

SAN DIEGO RABBIT NEWS

SPRING 2002

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RABBIT DENTAL DISEASE:

Open WIDE

Dental disease in the pet rabbit remains one of the most common problems seen by veterinarians. In recent years we have come to a better understanding of causes, prevention and treatment of these diseases.

Anatomy of rabbit teeth

Rabbits are herbivores that are designed to eat a diet comprised of a wide variety of vegetation from succulent to tough, dry material. All of the rabbit's teeth grow continuously throughout its life to compensate for the pronounced wear created by long periods of chewing on abrasive foods. Rabbits have a total of 6 incisors (the teeth you see in the front), 2 sets upper and one set lower, and no canine teeth. The cheek teeth consist of 3 upper premolars and 3 upper molars and 2 lower premolars and 3 lower molars on each side. The teeth are worn down at a rate of approximately 3mm per week.

The normal structure of the jaw AT REST allows the incisors to touch, but not the cheek teeth. A rabbit can use its incisors to cut food material without interference from the cheek teeth. Food is taken into the mouth with the prehensile ("grasping") lips and incisors and then moved via the tongue to the cheek teeth. When ready to chew, the

rabbit changes the position of the jaw and brings the cheek teeth into contact. At this time the incisors are no longer in contact allowing the rabbit to chew without interference.

Rabbits chew their food with a wide side to side movement. A normal shape to the jaw is very important to the normal wearing of the teeth. **It is**

important to note that dental disease can start in either the cheek teeth or incisors, but over time will ultimately involve both sets of teeth. The lesson here is that we must always be concerned with the health of ALL the teeth, even when we initially see disease in only a few.

The top part of the tooth that is visible to us is called the *crown* and the bottom is called the *root*. The root is only visible with the aid of a X-ray. Improper wear of a rabbit's tooth can lead to overgrowth or crooked growth of either the crown or the root. Overgrown crowns are generally easy to see, but overgrown roots can be overlooked. Severely overgrown roots in the lower jaw can cause a lump to form along the bottom edge of the jawbone. Overgrown roots in the upper jaw can block the drainage of tears through the tear duct and cause lumps behind the eyes.



Bad teeth

(continued on page 6)

*You're invited
to our*
**OPEN
HOUSE**

Join us for our annual Open House, Saturday, April 20 from 12 noon to 4 p.m. Food, fun and frolicking bunnies! Stop by our storefront at 4750 Cass Street, just 4 blocks north of Garnet Avenue in Pacific Beach. Visit with HRS volunteers and foster rabbits, pick up supplies for your rabbit such as hay, pellets or perhaps even a new cage. Join in the fun of our raffle and munch on some yummy treats. All proceeds benefit the homeless rabbits in San Diego County. Please join us!

Adoption Updates

Have you adopted from SD HRS? If so, we'd love to hear from you. Send us a note or photo of your happy house bun to be included in the SD Rabbit News. Hearing from you and knowing our ex-foster buns are doing well, makes our day!

People Who Make a Difference

If you've ever wondered how one person can make a difference, take a look at all the rabbits who are in new homes, safe and happy tonight, because HRS volunteers took the time to socialize them at the shelter or give them an extra carrot slice before tucking them in for the night in foster care. Hundreds of rabbits are alive and well because of the dedication of the San Diego House Rabbit Society volunteers.

Our volunteers are people from all walks of life. Among us are a court reporter, two nurses, a geologist, a few computer geeks, a photographer, a couple of office managers, a pet sitter and several homemakers, to mention just a few, but they all have at least two things in common: a love for rabbits and a desire to help those less fortunate. These "ordinary people" have made a difference in the lives of many rabbits and I am very proud of our compassionate and caring volunteers.

In order to do the work we do, we rely on the cooperation of local veterinarians, animal shelters and humane societies and you, our supporters.

We are fortunate to have a great working relationship with nearly every shelter in San Diego. These shelters allow us to help them care for their rabbits. HRS volunteers bring the shelter rabbits hay and veggies, socialize them and take them into foster care as needed or transfer them to other shelters to facilitate their adoptions. Often, we spay or neuter the shelter rabbits, too, and last year, partly because you bought hay from us and made that generous donation at our Open House, we were able to fix more than 250 rabbits both in HRS foster care and from our local shelters.

We also provide the shelters with educational materials, supplies and cages, if needed, and do the follow-up calls on many of their adoptions. We promote their rabbits and refer people to the shelters almost daily making

their adoption rates better than ever.

The Rancho Coastal Humane Society deserves a special mention here, because it not only held an HRS education day for its staff, but also opened up space for more than 30 rabbits to come into its facility last year from other shelters. These were all wonderful rabbits who were simply not getting adopted where they were. HRS volunteers made sure these rabbits were fixed and then made the transfers for the shelters.

Of the many vets we work with, several distribute hay for us. Not only does this hay exchange get affordable, good quality mixed hay out to rabbits, its an important fund-raising tool for HRS. Thank you to Acacia Animal Hospital, Amazon Pet, Carlsbad Animal Hospital, Cabrillo Vet, Rancho San Diego Animal Hospital and Avian and Exotic Animal Hospital, where they sell hundreds of boxes of hay each month! Thank you all for your help and expertise!

And of course all this hay has to be packed. For this we are eternally grateful to the nearly 20 HRS Hay Elves. These Hay Elves are volunteers who donate their time — and several of them their trucks or SUVs — to haul hay and hundreds of boxes each month to distribution locations around the county. Our Hay Elves even got their very own "Got Hay?" T-shirts last year! The rabbits thank each and every one of you.

Getting the word out about proper rabbit care is foremost in stopping the glut of abandoned rabbits. We have several volunteers who answer rabbit care questions on the telephone (more than 1,000 this past year!), by e-mail and in person at educational events. Additionally, our web site is maintained by Judith Pierce and this quarterly newsletter is edited by volunteer Kristin Tow — two more very important ways we get the word

out to the public about proper rabbit care and adoption. Thanks ladies!

