

SAN DIEGO RABBIT NEWS

WINTER 2003

What's Inside

Senior Years

Enjoying your older rabbit...2

Calendar

Upcoming events...2

Valued Volunteer

Larry Dudus...4

Long-hair

Tips for grooming a long-haired rabbit...5

Christmas Story

Giving in the spirit of the season...6

Hypothetical Event

Bunny-eye view...7

Black Gold

Make compost out of bunny droppings...10

Adoptable Rabbits

Rabbits in foster care who need their own homes...12

Hay Sources

Where to get hay, litter...14

Order Form

Membership and HRS products by mail...15

Rabbit Digs: Homes Safe for Rabbits and Their Humans

Their twirling around the room leaping and dancing makes you laugh. Their little butt twitching as they devour a fresh piece of banana is most adorable. Their sleeping so soundly makes you smile and wish you could sleep so contently. But when your rabbit takes a nibble out of your favorite chair or digs intently at your oriental rug, you cringe. You may send him away with a loud clap only to watch him sneak back just moments later to reassert his intentions.

There is no doubt rabbit behavior can be frustrating and very trying to us mere mortals. When faced with "destructive" rabbit behavior, some people resort to giving away their pet rabbit or banishing him to a cage, garage or yard. Some even declaw their rabbit. (See why *not* to declaw a rabbit, page 9.) So, how do we stop these unwelcome behaviors? First let's look at why rabbits do what they do.

Rabbits are rabbits. They enjoy a good dig and a challenging chew; it's their nature. In the wild, rabbits dig and burrow underground, building entire communities beneath us. Gnawing and chewing are also essential to proper rabbit dental care. As San Diego veterinarian Dr. Jeffrey Jenkins states, "The upper and lower incisors (front teeth) of rabbits grow 4 and 5 inches a year, respectively. Similar statistics for cheek tooth growth are not available; however, the rate is significant. In the normal rabbit mouth, biting and chewing of food continually grinds down the teeth,

keeping this growth in check and the teeth at stable lengths."

Digging and chewing along with other daily exercise is also an important physical and psychological pleasure for your rabbit. Rabbits who are cooped up in a cage for days on end are more likely to be aggressive and cranky. Rabbits should get out for play time and burn off energy on a daily basis. This will make for a happier, healthier and more friendly rabbit.

Redirect

So, how do we survive the destruction our furry friends might cause? You cannot explain to a rabbit not to chew your favorite table leg, but you can redirect his behavior. Redirecting his behavior is the key. Once your rabbit decides the heavy-duty cardboard tunnel you gave him is a good chewing alternative, he is well on his way to being "trained." Until then, remember he is not being intentionally difficult, he is just hard-wired to chew and dig. And, because rabbits are creatures of habit, be sure not to let an unacceptable behavior go unattended; it will only get worse as Bun develops the bad habit. As soon as he starts nibbling on the couch or table leg, clap your hands or remove him from the area and give him something else to do. Develop a different habit. If Bun is particularly stubborn, you may have to block off or cover a problem area for a period of time to break the habit. But, be sure to figure out a different way to keep

(continued on page 8)

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

Sunday, Feb. 23

North County HRS Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 619-718-7777

MARCH

Sunday, March 2

Pacific Beach HRS Adoption Day, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Call 619-718-7777

Monday, March 3

Volunteers' Meeting, 4750 Cass Street, Pacific Beach, 7 p.m.

Sunday, March 16

North County HRS Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 619-718-7777

APRIL

Thursdays, April 3, 10, 17

"Bunny Basics & Rabbit Habits," 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., Mathes Center, 2475 Kalmia, Escondido; \$27 for 3-class series. Call 760-839-4691 for additional information and registration materials. Presented by Debra Doerfler, licensed HRS educator.

Sunday, April 6

Pacific Beach HRS Adoption Day, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Call 619-718-7777

Monday, April 7

Volunteers' Meeting, 4750 Cass Street, Pacific Beach, 7 p.m.
Sunday, April 27
North County HRS Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 619-718-7777

Sunday, April 27

North County HRS Adoption Day, 1-3 p.m., call 619-718-7777

Enjoying Your Older Rabbit

Isn't it great having a rabbit companion? They are the best! No matter what age, these soft and gentle lagamorphs are the dearest pets. But like all pets, and people, too, aging is inevitable. Time passes and your teenage bunny is no longer a rambunctious teenager, but has mellowed into a stately senior rabbit.

Certainly you've noticed changes along the way—just as you've noticed them in yourself (how about those "laugh lines" that weren't there before?). Perhaps your older rabbit is less active, or has lost or gained weight. No need for anxiety, of course. Change comes with age. Here's what you might expect.

Slowing Down

Domestic rabbits can live anywhere from 5 to 10 years, depending upon breed, health, care and whether or not the rabbit is housed indoors or outdoors (indoor rabbits tend to live longer because they are less stressed and more protected). According to Michelle Wilhelms, San Diego Chapter Manager for the House Rabbit Society, rabbits can be considered geriatric, or seniors, at age 7. However, there are rabbits at age 7 who act like youngsters and 4-year-olds who act like oldsters. "It really depends a lot on the individual rabbit and his health," says Wilhelms.

The most obvious sign your rabbit is stacking up years is his tendency to slow down. The senior rabbit moves less and sleeps more. He is more sedentary, and not as active as, say, a year-old rabbit. "I think rabbits tend to slow down and get a little more quiet each year as they age," says Wilhelms.

Health Concerns

With advanced years can come health problems. This isn't always the case, but it's wise to be on the lookout for these treatable conditions in your

senior rabbit and consult with your veterinarian right away. If you don't already have your rabbit checked — physical exam and blood tests — annually by a rabbit-savvy vet, now (at least beginning at age 5) is the time to begin.

