The Chinese zodiac was first introduced in 2637 B.C., and it is based on the ancient philosophies of Confucius, Lao-tse, and the I Ching. It consists of a 60-year cycle, within which are two separate overlapping cycles. The first is the 10-year cycle of the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). Each element is assigned to two sequential years, with odd-numbered years being yin (representing the female, night force), while even-numbered years are yang (representing the male, day force). The second year is the cycle of 12 zodiac animal signs (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig). The 60-year cycle, which most recently began in 1984, always begins with Yang Wood Rat and ends with Yin Water Pig. 2011 is Yin Metal Rabbit.

The 12 animal signs of the Chinese zodiac represent different personality types. Several versions of a similar legend explain how the 12 animals were selected for inclusion in the zodiac. A common version of the legend is that Buddha invited all of the animals of China to visit him, but only 12 animals showed up. Each of these animals was given a year on the calendar, in the order in which they arrived. The rat came first because he hitched a ride on the ox’s back, then jumped off and raced ahead so that he could be first to arrive. The deliberate and hard-working ox came second, followed by the strong and brave tiger. Next were the detached and refined rabbit, the charismatic dragon, and the wise snake. They were followed by the confident, handsome horse; patient, artistic sheep; energetic, skillful monkey; and courageous, outgoing rooster. The last two animals to arrive were the loyal and affectionate dog and, finally, the tolerant and determined pig.

The animal assigned to a particular year affects not only people born during that year, but all people. According to astrologer Shelly Wu, 2011’s Metal Rabbit will bring detachment, creativity, and diplomacy to the world. Whether or not you believe in Chinese astrology, one thing is for certain: the Year of the Rabbit will have a great effect on the world’s rabbits.

Detached and diplomatic. Ambitious, talented, and creative. Refined, with excellent taste. Would you say that these qualities describe a certain furry member of your family? In Chinese astrology, these are some of the attributes associated with people who are born during the Year of the Rabbit. February 3, 2011 ushered in the lunar new year and the Year of the Rabbit, which will end on January 22, 2012.

2011 may be the year of the rabbit according to Chinese astrology, but rabbits are not fad pets and require at least a 10-year commitment, just like other companion pets.

Unfortunately, some people will acquire pet rabbits out of a belief that rabbits are “lucky charms,” and many of these rabbits will be abandoned when the year is over. 2011 is therefore an important time for Rabbit Advocates to continue educating the public about the 10-year commitment that pet rabbits require. The focus on rabbits also presents an opportunity for us to let people know what wonderful pets rabbits can be for those who are willing to make the commitment.
Chinese New Year began, according to legend, with a fight against a mythical beast called the Nian. The Nian arrived the first day of each new year to eat crops, livestock and even villagers. To protect themselves from harm, villagers would put food in front of their doors to satisfy the Nian and protect themselves since it was believed that after it ate the prepared food, the Nian wouldn’t attack more people.

Legend tells that once the Nian was frightened away by a child wearing clothes in the color red, so when the new year is about to come, villagers hang red lanterns and light firecrackers to chase away the Nian.

Today, the Chinese New Year is observed in many countries around the world. Celebrations often include a parade, festivals and special foods. A special dinner is held on New Year’s Eve during which time members of the family gather in or near the home of the most senior member of the family. Traditional New Year’s Eve dinner is elaborate usually includes chicken and fish. Sometimes, the food is not completely eaten and leftovers are stored over night so that the Chinese phrase “may there be surpluses every year” can be uttered.

Closer to home, the city of San Francisco boasts a Chinese New Year celebration that began in the 1860s by the Chinese community to educate residents about the Chinese culture. Today it is the largest Chinese New Year celebration outside Asia. Earlier this year, the Rabbit Advocates focused on the year of the rabbit with its own celebration that included a celebration along with education about rabbit care.

(Editor’s Note: The photos accompanying these stories were taken in northern Thailand by Jim Wageman, father of Rabbit Advocate volunteer Sarah Yasutake and feature detailed rabbit figures made from flowers.)

Fritz makes himself at home. (Photo by Kem Sypher)
Rabbit Advocates need your help

As an all-volunteer organization, Rabbit Advocates relies on the hard work of dedicated people. Without kind people who give of themselves and their time, Rabbit Advocates could not produce its very own blend of gourmet hay, produce this newsletter or keep the organization going.

The Rabbit Advocates has developed a committee structure to help encourage and direct its volunteer structure. Each committee and project needs more help. If you are able to dedicate even a small amount of time and effort, please contact Betty Bussey, betty@bussey.us, Volunteer Committee Chair.