We are confident that, because of our Education Team, there are many rabbits who will now live longer and healthier lives; there are many outdoor rabbits who were brought indoors, possibly for the first time ever, and many rabbit lives were enriched because we were able to so eloquently explain bunny toys! Thank you to all the wonderful HRS volunteers involved with our Education Team.

The San Diego media have been very supportive of our work. For example, KUSI TV has invited SD HRS to be on the morning news every fourth Saturday. Watch for us on KUSI Channel 9! We appreciate all the publicity and support from our community.

Now, on to two more very important groups of people, our shelter and foster home volunteers. We could not exist without these fabulous people. The shelter volunteers spend time socializing, transporting and caring for the hundreds of rabbits left at our shelters. There is always a possibility rabbits will be euthanized, but with our volunteers on the scene, there is a much better chance these rabbits will survive and eventually find homes. This confidence is only possible because we have dedicated volunteers in nearly every shelter in San Diego. This makes a huge difference in the lives of the rabbits while they are there, as well as in their chances of getting adopted. So a huge thank you to all our many shelter volunteers. Every time you arrive at the shelter, you truly make a difference.

And, our dedicated foster home volunteers show their compassion, commitment and dedication every day, as they care for rabbits for as long as it takes to find them new homes. They transport them to adoption events, take photos and update our adoption descriptions, and screen prospective adopters to ensure happy matches. Special acknowledgement goes to our

foster home parents Sandi Stewart, Debra Doerfler, Larry Dudus, Judith Pierce and Larry Nixon, Candy Garner, Brenda Bowen and Fenella Speece. Hundreds of rabbits have you to thank for their lives.

This brings us to you, our supporters and donors. Because you bought those boxes of hay for your rabbit, we are able to buy more litterboxes. Because you bid on that beautiful tapestry at Bunnyfest, we were able to spay another rabbit. Because you gave that generous year-end donation, Blue Bunny got the medication she needed; Tia, Freddie and Stacie were able to have their maloccluded front teeth removed; Savannah, Jim Bob and BlackJack were taken into foster care and their respiratory problems cleared up; Molly Brown was able to have the three surgeries she needed; Maxwell was able to have his broken and mangled leg removed, and so many others were able to pass through our fostering network, healthy and happy. Last year, San Diego HRS was able to take 75 rabbits into foster care. This would not have been possible without your help, donations and support. We thank all of you from the bottom of our hearts.

By Michelle Wilhelms, San Diego HRS Chapter Manager

Thank You, Thank You

A special thank you to Diane and Chris Calkins for the computer donation. We sure can use it. Thanks soooo much!

Thank you to the Haugh family for the bunny condo and other supplies donated in memory of their rabbit Elvis. Thank you for thinking of HRS.

Thank you to Julie Harris who made a donation along with her membership renewal in memory of 'Puppy' Harris.

And a special thank you to Maurice Norris for his donation in memory of his wife, Carol, who loved rabbits and recognized how special they are. Many bunnies will be helped because of your generosity. Thank you so much!

Thanks go to Renea Mayfield at Shaw Carpets, Inc. She responded to Larry Nixon's request for donations of carpet samples to go in rabbits' cages, giving them a cushion from sitting on wire cage bottoms. (see photo below)



Cassie and Kirby, foster bunnies of Judith Pierce and Larry Nixon, place their Rabbit Seal of Approval on a carton of carpet samples donated by Shaw Carpets, Inc. The samples are given to foster rabbits and sold by the San Diego HRS as a fund-raiser.

Sydney's Story

Sydney came to us in February 1997, a scared little bunny who had been left at the South County animal shelter. She was rescued by an HRS volunteer. Because Sydney was so afraid of us, we came to believe she came from an abusive situation. Jerry and I adopted her as a mate for Mulder. After a few hours the two of them seemed to get along just fine.

More than a year later, around Easter time, Sydney was hopping



Sydney, left, in September 2001 at Bunnyfest

around the house. She normally wouldn't let us get too close to her. Jerry got on the floor and got nose to nose with her and asked, "When are you going to trust us?" Sydney presented herself to him and then hopped off.

That told us she trusted us. Later that evening, as she hopped around the house, her head would peak up on the coffee table. Little did we know she was stealing sugar-coated gummy candies out of the candy dish. As soon we realized this, we jumped up and ran after her and found several half-eaten candies in her cage. She looked at us as if to say, "but they're good." That little rascal! She not only decided to trust us, she let us know she had a sweet tooth.

Her personality finally came out and it was adorable. She would scamper around the house, jump, run and play with one ear up and one ear down.

She was with us for more than four years, with no health problems until May of 2001. We noticed she was losing weight, and in June she was diagnosed

with terminal intestinal cancer. An ultrasound showed a 10-cm mass on her intestine that caused her body not to absorb her food intake.

Through all the ups and downs with her health deteriorating over the months, her spirit remained upbeat. She was still curious about everything, always wanting treats and hugs, and playful as ever. Even as her weight continued to go down, as her hair was falling out on her tummy, rear and tail, and as she started losing her ability to hop around and play, she still remained Sydney. We asked our veterinarian, Dr. Rosanne Brown, if we were doing the right thing for her. Rose said, as long as Sydney seemed happy, wanted attention, and continued to eat, we should just let her live her life taking it one day at time.

She started getting worse in November and by Thanksgiving she had lost so much weight (down from 5.5 lbs. when she was diagnosed to 2.6 now) that she lost her ability to run around and get in and out of her litter box. She became incontinent and had to start wearing baby diapers that had to be changed every 4 hours. She knew we were helping her and didn't mind being changed. In fact, as soon as the diaper was off, she'd pee all over the changing pad as if to say, "oops" or "ha ha." Her weight loss had left her so thin that she started wearing newborn baby rompers that I tailored to fit her to keep her warm at night. Sydney even had her favorite, a little blue one with bunnies on it. On cold nights we'd put her in a romper, cover her with a baby blanket and she'd snuggle in it and nap, all warm and comfy.