Teeth problems: Older rabbits who have never had teeth problems can develop molar spurs (sharp points on their teeth) and other teeth problems. You might notice that your rabbit is drooling and having difficulty eating — he cannot take as much food into his mouth or it falls out. A weepy eye might indicate teeth problems, or a blocked tear duct, which often can be flushed out.

Arthritis: Perhaps you've noticed that your senior rabbit isn't hopping about with as much agility as he used to, or he seems grouchy when you try to pick him up. It's not uncommon for older rabbits to suffer from arthritis, which can vary in severity. Anti-inflammatory medication may help, and some people have reported good results from veterinary acupuncture.

Heart disease: Another cause for your rabbit's decrease in activity may be heart disease. Exercise difficulties, decreased appetite with weight loss, coughing or other respiratory difficulties are signs of an ailing heart. Early diagnosis is the key to achieving the best outcome for your rabbit.

Kidney disease and urinary tract infections: Sometimes, a sedentary older bunny fails to take in enough water and can suffer from urinary tract infections. Early signs of kidney problems include increased water intake, increased diluted urine output and weight loss. Water intake should be encouraged and should never be withheld from any rabbits.

Fly strike: While more common in rabbits housed outdoors, fly strike can affect any sedentary rabbit. Flies lay eggs, which hatch into maggots that crawl into the rabbit. Fly strike is life-threatening.

Weight change: Nutrition requirements may change during the senior years, which can prompt a weight change. The senior rabbit may gain or lose weight. Adjustments in diet — protein and calcium content, calories, supplements — may be needed to maintain an optimum weight.

Incontinence: Older rabbits can become incontinent for a variety of reasons. For rabbits in whom the condition cannot be resolved, you can diaper the rabbit with newborn baby diapers.

Sore hocks: From years of hopping about, senior rabbits can develop sore hocks, where the fur on their heels is worn off. Open wounds can occur. Extra padding in the cage, carpet samples or lamb's wool, may be necessary.

Cataracts: Cataracts cloud the eye's lens, restricting vision. A rabbit with cataracts may be reluctant to move around, especially in new surroundings, and be sensitive to bright light. The veterinary community is increasingly suspecting that some — perhaps many — cataracts are the result of *e. cuniculi*, the parasite that also causes head tilt. A screening for *e. cuniculi* could help you prevent your rabbit from developing a second cataract and potentially other EC symptoms. Glaucoma is a rarer eye complication.

Cancer: A thorough bunny massage is more than a good way to pull out excess fur and bond with your companion. It is also an opportunity to feel for unusual lumps and bumps that may be signs of cancer. Some tumors are very treatable, so don't jump to conclusions before getting a good veterinary work-up.

Daily help and handling

For the senior rabbit stiff with arthritis, moving about may be difficult. "Sometimes older bunnies are not quite as mobile," says Wilhelms. "Perhaps they now can't jump into a litter box or jump into a cage that is raised a couple of inches off the floor."

You can help your senior rabbit by making a few changes in his housing. Cut down one side of the litter box, or buy a box with easy access. Feed your rabbit on the floor so he doesn't have to reach into a bowl. Assist your rabbit in and out of his cage, or set him up in an exercise pen. Add extra padding in the cage to prevent sore hocks and to cushion the arthritic bunny's bones.

Senior rabbits can become finicky about being handled. Watch carefully for signs that your rabbit isn't enjoying being picked up or petted. "They may have a few more aches and pains," says Wilhelms. "I think the most important thing is to tune into your rabbit's behavior and know what is normal for him. Rabbits are so subtle in their behavior that it's really important to notice the small changes. As the caretaker of the rabbit, you are one of the best judges if something's hurting him; you'll probably be the first to pick up on that. And you would know that he just doesn't want to be carried this way any more."

The Best Is Yet To Come

In spite of a few changes, rabbit enthusiasts say living with older rabbits is a treat. Older rabbits are typically gentle, quiet, stoic, enjoyable. "Personally, they're one of my favorites. I love older rabbits. The golden years are sometimes the best and most enjoyable," says Wilhelms. For more information on senior rabbits and rabbits in general, refer to the rabbit resources at right.

Adapted from an article by Virginia Parker Guidry, a freelance writer living in Spring Valley, Calif., and reprinted with permission.

CALENDAR

MAY

Sunday, May 4

Earth Day. All-day education event in Balboa Park. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Volunteers needed.

Monday, May 5

Volunteers' Meeting, 4750 Cass Street, Pacific Beach, 7 p.m.

Saturday, May 17

San Diego HRS Open House, 4750 Cass St. (4 blocks north of Garnet Ave.) in Pacific Beach, 12 noon - 4 p.m. See details on page 16.

Tip

Overheard at Bunnyfest: "Our young daughter is very gentle with rabbits. We taught her to pet the rabbits with as many fingers as she is old." For instance, a 3-year-old child pets a rabbit with three fingers only. The child is usually intent on counting the fingers she is allowed to use and is generally very gentle toward the rabbit.

Rabbit Care Resources

- House Rabbit Society www.rabbit.org
- San Diego House Rabbit Society www.sandiegorabbits.org
- Rabbit Resources www.morfz.com/rabrefs.html
- Cats & Rabbits & More www.catsandrabbitandmore.com

Valued Volunteer Larry Dudus

Making a Difference

Our Valued Volunteer this quarter is a man many of you have probably seen, if not met in person: Larry Dudus. Larry has been working with HRS as an educator, and now also as a fosterer, since 1994. At that time, he, like many of us, was completely new to rabbits — “clueless” as he says — and the young little stray that he rescued in 1990, “Bunski,” was the special bun that started it all for him.

Larry had been interested in becoming involved with animal organizations for many years, but never found the motivating factor to actually do something about it — that is, until he became involved with rabbits.

Debra Doerfler: Larry, so you found this little rabbit, but how did you actually get hooked up with HRS?

