

RabbitingOn

The Magazine for Rabbit lovers

Spring 21 Price £6.00

25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

HEALTH ADVANCES

Rabbit health over the last 25 years

DANGEROUS DRUGS

Medications that shouldn't be used

SPRING GRASS

How and when to feed

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WELCOME TO THE SPRING ISSUE OF RABBITING ON



2021 is here and we were all hoping for a change from 2020. For now, we all need to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives, and hope that soon we can all start to resume some normality.

This issue celebrates 25 years since the British Houserabbit Association (now the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund) was formed - and what an amazing quarter of a century it has been, campaigning for a better life and understanding for pet rabbits. Without the existence of the BHRA/RWAF, rabbits everywhere would be worse off. It will never be possible to mention all that has been achieved in those years, or all the individuals that contributed to make it happen, but we hope the snap-shot in this issue will give you some idea of the blood, sweat and tears that has been put in by so many. Read the feature on page 2 to find out how the BHRA started out.

The feeding of spring grass can be a contentious issue with lots of conflicting advice flying around. Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser, Guen Bradbury, explains all in her feature on page 6.

Healthcare for rabbits has advanced dramatically in the last 25 years. Thankfully now we have an all-in-one licensed vaccination for myxomatosis, RVHD1 and RVHD2, treatments for many diseases and vets who have further qualifications and an interest in treating rabbits. RWAF Veterinary Adviser, Richard Saunders looks back on how far we have come in his feature on page 10.

Whilst so many advances have been made, along the way we have also discovered that some medications cannot be used in rabbits. Veterinary Surgeon, Molly Varga Smith looks at what drugs are dangerous to use on page 22.

Rescue centres offer a variety of services, one being bonding of their rabbits to a potential companion rabbit. This all comes at a cost of time and money to the rescue. Lea Facey from the Rabbit Residence Rescue explains more on page 30.

Rabbit hutches used to be marketed as suitable housing for rabbits - nowadays, with the help of the RWAF campaigning for a better life and specifically with their 'Hutch Is Not Enough' campaign, rabbit housing has developed, for the better, in many ways. The feature on page 34 demonstrates what can be achieved.

Many congratulations to Robin Wells with Binky and Flame who have been awarded the prestigious title of our 2020 Cover Stars competition winners. Their photo proudly adorns the cover of this collectors' issue. Congratulations to the all the winners, and thank you to those who entered to help raise funds for the RWF. The winners can be found on page 43.

Although this issue is focused on 25 years of the BHRA/RWAF and how things have changed for rabbits in this time, this issue also has a selection of other fantastic topics including: how to nurse rabbits with flystrike; feeding baby rabbits correctly; breed conformation; houseplants when you have houserabbits; plus lots more!

We love receiving your letters, photos or ideas for features for future issues.

Until next issue, take care.

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:

<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk>

To join the RWAF please go to the website or telephone the Helpline: 0191 933 9000



Cover picture: R Wells

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Coco and Dixie were Lizzie's inspiration for helping create the BHRA

THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH HOUSERABBIT ASSOCIATION/ RABBIT WELFARE ASSOCIATION & FUND - 25 years of helping rabbits

By Lizzie Smith, Founder Member, BHRA/RWAF

Back in 1995 I was working at Newcastle University Medical School and had three houserabbits; Miffy, Dixie and Coco whom I adored. I'd discovered an online forum for rabbit lovers and it soon became apparent from discussions on the forum that a then Newcastle Medical Student, Linda Dykes, also owned a houserabbit called Jaffa. We quickly met up and discussed the joys of having these remarkable animals as pets and agreed that so much more needed to be done as many of them ended up as neglected rabbits stuck in a tiny hutch on their own at the bottom of a garden. Linda had already been in touch with Helen Flack and Anne Mitchell, two people whom she'd met, who also shared a passion for rabbits; the idea of starting up a UK organisation for rabbit lovers was born.

Early days

The British Houserabbit Association (BHRA) was inaugurated by Linda, Helen, Anne and I in 1996 with the constitutional aims to:

- Encourage the keeping of pet rabbits as house pets
- Educate the general public, pet-trade and rabbit fancy as to the potential of the rabbit as an indoor pet equal in status to the dog or cat; and to raise the quality of life of all rabbits
- Increase interest and knowledge of rabbit medicine in the UK veterinary profession
- Promote contact and mutual support between houserabbit owners.

We set up a helpline; published a website; wrote tens of articles pertaining to keeping houserabbits; and printed a leaflet outlining our aims and encouraging rabbit lovers to join our organisation. We attracted a huge raft of publicity including the Times Weekender, Daily Telegraph and Woman & Home. Linda and I also appeared separately with our rabbits on television. By September that year, we had over 200 members, including some international members.

Over the following months, 'Rabbiting On' the association newsletter was launched, a network of volunteer coordinators was established and membership continued to grow. By the end of 1997, 'Rabbiting On' (RO) was a full colour magazine (once showcased on 'Have I Got News For You' as their guest publication!) and we held a Veterinary Conference to raise awareness of rabbits amongst the veterinary community. The first of many.



The very first Rabbiting On was very different to what it is today

Growing bigger and better

Over the next few years the association went from strength to strength: we produced thousands of leaflets about various aspects of rabbit welfare; introduced an online shop; put in place a 'rabbit-friendly' vet list; appeared with the help of numerous generous volunteers at pet shops and exhibitions around the country to promote best practice in keeping rabbits; started our fundraising activities; and launched the Houserabbit Members Houseparty; all in line with our original aims.

By the year 2000 we had over 2,500 members and due to the increasing workload of the volunteer Committee, the original Committee of Linda, Helen, Anne and I invited the assistance of Rae Walters (now Director of RWAF) and Peta Charman, first editor of Rabbiting On. Their considerable input helped to support the increasing campaigns which the BHRA was undertaking such as a campaign to discourage the breeding of 'Long-Haired Rabbits' which are concomitant with numerous health conditions and another focussing on 'Rabbits and Children'. Again, these were the

The British House rabbit association

The BHRA was officially formed in 1996

first of many campaigns. Rae also took on the liaison role with external bodies such as DEFRA.

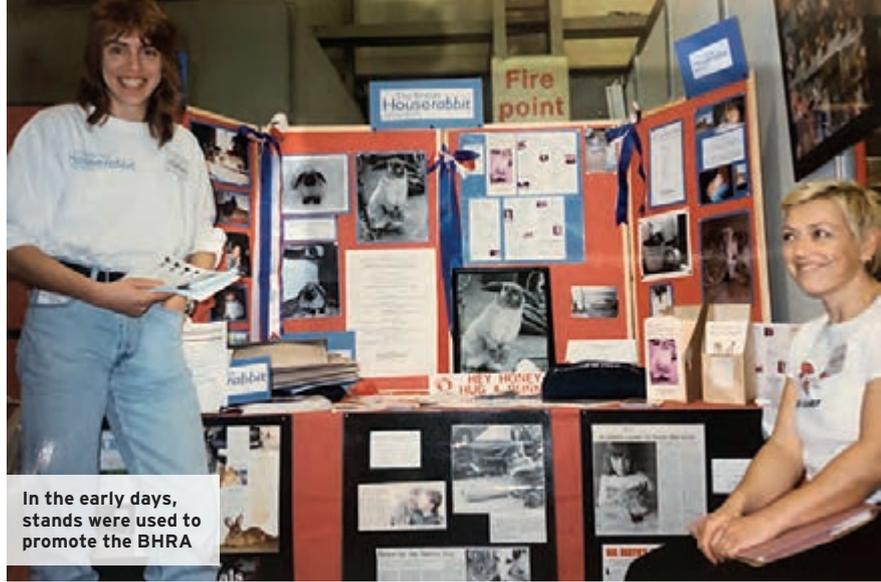
Establishing a charity and renaming the BHRA

With all the work being undertaken by the Committee and our regular volunteers, the Committee agreed that we should establish a charity which would sit alongside the members association. This would enable us to better fund our increasing educational and research work. Rae Walters took the lead on this, and thus on 23rd March 2000, the Rabbit Welfare Fund (RWF) was approved and registered by the Charities Commission. The mission of the RWF was simple: "To improve the quality of life of pet rabbits in the UK". At the same time, the Committee felt that the BHRA had moved away from the original 'club' aspect and were becoming more of an outreach organisation. Therefore, in order to widen our vision, to simplify our aims, and to be more encompassing of our many members who kept rabbits outdoors we rebadged the BHRA as the Rabbit Welfare Association (RWA). The Association and Fund are now jointly known as The Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWAF).

New ventures

With the new organisation formed, the RWAF embarked on exciting new ventures. One of the most memorable for me was the funding (jointly with Bristol Zoo Gardens), of a Veterinary Intern which would specialise in rabbits and exotics. A rabbit only clinic - the first of its kind in the world - was established, and while mainly attracting cases from the Bristol area, RWAF members were able to have a telephone referral. Following the third round of funding, the RWAF appointed Richard Saunders (BSc (Hons) BVSc MSB CBiol DZooMed (Mammalian) MRCVS) as their Vet Specialist Adviser. Richard's role is to guide the health and welfare strategy of the RWAF, as well as raising the standards for rabbits across the UK.

By 2003, Helen Flack and Linda Dykes had stepped down from their Committee positions due to the demands of their careers and were replaced by Veterinary Surgeon,



In the early days, stands were used to promote the BHRA

Judith Brown and Veterinary Nurse, Claire Speight (now RO editor,) who bought new dimensions to the team, this was especially important as our education role as an organisation expanded. In 2006 Alan Wilson was a thoroughly welcome addition to the Committee and took (and still takes) a large role in writing and revising articles for the RWAF website and press releases. Incidentally, Alan was the creator of our 'A Hutch is Not Enough' Strapline. Jo Edgar also joined the team in 2007 and took a lead in getting our research projects underway. The RWAF Grants Scheme was created in order to fund clinical studies seeking answers to problems affecting pet rabbits, such as the *E. cuniculi* project and pain relief study; another significant piece of work carried out by the organisation in those early days. Gemma Richards took over this important role from Jo when she stepped down.

So much achieved

Researching back through my BHRA/RWAF archives to write this article leaves me with an enormous amount of pride in the organisation; it has truly come a long way in its 25 years. There have been so many achievements made to better the lives of pet rabbits in the UK. The constitutional aims may have progressed over the years, but the BHRA/RWAF has worked tirelessly to achieve all of its aims.

I've made mention of some of the achievements throughout this article, but it would be remiss of me not to mention the 'Hutch is Not Enough' campaign. This is a long-running, wide reaching and wide ranging campaign right at the heart of the organisation's mission. A Hutch Is Not Enough sums up, in five words, that there is so much more to keeping rabbits than many people realise. If you are unfamiliar with the campaign, I would strongly urge you to support it. You can explore it in more detail at: <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-welfare-association-fund/our-work/a-hutch-is-not-enough/>

The Committee has evolved over the years to where it stands today, comprising: Rae Walters, Ros Lamb, Emma Boyd and Alan Wilson. I stepped down in 2010 due to taking a full time role out in Malaysia for Newcastle University. However, one thing I do know having worked with all the various Committee members of the BHRA/RWAF over the years; all of them are passionate about rabbits; each and every Committee member has been prepared over the years to dedicate their time and effort to drive the achievements of the organisation forward to the ultimate aim - to improve the lives of pet rabbits in the UK.

There are others too, not just Committee members who have given their time to help us achieve our aims. I don't have the word count available to me to name you all, but you know who you are! I'm sure the current Committee and all UK pet rabbits would join me in saying a HUGE 'thank you'.

Rabbiting On has got bigger and better over the years



BHRA merchandise was a way of getting the name known



Photo: D Staggs

Appropriate companionship is important for rabbit welfare

Photo: The Rabbit Residence Rescue

THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS - The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals

By Laura Dixon, Research Scientist

This is the fourth article in a series looking at the Five Welfare Needs, and how they apply to our pet rabbits. As a reminder, the Five Welfare Needs (previously known as the Five Freedoms), were developed as a way to assess animal housing and management, and they are!:

- Need for a suitable environment
- Need for a suitable diet
- Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- Need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Here we will be discussing what animals should and should not be housed with rabbits, and why appropriate companionship is important for rabbit welfare.

Rabbit social behaviour

Rabbits are a social species and in the wild live in mixed sex groups of rabbits of different ages². As a prey species, this allows some rabbits to perform risky behaviours, like feeding, while other rabbits keep a look out for predators³. Normal rabbit behaviour involves grooming other rabbits, playing with each other, and resting together. Rabbits spend much of their time with companions – up to 79% of the day in close proximity to others, and 58% of the time in body contact with others⁴. However, even just being within sight of another rabbit is very important social behaviour and rabbits don't have to be physically next to each other to be getting welfare benefits. We know that rabbits are motivated to be with another rabbit, and they will work by pushing through weighed doors to access a friend⁵, but they will also work hard for even just visual access to an unfamiliar rabbit. Prey species will keep sight of others of the same species as another way to avoid predators – they can see if another animal has spotted danger that they haven't. Behaviours like this that aid survival in the wild have often evolved to be pleasurable and highly motivated in the animal.

Companionship and welfare

Since rabbits are so social, individually housing rabbits can be very stressful for the rabbit, and they will decrease their play and vigilance behaviour when housed alone⁴. Singly housed rabbits often also develop abnormal behaviours that are thought to indicate poor welfare. These may be behaviours like pulling out their own fur, performing repetitive biting on objects or surfaces, or pacing and circling⁶. Housing rabbits singly can also affect rabbit health. Rabbits housed with companions are more active and spend less



Dogs and rabbits must be supervised

Photo: T. Leah



Rabbits are the best companions for rabbits to meet social, behavioural and welfare needs

time feeding than single rabbits, leading to a decrease in rabbit obesity levels⁷. Obesity increases the risk of certain diseases and obese rabbits groom less, have earlier onset of arthritis and have an increased risk of developing sores on their feet and hocks due to inactivity. Therefore it is important for a rabbit's physical and mental wellbeing to be housed with an appropriate companion.

Rabbits as rabbit social companions

Although rabbits are the best social companions for other rabbits, not all rabbits will necessarily get along together - two young males, for example - so you need to choose a compatible companion and introduce them properly. Rabbiting On has featured bonding advice and the RWAF website also has information on how to bond rabbits, but in general, a castrated male and spayed female have the best chance of bonding, and introductions should be done slowly in a neutral environment with lots of space for the rabbits to avoid each other and enrichments to distract them. It's important not to rush rabbit introductions and the rabbits should be able to progress at their own pace.

Other species as rabbit social companions

Rabbits should always be housed with another rabbit companion. However, these rabbits can live with some other species of animals if the other animals aren't predatory towards the rabbits, the animals aren't bullying each other, and all species' needs are met.

Rabbits are prey animals so mixing them with a predatory species like a cat or dog must be done very carefully. Some dog breeds that have been bred to hunt and kill small mammals may never be suitable companions for rabbits, while breeds bred for other purposes, may be manageable with appropriate introductions and training⁸. It's often easier to train a younger dog to ignore rabbits and rabbits should always be kept separate from the dog while the training is going on. If there are any doubts about the dog being able to live safely with the rabbits, the rabbits must be kept somewhere secure and safe from the dog.



Rabbits spend up to 58% of the time in body contact with each other

Cats and rabbits can often mix happily together. Rabbits will defend their home territories from cats and this may make the rabbit seem less like a prey animal⁸. It's preferable to house larger rabbits and cats together rather than smaller rabbits, and there should always be opportunities for the animals to get away from each other. Again, younger cats are easier to introduce to rabbits than older cats, especially as kittens will be a similar size to, or smaller than, the rabbits initially. Introductions should always be made slowly, and they should be supervised as the younger cat moves from adolescence to adulthood.

It is often a common belief that guinea pigs and rabbits can be housed together; however, in practice, this is rarely ideal. Guinea pigs have a different Vitamin C requirement from rabbits so they need different food types, and guinea pig and rabbit social behaviours are different from each other, which could lead to miscommunications and stress⁹. Guinea pigs are also susceptible to the bacteria *Bordetella*, which is a common cause of respiratory disease. Rabbits can carry *Bordetella* and pass this onto the guinea pigs, making them unwell.

Similar to guinea pigs, if chickens and rabbits are housed together, they need same-species companions as well and this grouping is also less than ideal. Chickens have quite different behaviours and needs from rabbits and they may be aggressive to the rabbits, while rabbits may attack the chickens to defend their territory. A large enclosure would be needed to co-house chickens and rabbits, to allow them space to escape each other and provide for all animals' needs, so this pairing is generally not recommended.

Another consideration when housing different species together is the risk of disease spread. Dogs and cats can transmit fleas and tapeworms to rabbits, while guinea pigs are vulnerable to respiratory disease that can be transmitted by rabbits. Chickens carry *Salmonella* and rabbits can become infected with this from chicken faeces. This means that preventative veterinary treatments, like flea and worm medications, need to be properly administered to the animals sharing the environment⁸.

Conclusion

Rabbits are the best companions for other rabbits to meet social, behavioural and welfare needs. It may be possible to mix rabbits with a cat or dog, if appropriate precautions and training take place. Rabbits should be kept separate from animals that view them as a prey species. Housing rabbits with other prey species like guinea pigs or chickens is generally not recommended. Disease transmission between species should be considered and preventative measures taken to keep all animals healthy.

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SPRING GRASS

By Guen Bradbury,
Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser

Rabbits that are always kept on grass are very unlikely to have problems caused by eating spring grass

Photo: J Botelle



Rabbits have evolved to eat a lot of grass. However, for some rabbits, access to a lot of grass during the spring can cause gastrointestinal upset, stasis, and sometimes even death. This seems paradoxical - why do some pet rabbits suffer when wild rabbits do not? And what can owners do to limit the risk? The major reason that spring grass can cause gastrointestinal upset for rabbits is because of the high levels of non-structural carbohydrates in the grass.

Differences between spring grass, summer grass, and hay

Plants photosynthesise during the day to produce sugar, which they store as 'non-structural carbohydrates'. Non-structural carbohydrates are sugars (glucose, fructose, sucrose), starches (digestible chains of glucose molecules) and fructans (chains of fructose molecules). They then use these to grow overnight - they convert the non-structural carbohydrates into structural ones like cellulose.

Throughout most of the year, the levels of non-structural carbohydrates increase during the day (until about 4pm) and then decrease, with the lowest levels in the early morning. In the winter, the light levels are quite low, so the grass does not photosynthesise much. In the spring, the light levels start to increase and photosynthesis increases. This means that grass produces a lot of non-structural carbohydrates during the day. However, the spring evenings are often too cool for the plant to grow. This means that the non-structural carbohydrates accumulate in the plant because it cannot use them for growth. This is what

makes spring grass softer than summer grass. It has a lower percentage of fibre (structural carbohydrates or cellulose), a higher percentage of easily digestible, fermentable, non-structural carbohydrates, and a lot more protein.

