Sharing Space with a Bunny  
by Liz Huffman

I went from sharing my home with one very small dwarf bunny to having my house renovated by four furry Bob Vilas within six months. Kitchen tiles were mysteriously rearranged in the night. The wall trim was stripped of paint and laboriously rounded off. The legs of my kitchen table were treated similarly. Even my sofas sported carefully placed holes. I was in despair. As my house continued to deteriorate, my husband pointed out, “Well, look at it this way. The house looks nice for a barn.”

A barn. That’s when it hit me—my house is a place where animals live. It is not going to look like Martha Stewart’s house (and really, is that a bad thing?). I had to stop thinking about “bunny-proofing” my house. “Bunny-proof” sounded like an attempt to stop my rabbits from affecting my house. I wanted rabbits in my house and in my life. The idea, I realized, was not to make my house impervious to rabbits, but to make it safe for them—to “bunny-safe” my house.

“Bunny-safing” a house happens from the ground up. Start on the floor. Really, get down on the floor and look around. What’s under your nose? Wood floors good for chewing and scratching? Long, sharp carpet fibers? From a bunny-proofing perspective, the wood floors may be ruined. But, from a bunny-safe perspective, those carpet fibers are ten times as dangerous. Many rabbits take joy in plucking the fibers from your carpet and, unfortunately, a lot of those fibers could be ingested. Watch your bunny—is he a plucker? Do you find the fibers, or do they just disappear? You may decide to cover parts of your carpet with wood or carpet remnants, or to just let your rabbit run around only when you can watch her. You may decide to dispense with the carpet entirely and install something else. Rice and maize mats, found in stores like Pier One and IKEA, also provide a safe, inexpensive alternative for digging and chewing. The main goal is to keep Bunny from making a meal of something that could result in a GI stasis.

Raise your head a little higher. What catches your eye? Luscious house plants? Are they toxic? Do you know? Check with HRS educators, your vet or the local library. Keep them high out of reach. What about electric cords? Can you see them? If you can see them, they can be chewed by a rabbit. Tubing to encase the cords can be found at hardware stores or Radio Shack, or wires can be tucked behind or under furniture. Although the chance is slim that a rabbit will bite on a phone cord at the wrong instant (while it’s ringing) and receive a shock, having a disconnected phone is inconvenient and even unsafe.

Examine your walls. How old is your house? Could the paint on the walls be lead-based? Rabbits need paint in their diet as much as they need carpet fibers. Nailing strips of untreated, unfinished wood along the baseboards gives your rabbits something to work on. Furniture is a bit trickier. If you want a piece of furniture to remain unscathed, remove it from the rabbit rooms. I had to relocate a rocking chair I loved because not only were the legs irresistible as an after-dinner snack but I was scared to death of rocking back onto a bunny. Wooden legs that are already round seem to be less of a chewing temptation. Sofas can be covered with plastic, old blankets or big cotton throw rugs to keep your rabbit from adding “cushion stuffing” to their breakfast.

In all of this, you have to be aware of who your bunny is. Is she young and not spayed or neutered? Better not let her out unsupervised then because she is wild with energy and hormones and likely to get into all kinds of trouble. Is he a confirmed digger? You may need to cover parts of your carpet with wood or carpet remnants, or to just let your rabbit run around only when you can watch her. You may decide to dispense with the carpet entirely and install something else. Rice and maize mats, found in stores like Pier One and IKEA, also provide a safe, inexpensive alternative for digging and chewing. The main goal is to keep Bunny from making a meal of something that could result in a GI stasis.

Talking to other rabbit owners and visiting their homes is a wonderful way to learn new ways of keeping your rabbits safe. When I’m rabbit-sitting, I take a good look at how the bunny owners have set up their rabbits’ environment and I take some ideas home with me. The main idea I carry with me as I walk through my house is that I am not bunny-proofing. I have the feeling that could only be accomplished in a concrete bunker with wrought-iron furniture. I am doing my best to make my house bunny-safe and bunny-friendly for my rabbits because it’s their home too.
Hurdling through Space and Time with Two Pet Rabbits

by Nan Gibson

I don’t have a dog, cat or singing bird, the only pets cleared to travel in the cabin area of Austrian Airlines. I have two rabbits—Ned, a broken fawn English lop, and Sheba, a black Austrian. We want to fly from Washington, D.C., to the Republic of Georgia where my husband Gene is posted with the USAID (USAID). Door to door, the trip will take about twenty-one hours, with short layovers in New York and Vienna. I have flown many international flights, but this will be my first time traveling with pets.

First hurdle: On January 8, the Georgian consulate tells me there are no restrictions on bringing pets into Georgia as long as they have international travel papers. Austrian Airlines requires a special dispensation to allow such a wild animal as Ned among the passengers. To convince Austrian Airlines to accept Ned, I send a fax to their customer service department. I explain patiently that rabbits are clean, quiet animals who make excellent pets.