Larry Dudus: I went into a pet food store to buy some pellets for the bunny and met Lynn Little who was working there. I didn't know it at the time, but she was one of the co-founders of the San Diego HRS. She and I started talking and she said, “You're not going to feed those to your rabbit are you?” I, of course, *was* planning on feeding them to Bunski. After all, they were ‘rabbit pellets,’ but as Lynn and I chatted she started telling me all about a proper rabbit diet. I think I was in the store for over an hour. After that, I went back every weekend and picked her brain. She knew

everything...I was like a sponge.

DD: You were lucky to have run into her. So she told you about you

about Bunnyfest?

LD: Yes, and one thing led to another, and before I knew it I was at one of the first Bunnyfests helping with setup. I was just there to do some labor stuff; you know, delivering tables, chairs and such. But, there I am, and I'm walking by the education booth and there are 20 people crowded around these two volunteers asking all these questions: “What should I feed my rabbit? How do I litter box train him?” stuff like that. This light goes off and I think to myself, “I know this stuff!”

DD: And, that's where we can always find you at Bunnyfest these days, at the Education Booth. What's the one thing that really keeps you going? It's been nine years, so what do you get out of helping HRS and the rabbits?

LD: Every so often I meet up with someone who adopted one of my foster bunnies — one of those rabbits for whom our tax dollars were going to be used to euthanize because his time was up at the shelter. And you see something in their eye; the people have changed. It's hard to explain, but I know that the rabbit they adopted, the rabbit that I fostered, that HRS saved, has changed their life in so many wonderful ways. They talk to you, tell you about the antics of their bunny, and the happiness they have experienced having been indoctrinated into the house rabbit world. It might only happen every so often, but that one person, or that one family's experience is all I need to know that I am making a difference and that's a good feeling.

DD: So Larry, what do you do for a living? We know bunny rescue doesn't pay.

LD: I'm a geologist. I worked for two years in oil exploration, primarily off-shore Alaska, and the last 16 years doing environmental work like charac-



Larry keeps his personal companions at a minimum so he has room in his home to foster and time to volunteer. In his lap is Stephie whom you might recognize as the large red rabbit from our San Diego HRS website. On the left are Marty and Shelly, a bonded pair, and “Sally Cat” is hiding under his knee looking to make the big break.

terizing and cleaning up hazardous waste sites, primarily at military bases. I like the idea of helping make the planet a little cleaner, instead of drilling for oil.

DD: And now for the fun question; What's the one thing that not many of our membership know about you (that you can share)?

LD: I've been in a relationship with Michelle, San Diego HRS chapter manager, for eight years now. Not too many people outside the core group know that. When she and I first met,

she was the Volunteer Coordinator and I wanted to volunteer.

DD: Well, you guys are a great couple and HRS is lucky to have you (and her!) to help in so many ways.

On any given day you can catch Larry boxing hay, delivering hay to Avian & Exotic, or at an adoption event, or caring for his foster bunnies, or at the animal shelter, or.... You get the idea — he does a lot for the bunnies! Thank you, Larry Dudus, for all that you do!

Grooming Long-haired Rabbits

Do you have a long-haired rabbit whose fur is constantly tangled? Have you considered trimming the fur? Long-haired rabbits are too often abandoned because they are so time-consuming to care for. After their coat is well groomed and silky, they should be lightly brushed every day as maintenance. (Angora fur doesn't fall out and fly around the house like short-haired rabbit fur; instead, it weaves itself in with the strands of long fur, eventually building up to a nasty mat if not continually combed.)

It's a delicate balance between wanting long-haired rabbits to be able to stay "true to their nature" with long fur, and the difficulty in finding adoptive homes where the humans will routinely groom the long fur. A middle ground can be to trim the rabbits. Some rabbit rescue groups (including HRS chapters) encourage owners to, at the very least, keep the rabbit's tummy clipped because this area tends to get uncomfortably tangled.

"We trim down all of our long-haired rabbits. It makes life so much easier for us, and they are so much happier without getting all that yuk tangled in their fur and having to withstand weekly hours of brushing," says Alex Logsdon at Zoon Corner Rabbit Rescue.

For more information on grooming long-haired rabbits see www.mybunny.org/info/groom_long_haired.htm

If you clip the coat, be very careful not to cut the skin. Hold your hand or a comb between the scissors and the rabbit. Or use clippers.

If you let the fur stay long, you might check out "Grooma Comb," — www.grooma.com/comb.html — a horse grooming comb that one Angora owner recommends highly. "It literally slid right through the coat and the mats, very easily removing the debris better than any other brush or rake that I found," she said.

"The teeth are loose and something about that 'loose' thing makes it work very well. Back when I still had Hairy, the Angora, this little comb was the only thing that made grooming anything but a terrible ordeal. I'd trimmed and trimmed his coat and it still tangled and matted constantly. The Grooma Comb at least made the grooming quick and painless. Less than five minutes and he was clean and ready to romp again."

The comb is available at large equine/farm suppliers such as www.americanlivestock.com.

Shelter Volunteers Needed

Do you have a few hours a month to volunteer at your local animal shelter? We need shelter volunteers in all areas of the county. Duties include cleaning cages, grooming and socializing rabbits, handing out veggies and hay; and updating HRS. Shelter volunteers must have some experience handling rabbits, be reliable and able to communicate with shelter staff and HRS volunteers.

If you are interested in helping at your local shelter, contact Michelle at 619-718-7777 for further information. The bunnies say thanks and hurry up with the carrots!