Summer grass has more fibre than spring grass and less non-structural carbohydrates - it feels firmer. Also, the plant will have started to make stems upon which to grow the seeds. These stems contain a much higher proportion of cellulose - that is why the stems of grass are stiffer and harder to break than the leaves.



Spring grass is so palatable that rabbits can still overeat if they have enough time to do so

Photo: P Finn

Plants photosynthesise during the day to produce sugar



Hay is often cut towards the end of the season, when the grass has finished growing. This means that there are a lot of stems, fewer leaves, and the leaves themselves have more cellulose and less non-structural carbohydrates.

The effect on rabbit digestion

When a rabbit eats different types of grass, the microbes in its gut (the microbiome) change. If a rabbit eats a lot of spring grass with low levels of cellulose and high levels of starch, the microbes that eat cellulose decrease in number and the microbes that eat the starch increase in number. If a rabbit eats a lot of mature grass with high levels of cellulose and low levels of starch, the microbes that eat cellulose increase in number and microbes that eat starch decrease in number.

It takes several days for the microbial populations to adjust to the foods that they eat. If a population of microbes that eats one type of food is suddenly overwhelmed by a different food, then the balance is upset. Sometimes, when the rabbit eats a lot of an unusual food, harmful bacteria can grow very fast and produce lactic acid and gas which cause intestinal distension and pain. This can damage the gut so bacterial toxins can leak into the blood stream, which can lead to organ failure and death. This is why it is so important to change a rabbit's diet gradually.

Why wild rabbits don't get sick

This is why wild rabbits don't become ill when they eat spring grass. Their diet changes naturally as the season changes. When the grass starts to grow, they eat the small amounts that have grown, and then they eat more as it grows more. This allows the microbial populations to gradually adapt as the grass composition changes - nature allows a gradual dietary transition.

Additionally, the grass itself changes when it is grazed. Grass that is grazed by herbivores makes itself less appealing to them to protect itself. It increases the amount of silica in the leaves, which requires more chewing and is less tasty. This means that the grass and the rabbits are in an equilibrium so that the rabbits stay healthy and enough of the grass survives to reproduce.

So rabbits that eat grass all year round are extremely unlikely to become ill when they eat spring grass. This includes wild rabbits and pet rabbits that live outside on grass. Problems arise for rabbits that don't have continuous access to grass. When they are put out on grass, this is a very big dietary change, especially if they usually eat hay. Additionally, most rabbits find spring grass very tasty, so if their access to it is restricted, they are likely to eat a very large quantity when they can - just like children in a sweet shop.

What owners can do for pet rabbits that are not kept on grass

If your rabbit is kept on grass all of the time, then it should self-regulate. Most rabbits prefer eating grass to hay, so they will start eating more as the grass grows, and just fill up with hay. This means that their microbial populations can adapt.

If your rabbit is not kept on grass all of the time, then you need to be a bit more careful and provide the gradual transition that nature is not providing. You should try to let them out on the grass when the levels of non-structural carbohydrates are lowest - so in the early morning. You can let them out to graze after you've given them their daily ration of leafy greens and weeds - this means they will feel fuller and will eat less.

You also should restrict the amount of time they are grazing for. Start with ten or fifteen minutes and increase it gradually every other day. Monitor their faeces during this time. If, when they are grazing for fifteen minutes a day, you notice that their faecal pellets become soft, then reduce the time to ten minutes the next day and then increase it more slowly. Some people like to restrict the amount of available grass so the rabbits only have a certain area to graze, but spring grass is so palatable that the rabbits can still overeat if they have enough time to do so.

In conclusion, rabbits that are always kept on grass are very unlikely to have problems caused by eating spring grass. However, rabbits that have restricted or intermittent access to grass are at risk. Owners can reduce the risk by gradually giving rabbits more and more access to allow their gut microbes to adapt.

Wild rabbits don't have any problems eating spring grass



A wild rabbit weighs between 1.2-2kg and is between 30 and 40cm long

Photo: H Brindley

THE ETHICS OF EXTREME CONFORMATION – How far should we go?

By Dr Emma Milne, Veterinary Surgeon

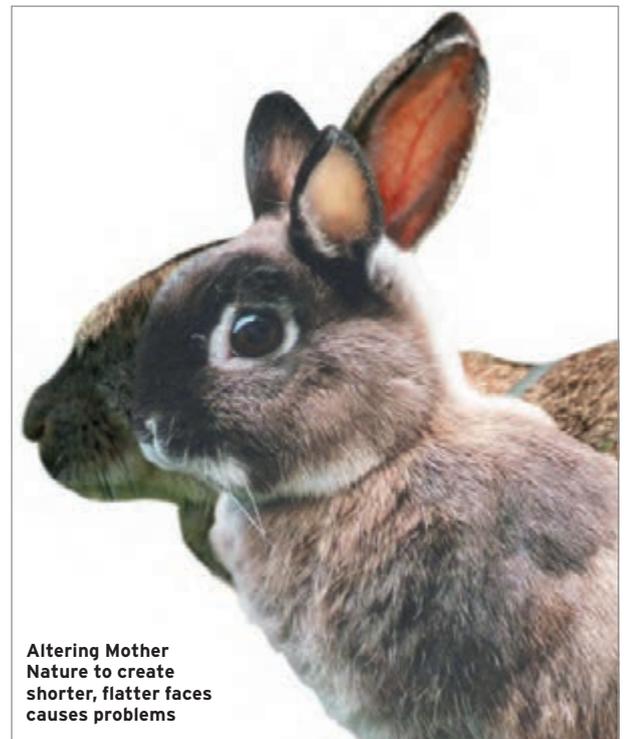
“Oooh, what a cute rabbit. What breed is he?” This sentence could apply to virtually any pet these days. People love to have a certain breed and they like to have these conversations. We like people to be fascinated and like our pets because it reflects well on us. Obviously, this applies most to dogs and cats, but nowadays rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, and a multitude of other pets are being altered by humans. What many people are surprised to learn is that breeds do not exist in nature. Within a species you can find different types and slightly different shapes but not a great deal of variation. The most fundamental thing is that these variations have arisen through natural selection. The concept of breeds is totally and utterly man made.

Selective breeding

This isn't necessarily a problem. It is entirely possible to breed animals and select for healthy attributes. You just pick the healthiest animals and mate them together, the way Mother Nature does. The problem we have is that pet animal breeds are 'designed' to look very different from each other. They are selected for certain physical attributes. In nature, rabbits are a uniform size, they have long faces, erect ears and a short coat. Even in climates where it is very cold, including the arctic, the coat becomes dense, not long, and is shed in summer. Mother Nature has taken millions of years to select rabbits like this. They have teeth that are perfectly aligned, erect ears allow for excellent sound location and drain properly and have open canals which aerate and keep the bacteria under control. A short coat is easily kept in good condition through grooming and doesn't get debris tangled in it. All of these features are what keep rabbits in the wild alive.

Pet rabbit breeds

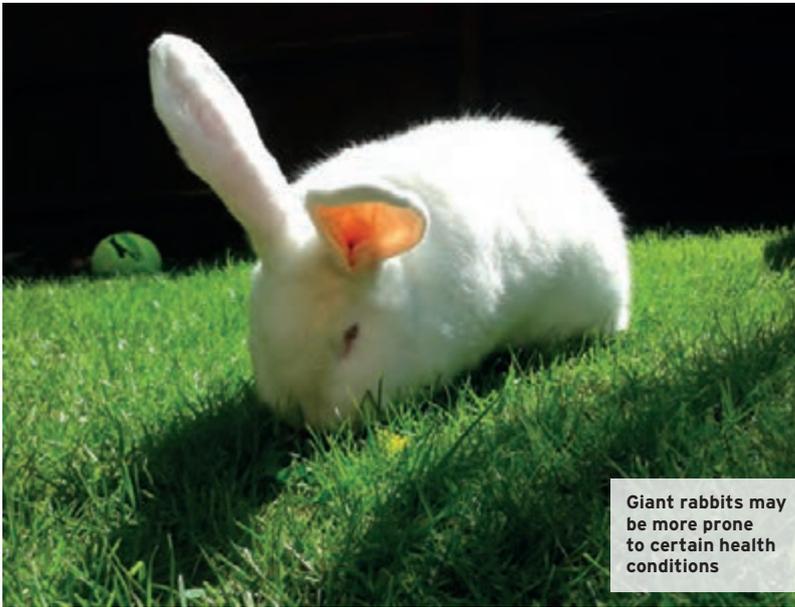
At the moment there are around 300 breeds of rabbit in the world. Now if you consider that these have all got to be physically different enough to be recognised as their breed, you have to have some radical changes to some of them. Selecting for different colours doesn't usually do much



Altering Mother Nature to create shorter, flatter faces causes problems

Photo: RWF

harm but as with dogs and cats some rabbit breeds are becoming more and more extreme, and this is extremely bad for health and welfare. Below are some of the changes that man has made that is farthest from nature



Giant rabbits may be more prone to certain health conditions

and the worst for our pet rabbits. As with many of my talks and articles, I always ask people to think back to what nature has selected when you consider these things.

• Coat changes

As I said, altering colours doesn't usually do much harm, although some colours can be linked with genetic problems. The most detrimental coat changes are those which give rabbits overly long fur. Breeds like this include the Angora, Lionhead, Cashmere, Silver fox and Jersey woolie. Some of these breeds, like the Angora, have long fur all over while others just have long fur in certain places. When you Google care of these breeds, you will soon see that most sites tell you that you have to groom, trim and care for these rabbits because they are incapable of doing it for themselves. Long fur is unmanageable in virtually all pets, like Persian cats, and is totally unnatural. Can you imagine how it must feel for a rabbit, which is a fastidious groomer, to have wet, knotted and tangled fur full of hay and bits of debris from the garden? At best they are high maintenance for the best owners, at worst they are the most vulnerable to skin disease and of course fly strike.

Rex rabbits are bred to have fur that feels like velvet which is the result of a unique gene. This means their fur often wets and soaks through quicker and they are more prone to conditions such as pododermatitis.

• Size changes

An easy way to make breeds different is to select for unnatural size changes. A wild rabbit weighs between 1.2-2kg and is between 30 and 40cm long. Some of the biggest man-made breeds can reach up to 10kg in weight and can be the length of a medium-sized dog! Just the same as for giant dogs, this abnormal size comes with health issues. The weight of these rabbits can cause more problems with sore hocks, they are prone to osteoarthritis and spinal problems and, like their giant dog counterparts, are also prone to heart disease and an early death.

At the other end of the spectrum are dwarf rabbits. When you want to



Angora pelt shaved off after severe matting

Photo: K Russell

produce a small or tiny animal you have to select the smallest animals and mate them together. Often the smallest animals in litters are small because they are the weakest genetically. In nature these animals would often fail to thrive and therefore not reproduce. By actively selecting and breeding from these animals we create fragile miniatures, prone to injury. Dwarfs are also prone to intestinal problems more than their normal-sized counterparts¹.

• Lop ears

There are dozens of varieties of rabbits now being bred to have lop ears. This means ears that do not stand up. For some reason, lots of people find this cuter than the natural erect ears. Think back, you never see lop ears in nature. Ears that fold like this can't drain so get build-ups of wax. This alters the ear canal environment. The lack of air causes certain bacteria to flourish, the ear becomes inflamed and sore and infected. Lop-eared rabbits are much more prone to ear-base abscesses, which are very painful and incredibly difficult to treat.

• Flat faces (brachycephaly)

Save the best for last. Or in this case, the worst. You'd have to have lived under a rock to have missed the publicity in recent years about the health problems in flat-faced dogs like bulldogs and Pugs, but in many ways for rabbits it is just as bad or worse. Why do we love flat-faced animals so much? I say we - I find it very unattractive, but then all I see as a vet is disease and suffering. Lots of studies have shown that humans find flat faces attractive because they resemble babies. Most mammals, including humans, are born with flatter faces than their adults. This helps with suckling milk. We are programmed to nurture babies and young animals and this is a strong theory as to why we find it desirable. The problem is that it is devastatingly unnatural. When you shorten the face of a rabbit, the teeth have to crowd in and change position to fit. Teeth that line up properly are absolutely essential for rabbits. Their teeth grow life-long and must wear perfectly against each other to keep short, avoid overgrowth and eventually tooth root abscesses, jaw damage, tongue lacerations, pain and often death. The teeth problems knock on to affect the tear duct, so many of these breeds have overflowing tears, wet, infected faces and sometimes pus coming from the tear ducts.

All together now...

Tragically for some rabbits (like Pekingese dogs for size, coat and brachycephaly) they have a double or triple whammy. Breeds like the English Angora, Lionhead, Dwarf Hotot and numerous others are either dwarf and brachycephalic, brachycephalic and very long-haired or in some cases like the Dwarf Lionhead, all three.

Make no mistake: extreme conformation causes unnecessary suffering in all species. When man plays Mother Nature we are stupid and reckless and care about looks more than health and it's high time it stopped. If you decide to purchase rabbits (never a single rabbit), please choose a moderate breed - medium-sized, short-haired, erect ears and a normal-shaped face (of course many rabbits in adoption centres may not fit these criteria and need a loving home. Please do consider offering them a forever home, but never purchase these rabbits from breeders or pet shops, which continues the cycle and demand). If you choose a moderate, proportioned rabbit, their health and welfare is much more likely to be good which means a longer friendship for you and the bonus of fewer vets' bills. Choose life. Choose nature!

Reference

¹<https://www.vetstream.com/treat/lapis/freeform/gastrointestinal-ileus>



25 YEARS OF RABBIT HEALTH

By Richard Saunders, RWF Veterinary Adviser

Rather horrifyingly, I realised that I qualified 25* years ago, so, once I got over that shock, I realised that I was in rather a good place to write this article on the past 25 years of rabbit veterinary care.

Graduation and early days

When I graduated from Liverpool, we had received a week, in total, on all animals that weren't conventional farm or companion species. I didn't see a single rabbit at the university itself, and was taught more about the nutritional composition of rabbit meat for feeding to cats, than about rabbits themselves.

Things were somewhat better in private practice, if you knew where to look. I was lucky enough to be able to spend much of my time "seeing practice", now generally termed "EMS" or "Extra-Mural Studies", with vets who pioneered rabbit medicine and surgery; Dermot Malley, Martin Lawton and others.

Once qualified, I was lucky enough to be mentored by Paul Nurse, a vet who would modestly never claim any special expertise in rabbits, but was supportive and gave wise counsel on almost every topic. I was privileged to attend the first RWF conference, and hear and speak to others, such as Frances Harcourt-Brown and Paul Flecknell, but whilst there were a scattering of people doing great stuff, there was a dearth of hard information out there.

The internet did not exist in any useful form at that point, and so communication with other vets and societies was slow and difficult. In particular, advances across the Atlantic were more difficult to follow than nowadays. Journal searches were expensive and time-consuming unless one subscribed to a range of journals or had access to a university library.

Vaccination and anaesthesia

Only a few years after that, things really started to improve: the first edition of "Ferrets, Rabbits and Rodents" came out in the US in 1997, the first edition of the BSAVA manual of rabbits in 2000, and Frances Harcourt-Brown's "Textbook of Rabbit Medicine" in 2002.

And general rabbit care followed a similar pattern. The only vaccination when I qualified was the one using Shope Fibroma virus, developed in the 1950's, which had to be given both under and into the thickness of the skin, and only lasted 6-8 months. Protection wasn't great and uptake was poor. When the original Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease Virus emerged, an oil based



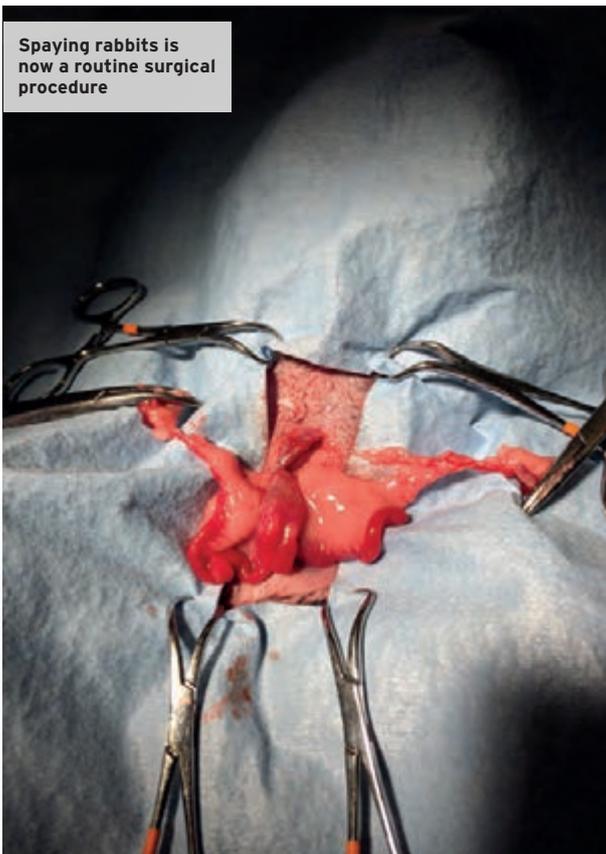
The original myxomatosis vaccine was not that effective

vaccine was produced and used, with good effect, but with the risk of skin sloughing at the site of injection. Again, uptake was low. Few noticed rabbits dying from the latter, as death was so rapid and often without any signs.

There was a similar situation with rabbit neutering too. Whilst castration of rabbits was not uncommon, it wasn't the default setting, and it was very common to see rabbits housed with guinea pigs to provide companionship without unchecked reproduction. Neutering female rabbits was, however, much less common (I can't recall seeing a single one performed outside of specialist "exotic" practice until doing them myself a few years after graduation), mainly in view of the fears about anaesthetising them.

This was a major deficiency in rabbit care. Rabbit anaesthesia was viewed with something between concern and panic, and as a result, both planned and

Spaying rabbits is now a routine surgical procedure



unplanned surgery was not carried out as often and as promptly as it could have been, with obviously suboptimal results: waiting until there is nothing to lose by operating on a rabbit often means that, sadly, they are too far gone. And it therefore became a self-fulfilling prophecy that "rabbits always die under anaesthetic".

