are extremely popular as pets. Their endearing faces make them a popular choice, but a recent study at the Royal Veterinary College found them to be at an increased risk of dental and ear problems. Hannah Lacey from the RVC has published their findings on page 4.

Vaccinations, over vaccination and what vaccines to use and when is a topic which comes up again and again. RWA Veterinary Adviser, Richard Saunders has compiled an up-to-date explanation as to what your rabbits need, when and why in order to stay protected. His feature can be found on page 9.

Do rabbits like going for walks on harnesses or do they find the experience stressful? Dr Emma Milne tackles the issue in part 1 of her new ethics feature on page 10. We will be featuring a different subject in each issue of Rabbiting On.

Bonding rabbits can be difficult and fraught with potential problems. Page 18 features Dr Laura Dixon's article on how to embark upon bonding rabbits together.

Rescue centres often take in rabbits that are already pregnant. This can mean enormous difficulties for the rescue, both in terms of finances and space. David Bell of Beloved Rabbit Care explores the subject in our Rescue Point of View feature on page 34.

Also in this issue you will find features on how to health check your rabbits, selecting a rabbit savvy vet, why rabbits hop and why walking is often an abnormal sign, the different types of cancers that rabbits can suffer from and the G and H of herbs in our Back to Nature series...plus much more!

It is always a delight to hear from you all so please do keep sending your stories, photos, questions and comments into 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 RWA please go to the website or telephone the Helpline: 0844 324 6090



Cover picture: D Staggs

## STAR BUNNIES



### Our Winter Star Bunnies are Bertie and Poppet, sent in by Nicki Henderson

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# CHOKING IN RABBITS

By Molly Varga, Veterinary Surgeon

**W**hile rabbit owners are often concerned about 'choking' in rabbits this is not something that the author has commonly seen in practice.

This notwithstanding, it doesn't mean choking never happens and owners need to be aware of the signs of choking and what to do about them.

## The difference between choking and choke

Choking in general terms is described as a situation where an object gets caught in the throat or windpipe blocking air from entering the lungs. This situation is clearly an emergency and owners need to understand how it may happen and what signs to look out for as well as what action to take. Choke however, can mean something else when applied to other animals (horses in particular). In this case 'choke' means a foreign body that becomes trapped in the oesophagus blocking the entry of food and saliva into the stomach. Again, this situation is an emergency and the signs that owners need to recognise as well as what action to take will be dealt with in this article.

## True choking

This is the situation where something (a foreign object, respiratory discharges or pus) becomes stuck either in the throat or the windpipe. In most cases this happens suddenly and is associated with coughing or desperate attempts to breathe. This situation requires immediate action, and arranging to get your rabbit directly to the vets is vital.

## Respiratory anatomy

Because rabbits are 'obligate nasal breathers' (this means that in normal circumstances they do

not breathe through their mouths) getting foreign material into the nasopharynx (the area at the back of the nose that leads to the windpipe) or the trachea is fairly difficult. However, there are circumstances where this can happen - if the rabbit is already having difficulty breathing and is in fact breathing through the mouth (this is always abnormal) meaning that food or other objects/discharges in the mouth can be inhaled into the back of the throat or the windpipe. Alternatively, a rabbit that has a significant amount of thick nasal/respiratory discharges may be at risk of breathing these in (aspiration). The thickness of some respiratory secretions can certainly block the narrow airways of a rabbit.

## Signs of choking

- Nose pointed up into air whilst breathing
- Open mouthed breathing
- Abdominal breathing - rabbit is making efforts to breathe using its abdominal muscles
- Coughing
- Whistling or gurgling sounds while breathing
- Gums/tongue turning blue
- Pawing frantically at mouth whilst trying to breathe.

Whatever the cause, a rabbit that is choking is in immediate danger of death. So two things need to happen:

- 1 Make immediate arrangements to get your rabbit to the nearest vet. This is one time where time/distance matters. An hour to a rabbit savvy vet versus 10 minutes to your nearest vets - don't compromise survival with long travel time.
- 2 Consider physical options to attempt to dislodge the blockage - 'Bunny Heimlich Manoeuvres'. **Remember that with any of these physical interventions it is easy to seriously injure your rabbit unless you know what you are doing.** Watching demonstrations on YouTube or attending a local Rabbit First Aid Course is highly recommended.

<b>Centrifugal Swing</b>	Place your rabbit along your forearm with its head supported by your hand. Use your other arm/hand to support the rabbit on your arm and use your arms as a method to swing the rabbit downwards and then upwards to allow the weight of its abdominal contents and centrifugal force to dislodge the obstruction.
<b>Heimlich Manoeuvre</b>	Hold the rabbit with its nose/head well supported but pointing downwards. Gently but firmly push upwards against the diaphragm using a movement that starts in the mid abdomen and moves firmly but gently forwards towards the ribcage. This will put pressure on the lungs and may dislodge the obstruction.
<b>Back Pounding</b>	With the rabbits head pointing away from you and the nose angled slightly downwards firmly slap both sides of the chest at the same time, to try and force air out of the lungs - this works in a similar way to coughing. Forcing the air out should help dislodge an obstruction.

It is imperative that you try and stay as calm as possible. Your rabbit may be panicking if they are unable to breathe properly. Do not attempt to chase the rabbit to capture them or attempt any intervention which may make the situation worse.

Most episodes of true choking can be resolved without surgery; however it is important to remember that in some cases surgery may be needed and may well be life-saving. In particular placing a tracheostomy tube (a tube inserted into the windpipe below the obstruction that gives air the opportunity to reach the lungs) and can allow a rabbit to breathe normally while the obstruction is being removed. Surgery, if required, is a serious intervention, and most likely this will involve a hospital stay for your rabbit.

### Finding a cause

Once the choking episode has been brought under control it is important that the reasons behind the episode are evaluated. Choking is rare and generally doesn't happen for no reason. Underlying respiratory disease, sinusitis or oral foreign bodies caused by dental disease are all possibilities. In many cases a course of anti-inflammatories and maybe antibiotics will be indicated.

### Oesophageal choke

This is a more common condition, where something that has been eaten (usually) gets stuck in the oesophagus. While this is an emergency situation, it generally will not impede breathing.

Signs include:

- Increased salivation/drooling
- Wanting to eat but not being able to
- Appearance of regurgitation/food being dropped out of mouth
- Eventually gut stasis
- May rapidly lead to electrolyte abnormalities because electrolytes in saliva are not being swallowed and reabsorbed.

Rabbits showing signs of oesophageal choke should be taken to your vets immediately. In the meantime, both centrifugal swings or bunny Heimlich manoeuvres can be attempted. Chest slapping is less likely to be helpful.

In many cases of oesophageal choke the obstruction can be removed without surgery (although sedation may be necessary), however where the obstruction is large or at risk of tearing the oesophagus, then surgery may be necessary.

As with true choke, the reasons behind an episode of oesophageal choke should be investigated. Your rabbit savvy vet may suggest x-rays or blood samples to confirm what is going on. Again some medications may be suggested, often gut stasis medications such as metoclopramide, ranitidine or cisapride as well as anti-inflammatories.

### Conclusions

Rabbits are generally curious animals (I find that they particularly like to chew white wires!) and combining this with a tendency to hide clinical



Top of the Bunny Heimlich Swing



Bottom of the Bunny Heimlich Swing



The Forward Thrust Movement

signs of illness means that episodes of choking can appear to happen out of the blue. It is important to react to these episodes promptly and appropriately. These are the times where you as owners can literally save your pets life. Definitely attend local Rabbit First Aid Courses where available, or utilise resources such as those provided by RWF or the House Rabbit Society (YouTube videos are a particularly good resource).

### Disclaimer

The techniques outlined in this feature must only be attempted in situations of respiratory distress caused by an obstruction and extreme care must be taken.

### Photo note from Molly Varga:

*Please bear in mind that in these photos it's myself, and an RVN who are both experienced with rabbits attempting these manoeuvres on a 3kg rabbit. These are actually really difficult to do and these are not things that owners should jump into doing without good reason, or being shown how to do this properly by their vet.*

The study results showed lop eared rabbits suffer more with ear and dental problems

Photo: R Lamb

# LOP-EARED RABBITS - A WELFARE CONCERN?

By Hannah Lacey BSc, Royal Veterinary College Alumni

Over half of rabbits in British homes are now of lop-eared varieties. It's hardly surprising, because with their signature long, floppy ears, they are desperately cute! However, with the relatively recent focus on extreme body conformations in breeds of dogs and cats, flat-faced breeds being a high profile example, the spotlight is now being shone on the rabbit world.

## Specific problems

Recent research has shown that lop ears are unfortunately associated with a range of ear problems and, because of the accompanying skull

shape, dental issues to boot. This means that lops are at a higher risk of pain, and possibly deafness and eating difficulties, compared with rabbits with more natural, 'up' ear shapes.

Researchers at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) conducted a ground-breaking study<sup>1</sup> comparing lop eared and up-eared rabbits. This comprised of 30 rescue shelter rabbits, with an even split of 15 lop-eared and 15 up-eared rabbits across a mix of breeds and ages. The rabbits in the study all had physical examinations focusing on the ear and mouth areas. Their ears were checked for swelling, scratches, redness and crusting, before an otoscope was used to look into the ears for internal abnormalities. Swabs were taken for further testing of any present bacteria, yeast or parasites. The dental exam involved gentle feeling for lumps and bumps then a good look inside to ascertain if any teeth misalignment or overgrowth was apparent. This examination also covered any dental disease that may have been present.

## Ear study results

The lop-eared rabbits had forty-three times higher odds of having extremely narrow ear canals, known as 'stenotic' ear canals, with 13 out of the 15 presenting with this condition, compared to just 2 out of the 15 up-eared rabbits. Stenotic ear canals can prevent proper airflow and the natural cleaning of the ear that gets rid of earwax. Excess wax can build up and encourage yeast and other bacteria to multiply, risking infection and inflammation. The lop-eared group also had fifteen times higher odds of showing pain during the examination than the up-eared group.

Lop eared rabbits are endearing but their looks affect their health



Photo: C Speight

It is worth mentioning that the researchers also looked back at the medical records of the rabbits and these confirmed their observations. For example, 14 out of the 15 lop-eared rabbits had been noted as having excessive earwax during a health check at the rescue centre. In contrast, only three up-eared rabbits had an excess wax note on their record.

## Serious considerations

“People now need to weigh up whether those cute floppy ears are worth the risk of pain, deafness, and difficulty eating for the rabbit, not to mention the extra vet bills” says Dr Charlotte Burn, lead researcher of the study and Senior Lecturer at the RVC. This reaffirms that not only could such problems be concerning for the wellbeing of lop-eared rabbit pets but also to their owners who may be unaware of additional costs that certain breeds may incur. This can add stress and worry to the ownership of a loved pet, potentially putting them at risk of being rehomed or, worse, neglected if the upkeep exceeds the perceived level of care.

## Dental issues

Turning to the teeth, the lop-eared sample were at twenty three times more risk of dental issues, such as overgrown or sharp molars. Once again the medical records confirmed observations, showing that eight of the 15 lop eared rabbits had tooth abnormalities, with six of those needing dental work during their stay at the rescue centre, compared with none of the up-eared group.

Final year Veterinary Medicine student at the RVC, Jade Johnson, said of the results, “Collecting the data revealed the extent of the ear and teeth pathologies present in lop-eared rabbits”.

It may be surprising that having lop ears can be associated with dental problems, but the change in skull shape that accompanies the ear shape, can change the overall length of the upper jaw. Rabbits’ teeth grow continuously, with the top and bottom teeth helping wear each other down, so a reduction in upper jaw length can cause teeth misalignment, leading to overgrowth. This has direct welfare implications because, when rabbit teeth are unable to wear down correctly, they can cause painful

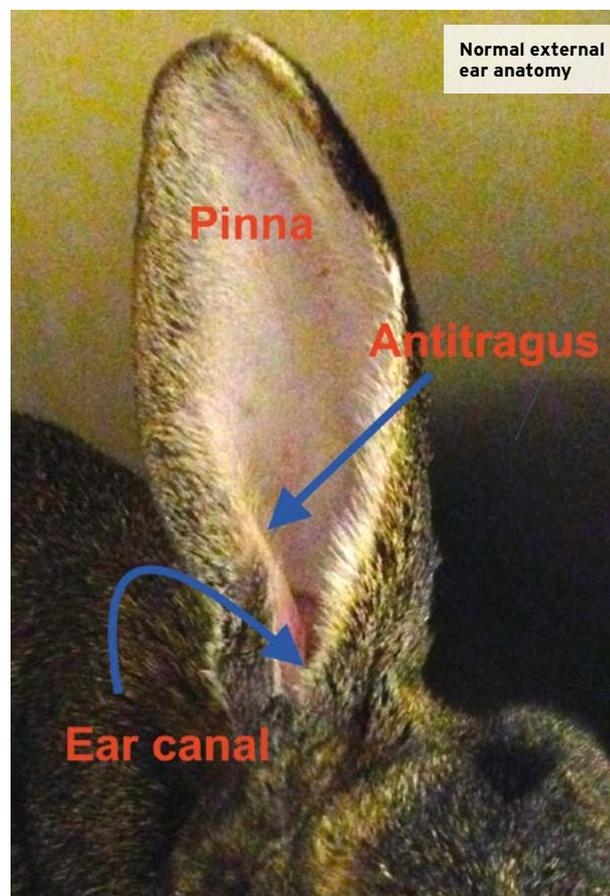


Photo: A Muir

molar spurs that dig into the tongue and gums.

The results of the Royal Veterinary College study confirmed the hypothesised expectations from veterinarians. Before the study, evidence was somewhat anecdotal, with veterinarians and other rabbit experts sharing their professional opinions and experiences of lop-eared rabbit health issues, but no one had tested the observation systematically before. Here, the study reveals that up-eared rabbits have less risk of suffering with ear and mouth/dental issues compared to lop eared rabbits.

## Conclusion

The results indicate that lop-eared rabbits are more likely to suffer with conditions because of their desired appearance. This highlights welfare concerns surrounding the breeding and care of lop-eared rabbits and further work should be carried out to investigate these matters. Selective breeding, whilst producing a popular aesthetic, can eventually lead to unintended harm for the species involved.

So, if you have a lop eared rabbit, be vigilant with their veterinary health checks and seek advice - most practices offer routine bi-annual checks in addition to vaccinations, so that the necessary elements of a healthy rabbit are monitored. Be patient with your lop if he or she seems unfriendly or scared, and check with an expert in case it is because of pain or deafness. Consider if you can choose up-eared rabbits in future, and in the meantime, keep on top of any concerns and your rabbits should be content for many years.

## Further reading

<sup>1</sup> The study is due to be published in The Veterinary Record, but a preprint is available as follows.

Johnson JC, Burn CC. Lop-eared rabbits have more aural and dental problems than erect-eared rabbits: a rescue population study. bioRxiv.2019:671859. <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/671859v2>



Photo: S Lilley

# LAWNS

By Twigs Way

A lawn of mixed grasses and weeds will often stay greener in drought years, and provide better forage for rabbits

All photos: T Way



Lush and long or neat and stripy, our (usually) temperate weather and year round rainfall makes a lawn an obvious garden choice for rabbit owners. However every now and again it may start to fail you, developing bare patches, sprouting large patches of moss or turning into a clover meadow. At this point people generally turn to the internet and discover a previously unknown world of lawn fertilisers and feeders, moss killers, weed removers and general 'pick me ups' for the lawn. These often include re-assurances that they are 'natural' or 'harmless to children' but rarely do they address the question 'are these suitable for rabbits to eat'?

So let's have a look at what is in these, how they work, and whether they are safe for rabbits.

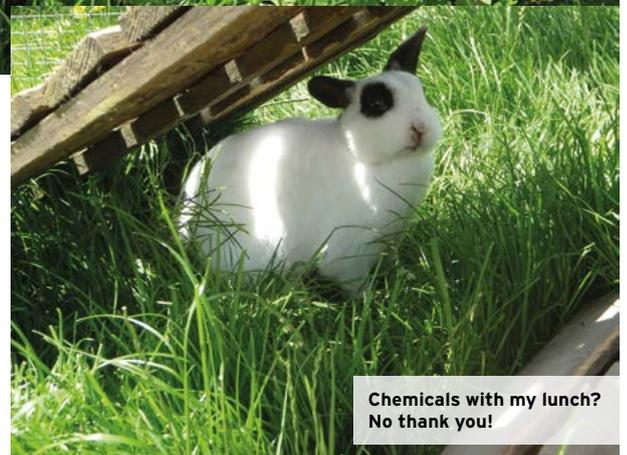
## 'Artificial' Fertilisers

These can be divided between those that merely fertilise the lawn and those that combine this with some sort of weed or moss killer (which are covered in the next section).