Local Animal Shelters

(call for hours of operation)

- Central San Diego County Animal Shelter, 5480 Gaines St., San Diego
619-236-4250
- North San Diego County Animal Shelter, 2481 Palomar Airport Rd., Carlsbad
760-438-2312
- South San Diego County Animal Shelter, 5821 Sweetwater Rd., Bonita
619-263-7741
- San Diego Humane Society, 887 Sherman St., San Diego
619-299-7012
- Chula Vista Animal Shelter, 130 Beyer Way, Chula Vista
619-691-5123
- Rancho Coastal Humane Society, 389 Requeza, Encinitas
760-753-6413
- North County Humane Society & SPCA, 2905 San Luis Rey, Oceanside
760-757-HELP

A Christmas Story

As a volunteer with HRS for 7 1/2 years, I've spoken with hundreds of people about their rabbits, fostered dozens of bunnies, and answered thousands of care questions, so when I called June to discuss her concerns over a sore on her rabbit's neck I wasn't expecting anything out of the ordinary. What I got was extraordinary. For me, working in animal rescue is rewarding because I see the rabbits' lives changed, made better, things made right for them. It's all about the animals for me – that is, up and until I met June.

June called the HRS help line to get some health questions answered. She called in December, when the holidays were in full swing and thoughts of family, friends and loved ones were heightened. I can't say exactly what

struck me about her, perhaps that she's a senior citizen, perhaps that she's handicapped, or maybe it was just how she spoke about her rabbit. She loves her bunny and she was very concerned about "Bunny Girl."

June and I spoke at length on the phone and after our discussion I knew that the only way to get a clear picture of the situation was to visit her and do a home inspection. This would give me the opportunity to see "Bunny Girl" and talk with June in person. The other thing I learned from that initial phone call was that June lived in East County and was on a very limited income.

With the holidays in full swing, I was feeling charitable and I sent an e-mail out to a group of HRS friends asking for support, either by going with me or by making a donation. Sandi Stewart, Larry Dudus, Judith Pierce, Larry Nixon, Kathy and Pete Burke

and Michelle Wilhelms responded with offers of help for a woman they had never met or spoken with. They donated supplies, housing, toys for "Bunny Girl" and a holiday basket for June.

As I made my way from Escondido to El Cajon I felt good. I knew not what lay before me, but in my heart I knew I was doing the right thing. As I pulled into the small mobile home park, the rain started again. Her trailer is situated on the outer edge of the park, overlooking a meadow.

Though small, June's home is welcoming and I immediately felt at home in her presence. She introduced me to "Bunny Girl" and we sat and chatted about rabbits in general. June told me the whole story: how she'd been told the baby bunny would stay small (3-4 pounds she was told) and that it was a girl. What sat in the small cage on top of the coffee table was a great big beautiful French lop. (We later determined that she wasn't female either, as evidenced by the large testicles!) At just slightly over 6 months old, the rabbit was between 8-9 pounds already and would continue to grow.

June's story is very common. Pet stores mislead shoppers into purchasing animals that are inappropriate for families. Baby rabbits are frequently peddled as small "dwarf" breeds when, in fact, they are standard large breed varieties. In addition, they all too often sell rabbits stating the bunny is a female, when in actuality the sex is undeterminable by all but the most experienced rabbit people, certainly not a sales clerk at a pet store (most have little or no experience with rabbits).

I tried to convince June to give "Bunny" a proper name...maybe Larry or Pete!? For now, it's "Bunny Boy." It took two trips, but when we finished June's bunny had a roomy cage with large litterbox, Carefresh and mixed



June and Bunny Girl

hay, a carpet, crock lock and some new toys. A large pen was placed around the base of the table to allow June to let him out for playtime in a safe, secure area, and he has a custom ramp to get from his cage to the floor. June also made arrangements to have her bunny seen by a vet who does house calls.

When we left June that cold, rainy

Sunday afternoon, her bunny was dancing in his new cage and she was dabbing the tears from her eyes. "Thank you for everything," she said. The card she gave me said, "Dear Debra & friends, I can never express how much I appreciate your help with my rabbit. Thank you. June & Bunny Girl."

By Debra Doerfler

A Hypothetical Event

Say somebunny had a really bad night. Maybe every time she got snug and cozy in her special box — which she'd spent hours gnawing into just the right shape, with nice front and side doors and everything — when her pesky sister showed up and nudged her out of the best spot! Naturally, this hypothetical bunny could never get back into her peaceful slumber for the rest of the night! She might very well wake up the next morning in a cranky mood.

Not that this ever happened to me, of course — this is all purely hypothetical.

But if somebunny *did* wake up feeling ornery after a bad night, she just might do something out of keeping with her normal pleasant personality. Like, oh, for instance, eating a large hole in the office rug...not that this ever happened to me, but I can imagine in this hypothetical situation I, ...that is, "she" just might do that. Accidentally. While she was ripping the carpeting up in some dark secluded corner of the room, maybe. I'm just guessing here.

Or she might — again, just accidentally — nip her big bully sister in the butt when she wasn't looking, causing her sister (let's call her "Eve") to suddenly lurch forward in surprise knocking the food dish over and scattering the nice fresh pellets Mom had just filled it with all over the floor. This might make a lot of noise. And the wild chase that follows this hypothetical incident would probably make even

more noise, with rabbit nails slashing across hard wood floors trying to find some traction, cardboard boxes propelled across rooms, and soft bunny bodies thumping into an interesting variety of objects — that sort of thing. This could be disturbing to Mom who, hypothetically, might be trying hard to concentrate on an important job that has to be finished by the end of the day.

It's possible that this noise could be quite distracting. Mom might even leave her computer where she's completing her hypothetical job to track down the culprits and suggest they find some quieter activity. But — and this is still only hypothetical — the sibling rabbits might already have made their peace and turned to a more sedentary project like, oh, let's just say nibbling on some books they found lying around on the bookshelf. These books might be expensive reference books that Mom needs for her work - assuming she was careless enough to put them on one of the lower shelves. Theoretically, Mom might be really annoyed when she discovers this new activity.

Not that this ever happened to me, but in this hypothetical case, could the bunny who'd woken up out of sorts — let's call her "Lilith" — be blamed? I say "No." Everybunny has a bad hare day sometimes. Even I might misbehave under exceptional circumstances like these — hypothetically.