It was comparatively rare to intubate rabbits, and this was something that very much came into even exotic animal practice from the laboratory field. Whatever one's feelings about laboratory rabbits, much of what we have learnt about anaesthesia and analgesia has come from there. The use of endotracheal tubes and intravenous access to improve anaesthetic safety (my anaesthesia lecturer, 25 years ago, maintained that the most important things to aid in safe anaesthesia were "an open vein and an open airway", and this is just as true today).

So how have things changed since then?

Well, the information age has well and truly arrived, with dedicated exotic journals being something that anyone with an internet connection can access. Whilst nominally needing university library access or to pay for each article, some articles are free, selected excerpts can be easily and freely accessed, and grey area download sites can be found with a bit of searching. Almost any article or book can be accessed for free. Although the morality of this is questionable, the business model of scientific journals makes such pirating only too tempting!

The explosion in information in books has been remarkable. The BSAVA manual went from a single slim volume, to an updated rewrite within 6 years, to a 2 volume set, each of which is about 4 times the size of the original single text. Frances Harcourt-Brown's seminal text was updated by Molly Varga, and the US Ferrets, Rabbits and Rodents is currently on its 4th edition. A plethora of other, more specialist texts have been published on ophthalmology, imaging, anaesthesia, behaviour and welfare and other topics.

The sheer volume of information CAN be a downside. Wading through Dr Google looking for accurate, relevant information is tricky. Some sites (Medirabbit; Frances Harcourt-Brown's; specific university exotic veterinary departments; and of course, the RWAf one!) and the various forums can be a useful source of information and support for vets and owners. On the other hand, inaccurate, misleading or inappropriate advice and information is widespread.

We've gone from a relatively small number of vets happy to see rabbits, to a Rabbit-Friendly vet list of over 200, and many more practices not on that list. This isn't always because the vet schools have expanded their teaching (it remains variable depending on the university, and I would like to see much more teaching taking place), and is partially because of the vast increase in private CPD teaching from both the more traditional sources and newer companies.

Vaccination has progressed enormously. From a single, initially pretty much home-made vaccine, from a related virus, offering cross-protection against myxomatosis only, to a second generation genetically engineered vaccine covering both myxomatosis and the 2 strains of RVHD.

Neutering is much more routine now, but neutering does still lag behind in frequency, perhaps partly due to continuing veterinary reluctance, especially if there is a perceived choice between the male and female in a pair, to neuter the doe, or on cost grounds (it's usually more expensive to neuter a female than a male rabbit). Still, it's pretty rare to see rabbits and guinea pigs housed together anymore!

So, things have improved a lot for rabbits, owners, and vets, but here's to the next quarter century!

*26 actually, but let's not let facts get in the way of serendipity

Reference:

¹<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0368174256800313?via%3Dihub#>

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BRINGING THE OUTDOORS INDOORS

Can houseplants and rabbits mix?

By Twigs Way

Houseplants are making a resurgence in homes everywhere; they were once a fashion of the 1970s, when no home was complete without a cascading 'spider plant'. Whether it's home-workers trying to recreate the pre-Covid office, or just people looking for a greener home life, window sills are once more filling with greenery of all kinds, whilst light-filled conservatories are a perfect home for a wide range of plants. But how safe are these for houserabbits?

Inquisitive eaters

Almost all plants commonly sold as houseplants come from tropical or desert climes, which enable them to grow happily in the indoor conditions of modern centrally-heated houses. Unlike most of our native plants, rabbits have no experience of these and no 'instinct' as to what might be edible and what not, and many of the plants are toxic, some even carry toxins in their flowers or pollen. The average houserabbit tends to come under the heading of 'inquisitive and adventurous eater' and the combination of a bored rabbit, and new plant, can be a disaster waiting to happen.

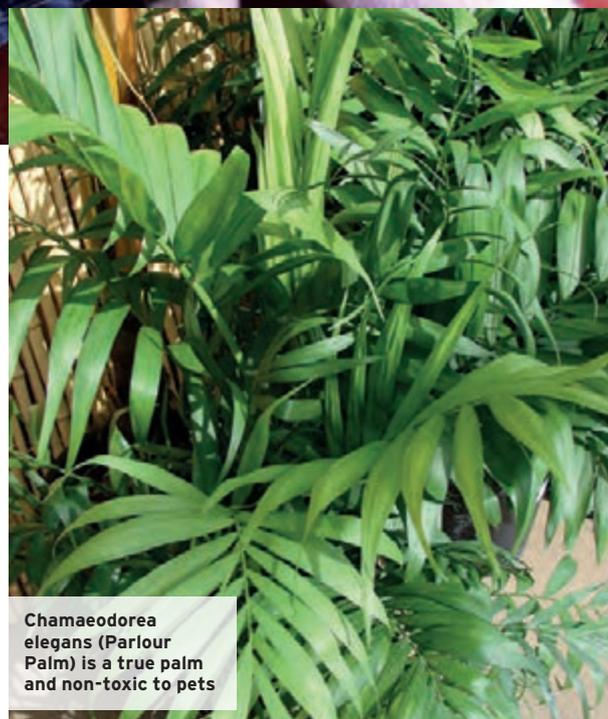
Hundreds of houseplants are now available, many of which are sold under 'common' rather than Latin names, which causes confusion when trying to ascertain toxicity: the Sago Palm for example is not a palm at all, the 'Grape Ivy' (*Cissus rhombifolia*) is not an ivy, and the Peace Lily is not a true lily, although at least that means it is slightly less toxic. Fortunately, the alarming sounding Nerve Plant (*Fittonia albivensis*), has no nerve toxins, whilst the Cape primrose, which might ring alarm bells amongst those who know rabbits should not eat primula, is not a primula but a gesneriad.

Difficult to ensure safety

Given the huge number of plants now available, it is impossible to make a concise list of the toxicity of even a small fraction of the houseplants rabbit owners might consider. One of the best houseplant lists for pet owners I have found is on a fabulous blog called 'Plants Are The Strangest People' (<https://plantsarethestrangestpeople.blogspot.com>), which, over seven detailed blog entries, considers the toxicity of most of the common houseplants, dividing them into Crazy Super Dangerous, Dangerous, Potentially Dangerous, Unpleasant, and the final short category 'Probably Safe' (search for 'Houseplants Toxicity' to find all the parts).

May get messy!

Once you have identified a suitable plant, do remember that even if the plant itself is relatively unappetising or non-toxic, the soil or compost it grows in will prove an irresistible draw to the houserabbit and soon the whole plant will be upended and roots and soil all over the place. This in itself can be a real danger (and not just for your carpet), as many of the planting mediums contain granules to increase water retention or prevent water-logging or slow-release fertilisers.



Chamaeodorea elegans (Parlour Palm) is a true palm and non-toxic to pets

Bunches of flowers

As well as houseplants, bunches of flowers can also present dangers. Even usually harmless flowers such as roses may have been sprayed with chemicals, particularly if hot house raised. Exotics such as bouquets of Australian plants, or the inclusion of conifers, or even plastic 'add ons' are all possible hazards. So if choosing a bouquet, best stipulate a choice from the range of edible plants and flowers in 'Gardening for Rabbits'. That way both you and the rabbit will be happy.

Possible options

If after reading this you still feel that you need houseplants in your life then there are some other options.

Grow plants in a terrarium or old fashioned large bottle - the rabbits will be able to see them through the glass but not eat them; plant a native tree seedling, such as hazel or birch, and bonsai it so you can bring it indoors; grow edible herbs on a windowsill as at least they are meant to be eaten; place the houseplant behind bars/rabbit-proof mesh and never leave it unattended; place the plant on a very high shelf where it is impossible for the rabbits (or you) to see it(!); buy a painting of a houseplant and hang it on the wall out of reach of the rabbits.

25 YEARS OF FEEDING RABBITS

What's Changed?

By Dr Suzanne Moyes,
Veterinary Surgeon, Burgess Pet Care

All photos: Burgess Pet Care

Many of the most significant changes to improve rabbits' diets have occurred due to a change in perception

As this issue marks the 25th anniversary of the British House Rabbit Association/Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund working to improve the lives of pet rabbits, we wanted to take a look back at how the dietary advice and perceptions of the best diets for rabbits has changed over the past 25 years.

Specialised digestive system

Rabbits have always had specialised digestive systems, that require high amounts of fibre to keep them healthy and happy, and the best diet for rabbits should generally replicate what they would eat in the wild. That means plenty of high-quality feeding hay and/or fresh grass, with constant access to a clean water source for drinking. This should be supplemented with nuggets to ensure the correct balance of vitamins and minerals, leafy green vegetables, and, of course, the occasional healthy treat for good measure!



Make feeding interesting

The importance of high-quality feeding hay or grass in a rabbit's diet cannot be underestimated. Rabbits need two types of fibre moving through their gut at all times: digestible fibre and indigestible fibre. Indigestible fibre moves through the rabbit's digestive system and is excreted as hard droppings, the ones that are left behind in litter. Digestible fibre, however, moves through the digestive system into an organ called the caecum, which is then fermented and made easier to digest. It then emerges in the form of sticky droppings called caecotrophs, which are redigested by the rabbit for maximum nutritional benefit.

As high-quality feeding hay and grass is so high in fibre, it's very difficult for rabbits to get their required intake of fibre from any other food source, and although most rabbit owners may see this as common knowledge now, the importance of fresh hay and grass in a rabbit's diet and its role as a primary food source wasn't largely recognised by many rabbit owners 25 years ago.

Feeding muesli

Muesli-style foods used to be one of the most popular commercial diets that were sold for rabbits. So popular, in fact, that even today for many people it is what they imagine when they think about rabbit food. Although muesli was always sold to be a supplementary part of a rabbit's diet, that didn't stop some rabbit owners from feeding muesli as their rabbits' primary food source. From a loving rabbit owner's perspective, it could be easy to see why: their rabbits didn't seem that interested with fresh hay and would only focus on eating muesli! Many rabbit owners also noted that their rabbits would only eat certain parts of the muesli, those high in sugar, and leave the rest behind.

This is an issue that's known as selective feeding, where rabbits pick out the high starch elements of their diet, such as flaked maize, and don't eat anything else. It's the equivalent of giving a child a plate of sweets, chocolate and healthy vegetables (what do you



An occasional, healthy treat may be enjoyed

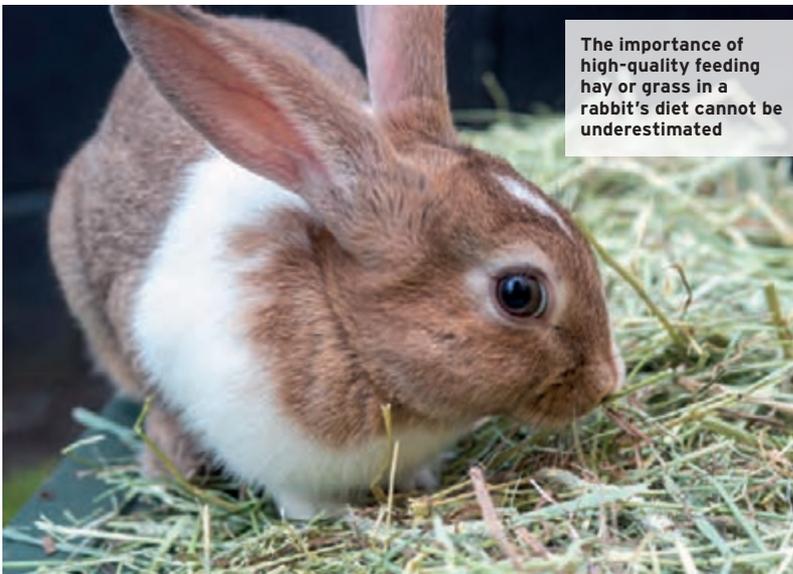
think they'd eat first?!). Ultimately, this leads to the consumption of an unbalanced diet. But unbalanced diets in rabbits may lead to serious or even fatal health conditions.

The problems of feeding muesli diets to rabbits, although suspected by some vets, had never been thoroughly researched. At Burgess, we supported a two-year-long study with the University of Edinburgh into looking at the feeding of muesli to rabbits compared with nuggets. The studies showed that rabbits became rapidly obese when they were only fed muesli, compared to rabbits on hay and nugget diets, but research also uncovered several new problems.

It found that feeding muesli to rabbits reduced faecal output which may increase the risk of gut stasis, an often-fatal condition. The consumption of less hay as part of muesli diets can cause abnormal growth of teeth, leading to pain and a further reduction in hay intake. A reduction in water was also seen in rabbits fed muesli, which may increase the risk of urinary tract problems. An increase in the amount of uneaten caecotrophs increases the risk of flystrike if they become matted in rabbits' fur, whilst selective feeding overall can lead to an imbalanced diet lacking in vitamins and minerals.

Stopping production of muesli

When the findings of this research were first shared in 2013, Burgess stopped production of muesli products for rabbits and guinea pigs and now doesn't make muesli-style diets for any species. The research was widely acknowledged and supported by the veterinary community, as well as UK charities such as the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund, RSPCA, and PDSA, and many retailers have stopped selling muesli-style diets for rabbits.



The importance of high-quality feeding hay or grass in a rabbit's diet cannot be underestimated

As a result, 2013 marked a significant improvement in the welfare of rabbits, due to the change in perception amongst rabbit owners about the best diet to feed their rabbits. As this research highlighted the risks of feeding muesli diets, rabbit owners were encouraged to learn more about the correct diet for rabbits, and the importance of high-quality feeding hay and fresh grass as a result.

Differences in hay

As the focus turned to the importance of hay, this provided an opportunity to educate rabbit owners on the differences between hay for eating and hay for bedding. Any loving rabbit owner will be able to tell you that no hay is the same, and there's a significant difference between bedding hay, which may be poor quality and should only be used for sleeping or litter, and nutritious feeding hay, which has been specially grown, harvested and then packed as food.

A good quality feeding hay will be green and sweet smelling, dust extracted and may include additions to encourage a rabbit's natural foraging behaviour. Long-chop feeding hay, such as Excel Long Stem Feeding Hay, is important for stimulating feeding behaviours.

Welfare advances

Many of the most significant changes to improve rabbits' diets have occurred as a result of a change in perception. This highlights the importance of animal welfare campaigns such as Rabbit Awareness Week, which takes place every year to address the key issues facing the welfare of rabbits in the UK. Campaigns such as Move Away from Muesli and Hop to Hay have played a significant role in educating rabbit owners on the risks of muesli and the role of quality feeding hay in a rabbit's diet.

According to the PDSA's Animal Wellbeing Report, 55% of rabbit owners were feeding their rabbits muesli in 2011, which has dropped to 21% in the latest 2019 report. Although this is a significant improvement that shows the success of positive campaigning, it shows that there is still work to be done, especially when the same 2019 report shows 26% of rabbit owners do not provide hay as part of their rabbits' primary food source.

So, what is the best diet for rabbits in 2021?

At Burgess, we use the Excel 5 Step Feeding Plan, which recommends that the diet should contain 85-90% high-quality feeding hay, with the rest comprising nuggets and fresh leafy vegetables. We also produce Excel Nature snacks for owners who want to occasionally give their rabbits a treat, and constant access to fresh water should be available.

High-quality feeding hay and grass will always be the most important part of a rabbit's diet, and this will never change. This is why it's so important to help other rabbit owners recognise the role of hay in their rabbits' diet and how they can work with their rabbits to increase their hay intake. There are plenty of ways to do this, such as placing hay in cardboard tubes with some pellets/vegetables, scattering pellets in hay etc., and items to encourage foraging behaviour.

In addition to the amazing resources on the RWAFF website, rabbit owners can download their own rabbit care guides from the Rabbit Awareness Week website, which have been put together with the support of animal welfare experts at the RWAFF.

Changing perceptions of new owners about the mental capabilities of rabbits, is likely to be of benefit for domestic rabbit welfare

All photos: S McMahon

MIND MATTERS

The public's perception of rabbits and their mental abilities

By Sarah McMahon, Final Year Veterinary Medicine and Surgery Student

The welfare of pet rabbits has been of increasing interest to vets and scientists, raising concerns that this popular pet is often kept alone, poorly housed and fed, and not provided medical care. The RWAFF has been providing the public with information to improve rabbit welfare; confirmed in our study as key factors in positive welfare for rabbits were: a majority hay diet, varied enrichment and free roam housing (rather than in a hutch)¹. So, if this is accurate information that will improve the lives of pet rabbits, why do people not provide it?

How are rabbits often seen?

As a rabbit owner, I've frequently encountered the following views: "But it's just a rabbit"; "they don't do much"; "they're stupid"; "they're for children". I found these statements quite different from how I see my rabbits - I view them as emotional, mischievous characters full of incredible behaviours and personality. This made me wonder how people's perception of an animal influenced their treatment of them.

Perceptions

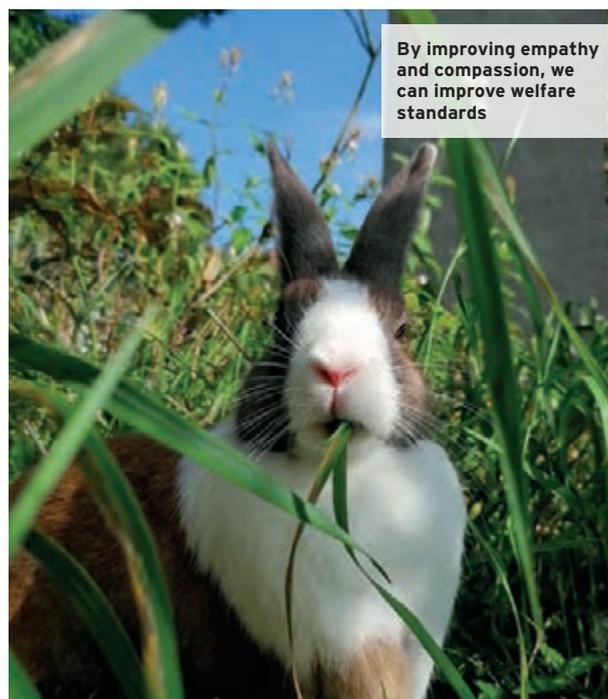
A small survey-based study of 52 owners, at the point of purchase of pet rabbits, found that knowledge and attitudes surrounding the species were indeed significant factors in husbandry and resource provision, such as providing a companion, an appropriate diet and an intention to neuter/spay their new pet².

A link between an animal's perceived ability to think, and the subsequent treatment of that animal species by humans has been found³. Indeed, Smuts states that the stage before establishing a beneficial interspecies bond is the acknowledgment of a fellow social being with which communication is possible⁴. The idea that another animal has cognitive processes such as our own, carries a moral responsibility to consider the feelings of a species and the subsequent need to re-evaluate our treatment of that animal⁵.