Here’s how you can help:

**Donate money:** Rabbit Advocates is a non-profit organization. Your donation is tax deductible. Donations pay for things like the printing and distribution of this newsletter, among many other projects and expenses.

**Donate time:** This issue of The Rabbit Advocate highlights some of the many opportunities to get involved in the organization. One project is Bunny’s Best Bites, a gourmet hay blend. Mixing and bagging Bunny’s Best Bites requires volunteer time and labor. The job is a work-out but it’s also rewarding. Proceeds from the sale of Bunny’s Best Bites go to the Rabbit Advocate Medical Fund, which offsets expenses for spaying, neutering and providing medical care for rabbits.

**Western Pet outreaches:** Another project is the education outreaches held monthly at Western Pet Supply. These events allow the public an opportunity to learn about companion pet rabbits. Volunteers talk with the public and groom pet rabbits when requested.

**Rabbit Advocate telephone help line:** A third ongoing project is the Rabbit Advocate telephone help line. Volunteers check voice mail messages every day and return phone calls to people who have called the help line to ask rabbit-related questions. The helpline project consistently needs volunteers to check messages and return phone calls.

**Donate a chunk of your heart:** Sadly, there are more home less bunnies than available loving homes. If you can open a space in your home to adopt, please consider adopting a wonderful companion rabbit. Many are featured on the Rabbit Advocate website at www.rabbitadvocates.org. If you are unable to provide a permanent home, please consider opening your home on a foster basis to provide shelter and love to a rabbit that otherwise would not have either. Adoptive and foster homes for otherwise homeless rabbits are a constant need.

For more information on these or any other Rabbit Advocate projects, please contact Volunteer Committee Chair Betty Bussey at betty@bussey.us
Today, a Rabbit’s Life was Saved

By Bob Sherman
TRACS Rabbit Advocates, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

I am not writing this in search of praise. I know many Rabbit Advocates have saved lives. My purpose is to share a meaningful experience, give credit to the Rabbit Advocates, and encourage all to trust their gut feelings.

My wife Marie and I recently constructed a new bunny sanctuary in Kelowna, B.C. as part of a very large feral rabbit rescue operation with The Responsible Animal Care Society (TRACS). We used experience gained from two other projects to refine the details of this one. It became the home for about 50 young rabbits that had been fostered by “Grandpa and Granny,” a wonderful couple in their 80s who love rabbits and care deeply about them.

This new building, along with another building housing an additional 60 rabbits, requires a great deal of weekly care. Recently I was cleaning in the new building, while Marie cleaned the original one. This consists of sweeping the building’s floor, changing the straw put in small shelters to help the bunnies keep warm, and cleaning the corners which rabbits have preferred for bathroom facilities. Part of the work is a welfare check of the rabbits to assess their health.

As I clean and work my way through these chores, if I notice a bunny near my feet, I reach down and attempt to pet the rabbit. Usually the bunny runs away, but occasionally stays. This allows me to determine which rabbits are friendly and might be good adoption candidates. When I do manage to pick up a friendly bunny, the bunny always scampers away when I put him or her down. This is a normal reaction.

On Tuesday, I noted a small black bunny by my feet as I cleaned. I picked him up. After a bit of petting, I placed him down on the floor. He didn’t run away. I continued to observe this bunny, and saw he was unusually lethargic. Other rabbits would come near him, and even jump over him, without any reaction. This was very odd. Marie and I agreed that this bunny needed to go to the veterinarian right away.

Our suspicions were confirmed. The bunny knowledgeable vet, who helps TRACS Rabbit Advocates in many ways, did x-rays and a stool test. Her outlook was grim as she diagnosed the bunny with a parasite known as coccidiosis, in an advanced stage. She said that, based on his blood count, she was surprised he was even alive. She prescribed a medicine (Teva Trimel) to be given orally, and a diet of hay and iron rich greens, with no pellets. Based upon my Rabbit Advocate experience, I also suggested force feeding him with an herbivore-specific food like Oxbow Critical Care. I knew this bunny had to
start eating, and was unlikely to begin eating hay on his own. She agreed we could do that.