Lilith Bunny

by Dorothy Hoffman

<http://members.bellatlantic.net/~libun/ts/hypothetical.html>

Critter Life Rafts

Mary Lou from South Carolina wrote to share her good idea of how to keep the little critters who fall into her pool from drowning.

"We have a backyard pool that lures critters. I have fished out mice, snakes, lizards, turtles, muskrats, rats, bunnies, scorpions, toads and frogs and all species of little and big bugs. I have finally found a way to keep them safe till I can rescue them out in the morning. I thinly sliced a child's pool noodle and float several of them in the pool like lily pads. They end up in the skimmer baskets and they act like little life preservers. The mouse I saved this morning wasn't even wet. He was sitting on top of the styrofoam noodle slice twitching his whiskers. A Mouse Preserver!"

What's a child's pool noodle? They are long, skinny foam toys that kids use in the pool. But, at 5 feet long and 3 inches in diameter, they look like spaghetti, not noodles. Perfect for slicing and making little life rafts.

Editor's note: Thanks, Mary Lou, for sharing your tip and thank you to: forotherlivingthings.com for allowing the reprint of Mary Lou's tip.

Rabbit Digs

(continued from page 1)

him busy and entertained. Too much freedom is also a common element with extremely destructive rabbits. Make sure he has some time in a large cage or pen to help with training.

Rabbits learn by repetition, so the more consistent you are with him, the faster he will pick up the behavior you want. Develop a daily routine for him. Despite the popular “dumb bunny” phrase, rabbits are actually quite intelligent. It is up to their human caretakers to understand their needs and provide appropriate alternatives.

Tip

To clean your rabbit cage or pen really well, take it to a do-it-yourself car wash and “power-wash” it with their hoses. You will be amazed how clean your rabbit cages will get!



Hydrus the rabbit explores all the wonderful toys he has to choose from: an old phone book (foreground) to tear and chew; untreated willow basket and ring to chew (lower left); a basket full of toys to toss around.

Bunny-proofing

Although most rabbits tend to chew and dig less as they mature, be prepared for a lifetime of chewing just in case. You'll want to train Bun early to chew acceptable items and you will want to bunny-proof your home to save your sanity. Spaying and neutering helps curb the intense destruction that can occur as rabbits go through adolescence, but rabbits will always need a way to exert their energy, a way to be a bunny. Bunny-proofing not only saves your home, but it also can save your

rabbit from serious injury or even death. Covering cords and wires is essential to having a safe bunny habitat. There are many cord cover products available at home improvement stores or you can block access to areas like behind entertainment centers where there are a lot of cords. Next, move plants up high and place books and other “chewable” items out of reach. Magazines and baskets laying around will be fair game for your rabbit, so remove them if you don't want them chewed. Sometimes products like Bitter Apple will work to deter a rabbit from visiting an area, but you need to spray them daily. When redecorating, avoid wicker furniture — a bunny's paradise!

What does your rabbit want?

Observe your rabbit. Is he a pusher/buncher or a chewer/shredder?! Perhaps he just enjoys lying contentedly in a tunnel. Once you have an idea about your rabbit's favorite behaviors, provide different toys and activities for him just like you would for a cat or dog. Rotate toys to keep him interested and try new toys every so often. Well placed and interesting toys will keep your rabbit busy for hours. Unfinished willow baskets, a cardboard box or tunnel, hard plastic toss toys and grass mats all have an important place in a bunny home. If you have expensive antiques or other items you just can't risk, make that room off limits. A baby gate may work to keep Bun out, but be warned, many rabbits can jump over these gates or chew through the plastic ones. Or, simply close the door to these off-limit areas. Once you have ideas about your rabbit's activity preferences and have obtained several toys for him to choose from, the next challenge is getting him to use this new found entertainment.

Location, location, location!

If your rabbit likes to dig in a specific corner, either block off that area to discourage the behavior alto-

gether or place a digging box or grass mat there so it's okay for him to dig, dig, dig. Try placing toss toys and a few chewable toys in the areas where he likes to hang out. Also, place a few toys in his cage or run area so when he is confined, he learns to chew these items. Don't forget to provide lots of fresh hay. Hay will allow your rabbit plenty of chewing pleasure and will help promote good dental care.

Training your rabbit can be fun for both you and your rabbit. You will see new behaviors you never knew existed and you will get to know your rabbit better. He in turn will be trained to do what pleases him, in a way that pleases you.

Great rabbit toys and ideas can be found at:

www.bunnybytes.com

www.busybunny.com

www..catsandrabbitsandmore.com/products

www.forotheotherlivingthings.com

www.rabbit.org/chapters/san-diego/behavior/toys.html

www.rabbit.org/chapters/san-diego/behavior/bunnyproofing.html

by Michelle Wilhelms

Why Rabbits Should Not Be Declawed

Declawing rabbits is unnecessary and cruel. Here are some facts that you should consider before making a decision. Please note that in this article, the comparisons to declawing a cat do not imply that the HRS supports cat declawing. Rather, that it is even more severe for a rabbit to undergo this amputation.

1. Rabbits do not have retractable claws like a cat, which means they use them ALL the time for traction. (A cat does not need its claws in normal movement around the house. It "extends" the claws when it needs to "hook" into something like a prey item or a toy.) Rabbits who are declawed have more problems with traction, particularly on smooth surfaces. This can lead to splay leg conditions, par-



Maggie sits atop a Cottontail Cottage cardboard playhouse that she gets to explore and chew. Her humans, Judith Pierce and Larry Nixon, happily replace the cardboard cottage when it has been gnawed to a falling-down state. Larry is also adept at constructing less elaborate houses out of over-turned cardboard boxes. Add two cut-out doorways at opposing corners and a carpet remnant, and you have a secure place for your bunny to sit and watch the world.

