**New Non Profit to Benefit Companion Rabbits**

*A Word from our President, Mary Huey*

Rabbits, rabbits, and more rabbits! Their cute images are everywhere, but how many folks know what it’s like to bring one into the home? Welcome to the wonderful world of companion rabbits and to the Rabbit Advocates. Let me tell you something about us.

Our passion for rabbits is sincere. We appreciate how intelligent, gentle, affectionate and entertaining rabbits can be and want to share our enthusiasm and knowledge with all animal lovers.

Frequently, when visiting with people who have previously had a rabbit, we hear stories about their past experiences. Some stories are heartwarming and some are heartbreakers. Rabbits are prey animals who need special considerations to keep them safe, and they are social animals who benefit from close human companionship.

Much progress has been made over the past few years regarding the way that these unique animals are viewed and should be cared for. It is our goal, through educational efforts, to share this information and promote a more enlightened view. We hope this results in a better quality of life for all companion rabbits.

For the past five years the Rabbit Advocates have worked closely with Oregon Humane Society in establishing their companion rabbit care and adoption program. Rabbits are the third-most-surrendered animals at shelters, preceded by dogs and cats. Our volunteers work very hard to keep rabbits in the spotlight and to place them in loving homes.

We have now taken the giant step of becoming a nonprofit organization dedicated to the welfare of companion rabbits. I invite you to: visit our web site (www.adoptarabbit.org) attend our monthly meetings, come to our outreaches at various community locations, attend our educational and fundraising events, call our telephone information line (503-617-1625) with your questions about rabbit care or about the Rabbit Advocates.

Working independently toward making the world a better place for companion rabbits makes this an exciting time for all of us. We welcome all of you to contact us and join in these efforts. You won’t find a nicer, more caring group of people!

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**Rabbit Rescues: Kudos to Volunteers and Vets**

Following up on calls to our help line, Rabbit Advocate volunteers recently rescued four rabbits which had been released in an Aloha neighborhood. Days later, volunteers searched the steep rocky terrain of Shepperd’s Dell State Park in the Columbia Gorge and rescued twelve adorable dwarf rabbits which had been abandoned there.

Many thanks to the teams of volunteers who made expeditions to Aloha and Shepperd’s Dell, the foster families who are caring for the rabbits, and the following veterinarians who have generously donated spay/neuter services:

- Dr. Wood, Raleigh Hills Veterinary Clinic
- Dr. Wilson, Beaverton Pet Clinic
- Dr. Davis, Vista Pet Hospital

Loving foster families and permanent homes are urgently needed! Please call us at 503-617-1625 if you can help.

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Become a Rabbit Advocate volunteer. Join a group of dedicated, fun-loving people who are committed to the welfare of companion rabbits. Meetings are held on the third Sunday of every month. Log on to www.adoptarabbit.org for further information. Or phone: 503-617-1625
Continuing Education: Q & A for Bunny Parents
by Shelley Hanel and Halli Altson

Q  How can you tell when a rabbit is becoming ill? If you see that she’s not eating what are the first steps to take? When do you need to take her to the vet?
A  There are several ways to tell if a rabbit is not feeling well. Symptoms include lethargy, decrease in appetite (she should always want her favorite treat), fewer and smaller poops, and a temperature one degree outside of the normal range which is 101-103 degrees F. It is important to contact your vet immediately if your bunny does not feel well.

Q  What is the best way to hold/restrain my rabbit while grooming/nail trimming/temperature taking? What is the best way to pick up a bunny?
A  Put him on your lap or on a table with his rear end touching your stomach and his head pointing away from you. Restrain him with both hands. You can also wrap your bunny in a cloth and take one foot out at a time to trim his nails. The best way to pick up a bunny is using one hand to lift him under his rear end and the other hand to lift him under his chest/front arms making sure that he can not jump out of your arms.

Q  How long can I expect my rabbit to live? What are the positive steps I can take to ensure as long a life as possible?
A  Your rabbit can live 8 to 12 years. To increase longevity, keep her indoors with you and exercise, feed and love her well!