We brought Cole home and made him as comfortable as we could. He was lethargic and we knew he did not feel good. He couldn't even hold his head up. He sat scrunched up with his head between the support rails of the indoor hutch with his eyes half closed. He looked so sad. We began the regimen of medicine and Oxbow Critical Care. Within three hours his eyes seemed to brighten. We still had hope for him. Still on Wednesday we did not see any new elimination pellets, although a good amount of urine was present. His eyes were brighter and he was moving around a bit. He started eating some hay and greens but still no pellets. Wednesday night, I said a prayer to St. Francis, the Patron Saint of Animals.

As if by a miracle, on Thursday morning, we were overjoyed to find Cole had left us 10 pellets! We knew his system was beginning to work. We kept him in fresh hay and spinach to build his blood iron. His appetite improved by leaps and bounds. His bunny vet called to see how he was doing, and was amazed that he was still alive. She had been planning an autopsy to determine what his condition had been, in order to plan preventive care for the other rabbits at the sanctuary.

He will keep taking his meds for two weeks. He is lively and looking very good. We changed his name to “Lucky.” We know he would not have lasted another day if we had not brought him home. He is the most beautiful black bunny, with big back feet and long ears. We think perhaps his immune system is a bit weak, so he won’t go back to the sanctuary. He will stay with us and we will be on the lookout for a perfect “forever” home. He will have lots of love and be spoiled here until that day comes. Who knows, he might even become pals with our other bunny, Sunshine. Thank you, Rabbit Advocates, for the experience, training, and shared knowledge that allowed us to take timely action and save this life!

Editor’s note: For more information about the Kelowna rabbit rescue and TRACS, see the story in the winter, 2009, Rabbit Advocate newsletter on our website at www.adoptarabbit.org.
What’s Breed Got to do with it? How Important Is the Breed When Choosing a Pet Rabbit?

By Guinevere Boostrom

Prospective adopters frequently approach rabbit rescue groups with requests for specific breeds of rabbits. Some may say they live in a small apartment and want a Netherland dwarf because they assume a smaller rabbit will be more appropriate for their living situation. Others may say they want a lop because the rabbit is for their kids and they’ve heard that lops are gentle with children. All of this begs the question: what’s in a rabbit breed? Do certain breeds of rabbits have special characteristics that make them more or less suitable as pets in certain circumstances?

All domestic rabbits descend from the European wild rabbit. The Romans are widely credited with having been the first to keep the European wild rabbit in captivity as an agricultural resource, although they did little with breeding. Monastic monks in the Middle Ages are believed to have been the first to selectively breed rabbits for specific characteristics, and by the 16th century had developed a handful of color and size variations in rabbits. It was in 19th century Europe and the United States where rabbits became popular both as pets and show animals, and rabbit fanciers began breeding for more and more distinct physical characteristics.

Rabbit breeding for specific physical characteristics continues to this day. The American Rabbit Breeders Association now recognizes over four dozen specific breeds of rabbits, from the American to the Thrianta. Certainly, knowing a rabbit’s breed can tell you something about how the rabbit might look. We know that Rex rabbits typically have short, dense, velvet-like fur and angoras will have long, silky fur. We know that Netherland dwarf rabbits will weigh approximately two pounds and have petite, erect ears, whereas English Lops will weigh about 10 to 12 pounds and have ears long enough to drag on the ground. But can a rabbit’s breed tell us anything about its personality and whether or not it will make a good companion animal?

Many rabbit breed clubs certainly take the position that certain personality characteristics are intrinsic to a breed. The American Britannia Petite Rabbit Society describes their breed as “sprightly upright little show offs” on their website, whereas the National Jersey Wooly Rabbit club states in their promotional materials that “Jersey Woolies are known for their friendly temperament.” Many pet-related websites also offer opinions about the personalities associated with specific breeds. For example, a Google search for “Netherland Dwarf” will pull up a link to www.petwebsite.com that indicates:

The Netherland Dwarf Rabbit is timid, lively and can be highly strung and so despite its small size is not the best of rabbit breeds for small children. The Netherland Dwarf Rabbit breed has been associated with bad temperament, particularly in bucks and so assessment of temperament is important.

The same Google search pulls up a Wikipedia article about Netherland Dwarf rabbits that states:
Netherland Dwarfs have a reputation of being skittish, wild, and/or of poor temperament. This is a leftover stereotype from the beginnings of the breed, when temperament wasn’t the best. This has changed through selective breeding, making Dwarfs a docile breed. There are always exceptions, however, and there are testy individuals out there. In general, the Netherland Dwarf is curious and gentle. Those that are handled often learn to seek out human contact and enjoy companionship.