Further research concluded that attributing emotionality to sheep is significantly associated with more positive treatment from their farmers^{6,7}; dairy farmers with positive attitudes towards animals had better human-animal relationships, less fearful animals and higher milk yields^{8,9}; and an attribution of higher emotionality of pet dogs and cats led to an improved human-animal bond with their owners¹⁰.

Our study

There had not yet been a large-scale study regarding the public's perception of rabbits and their mental abilities. By using an online survey for current



By improving empathy and compassion, we can improve welfare standards

rabbit owners, our study aimed to provide a novel understanding of the public's perceptions of rabbits; how owner perceptions of rabbits' ability to experience pain, emotions and intelligence affect the resources and husbandry that they are provided with (including the important resource of a partner), and how these various resources affect the rabbits' welfare.

A positive relationship was found between higher perception scores with positive welfare score, and a negative correlation was found between high perception scores and negative welfare score. This indicates that a higher perception of rabbits increases positive welfare, and decreases negative welfare.



The welfare of pet rabbits has been of increasing interest to vets and scientists

Specifically:

Perception	Welfare improvement provided
↑ Intelligence	Better diet
↑ Emotions	A rabbit partner
↑ Pain	Free roam housing and more enrichment

The human behaviour cycle

Edgar Schein's ORJI cycle (Observation-Reaction-Judgement-Intervention) simplifies human actions¹¹. It begins with *Observation*, which surrounds your perceptions, and what you notice about something, followed by *Reacting* to this with an emotional response. A person then evaluates what they've witnessed or perceived, and how they felt about it, and a thoughtful response arises (*Judgement*). Finally, an *Intervention*: an action, a choice or a decision is made.

Interrupting the cycle

The results of this study highlight the great importance of owner perception of rabbit mentality to improve welfare - agreeing with the aforementioned conclusions of previous literature that a higher perception of animal intelligence, emotions and pain leads to better treatment, and better subsequent welfare. Thus, changing perceptions of new owners about the mental capabilities of rabbits is likely to be of benefit for domestic rabbit welfare.

It is therefore suggested that public education be tailored to improve the perception of rabbits' ability to experience, and to promote empathy towards the species.

Notable behaviours were mentioned by participants in this study that greatly impacted them, and were spoken of very emotively. Perhaps these behaviours could be used to cause an emotional impact on new owners and alter their perceptions of rabbits. For example:

- "Binkies" and "zoomies" were seen to be an unequivocal sign of joy in pet rabbits by owners, and it was repeatedly reported to also be a great joy for owners themselves to witness
- The bond between rabbits, that had been successfully group housed, was spoken of as indescribably strong, and frequently described as 'love'
- The perceived grief experienced by rabbits was frequently mentioned when attributing emotional pain, emotionality and emotional intelligence, and had a great impact on owners that witnessed it, highlighting the strength of the interspecies bond
- The ability of rabbits to learn tricks, their perceived ability to understand timing and routine, and their spatial memory had clear impact on owner perception of rabbit intelligence.

In terms of the ORJI cycle, this would be breaking a cycle of human behaviour by altering perception - the "Observation (O)" in the cycle.

For example: "I *Observe* that the rabbits I've seen simply sat in the corner of a hutch. My *Reaction* may be boredom, or disappointment. I have a *Judgement* that rabbits are boring, don't do anything, or are stupid. I therefore have an *Action* of inaction - as rabbits don't do anything and are stupid, why would I care that they should be provided a partner, enrichment, an appropriate diet, etc.

This could perhaps be altered to, for example: "I *Observe* that rabbits can complete puzzles, can hurdle, grieve, binky and zoomie. I *Judge* that rabbits are more intelligent than I thought, must experience emotions like joy and have such strong bonds with others that they grieve. I may therefore choose to *Intervene* with my current behaviour, acting with more empathy towards the species, perhaps providing them with things they need and enjoy. As I spend more time and provide more appropriate resources, this cycle of positive change may continue.

Existing Owners

Our study showed that existing owners who spent more time with rabbits, and provided them with more enrichment (like hides, tunnels, toys, puzzles etc.) had higher perceptions of rabbits. We think that watching their rabbits interact with the world around them 'unlocked' for these people the often-subtle emotions and intelligence of rabbits.

Vets and pet care professionals

As the public's face of animal welfare, veterinarians have a part to play in changing perceptions of the third most popular pet species. The role of pet care professionals and vets in face-to-face education at the point of purchase/adoption and onward throughout the life of rabbits, has an impact on health care level and resources provided to these animals. Perhaps vets and pet care professionals should also be reflecting on their own perceptions of rabbits, thus perhaps influencing more individuals to push more strongly for better standards from owners.

What do you think about your rabbits? It matters!

So, what can you do to help improve perceptions of rabbits, or perhaps even improve your own?

- Spend more time with the species, not directly handling but observing their interactions with each other and the world around them
- Branch out with your enrichment - you might be surprised by the items and activities rabbits will engage with
- Share your experiences! People often have no idea what rabbits are capable of until they're shown. Binkies, zoomies, hurdling, puzzle solving and the intense bond and love that rabbits have with each other are some great behaviours to share
- Teach children - I'm not recommending rabbits as children's pets, but if children are interacting with rabbits, make a point of teaching them about rabbit emotions and feelings. Compassion and empathy are an essential for being kind to other living beings. Understanding from an early age that bunnies aren't a glorified cuddly toy is a fantastic and important lesson in compassion.

Hopefully by improving empathy and compassion towards this species, deemed widely as an inexpensive and replaceable 'child's pet'; we can move towards rabbits being seen as a sentient, sociable mammal with a wide range of complex and dynamic behaviours that deserve respect and a high welfare standard.

References available upon request.

Wild rabbits are born in spring to coincide with the increasing grass growth

Photo: A Pennie

WHAT SHOULD WE FEED YOUNG RABBITS?

By Guen Bradbury, Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser

Young animals often require a slightly different diet from adult animals, to accommodate their growth and development. Many owners wonder what they should be feeding their young rabbits to give them the best chance of a long and healthy life.

Typically, owners worry most that they might not give their young rabbit enough protein and micronutrients to allow it to grow. However, it is equally important to provide young rabbits with the diet that we need them to eat for the next 10-12 years, and to ensure that we don't feed them in a way that will increase their chance of getting dental disease. Far more rabbits suffer with dental disease, which causes poor welfare and shortens their lives, than suffer from conditions caused by early life protein deficiency.

What dietary components do young rabbits need?

A juvenile rabbit has higher requirements for a range of nutrients, including protein, energy, vitamin D and calcium. Wild rabbits are born in spring to coincide with the increasing grass growth. They are suckled by their mother for about five minutes per day - the milk is so rich that the babies are full within minutes. Once the baby rabbits have mature eyes and ears and grow fur, they start exploring their environment and tasting different plants. In the wild, young rabbits are typically weaned by about 7-9 weeks of age.

Their dietary requirements for protein and micronutrients are then met by the lush-growing grass and plants, which have higher protein and energy levels in the spring than later in the season. Additionally, the very high consumption of grass stimulates normal chewing behaviour. This is vital. If young rabbits don't eat enough hay and grass, their jaws do not grow correctly, their teeth do not meet properly, and they will suffer from lifelong, life-limiting dental disease.

What foods should we offer?

Clearly, plenty of fresh grass and hay is crucial - not just for nutrition at this stage of life, but to ensure

the correct growth and development for long-term health. Additionally, a variety of different leafy green plants will help to provide a range of micronutrients. Leafy weeds, such as dandelion and plantain, will provide a wider range of micronutrients than cultivated vegetables (kale, spinach, cabbage etc. - what people call 'leafy greens') because the weeds are likely to grow on healthier soils that are not fertilised (commercial fertilisers only replace the micronutrients that the plant requires to grow, rather than all the micronutrients required for optimum health).

When babies have mature eyes, ears and grow fur, they start exploring their environment and tasting different plants

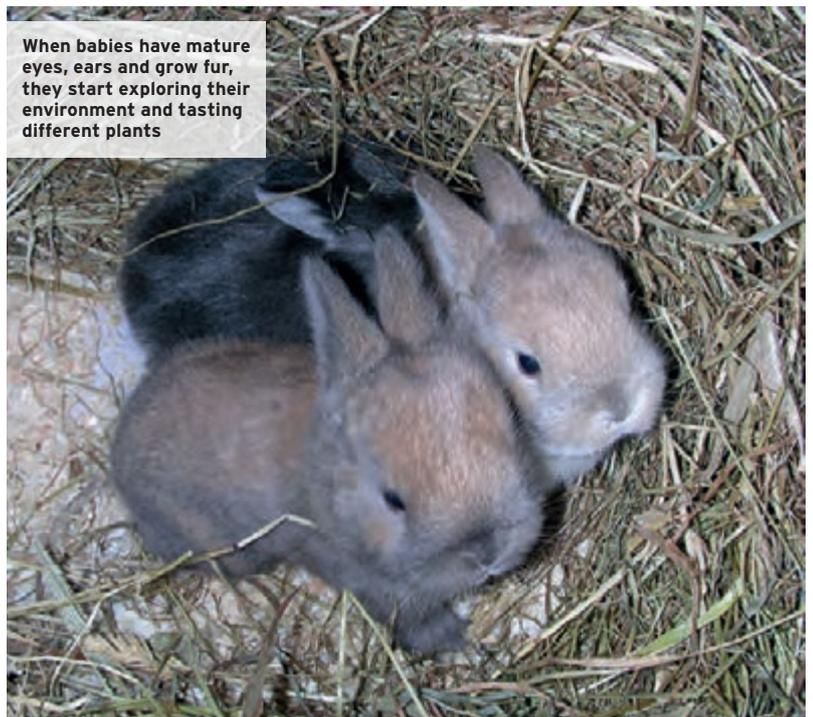


Photo: A Pennie

Owners often wonder when to start feeding leafy greens and vegetables to young rabbits. I suggest that young rabbits should be offered fresh grass and hay as soon as they are brought home. Over the next few weeks, you can start to offer a range of garden weeds (see the RWAF website for a list) - these are more nutritious and less likely to cause digestive upset than leafy greens. There is no hard and fast rule of when to start offering leafy greens, but I would suggest that, if you can offer fresh grass and weeds instead, then you only offer leafy greens in very small quantities as a treat until the rabbit is around 4 months. If you're not able to get fresh grass and weeds, then you can gradually introduce leafy greens so the rabbit can have some fresh food but remember that this should never form more than 15% of the rabbit's diet. Most of the rabbit's nutrition should come from grass and hay.

Rabbits have evolved to eat food which has the nutrient density of grass and takes the same amount of time to chew. Pellets have a higher nutrient density than grass (even if grass is the first ingredient), and they don't require as much chewing. This is why rabbits are likely to eat too many pellets and suffer adverse health effects.

Feeding pellets helps to ensure that the diet is balanced, and the rabbits receives the higher levels of protein, energy, and other nutrients that they need. We don't know exactly whether or not young rabbits need pellets in their diet, but we err on the side of caution and advise that young rabbits need a small quantity of junior pellets. However, if the young rabbits eat too many pellets, they have a higher risk of dental disease, so it's very important to stick to the manufacturer's guidelines. Essentially, we look to use pellets as a "hay balancer", to make up for any borderline or actual vitamin or mineral deficiencies in forage alone, and to raise the energy levels a little.

Owners often feed pellets in bowls, but this is a habit based on old feeding practices. When people used to leave bowls of concentrate food down all day, they wanted to make sure that the food wasn't soiled. However, as we now know that concentrate food in large amounts causes disease, we no longer leave bowls of food down all day. It is much better to feed pellets in a way that replicates some of the normal foraging behaviour of the rabbit - that increases the effort and time required to find the food and slows the eating behaviours down to a more normal speed.

It is important to provide young rabbits with the diet that we need them to eat for the next 10-12 years

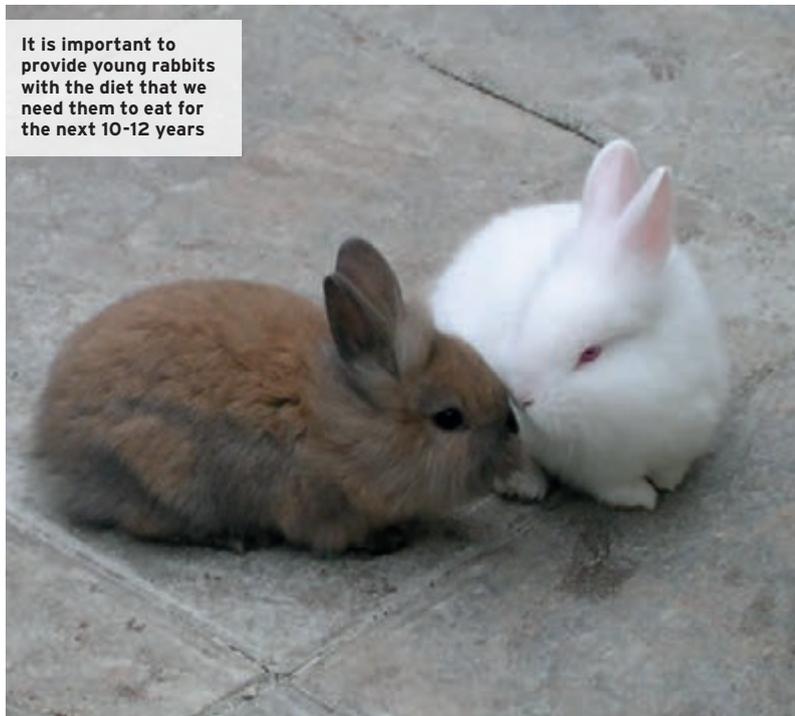


Photo: A Pennie

How should we feed young rabbits?

So how should you feed pellets to your young rabbit? Try sprinkling them in the hay so the rabbit has to hunt for its food. Or put them in a puzzle feeder, such as a ball with a hole in it, so the rabbit has to push the ball around to get the food. Finally, pellets make really good treats. They are small enough that the rabbit can eat them quickly, so you can use them as rewards if you are training them. Feeding a small amount first thing in the morning, by hand, helps promote a positive owner and rabbit bond. It also allows you to watch them running towards you and check that they are eating well. If they have supervised free run of your house or garden, then teach them to come back to you with a whistle and give them pellets when they get back to you. There are lots of ideas for tricks to train rabbits on YouTube - so why not give them a try?!



Young animals often require a slightly different diet from adult animals to accommodate their growth and development

Photo: M Guard

RESCUING RABBITS OVER 25 YEARS

By Mairwen Guard, MBE, CottonTails® Rescue

Whilst reflecting on the positive news that the RWAf (BHRA) is in its 25th year, it got me thinking back to 1993 when CottonTails® Rescue first started - 28 years ago. How things have changed! Whilst some issues have stayed much the same, others have changed significantly, with massive but generally positive knock-on implications.

Ethos

When I think back to what my aims were in 1993, the fundamental purpose was to take in as many unwanted and neglected rabbits as I physically could, so that they were at least safe and cared for. Almost secondary to this aim were thoughts about accommodation, costs, and how to go about finding good homes. Whilst our ethos has remained the same, in equal importance now is how the rabbits are kept, their welfare whilst here, and how to find suitable new permanent homes in the most time-efficient way possible with the finances available.

Neutering and Housing

Veterinary services were extremely limited in the early 90's for rabbits and other small animals as the skills, specialist equipment and advanced medications were simply not available. Neutering, vaccinating, and general health services that we take for granted now, were then non-existent. As a result, very few rabbits were neutered, and usually only single males as the spay procedure at the time had a very poor survival rate.

As most of the rabbits were therefore unneutered, bonding was not undertaken and almost all rabbits in rescue centres had to be kept as singles once they reached maturity. Lack of space as a result of housing all of them separately, combined with general poor understanding of welfare needs, resulted in rescue centres, and other animal organisations keeping rabbits in small hutches with little, if any, access to runs, and no stimulation from things like toys that would allow the rabbit to display its natural behaviours. Comparing those days to how things are now, the transition from solitary small hutch to today's modern rescue centres

large hutches and aviaries with runs attached is astounding. The inclusion of digging boxes, tunnels, objects to nibble on and trash are all fairly recent, but accepted now as standard. This is in part thanks to a new awareness of what rabbits actually need to keep them happy and healthy, supported by the on-going amendment of the Animal Welfare Act (2006), which enlarges on the previous duty-of-care responsibilities to take into account mental health needs as well as physical ones.



When we first started in 1993, the commonest reason for giving up a rabbit was generally down to ignorance

It was not until 1998 that we were able to make neutering for all rabbits mandatory prior to adoption, and by then the use of the new anaesthesia had become commonplace, making surgery safer and pain management more effective.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations are taken for granted now, but the ability to protect our much loved pet rabbits has been a fairly recent event. In 1994 we started to give myxomatosis vaccinations, but it was not until 1999 that we were able to include the separate vaccination for RVHD1. By 2002 we finally managed to get hold of the new combined version of the vaccine, protecting against both diseases at the same time, and this saved time and money and also sped up adoption availability. It is only very recently that we have had to face yet another challenge - the emergence of RVHD2 - and by 2017 have been vaccinating against this disease as priority, as soon as a new rabbit arrives. Now there is a new 3-in-1 vaccine to protect against myxomatosis, RVHD1 and RVHD2.

Bonding

Thanks to the changes in anaesthesia enabling all rabbits to be neutered as routine, safely and efficiently, the majority were then able to be pair bonded. This made a huge difference to us, as not only did the rabbits appear happier in most cases but it effectively halved the accommodation required, resulting in the ability to set up larger pens with equipment to keep them mentally and physically stimulated. We continued to follow the fast track bonding system very effectively with almost 100% success rates for several years until around 2017, when it became apparent that the blind-date system was no longer working so well. It was at this point that we switched to the slow bonding method, but as the name implies this effectively tied up space for longer periods of time so the decision was made to assist new owners in following the bonding process themselves at home, over a period of weeks.

Reasons for Rehoming

When we first started in 1993, the commonest reason for giving up a rabbit was generally down to ignorance, not understanding what was required to keep the animal well and happy, and a false perception of what a rabbit was actually like as a pet and their unsuitability for young children. There was no internet in those days, no way to quickly look up what to do, and any research was based either on hearsay or from books, some more helpful than others. In today's world of mass media, almost the reverse is true, with often conflicting information dripping out of every page clicked or post read. Despite this, the level of ignorance appears to be still at the same level as it was when we started all those years ago. Over the last five years, a new reason has become prominent, where people are moving into rented accommodation and the landlords increasingly not allowing any pets. The novelty factor will always be a part of why any pet is given up for rehoming, and this is no different today than it was 28 years ago, and sadly I fear it will always be a factor as long as we keep animals as pets.