Happy Adoptions

Have you adopted from the San Diego 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. It makes our day to hear that our ex-foster buns are doing well!

ticularly if the rabbit is sedentary or overweight.

2. This is a painful operation and the rabbit has to walk on the surgery sites for several days while healing takes place. A declawed cat is also in pain, but rabbits walk more ON the surgical site, rather than on an elevated pad. When declawing a rabbit, the bone that the claw is attached to is either severed or removed and there is a large hole that has to be either sewn or glued shut. It's the equivalent of removing your fingernail by amputating the finger at the nearby joint.

3. When a rabbit is declawed, it cannot clean its ears or scratch an itch — and that could be quite frustrating.

Online Update

Want to keep updated on the San Diego chapter activities by e-mail? Join our online update and get monthly updates sent right to your desktop. 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 e-mail to: sandiegorabbitsonline-subscribe@yahoo.com

Compost: Black Gold

What do you do with your rabbit's dirty litter box? Do you dump it in the trash? Why not try composting? If you have a garden, it's a must. By composting, you can reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, you can conserve water, and reduce the amount of material going to our landfills. Compost increases organic matter in the soil, attracts and feeds earthworms (a good thing), aerates clay soils, helps sandy soil hold moisture, helps plants build sound root structures, and reduces water demand.



Nothing messy about this compost set-up. The bin sits neatly between trash cans and a raised vegetable garden.

\$40 Spay/Neuter Rebate Coupons for Carlsbad Residents

Pet owners residing in Carlsbad are eligible to receive a \$40 rebate coupon to cover or defray the cost of spaying or neutering their pets.

The coupons are accepted by veterinarians throughout the county and must be redeemed within 30 days of issuance. Eligible Carlsbad pet owners may visit the Carlsbad Police Department Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., to obtain their coupon or may call 760-931-2170 for further information. Coupons are limited and will be distributed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

What is composting?

Composting is the natural process of decomposing organic material into a fertile soil amendment. Your rabbit's litter box contains most of the ingredients needed for successful composting. The ingredients include "browns," "greens," and water. Browns are dry, carbon-containing materials such as hay and Carefresh. Other types of browns include leaves, straw and woody material. Greens are nitrogen-rich materials like bunny's droppings, grass clippings and vegetable scraps. Urine (high in nitrogen)-soaked Carefresh falls into both categories. Add browns, greens and a little water, and in no time naturally occurring oxygen-consuming (aerobic) microorganisms — bacteria — and earthworms will go to work, turning the contents of bunny's litter box into black gold.

Getting started

The easiest way to get started is to buy a composting bin from a home improvement or garden shop. There are several readily available styles. Most are made of recycled plastic, have a volume of a little less than one cubic

yard, (sufficient to retain heat and moisture), have side air vents, a side opening, and a lid. You could also make your own out of wood, a trash can with some holes drilled in the side and bottom, or just toss everything in a pile for that matter. But for most urban settings, a bin is the way to go. Large drum "compost tumblers" also work well but take up a lot of space and are more expensive.

I've set my composting bin next to my vegetable garden, near the trash cans full of hay and Carefresh. I dump and rinse the litter box in the bin then refill the litter box with fresh Carefresh and hay. Occasionally I add grass clippings from the lawn along with banana peels, orange rinds, coffee grounds, etc (no animal products except manure from vegetarian animals, and no oils.) Everything from my vegetable garden that isn't eaten, including weeds, also goes into the compost bin. Temperatures up to 150 degrees can be generated during the composting process. These temperatures are sufficient to kill most weed seeds.

How long will it take?

This depends on the material you add and how much time you want to spend managing your compost. If you vary the material, use finely chopped or cut material, mix new material into the pile, turn the pile (with a pitch fork) frequently to provide maximum aeration, and maintain ample moisture (damp as a wrung-out sponge) you should have compost in a month or two. Or, you can just keep adding the litter box contents and water to the pile. No mixing or turning. Then, when the bin is full — in 6 to 8 months depending on the size and number of rabbits, of course — the stuff on the bottom should be ready to use. It's almost fool proof.

Will it smell?

No. If your compost pile is "cooking"

along properly, it should smell like freshly turned soil. However, adding too much water or greens, such as lawn clippings, can restrict the amount of oxygen needed for the aerobic microorganism. The pile can become anaerobic and emit a sour or “rotten” odor. If this happens, simply add more browns and turn the pile. In a day or two, the odor will be gone.

Harvesting your compost

Finished compost should be dark brown to black, feel like good crumbly garden soil, and have a sweet earthy

aroma. Your compost may even be loaded with earth worms. Compost can be used in your garden as a top dressing or mixed into the soil. It can also be used around trees, in shrubs and even on the lawn.

And you were going to throw it in the trash!

For more information, check out www.digitalseed.com and click on “the Composter.”

by Your Garden Guy

Note: You can buy live red worms at your local garden store to enhance the composting process.

Holiday Fund-raising

This year’s Holiday Party was a huge success and lots of fun. We raised more than \$1,400 to benefit the San Diego HRS. Big bunny hugs to all the volunteers who helped out and everyone who donated that night. We appreciate it!

This December, San Diego HRS volunteers took time out of their busy holiday schedules to lend a hand in two fund-raising events.

Christmas wrap-up

They wrapped purchases at a Barnes and Noble Bookstore for donations to HRS. They were also able to hand out rabbit care information. Thanks to Kathleen Goodson, who helped organize this event, and all the volunteers who helped wrap those gifts!

Santa and the Elves

SD HRS volunteers also played Santa and his elves at the Petsmart in the Sports Arena area to raise money for HRS. A portion of the proceeds from the photos will come back to HRS. The Santas were dressed to the hilt and played by volunteers Pete Rivas and Brian Vestyck.