Most lawn fertilisers are 'generic' and usually contain a mix of ureic nitrogen (basically dried urine), potassium oxide and soluble iron (Ferrous sulphates). Some lawn fertilisers have different products for spring, summer and autumn: a spring feed might be high in nitrogen to encourage top growth for example, whilst an autumn feed will be low in nitrogen to encourage root growth. These are often liquid feeds, watered onto the lawn.



Grass growth under shade will always be patchy regardless of any fertilisers, but hand weeding nettles and weeds down will help grass compete



Chemicals with my lunch? No thank you!

These are almost all marketed as 'child and pet friendly', although with the proviso that pets should be kept off the areas until absolutely dry. Given that the rabbits are actually eating the grass that has been sprayed rather than just playing on it you might want to be rather more cautious, and to also consider that many aspects of a rabbit's physiology depend on the correct balance of potassium and calcium. Ingested ferrous sulphides have also been generally implicated in liver and kidney damage, although not rabbit specific.

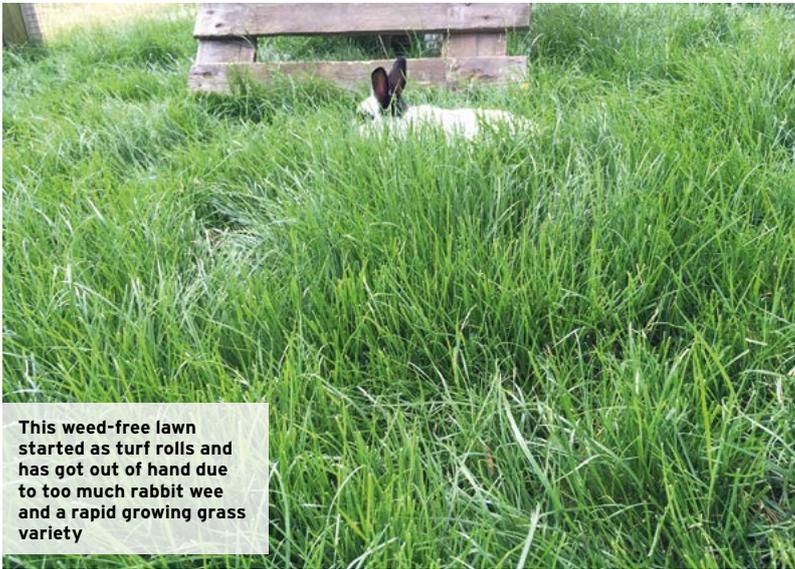
The Safety Data Sheets for these products, which are supplied with all chemical products, also note that liquid contact of potassium oxide with eyes or skin should be washed off and anyone ingesting the liquid should get medical attention.

Those fertilisers that claim to be 'slow release', or 'sprinkle on' may be pelleted or granules rather than liquid and these should definitely be avoided in case the rabbit ingests the pellets as 'treats' whilst grazing.

None of the fertilisers will work particularly well in a dry spell as they need water to get into the soil and the grass needs water to grow. Nothing other than a rainstorm or constant watering will turn a drought-stricken lawn green. However grass will naturally recover miraculously from even quite prolonged drought.

## 'Natural' Fertilisers

If you look at the list of contents in the artificial



This weed-free lawn started as turf rolls and has got out of hand due to too much rabbit wee and a rapid growing grass variety

fertilisers you will realise that these are also contained in 'natural' forms, most notably rotted vegetable matter, poo, and pee (ureic nitrogen especially). Spreading most kinds of poo all over the lawn generally creates an unpleasant and unhygienic environment, but you can make a lawn fertiliser by soaking rabbit poo from the litter tray in a large trug of water (ensuring first none of the rabbits are carrying worms, coccidiosis etc.) and then diluting this as low as 1 in a 100, and using it as a fertiliser. However do BEWARE that this is a surprisingly smelly process and may be better reserved for a distant vegetable or rose bed.

Alternatively you can let the rabbits randomly poo and pee all over the lawn whilst cheerfully eating it. With sufficient rabbits, this is very effective and much less smelly, but with obvious dangers if you extend it to vegetable or rose beds.

## Organic-Mineral Fertilisers

There is a new range of organic fertilisers by the company Viano (and undoubtedly others to follow) called Mo Bacter that uses a mix of humic acids, magnesium and bacteria to encourage grass growth and suppress weeds. These also claim to be pet friendly. Unfortunately they will not make their Safety Data Sheets available to the public. Do remember that just because something is labelled 'organic' it is not necessarily safe.

## Moss Killers

Many lawn fertilisers contain a higher percentage of Ferrous sulphates (iron) which causes the moss to go black and die. **Ferrous sulphides are toxic and these should be avoided.**

An alternative approach to moss is to address the reason why the moss is there. Moss is especially prevalent in poorly drained areas, shady lawns or neglected compacted lawns with dead grass. Try to improve the lawn by energetically raking out dead grass ('thatch') in autumn and spring along



A good lawn mower used frequently will help keep your lawn weed free and healthy (remove all rabbits from lawn before using!)

with the moss, keeping the lawn well mown, adding sand as a top dressing to help with drainage, and pruning out trees that are producing dense shade. Over a couple of years this will remove moss on most lawns. However by creating a drier environment generally your lawn may be less able to stand drought years so do think ahead! A clover rich lawn will look green even in the middle of a drought!

## Weed Killers

'Selective lawn weed killers' or herbicides, contain chemicals which kill broadleaved plants but leave grass unaffected. These are often hormone based and may be persistent in the lawn even when applied correctly. They are also a danger to pets if stored incorrectly.

However 'organic' or 'biodegradable' they claim to be, weed killers are adding a chemical to the garden which your rabbit will then consume. **Your lawn is your rabbit's dinner. If you wouldn't pour chemicals in their food bowl don't put them on the lawn!** Most weeds are just forage by another name and attract bees and other wildlife.

If you feel your lawn is infested with more weeds than grass and you want to redress the balance then there are other ways to deal with this than putting weed-killers on it:

- Mow more often. Grass grows continuously from the root, which is the secret of its success. Unlike any other plant it will positively thrive on mowing, whilst other weeds will eventually give up and die. Mow at least once a week in growing season.
- Set mowing blades higher (3 inches) to catch the weeds and tall clovers but not over-stress the grass. Never 'scalp' the grass!
- Hand pull or dig up low growing weeds or ones with root runs (nettles, creeping thistle, bindweed etc.) Also remove ragworts and ox-eye daisy by hand before mowing otherwise you may spread them.
- Clover may need digging out and re-turfing (or making into a bee-friendly clover patch). However it prefers poor soil so more bunny poo will help get rid of it!
- Let the rabbits out to pee and poo and eat weeds more often.
- Get more rabbits!

Never forget there are other options to killing the weeds - covered in the 'Grow your own meadow' feature in the summer 2019 edition of Rabbiting On.

## Grass Seed and Turf Rolls

Many people are tempted by the cheapness of grass seed to use this to 'liven up' a ragged lawn or create a new grass patch. However, grass seed can get caught in rabbit feet and fur and even in the ears or mouth. It can take several seasons to actually really establish and also often comes ready treated with various chemicals to 'improve' growth. If you do want to 'over-seed' an existing patch and are not too lawn-proud I recommend you look at something like Boston Seeds 'Paddock Repair' grass seed, and maybe even mix in some Boston Seeds Mixed Paddock Herbs with plantain. I use turf rolls either for creating a new lawn or for 'over-turfing' muddy and almost bare rabbit-run areas. However almost all turf will have had fertilisers applied. Always buy direct from the turf supplier (not via a DIY store etc.) and ask what was applied and when.

## Further Reading

A detailed guide to weed killer chemicals is provided by the Royal Horticultural Society at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/pdfs/weedkiller-for-home-gardeners.pdf>





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# VACCINATION AND OVER VACCINATION

By Richard Saunders,  
RWA Veterinary Adviser

Rabbits must be vaccinated against myxomatosis every 12 months with Nobivac

Photo: R Saunders

**V**accination is, as ever, currently a hot topic in rabbit medicine. There are a number of issues to mention here in this brief update.

Vaccination Duration of Immunity (DOI) is not always easy to quantify. Firstly, studies into the efficacy of a vaccine can be carried out in 2 ways. Testing for antibodies is one method, but not all immunity is due to antibodies, with cellular immunity playing a role too, and so "challenge studies" are widely used in vaccine testing. The animal is challenged by exposure to the live disease, and only if animals are effectively protected will they survive this challenge. It carries an ethical cost, and takes time to do this, and so repeat testing at different intervals is rarely done once a DOI of 12 months is obtained. It is POSSIBLE that immunity may last longer, but, conversely, it's possible that, in the real world, with our pet rabbits having other infections, such as respiratory tract bacteria and *E. cuniculi*, that their immunity is lower than in laboratory studies.

## Vaccination schedules

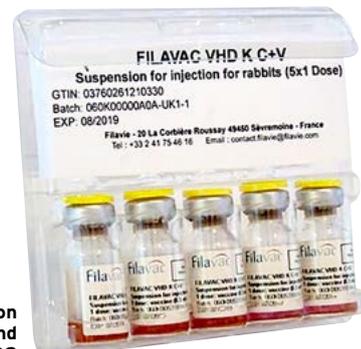
As a result, and due to the lack of commercially available titre testing for rabbit diseases to ascertain protection levels, we would recommend vaccinating according to the manufacturer's directions. Currently these are every 9 months for Eravac, (with work in progress expected to give a recommendation of every 12 months, soon) and every 12 months for Nobivac and Filavac.

The possibility of over-vaccination with 2 vaccines against RVHD1 (i.e. Filavac covering RVHD1 and 2, and Nobivac covering Myxomatosis and RVHD1) is another issue that

Eravac is currently advised to be given every 9 months and protects against RVHD2



Nobivac offers protection against myxomatosis and RVHD1



Filavac gives protection against RVHD1 and RVHD2

comes up from time to time. Whilst it's difficult to quantify the amount of "extra" protection given with this combination, and whether this might have any adverse effects, it seems that the use of these 2 vaccines together do not, at least, interfere with each other in terms of protection.

Whilst RVHD1 appears less and less of an issue, outcompeted by the newer virus variant, we can't be sure that it won't return, and other variants, such as K5, may reach the UK, and so keeping this, and covering it with 2 separate vaccines, is likely to do more good than any potential harm (1).

## Vaccination timing

This is another question addressed by the above study, as this looked at giving the Filavac and Nobivac vaccines at the same time (although in different sites and in different syringes). Whilst this is "off licence", there may be a justification for this on the basis of individual rabbits' response to the stresses of otherwise visiting the vets twice in a 2 week period. This also achieves protection against RVHD1+2, and Myxomatosis sooner than when splitting the vaccines, which may be justified in an area currently suffering both diseases.

Of course, just because the vaccines should be given 2 weeks apart under the licence conditions, doesn't mean that they can't be given further apart than 2 weeks, and it may be useful to stagger the vaccines by 6 months, giving rabbits a twice yearly check at the same time. We would not, however, recommend WAITING 6 months or so before starting a vaccine course, but this may be worth doing if current vaccine due dates allow, by giving one of them early.

## Reference

1 Lack of serological interference following the concurrent use of Nobivac Myxo-RHD and Filavac VHD K C+V vaccines in Rabbits. S. Reemers, L. Peeters, J. van Schindel, S. van de Zande and D. Sutton.

# HARNESSING HAPPINESS OR HELL?

By Dr Emma Milne,  
Veterinary Surgeon

**T**here are dozens of different harnesses available for all sorts of species from cats to rabbits to ferrets and even some of the smaller furry species we keep as pets. But just because manufacturers make them does it mean it's right to use them?

## Times change

Since I qualified over twenty years ago our understanding of animal behaviour and needs has changed dramatically. I love the five welfare needs as an easy way to think about what makes animals' lives the best they can be. I always view them as three needs for physical health and wellbeing (the needs for food and water, the right environment and protection from pain and disease) and two needs for mental wellbeing, their social and behavioural needs. I think that it is these last two that are so often neglected in many pets.

## Preyed upon

Rabbits are social animals and love the company of other rabbits. Because they are a prey species they feel safe with other rabbits and also need to feel like they always have at least one option for escape, usually preferring several choices if possible to avoid being trapped. The other thing about prey species is that they tend to be very stoical. This means that they don't show stress, pain or fear in the obvious ways that animals like dogs might. Any sign of weakness in the wild is likely to end up with

you being singled out to be breakfast for a predator.

One of the other things that has become clear over the years of behaviour research is the need for choice. In animals, and humans as well, one of the biggest things that makes a positive impact on welfare is freedom of choice. For example, if a rabbit has a hutch and a separate run, it is not the rabbit's choice when it goes to explore or run or graze. This is why rabbits should always have free access to a large, safe area so that they have the choice of when to do their various activities. Lots of small furries are naturally active away from full daylight hours which means they often want to do the fun stuff when you've got your feet up watching the TV after a hard day at work!

## Harnesses

So, going back to the subject of harnesses, why do people want or need them? Lots of people have animals like cats and rabbits in environments that might not allow a lot of free roaming or exercise. They want to do the right thing and a harness seems like an easy and effective way to do this. We take dogs for a walk so why not other species too?



When I asked people on social media what they thought about the subject there were varying responses. Most were against the idea but some said they had used them and it very much depended on the individual rabbit. But if rabbits don't show stress in an obvious way can we be sure that they weren't terrified on the inside?

Despite our best intentions there are many reasons, in my opinion, that harnesses do not improve welfare and could actually do the exact opposite. I'll tell you what my thoughts are and maybe you can let us know your feelings and experiences in the Letters section?

- **Choice** - As I mentioned before, having freedom of choice is REALLY important for humans and animals to be happy. Taking rabbits out on walks is your choice, not theirs. You choose what time you go, where you go and for how long. The chances are you will not want to walk them in the semi-dark morning and evening when they might feel more active and less afraid.
- **Type of exercise** - If you watch rabbits either in the wild or in a good, large enclosure they have a very distinctive way to exercise. They spend long periods still and grazing, which is essential to their teeth and gut health, but when they do run it's in short, fast bursts. Rabbits feel the need to exercise like this because it is what millions of years of evolution has instilled in them. Running fast in short bursts and leaping, powered by those incredible hind legs is what keeps them safe from predators. Walking in little hops at the pace of a human is not quite the same thing and won't actually provide them with meaningful exercise. They could also find this very frustrating.
- **The need to escape** - I suspect that for many rabbits being taken away from their normal environment, where they feel safe and reassured is quite stressful. They will know that on the harness they have no means



of escape. In open spaces rabbits will feel incredibly vulnerable from attack from above and also from the predators they will see and smell like dogs and cats. Rabbits are the major prey animal for around 30 species of predator. With this in mind you can imagine that being restrained around the chest and neck could well cause fear and anxiety. Even if you think you know they are safe, they certainly won't feel that.

- **Chances of injury** - I think the risk of injury is pretty high for rabbits on harnesses. They could escape and get injured on the road or disappear altogether. They could get attacked by other animals and you may not be quick enough to grab them up, which in itself could cause injury. Also let's not forget that many rabbits can badly injure themselves when panicking and trying to flee a stressful situation. The powerful kicks of their back legs in the wrong circumstances can easily cause broken legs, spinal damage and paralysis.
- **Disease** - I would hope that your rabbits are all protected from myxomatosis and RVHD 1 and 2 by vaccinations, but taking them into public areas will almost certainly put them at higher risk. They may be in areas with higher concentrations of wild rabbits where the chance of disease transmission and parasites is greater.

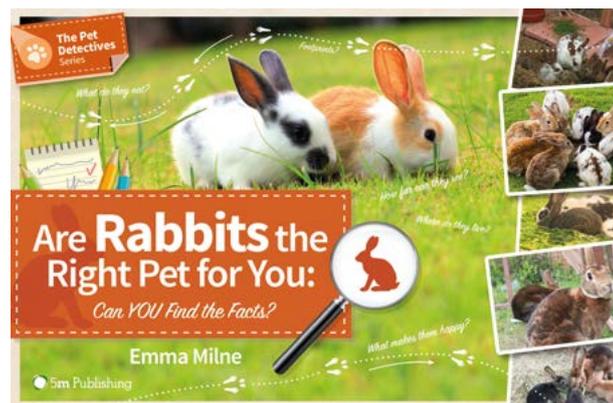
## Just because we can doesn't mean we should

I think fundamentally we need to go back to the basics. Humans seem to think it is their right to have anything simply because they want it. That may be fine for an inanimate object like a nice settee but when it comes to animals I think it's a bit different. All animals have complex needs and rabbits are one of the most misunderstood animals we keep. It is up to us to know what these needs are and more importantly to be sure we can meet them. Rabbits need social company with other rabbits and a huge exercise area with access all the time so that they can have freedom of choice and express all their natural behaviours, including digging.