For Sydney's safety, we had to separate her from her mate, Mulder, the first week of December. He was bigger and kept knocking her over. In her weakened state, she couldn't get back up.

Online Update

Want to keep updated on chapter activities by e mail? Join our Online Update and get monthly updates sent right to your desk top. We post to this list only once or twice a month as important events come up, so don't worry, this is not a busy list. Join by sending a blank email to: sandiegorabbitsonline-subscribe@yahoo.com

She had a stuffed bunny hand puppet that she loved to snuggle and it became a soothing prop to lie against when her weight loss made it uncomfortable to sleep on her tummy. She loved to be bundled up in a warm blanket and lie on a pillow between us in bed or on the couch for hours and she would kiss us, kind of saying, "Thank you" and "I love you too." When she was hungry or thirsty, she wouldn't stop kissing us until we offered her something.

I started taking her to work with me since she had become so frail that I was afraid to leave her at home. She went everywhere with me. I carried her in a basket. Out Christmas shopping everyone would stop to see her and pet her. She loved the attention. Even in her weakened state, she had one ear down and one ear that stayed up. When she was curious or happy, that ear really stood up. When she was mischievous, both ears would lie flat. Too cute!

These weeks had their ups and downs. The second week of December was an extremely rough week for her. Her appetite had started to decrease even more and all she did was sleep and turn herself around.

We took her to the San Diego House Rabbit Society Christmas party Dec. 12, and she loved it. I'm sure a lot of you remember her from that night. She was in her Santa romper and she actually tried to run around. For just that night, we saw the Sydney we knew before this all started.

We did everything we could for her. We gave her everything she loved to eat and we didn't mind all the extra work we had to do to make her happy. All her kisses made it all worth while. Both of us took turns checking on her during the night to see if she had fallen over. For weeks Jerry would check her at 1 a.m. and bring his guitar in and play for her. He started playing a little piece he came up with one night with her that almost sounded like a lullaby. She would get

comfortable each time he played it and she would fall asleep. She knew it was her song.*

She went to see Jerry at work Saturday the 15th and tried hopping around this new place. She was so interested in where she was, but by that evening, she had become increasingly quiet and wouldn't eat much, just her baby food and juice. I got on the floor with her, kissed and hugged her and I asked her, "Are you trying to tell us something? You know we love you and want you to be happy. Tell us what you want."

A little while later, she was on her new pillow next to her Snuggle bunny, and she fell over. Something wasn't right this time. At 6:50 p.m. on Dec. 15, 2001, our brave little Sydney lost her 7-month battle with cancer. She passed away in her Mommy's arms in the bunny room surrounded by love. She was a special little girl, our little "diaper butt," and we will miss her forever.

By Eileen and Jerry Lee

* You can hear Sydney's song, "Bright Eyes," at www.mp3.com/jerry_vayne.

Yes, You Can Play With Your Food

This tip comes to us from Brian who adopted Codi from the Rancho Coastal Humane Society.

"We've added a twist to the treats she gets. We take a brown paper lunch bag and put several carrot slices in it. We then roll up the bag or sometimes flatten it, and put it in a different place each evening when Codi is out for her run time.

"This gives her a new toy to play with and gets her to use her brain to figure out how to get the carrot slices out from the bag. We think this is a safe way for a rabbit to have another toy to play with while she is out and yet it stimulates her, as she needs to find where the carrots are and get them out of the bag."



San Diego Rabbit News' summer 2001 cover-bunny Timmy (right) and new girl-friend Meg obviously are very content in their new home. Thank you, Casterline family, for giving these bunnies a second chance at happiness.

March Hare

The North County Humane Society hosted "March Hare's Rabbit Awareness Day" on March 9, 2002.

House Rabbit Society volunteers Gerry Streff, Kathy Burke, Misty Dobson and Debra Doerfler were on hand throughout the event to answer rabbit-related questions, trim nails, and discuss the importance of making a lifetime commitment to companion rabbits.

Many thanks to Shelter Director Dr. Jennifer Stuart and Humane Education Coordinator Chuck Dotson for their efforts in pulling this event together.

Many people came by to get information and inquire about the rabbits available for adoption at the shelter. Thank you everyone for making this pre-Easter event possible.



A Carrier for Every Rabbit

Get one of these cardboard carriers for each of your rabbits and be prepared for emergencies when you need to evacuate your animals. In the meantime, use the carriers for trips to the veterinarian and the bunnysitter. They are inexpensive and collapsible for efficient storage. Available at the HRS Open House, April 20 (see details page 2) and at other HRS events (see Calendar, pages 8-9).

Teeth

(continued from page 1)

Rabbit teeth have a natural curve as they grow. If the crown of a cheek tooth becomes overgrown it can come into contact with either the inside of the cheek or the edge of the tongue resulting in painful ulcers. These ulcers can be painful enough to cause the pet to stop eating.

Causes of dental disease

- **Genetics** – Unfortunately human interference in the breeding of rabbits has often resulted in anatomical changes that can lead to disease. In the case of dental problems, changing the shape of the skull can drastically change how the teeth contact and wear on each other. The most obvious example is the lop-eared rabbit, in which the length of the jaw has been shortened. The changed jaw structure results in malocclusion of the teeth and ultimately elongated teeth (because they are not being worn down) that must be trimmed or removed. This type of dental problem is usually seen in young rabbits before one year of age and is often first noted in the incisors. However, if left untreated, the cheek teeth will also be affected in due course. There is no cure for this problem other than life-long control and maintenance of the abnormal tooth growth. The ultimate solution is to breed rabbits with normal jaw anatomy.