Pet Food Drive

At this year’s holiday party we collected donations not only for rabbits, but we also participated in the

AniMeals Program. This event helps distribute cat and dog food to those who need a little help for their pets during the holidays. HRS members were exceedingly generous at the holiday party and brought rabbit food and gifts as well as cat and dog food.

Thanks to those of you who contributed to the AniMeals Holiday Pet Food Drive at the Holiday Party! Here’s a message from Leslie Keehn, Chair of the San Diego County Bar Association’s Animal Law Section, on the overall results of the drive sponsored by the group:

“Many thanks to all of you who supported our Holiday Pet Food Drive,” Leslie said. “The folks at Helen Woodward Animal Center were truly amazed at the amount of food we gathered for their AniMeals program. People donated a total of 1,289 pounds of dog and cat food...”

WOW! We’re looking forward to beating those numbers next year!”

Heidi Vaught (below, left) and Leslie Keehn, chair of the Animal Law Section of the SD County Bar Association, which helped organize the AniMeals drive, got to meet many rabbits at the party and are now fans of these special animals!



Rabbits Needing Homes

Heather is a beautiful tri-colored lop girl, about 4 years old. She is a bit thin right now, but we anticipate she



will get to be about 9-10 pounds. Heather is a special girl; we hope you'll agree and give her the home she deserves! Heather was dropped off at a shelter, essentially to die — at least that's what the person who dumped her thought. After living with a family for nearly four years, she developed large lumps on her underside and the owner decided he didn't want his kids to "suffer by having to see her die." He refused to have the growths removed, saying that she should live out "whatever life she has left." Fortunately, HRS volunteers were on hand to intervene and she was taken to a vet who removed the lumps and spayed her. While the lumps were malignant, the vet believes he removed all the cancer and that Heather will be fine. Heather is active, happy and loves attention. Does she know she's been given a second chance at life? We are eager to place Heather in a loving home where she will receive the love

and attention she craves and deserves. Heather is very good with her litter box and is good around kitties; she has also been around quiet children.

Becky is an active 3-year-old who is just beautiful. She has spent half of her life in foster and would very much like a home of her own with experienced rabbit people. She's gotten an undeserved reputation because she nipped a time or two when startled — who wouldn't? — but she also loves to be petted and will come running up to see you, in hopes of getting your attention. Becky has a great appetite and enjoys prancing around her pen with her carrot chunk in her mouth!



Belle is a 1-year-old, Hotot-dwarf mix girl who enjoys playing and being petted. She's a bit protective of her space, so we recommend a large pen or a top opening cage for her home. Belle is a young, petite and active bunny who may make a good companion choice to a quieter, more submissive boy bunny. Probably not a good choice for "first bunny," but would do best in an experienced adult home.



Blossom is a multi-colored, beautiful young rabbit with a great temperament. This gentle gal would do

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 (\$80 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 in the San Diego House Rabbit Society. Supplies are also available at HRS adoption days.

Double the Fun

Experienced bunny families will tell you that bunnies usually prefer to have a friend, and caring for a bonded pair is just as easy as for one! Visit the HRS website to learn more: www.sandiegorabbits.org.

best in a quiet home, but would probably be okay around well-behaved children.



Blossom likes to explore the house and is pretty easy to hold. She loves to be petted and is also very good with her litterbox. Now all she needs is a permanent home!

Summer is a young mini-lop male, about 4 months old. He is very active and social, and will need lots of run time and attention to keep him happy. Summer needs a large cage or a pen, with a top on it, as he finds it very easy to climb/jump out of a 36" pen! Summer is very active, therefore not recommended for small children.



Pretty **Zoe** is a sweet young female, about 10 months old. Though somewhat shy, especially in new surroundings, Zoe is a sweet girl who can learn to trust you through gentle interactions and sweet words. She loves her run time and has a blast dancing up and down the length of the bunny yard. This young girl may be a good companion choice to a gentle-natured bunny boy.



Young **Scotty** rests 'neath the holiday tree, dreaming of his own new home. Scotty is a handsome lop-mix boy, about 2 years old. This happy boy is friendly, loves to play, and has a really nice personality. He doesn't care much for being picked up, but once in your arms is easy to hold. This nice boy is looking for a special family of his own; perhaps a family with wellbehaved older children, or a young couple looking for a bunny to dote upon.

Dorothy is a very friendly New Zealand White girl, who would make a great first rabbit. She runs to the front of her cage to greet you. She loves attention and loves to be held. She even tooth purrs while you hold her. Dorothy is spayed and is about 8 months old. She is starting to grow into those ears!

Alex and Emily are two young Californian kids, about 8 months old. Alex, in the back, has a light grey coloring on his nose, ears and feet, while Emily's are a darker brown color. They are two very active kids, full of energy,

curiosity and funny bunny dances! A bonded pair, they do everything together. We expect they will grow to be larger bunnies, as most Californians do,

but true to their breed they are very loving, very friendly, and will make great family companions.



Who We Are

The San Diego Rabbit News is published by the nonprofit House Rabbit Society, San Diego Chapter. Every reasonable effort is made to ensure the accuracy of information in the News, however the editors and House Rabbit Society assume no responsibility for unintentional errors and omissions.

The content of this newsletter has not been reviewed by the national House Rabbit Society, which is in no way responsible for its content.

There is no expressed or implied recommendation for any vendor/sponsor named in this newsletter.

Contact Us

Mail comments and suggestions to the San Diego Rabbit News, P.O. Box 2628, Spring Valley, CA 91979 or e-mail to the addresses below.

Chapter Manager
Michelle Wilhelms
MEWHRS@aol.com

Newsletter Editor
Kristin Tow
Lopears1@aol.com

Website Editor
Judith Pierce
pierceja@cox.net

San Diego Rabbits Online
Amy Spintman
SDiegoHRS@aol.com

Website

www.sandiegorabbits.org

Hay, CareFRESH Sources

The House Rabbit Hay Exchange offers fresh hay and grasses at an affordable price. For just \$8 (\$8.62 with tax) you get a good-sized box filled with hay. Plan ahead. Don't let your hay supply run out before trying to buy more.