Costs

The financial costs to run a rescue centre and keeping rabbits in general have increased as one would expect, with a steep rise in veterinary fees, reflecting the increase in expertise, equipment and medication that are now available. In 1997 it cost CottonTails® £14 a day for food, bedding, and vet expenses. Our latest expenditure shows that for the same items we spent £18.60 a day, a 25% increase during 24 years.

The financial costs to run a rescue centre and keeping rabbits in general have increased



Diet

Rabbit food and the advice surrounding diet has changed out of all recognition. In the early days, there were no scientific guidance about rabbit diets, and this meant that how much and what to feed was left up to the perceptions of the individual owner, with most people grossly overfeeding their pet on inappropriate mix, whilst allowing the development of selective feeding into the bargain. Today, muesli-type food is being phased out and the stocking of good quality pelleted food by supermarkets is at last leading owners to feed their rabbits a healthier diet. The emphasis on hay/grass and green vegetables is gaining momentum all the time, adding to the drastic change in ideas compared to the early 90's.

I feel privileged to have been a witness to such positive changes over the last 28 years, and look forward to more exciting advances in rabbit welfare to come in the future. Any advance in knowledge has got to be a positive step to keep our beloved pet rabbits happy and healthy, so here is looking to the next decade and beyond!



All rabbits can now be neutered as a matter of routine, and most bonded with a companion

DANGEROUS DRUGS FOR RABBITS

What shouldn't we use?

By Molly Varga Smith, Veterinary Surgeon

You can give any drug to a rabbit, but the real question is SHOULD YOU? This article will discuss those medications that should either not be used, or that should be used cautiously in rabbits.

Safe and effective

In the UK there are currently around 50 drugs that are actually licensed for use in rabbits. This means these drugs have undergone vigorous testing to ensure we understand how safe and effective they are. Most of these drugs are vaccinations, parasiticides, feed additives and some sedatives/anaesthetics. This means that many of the drugs we use to treat specific conditions in rabbits are not licensed in this species. In the UK, we follow the 'cascade of prescribing', which allows veterinary surgeons to prescribe medications for a pet if that medication is licensed for:

- 1 A specific condition for that species
- 2 A different condition in that species
- 3 That specific condition in another species
- 4 That condition in that species in another part of Europe (this will soon change) or
- 5 That specific condition in humans.

All of this means that in order to prescribe a medication to your pet, we need to come to a diagnosis and give some thought to which drugs we should use, with the intention of allowing your vet to choose safe and appropriate medications. If veterinary surgeons only used medications licensed for rabbits, we would not be able to prescribe pain relief (what would we do without meloxicam*?), we would not be able to treat kidney or heart disease, and we would only have two possible antibiotics to choose from.

Having said all this, what about those drugs that we really should not be using for our rabbit patients? These medications may well fit into the "cascade" so we need to be very aware of some of the pitfalls.

Fipronil

Fipronil is toxic to rabbits. Fipronil is a component of some topical flea control products sold for cats and dogs. While fipronil has been reported to be effective against some external parasites in rabbits (*Cheyletiella* or walking dandruff), there have been reports of adverse reactions when this drug is used in small or young rabbits. Rabbits that have been exposed to fipronil will often have a lack of appetite and become lethargic. Some rabbits will even develop seizures. Since these adverse reactions are potentially fatal, and particularly because we have many other suitable alternative medications, fipronil should never be used to treat external parasites in rabbits. If your rabbit is accidentally exposed to fipronil, the first step is to prevent it from grooming the product off itself (a lot can be taken in while grooming and this can cause serious problems), and to organise getting the rabbit to your vet as soon as possible. Your vet will likely attempt to remove the product by bathing and may well give your rabbit supportive care such as activated charcoal to try to avoid any of the drug in the gut being absorbed, intravenous fluids, and supportive feeding. Your vet will also be able to try to control seizures if they occur.

Antibiotics

Rabbits are commonly prescribed antibiotics, and most owners and vets are aware that some antibiotics can be risky or toxic to rabbits. There are five main antibiotics that can cause digestive upset - 'dysbiosis' - by altering the gut bacteria and allowing pathogenic (bad) bacteria to outnumber the 'good' bacteria. This causes diarrhoea and can be fatal. These antibiotics are known as the 'PLACE' antibiotics:

- Penicillin,
- Lincosamides, (lincomycin, clindamycin)
- Amoxyicillin/ampicillin,
- Cephalosporins
- Erythromycin.

All of these antibiotics, if given orally (by mouth), are likely to cause significant dysbiosis. However, many of you with rabbits with severe bacterial infections, such as tooth root abscesses or pneumonia, may have had one of these antibiotics prescribed. In particular, penicillin G is often prescribed to treat ongoing deep-rooted abscesses. How can this be? Well, there are certain circumstances where lab culture results dictate which antibiotic is going to best treat an infection. In these cases, often there is little choice but to use a riskier medication, but to try to do this safely. The commonest way of giving these drugs more safely is to give them by injection rather than by mouth, meaning that little of the drug gets into the gut and therefore there is less risk to the gut bacteria. This doesn't mean that there aren't risks, and certainly if the rabbit being treated has a companion, then this can also be an issue. If a companion rabbit grooms its partner after it has been injected, then it is possible for the companion to ingest a small amount of the injectable antibiotic from the injected rabbit's skin and thereby be at risk of getting diarrhoea. The truth is that on an individual basis any antibiotic can cause an adverse reaction in a rabbit, not just those antibiotics that are known to be risky.

If your rabbit shows signs of dysbiosis or diarrhoea when he or she is on antibiotics, this should be viewed as an emergency and you should contact your vet. It is likely that your rabbit will require care in hospital, and this may include activated charcoal or cholestyramine to try and absorb any toxins within the gut, intravenous fluids, and the use of supported feeding containing pre and pro-biotics.

Steroids

The use of steroids in rabbits is always a touchy subject, with some vets feeling that they are never justified and others feeling that in the right situation they can significantly help some animals. As a species, rabbits are certainly sensitive to steroids. Corticosteroids are used in both human and veterinary medicine for their anti-fibrotic and anti-inflammatory properties. They are mainly used in inflammatory, allergic, auto-immune and some tumour conditions. Steroids are very good at suppressing symptoms, meaning that if they are inappropriately used, a disease condition can progress without a diagnosis being made.

When given steroids, rabbits can become immunosuppressed because the steroids can damage the white blood cells. The consequence of this can be that underlying infections, such as snuffles (Pasteurellosis) or *E.cuniculi* (encephalitozoonosis), can become clinically obvious and cause harm to the rabbit. In these days of coronavirus, however, we are becoming increasingly familiar with cases of infectious disease that also actively benefit from the use of steroids, particularly diseases such as encephalitozoonosis, where inflammation is a significant factor in causing clinical signs. Clearly there are contradictions here, and this is one reason why the use of steroids can be controversial. Steroids, used appropriately



Photo: N Stapleton

are not all bad. For example, inhaled steroids can be a significant benefit for those rabbits suffering sensitivity to inhaled particles such as hay dust. I have personally rarely used oral or injectable steroids in rabbits; however, in the right case, often as end-of-life care, they have proven very beneficial. This is particularly true where a rabbit has a defined diagnosis of terminal cancer, for example. When there is not likely to be a long time remaining for a patient then the benefits of steroids can outweigh the risks and can improve the welfare of the right patient for the time they have left.

Case by case basis

There are a few drugs that need to be used with caution in rabbits, and your vet will look at the evidence regarding the use of medications before prescribing them. A good example of this is the use of opioids for pain relief. Historically it was believed that opioids could contribute to gut stasis in rabbits; however, the original research into this suggested that this would only occur after using opioids for at least 48 hours, and recent research has demonstrated that a single dose of buprenorphine (the most commonly used opioid), does not reduce gut motility at all. We must remember that it is very much easier to prescribe appropriately when a defined diagnosis has been made. Making a defined diagnosis and therefore an educated choice of medication is a collaboration between vets and owners and will ultimately push rabbit medicine forwards.

RWAF notes

Due to VMD regulations, the RWAF is unable to name trade names of drugs, so generic names have been used throughout this feature. Your vet is the best person to suggest suitable treatments for your rabbit, and will have access to rabbit specialists who will be able to assist them further.

*Other drugs in this class are available, but the palatability, the liquid formulation and the relatively large amount of data on this drug makes a first line choice in most situations.



Photo: B Lord

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

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

RWAF Animal Welfare Officer 2020 report from Mark Dron

"The following is the report from Mark, our fabulous Animal Welfare Officer, who has worked absolutely above and beyond what we could have expected from him in 2020. The report speaks for itself, and we are so very fortunate to have Mark on our side. We can only continue this work if we can fund Mark's post, so any donations to support our work are always put to good use. "You can donate via our helpline or website", The RWAF.

2020 was a very unusual year for everyone, and the work that I would normally undertake was massively impacted by the three 2020 Lockdowns, and the huge impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on how people lived their lives.

However, far from reducing the workload of the AWO, the fact that many people lived their lives online, and shifted their businesses and shopping habits to online platforms, actually saw a noticeable increase in the amount of breeders advertising and selling online, and thus a similarly noticeable increase in casework and referrals made to other agencies.

2020 in figures (cases by month):	
January 2020	25
February 2020	23
March 2020	11
April 2020	55
May 2020	21
June 2020	12
July 2020	6
August 2020	30
September 2020	48
October 2020	24
November 2020	58
December 2020	42
Total cases raised for 2020	355
Previous total cases raised 2019	107
Increase in cases - 248 (69.9% increase)	

It can be seen that there was a sizeable increase in cases raised by the AWO in 2020; it is believed that this was largely due to a marked increase in online breeders, but also represents an increase in cases referred to RWAF Head Office by members and the public, relating to animal welfare issues and concerns uncovered during 2020.

Types of Cases

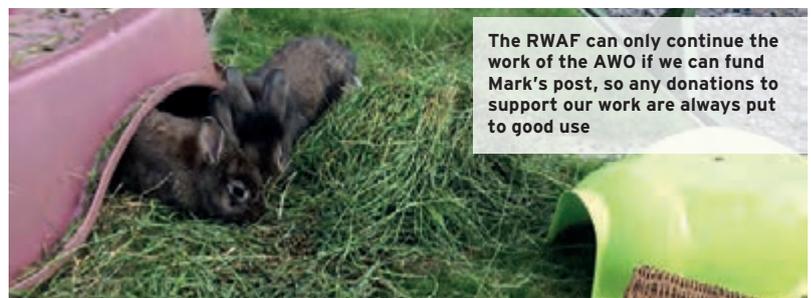
As you will be aware, whilst carrying out enquiries for the RWAF, there are occasions where other offending is identified by the AWO.

Where this happens, details and information are always recorded and passed to the appropriate enforcement agencies.

In 2020, the offending profile was as follows:	
Animal Welfare Offences including Licensing	283
CITES (Endangered Species) offences	8
Currency offences	1
Drugs	2
Fly-tipping	2
Red diesel offences	4
Firearms (these all form part of wider offending usually involving illegal hunting)	6
Illegal hunting offences (Including hare coursing)	21
Food safety	1
Fraud Act 2006	18
Money laundering	2
Illegal tobacco	1
Medicines and medical devices	1
Modern slavery	1
Road Traffic Act	1
Vehicle theft	1
Cycle theft	1
Fuel theft	1
Unlicensed dog breeding	1
Video recordings offences	1

Summary

As can be seen, the largest area of concern in 2020 related to the AWO's primary duties which involve identifying unlicensed pet sellers (usually rabbit breeders, but there are other areas of concern that have impacted on the casework), with fraud, illegal hunting, firearms and endangered species issues accounting for 53 case referrals in 2020.



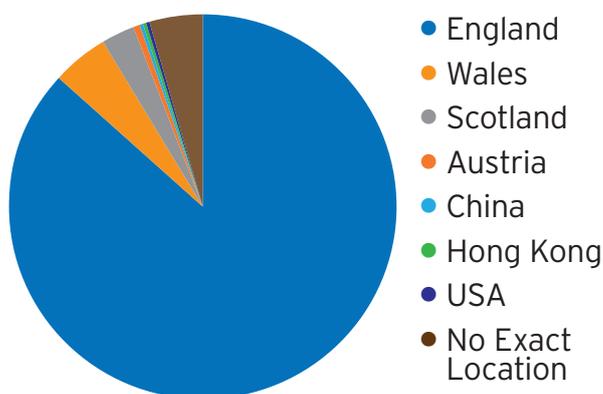
The RWAF can only continue the work of the AWO if we can fund Mark's post, so any donations to support our work are always put to good use

Geographical Spread in 2020

Cases in 2020 were largely located in the UK, with the highest proportion of traders being in England, followed by Wales then Scotland; but my enquiries also took in issues in Austria, Hong Kong, China and the USA.

Geographical Enquiries:	
England	308
Wales	17
Scotland	10
Austria	2
China	1
Hong Kong	1
USA	1
Unknown	15
Total	355

Cases



Referrals in 2020

Referrals were made to the following agencies in 2020:

Local Authorities	80
HMRC & other Government agencies	75
Police UK and overseas	8
Other agencies	35
Total referrals in 2020	198

Breakdown of case disposal

Cases finalised with a referral	198
Cases closed with no further action possible with the information available	95
Cases carried over to 2021 (still ongoing)	62

Summary

95 (26.8%) of the cases identified and commenced could not be progressed, usually because it proved impossible to trace them, or when the investigation did progress there was insufficient evidence to warrant further action.

Of the 355 cases raised in 2020, 198 (55.8%) were carried through to some form of resolution and 62 (17.5%) are ongoing.

Special projects and notable work

It was noted in July 2020, that a selling platform that had previously been virtually devoid of rabbit sales had suddenly exploded with new breeders; this was Free-ads a platform similar to eBay and other sites, whereby used items could be offered for sale. Amongst the commodities offered were a massive array of animals, including rabbits.

I carried out a special project (which is now in its final month of activity) targeting sellers on this platform; the immediate notable and interesting factor identified from this project was the preponderance of new traders identified (by which we mean those who have started breeding in 2020), and this has shown a marked increase in activity.

The project has also provided us with many more in-roads into activity in Scotland and Wales, which will form the basis of a sizeable project in 2021.

Through links in to volunteering with the Angling Trust/EA on Fishery crime, we have also managed to make connections with local Police Forces in the South East, which has enabled us to find contacts in rural crime teams who are happy to receive and deal with intelligence relating to Hare Coursing, which has seen a massive increase in the Winter months of 2020.

I also obtained the Animal Welfare Inspection qualification in 2020, as well as attending a number of other courses which have enabled me to provide a wider base of assistance to the RWAf's Senior Management Team.

2021

2021 has started in much the same manner as the majority of 2020, in Lockdown and still plagued by the Covid-19 pandemic; it is however shaping up to be another busy year and the following work is planned:

- 1 We already have 43 cases open in the book to be researched, an increase of 18 on this time last year.
- 2 Geographical Intelligence Project looking at Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man.
- 3 More liaison with Rural Crime Teams as contacts can be made.
- 4 Resumption of observation and visit programme once Lockdown is eased.
- 5 Planned increase in referral activity provided the pace of identification of breeders and their locations can be maintained.
- 6 Possibility of closer-working with a new charity that deals primarily with animal cruelty matters (The Animal Protection Service) who have a presence in the South East and elsewhere in the UK, and while they largely deal with Dogs and Puppy Farming, are also looking to diversify across different pet animal species.



Photo: R Macvicar

Reminder to the change of our Helpline number

Please note our new helpline number! **0191 933 9000** is now the telephone number for contacting the RWAf.

We have moved away from the old 0845 number. This means that the new 0191 number may be free for people to call if they have free minutes with their call plans (08 numbers are usually not included in these).

Please remember that we cannot give health advice via the helpline - you need to contact your own vet for that.

NURSING CARE AT HOME

Caring for rabbits after flystrike

By Claire Speight, Registered Veterinary Nurse

Urinary tract disease and spinal pain are predisposing factors for flystrike

Photo: R Lamb

Our 'Nursing at Home' series aims to help guide owners on how to care for their rabbits at home, when faced with specific nursing care needs. This issue, we look at caring for rabbits who have been affected by flystrike.

What is flystrike?

Every year, as we approach spring, we issue warnings about the dangers of flystrike. Flystrike is a truly awful condition, caused by green and blue bottle flies laying their eggs onto the soiled skin/fur of rabbits or those suffering from open wounds, and is far more common in the warmer months of the year.

This often happens around the rabbit's tail and back end, which may be soiled with urine or faeces (often uneaten caecotrophs), but can occur around the head, especially if the rabbit has facial abscesses or hypersalivation, or anywhere on the body if wounds are present.

The eggs look like small grains of rice, and the maggots will hatch from them within a few hours (depending upon the conditions - warm, humid conditions cause the eggs to hatch quicker). Once the maggots develop their mouthparts (again within a few hours), they will start to eat into the flesh of the rabbit, causing suffering, pain and ultimately death in many cases. These are emergency cases and **MUST** be taken to a vet immediately, day or night. Please do not attempt to wash the maggots off as this may hinder treatment upon arrival at your vets.

Can flystrike be treated?

If caught early, your vet is likely to be able to treat your rabbit. Superficial wounds may look awful but can be treated. Those wounds which extend into the deeper tissues, such as into the abdominal cavity, are more difficult to treat and euthanasia may be required to stop the rabbit further suffering.

Your rabbit may require a stay at your vets, where they may be given assisted feeding, fluid therapy and surgery, as well as pain relief, medications to keep their gastrointestinal tract moving, antibiotics and wound cleaning. When they are discharged home, you will need to continue with much of this care.

At home care

When your rabbit is allowed home, you are likely to need to undertake and be able to offer some or all of the following:

- **A clean living environment** - this will need to be indoors. Rabbits recovering from flystrike are at serious risk of another attack, so it is imperative to reduce the risk as much as possible. Their companion will need to stay with them. Keep them in a quiet area in the

house, away from the TV, other animals, busy areas and cooking smells. You need to make sure the enclosure is safe and secure and does not become either too hot or cold.

- **Assisted/syringe feeding** - if your rabbit is not eating, you will need to syringe feed them to ensure they



The damage caused by the maggots can be extensive

Photo: C Speight



Hypersalivation is a predisposing factor for flystrike



An accumulation of uneaten caecotrophs will attract flies

receive the calories and nutrition they require. This may need to be repeated several times a day and some rabbits are easier to syringe feed and more accepting of it than others. Your vet or vet nurse can demonstrate this to you.