- **Trauma** – Trauma to the face can result in changes in the jaw or malocclusion of the teeth. If the jaw is broken it may heal in an abnormal position. If the teeth are broken (most typically the incisors) and they grow in at an improper angle, it will throw off the anatomy of the mouth and lead to multiple tooth problems. One of the most common incisor traumas is caused when a tooth breaks off below the gum line as a result of trimming the incisors with dog nail trimmers. (See the section on treatment for safer methods of trimming incisors). However, accidents do occur and it is essential to get imme-

diately care for your pet should a facial trauma occur to provide the best possible chance for a normal recovery.

- **Systemic disease** – Some systemic diseases can result in a change in dental health. For example, diseases that alter calcium levels in the body can cause a change in the bone surrounding the tooth, which will cause the tooth to shift its position and lead to malocclusion.



Bad teeth

Rabbits too weakened by disease to chew on solid food can develop overgrown and maloccluded teeth due to improper wear. It is important for your veterinarian to monitor the dental health of your pet while it is experiencing any serious systemic disorders because dental disease may occur as a secondary problem.

- **Dental infections** – Dental infections are not a common cause of dental disease. More often, abscesses of the tooth roots are the result of long term dental problems, particularly where the tooth root has overgrown and resulted in inflammation.

- **Diet** – Next to genetics, this is probably the most common cause of dental disease in the pet rabbit. In our modern world, we were trained to believe that a commercial pelleted diet is the best diet for a rabbit. After all, it is convenient, tidy and contains all the nutrients that the rabbit needs. The commercial rabbit diet was originally developed for the "production rabbit," meant for a short life ending in the meat or fur market, or for laboratory rabbits who also experience a shorter life span. For these purposes it is an efficient means of growing a rabbit quickly, but is a poor diet for rabbits kept as pets for the full

span of their life.

The problem is that rabbits were never designed to eat a diet that is essentially already “chewed up” or pulverized. A pellet breaks apart easily in the mouth and there is little work for the teeth to do and thus little wear. In addition, because pellets are a concentrated nutrient source, the VOLUME of food is a fraction of what a rabbit would be eating in the wild and therefore the actual amount of time a rabbit spends chewing in a day is drastically reduced. **Both the small volume and composition of an exclusively pelleted diet adversely affect proper tooth wear.** We do not recommend commercial pellets as a main source of food for any pet rabbit for this reason.

Disease caused by an improper diet may not be evident for many years. Affected rabbits are usually 3 years or older. Dental changes may be very subtle at first, but if the situation is not quickly corrected, advanced dental disease can occur.

Signs of dental disease

There are a variety of signs associated with dental disease ranging from almost undetectable to severe. If the disease is mild, the rabbit may not show any obvious problems and the problem may only be discovered on a routine physical examination. However, most dental problems eventually become painful and the rabbit will give some obvious indications of discomfort or inability to eat properly.

- **Anorexia** (loss of appetite) – This is a common finding because of the pain of either a tooth spur causing an ulcer of the cheek or tongue, an elongated tooth root or because the teeth are so out of alignment the rabbit can’t pick up or chew food. There are many other causes of loss of appetite.

- **Being more selective about the food** – As rabbits start to develop malocclusion of the teeth or dental pain they may stop eating certain

items such as carrots, pellets and occasionally hay. They will continue to eat soft foods like fruits and some leafy greens, but cannot eat the harder foods.

- **Dropping food out of the mouth** – The rabbit still tries to eat, but can’t completely chew the food and some of it falls back out of the mouth.

- **Excessive tear production** – This is a common sign of dental disease that involves the upper incisors. The tip of the upper incisor root is in close proximity to the tear duct. Inflammation or elongation of the root can partially or totally block the tear duct. The tear gland will still produce tears but they spill over onto the face as opposed to going down the duct. The corners of the eyes appear wet or accumulate a crusty white material that is an accumulation of salt and mucous. Secondary bacterial infections cause inflammation of the tear duct as well as the production of pus.

- **Nasal discharge** – If the roots of the upper incisors are inflamed or elongated there may be irritation to the sinuses and with resultant nasal drainage. This can be difficult to differentiate from true upper respiratory disease, and it is essential to have a high detail X-ray to aid in the diagnosis.

- **Salivating excessively** – This can happen because of pain or the inability of the rabbit to properly close its mouth due to overgrown teeth. The saliva accumulates on the fur in the corners of the mouth, the chin and the dewlap. Other causes of excessive salivation include overheating, eating something that has an unpleasant taste, foreign bodies in the mouth and extreme general weakness.

- **Tooth Grinding** – This is more often seen with abdominal discomfort, but some people have noted that rabbits with dental disease may grind their teeth more frequently. Occasional tooth grinding can be normal, but if it is heard continuously there may be a problem.

(continued on next page)

Just a Click Away

Have you visited our website lately? It's located at www.sandiegorabbits.org and, with just one click, provides a wealth of information for rabbit lovers of all ages.

Thinking of getting a companion for your rabbit? Visit our adoption page and preview photos and descriptions of HRS foster bunnies currently available for adoption. Each month, we feature a different foster bunny and tell a little more of their story.

Parents and teachers, download our coloring book for free! “Kids ‘n Bunnies” will help your children learn about bringing home a new bunny. It's located in the Adoption section.

Need tips on great cage or pen set-ups? Our new article, “To Cage or Not to Cage,” also in the Adoption section, includes photos and plenty of great ideas for improving your bunny's habitat.

Questions about what to feed your rabbit? Go to the Diet section for a food list.

New: The FAQ page has answers to commonly asked questions.

Check back regularly, as we are constantly updating our site and adding new information. Coming soon - a new page with lots of great “bunnyproofing” tips!