If you live somewhere that you can't provide this then I'm sorry to say that rabbits are not the right pet for you. Harness walks do not make up for an inadequate environment and could put your rabbits at considerable risk of fear, stress, injury and disease. Please think long and hard about the welfare needs of your pets and even if you have them already see if there's anything you can improve on. Maybe it's a friend, maybe it's a better run or a big pot to dig in. After all, wouldn't it be nice if all our animals were really happy as well as healthy?

## Recommended reading

If you or your children are interested in finding out more about the welfare needs of rabbits try Emma's Pet Detective rabbit book and the RWAf will get 10% of the royalties. Available from the RWAf online shop and other major sellers.



Buy Emma's book from the RWAf shop

# PARTY SEASON BE PREPARED!

## WIN PRODUCTS

For your chance to **WIN £50 of Pet Remedy products** simply email your name, address and RWF membership number to: [WIN\\_FREE\\_PRODUCTS\\_rocompetitions@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:WIN_FREE_PRODUCTS_rocompetitions@rabbitwelfare.co.uk) the **first 10 names** drawn at random after the closing date of the 30th December 2019 will be sent a £50 voucher code to spend at [www.petremedy.co.uk](http://www.petremedy.co.uk) (winners will be picked at random)

Bonfire Night  
Diwali  
Halloween  
Christmas  
New Years Eve  
Chinese New Year

Available from your vet or local pet shop including Pets at Home or online at [www.petremedy.co.uk](http://www.petremedy.co.uk)

Pet Remedy can help with firework phobias and any other stress or anxiety related issues

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Use the calming spray for localised and immediate effect on bedding or bandana, whether in the home or when travelling

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HELPS ALL PETS



The plug-in diffuser works by slow release of low dosage Valerian blend active for up to 8 weeks

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Coming next issue...

The spring 2020 Rabbiting On will contain features on:

- **Companionship needs** - Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser, Guen Bradbury looks into whether or not human company can ever fully replace the company of another rabbit.
- **Ethical dilemmas** - Dr Emma Milne continues her ethics series and explores the effects of taking rabbits into schools and hospitals.
- **Spring fever** - Laura Dixon explains why it occurs and what you should do.
- **Enucleation** - What is involved when an eye needs to be surgically removed and how rabbits cope afterwards. Veterinary Surgeon Nathalie Wissink-Argilaga explains.

**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 February 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.

The overall 2018 Bunnies of the Year winners was Harriet and Hamish

# MAKE YOUR BUNNIES RABBITING ON COVER STARS!

**A**re your rabbits Rabbiting On cover stars in the making!? We are on the hunt for cover stars of the future and are running a competition to find them.

As well as having your rabbits adorn the cover of the Spring 2020 Rabbiting On, there are also some fantastic prizes to be won, whilst the competition also helps raise vital funds for the Rabbit Welfare Fund.

**The competition is open to photos of two or more rabbits and photos must be portrait in orientation. Photos of single rabbits or those in landscape format will not be entered.**

We will be offering prizes to 1st and 2nd place in both of the following categories:

- **Most loved up pair - Two or more rabbits snuggling up together**
- **Bunny posers - Two or more rabbits posing for the camera.**

## Most loved up pair

**1st place:** £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 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.

**2nd place:** 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

**1st place:** 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.

**2nd place:** 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

Photo: Suzanne Lilley

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

## Entry details

The winner from both categories will compete for the overall Cover Stars crown and their photo will be the cover of the Spring 2020 Rabbiting On...it could be your rabbits!

To raise vital funds for the important work that the RWF does, there is a small entry fee of **£2 per photograph entered. You can enter as many photos as you like but the entry fee must be paid for each photo.**

Photos can be entered as prints of digital images (preferably saved on a CD). Please set your camera to the maximum image quality to ensure that the resulting file is large and detailed enough to be reproduced in Rabbiting On. Save the digital photos at 300dpi, and at least postcard size. Make sure that your name, address, telephone number, RWF membership number and the rabbit's names are on the CD.

If you send prints please stick a label on the back of each photo listing the information above.

Send your photos/CDs and entry fees to: **Cover Star competition, RWF, Enigma House, Culmhead Business Park, Taunton, Somerset, TA3 7DY.** Please make cheques payable to: **The Rabbit Welfare Fund.**

Regrettably we are unable to return photos or CDs, so please do not send your only copies.

You can also enter your photos by emailing them. Firstly please ensure you visit

<https://shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/product/rwf-cover-stars-competition/> to pay the entry fee for each of your photos, then visit <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/about-the-rwf/photo-submissions/> to upload your photos. You must include your name, address, telephone number, RWF membership number, the rabbits' names and the payment transaction number the shop will generate when you pay for the entries.

**The closing date for entries is 5pm on the 30th December 2019 and the winners will be announced in the Spring 2020 Rabbiting On. Good luck.**

## Terms and Conditions

All of the photos entered that aren'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 in RWF literature, on the website or social media. By entering you are agreeing to these terms.

Prizes will be posted out direct from the prize donors, so by entering you are giving permission for your details to be passed onto them. Prizes can only be posted to UK postal addresses.



2nd place in the posers category in 2018 was Jake and Poppy

Photo: Elisa Griffin



# OUR 'HOW TO' SERIES CONTINUES WITH - HOW TO HEALTH CHECK

By Jo Hinde, Registered Veterinary Nurse

**H**ome health checks are a vital part of rabbit care and it's important to understand how to carry these out safely. Some of them will need to be done more frequently depending on your rabbit's age, breed and health status as well as the current weather conditions. Ideally have someone to help restrain the rabbit for you as this will make it easier and less stressful for both you and your rabbits.

## Handling

All check-ups and grooming can be done without the need for trancing. Simply place a towel on a table and stand the rabbit on it with their back to your helper who can then place one hand gently over the rabbit's head to cover their eyes. This helps to calm them down a little and reduce the chance of them jumping off the table. This natural sitting position will allow you to check the head, eyes, teeth, ears, body condition, fur, skin, feet and nails. To inspect the genitals and scent glands, ask your helper to gently place one hand under the rabbit's chest and front feet and lift them into a standing position with their spine against your helper's body. They can also then place a hand over the back feet to minimise the risk of the rabbit slipping or kicking. This position will allow you to check the abdomen, genitals and scent glands with minimum stress to the rabbit.

If the rabbit doesn't like being picked up, hold food above its head to encourage it to stand on its hind paws. This should give you a reasonable view of the abdomen and perineum.

## Daily checks

**Behaviour:** As a prey species, rabbits will hide their feelings, but you will know your rabbit's habits well enough to spot when something is not right. This could be subtle like seeming more quiet or grumpy than usual or it could be more obvious such as refusing to move or bullying their bonded partner. Both could signify that the rabbit is not 100% and further

investigation should be done. By carrying out the rest of the daily health checks, this can help you decide if a vet visit is needed.

**Appetite:** Any changes to eating habits should be taken seriously as it could be a sign of a major problem. Your rabbits should be very eager for breakfast and happy to take a healthy treat at any time of the day. If they refuse all food, then call your rabbit savvy vet immediately for an appointment. Also make sure you always measure out the food portions so you can tell how much has been eaten and be aware of any slow reduction in consumption of any part of the diet as this could be a sign of dental problems.

**Discharge:** The eyes and nose should always be clean and clear. Any discharge, staining, crusting or weeping is abnormal and needs to be checked out by a vet. Check the inside of the forelegs for matted fur, which may indicate the rabbit is wiping discharge from the eyes, nose or mouth. Rabbits are obligate nasal breathers meaning they only breathe through their nose, so it is vital this does not get blocked. If the rabbit is holding its eye slightly closed or it looks red, inflamed or has the third eyelid across, then this is a sign of a problem that needs further attention. Bear in mind that damage to the eyes surface can rarely be seen without the use of a special dye so do not assume it is ok because you cannot see a scratch.

**Litter tray:** Healthy rabbits can easily produce over 300 faecal pellets per day and the shape, size and

consistency of these are a great indicator of their gut health. The litter tray should be checked and spot cleaned daily as any decrease in the size or amount of faeces produced is a warning sign. If the rabbit suddenly starts to urinate outside of the litter tray, then this may also be a sign of an underlying problem. The colour of rabbit urine can vary from light yellow to dark orange depending on their diet but any sudden changes in colour or consistency, or if the rabbit seems to be struggling to urinate or passing blood in the urine then call your vet for advice.

**Genitals:** These should be clean and free from any discharge. There should not be any faeces stuck to the bottom nor should there be any urine staining or sore skin. In summer, the genital area should be checked at least twice a day as part of your flystrike prevention routine and smelling the rabbit can help detect if any caecotrophs are stuck somewhere in the fur. Rabbits have 2 small pockets either side of their genitals - these are scent glands. In general, you do not need to clean these areas as healthy rabbits will keep them in good condition, however sometimes they can get a hard, waxy build up inside them. If this causes a problem, it can be carefully removed using a cotton bud dipped in Vaseline but be gentle as the skin is very thin here.

**Grooming:** Usually this is a weekly task, however with long haired breeds like angoras and when rabbits are moulting, they should be groomed daily. One of the best and safest brushes to use is the cat Zoom Groom by Kong. This rubber brush is well tolerated by most rabbits and suitable for use on all breeds. Small toothed combs can be used for longer hair and to remove any tangles. As you groom, check that the skin is a healthy light pink and not sore or flaky. Also check the fur is in good condition, with no clumps or staining and there are no signs of mites.



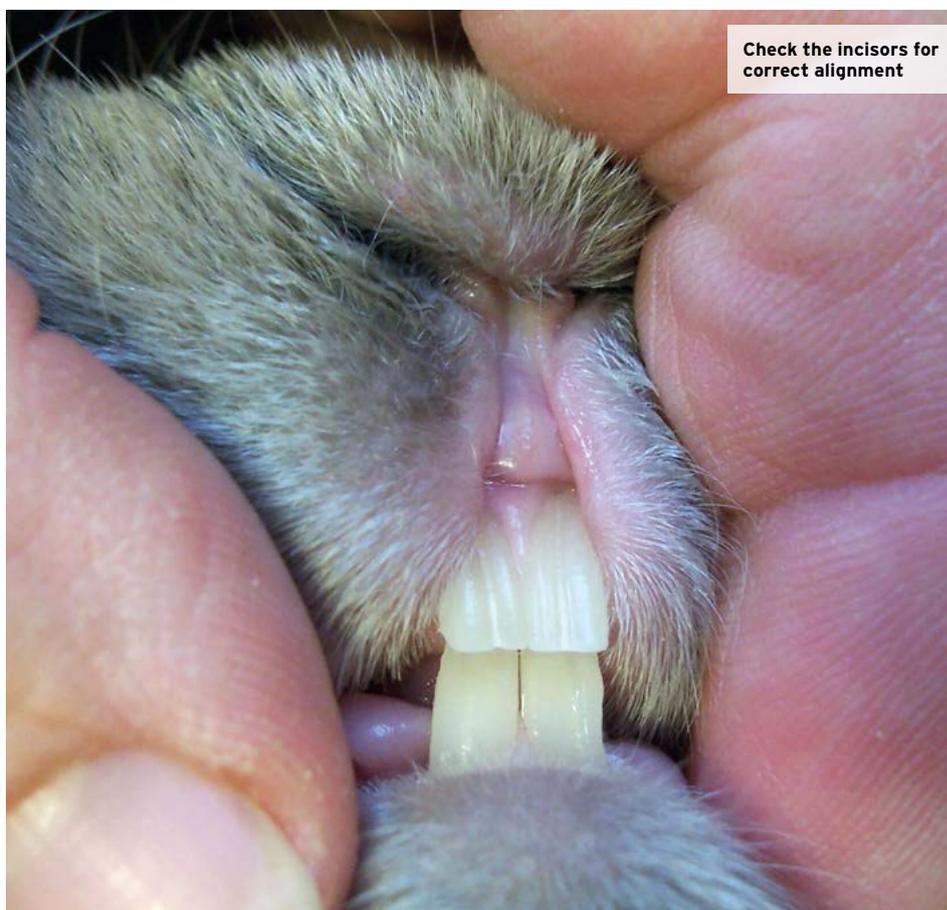
The Zoom Groom brush is useful to groom rabbits with

## Weekly checks

### Body weight and Body Condition

**Score:** Healthy, adult rabbits should stay roughly the same weight throughout the year. Use a pair of baby scales at home to monitor them weekly as well as carrying out a body condition score. By using the 2 measurements together, you can ensure your rabbit is a healthy size: <https://www.pfma.org.uk/rabbit-size-o-meter>.

**Ears:** Check the skin and fur on the outside to ensure there are no scratches, thinning fur or dry patches as this can indicate they are scratching or over grooming. Look inside the ears too as the skin should be light pink and no lumps of dark wax or debris inside. It is also important to feel around the base of the ears, especially in lop breeds. Use both hands to gently check both ear bases at the same time as this will help you feel any differences between the two - most rabbits that enjoy being stroked on the face will willingly allow this without requiring restraint. If you find any lumps that are on one ear only, then make an appointment to see your vet.



Check the incisors for correct alignment

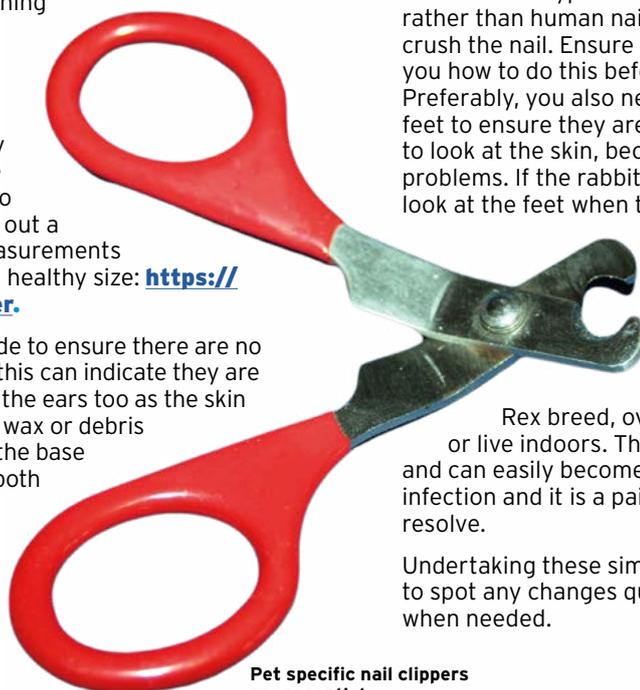
**Jaw and teeth:** The two handed palpation method should be used on the jaw too, and if you slowly introduce this process during stroking, most rabbits will accept it well. Gently run your finger and thumb along the edges of the bottom jaw. It should be smooth and the rabbit should not flinch at your touch. If you feel any bumps on one side or the rabbit seems sore in one area, then this can be a sign of a dental issue that needs further investigation. Also, be sure to look at the incisors as they should be a nice normal shape and length.

**Feet and nails:** Rabbits nails will often need trimming every couple of months, but they should be checked weekly to look for any damage or overgrowth. Always use a scissor type nail cutter that is specific for pets rather than human nail clippers as they can bend and crush the nail. Ensure your vet or vet nurse has shown you how to do this before you try to do it at home. Preferably, you also need to check the underside of the feet to ensure they are clean by pushing the fur back to look at the skin, because sore hocks can cause many problems. If the rabbit doesn't tolerate this, then try and look at the feet when the rabbit is lying down or at least

look at the rabbit's movement, and only pick the rabbit up and examine the feet if the rabbit is lame or if they have some of the risk factors. Rabbits can often get pododermatitis (sore hocks), especially if they are a

Rex breed, overweight, have overgrown nails or live indoors. The skin on the hocks is very thin and can easily become irritated and this can lead to infection and it is a painful condition that can be hard to resolve.

Undertaking these simple, frequent checks, will help you to spot any changes quickly and seek veterinary advice when needed.



Pet specific nail clippers are essential

A post mortem can be an invaluable diagnostic tool

Photo: D Staggs

# POST MORTEM EXAMINATION IN RABBITS

By Elisabetta Mancinelli,  
Specialist Veterinary Surgeon

**P**ost mortem or autopsy refers to the detailed medical examination performed on a pet's body after death, with the aim to determine why the animal died. Despite the fact that a post mortem is an invaluable diagnostic tool, it remains a very sensitive and delicate matter. Often veterinarians hesitate to offer the examination to a client as it can be difficult to bring up this subject. The death of a beloved rabbit is a very emotional time for any owner and deciding whether to have a post mortem examination while grieving and dealing with the loss can be extremely hard. Many people may consider this type of examination an unnecessary alteration of their rabbit's body after death. Whichever the reason an owner may have to decline an autopsy, this decision needs to be respected.