Q  What is the best living arrangement for a rabbit? Will my bunny be happier with or without a companion?
A  A good home for a bunny is inside your house with as much room as possible. If needed, a wire pen with room to play, jump, stretch, feed and use a litterbox will help contain your rabbit. Many bunnies are happier with a companion. Care must be taken when introducing animals. See our website for more information.

Q  Where can a new rabbit owner find the most basic, easy to understand and accurate info on caring for a bunny?
A  Visit our website, www.adoptarabbit.org, and the links from this site.

Living with a House Rabbit
by Lara Blanck-Weiss

When my first house rabbit came home, I thought I was prepared. I’d decided he would be cage-free. So, I set up a lower cupboard with a shelf and a ramp for his hideaway. That corner of the room had a water bottle, food dish, cute toys, and litter boxes set up, and I had good, healthful pellets and timothy hay. I had read the House Rabbit Handbook. I was ready for my new housemate.

Little did I realize how much there was to learn. Otis arrived and refused to go in the cupboard nook I’d created – except to use the lower half as a litter box if hay was in there. He liked to hang out under his ramp, but didn’t like going on it. The fencing I used to limit his space (to aid with litter training, as I’d read to do) was seen as a challenge. The first three nights with a rabbit in the house were loud; he quickly learned I came running at the sound of the fencing banging. It took me a while to recognize his neat trick. I was beginning my training.

Since that start, Otis has learned new ways to get my attention. There’s no more fencing so instead he flings the remote control. As soon as the fencing came down he moved “his” space to one of the chairs under the kitchen table.

Otis has learned “no” means to stop what he is doing, and he has learned when he will hear it. In those situations he is stealthy, practically tiptoeing, and when he hears the inevitable “Otis NO” he binkys away gleefully. He now begs on cue, but I sometimes feel he taught me to give treats on command. We’ve compromised on where the litter boxes should be placed and Otis has been keeping his side of that deal. I’ve learned to store paper items and plants above knee level, and to latch doors behind me. And the most important lesson I’ve learned: No toy is as important as a cardboard box with hay inside.
**Volunteer Spotlight: Mary Thompson**

*by Joan Gilbert*

Mary T, as she is called by the Rabbit Advocates, is a highly dedicated and multitalented volunteer. She fosters rabbits, answers the phone and e-mail help lines, educates the public, helps at special events, takes rabbits to adoption outlets, and is the Webmaster for the group. Behind the scenes, she is on the Board of Directors, chairs the Education committee, and participates on the Volunteer and Risk Management committees. In short, she is there whenever needed!

Mary has had a fondness for rabbits since childhood. When she and her husband Jeff moved to Oregon, they brought two house rabbits with them, Babs and Lillian. Because of her love for them, and desire to help other rabbits, she started volunteering at Oregon Humane Society over five years ago. When the idea came up for a new nonprofit group dedicated to educating the public about companion rabbits, she was eager to get involved. Mary takes digital pictures of adoptable foster and shelter rabbits for the website, www.adoptarabbit.org, and adds colorful descriptions. “The website is also a great way to become involved in a larger community of people with an interest in the welfare of companion rabbits,” notes Mary. There are articles addressing rabbit care and behavior, links to other information, rescue groups, retail outlet sites, recommended books, and more.

Ebony, who is blind and at least partially deaf, was one of many rabbits who found a loving home through the website. Mary describes him as “an elder-bun who is lovable but not one that the average adopter gravitates towards.” When a caring family saw his picture, they decided they would love to have him in their home. He got attention, affection, and “even got to sleep in bed with his people.”

Mary works as a software engineer, enjoys the outdoors, reading, taking exercise and art classes, and playing Mah Jongg, an ancient Chinese tile game. She plans to go skydiving someday. She says that “the camaraderie and support of the members of the group make volunteering a fulfilling experience.”

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**Keeping Bunny Healthy: Nutrition**

*by Valerie Madison*

The best health insurance for your rabbit is a high fiber diet. Beneficial bacteria and protozoa located in the rabbit’s cecum and large intestine ferment and convert food into digestible nutrients that can be used by your rabbit. Bunny parents should be aware that any sudden change in diet can disrupt the normal microbial population in the gut and have serious consequences for bunny’s health.