Calendar

APRIL

Monday, April 1

Volunteers meeting, 4750-A Cass St., Pacific Beach, 7 p.m.

Sunday, April 7

Pacific Beach Adoption Day, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., call 858-490-9003

Saturday, April 13

Discovery Channel Store, UTC, 1-4 p.m. Education event

Saturday, April 20

OPEN HOUSE! 12 noon-4 p.m. 4750 Cass Street, 4 blocks north of Garnet Ave in Pacific Beach. Join in the fun!

Sunday, April 21

North County Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 858-490-9003

Sunday, April 21

Earth Day, Balboa Park. All day event.

MAY

Sunday, May 5

Pacific Beach Adoption Day, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., call 858-490-9003

Monday, May 6

Volunteers meeting, 4750-A Cass St., Pacific Beach, 7 p.m.

Saturday, May 11

Discovery Channel Store, UTC, 1-3 p.m. Education event

Saturday, May 18

Educational event at Leaping Lotus, 240 South Cedros Ave., Solana Beach, 11a.m.-2p.m.

Sunday, May 19

North County Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 858-490-9003

Teeth

(continued from previous page)

- **Bulging of the eye** – Abscesses of the upper premolars or molars can lead to pressure behind the eye. The eye will be pushed slowly out until the optic nerve is stretched and damaged and the pet loses its sight. Tumors behind the eye can also cause a similar sign.

Diagnosing dental disease

- **History** – The history of the rabbit may reveal changes in eating habits that indicate dental disease. As I have said many times, it is vitally important that you observe your pet closely and share your observations with your veterinarian.

- **Physical examination** – Every rabbit should have a thorough mouth examination done at least once a year. It is my opinion that every rabbit should have a mouth examination performed **each time** it comes into the veterinary clinic. The earlier we can detect dental disease the greater the chances for success of treatment. The examination is usually performed without anesthesia in the healthy pet. There are a number of instruments that can be employed to examine the cheek teeth without discomfort in the conscious pet. In cases where the pet is difficult to handle or where dental disease is difficult to see due to its position, it will be necessary to use sedation for the mouth examination.

In addition to the mouth examination, a complete physical examination is vital to determine any other disease problems that might be present.

- **Radiographs (X-rays)** – Rabbits that have dental disease need to have radiographs taken of the skull to determine the extent of the disease and to determine the appropriate treatment approach. Without a radiograph, it is impossible to assess the condition of the tooth roots. Several views of the head need to be taken in order to see all the teeth. It is necessary and also much less stressful to the rabbit to use anesthesia for this diagnostic procedure.

- **Blood tests** – If the rabbit is suspected of having concurrent disease that may have lead to the dental disease, your veterinarian will recommend that certain blood tests be performed.

Treatment of dental disease

The most valuable key to treatment and management of dental disease is EARLY DETECTION. This is why a thorough mouth exam coupled with your keen observations of your pet are critical.

- **Diet** – A diet full of food items that require chewing is essential. A healthy diet is necessary in the treatment of dental disease to minimize further damage and to attempt to prevent reoccurrence.

- **Grinding/cutting overgrown teeth** – Incisors should not be cut with side cutters or dog nail trimmers. Although there are individuals who have employed these methods for years with success, it only takes one occurrence of breaking off an incisor below the gum line that leads to a lifetime of dental problems. It is not worth the risk. Overgrown incisors are best cut with a dental burr or a small grinding attached to a low or high-speed motorized handle. In this way teeth can be trimmed without fear of breakage. This procedure can be performed at a veterinary clinic or by a person experienced in this technique. It is generally performed painlessly and quickly while your pet is awake. Occasionally, a very nervous rabbit is difficult to handle and may have to be sedated for this procedure.

Overgrown cheek teeth are more difficult to trim in the conscious pet. The rabbit has a narrow mouth opening making it difficult to access all areas easily in the conscious pet. It is usually necessary to anesthetize your pet to properly manage all but the mildest cheek tooth overgrowth. The treatment that has been used for years is to simply cut back the overgrown crowns with a bone-cutting instrument. The

problem with this treatment in all but the mildest of dental disease is that it does not allow for correction of the alignment of ALL the cheek teeth. It is rare that only one or two teeth are malaligned. Although this procedure can often be done without anesthesia, the likelihood of rapid (4 to 6 weeks) reoccurrence of the overgrowth is high. In addition, some rabbits object vigorously to this procedure and because it is often being performed blindly, there is a possibility of injury to the cheek, gums or tongue. In cases of moderate to severe disease it is preferred to anesthetize the pet and use a dental burr to grind and reshape all the cheek teeth at the same time to encourage proper realignment. This



Good teeth

treatment addresses the entire anatomy of the mouth rather than just one or two teeth. In early cases, this treatment may be curative. In chronic or more severe disease, the procedure will need to be repeated, but the length of time between treatments is much longer than with a simple clipping. Your veterinarian can advise you on the best treatment regimen for your pet.

• **Extracting teeth** – Extraction of abnormal teeth, either cheek teeth or incisors, is a viable and often more humane option for your pet than frequent trimming. Rabbits can successfully live without their incisors because they can use their prehensile lips to move food into the mouth. Rabbits can also live and eat without one or more cheek teeth. We have helped many rabbits that otherwise would not have been able to survive by removing the abnormal teeth permanently. Diet modifications may have to be made in these cases. Specifics should be dis-

cussed with your veterinarian.