## Why should a post mortem be performed?

There may be several reasons for which a post mortem may be useful. Only the examination of a rabbit's body and its internal organs can reveal essential information on the cause of death. This may bring some piece of mind to the owner. For example, when a pet dies suddenly or without an obvious cause often owners blame themselves for oversight. Without a post mortem, the cause of death would remain unknown. The veterinarian cannot guess why a rabbit may have died and the autopsy may provide relief to the owner by showing that that death could not have been prevented. It may also provide information that could be helpful to prevent the same problem from occurring with future or other rabbits. In some cases, a post mortem may even be essential. For example, if an infectious disease is suspected (e.g. RVHD2), a post mortem may reveal if the cause of death of a rabbit is likely to be due to a disease that could spread to the others. In these cases, the post mortem may allow preventative measures to be taken for the remaining rabbits.

A post mortem can sometimes reveal congenital problems (a disease or an abnormality present from birth), environmental or dietary related issues. The information gathered may help improve the way we keep our rabbits. For example, in the past much of the information regarding inappropriate diets in rabbits came from post mortem examinations, which alongside focused research studies, have helped improving rabbits' diet and health.

In specific cases, a post mortem could also help veterinarians to know whether a treatment prescribed or a surgery performed may have been successful or not. Much of the current veterinary knowledge comes from post mortem examinations, which provide invaluable feedback to vets and can certainly improve future therapeutic choices.

## When should a post mortem be performed?

Time is very important when performing an autopsy as decomposition occurs rapidly hindering the results of the examination. In order to obtain useful information, a post mortem should ideally be performed as soon as possible and always within 48 hours of death. During this time, the body should be kept cool but not frozen.

## How is a post mortem examination performed?

A post mortem examination may be performed in different ways. More often, the entire body is examined following a precise technique. This allows being consistent and avoids overlooking lesions. A midline incision is made along



Photo: C Speight

Discussing performing a post mortem is a delicate subject

the underside of the animal to gain access to its abdomen and chest. Systematically, all body cavities and organs are examined in place first, for obvious abnormalities, and then removed for closer examination. In some cases, the cause of death may be immediately evident but in others, it may be necessary to take samples of different tissues that will need to be examined under the microscope (histologic examination) or submitted for other tests (e.g. isolation of bacteria, viruses or toxin identification). A "cosmetic post-mortem" may also be performed. This is only a partial examination, which allows the vet to perform a quick evaluation of some of the internal organs, sew up the incision performed and return the rabbit's body to his owner.

In conclusion, a post mortem examination can be an extremely useful tool as it could provide information essential to improve the health of our pets and ultimately veterinary knowledge. However, as it remains a very delicate subject, it may help thinking about what your choice would be well in advance, should that difficult time come. Always ask your veterinarian for further details before taking the final decision. The vet will respect it.

# READERS' LETTERS

## Don't give up on a grumpy bunny!

When we decided to partner up our first rabbit, I didn't think through what a good partner would be like. Our first, Elvis, was rescued (aged 6 months) from an unsuitable home and quickly became 'our boy'. He was needy for affection (which suited us just fine), funny and chilled out. So a partner who would lavish love on him would have been ideal.

After lots of deliberation, enter Mandy. Having decided to go to a rescue for a partner, I started 'internet dating' for a suitable bunwife. Our local Blue Cross had, as always, too many choices. They all deserved a loving home, but I chose Mandy to apply for.

On the day we visited to collect her, we heard that she had previously fought with her sister and she was recovering from the stitches and being spayed. Nonetheless, when we met her, Mandy hopped nonchalantly over to my wife and I, checked for anything interesting, decided there wasn't, and then hopped off again. We wanted to take her with us.

After bonding to Elvis, her new home was a fully enclosed garden on nice days - with lots of lush green grass, the house in bad weather and a spacious garage for their bedtime accommodation.

However, it quickly became apparent one thing she didn't want was human love and affection. She hated being handled. She struggled and scratched whenever it was necessary to pick her up. Elvis, by contrast, was happy being stroked whenever possible. We were intent on loving them equally. When we went to sit or lie with Mandy, the only thing to hold her attention was a yummy treat. Elvis would give copious kisses. Mandy treated us with disdain, although she would happily snuggle up and mutually groom with 'Elvie'. So these two had many years of following each other around the garden and into the office, getting into corners and looking for trouble like a couple of naughty toddlers. They were so good for each other.

Sadly, we said goodbye to Elvis in the Autumn of 2018, leaving us with 'the grumpy one'. We were distraught and turned all our attention to his widow. Mandy is now 9 and we have had her for 6 years and I'm pleased to report that she has softened a little. She is her own girl, but we do get a lot back with the occasional lick on the head, arms or hands. This never happened before. She also comes and sits outside our garden office, which we take as a compliment.



Mandy has a strong personality

She still has many ways to show us she's not completely satisfied with us. She stamps, grunts, nips, flicks her heels, turns her back on us..... you get the idea. We wouldn't swap her for the world though and one day we will miss her funny ways terribly.

Our advice would be not to leave a rabbit like Mandy. Even if they are not affectionate and human friendly, they are still a joy and give so much back. If you persist there's a chance that they will get used to you and one day might just give you that little lick on the nose that says "you'll do".

Rich and Jo Marsh



Ribena, Athena and Loki keep Rachael busy

## Capone Campaign work

Until recently I had never heard of the Capone Campaign, but it's fantastic! Thank you for sending the link to me. I contacted the RWF recently regarding concerns I had about an online seller and the article in one of the latest Rabbiting On magazines was extremely useful in this situation.

Thank you so much for everything. This is the first time I've had to contact the RWF since becoming a member, and you have all been amazing and ever so helpful. I really do appreciate it!

Keep up the amazing work.

Rachael Wix

Generally the best combination is a male and female, both neutered

Photo: B Shipsey

# BONDING: HOW TO INTRODUCE A NEW COMPANION TO YOUR RABBIT

By Dr Laura Dixon, Research Scientist

**R**abbits are a social species and in the wild they live in groups consisting of males and females of different ages<sup>1</sup>. As rabbits are a prey species, living with companions allows some rabbits to feed while others keep vigilant for danger<sup>2</sup>. A normal behavioural repertoire for rabbits involves grooming other rabbits (called allo-grooming), playing with and resting in contact with companions<sup>1,3</sup>. Rabbits housed with companions will spend 79% of their time in close proximity to with each other<sup>4</sup> and 58% of their resting time in body contact with each other<sup>5</sup>. The ability to perform a normal range of behaviours for a species can be used to assess welfare<sup>6</sup>. This means rabbits housed individually show limited behaviour patterns compared to rabbits housed with companions and the inability to perform these behaviours may cause stress, frustration and decreased welfare<sup>7</sup>.

## The need to be with another rabbit

For these reasons it is recommended that rabbits are housed with a rabbit companion<sup>8-10</sup>. However, surveys of rabbit owners have shown

that 41.9-57% of pet rabbits live without a companion in the UK<sup>11-12</sup>. Research has found that rabbits housed individually show more abnormal behaviours (an indicator of poor welfare<sup>4</sup>), such as pulling out their own fur and repetitive biting on metal surfaces, than pair housed rabbits<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, rabbits will work hard by pushing through weighted doors to access another rabbit, demonstrating that they are motivated to be with a companion<sup>14</sup>.

Rabbits that have been housed and bonded with another rabbit may eventually end up singly-housed when one of the pair-bond dies. Many animals are thought to experience grief when they lose a companion<sup>15</sup>. Behaviour may change, the animal may appear depressed and/or they may change their eating and drinking habits. Although it can be difficult as a person to replace the deceased companion, it is best for your remaining rabbit to find them a new companion.

## How do I give my current rabbit a new friend?

First an appropriate companion needs to be identified. It's recommended that a neutered male and spayed female pair will have the best chances at a successful bonding<sup>16</sup>. Some rabbit rescues will help with or even bond the rabbits for you, plus there is the benefit of giving a rescued rabbit a home.

The new rabbit needs to be slowly and carefully introduced to the resident rabbit. Some level of aggression - a bit of chasing and nipping - and mounting behaviour is not uncommon as the rabbits establish their dominance hierarchy, but don't let this escalate into a full-on fight.

Initially house the new rabbit separately but near the resident rabbit so they can get used to each other's scents. To help with this, you can also exchange litter trays or other objects in their environments<sup>17</sup>.

Successful bonding needs careful introductions



Photo: D Staggs



Grooming each other is a positive sign

After they appear used to each other in this way, have short sessions where the rabbits will be placed in the same environment together. This should be a different environment than either of the areas the rabbits are currently housed in. There should be enough space so the rabbits can get away from each other (around 2m<sup>2</sup> (8')) and have enrichment items, such as platforms, tunnels, hay, etc., available to help distract the rabbits. If you provide any kind of food enrichment, scatter it around the environment and there should be two water bowls and multiples of other enrichments so the rabbits don't try to monopolise and defend these. Also make sure there aren't any small areas where a rabbit could get backed into and trapped - that could lead to the rabbits fighting.

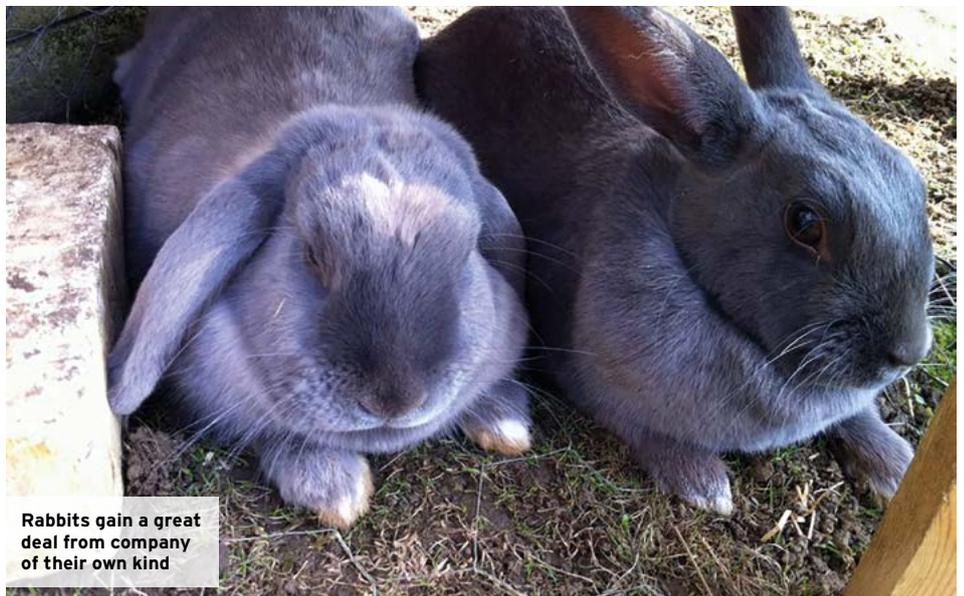
You will need to closely monitor the rabbits when doing this and remove them if the rabbits are becoming tense or beginning to nip and chase each other. These sessions should be repeated daily until the rabbits seem comfortable with each other and are happily grooming each other or lying next to each other. Start off trying the rabbits together for 10 minutes and if everything goes well, you can increase the time gradually each day.

This whole process may take anywhere from hours to months to complete. It's important not to try and rush the process and let the rabbit's progress at their own pace.

Unfortunately, some rabbits may never bond. If your rabbits attempt to fight when put in the same environment, contact a rabbit expert - this may be a vet, vet nurse, a behaviourist or someone from a rabbit rescue - and they may be able to offer suggestions on how to progress with the bonding. Once you have bonded your rabbits, don't separate them. If one needs the vet, take both rabbits in the same carrier.

## Conclusion

Having a social companion is important for rabbits and allows them to perform behaviours that they are unable to when housed on their own. Let the new and resident rabbit get used to each other's scent before putting them in the same environment together. Keep your introductions slow and seek advice if you are unsure about what to do.



Rabbits gain a great deal from company of their own kind

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# RABBIT ESSENTIALS

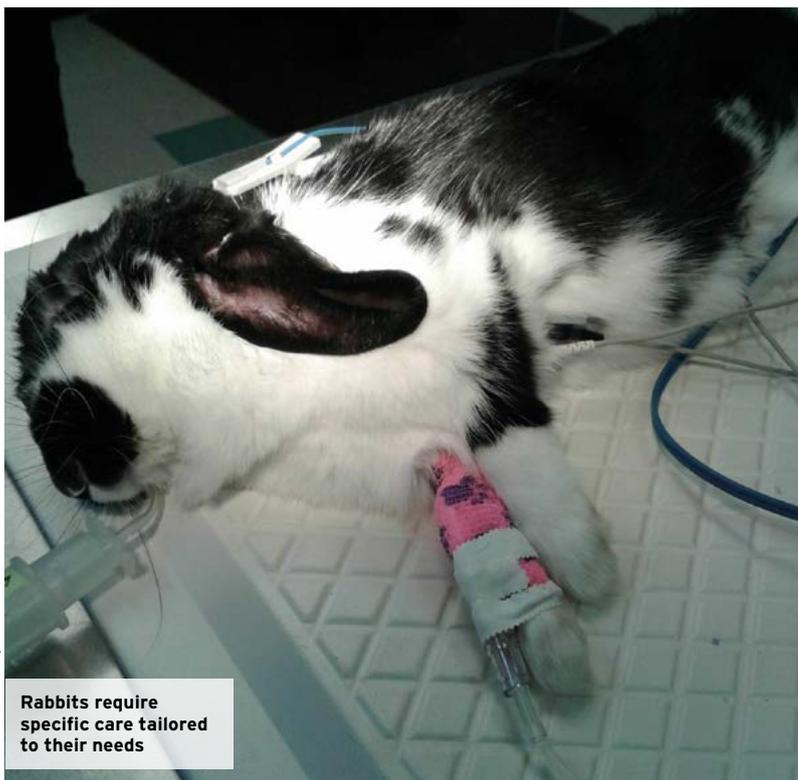
## Selecting a rabbit friendly veterinary practice

By Claire Speight, Registered Veterinary Nurse

**O**ur series, 'Rabbit essentials' focuses on an area of rabbit care each issue to help guide new owners and readers of Rabbiting On. In this instalment we look at what you should look for when selecting a veterinary practice to care for your rabbits.

### Cats and dogs are not the same as rabbits

There are thousands of veterinary practices throughout the UK, both independent and those that are part of a corporate chain. Just because your local veterinary practice may have treated your pet dog or cat for the last 20 years, sadly isn't indicative that they will be able to offer your rabbits a high level of veterinary care.



Rabbits require specific care tailored to their needs

Photo: P. Chaney

### Friendly and knowledgeable staff

Staff should be approachable and not stand-offish with you. This should include the veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and receptionists as you would come into contact with all of them if you selected that veterinary practice.

Some vets have specialisms or further qualifications in exotic species. It may be that this is the vet you need to see with your rabbits. Ask before registering.

### Hospitalisation facilities

Ideally a practice would have an individual rabbit/small furry ward, but this is rarely the case. At the very least rabbits must be housed away from all predator species. This not only includes dogs and cats, but also ferrets, birds of prey and some reptiles. Being housed near any of the species will cause stress to the rabbit.

Hospital cages should be large enough so the rabbit can lie at full stretch and stand up on their hind legs, and hay, water and a selection of fresh food should be offered to rabbit inpatients. The practice should encourage companion rabbits to stay with the hospitalised rabbit.

### Premises

Some veterinary practices are purpose built; others are renovated houses or buildings previously used for other purposes. The actual building type is pretty irrelevant. What is important is that the waiting room should be tidy, clean and have ample seating for clients. You should be able to get away from noisy dogs who may stress your rabbit out and ideally there should be a separate waiting area for rabbits.

### Out of hour's emergency care

This may not seem very important when considering what practice to choose, but it is advisable to know the out of hour's care that would be available to your rabbit in an emergency situation before one may occur!

Make sure you enquire about the facilities and staff



Nowadays a lot of practices no longer do their own out of hour's emergency service. They may have a designated emergency service who take over their phone lines when the practice shuts or a pool of practices may get together and rotate the out of hours between them. If this is the case how far away may you have to travel in an emergency? Do you know if the vets who may have to treat your rabbit in an emergency are rabbit savvy, or can call on more experienced colleagues if not?