- **Bedding** - you need to use bedding which will not stick to or contaminate any wounds - Vetbed is good for this, but make sure they do not attempt to

eat it. Hay must still be provided, but should be done so in a manner that the rabbit doesn't rest on it with their wounds, as often these are around their bottom area. Placing hay in a low rack, which is easily accessible, may be a better option in the short-term.

- **Preventing wound interference** - most rabbits are unlikely to interfere with their wounds if they are on sufficient

pain relief - discuss this with your vet. You do need to ensure their companion does not lick their wounds. If this is the case, the rabbits need to be kept together but separated by wire, so they can still see and smell each other, ensuring their bond does not break down. **Buster collars should never be used on rabbits** - they are likely to cause a great deal of distress, as well as stopping the rabbit grooming themselves, and can make the situation worse by stopping the rabbit eating their caecotrophs from the anus, increasing soiling of the area.

- **Medicating** - your rabbit may be on a combination of medications, including pain relief. Make sure you are aware how much to give, how and when, and do not change from this unless your vet gives you instructions to do so.

Prevent further episodes

To help prevent further episodes, it is important that you work with your vet to find the cause/s and take steps to correct them. Obesity, an incorrect diet, urinary tract disease, spinal/hip pain, dental disease, too small an environment, unsanitary conditions and an overly large dewlap are all common causes. Using preventative products, such as Rearguard or F10, may help 'at risk' rabbits from being severely affected again. Your vet will be able to discuss these with you.



Vanilla is a tripod bunny, missing his rear left leg

The RWF Sanctuary Rabbits

By The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund and Twigs Way

The RWF and RWF are not rescue centres. However, at times we have stepped in and taken in rabbits to care for.

You will have noticed that we have changed telephone numbers and now operate from a 'virtual' 0191 number. We currently do still have the warehouse at Enigma House, but we are now working remotely from Newcastle and Halifax, and as a result we had to find new foster homes for some of the sanctuary rabbits. Vanilla and Dora are now very lucky to be living at Parsleys Warren, with the fabulous Twigs Way. So Twigs is doing this issue's update.

Dora and Vanilla

Parsleys Warren is a sanctuary for elderly and special needs rabbits and we love to work with other rabbit rescues to provide life-long homes for any rabbits that might benefit from our lifelong care. We have long been fans of the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund, and have been lucky enough to attend and speak at several RWF conferences. We were therefore delighted to be able to offer a new home to Dora and Vanilla, two of the RWF rabbits, when the RWF recently had to move to other premises.

Vanilla is a tripod bunny, missing his rear left leg following an accident and amputation. Like most tripods, he gets around brilliantly, and most visitors don't even notice he has a leg missing! However, he does need special attention paid to his grooming and especially his ears, as it's hard to clean your ear with a missing leg. He has a tendency towards ear mites and has had a recent

ear infection! As he gets older he will also probably need physiotherapy to prevent the spine curvature and protruding front leg (on the opposite side to the missing hind leg), that sadly often becomes typical of a tripod bun. Here at Parsleys Warren, we have an excellent rabbit physiotherapist 'to hand', so we will be able to give him the support he needs.

Dora, his long-term partner, has come with him (of course!), and although having no special needs, does struggle a bit with ear mites, probably passed from Vanilla. She also has her third eyelids showing and although a thorough examination cannot detect any heart or lung issues (which can cause this), it will be something our vets will monitor, especially as she gets older.

Dora and Vanilla have joined our large group of eleven indoor buns and have settled in perfectly, both being extremely friendly buns. They have already starred on our Facebook page @Parsleys Warren. It is a delight to have them with us and to know that we are helping RWF by providing them with a lifelong foster home!



Dora is Vanilla's long-term partner

Make sure you don't miss out on the Summer 2021 Rabbiting On!

Make sure you get your paws on the Summer 2021

Features will include:

- **Respiratory disease** - Veterinary Surgeon Tariq Abou-Zahr explains respiratory disease in rabbits; the causes, signs and treatments, including a case study.
- **Ethics** - Dr Emma Milne looks into the practice of showing rabbits, and the ethical considerations.
- **Rabbits and children** - Rabbiting On Veterinary Adviser Guen Bradbury, examines if and how rabbits may be suitable to integrate with children.
- **How are myxomatosis and RVHD spread** - Veterinary Surgeon Sophie Jenkins separates fact from fiction about how these often fatal viruses are spread.
- **Polydipsia and polyuria** - Veterinary Surgeon, Brigitte Lord explains what PU/PD is, and the potential causes.

And much more...Don't miss out! Ensure that your subscription is up-to-date so you can receive the issue hot off the press in May 2021.

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.

• Features are subject to change without prior notice.

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RABBIT ROUNDUP

Burgess Excel Veterinary Awards

A judging panel of industry experts, veterinary professionals and rabbit specialists chose one winner from a shortlist in each of the four categories.

Winners were judged on a variety of elements, including their expert understanding of rabbits' specific needs, the specialist rabbit facilities available in the practice, the provision of educational rabbit materials and the general support for rabbit owners.

Dr Suzanne Moyes MVB MRCVS, Burgess Excel Awards judge and Veterinary Director at Burgess Pet Care said:

"On behalf of the entire judging panel and rabbit owners across the UK, we'd like to extend a massive congratulations and a huge thank you to the winners of the Excel Vet Awards, for doing everything they can to improve the wellbeing of rabbits in the UK. Equal thanks must go to all of the veterinary professionals and practices that were shortlisted too".

The winners and final shortlist for each category are as follows:

• Rabbit Vet of the Year

Winner

Dr Sophie Jenkins, Origin Vets in Cardiff, Wales

Shortlisted

Dr Nadene Stapleton, Beaumont Sainsbury Animal Hospital in Camden, London

Dr Rachel King, East Barnet Vets in East Barnet, London

Dr Rieke Hettrick, Moorview Vets in Newcastle

Dr Madonna Livingstone, Ark Veterinary Clinic in Coatbridge, Scotland.

• Rabbit Vet Nurse of the Year

Winner

Nicky Leech, Vets4Pets in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

Shortlisted

Laura Petts, Robson and Prescott Veterinary Surgeons in Morpeth, Northumberland

Kerry Warrington, Cogges Veterinary Surgery in Witney, Oxfordshire

Emma Maguire, Westfield Vets in Somerset

Olivia Coulton, Wendover Heights Veterinary Centre in Buckinghamshire.

• Rabbit Friendly Veterinary Practice of the Year

Winner

Toll Barn Veterinary Centre in North Walsham, Norfolk

Shortlisted

Beaumont Sainsbury Animal Hospital in London

Robson and Prescott Veterinary Surgeons in Morpeth, Northumberland

Abbey House Veterinary Hospital in Morley, Rothwell and Cleckheaton, West Yorkshire

Scarsdale Vets in Langley Mill, Nottingham.

• Best Rabbit Awareness Week Campaign of the Year

Winner

Abi Nell, Mill House Veterinary Practice in King's Lynn, West Norfolk

Shortlisted

Molly Fiander, Locum Veterinary Nurse.

Future announcements about next year's Burgess Excel Vet Awards, including information on how to nominate and apply, will be announced on the Burgess Pet Care website.



Renewal form in Rabbiting On

You will have noticed that we have changed from the clear plastic wrap to paper. This means we are removing the plastic from our mail-out process, which we know you will all be pleased about. It also means that we don't now need a printed 'carrier sheet' which also acted as a renewal form, so we are including a renewal form in the magazine from now on.

It is more efficient and cost effective for us if you can renew online, or by standing order, but if you prefer to send a cheque in the post you can still do that.

You can find your renewal details on the paper wrap that your magazine came in. It will show your membership number and your renewal date.

Remember that if you pay by PayPal, direct debit or standing order you can cancel your payment at any time, but we cannot do that for you.



BVNA donation

The RWF was the nominated charity for British Veterinary Nursing Association for 2020, who raised an amazing £616.

Jo Hinde, former President of the BVNA, and for the year for which the RWF benefited, said "I am very pleased that we were able to raise some funds for you, although I am sad that the amount is significantly lower than other years - but this is due to us not being able to hold any face-to-face events, due to Covid 19".

RAW partners encouraged by PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) report's latest findings

Research from the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report, has shown that 10 years of Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) has had a profound, positive impact on the lives and welfare of pet rabbits in the UK.

Now in its 10th year, the 2020 PAW Report's key findings include:

- Fewer rabbits are fed muesli as one of their main food types - down from 49% in 2011 to 18%
- Fewer rabbits are being fed less than the recommended amount of hay or grass - down from 42% in 2011 to 21%
- A significant decrease in the number of rabbits living alone - from 67% in 2011 to 42%.

Holly Ackroyd, Senior Brand Manager at Burgess Pet Care, who organise RAW, said:

"We are really encouraged by the key findings of the PDSA's latest PAW Report, which reflect the dedication of the RAW partners who, for almost 15 years, have worked hard to improve the welfare of rabbits, which are still widely recognised as being one of the UK's most misunderstood animals".

Nina Downing, PDSA Veterinary Nurse added:

"Since the first PAW Report was published 10 years ago, it's clear to see that as a collective group we have made real strides in advancing the welfare of pet rabbits in the UK. Whilst these findings are positive, we need to continue to work hard to ensure that the UK's pet rabbits receive the care they truly deserve, in line with PDSA's vision of 'a lifetime of wellbeing for every pet'".

Companionship for a rabbit means the constant visual presence of another rabbit

All photos: The Rabbit Residence Rescue

RESCUE POINT OF VIEW

Bonding in a rescue environment

By Lea Facey,
Manager for The Rabbit Residence Rescue

Scientific studies have shown that rabbits stay warmer and even recover more quickly from stressful events and illness if they have a companion of their own kind. Yet the 2020 PDSA PAW report shows that 42% of pet rabbits still live alone.

As rabbits are crepuscular, they are usually most active around dawn and dusk. Companionship for a rabbit means the constant visual presence of another rabbit, ongoing communication through body language, and mutual reward through joint exploration, play, and mutual grooming.

Communication

Rabbits are largely silent and communicate using subtle body language, very different from the main way we humans communicate with each other.

As much as we might love our rabbits and spend time interacting with them, it's simply not the same as having a companion of their own kind.

Some people are concerned that having a friend may have a negative impact on their existing rabbit's behaviour. I can honestly say that this is not the case, and that many owners see a decrease in unwanted and destructive behaviours once their rabbit has a constant companion.

If you have a single rabbit that likes human attention, they will continue to enjoy this after they have been bonded, and if you have a shy rabbit, their confidence is likely to grow if they are paired with a friend who is happy to interact with people.

Finding a friend

By far the easiest way is to contact your local rabbit rescue. A rescue will do its best to match you and your rabbit with a suitable rabbit companion.

The rabbits will already be neutered, vaccinated, vet checked and have had a behavioural assessment prior to being offered for adoption. On average, this would save an owner approximately £100.

Rabbits do not care about breed, size, colour, or age of their potential new friend





Rabbits are largely silent and communicate using subtle body language

rabbit's individual likes and dislikes and the suitability as a partner for the existing rabbit.

A good example would be matching a long-haired rabbit with potential new owners, as these rabbits have very specific requirements. You need an owner with enough free time to groom and trim them regularly and they are not best suited to enclosures with runs that don't have a solid roof, as they get very matted and dirty if they get wet. They also need to be housed on hard standing such as paving or a kennel type enclosure, with non-slip flooring, for the same reasons, so dig-proof grass enclosures do not work well for long-haired rabbits either.

I would say that probably ninety percent of potential adoptees will end up choosing the rabbit we have already identified as the best match for them.

The bonding process

Here, we will usually bond the rabbits ourselves on site, and the majority of rabbits will stay with us from five to

fourteen days. We bond in the region of one hundred single rabbits each year, and have a dedicated neutral bonding area where we can increase or decrease space and vary enrichment easily.

It is important to use a neutral area for bonding - by this we mean an area unfamiliar to both rabbits, as introducing a new rabbit into another rabbit's 'space' can cause territorial aggression.

It's important to acknowledge that you cannot force two rabbits to be friends and in some cases it is simply better to try a different rabbit in order to prevent injury, if serious aggression has been shown. If fighting occurs, this does not mean that the rabbit should live on their own permanently, it is just a signal that the particular combination is incompatible.

We have had rabbits come to us after multiple failed bonds, that we have managed to successfully bond, by trying them with several different rabbits, or by varying the technique, such as using a very large space with lots of enrichments and multi-exited hideouts.

On very rare occasions (three rabbits out of just over six hundred), we have made the decision to rehome a rabbit as a single free-range houserabbit, after multiple bonding attempts, which have later broken down resulting in severe injury to the other rabbit.

It is important to note that a bonded pair of rabbits should not be separated.

You need to ensure that you have thoroughly cleaned and disinfected the entire area and moved all of the enrichment items around to make it as neutral as possible for your newly-bonded pair.

Ideally this should happen during the morning, so you can spend the rest of the day observing from a distance as some chasing and mounting may occur at this point.

It is also important that you, as owners, do not interfere whilst the rabbits are settling back in at home; this is really hard for some owners who will be used to seeking out interaction with them, but it is better to let the rabbits choose to come to you when they want a fuss, and for you to ensure any affection or hand-fed treats are shared equally between your original rabbit and their new friend.

Reputable rescues offer lifetime back-up, so if you have any concerns they will be able to offer you advice and support.

Time and cost involved

Most rescues do not charge for bonding rabbits, but offer the service to enable their rescue rabbits to be rehomed as part of a pair. The time involved in the process should not be underestimated. We spend many hours monitoring pairs who are being bonded, looking for potential problems, as well as advising owners and offering support once the rabbits are collected. All this time costs the rescue, who may have to pay for staff to undertake the work. When you use a bonding service at a rescue, please do consider offering a donation to help cover some of their costs.

Many reputable rescues also offer a bonding service: they will introduce your existing rabbit to potential friends, in a neutral environment, and carefully monitor the interactions until they are satisfied that the rabbits have established a stable relationship, and can return home to you.

Rabbits do not care about breed, size, colour, or age of their potential new friend. One of the most common reasons we have rabbits signed over to our rescue is that same sex pairs, purchased together as babies, have subsequently fought badly when they've reached sexual maturity at a few months of age.

Age is not usually a factor to consider when bonding - if the rabbits have reached maturity, you can successfully bond a ten-year-old rabbit with a two-year-old, providing they are otherwise compatible. However, finding a companion of a similar age to an existing rabbit is something many rabbit owners look for, as they may not be willing to commit to an endless cycle of bunnies.

The most important thing to look for when picking a new friend for your existing rabbit is for the new rabbit to have a similar activity level, as this means the rabbits will ultimately spend more time in each other's company. The other is to pick a rabbit with a complimentary character to your existing rabbit. Two very confident, dominant rabbits are less likely to be a good match than a dominant rabbit and a calm, submissive rabbit.

Again, a rescue will be able to advise you on this. They will also be able to offer advice on whether a rabbit will be a good fit for your current lifestyle and how your existing rabbit lives.

A match made in heaven

Matching rabbits with the correct home is something that we take very seriously, as in doing so we give the rabbit the best chance of a forever home and the family rabbits they will enjoy spending time with. We do insist that the whole family comes to meet the potential friends if possible, as rabbits react differently to different people, and experience has shown me that the rabbits pick their new home as well as the humans involved in making the decision.

A lot more work goes into matching rabbits with their forever home than you might expect. We look at many other criteria, such as if they are suitable to live indoors or outdoors and what type of environment might suit them best, if they would cope in a busy household, with children or where there are other animals. We also consider each

THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS OF THE BHRA/RWAF



Carol has remained a member from the beginning

When the BHRA formed in 1996, membership numbers expanded over the coming months and years. However, to begin with a couple of hundred members were the stalwart of the BHRA, and now 25 years later, 25 of these members are still members!

Here we introduce three of them.

Helen Flack

I didn't really 'join' the BHRA all those years ago as it didn't exist then, but I helped to bring it to birth. It started when I met Linda Dykes. She'd been in America and had experience of the House Rabbit Society there, and I was glad to hear all about them. I had a houserabbit called Bugsie back then, who had ended up living indoors because I didn't have the heart to put her outside in the flimsy little hutch that came with her in the depth of winter. I learned from experience the wonderful character of a rabbit. I was completely enchanted by Bugs and her binkying around the room, the way she followed me from room to room, nibbled my hair and groomed my face when I was trying to sleep! It was the beginning of a love affair with bunnies that has continued to this day, and a passionate determination to see all rabbits better treated.

Carol Boxall

Was there ever a time when I was not mad about rabbits? I don't think so. My passion began at 9 years old with a rabbit called Thumper and it is still going strong at 66 years old!!! I have six rabbits now - two adopted from a rabbit rescue and four rescued - who free range in the house with me. I was so excited when I came across the BHRA 25 years ago - here were people who really cared and understood rabbits; I was not alone! Before then I had felt a bit of an oddity being a grown-up who had not outgrown rabbits. The BHRA/RWAF gave rabbits a whole new persona... they were not just children's pets but unique sentient individuals with complex needs. A rabbit is never 'just a rabbit' - not any more. Thank you RWF and many congratulations for all you have achieved as our top ambassador for rabbits.

Petajane Charman

Congratulations to the RWF and Rabbiting On; our little newsletter rose to a fully-fledged magazine, which helped to raise the membership of the BHRA/RWAF.

Its purpose in the very early days was to inform the growing number of people keen to learn more about keeping houserabbits.

Our main aim was to encourage those who had rabbits as pets, that it was quite easy to train them to be part of their everyday lives, rather than leaving them in hutches at the end of the garden.

Having been a journalist and editor of a business magazine in New Zealand and newspapers in Australia and the UK, I felt it would be great to create a



Clarissa is one of Helen's rabbits

proper magazine for the association.

It was by meeting Helen Flack, that she told me about a small but inspired group of people who were keen to get the ideals of houserabbits out to as many rabbit owners as possible.

I was very interested and decided to be part of the group, which was gathering momentum with surprising speed.

Because of this growth, I discussed with Helen the idea of creating a magazine with the aim of spreading the word, and thus was the beginning!

We worked hard, gathering articles from all facets of rabbit care, and the enthusiasm of rabbit owners was infectious!

Rabbiting On caught the attention of the media and we were invited to television and radio interviews, plus a special appearance at Harrods! As with all good things, the association and the magazine grew to cover ever increasing numbers of members, not only in the UK, but internationally.

So from a little newsletter to a glossy magazine, Rabbiting On has come a long, successful way.

I am very proud to have been part of the journey.



Petajane was the first editor of Rabbiting On

RWAF FOCUS - WHO IS WHO AT THE RWAF Reena and Nitesh Vora

RWAF website design and support

Neither Reena nor Nitesh had pets as children. One of Reena's conditions for getting married was that the couple would get a pet. The year after they married, Marley the rabbit joined the family. Unfortunately, Marley died due to natural causes after just a few short weeks, something obviously devastating to any rabbit owner.