• **Treating abscesses** – The treatment of abscesses of the face is a topic for an entire column, so I will not attempt to go into it here in detail. Suffice it to say that dental disease must be considered anytime a rabbit develops an abscess on the face or jaw and X-rays should be taken to assess the problem. There are many options now available for the treatment of dental abscesses including complete surgical excision, antibiotic bead impregnation, and various injections into the wall of the abscess. Please discuss these options with your veterinarian.*

Prevention of dental disease

• **Diet** – It is obviously not possible to prevent all types of dental disease. Dental

problems caused strictly by diet, however, can be avoided. Your rabbit should be fed a diet of unlimited grass hay and a good amount and variety of fresh leafy greens daily. Avoid feeding an exclusive diet of commercial pellets. You can find specific information on the healthy diet of the House Rabbit in our “Care Of Rabbits” handout. In addition, offer other items to chew upon such as fresh tree branches (from trees that are NOT sprayed with chemicals), untreated wood pieces and unvarnished, unpainted wicker baskets. Providing a healthy diet will ensure adequate wear of all the teeth. **It is never too late to convert a pet to a healthy diet.** A natural diet has a myriad of benefits beyond just good teeth; it is literally the foundation for good health.

• **Examinations at home** – Be

(continued next page)

Calendar

JUNE

Sunday, June 2

Pacific Beach Adoption Day, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., call 858-490-9003

Monday, June 3

Volunteer meeting and potluck in Escondido, 6:30 p.m. Call 760-737-8397 for more information.

Saturday, June 8

Discovery Channel Store, UTC, 1-4 p.m. Education event

Saturday/Sunday June 15/16

San Diego County Fair at Del Mar, education event, all day. To volunteer to staff our information table at the fair, call 858-490-9003.

Saturday, June 23

North County Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 858-490-9003

SEPTEMBER

Sunday, Sept. 22

Bunnyfest, Heritage Park, Old Town.

Renew Early

Check your membership expiration date on the mailing panel and be sure to renew early so you won't miss an issue of the San Diego Rabbit News. Timely renewals also save the chapter the cost of mailing you a reminder flyer. You may use the order form on page 15.

You can now renew membership (combo local+national only) on our website, www.sandiegorabbits.org. Click the "Donate Online" button on the homepage.

The online combo membership is \$30 to cover our costs of processing, vs. \$28 by mail. You have the convenience of using a credit card or electronic check.

While you're online, consider a generous tax-deductible donation to the San Diego HRS. Contributions stay in San Diego to support rabbit rescue, adoption and education.

Rabbits and Amazon.com

If you access Amazon.com from the link on the homepage of the national House Rabbit Society at www.rabbit.org, then the House Rabbit Society receives five percent of the purchase of anything you buy from Amazon.com.

Finding the Right Rabbit

When looking to adopt a rabbit, it is important to consider not only the health of the rabbit, but also the rabbit's temperament and activity level. Of course, you need to be attracted to your new companion, but the personality of the rabbit and the needs and expectations of your family members should weigh heavily when making your decision.

Are you looking for a quiet, older rabbit? Or maybe a smaller, active friend? Remember, rabbits are like people in that they have a full range of personalities. Sometimes a "difficult" rabbit may not seem so demanding in the right, experienced home. Do you have other pets? Small children? Live in an apartment or a house? All these factors must be considered when choosing a rabbit who is a good "match" for you or your family.

One of the many benefits of adopting through the House Rabbit Society with our network of foster homes, is that a rabbit in a home

setting can let his personality begin to emerge. You, then, can rely on our foster parents to tell you a bit about the temperament of the rabbits you are considering adopting. Also, if this is to be your first rabbit, you can rely on our volunteers to help educate you about the care and needs of rabbits, and how best to integrate them into your family.

Once in his adoptive home, your rabbit will continue to develop and learn to express himself. You may be surprised how much your rabbit can change and grow once in a loving, permanent home.

If you are in San Diego, give us a call and let us help you find the "right" rabbit. You can reach us at telephone 619-718-7777. Be sure to leave a number where you can be reached in the evening or on weekends.

If you are not in San Diego, visit the national HRS web site at www.rabbit.org to see if there is an HRS chapter near you.

Teeth

(continued from previous page)

familiar with the appearance of your pet's teeth. You will only be able to see the incisors, but take a good look at least once a month. Your veterinarian or experienced rabbit friend can help show you how to perform the exam. Report any changes in shape, color or texture of the teeth to your veterinarian as soon as possible.

• **Veterinary examinations** – As mentioned, your veterinarian should examine your pet at least once a year. Part of a thorough physical examination on a rabbit is a dental exam.

Merely examining the front teeth is not sufficient. Cheek teeth may have early disease that will be missed so the entire mouth needs to be examined.

Conclusion

Dental disease is common in the pet rabbit. Diet is the best means of prevention and is essential as well in treatment. Your pet's teeth should be thoroughly examined at least once a year. If your pet does develop dental disease, there is a good possibility it can be controlled effectively if diagnosed early.

*By Susan Brown, DVM, Midwest Bird & Exotic Animal Hospital, Westchester, IL 60154
From Pet Care Forum / Veterinary Hospital on Veterinary information network (www.vin.com)*

**Editor's Note: Last year the San Diego Rabbit News published a report from a local veterinarian about successfully using laser surgery to treat facial abscesses.*

Word Puzzle

C L T N R Q Y U P A C B H
 A G O U T I G J F L E A S
 N I Y P K M F U R J N L O
 G C S D Z L O H U N H P F
 O V U T J I N C I S O R S
 R A B B I T K I T P T D N
 A Q O S C T I O S K O J U
 Q P N R F E G E C U T L F
 O W D T V R E X V K I F F
 L B I T E T S E J P K L L
 K U N Y A T V R H A U V E
 D I G E R C T C U R J H S
 A N M P S N A I L S S R T
 N F V E K Y I Z K L X G B
 C R J N E U T E R E D J X
 E F V J M E R D R Y F K O

Find these words in the puzzle:

AGOUTI colored rabbits are sometimes mistaken for being wild rabbits.

An **ANGORA** rabbit requires daily brushing of its long fur.

Sometimes rabbits will **BITE** in an effort to communicate.

BONDING brings two rabbits together so they can share a friendship.