### Hospital status

Only those practices that are hospitals are required to have someone on site 24 hours a day, although some non-hospital veterinary practices may have this. If the practice doesn't have 24 hour staffing then it is worth asking what would happen when the practice was shut and your rabbit was an inpatient. Some practices will employ a service whereby inpatients are taken to another veterinary practice during the hours they are shut, especially if another practice does their out of hours emergency work, with the animal going back to their original practice the next day. Other

practices will have staff coming in at regular intervals to check on inpatients and administer medications etc., but you need to be aware what will happen in this situation.

### Anaesthesia and surgery

Rabbit anaesthesia for routine procedures such as castrations and spays should no longer be seen as high risk, and practices should recommend neutering and be willing to discuss this with you.

Ask if rabbits are routinely intubated or have a V-gel placed during surgical procedures and how many anaesthetics the practice routinely performs on rabbits each week. Rabbits should always go home with pain relief after surgery, ideally included in the cost of the procedure - does the practice offer this?

### Vaccinations

Your rabbit is going to need two vaccinations each year and if the practice does not recommend and offer these then steer well clear! The combination of Nobivac with either Filavac or Eravac is essential to provide protection against myxomatosis and RVHD1 and 2.

As you can see there are numerous points to consider when selecting a veterinary practice for your rabbits. The RWF have a list of rabbit friendly vets which can be found at <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-friendly-vets/> - all of these vets are RWF practice members, have applied to be added to the list and have filled out a comprehensive questionnaire in order to be listed. You may have to travel up to an hour to see one of these veterinary surgeons, but it may be that there is a veterinary surgeon not on the list who fulfils the requirements needed to treat your rabbits. And if so, please suggest to them that they apply to be on the RWF list!

## RWAF FOCUS - WHO IS WHO AT THE RWAF Claire Speight

**Registered Veterinary Nurse, A1, Clinical Coach, C&G Cert in Veterinary Nursing of Exotic Species**

Claire has been the editor of *Rabbiting On* since 2013, and also works as part of the RWF education team.

Qualifying as a Veterinary Nurse in 2007, Claire currently works as a Head Nurse in a busy first opinion practice with a high rabbit caseload in Northamptonshire. Claire has worked at numerous practices, including in referral and as a locum during the last decade, and has always been known as the 'rabbit nurse'.

Claire completed the City and Guilds Nursing of Exotic Species certificate in 2009 and the A1 Assessor qualification to enable her to train student nurses in 2010. This has now been superseded by the Clinical Coach qualification, which Claire also holds.

As well as working in practice 4 days a week and for the RWF, Claire regularly lectures at colleges and conferences to veterinary nurses, vets and owners on rabbit care, health and welfare on a variety of subjects and has just recently written a course on rabbits (and rodents) for a college in Australia. Claire is also a regular contributor for several veterinary and owner publications, including *Rabbiting On*.

At home Claire has 2 rabbits (both rescues) and has kept rabbits for over 25 years, having always been a member of the RWF and before that one of the first few of the BHRA.

Claire has edited *Rabbiting On* since 2013

# RABBIT ROUNDUP

## First Veterinary Practice in Wales awarded Gold Standard

Valley Veterinary Hospital in Cardiff, Wales, has been awarded the first Gold Standard award for rabbit care in Wales, following an application and assessment by the RWF.

There are only 13 other practices in the UK that hold the Gold Standard award for rabbit care, a respected and coveted title for any practice that handles small animals and exotic pets.

Valley Veterinary Hospital had to demonstrate excellence across all aspects of rabbit care in order to achieve the award. The practice was commended on its top-quality facilities, including a dedicated exotic department with separate waiting and consulting rooms, as well as kennel areas for rabbits to keep them away from larger animals, relieving them of stress and anxiety.

Valley Veterinary Hospital exotic animals specialist, Tariq Abou-Zahr, BVSc CertAVP(ZooMed) MRCVS, said, "I am absolutely delighted that Valley Veterinary Hospital has met the grade to achieve the first RWF gold status in Wales. I believe that rabbits are just as deserving of excellent veterinary care as cats and dogs, and I am so pleased that I work in a veterinary hospital where we have the facilities to provide this standard of care".

The Gold and Silver RWF Standard awards allow rabbit owners to recognise veterinary practices that are able to offer specialist rabbit care.

Applications for the Awards are assessed by Dr Richard Saunders BSc Hons MSB CBIol DZooMed MRCVS, one of the UK's leading specialists on rabbit welfare and veterinary adviser for RWF.

Dr Richard Saunders said, "I'm really pleased to accept our first Welsh Gold rabbit-friendly vet practice member, Valley Vets, to the RWF list. Rabbits are highly misunderstood as easy first-time pets, but they are in fact very complex animals that require specific handling and care. A practice holding the Gold standard award demonstrates to rabbit owners



that their pets are in the best hands, and people in Cardiff can be assured that Valley Vets has been recognised for their high standards in care.

"As a dedicated rabbit charity aiming to improve the wellbeing and welfare of domestic rabbits throughout the UK, our requirements to meet a Gold standard in rabbit care are very high. Valley Vets has met all of these standards and I'm delighted to reward a practice in Wales who have demonstrated that they are as passionate about rabbit care as we are."

RWF have put together a list of their award-winning rabbit-savvy practices on their website which can be viewed here: <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-friendly-vets/rabbit-friendly-vet-list/>

## Be safe when ordering medications online

If you are ordering pharmaceuticals online, non-prescription, or using a prescription from your vet, make sure the pharmacy is registered with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD).

Registered pharmacies will only sell genuine products that have been properly stored and are in date. A full list of VMD registered/accredited retailers can be found at: <https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/InternetRetailers/accredited-retailers.aspx>

## Jo Hinde becomes BVNA President

Jo Hinde has taken over as president of the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) at the association's annual conference at the Telford International Centre (11-13 October).

Jo said: "It is humbling and exciting to be president" and her chosen charity for the year is the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund, which we are very grateful to Jo for. We wish Jo the very best of luck.



## Tribute to a special bunny - By Guen Bradbury

Pewter was Guens inspiration for so much

My father bought Pewter when he developed a brain tumour. Pewter loved my Dad and loathed everyone else. Dad died when Pewter was two and I took him on. Initially, he bit everyone who went near him, but after being bonded to a friend (Babbitt) and being clicker trained, he changed completely. He inspired me to set up a teleconsultancy on rabbit behaviour and to publish academic papers and then a textbook - 'Behavioural problems in rabbits: a clinical approach.' He died aged ten and a half. I miss him so much, but his legacy lives on.

# Price increase in 2020

To allow the organisation to be sustainable we are always reviewing our income and expenditure and ensuring that we are as efficient as we can be. Examples of this recently are upgrading our Royal Mail account so that we take advantage of the better prices offered, and slightly changing the paper of this magazine to reduce costs.

However, even with these savings, prices of everything have risen steadily over the last 7 years, which is when we last implemented a price increase (from £17.50 to £20) and to make sure we are still here in another 7 years and more, we unfortunately need to increase the subscription rate again by £1 per magazine. This will take UK adult membership up to £24.

We hate to do this and have put this off for as long as possible, but we cannot absorb the increased costs any longer. We are sure that everyone will understand that it's a necessary measure, not least to keep up with the price of inflation and escalating postage costs.

Rabbiting On is a brilliant magazine, and we pride ourselves in being a totally reliable and up to date source of information.

The increase for existing members will be in spring 2020, but for new members, the increase started on 1st August this year.

Membership will continue to be fantastic value: 4 copies of Rabbiting On, Hop to It booklets, priceless referral advice from our expert Vet to name just a few of the fabulous benefits. We hope that everyone will continue to support rabbits by continuing to support us.

## Pet Food Manufacturers Association report on pet obesity highlights a growing issue for rabbits

The Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA) has released new data in its Obesity Report, highlighting that an alarming 51% of dogs, 44% of cats and 29% of small mammals are overweight or obese. Moreover, an overwhelming 100% of vets are concerned about pet obesity.

Despite this weighty reality, research among 8000 households, shows that the majority of owners are seemingly unaware of the problem; 68% of pet owners think their pet is exactly the right weight and 67% admit they are not worried about pet obesity.

With almost 8.5m pets in the UK currently overweight, the last five years has seen a worrying increase and today almost 600,000 more UK pets are overweight or obese and at risk of living two years less than a healthy, fit pet.

With pet obesity now recognised as a disease among many health organisations, Nicole Paley, Deputy Chief Executive of the PFMA gives advice on how rabbit owners can keep their pets fit and healthy.

- 1 Ensure the right diet is provided. Rabbit's need at least a body sized bundle of hay a day for gut and dental health.
- 2 Commercial rabbit food helps rabbits get all the nutrients they need but the portions need to be weighed out in line with guidelines.
- 3 Weight needs to be monitored on a regular basis and food portions adjusted accordingly. The PFMA Rabbit Size-O-Meter has been designed to help owners understand what a healthy sized rabbit looks and feels like.
- 4 Exercise is as important for rabbits as cats and dogs. Rabbits need access to a large run.

For more information on keeping rabbits lean and healthy, please visit: [www.pfma.org.uk/rabbits](http://www.pfma.org.uk/rabbits)

To view the PFMA obesity report: <https://www.pfma.org.uk/pet-obesity-reports>

The new membership rates are now:

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

If you have a PayPal subscription or a cardless direct debit set up, we will be changing the billing amount in time for January 2020. You don't need to do anything. If you do not want to pay the additional £1 per magazine you just need to log on to your own account and cancel the payment.

If you have a standing order set up please cancel it and re-new at the new rate from 2020.

Obviously if you send us a cheque please use the new amount, and you can still phone and renew via the helpline.

If we have an e-mail address for you we will be contacting you and reminding you about this.

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)



Richard and Kim Skinner got married on the 3rd June 2019 and with a combined love of animals in general and rabbits specifically, wanted to use their wedding to raise awareness as best they could and to help buns. They already lived together and weren't setting up a home together, so asked people for donations to the RWAF instead of wedding gifts - Rich even pushed for more donations in his speech!



Wedding favours were another thing they looked at, usually you get some random small item you never use again, and instead they let their guests choose from a list of animal charities including the RWAF and the Rabbit Residence Rescue, and donated £5 on their behalf.

Rich said, "We'd have loved it if Lord Jeremy Hopper could have attended our wedding. I think our dream wedding would have involved all our rabbits running down the aisle and queuing up with the bridesmaids before Kim walked down, but his clicker training has not progressed that far as I can't help but give him all the nuggets!! However, we did have all our animals on our cake, made by Kim".

In total, including Gift Aid, a magnificent £1023.75 was raised for the RWAF.

## 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 expert 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

## Unloved rabbit

**Q** I am concerned that my neighbour's rabbit is not being cared for properly. The water is green, it never seems to have hay and I never see it out of the hutch. What evidence and to whom should I report it to?

**A** If you have a serious concern about the welfare of an animal, then your first port of call should always be the RSPCA's 24 hours hotline for the reporting of animal cruelty, neglect or an animal in distress. Call **0300 1234999**.

Unlike the RWF, the RSPCA line is 24/7 365 days a year, and the organisation does have a dedicated Inspectorate Service that covers England and Wales, while they may not be able to make an urgent visit you stand a much better chance of achieving a positive outcome for the animal by contacting the RSPCA directly.

The RSPCA call-handler will be likely to ask you a number of questions which will involve facts such as where you are and where the animal is located, what type of animal it is and what are your specific concerns and why. They may also ask you whether you have evidence, this could include photographs or video evidence, it could also include notes taken by you of the situation that presents itself, these would probably be in the form of diary entries such as the last day you saw food or hay in the hutch, when the water was last changed etc.

You must remember though that as a private citizen you have no powers to enter premises to obtain this evidence, and you should never place yourself in danger to obtain such evidence.

Many complainants may feel inclined to call the Police, you must remember however that the Police are unlikely to take action in individual matters of neglect, and would be more likely to call the RSPCA or advise you to do likewise. If however you feel the matter warrants Police involvement their non-emergency contact number is 101, in an emergency always dial 999.

Dependent upon where you live, or where the animal is located the local council may have a dedicated Animal Welfare Officer; these officers hold powers under animal health and welfare legislation and do have powers of entry in certain circumstances, or when executing a warrant granted by the courts.

You may find such officers in local Trading Standard, Environmental Health or licensing teams, it is worth contacting the local council's switchboard and asking for the AWO to see if they can assist you faster than the RSPCA.

The RWF can be contacted during the working hours of the helpline, but we have no powers to intervene in animal welfare matters, nor to enter premises so our position would very much be one of providing advice to callers and signposting them to the appropriate authorities.

If you have information relating to concerns that rabbits may be being bred and sold from premises without a Local Authority pet sales licence, an activity that often goes hand in hand with welfare concerns, please contact the RWF since we are currently involved in a variety of work-streams targeting and exposing this trade which will often see animals suffering neglect and kept in awful conditions.

**Mark Dron**

# Winter playtime



Photo: J Dene

**Q** I have been advised that my outdoor rabbits should not be brought inside the house to exercise and play during winter. Why is this? Also, can they stay outdoors if the weather is below freezing or should I provide them with extra insulation?

**A** Wild rabbits have various physical and behavioural adaptations to survive cold weather. Physically, rabbits grow a thick coat in the autumn. Their furry feet prevent their skin being in prolonged contact with the cold ground. Behaviourally, they make insulated, underground burrows which don't fall below freezing – they rest in these burrows and come out to feed.

Most pet rabbits kept outside will grow a thicker coat for winter (although this may not be adequate in rabbits that have been bred for abnormal fur, like Rex rabbits). Rabbits used to being kept outside may find a centrally heated house too hot. It takes a little while for rabbits to adjust to changing environments, and so moving them around a lot can be stressful

– so decide where they are going to spend the winter and stick with it.

Although wild rabbits are comfortable at temperatures below freezing, many pet rabbits may suffer at these temperatures. This is because they don't have access to an underground burrow and frequently don't have much reason to move around (if they aren't grazing). This means that they can become hypothermic and even die. Therefore it's really important to provide extra insulation.

So what does good winter housing for pet rabbits look like?

All rabbits should have permanent access to a large run, and they should continue to have this throughout the winter – this enables them to show normal grazing behaviour and get enough exercise. Enclosures should be well insulated and if a hutch is used it should be off the ground and attached to the run, dry and waterproof, sheltered from wind and rain, and well insulated with newspaper and hay. Giving the rabbits a choice means that they can use their normal instincts to regulate their temperature appropriately. You may be surprised at where they choose to spend their time when they have a choice!

**Guen Bradbury**



Why does she over groom him?

# She prefers clean shaven!

**Q** What can we do to stop our rabbit, Ebony, nibbling at the whiskers and eyelashes of her partner, Dijon?

We adopted Ebony 6 months ago, as a new companion for Dijon, who had just lost his partner of 7½ years. She had just lost her previous partner, so was being re-homed to join a new companion. It took 3 weeks for her to bond with Dijon. Any nips were from her, with no retaliation, only cowering, from Dijon. There was never any mounting from either.

They are now happily settled together. She still chases him sometimes - for example, when Dijon ventures into 'her' tunnel. There is some allo-grooming, but mostly she licks around the corners and lids of his eyes. He endures it for a while, but usually tries to move his head in an attempt to make her groom him elsewhere - usually without success.

**A** It is hard to say exactly what is going on with your rabbits but I am wondering if this is actually a form of over-grooming. Rabbits will often participate in a mutual grooming behaviour known as allo-grooming which probably helps strengthen their bond. Furthermore maintaining a healthy coat is very important and if a friend can reach the spots you can't, all the better! A fellow rabbit will often lick and nibble another's face, head, ears and neck.

Do you know whether Ebony nibbled her previous companion's whiskers and how it responded? If she has been exhibiting this behaviour for a number of years there is every chance that there is a strong learnt component to it which will make modifying it all the harder. Also, it is thought that these repetitive type behaviours can provide an internal reward which means

an animal will want to keep performing them.

I would advise that you ask your vet to check both of your rabbits. If they are found to be in good health then this behaviour could be connected to either a lack of fibre in their diet, environmental stress, lack of stimulation or a problem within their social relationship.

It is possible that the relationship between your rabbits is influencing this behaviour. Some studies suggest that a dominant rabbit is usually responsible for over grooming behaviour whilst other research implies it is more likely to be performed by a subordinate individual. I am assuming that both of your rabbits are neutered and although this helps to reduce these status related behaviours, it is no guarantee.

A lot of rabbit problems can be affected by lifestyle. Where they live, what space they have, what they eat and what they have to do with their time is undoubtedly reflected in their behaviour.