MJ arrived a few months later, and soon taught them the advice they had received from acquaintances and pet shops was wrong. MJ was fortunate enough to have his own room in the house but was limited to his hutch overnight and hated it. Realising he wasn't happy, they allowed him to roam free 24/7.

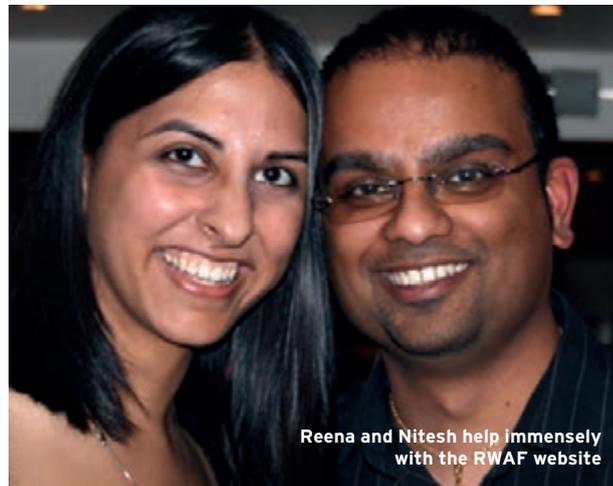
Both Marley and MJ came from an acquaintance's pet shop. After learning the importance of the 'adopt don't shop' message on welfare sites, Kushi was adopted from the Fat Fluffs rescue so MJ could have a partner. Kushi was with MJ for 4 months before passing away due to a digestive issue. Lotty was adopted soon after from The Rabbit Residence and remains happily bonded with MJ.

Surprised by how much incorrect information they had been given, Reena searched for good sources of advice for their bunnies and stumbled across the RWAF website. Reena began volunteering with the RWAF in 2013, hoping to ensure new (and old) bunny owners didn't make the same mistakes that they did.

As a Digital Project Manager at the time, the RWAF team realised Reena could help get their new website up and running; providing guidance on writing for the web and how to organise the content, as well as practical help creating the pages and editing images.

Nitesh also volunteered to help. As a Website Developer, he provides technical expertise as well as designing the look and feel.

Together they have supported two major updates to the RWAF website. The website has been updated to engage users and make information easy to find, and also to empower the RWAF to be as self-sufficient as possible in making their own updates.



Reena and Nitesh help immensely with the RWAF website

Today Reena is Head of Product for an agency creating internal websites and Nitesh runs his own freelance web development company (Voras.co.uk).

RWAF note

Reena and Nitesh are web experts by trade, and they have given up a huge amount of their valuable time and expertise to ensure that the RWAF website is fit for the purpose of getting our vital messages across. We dare not add up the many hours they have dedicated to overhauling and relaunching the website, including all the ongoing support and trouble shooting. It's worth pointing out that they haven't just done this once, they've done it twice!

Reena and Nitesh retained their sense of humour throughout this lengthy process and showed incredible patience and dedication all the way through. They have saved the RWAF a substantial amount of money by providing their expert services as volunteers.

We are hugely grateful personally, and know that rabbits everywhere have benefitted from their tremendous hard work and generosity.



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RABBIT ACCOMMODATION THEN AND NOW A Hutch is Not Enough!

Rabbit housing has come a long way in 25 years. The days of putting a single rabbit in a wooden hutch at the bottom of the garden, is thankfully no longer considered acceptable, and many companies now have large, secure and enriching accommodation available to purchase.

As well as this, lots of our members have created their own five-star rabbit homes - whether the rabbits live indoors or outdoors. Here we feature a few of these, which may give other members ideas to enrich their rabbits' accommodation.

The RWAf recommends a minimum enclosure size of 3m x 2m x 1m high for a pair of average-sized rabbits, regardless of whether they live indoors or outside, accessible to the rabbits 24 hours a day, and that is enriched with areas to dig, sleep, forage, play, hide, run and jump.

The only limit is your imagination...

Photo: RWAf



Keeping rabbits alone in small hutches was common 25 years ago

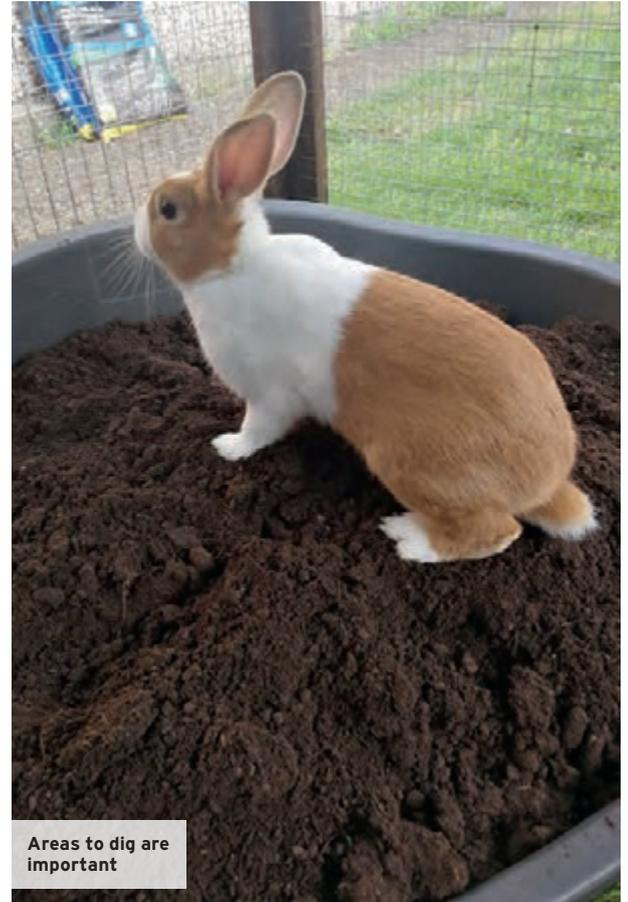


Photo: A Rippon

Areas to dig are important

GOOD HOUSING...

Photo: D Reynolds



Spacious and enriching accommodation

Photo: C Speight



Aviary linked to outdoor area



Photo: Z Swindle

Adding shelves and areas to explore, adds to the enrichment

Photo: T Rose



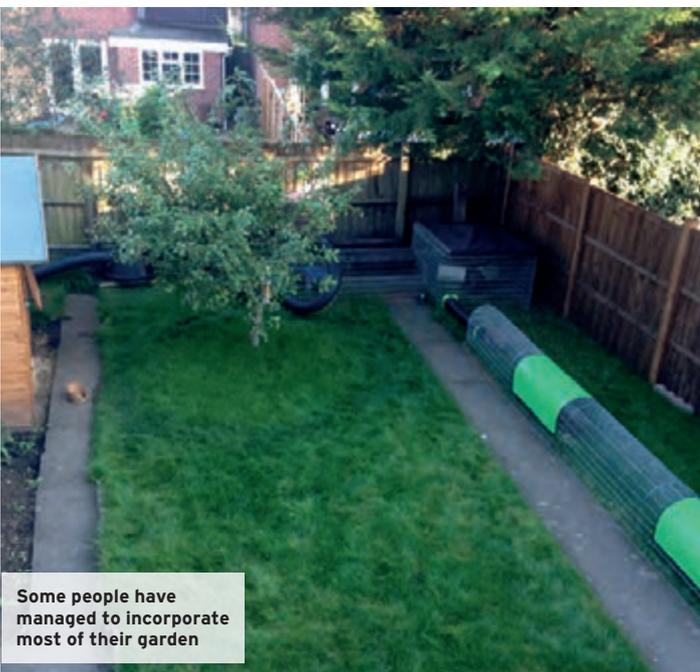
A Runaround system can be used

Photo: S Dark



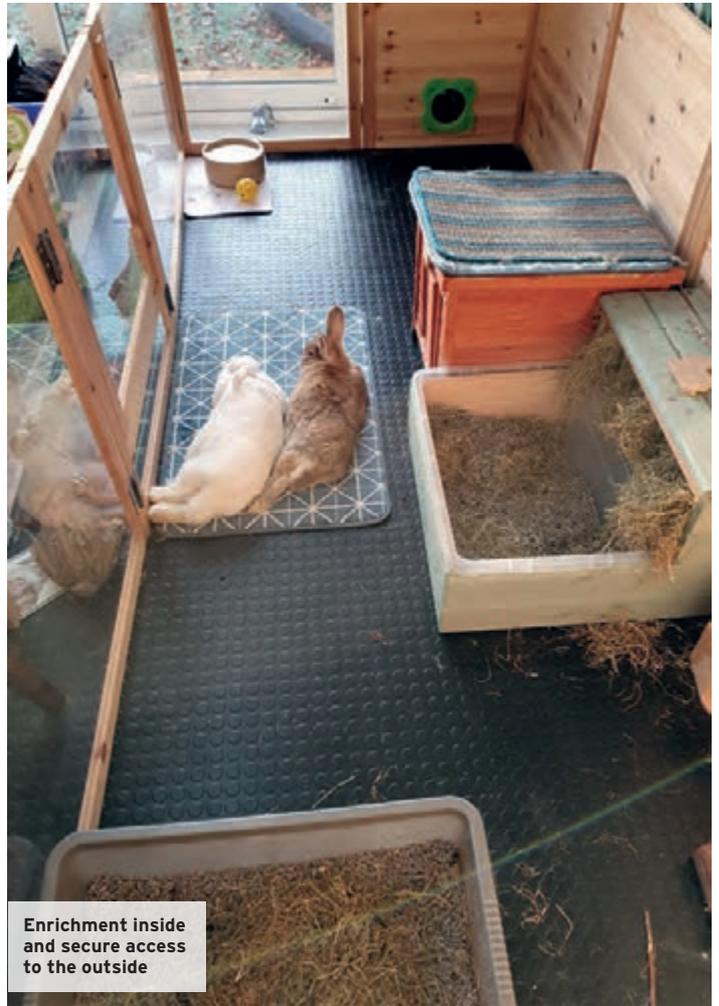
A large and enriching run, connected to an indoor area via a Runaround connector

Photo: B Darnell



Some people have managed to incorporate most of their garden

Photo: F Firth



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Health



Richard Saunders

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

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



Guen Bradbury

MA, VetMB, MRCVS

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

Behaviour



Carol Valvona

MSc (CABC)

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

Houserabbit Advice



Leo Staggs

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

Welfare



Georgia McCormick

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



Mark Dron

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

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

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

ASK THE EXPERTS



Q I am not sure what to do or whom to contact, or if there is anyone that can help at all!

I am aware of, but not involved with, a 'rescue' that is not all it seems. They rescue many different species, including rabbits. I don't know much about the re-homing or care of the other animals, but I know all of them, including the rabbits, are kept in awful condition. The rabbits are kept alone (unless being bred from), housed in 3ft hutches with no access to a run, fed muesli food, have no stimulation and many have runny eyes, dirty bottoms and mites. When they are rehomed, they are not vaccinated or neutered, although the rescue also charges a fee for the adoption. They also breed rabbits (sometimes from the rescue rabbits) to sell.

Is there an organisation or authority that can look into this? Their care is below standard, they are promoted as a rescue, but breeding and setting a poor example to the public or anyone adopting a rabbit from them.

A If you believe someone is running a business breeding rabbits, then you could try contacting their local council to see whether they are licensed to operate as a pet shop - you can identify the

If you have concerns about the care offered by any rescue or breeder then there are avenues to report them

local council for an address via the GOV.UK web site, the link for which is: <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

When you find the local authority, you need to make contact either with licensing or environmental health, and tell them your enquiry is about animal welfare matters.

You may find that the council declines to speak with you about the matter, or advises you that rabbit breeders do not require a licence. If that is the case then you may not have any further recourse legally, unless you suspect that the animals are suffering or that their welfare is not being catered for.

As regards the rescue aspect, there is no requirement in England for an animal rescue organisation to be registered under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, but there is a requirement for person(s) responsible for animals to cater for five specific aspects of their welfare (also known as the Five Welfare Needs), these are:

- 1 Freedom from hunger and thirst**
- 2 Freedom from discomfort**
- 3 Freedom from pain, injury or diseases**
- 4 Freedom to express normal behaviour**
- 5 Freedom from fear and distress.**

If you have a genuine belief that the breeder/rescue is neglecting their animals and is not catering for any of the aspects above, then you should complain to the RSPCA, who can receive complaints of animal neglect and/or cruelty via **0300 1234 999**.

Whilst the RWF has no legal powers and we have no recourse to a nationwide inspectorate to enforce legislation, we are always keen to do what we can to ensure that animal welfare legislation is adhered to, and that rabbits are kept safe, so if you do identify a home-breeding operation or a rogue "rescue" group then please also let us know. Our Animal Welfare Officer may be able to identify offences or activities that may well allow the case to be escalated to agencies that can deal with the matter.

Additionally, we maintain an intelligence capacity that concentrates on establishing the scale of these problems in areas around the UK, so any information you can provide helps us with this invaluable work.

Mark Dron



Confused about *E. cuniculi* blood testing

Q My rabbit has a head tilt and my vet suspects that *E. cuniculi* is the cause. Can you tell me how reliable the current *E. cuniculi* blood test is and what it is looking for? Is it worth doing, or would it be better to rule out another cause, such as an inner ear problem or treat without a firm diagnosis? I am not sure what the best course of action is.

A Good question. To answer it, I'm going to explain what causes a head tilt, how you can treat the different causes of a head tilt, how you can diagnose the cause, and how you can decide on the right course of action.

• What causes head tilt?

There are a couple of different diseases that cause head tilt in rabbits. The commonest of these is encephalitozoonosis, which is caused by a microscopic brain and kidney parasite called *Encephalitozoon cuniculi*. Other causes of head tilt include a middle, or inner-ear disorder (as you mention), or a brain abscess or tumour.

• How can you treat the different diseases?

These different diseases would be treated in different ways. Encephalitozoonosis is treated with a 28-day course of oral fenbendazole to slow or halt the growth of the parasite, often together with a drug to reduce brain inflammation. The effects of this treatment can vary. If it is effective, you can usually see some improvement in the head tilt in the first week or so, and then gradual improvements during the month of treatment. Some rabbits can come off the drug without worsening, some require treatment sporadically to control the head tilt, and some rabbits require lifelong treatment. Sometimes, the treatment isn't effective and if the rabbit's quality of life is poor, then euthanasia is the only option.

Middle, and inner-ear infections cause a build-up of pus in the inner parts of the ear. A sample of the pus is taken to find what bacteria are causing the infection, and then a suitable antibiotic is given, along with pain relief and supportive care. Sometimes, surgery is done to try to drain the ear, but rabbit pus doesn't drain well. Because of the location of the infection, it can be very hard to treat, although some rabbits do recover. Brain abscesses and tumours are very hard to treat because we don't know which drugs work effectively, it's hard to get the drugs to the right place, and we can't do surgery to remove the abscess or tumour.

• How can you work out what the cause is?

The best way of diagnosing an ear infection, abscess, or tumour is an MRI scan. However, these require a general anaesthetic, which is not without risk, and they are expensive. Middle, or inner-ear infections can sometimes be diagnosed on a radiograph, which is cheaper, (although still requires sedation or anaesthesia), but can't diagnose abscesses or tumours.

Encephalitozoonosis is hard to diagnose because more than 50% of rabbits are infected with the parasite but relatively few show signs because of it. There is no single test that can diagnose the parasite without risks. These are the tests that are currently used:

1 ELISA test for serum antibodies - there are two antibodies that can be measured and give information on the disease - IgM and IgG. Testing for both gives you more information. IgM is more indicative of a current, active infection. IgG indicates long-term exposure, with levels continuing to rise steadily from 30 days post infection until they peak at 70 days post infection. If the rabbit tests negative for IgG, then *E. cuniculi* can definitely be ruled out. However, if your rabbit has a positive result for *E. cuniculi*, it doesn't tell you whether or not the parasite is causing the signs. If your rabbit

has a high antibody titre, together with clinical signs, most vets will start treatment for *E. cuniculi*. However, a moderate or low antibody titre is less useful. In this case, the vet will probably take another blood sample a couple of weeks later to see if the antibody level is rising, (in which case the rabbit is actively mounting an immune response against the parasite).

2 PCR test for parasite spores in the urine - urine samples are collected for three days and sent to the laboratory. A positive result means that the rabbit is infected and shedding the parasite (it will shed more in the first three months after an infection), but a negative result may mean either that the rabbit is not infected, or that it is infected but just not shedding spores at that time.

3 Kidney tissue biopsy - this is the most accurate way of diagnosing the parasite but also is the riskiest and most expensive as it requires a general anaesthetic and surgery.

• What's the right thing to do?

So clearly, the different diseases can be diagnosed in different ways and should be treated in different ways. So how do you know whether it's worth doing more investigations or whether you should just try a treatment?

There are two factors that might influence your decision - how much the rabbit is suffering and how much money you are able to spend.

If the head tilt is mild and the rabbit's behaviour seems normal, then you can decide to request tests (even if those take several weeks for results), or treat for encephalitozoonosis to see if the rabbit responds. Fenbendazole is very unlikely to cause side effects. If the rabbit responds - that's good. If it doesn't respond, you don't know whether that is because the encephalitozoonosis is not responding to treatment, or if there is another cause of the head tilt. At that point, you could consider an MRI scan to look for other causes, if you thought it was justified.

If the head tilt is severe, the rabbit may be unable to balance while standing, moving, or grooming itself. This will severely affect its welfare because it won't be able to perform the behaviours it enjoys and it won't be able to escape from perceived danger. In severe cases, you should try to find out as quickly as possible what is causing the disease so you know whether or not you are likely to get improvement. If you can afford an MRI scan, then this will rule out the other major differentials so you can be fairly sure that encephalitozoonosis is the cause. If you can't afford an MRI scan, then you could try treating for a week with fenbendazole to see if you see substantial improvements - but if you don't, then you should consider euthanasia to end the rabbit's suffering. The treatments for the other major causes of head tilt are also very expensive and have limited chances of success.

Guen Bradbury

How do I start building a suitable enclosure outside?

All photos: RWF



Q I want to make my rabbits an outside enclosure that has lots of enrichment, meets welfare standards and encourages the rabbits to live a natural life, but do not know where to start. What size and design of enclosed area is best, how do I attach it to the outside area, how do I predator proof it and what enrichment should I include?