If you witness a bunny **DANCE** you know the bunny is happy.

It is a natural instinct for a rabbit to **DIG**.

Some rabbits like to have their **EARS** stroked.

Daily **EXERCISE** is important for all rabbits, especially if they are overweight.

FLEAS can jump onto your bunny if he is allowed to run outside.

Only a very limited amount of high fiber **FRUITS** should ever be fed to a rabbit.

A **HOTOT** is a breed of rabbit.

Grooming a rabbits **FUR** helps her to stay healthy.

The front 6 teeth in a rabbits mouth are called **INCISORS**.

Never use wood shavings as a **LITTER** with rabbits; it's unhealthy.

Trimming rabbit **NAILS** is necessary every 2 months.

A boy bunny is called **NEUTERED** when he's fixed; a girl is spayed.

PARSLEY is a favorite food of rabbits.

Some people prefer to use a **PEN** instead of a cage as their rabbit's home.

Every **RABBIT** deserves a loving home for his entire lifespan of 10-12 yrs.

The **REX** breed of rabbit is very soft.

SNUFFLES is a common name for the rabbit illness pastuerella.

TOYS are an important part of a bunny's habitat.

Answers on page 14.

Spay/Neuter Stamps

In September 2002, the United States Postal Service (USPS) will issue not one but TWO spay/neuter social awareness stamps. One will feature a kitten named Samantha and one will feature a puppy named Kirby.

We know many of you were part of the letter-writing campaign last year encouraging the postal service to produce these stamps — well, it paid off! We are told that because of the incredible outpouring of support for the stamps, the USPS will issue 100 MILLION spay/neuter stamps! So, come September, be sure to ask for and use these important new stamps for all your mailings.

For more information, go to Prevent a Litter Coalition at www.palc.org

Save \$\$ on Veggies, Herbs

North Park Produce, with locations in North Park and Poway, is a great little Middle-Eastern market with excellent prices on a wide variety of herbs, greens, fruits and vegetables. The average price for parsley and cilantro runs from between five bunches for a dollar, to 10 for a dollar. You can't match those prices in the major grocery stores. Quality runs from so-so to excellent, so if you don't see what you like the first time you visit, try again.

North Park Produce is located at 3551 El Cajon Blvd. in North Park and 12342 Poway Road, Poway.

Wanted: Permanent Homes

Adopting from the HRS

Did you know that rabbits crave companionship and are typically most happy when part of a pair? If you have only one rabbit, go to www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/multiple.html and learn about the advantages of getting a companion. HRS volunteers will be happy to help you find an appropriate companion for your bunny and guide you through the bonding process.

Unless noted otherwise, call 619-718-7777 to learn more about any of these, or other, rabbits.

The HRS adoption fee is \$50 (\$85 for a pair), which includes a spayed or neutered rabbit, free vet exam, box of hay, coupon for another box of hay and a one-year membership to SD House Rabbit Society. Supplies are also available at HRS adoption days.

Rabbit References

Find everything you want to know about house rabbits at the Rabbit References website: www.morfz.com/rabrefs.html. Hundreds of articles about rabbit care, behavior and health are linked from this site and organized in a clear manner. Be sure to bookmark this page!

Walter is a sweet young boy, about 6 or 7 months old. He's neutered and is getting good with his litterbox. Walter loves

people! He enjoys being held and runs to the front of his

cage to greet you when you come in the room. Walter can sometimes get easily startled, therefore he's probably not a good choice for smaller children. He's funny, active, and would make a great first-time bunny



Tessie is a smart Rex girl who longs for kisses and pets and just melts when you touch her. She is 2-3 years old and needs a home which will be attentive to her

dietary needs as Tessie got too heavy sitting in the shelter. We are hoping to slim her down now that she is in HRS foster care. She also has some ways to go in her litterbox training, but we know that with the proper set up and care, she will be a loving addition to the right home.



Hydrus is a young neutered male, just under a year old. He is active, friendly, and doesn't mind being held – – for just a little while.

We have attempted to bond Hydrus with a couple of girl bunnies, but



it hasn't worked out so we are beginning to think that he would do better as a "bachelor" bunny. Hydrus would make a good first bunny, perhaps in a home with older children.

Sunny is an active, confident spayed dwarf mix girl who loves to play and enjoys her toys. Sunny will come running when she sees you and doesn't mind being picked up and held. She very much appreciates all

the finer things in life, especially being indoors. She is very nervous outside the house and does not enjoy going outdoors at all.



Basil is a charming bunny boy, about 6 months old and recently neutered. Basil is good with his litterbox and just loves his fresh veggie! And you don't you just guess it - Bunnies Basil is his favorite! Basil is an active

young man who will need lots of room to run and perhaps a bunny girl friend to play with. Call HRS at 619-718-7777 or email pierceja@cox.net for more information.



Patrick Murphy is an Angora-mix male, probably just under a year old. He is shy at first but warms up to you with gentle handling. Patrick's long fur was severely matted when he

came to HRS, but he got a little “trim” at the vet and his new coat will grow out beautiful and long. Patrick is mostly white, with butterscotch-colored ears and rings around his eyes; a very



pretty combination. Patrick would likely make a good companion

to your spayed bunny girl. Remember, Angoras need weekly grooming to stay beautiful!

Misty is a 9-month old Californian girl, who is very active and needs a lot of run time. She is very friendly and is an amazing snuggle bun, who loves to be held and will cuddle with you for as long as you can hold her. Misty will need a home with a confident, experienced bunny lover, who is not intimidated



by her rambunctious attitude and can enjoy the benefits of her very loving side. Your benefit will be watching her ears, feet, and nose change color from dark brown to soft gray with the seasons — an intriguing trait of the Californian breed.