Increasing the percentage of fibre in your rabbits' diet could be the key to answering this problem and good quality hay is by far the best source. It is essential for good gut health, but also, it takes a long time to eat - and they have to eat a lot of it! The more time spent eating the less time there is for grooming or more importantly over-grooming. Make sure the bulk of their diet is hay as well as grass - if it isn't possible to give them access to grass you could plant them a grass and herb tray. Only feed small quantities of dry food and make them work for it e.g. hide the pellets in a willow hay ball, a hay box or scatter feed. Also treat dispensing toys (which you could hide in the hay box) and puzzle feeders can increase the length of time your rabbits spend foraging - you could do similar things with their fresh food too. Promoting foraging will help to enhance their mental stimulation and welfare as will increasing their opportunities to chew, dig and providing space to run and stretch.

Do remember that although over grooming is not a typical behaviour and needs to be discouraged, mutual grooming is necessary and entirely normal.

**Carol Valvona**

# What information can I trust on the internet?

**Q** Which websites can I really trust? Whenever I search for information online I get differing advice from different websites. Where can I go for accurate and up to date information on health, how to bond, how best to travel with rabbits, what is a good diet and suitable toys etc.?

**A** For most rabbit care information, you are better off visiting websites published by respected rabbit charities such as the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund (in the UK, [rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://rabbitwelfare.co.uk)) and House Rabbit Society (in the USA, [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org)). The information they publish will be amongst the most accurate and up-to-date available. They also have expanding libraries of information and, in the case of the RWAf, many downloadable resources. Websites by the RSPCA, PDSA, Wood Green, Blue Cross and RAW/Burgess can also be trusted to offer good advice.

If you are looking for more specialist rabbit-related information, it can be useful to join a forum where you can draw on the personal experiences of other rabbit owners. Although, these must never take the place of consulting a rabbit savvy vet if you suspect your rabbit is ill. There are quite a few rabbit-related forums, and three of the better ones are Rabbits United (<http://forums.rabbitrehome.org.uk/index.php>), Rabbits Online (<https://www.rabbitsonline.net>), and UK Companion Rabbits (<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/UK-Companion-Rabbits>). You will need to create accounts to join them.

**Leo Staggs**

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



The RWAf website provides accurate and up to date information



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# COMMON RABBIT CANCERS

By Lisa Butwell, Veterinary Surgeon

Testicular tumours  
are relatively rare

Photo: R Saunders

**R**abbit owners are often aware of the risk that female rabbits have of developing uterine cancer, particularly as they get older. This is one of the most popular reasons that owners decide to neuter (spay) their rabbit, as it will prevent this cancer from developing. Alongside uterine cancers, rabbits can go on to develop a number of other types of cancer, although these are less frequently seen compared to uterine disease. By being familiar with the common types of cancer that affects rabbits, you can be aware of any signs of illness, so prompt veterinary care can be sought.

## Types of cancer

There are a number of different types of cancers that have been detected in rabbits, with some types being more common than others including:

- Uterine adenocarcinoma
- Lymphoma
- Mammary carcinoma
- Testicular tumours
- Thymoma
- Osteosarcoma.

## Uterine adenocarcinoma

This is the most common type of cancer that is seen in rabbits. It affects unneutered females with the risk of uterine cancer developing increasing as the rabbit gets older. It is often suggested that this cancer may affect up to 80% of unneutered female rabbits over 5 years old. However, the risk to the pet rabbit population may actually be lower than previously thought and future studies may provide us with valuable information that changes our management of this disease. This cancer is usually slow growing and can metastasize (spread) elsewhere within the body. Any metastatic spread that is present when disease is diagnosed can affect the prognosis.

Signs of illness include:

- Haematuria (blood in urine)
- Anorexia (not eating)
- Depression
- Bloody vulvar discharge
- Cystic mammary glands
- Partial urethral obstruction (not able to pass urine properly)
- Weight loss
- Enlarged abdomen.

This cancer may be able to be felt inside the rabbit's abdomen when an examination is performed. Ultrasound and/or radiography will be needed for a diagnosis, which can also be used to screen for any spread of the disease.

Surgery to remove the cancerous tumour by performing an

ovariohysterectomy (spay), which involves removing the rabbits uterus and ovaries, is the most successful treatment option. If there is no metastatic spread present at the time of surgery then the rabbit can go on to make a full recovery. However regular check-ups to monitor for any spread of the cancer will be needed for up to 2 years after treatment.

Metastatic spread most commonly occurs at the lungs, liver, brain, bone or peritoneal cavity (abdominal space). If any spread is detected then the prognosis for recovery is poor. Additional cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, are generally unsuccessful and palliative treatment with pain relief and anti-inflammatories may be used to keep the rabbit comfortable. Unfortunately, quality of life may be quickly affected and euthanasia may need to be considered.

## Lymphoma

The second most common type of cancer seen in rabbits is lymphoma and it is the most frequent cancer type seen in young juvenile rabbits. This cancer can occur in a number of different forms. Generalised lymphoma is found throughout the body so will often be affecting multiple organs by the time that it is detected. Cutaneous lymphoma is a form of lymphoma that affects the skin, so affected rabbits will usually have skin abnormalities present.

Often affected rabbits will only show generalised signs of illness including:

- Weight loss
- Anorexia (not eating)
- Lethargy
- Depression
- Diarrhoea.

More specific signs of lymphoma may be present:

- Sore ulcer like skin lesions
- Protrusion (bulging) of both eyes
- Enlarged lymph glands.

Treatment for lymphoma is usually unsuccessful with various surgical and chemotherapy protocols used in the past. Advice from an oncologist can be sought for individual cases but prognosis is usually poor.

## Mammary Carcinoma

This is a cancer of female rabbits that affects the mammary glands and is generally uncommon compared to uterine cancer. Although rabbits that suffer from cystic mastitis can commonly go on to develop mammary tumours in the future.

Signs of illness include:

- Irregularly sized mammary lumps
- Milk/fluid discharge from the mammary glands.

Mammary tumours can metastasize to the lymph nodes, lungs, abdomen or bone marrow so the presence of any spread should be assessed before treatment is performed. Surgery will usually be recommended, including a partial or complete mastectomy; where the tumours and either part or all of the mammary gland will be removed. At the same time an ovariohysterectomy may also be advised.

## Testicular tumours

Testicular tumours are a cancer of male rabbits that is rarely seen. There are a number of different types of tumour that can occur in rabbits including; seminomas, interstitial cell tumours, sertoli cell tumours or lymphoma.

Signs of illness include:

- Non-painful swelling of a testicle
- Reproductive failure (unable to breed).
- Weight loss

These tumours are treated by castration where both testicles are removed. At this stage the tumour type can be diagnosed by histology. If there is no metastatic spread present at the time of removal then the rabbit can go on to make a full recovery.

## Thymoma

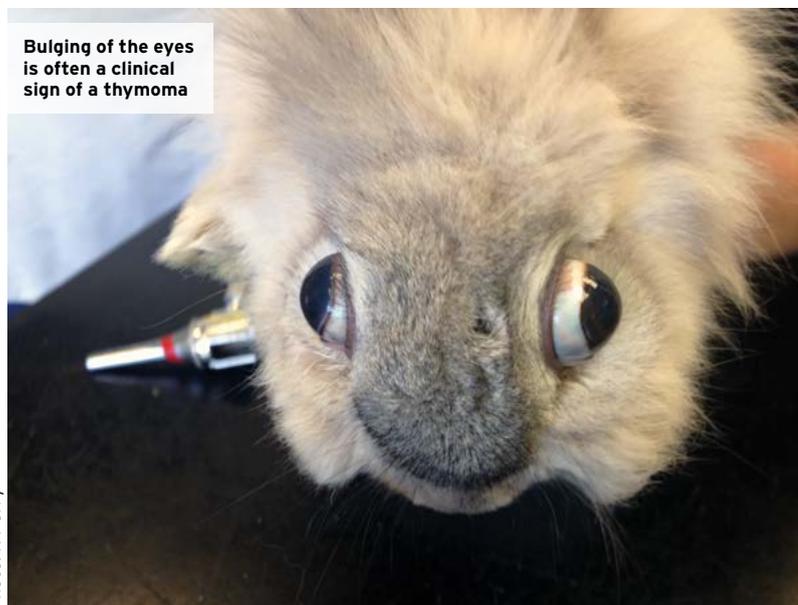
A thymoma is an uncommon cancer in rabbits but it is the most common cancer type to affect the thymus gland. In rabbits the thymus gland is found in the chest, where it remains as a permanent structure throughout life. In other animals the thymus gland will decrease in size when the animal reaches maturity.

Usually, they are slow growing tumours that do not generally metastasize (spread) to other parts of the body but they can become locally invasive and affect parts of the body close to the thymus gland. A thymoma will increase the size of the thymus gland inside the chest. This causes compression of the normal structures found within the chest, resulting in the clinical signs shown.

Clinical signs of a thymomas:

- Breathing difficulties
- Bulging of the eyes.
- Exercise intolerance

There are a number of possible treatment options available for treating thymomas. Surgery to remove the tumour can lead to a cure in certain



Bulging of the eyes is often a clinical sign of a thymoma

Photo: R Perry



Haematuria can indicate uterine adenocarcinoma

Photo: J Hinde

individuals. Alternatively, radiation treatment has also had some good results in rabbits with a thymoma.

## Osteosarcoma

Osteosarcoma is a tumour in the bone and is rare in rabbits but there have been a few cases diagnosed. It is a cancer that can metastasize where it may spread to the lungs, abdominal organs or under the skin. Depending on the location of the cancer then surgical removal may be recommended.

## Risks of cancer

Currently, there is a lack of studies into the risk factors for cancer development in rabbits. However, as the popularity of keeping rabbits as pets increases, along with a greater number of rabbits kept as house-rabbits, we should be considering the effect that our lifestyle has on the health of our rabbits. This may include exposing our rabbits to smoking, vaping or general toxins found around the home. We already know that our pets can be subjected to the effects of passive smoking but in the future we may develop our understanding further to discover how these risk factors can affect the health of our rabbits.

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# CAMPAIGN UPDATE

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

## Animal Encounters, Petting Farms

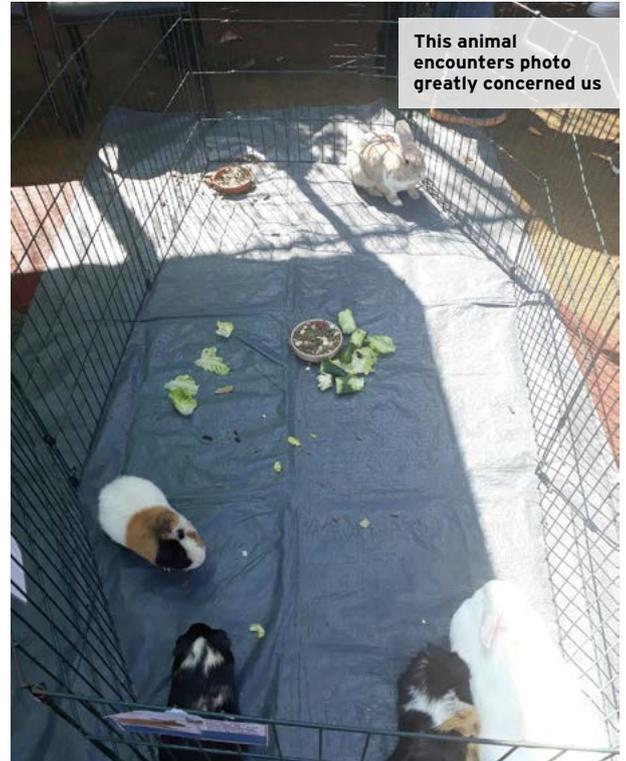
Back in August we were sent this photo and asked for advice. Where do we start pointing out the problems with this set up? And why do these organisers not know better than this?

If you go to any attractions or animal encounters please don't turn a blind eye if you see something you are not happy about. Remember that rabbits kept on display for the general public should be setting good examples of welfare standards, housing and diet. Anyone using animals on display should be licenced by the relevant Local Authority. The licence means they are subject to animal welfare standards. Be polite, but speak up if you see something that needs to be improved, please don't passively accept low welfare standards. Standards do need to be raised, and owners need to be educated, but breeding baby rabbits and allowing them to be inappropriately handled is not the way to do it. Setting good examples of companionship, housing, and diet are the way to do it. So please be rabbit ambassadors.

If you see something that concerns you:

- Bring it to the attention of the staff at the time
- When you get home, follow it up in writing with them, and include the Local Authority that issue their licence, and if you have taken any photos include them
- Sometimes they reply quicker via Facebook or Twitter so that is worth bearing in mind.

Some Local Authorities won't follow up on complaints of poor welfare and will refer you to the RSPCA to make a complaint with them.



This animal encounters photo greatly concerned us

If you need help, then contact us and our Welfare Officer can assist with the referral on your behalf. In order for us to assist we will need details of the time and place, and photos if you have them.

## Rabbit play date cancelled

We were alerted to a 'rabbit play date' that was to take place in a feed store, encouraging rabbit owners to take their rabbits along to play in grass pens. Obviously we were concerned about this, not only for the risk of RVHD2, and other diseases, but also because it would be stressful and potentially harmful to the rabbits involved. Thanks to everyone who contacted the feed merchant and shared their concerns, as the event was cancelled, and they plan to do something more welfare orientated in the near future.

## Pet CV builder

We know it can be hard to find pet-friendly rental accommodation.

We hear frequently of people having to give up their much loved pets when moving into rented property. This is very distressing for owners and can also place huge burdens on animal rescues who very often have to try and accommodate pets when owners are faced with landlord ultimatums, time constraints for rehoming of their pets or the real possibility of having to give up their rental home.

The good news is things are gradually improving and one of the big reasons for this is the introduction of Pet CV's.

A Pet CV can be a great help in providing Landlords with added

information and the reassurance they need that you and your rabbits will make great tenants.

The RWAf has put together a brief thoughts list of areas for you to consider, together with an online Pet CV Builder which can either be completed online, or exported to PDF, or a download version which can be printed and completed manually.

If you rent and need help with finding somewhere that will accept your rabbits please check out our website: <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/home-sweet-home-renting-with-your-rabbit/>

Our huge thanks to our lovely volunteer Elaine Line for putting this together for us.

# Ranitidine recall

We are aware of the recall of Ranitidine. RWAf Veterinary Adviser, Richard Saunders had this to say:

"At this point it's difficult to see exactly how long and how completely the Ranitidine recall will go on for and consist of. We obviously hope that stocks will continue to be available for our patients in both the short and long term, as it is a very useful therapeutic agent. We would suggest maintaining sensible stocks, without panic buying and stockpiling, and we will continue to monitor the situation".

# First Gold Rabbit Friendly Vet in Wales

Congratulations to Tariq at Valley Vets for being the first Gold Rabbit Friendly vet in Wales (see Round Up for more information). We now have over 160 vet practices listed on our website, and 14 of them are Gold.



We have 14 practices now listed as Gold standard

A general note - It is worth you checking if the veterinary practice that you use does their own out of hours or not. Generally speaking if it is a veterinary hospital the animals will stay there over night and will be monitored. However, some practices send their patients to another veterinary practice or 'out of hours' provider and so the practice that you usually use might not have your rabbit overnight. This means they will be monitored, but it also means they will have had a journey to the out of hours practice, so make sure you know what your veterinary practice does.

# RWAf Representatives

We were recently contacted by a supporter who was concerned about the welfare of a rabbit she had obtained from a breeder. Whilst we are in the process of giving advice she mentioned that she had a phone call from an RWAf representative and that we had visited the premises and everything was okay.

We wouldn't make a phone call like this, so if you are told this please don't take it at face value. Unless you receive an e-mail from one of our @rabbitwelfare.co.uk addresses please assume that it is not from RWAf. We are still in the process of investigating this breeder and Mark, our Welfare Officer will update us next time.

# Other projects

We are working on several other projects behind the scenes that we can't wait to share with you, and hope that we can very soon. Watch this space for more information...

## RESEARCH SHOWS RABBITS SUFFER ILL HEALTH AND LONELINESS



**WITH her neck twisted to one side and head at a painful angle, Megan the rabbit looked like she'd suffered a horrifying attack — or even had a stroke.**

But the awkward posture was actually caused by her floppy ears.

It is a new case of a condition that has been linked to the UK's most popular domestic rabbit breed.

However, vets are now warning that many of our furry friends may be experiencing painful conditions — or even suffering from loneliness.

It is thought that "trauma-stress" is leading rabbits to learn to posture their poor backs when they hunch, huddling a similar trend in dogs and cats.

Celebrity pet bunny owners include actor and model Geth...

Delwngre and Kylie Jenner. Other stars, including Brita Chu and Kytira, owner of Kytira, have been "stung" of celebrities building their bunnies — hailing the animals as "perfect".