A When deciding to construct an outdoor enclosure, it's important to remember that there is a minimum recommended area of 3m x 2m x 1m high. These dimensions apply only to the ground space - additional storeys do not count! The enclosure must be secure and give rabbits the opportunity to express their natural behaviours 24 hours a day - running, digging, foraging, and hiding, as well as stretching to full length in all directions.

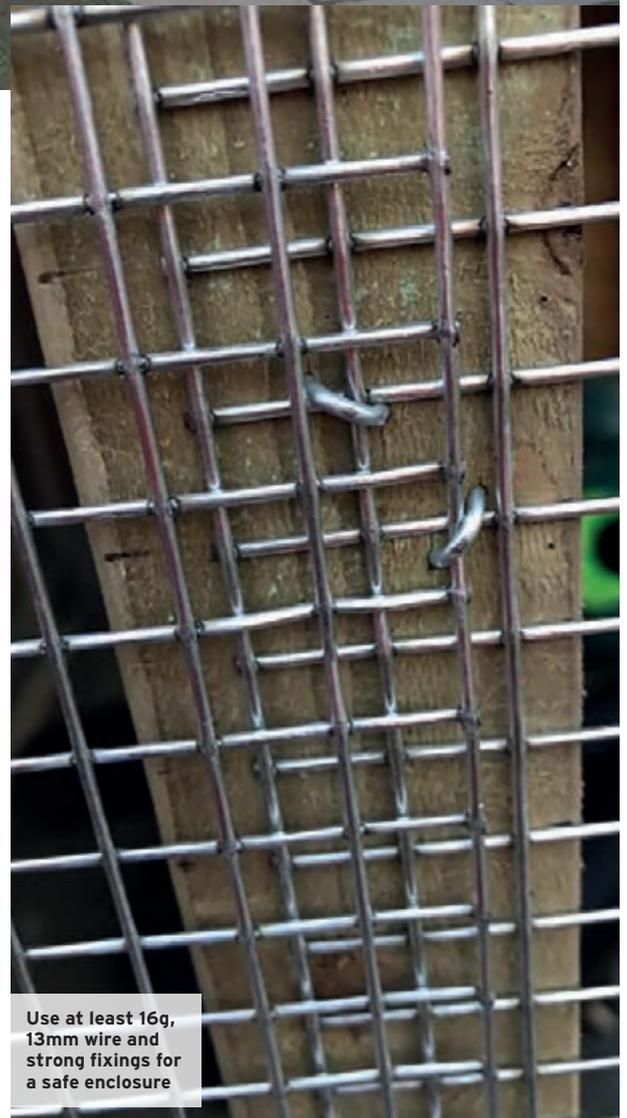
To make the enclosure secure, there are several factors that need to be considered. Don't use chicken wire, as it is too flimsy and easily bitten through. Instead, use a welded wire mesh, at least 16g, with holes no larger than 13mm which will prevent small predators entering the enclosure, and prevent your rabbits' limbs becoming trapped. If it is constructed on grass, the bottom edge of the mesh should either be buried at least 15cm into the earth, or folded under and held down with paving slabs to stop your rabbits burrowing under. Any doors should be bolted and have a padlock.

Shelter and a place to sleep are also required, and the bigger the better! A garden shed would be ideal if you have the space. This should be positioned out of direct sunlight, and be covered to keep your rabbits dry. Ensure there are several entrances/exits so that they can reach safety as quickly as possible. It's likely the shelter will be made of wood, so check that whatever is coating it is non-toxic to animals.

Enrichment is what rabbits need to be able to behave like rabbits. They will require an area to dig (especially important if your enclosure is not on grass), places to hide, and tunnels or tubes to play in. Don't forget plenty of fresh dry hay, foraging opportunities and clean water.

This is only a brief summary of what you could do for your rabbits. For more in depth information, take a look at the RWF's article on outdoor housing: <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-housing/outdoor-rabbit-housing/>

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.

READERS' LETTERS



Blackberry is an elderly gentleman

Two elderly gentlemen

Blackberry is a black and white Dutch rabbit, and is 12 years old. He has some arthritis in his back legs, but can still manage the 3 steps that lead onto the grass, which he loves eating. He had a companion called Walnut, she was a brown and white Dutch rabbit, and sadly died when they were both 7. Is he one of the oldest rabbits?

One of my other rabbits, Ash is 10 years old. Ash's companion, Willow, a brown and white lop eared doe sadly died last year aged 9.

I am so happy to have two old rabbits.

Joanne Hickman

Editor's note:

Does anyone else have elderly rabbits, even those maybe in their teens?

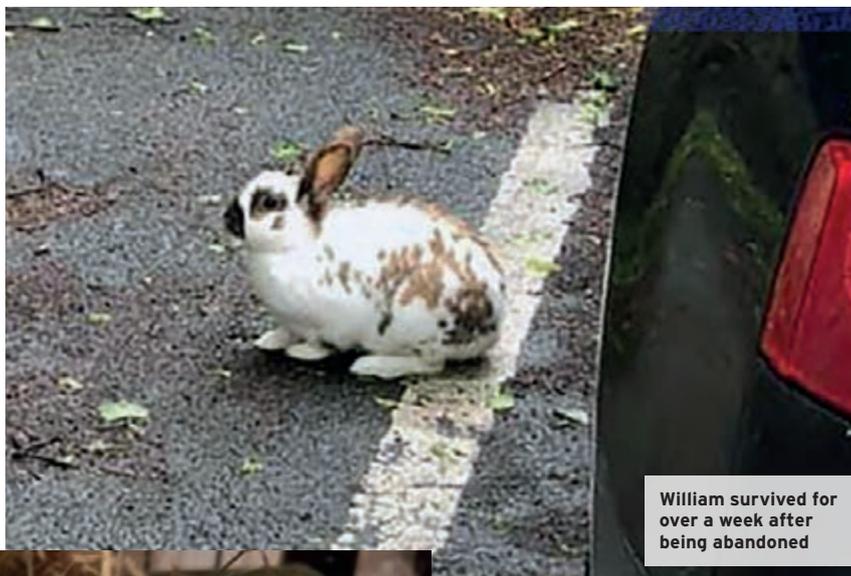
William the warrior

I wanted to share William's story with you. He was a rabbit who was dumped in Warkworth, Northumberland in the torrential rain. He had been fighting to survive for over a week. Someone had posted about him on a Northumberland lost and found site. I dropped everything and went to rescue him. He has survived hypothermia and is now living with megacolon disease. He also survived losing his mate who was unfortunately killed in Warkworth. I call him my little warrior.

Due to him I am super passionate about rabbits and their welfare.

I just had to share this little miracle with you because it is a story which has a happy ending and I think we all need some positivity at the moment.

Rachael Louise Brown



William survived for over a week after being abandoned



...and now lives a wonderful life

Handy hay forage tip

Just wanted to say I have received the winter 'Rabbiting On', and the hay rack vs ground foraging feeding was interesting.

This may be a useful tip for houserabbit people: for some time now I have been opening up paper garden sacks and spreading them on the floor. I spread hay and forage on them. The sack/hay works very well as it easy to remove the hay (daily), sling it in the garden waste, and about once a week I refresh the sack.

Victoria Priestley

CREATING A RABBIT-FRIENDLY PATCH

By Belinda Francis of Galen's Garden

Marshmallow is a very safe and useful plant which likes damp but sunny areas

Photo: Depositphotos



Whether you are creating an entirely rabbit-safe garden, or just a patch where your rabbits can freely exercise and graze, the main concern is safety. Being outside is really good for rabbits, and the welfare benefits to rabbits of being outside vastly outweigh the risks. Fox-proofing is the first priority, and it takes a bit of work to make the garden fox-proof, but it is worth it. This, and removing unwanted plants and preventing them from growing back, is key to being able to relax with your rabbits in the finished rabbit garden.

Preparation

As soon as the ground starts to warm up, the seeds that have been dormant in the ground since they were shed the previous autumn, start springing to life. It is also the perfect time to get sowing fresh seed or growing on plug plants.

If you are planning a rabbit-friendly area of the garden, now is the time to prepare the soil. As unwanted plants emerge from seed in the spring and summer months, they are easier to remove while still young and fragile.

This is also a good time to pot on any self-seeded young plants you find, which you do want to propagate. It also allows you time to be able to positively identify any plants you are not sure about before re-introducing them to your rabbit patch.

Remove, fence-off or replace?

Along the boundary with neighbouring gardens, you will need to protect your

rabbit patch from harmful plants bordering or overhanging your own garden that could drop seeds, leaves or berries

Meadowsweet, like willow, contains salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin

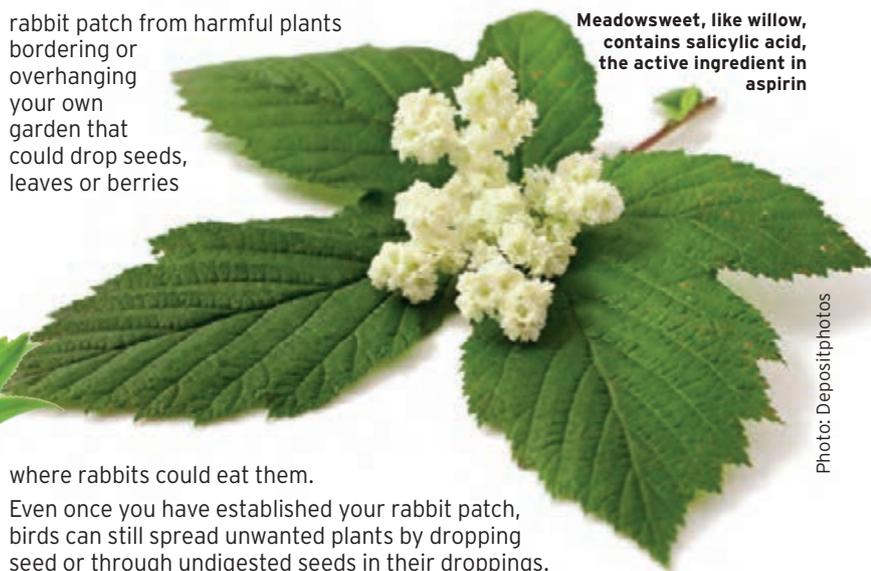


Photo: Depositphotos

where rabbits could eat them.

Even once you have established your rabbit patch, birds can still spread unwanted plants by dropping seed or through undigested seeds in their droppings.

Unwanted plants which spread underground can be traced back via their roots. You may need to create a physical barrier below soil level to prevent further encroachment on your bunny-friendly patch. This includes relatively safe plants such as mint, which can quickly mount a takeover bid.

The acidity of the soil may influence how you garden with rabbits in mind. Many of the plants on the 'Toxic Lists', including azaleas, some conifers, holly, hydrangea and rhododendron, grow best in acid soil. You could fence these off, or you could replace them with hibiscus, magnolia, willow or acid-loving varieties of blueberry and raspberry.

Swap unwanted plants

"A weed is just the right plant growing in the wrong place". Many plants which are not safe in a garden where rabbits roam free would be welcomed by other gardeners. Let them have your larkspur, lobelia and love-in-a-mist. If you can swap them for rabbit-safe 'weeds' then so much the better. If you've potted unidentified seedlings and they turn out to be unsuitable for the rabbit patch, they can at least have a good home elsewhere.

Plants grown from a bulb can grow just as well in pots, so dig them up and give them to a rabbit-free home.



Photo: Yay Images

Willow helps reduce the risk of flooding and soil erosion as the roots form a dense mat

Dark and damp

The majority of plants which grow in damp, dark areas are unsuitable for rabbits. If you cannot bring light to the area, then it is probably best to fence it off. Damp areas with good light can be used to plant willow and meadowsweet.

Willow helps reduce the risk of flooding and soil erosion as the roots form a dense mat. Both meadowsweet and willow contain salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin. Although safe to feed rabbits, you should talk to your vet about feeding them if your rabbit is on any pain relief medication, as this may have an effect on it.

Marshmallow is a very safe and useful plant, which likes damp but sunny areas. All parts of the plant are enjoyed by rabbits. It can grow quite tall, which makes it useful as part of a screen, along with willow.

Living willow can also be woven to create a living fence or living willow sculptures, which add interest to the garden.

Wild flower meadow

The wild flower meadow seeds sold commercially may contain plants that you would not want to feed to your rabbits. Making up your own meadow mix is simply a matter of combining non-competing grasses, such as timothy, with a mix of rabbit-safe seeds. Once the area is cleared of unwanted plants, rake over the surface of the soil, scatter the seed and cover with a loose mulch of timothy hay, meadow hay or straw.

When it comes to flowers for your wild flower meadow, you have plenty of choice: calendula, cornflowers, dandelion, goat's rue, mallow, plantain, sainfoin and yarrow, for example.

Low maintenance once established, a wild flower meadow

Yarrow can form part of a beautiful wild flower meadow



Photo: Yay Images

patch not only looks beautiful but it is excellent in terms of rabbit nutrition, bee-friendly, and if it grows too tall you can simply cut it and dry it as hay.

Tips and tricks

If you feel it is too late to grow from seed, there are a number of wild flower nurseries which sell plants in all sizes, from small plugs to large pots. A quick search for the name of the plant plus "plug plants" will help you to identify them.

If seeds are best sown in the autumn, you may find that you can get them to germinate even in spring or summer by putting them between a few sheets of damp kitchen roll in a container in the fridge for a couple of weeks prior to sowing. Keep the paper moist once they are out of the fridge, but only lightly covered to allow air flow, and hopefully you will see them germinate, you can then plant them.

ADVICE NOTES

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.



galens garden

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For your chance to **WIN one of our Small Mammal Kits** simply email your name, address and RWAf membership number to: **WIN FREE PRODUCTS rocompetitions@rabbitwelfare.co.uk** The first 10 names drawn at random after the closing date of the 31st March 2021 will be sent their prizes.

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When **bonding** - spray a little on a damp cloth or on your fingers, or use calming wipe, then gently rub around muzzle and front of chest of rabbits.

This helps with scent swapping as well as calming and this dual action will help speed up the bonding process.



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Available from RWAf, your local vet or Pets at Home and other pet shops' or online at www.petremedy.co.uk

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**

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 **info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk**, or the helpline on **0191 933 9000**, and we'll do what we can to help.

Photo: R Wells

Binky and Flame,
Cover Star winners



2020 COVER STAR COMPETITION RESULTS

Thank you to everyone who entered our 2020 Cover Star competition, which has helped to raise vital funds for the continuing work of the RWF.

Prizes were awarded from first to third place and our judges had an extremely difficult task selecting the winners from such an amazing assortment of photos. Our thanks go to Burgess Pet Care for their sponsorship of the competition and donation of prizes.

Our overall Cover Star crown for 2020 goes to Binky and Flame, two adorable bunnies sent in by Robin Wells. Their winning photo features on our cover, which is also our 25-year anniversary issue! Many congratulations to them.

OUR WINNERS

First place was awarded to Binky and Flame sent in by Robin Wells. They will receive: 2 x 2kg nuggets (winner's choice of Junior & Dwarf, Light, Mature, Adult Mint or Adult Oregano), 1 x 1kg hay and 2 packs of snack treats.

Second place goes to Dusty and George entered by Rebecca Fielding. Their prizes are: 1 x 2kg nuggets (winner's choice of Junior & Dwarf, Light, Mature, Adult Mint or Adult Oregano), 1 x 1kg hay and 2 packs of snack treats.

Third place goes to Harry and Daisy entered by Hannah Fiskel. They will receive: 1 x 1kg hay and 2 packs of snack treats.

Prizes will be posted out directly from Burgess. If you have won a prize and have not received an email contacting you for your postal details, please email Claire@rabbitwelfare.co.uk. Please allow up to one month to receive your prizes.

Due to availability, prizes may be substituted without prior notice.

Photo: R Fielding



Dusty and George
awarded 2nd place

Photo: H Fiskel



Harry and Daisy
were placed 3rd

Your photos may still appear in *Rabbiting On* or on our literature

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

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.



Woody and Freddie

CAROLINE FARNHAM



Roo

CHLOE PROSSER



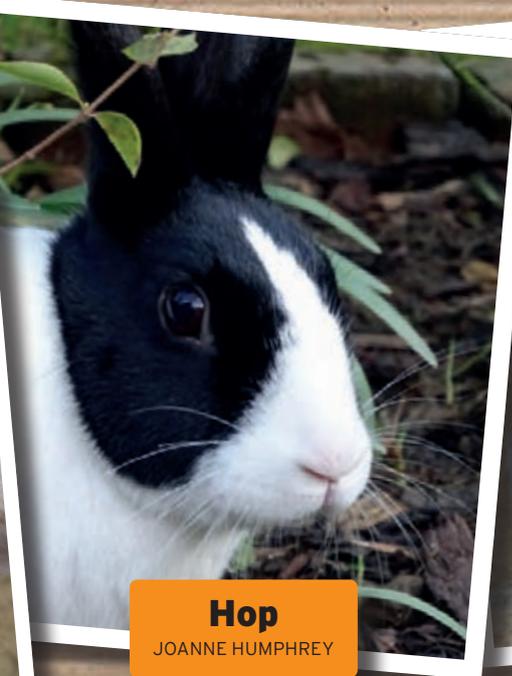
Fudge and Spud

LAURA AND SUMMER HOBBS



TJ and Hopster

KADEN TYRRELL



Hop
JOANNE HUMPHREY



Harry
REBECCA ANTHONY



Ronnie and Reggie
TAYLA ANNETS



Bobby and Moosa
EMMA MOROM



Gráinne and Orla
SARAH-JANE EGAN



Mabel and Rosie
HOLLY LONGDEN

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

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 or the helpline on 0191 933 9000, 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: 0191 933 9000**, 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 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:
info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk

RWAF departments

BOARDING YOUR RABBIT

If you are looking for someone to board your rabbit while you are away from home, or offer this service yourself, please call the RWF telephone helpline 0191 933 9000 or [email info@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:info@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 in the 'Books and Leaflets' category. Alternatively, call our helpline 0191 933 9000 or email info@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. 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.

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(Photos can be e-mailed to rwafphotos@gmail.com. Please do not e-mail photos to the Editorial e-mail address.)

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

Cut out or photocopy the form below and send it to: **RWAF, Enigma House, Culmhead Business Park, Taunton, Somerset TA3 7DY** or for instant membership simply phone the RWF Helpline: 0191 933 9000. Or you can join or renew online at shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk in the 'Memberships' category.

As a member of the RWF you will receive 4 copies of Rabbiting On each year along with the RWF Members Handbook, On The Hop (a complete guide to rabbit care), an RWF car sticker, and a 'Home Alone' card. You will also have access to the RWF's team of expert advisers.

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Signed: Date:

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Overseas Europe £40.00 Overseas International £44.00

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