Grass hay is an essential source of fiber and is the most important part of the rabbit diet. Good quality hay smells fresh, not moldy. Store it in a cool, dry place. Unlimited amounts of timothy, orchard, or oat hay should be available in bunny’s living space 24 hours a day. (Alfalfa hay is not recommended.) Without fiber, gut motility slows, the normal population of intestinal bacteria is disrupted, and changes in gut pH and fermentation occur. This chain of events can lead to indigestion, or gut “stasis”, which can be fatal if untreated.

High fibrous is also necessary for the health of your bunny’s teeth. A rabbit’s teeth grow continuously throughout its lifetime. Without a high fiber diet, the incisor or molar teeth, may overgrow resulting in sharp molar points and facial abscesses.

A variety of pesticide-free vegetables should be offered on a daily basis. About 1 cup per 5 pounds of body weight is a good rule of thumb. Tough fibrous vegetables are best; see our website, www.adoptarabbit.org, for a complete list of rabbit-safe veggies. Introduce new vegetables one at a time in small amounts and discontinue if there are any signs of digestive upset. Fruits and sweet vegetables like carrots should be fed in small amounts – no more than 1 tablespoon per 5 pounds of body weight - as they contain carbohydrates and sugars which can upset the normal microbes of the gut, resulting in growth of undesirable toxic bacteria. Pellets should be a relatively small part of the diet of an adult house rabbit. Choose a high-quality pellet that is high in fiber (>18%), low in protein (<16%) and low in fat (1-2%). Feed pellets at 1/4 cup per 5 pounds of body weight per day. If you need to convert your rabbit from one brand of pellet to another or to a smaller quantity, do so gradually, always providing an unlimited supply of grass hay. Never feed pellets containing seeds, nuts or other “treats”. These pellets are very high in fat. And never ever feed your rabbit human treats!

Don’t forget to provide clean, fresh water at all times. Water is essential for hydration and healthy functioning of the gut. Water can be supplied in a clean drip bottle, a heavy bowl, or both. A healthy diet = healthy microbes = a healthy rabbit!

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I step around the corner and a little white ball of energy bounces toward me, curious and affectionate. It’s Lindy, a beautiful rabbit who has met extremes of fortune and misfortune in his short life. It’s only after he nuzzles my hand and romps sideways that I notice he looks funny. It’s his back legs: one of them curves underneath him, and the other sticks out straight behind him like it was attached backwards.

Karen DiMilia, Lindy’s adoptive mom, scoops him up and pours on the affection. Karen and her husband Richard gave up their master bathroom to Lindy: “We wanted him to have the bathroom with the window.” They put foam padding on the floor, covered with soft towels for his comfort. Most rabbits stand up on the furry pads of their feet; Lindy’s handicap puts his weight on other places.

Lindy is one of the happiest rabbits I’ve ever met (and I’ve met hundreds). But his life was not always this joyful, and it’s amazing that he ended up in such a loving home. No one knows when or where Lindy was born. Someone abandoned him in winter cold on the step of a suburban pet store, whose employees turned him over to West Linn Animal Control. They contacted Rabbit Advocate Mary Huey, who arranged for a foster family to take him. After a short stay with the foster family, Lindy was brought to a vet’s office, where the staff wondered if he had been the victim of abuse, and whether he would ever be able to thrive.

Lindy’s chances of thriving skyrocketed when Mary and Karen made a visit to the vet’s office and both ladies quickly realized that Lindy needed most of all a stable, caring environment. In January 2002 Karen took Lindy to her home. The little bunny was covered in flea dust and urine stains. “We spent a long time cleaning him up,” says Karen. “He was pretty stinky!” These days Lindy keeps himself clean, and he’s getting better about using his litter box.

Veterinarian Mark Burgess has diagnosed Lindy’s condition as arthrogryposis: a congenital deformity in which joints come together at wrong angles. It does not get worse with age, and Lindy has adapted extremely well, getting around nearly as well as other rabbits do. But one thing he can’t do is scratch his ears. It’s heartbreaking to watch him try, so Karen keeps an eye out and gives him a hand whenever an itch strikes. As for Lindy, he doesn’t even seem to know that he’s handicapped. He just wants to love and be loved. Being adopted by Karen and Richard fits that plan just fine!