Curly ear rabbits, CUEs, even has its own Instagram account.

Megan's owners, comedian Megan and her partner, said they have made a full recovery.

The 16 owned by eight-year-old Fadia from Frodoham, Chesham, has that same look, she said. "The vet said it was an ear infection, she'd sprained a leg and she did say that it's not uncommon and she may never recover her posture."

**'Sad that top ears impacted well-being'**

"It affects her balance so you have to be very careful when picking her up otherwise she starts spasming because she feels discomfort."

"We really panicked when we first saw her in this state" — which kept us awake at night — which accounts for more than half of rabbits that rabbits — she says of the words, which were warning they are more susceptible to a loss of medical progress because of their floppy ears.

A recent study by the Royal Veterinary College, published in the journal 'Vet Record', showed how rare but more likely to suffer excessive ear wax, ear pain and dental problems due to the shape of their head.

They are also at an increased risk of injury and even prone to obesity if the shape of their ears restricts their movement, according to the report.

Miss Jo Stubbers-Cox and Miss Lucy Stubbers-Cox and their problems listed in tragedy. That took it, from Tinsley, Somerset, a director at the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund, received the adorable bunny on Christmas Eve 2018.

She said, "Curtis and Cuddly weren't even a year old. A combination of their breed and a poor diet meant that, they both had

The Sun's feature

# Media

We had a busy month in September!

The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) study in to morbidity of rabbits generated a lot of media interest, and we were interviewed for The Sun and The Guardian, appearing in print and via their on line versions. It is always brilliant when the main stream press pick up on rabbit news items because they have such a huge reach. Thankfully, in both cases some really good messages were communicated. We hope to have further information from the study in the next issue of Rabbiting On.

# SOCIAL MEDIA

We are using a PR company to post regular care and welfare advice and to grow our social media audiences so that we can get the messages out to as many people as possible. Please help us by sharing our messages if you can. This is a big investment for us, but we are really pleased with the results and the interactions so far, of course the cute bunny pictures are popular but so are the more hard hitting graphics that they have produced for us.



Our new Bunny Buyers Beware graphic

# 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, choose 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

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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	How to train your dragon!
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	Bonding theory i.e. Why important, stress bonding
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)

# THE RWA SANCTUARY RABBITS

By The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund

**T**he RWA and RWF are not a rescue. We are a campaigning and educational organisation. There are lots of excellent rescues out there and back in 2000 when we formed the RWF we deliberately stayed away from becoming a rescue because we wanted to be 100% focussed on improving the welfare and status of pet rabbits in the UK. Obviously we do support rescue, and we are against the casual breeding of rabbits whilst there are so many in rescue that need good homes. As part of our Sponsor a Rescue Scheme we have raised over £33,000 for rescue centres over the last 10 years.

However, all that being said, there are times when there are situations that we can not ignore and we have stepped in and taken in rabbits, or we have needed a rabbit to pair up with a bereaved rabbit. In a lot of cases where we have acted as a rescue we have been able to rehome them ourselves, but there are many who have stayed and become part of the RWA 'Sanctuary'.

## Current residents

At present we have 19 sanctuary bunnies. They are very helpful and they do earn their keep! They not only appear frequently in Rabbiting On, the website and social media, but they also take part in carefully selected studies, for example, they were the bunnies used in the Pet Remedy study and the handling study, both of which were undertaken by student veterinary nurses at Bristol University. Obviously they are not harmed in anyway and the studies usually involve watching how they respond to certain stimuli, i.e. the presence of Pet Remedy.

## Daily care

It means we are hands on, we are vaccinating and health checking ourselves, we are bonding, dealing with illnesses, doing vet trips and cleaning out in all weathers. We are observing different behaviours and likes and dislikes, and dealing with behavioural problems when they first arrive.

The bunnies are all now homed in the nirvana that is 'Shirley's' where they have lovely converted sheds with Runaround pipes and access to large, safe grazing areas where they have 24/7 access to grass. Rae Todd looks after all of the bunnies' day in, day out.

We've been pretty hopeless at being vocal about this side of our work, so we thought that we should dedicate some of Rabbiting On to introduce you to our rabbits and their backgrounds.

## Alice, Odin and Imani

Starting off, in no particular order, with Alice, Odin and Imani.

Alice joined us with a giant male rabbit, Big Bob, and had both been used for breeding. The breeder didn't want them any longer as they were not a good breeding pair and we were lucky enough to be able to get them. This involved one volunteer going to acquire them, transporting them to a foster mum, who did a brilliant job and got them neutered, and then Rae driving the length of the country to collect them from their lovely foster home to bring them to Shirley's. Sadly, we lost Big Bob only a few days later, we suspect to RVHD2 as it was before his vaccination had time to take effect. Alice was a lovely gentle rabbit and she



was very easily bonded with Imani, who had just recently been bereaved, despite them both being (spayed) females.

Imani had joined us with Hope, about 5 years earlier when we were asked by a vet to take them in. Despite their huge size they were being kept in an indoor rabbit cage 24/7.

The two girls lived very happily together for about 6 months until Rae took a call on the helpline from a local man, who wanted to rehome his 'support rabbit'. This was Odin. He was about a year old when he arrived and it was very clear that being a support rabbit was not something he was enjoying at all. As a result he was increasingly difficult to handle and fortunately for him Rae knew that she had a good chance of bonding him to Alice and Imani as they were both so laid back, so she agreed to take him. Odin was a very unhappy rabbit when he arrived. He had, at one point, lived with his brother (both entire) and so his experience of other rabbits had not been good as they had fought often. He had not enjoyed the handling involved in his job as a support rabbit, so he was very nervous as a result of all of his experiences.

He needed to be both neutered and vaccinated so he spent his time, whilst he was waiting to be bonded, in a run next to the two girls. By the time it came to bonding it was pretty easy as they had spent so much time next to each other. He is much more confident now and will happily take treats by hand.

**Next issue we introduce Ayra, Lagartha and Ragnor...**

At Beloved Rabbits one of our most common rescue situations are unplanned litters

All photos: D Bell

# RESCUE POINT OF VIEW

## When they really do breed like rabbits!

By David Bell, Director of Beloved Rabbit Care

**E**verybody loves to see a baby rabbit – those cute little faces are just irresistible aren't they?

But when faced with dozens of young, vulnerable babies alongside potentially pregnant does in an already stretched rescue environment, the reality of unplanned litters turns from cute to big problem really quickly.

### Assumptions

When people think about rabbit rescue, they naturally assume the rabbits are all older, with health and behavioural issues, all with a troubled past and complicated rescue story. But for Beloved Rabbits, one of our most common rescue situations is the unplanned litter, and more often than not each case involves multiple litters!

It is this multiple-litter situation that creates the real problem for a rescue to manage. It's a juggling act to manage this when you have one case to deal with, but earlier this year we experienced multiple cases where mum and a very young litter were surrendered into the rescue with a very high likelihood that mum was pregnant again.

### Fruits litter

First we meet Passionfruit, who entered the rescue at 3 years old having had a series of planned and unplanned litters with her previous owner. The owner described of upsetting situations of numerous losses from previous litters, and as it was getting increasingly harder to re-home the babies they had decided it was best to surrender her. She arrived with two eight-week old babies, Lime and Lemon, and three younger babies around 3 weeks old, Orange, Grapefruit and Pineapple. Dad, Jalepeno, also entered the rescue the same day and was immediately placed separately in another foster home.

Less than three days after arriving, we got word from Passionfruit's foster carer that she had indeed delivered another litter during the night. Now with three litter's in her care, all under 9 weeks old, we had the difficult situation of trying to decide if it was best to try to keep them all together as a family, knowing that babies need mum until at least 8 to 10 weeks of age, or considering splitting the group to reduce the pressure on mum and encourage better health for her and the youngest litter.

Having now faced this situation numerous times within the rescue, we know there is no right answer to this quandary. There is no perfect solution, and there is no way to get it right. Weighing up all the options on this occasion,

we decided to increase support for Passionfruit, but to try for as long as possible to keep all babies with mum. The older litter were close to being fully self-sufficient, but still showing signs of being close to mum. The middle litter had started eating hay, grass and nuggets and would shortly naturally start weaning themselves from mum, and Passionfruit appeared happy, content and very interested in all of her offspring.

There was also the small but not insignificant factor that, as most rescues will be, we were at capacity and approaching the summer holiday period when space was at a premium!



Baby rabbits are one of the biggest drains on the rescue's finances, space, time and emotions

For the next few days everything seemed to be doing well. The nest was busy, mum was active, spending time with all her babies.

## When things don't go to plan

When it comes to caring for such young rabbits things can take a turn without warning. Litter survival rates in general are very poor, but the circumstances of unplanned litters and rescue conditions often mean there is a higher fatality rate than people are aware of.

Just a few days after Passionfruit's third litter arrived, Orange's health deteriorated. He became quieter and wasn't gaining weight as well as his siblings were. Their foster carer, Lorna, was quick to take action and stepped in with additional care, monitoring and supported feeding. Unfortunately after almost 3 days of intense support Lorna found he had passed away despite all her efforts.

"I have been fostering now for 4 years, and have been really privileged to have fostered over 80 rabbits for the organisation," Lorna describes. "This was the first time I have had to deal with a fatality in my care, and it is even more upsetting when it is such a young rabbit, who otherwise should have had a long happy future ahead of them."

The following week, Grapefruit also began to deteriorate, and once again despite all of Lorna's best efforts we were unsuccessful in saving them.

These unexpected and sudden losses can be a result of a range of factors including genetic inbreeding, stress as a result of environment or diet change entering a rescue, or simply the "natural life" factor of rabbit vulnerabilities. Knowing it's common though doesn't make it any easier. Any loss is devastating to the team.

## In the meantime

In another foster home, on the opposite side of the country, Louise had recently taken on a new placement. Miley Hay Cyrus, a 6 month old rabbit who herself was the result of an unplanned litter, has been surrendered with her three 10-day old babies. Dad, Leonardo Di Rabbitto, who is also Miley's brother had also been surrendered into the rescue and placed with another foster home. Miley and her babies Bunald Weasley, Harry Pawter and Haymione have all settled in well. Louise though is advised by the Beloved Rabbits team to be on close watch for any abnormalities or health concerns with the babies, given the shared genetics of mum and dad. And we are all very aware that there is a real chance of a second litter.

Just over a week later Louise reports of definite 'movement' from inside Miley's tummy, and the team begin planning for another litter arrival.



Unplanned litters can pose big problems for rescues

Our next surrenders are Marilyn Bunro and her sister Scarlet O'Hare-a. Their owners describe how they had been masters of escape and could no longer be contained. They describe having found a litter that morning in their hutch which had been aborted. On close examination Marilyn has clearly recently given birth, and among other indicators is suffering from a great deal of hair loss, malnourishment and weight loss.

Marilyn is a perfect example that you don't even need to own a male rabbit to be at risk of the unplanned litter!

## Wider impact

We insist on vaccinating and neutering every rabbit within our care. Whilst litters only take up one space in the rescue, they result in an unexpected increase in the number of rabbits we need to fund for these standard treatments, and often even more is required to deal with other non-routine situations within such large groups.

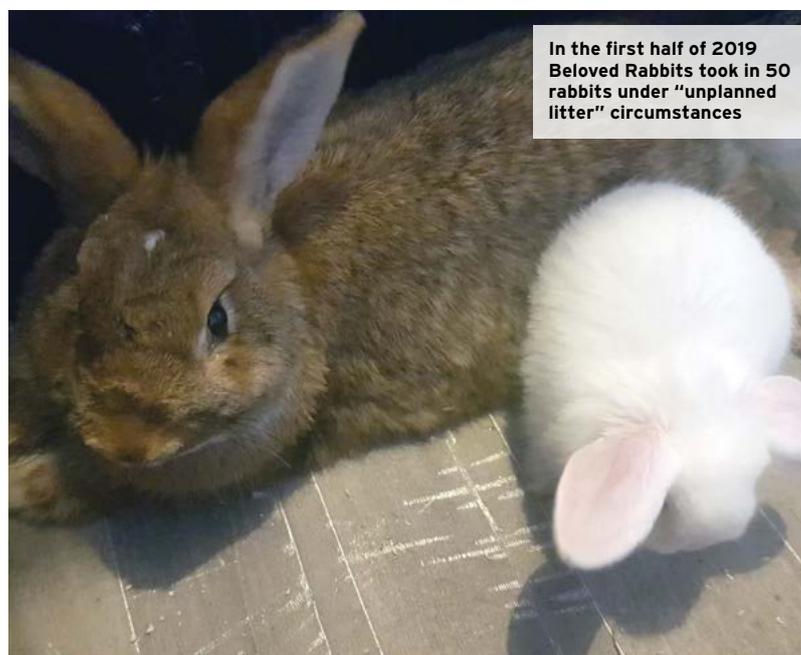
Whilst some babies may hop off to new homes with a neutering voucher, many wait in our care until they are old enough for neuter because they have been reserved by adopters looking to bond them with existing rabbits in the home. This means the rabbits are holding up rescue space for longer than our older bunnies would, and our waiting list for rescue and rehoming space continues to grow.

Mums need time after nursing litters to relax and let their bodies settle before we can comfortably progress neutering routines for them, and so they end up also being 'stuck' in the rescue for longer than average as we work hard to improve their physical and mental wellbeing prior to adoption.

Our foster carers find that caring for litters can also be incredibly emotionally draining - they are hard work, needing constant care and the threat of sudden loss is always a concern for our dedicated team.

In the first half of 2019 alone, Beloved Rabbits accepted around 50 rabbits in total under "unplanned litter" circumstances. It is one of the biggest drains on the rescue's resources in terms of finances, space, time and emotions.

We long for a day when neutering rabbits at a young age is the norm, and the general public become more aware of the importance of this as part of their care for their pets.



In the first half of 2019 Beloved Rabbits took in 50 rabbits under "unplanned litter" circumstances

# WHY RABBITS HOP

By Rachel Sibbald, Registered Veterinary Nurse

Healthy, happy rabbits are usually active and enjoy running

Photo: K Couzens



**A**part from being characteristically unique, there is evolutionary advantages to rabbits being able to hop. The skeletal system of rabbits is very light and only makes up 7-8% of total body weight. Couple this with their huge relative muscle mass (50% of body weight) and you have an animal capable of short but very fast and powerful bursts of energy. The heavily muscled hind limbs and spine allow for a powerful take off. During forward movement the forelimbs have an alternate rhythmical flexion and extension of the muscles whereas the hindlimbs have a synchronous movement where extension is more pronounced than flexion, so the body is pushed forward at each hop. The anatomical stance of a rabbit is usually a crouched position with the tarsus (hock) being in contact with the ground at rest, this allows the rabbit to remain low to the ground for grazing and hiding. Whilst a rabbit is moving the tarsus lifts off the ground and the rabbit bears weight on the toes. Examination of a rabbit's movement is an important part of a clinical examination of a rabbit and why your rabbit-savvy vet or nurse may allow your rabbit to move freely around the consultation room when at the vets.

## Signs of a problem

Unfortunately, there may be times where your rabbit's mobility is affected by illness or disease. Classic symptoms of mobility issues in rabbits include:

**Uneaten caecotrophs:** This can be caused by other issues such as diet and dental disease but in regard to mobility this is usually due to the rabbit being physically unable or too painful to reach round to their bottom.

**Urine scald:** There can be numerous other causes to this condition but rabbits with mobility issues often cannot adopt the correct stance whilst urinating therefore urine runs down the hind limbs causing scalding.

**Shuffling rather than hopping:** These rabbits tend to remain relatively low to the ground whilst moving and hops are small with a shuffling movement - this is usually due to pain.

**Walking rather than hopping:** This can often be due to reduced muscle



Xray of osteoarthritis in the carpus

Photo: R Sibbald

mass over the hindlimbs or pain - a healthy rabbit will sometimes walk when investigating a new environment, but this is not common.

As well as the above, any of these signs warrants a trip to the vet; limping, reluctance or inability to stand on hind legs, pivoting on the spot rather than hopping to turn around, lethargy, pododermatitis (sore hocks),



An abnormal sitting position with weight on the rear may indicate a problem

weakness or wobbling of the hind legs, falling over whilst performing co-ordinated movements such as binkies and at rest the hind legs tucked underneath so weight is placed on rear.