Mayla & Joey are a wonderful pair of minilop mixes. They are quite the couple and still appear to be on their honeymoon, if grooming is any indication. Mayla is the tri-colored girl, Joey her knight in white. They are both sweet as can be, enjoy being petted,



and love to go exploring in the house together. Mayla is the more adventurous, Joey hanging just behind her to protect her from . . . sneak attacks from behind! Yea, that’s it. Well Joey may be a bit timid when it comes to new surroundings, but Mayla quickly shows him it’s okay. Call Debra at 760-737-8397

Violet is a wonderful, large (12 lb.) New Zealand rabbit. She is super friendly, runs over for lovin’ and genuinely enjoys being the center of attention. She travels well, likes being held, is very good with her litterbox, doesn’t seem to be destructive, and is not finicky about her food at all. She gets along well with both children and kitties. Call Debra at 760-737-8397.



Coco, a beautiful chocolate colored former Easter bunny, is quiet and loving, with good litter box habits. Eats all her hay without complaint, and enjoys a variety of fresh veggies. She’s not fussy at all. Please consider Coco for your home. Call Debra at 760-737-8397



Annie and Sharon are two sweet Dutch-mix sisters, who are a bonded pair and must be adopted together. They love to play and snuggle, and spend time grooming each other. They are neat, clean, and good with their litterbox. These girls are spayed and just under a year old. These two girls



might be good with older children who will understand that they cannot be held much and are better enjoyed down at their level, on the floor. They would be a welcome addition to any bunny lover’s home.

ORDER FORM

Name _____ I'm interested in volunteering. Please call me.

Address _____ Apt. _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home phone _____ Work phone _____ E-mail _____

ITEM	COLOR: 1st choice	2nd choice	SIZE	QTY	PRICE EACH	TOTAL
SAN DIEGO RABBIT NEWS with 1-year San Diego chapter membership <i>(San Diego membership does NOT include national membership; join national below)</i>				1 YR	\$10	no tax
National House Rabbit Society Membership <i>(Does not include local membership or San Diego's newsletter)</i>				1 YR	\$18	no tax
House Rabbit Handbook, new 3rd edition					\$10	

Your purchases support HRS in San Diego

Supplies of some items limited. Please give 2nd choice color when ordering.

Totes— Buy a Bunny a Little Time "clock" motif in black on natural canvas tote bags. **\$12**



"Clock" motif

Caps - cotton baseball-style caps, one size with adjustable strap. Herman head design (upper right this page). Navy blue or green **\$12**
Caffeine bunny design on blue or natural caps. **\$12**

Poster—Spectacular rabbit photo collage shows dozens of HRS foster buns and members' rabbits reproduced in a first-quality poster, ready for framing. 20" x 28" **\$12**



HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY
"Caffeine bunny"

Clock motif T-shirt—Short-sleeve tee, imprinted center front in black. White or light green S-XL; Light gray S-XXL **\$15**



New 3-rabbit design

Scoop neck ladies T-shirt - Clock motif on short-sleeve T. Violet S-L **\$15**

3-rabbit T - Scoop-neck ladies short-sleeve T with illustrations. White S-XXL; yellow S-XL. **\$15**

For delivery in Calif., add 7.75% sales tax ...

Postage & handling (see below)

Additional donation for San Diego rabbit rescue

TOTAL ENCLOSED

Postage & handling:

Clothing items, tote, poster: \$3.95 first item; \$1.25 each additional

Handbook: \$2.40 each

Grocery pad 80¢ for one or \$3.95 for 5-12

Make checks payable to House Rabbit Society and mail with this order form to P. O. Box 2628, Spring Valley, CA 91979

Spring 2002

Check your expiration date
and renew early.



Printed on recycled paper

**Annual HRS
Open House
April 20. See
details page 2.**

HAPPY ADOPTIONS

Nellie, Julie, Jessica Update

Nellie came into our lives in November of 2000 and quickly bonded with our little lop Misha. We soon noticed changes in both bunnies. Misha, who'd frequently looked a bit scruffy and had to be groomed by me, was looking wonderful. Doting Nellie had taken over the grooming job. Misha had always grabbed for his banana slice; now he left it for Nellie. Honestly, I've never seen this kind of generosity in a bun when it comes to bananas. True love indeed! Nellie filled out a bit, her fur became softer, and her Himalayan ears darkened. She blossomed from a rather shy bunny into a trusting little girl who approaches her people for pets.

Sadly, Nellie's Misha passed away last October from liver failure. Nellie had done so well with a bunny friend that I couldn't see her being alone. I e-mailed HRS's Michelle who'd known

Nellie as a foster bun and asked what she thought about my trying Nellie with Thumper. Thumper was bonded with sisters Heather and Bambi. I wasn't sure about breaking up a trio, but thought Thumper and Nellie's personalities would be a good match, and Heather and Bambi would still have each other. Michelle e-mailed back with an okay and some bonding suggestions. Nellie and Thumper immediately accepted each other and have been

happily together for over four months now.

In February 2001, Julie and Jessica, two New Zealand White sisters, joined our household. They are BIG bunz, so the decision was made to set them up in the kitchen (totally bunny-proofed) where they could run free during the day. This arrangement has allowed them not only to exercise a lot, but to display their wonderful personalities. Our return home from school on weekdays is greeted by Jessica, always the bolder of the two, hopping over to greet us...very puppy-like. Julie prefers to approach when she thinks I'm not paying attention.



Julie and Jessica

The bunny nudging

my feet and tugging at the leg of my slacks as I fix dinner is frequently Julie. We had no idea how delightful new Zealand bunnies were when we adopted them, and we still marvel at the sight of their magnificent ears and the really big binkies they display when allowed onto the living room carpet.

Many thanks to all the HRS volunteers for rescuing and caring for the bunnies. My daughters and I can't imagine life without these bunz.

By Dorothy Rae Thomas



Nellie, left, with Thumper