Indeed, there seem to be as many opinions about what constitutes the usual temperament of a specific rabbit breed as there are individuals writing about the breed.

As those of us involved in rabbit rescue can tell you, there is absolutely no way you can predict an individual rabbit’s temperament solely by looking at its breed. Mini Lops are a breed that are often considered to be extremely friendly and outgoing, and due to this reputation, many families with young children specifically come seeking a Mini Lop. Nonetheless, in my many years of volunteering in rabbit rescue, I can truthfully say that the worst bite I ever received from a rabbit was from a very feisty, stand-offish Mini Lop. Does this mean that all Mini Lops are aloof, aggressive biters? Absolutely not. It just means that this particular rabbit, due to her individual personality and unique set of circumstances, was especially protective of her space and her body and didn’t like me throwing a towel over her to pick her up to get her out of her cage for some socialization and play time. She needed to be matched with a forever home that would be willing to take the time to make her feel safe and comfortable in her environment. However, my experience with this rabbit taught me that you really cannot make generalizations about breed personality characteristics.

Likewise, rabbit rescuers will tell you that fixating on the physical characteristics of your pet rabbit over the personality of the individual is not always a recipe for a happy, harmonious bond between human and animal companion. In a shelter for which I once volunteered there was an extremely chubby Rex rabbit aptly named Velvet. I always found her to be a sweet, calm rabbit, and spent many a socialization session just sitting side by side with her quietly, gently rubbing her head, and receiving “tooth purrs” and occasional licks in return. She was adopted by a family with small children who wanted a living “Velveteen Rabbit” that they could play with and hug. But Velvet was a rabbit that appreciated peace and quiet, and while well meaning, the children’s exuberance was too much for Velvet. She ended up biting one of the children when they tried to grab her to hug her. She was returned to the shelter, now carrying the stigma of being an aggressive rabbit, which in my opinion, couldn’t have been further from the truth. Several weeks later, the family came back to the shelter to try again, and this time sat with several of the rabbits and chose a rabbit based on which one seemed to interact best with the children. That rabbit was a keeper for them.

Fixating on a particular look over individual personality could also cause someone to overlook an ideal animal companion. Rabbit rescuers from all over will tell you that white bunnies with pink eyes (which is characteristic of several breeds such as New Zealand, Californian, and Himalayan) are some of the hardest to adopt out because many people find the pink eyes objectionable. But, just like you can’t judge a book by its cover, you can’t judge a bunny by his eye color. Some big white bunnies I have known have been the sweetest, most docile rabbits I have ever met. Others have been some of the most comical, entertaining goofballs I have ever met. What a shame it would be if someone missed out on their ideal pet match because they insisted on adopting only a rabbit that conformed to some preconceived notion of what their pet rabbit should look like.

So, in answer to the question “What’s breed got to do with it?” the answer is really, “not much.” A breed name can be a useful way to describe a rabbit’s physical characteristics. If someone says “Lionhead” you can immediately picture the “mane” around the neck and the fuzzy rear end these rabbits have. But the name “Lionhead” really can’t tell you much else about the rabbit. Some people might try to insist that all Lionheads are feisty and aggressive, but that is about as accurate as someone saying that all blondes are dim-witted. The only way to choose an ideal rabbit companion is the same way you choose your human friends, spend some time with them, get to know them as an individual, and come to appreciate what makes them unique as an individual.
## Upcoming Meetings & Events 2011

### General Meetings
- May 29
- June 26
- July 17
- August 21
- September 18
- (Tentative) October 16
- November 20

### Bunny's Best Bites
Volunteers blend and bag different types of hay to create Bunny’s Best Bites, our own custom blend of hay. For more information about the hay parties, go to the RA website.

(10am & noon unless otherwise specified)
- Saturday, June 4, 10 a.m.
- Sunday, July 10, 9 a.m.
- Saturday, August 6, 9 a.m.
- Sunday, September 4, 10 a.m.
- Saturday, October 1, 10 a.m.
- Sunday, November 6, 10 a.m.

### Adoption Outreaches
Each month, Rabbit Advocates showcase foster rabbits available for adoption. Adoption outreaches are held at Western Pet Supply, 6908 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway. Volunteers are also on hand to provide grooming and nail trimming services. A donation is appreciated for this service. Adoption outreaches are held the second Saturday of each month from noon-3 p.m.

- June 11
- July 9
- August 13
- September 10
- October 8
- November 12
- December 10

For more information, visit [www.rabbitadvocates.org](http://www.rabbitadvocates.org).