## Causes of mobility issues in rabbits

**Pododermatitis (sore hocks):** This can cause mobility issues or be caused by mobility issues. This is a very common condition often seen in older, inactive, overweight rabbits. As mentioned, the rabbit bears weight on the tarsus at rest however weight is transferred to the toes as the rabbit hops. If the rabbit spends long periods of time at rest, pressure sores can appear on the point of the hock. Hair coverage (especially in Rex breeds) can be poor in this area and can exacerbate the condition further. Pododermatitis can become a serious condition leading to infection in the bones of the foot causing life threatening sepsis and severe pain, therefore any sores or bald areas on the bottom of your rabbit's feet must be investigated. This can also affect the forelimbs however this is less common. Providing deep bedding and plenty of exercise should help minimise the risks of developing this condition.

**Osteoarthritis:** Arthritis is a common condition seen in many aging mammals. Rabbits are particularly prone to arthritis of the stifles (knees), spine and hips. Unfortunately, arthritis cannot be cured but thanks to advancement in veterinary medicine, pain can be managed far more effectively and allow older rabbits a far better quality of life.

**Spondylosis:** This is a type of spinal arthritis. Vertebrae in the spine can develop small bony spurs that can eventually bridge to the adjacent vertebrae. The fusing of the vertebrae decreases the spines flexibility. The process before the spurs have fused can be very painful and these rabbits may "shuffle" rather than hop. They may also have difficulty getting in and out of litter trays etc. Spondylosis is usually diagnosed by your vet using radiography or computed tomography (CT) images.



Pododermatitis can cause mobility issues and require surgery

As with arthritis the condition cannot be reversed but pain can be managed.

**Intervertebral disc disease:** Discs are the padding between each of the vertebrae of the spine. This normally acts like a shock absorber, however for a number of reasons this padding can bulge from between the disc spaces and put pressure on the spinal cord. Depending on the severity of the pressure and location within the spine this may cause complete paralysis to mild hind limb weakness. Unfortunately, this type of disc disease cannot usually be diagnosed using traditional radiography and a CT or MRI is required. Treatment may involve strict rest and painkillers or in severe cases surgery may be required.

***E. cuniculi:*** This protozoal parasite can cause a number of different issues for rabbits. With regards to neurological function *E. cuniculi* may cause hind limb weakness, head tilt, reflex deficits or seizures. Clinical signs may be similar to other conditions, so a diagnosis usually involves running blood tests to confirm the parasites presence in the bloodstream. It can be treated with medication but usually damage that has already occurred will not be reversed.

**Neoplasia (cancer):** Unfortunately tumours of the bones have been documented in rabbits. These may be primary or secondary to another cancer such as uterine adenocarcinoma in female rabbits. Tumours within the bones or spine of rabbits carry a poor prognosis.

**Trauma:** One of the most common causes of spinal/limb trauma in pet rabbits is from incorrect handling. If the rabbit gets a fright or starts to struggle and is incorrectly restrained the sudden twisting or kicking can fracture the rabbit's spine. Rabbits can also sustain this kind of trauma (although rarely) when running or playing. Rabbits that are confined to cages, who don't have access to direct sunlight, and who are not allowed daily periods of exercise are at an increased risk for trauma due to decreased bone density.

## Age is not a disease

Healthy, happy rabbits are usually active and enjoy running, hopping, jumping and doing binkies. Many are capable of this even in their twilight years. If your rabbit appears to be slowing down please remember age is not a disease and your rabbit may be suffering from a painful condition. Swift treatment and diagnosis at a veterinary clinic can help manage pain more effectively and potentially slow down the disease process. A healthy rabbit should always hop!

# A - Z OF HERBS

By Belinda Francis of Galen's Gardens

Goat's Rue can grow to 40cm tall

All photos: P. Taplin

## Our popular Back to Nature series continues and we look at the 'G and H' of common herbs

### Goat's Rue - *Galega officinalis*

**Common Names:** Goat's Rue, French Lilac and Italian Fitch.

**Constituents:** Alkaloids, bitters, flavonoids, saponins and tannins. Notably galagine which is a precursor of metformin used in the treatment of diabetes.

**Cultivation:** Plant seeds in the autumn and scarify before planting by rubbing between sheets of sandpaper. Goat's Rue is a legume and likes deep soil with adequate moisture. It can grow to around 40cm tall.

**Feed:** Although small amounts are safe as part of a mixed forage 'salad', Goat's Rue may be particularly useful for rabbit rescues which take in pregnant rabbits as it helps increase lactation.

**Traditional uses in humans:** Goat's Rue tea is used by herbalists for humans in the early stages of late-onset diabetes. It is also used for chronic constipation.

**Drying:** Harvest in mid to late summer when in flower and with good leaf cover. Goat's Rue is a long, straggly herb which dries well in loose bunches when hung in a warm, dry place. Re-tie the bunch of herbs higher up or lower down to allow that part of the stalk to dry.

**Caution:** Feed only in moderation and specifically for its traditional benefits. Legume forages are high in calcium with a high Ca:P ratio.

### Goosefoot - *Chenopodium album*

**Common Names:** Lambs Quarters, Fat Hen, Pigweed and Wild Spinach.

**Constituents:** A good source of vitamins and minerals. In common with many other plants in the Amaranthacea family (beet greens, spinach chard, amaranth and sorrel), Goosefoot contains oxalic acid.

**Cultivation:** Grows like a weed in sunny areas. Sown in the spring, it germinates quickly and once established will self-seed if allowed to.

**Feed:** Feed young leaves in moderation only due to the oxalic content.

**Traditional uses in humans:** The seeds were a source of food for ancient man. They can be ground into flour, similar to buckwheat. Leaves and stems are eaten like spinach.

**Drying:** Separate leaves from stalks and crush stalks before drying.

**Caution:** The oxalic acid in Goosefoot makes it unsuitable for rabbits with urinary stones or gravel. Treat as you would spinach in terms of use in the rabbit's diet.

### Grape Vine and Leaves - *Vitis vinifera*

**Common Names:** Grape Vine.

**Constituents:** Contains tannins, a natural source of antioxidants. Calcium level is around a third of that in alfalfa but the Ca:P is just over 4:1.

**Cultivation:** Grape vines should be planted in free-draining soil against a south or southwest facing wall or fence in full sun. The soil pH should be in the range of 6.5 - 6.8. New plants can be grown from cuttings once the vine is established.

**Feed:** The nutritional value depends on how green they are when fed. Leaves have more protein and less fibre than the shoots. High in fibre, including high levels of lignified fibre, vine leaves and shoots are useful for rabbits on a low protein and high fibre diet.

Vine shoot 'hay' is similar to straw with a crude fibre level of around 40% including over 10% lignin.

Grapevines are normally pruned after the fruit has been harvested which means the pruning's will be low in nutritional value.

**Traditional uses in humans:** Leaves are used in cooking.

**Caution:** Only feed leaves and shoots from plants which have not been sprayed with fungicide or pesticide.

### Groundsel - *Senecio vulgaris*

**Common Names:** Old Man of the Spring.

**Constituents:** Alkaloids, including senecionine.

**Cultivation:** Grows like a weed. Groundsel is an important food for the caterpillars of the Cinnabar moth.

**Feed:** It seems to be very palatable to rabbits, but only small amounts should be fed as part of a mix of forages.

**Traditional uses in humans:** Juice is used for relief from insect bites and as a styptic for minor wounds.

**Caution:** Rabbits can safely eat Groundsel but it is toxic to humans and other mammals if ingested. It is important that you can distinguish Groundsel from its toxic cousin Ragwort.



## Hawthorn - *Crataegus monogyna*

**Common Names:** May Tree and Haw.

**Constituents:** Flavanoids, polyphenols, coumarins, tannins and saponins.

**Cultivation:** Not easy to cultivate. Probably best to buy Hawthorn plants from a garden centre or nursery.

**Feed:** Hawthorn wood is a safe wood for rabbits. The highest concentration of the medicinal compounds is in the flowers and the leaves when the Hawthorn is in flower.

**Traditional uses in humans:** Berries (haws), leaves and flowers are used for heart related conditions such as angina and high blood pressure.

**Caution:** Due to their medicinal properties, the leaves and flowers should only be fed on the advice of a veterinary surgeon.

## Hawkweed - *Hieracium pilosella*

**Common Names:** Mouse ear.

**Constituents:** Coumarin, flavones, flavanoids, caffeic acid and cholerogetic acid.

**Cultivation:** Grown from seed in the spring. Large clumps can be spilt and replanted. Does not like damp soil. Thrives on neglected ground including lawns and has the ability to crowd out other plants. It does not thrive on fertile soil and rich pasture.

**Feed:** Rabbits like the stalks and flowers but normally only eat the leaves in drought conditions.

**Traditional uses in humans and other animals:** An extract of Hawkweed with antibacterial properties has been used as an antibiotic against brucellosis. Tea is permitted by the European Medicines Agency for use in humans for minor urinary tract problems and as a diuretic.

## 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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# 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.



**Inky and Rolo**  
AMELIA MAYES



**Bertie and Shushu**  
DAPHNE REYNOLDS



**Keo and Nissi**  
LEE DAMANY



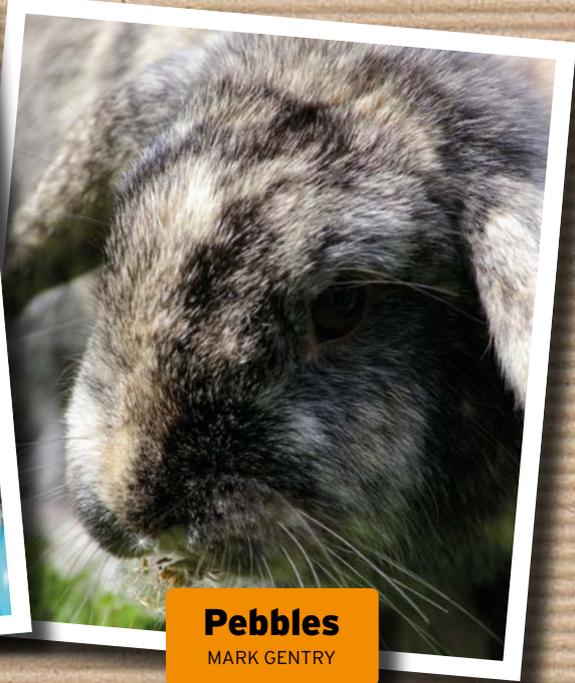
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MAGDALENA STRUMINSKI



**Hannah**  
ANETA WHITELAW



**Jose**  
CLAIR AND KEVIN STURT



**Pebbles**  
MARK GENTRY



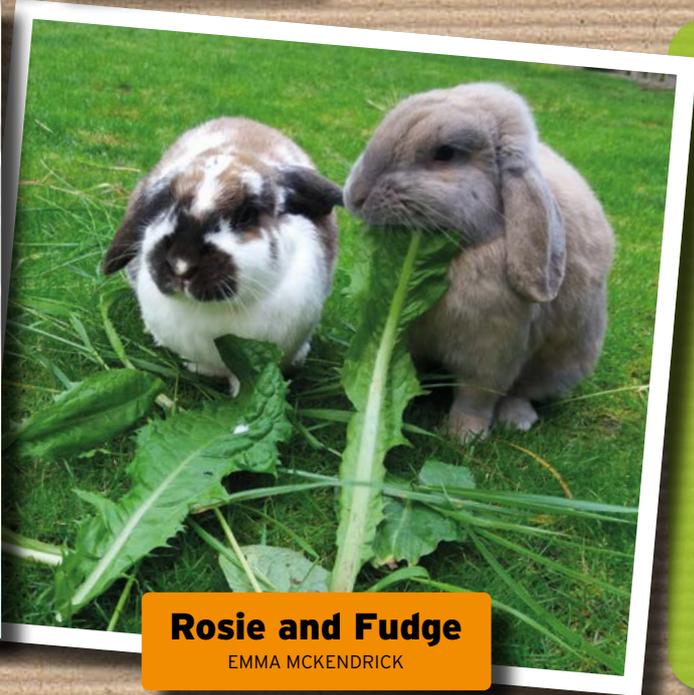
**Clementine**  
JOANNE CULLEN



**Herbie and Georgie**  
CHRIS EARY



**ki**  
YJ



**Rosie and Fudge**  
EMMA MCKENDRICK

## 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:  
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## 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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**Christine**  
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Email: [chrishartley@ntlworld.com](mailto:chrishartley@ntlworld.com)  
[www.callll.org](http://www.callll.org)

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For all your rabbit needs



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**Bristol Rabbit  
Rescue and  
Friends**



"Little Lives Matter"  
We are a small  
animal rescue centre  
based in Bristol.

Our main aims are educating the public  
and promoting rabbit welfare, as well  
as rescuing and rehoming small furrries.

Email: [bristolrabbitrescue@outlook.com](mailto:bristolrabbitrescue@outlook.com)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bristolrabbitrescue/>  
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/bristolrabbitrescue?lang=en>

**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.



**NEW**

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



**Silver Origins  
Twilight Hare Pendant**  
**£21.60**  
Inc VAT  
Plus £6.00 P&P

**Silver Origins  
Twilight Hare Earrings**  
**£25.20**  
Inc VAT  
Plus £6.00 P&P

**The RWF guide to Pairing Up Rabbits**

At last it's back, refurbished and updated, the best advice available on pairing up rabbits.

This book gives super advice on getting through that often tricky and stressful process of pairing up rabbits.

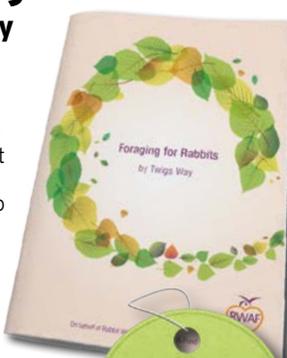
Super book, anybody faced with pairing up should have a copy.



**Pairing Up Rabbits**  
**£5.00**  
Plus £1.50 P&P

**Foraging for Rabbits**  
**Dr Twigs Way**

We all know how important it is for rabbits to have a good diet, as close as possible to what they'd eat in the wild. Many of us go out foraging, but what should you gather for them? What should you not? How do you stand regarding the law? Where is it best to get foraged plants from? How can you have a year-round supply of wild forage?



**Foraging for Rabbits**  
**£5.00**  
Plus £1.50 P&P

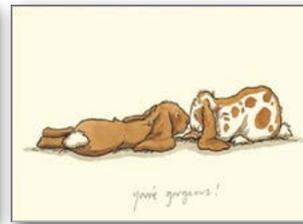
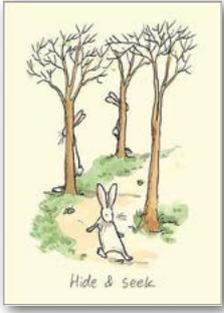
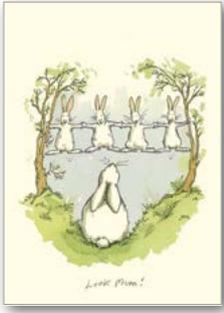
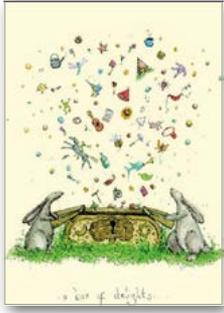
**Gardening for Rabbits**  
**Dr Twigs Way**

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.



**Gardening for Rabbits**  
**£5.00**  
Plus £1.50 P&P

## 2 BAD MICE CARDS



These beautiful cards are part of their extensive range of cards and gifts.

The design on this card is created by the artist Anita Jeram.

Each card is approximately 6" x 4" in size, and is blank inside for your own message. Cards are individually wrapped, and printed on high quality cream card with a high quality dark green envelope. Every card includes a free address label in a matching cream colour.

They're so captivating, they can be framed and used as artworks. Who wouldn't want to receive something so lovely?

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**2 Bad Mice**  
**£2.00**  
each  
Plus £1.50 P&P

# Burgess<sup>TM</sup> Excel<sup>TM</sup>

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## Treat your bunnies this Christmas



£1 off **Excel**<sup>TM</sup>  
Rabbit Nuggets

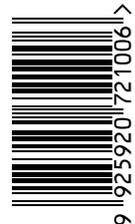
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Long Stem Hay

50<sup>p</sup> off **Excel**<sup>TM</sup>  
Nature Snacks



**To the customer:** This coupon entitles you to £1 off Burgess Excel Nuggets 1.5kg/2kg. Please do not attempt to use this coupon against the purchase of any other product, as refusal to accept may cause embarrassment. Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer or promotion.

**To the retailer:** Burgess Pet Care will redeem this coupon at its face value provided it has been accepted in part payment for a Burgess Excel product. Please submit coupons by 30.04.2020 to Valassis Ltd, PO Box 6199, Nuneaton CV11 9HQ. Burgess reserve the right to refuse payment against coupons thought to be misredeemed or that are submitted after 30.04.2020.

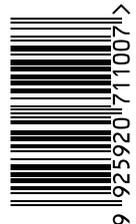


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