Hay sales by the sources below provide valuable income for the HRS. The money supports our spay/neuter efforts and the veterinary care for our foster and shelter bunnies.

Hay is boxed and distributed by volunteers. Please call ahead to see if there is hay available so you won't waste a trip.

Central San Diego	Cabrillo Veterinary Hospital	619-224-9516
	Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital	619-260-1412
East County	Rancho San Diego Animal Hospital	619-660-6767
North County	Diane Calkins	760-633-1564
	Acacia Animal Hospital	760-745-8115

Many pet supply stores, as well as some of the hay sources listed here, carry Carefresh litter.

Happy Adoption: Buddy

As some of you know, I adopted a bunny in September [Cindeberry at the county's central shelter] whom I named Bebe. I was having so much fun with her that I decided two bunnies would be twice as much fun! Plus I thought Bebe would enjoy having a buddy (of her own species), so I adopted another bunny and named him Buddy [formerly Joey]. He's an adorable brown lop.

I had told my friend at the San Diego HRS that I was interested

in adopting a buddy for Bebe if she came across another front-toothless orphan bunny. Bebe and Buddy both had their front teeth removed because of severe malocclusion, which works out to be a positive thing because when

toothless, they can run free in my house with no worries of them chewing anything which rabbits have a tendency to do. They can still eat with no problem, but they just can't bite, so I need to chop up their veggies for them.

Sure enough, within a couple days, she told me there was a little toothless boy looking for a new home. So we took Bebe over to meet him, and we all agreed he would be a nice addition to the family. Everyone is getting along great.

Buddy quickly adapted to his new home. He's having a blast exploring the condo, and I am just delighted to have another cute critter in my home.

Alison Leinbach



Buddy, left, and Bebe enjoy a carrot-top treat. Notice how Buddy has the tops way back in his mouth where he still has molars.

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



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


Caps — cotton baseball-style caps, one size with adjustable strap. Herman head design (upper right this page). Apricot or aqua blue **\$12**

Clock motif T-shirt — Long-sleeve, imprinted in front in black. Gray or natural in S,M,L,XL,XXL; Sky blue or bright yellow in M,L,XL **\$18**

Clock motif T-shirt — Short-sleeve tee, imprinted center front in black. White or gray in S,M,L,XL,XXL; Sky blue or bright yellow in M,L,XL,XXL **\$15**

Scoop-neck ladies T-shirt — Clock motif on short-sleeve T. Violet, light blue, light yellow S,M,L **\$15**

3-Rabbit T-shirt - Crew-neck short-sleeve tee with color illustrations on white backgrounds. Blue in S,M; or natural in S,M,L,XXL (no XL) **\$15**
Scoop-neck ladies short-sleeve T. White in S,M,L,XXL (no XL) or violet in S only **\$15**



3-Rabbit sweatshirt - Color illustrations on white backgrounds. Blue or natural in S,M,L,XL **\$22**

3-rabbit design

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 / hats, totes, posters: Southern Cal delivery \$4 first item, \$1 each additional; all other areas, \$5 first item, \$1.50 each additional item.
Grocery pads: 75¢ for one, 50¢ each additional.
Handbook: \$2.40 each

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

NOTE: Quantities may be limited in some sizes and colors, so please indicate a second choice.

Check your expiration date
and renew early.



Printed on recycled paper

Standard Presort
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 51
San Diego, CA

San Diego HRS OPEN HOUSE

Join us Saturday, May 17th
12 noon to 4 p.m.

4750 Cass St. in Pacific Beach
4 blocks north of Garnet Ave.

Food, fun & fund-raising
activities

Hay, Carefresh and gifts for you
and your rabbit available all day.

Purchase raffle tickets and win
great items. Proceeds benefit
San Diego HRS.

Ask HRS volunteers your rabbit
questions.

Get your rabbit's nails trimmed
for a small donation.

Questions? Call 619-718-7777

Benefits of Adopting vs. Buying

If you're reading this newsletter, you are probably already well aware of the benefits of adopting. But when someone mentions "buying" an animal, you're on the spot to explain why that isn't a good idea. Here's a list of the benefits of adoption to help you. Maybe someday you can persuade someone else to rescue an abandoned animal from a shelter or rescue organization rather than buy from a pet shop or swap meet.

We strongly suggest you adopt from a good rescue organization rather than buy an animal. You'll save two lives: the one you adopt, and the animal who now has a space in foster care and won't be euthanized at the shelter. Adopting is the humane thing to do; buying only encourages pet overpopulation by breeders who want to make money. Adopting is actually better for the adopter too. Why? Because you get an adult who is spayed/neutered, litter trained and "known" companion animal.

"Adult" There'll be no big hormonal changes as when bunnies go through puberty—no behavioral issues to deal with, no changes in personality.

"Spayed/Neutered" For many health and behavioral reasons, spay/neuter is recommended. In females, spaying eliminates the risk of uterine cancer; spraying is reduced or eliminated in neutered males. "Fixed" rabbits have better litter box habits. You can adopt a spayed/neutered rabbit at a fraction of the cost of that surgery.

"Litter trained"
Need I say more?

"Known"

Chances are that by the time you meet the animal/rabbit, he will

have been in foster care long enough for the foster family to know his temperament. Is he a lap bunny? A shy bunny? A chewer and digger? What does he like to eat? How does he cope with other animals and children? Usually by this time latent health problems will have surfaced and the foster agency will have dealt with them. You will know before adoption if this is a special-needs animal.

Adopting a rescued animal takes much of the risk out of bringing a new animal into your home. What you see is what you get, and you have the help of animal rescue people who genuinely want the best lifetime match for animal and human.