Second hurdle: Delta accepts the rabbits without a fuss, in cargo or cabin. But they explain that only one pet is allowed per passenger in the cabin. Should I split Ned and Sheba up? Or should I place them both in cargo, not knowing if I’ll ever see them alive again? At first, I choose to separate the buns, with Sheba in cargo, and Ned in the cabin. But Austrian Airlines requires a special dispensation to allow such a wild animal as Ned among the passengers. To convince Austrian Airlines to accept Ned, I send a fax to their customer service department. I explain patiently that rabbits are clean, quiet animals who make excellent pets.

Third hurdle: Austrian Airlines approves the buns to fly in cargo/cabin to the tune of ninety dollars each. Per each airline’s request, I give them the weight and dimensions of the carriers, and the weight of each of the buns.

Fourth hurdle: On March 4, I take the buns to our DC vet for the required check-up and travel certificate. I discuss the travel arrangements with the vet. I change my mind now about separating the buns on the plane. I decide to put them both in the same large carrier in cargo where they can comfort each other during the flight. I notify the airlines.

On the morning of March 11, I line their carrier with layers of towels, and tuck in a recently worn t-shirt. I add water, hay and carrots. At noon, my friend Kathryn arrives to take us to the airport. I am flying now on the wings of prayer as I snap their carrier shut and load the buns into her car. Am I writing them a death sentence? Will there be dogs in cargo that will terrorize them? At the airport, we attract the attention of other travelers standing in the check-in line. “You are going where?” they ask. “W ith two what?” The time comes for me to hand Ned and Sheba over to the cargo attendant. Kathryn and I write a note and attach it to the carrier. We explain that Ned and Sheba are on a long trip, and ask that the attendants take good care of them. As the cargo attendant carries them away, Kathryn runs after him and slips him a ten-dollar bill.

Fifth hurdle: On the plane, I ask the flight attendant if my pets are on board. Finally, after we are preparing to taxi down the runway, she approaches me with a grin. “Two rabbits?” she asks, incredulously, “Yes,” I say. “Thank you,” I add, enormously relieved. On take-off, I reach inside my purse and find my talisman, a Beanie Baby bunny, a good-bye gift from Kathryn. I hold it tightly, my hand in my purse.

Sixth hurdle: After changing planes in New York, I ask again if my pets are on board. “Yes,” they answer, “two rabbits?” By the time we are over the ocean, the Beanie Baby is out of my purse and onto my lap. I am a 45-year-old woman stroking a small stuffed animal and talking to myself.

Seventh hurdle: In the morning, I board a much smaller plane for Vienna to Tbilisi, the final leg of the trip. My fatigue is checked by my excitement of seeing my husband and arriving with the buns in Georgia. Before I have a chance to pop the question about whether my pets are on board, the flight attendant smiles and says, “Your rabbits may fly in the cabin with you.” I am going to like Georgia, I think to myself. The buns and I settle into a happy reunion, their carrier wedged into the floor space next to my seat. Soon, food and drinks are served. I drop my tray table with a contented sigh and read the printed menu. First course: marinated you-know-what. I cover the dish with a napkin, a white shroud, and apologize to the buns. We land in Tbilisi, three tired travelers. Gene meets us with flowers, as is the practice here. We zip through customs, then find the agricultural agent to process the buns into the country.

Eighth hurdle: We sit in a windowless office now. I am holding flowers, and Ned and Sheba are in their carrier at my feet. A USAID facilitator is with us. We pass the buns’ papers across the desk. The agricultural agent shakes his head. He starts waving his arms and muttering in Georgian. Another agent steps in. They speak loudly now, both shaking their heads. The USAID facilitator explains to us that our travel papers are not in order. I point to the rabbits’ names on the form, the date, and the vet’s signature. “Ara, ara,” they say Georgian for “no.” They light cigarettes. A third agent steps in. They show us an example of European travel papers, indicating that this is the form ours should have taken. It finally dawns on me that the agents cannot read our papers, so I point to the words at the very top. Someone translates “International Certificate.” The Georgians begin to nod. We begin to smile. We are given clearance to bring the rabbits into the country. But first we have to pay. Another round of discussion ensues, with arms waving and cigarettes dangling. A phone call is made. We have now been in the windowless office for forty-five minutes. It is settled. For sixty lari, or $30 US dollars, Ned and Sheba may enter Georgia.

Released from the bonds of Georgian bureaucracy, we soon arrive to our new home. I open the carrier and out crawl my two travel weary buns. I am so proud of them. They have crossed the pond and are now official members of an elite club of overseas pets. To dogs, cats, and singing birds, they say, “Move over, guys. There are new kids on the international block.”

Thank you to the following people for showing their support for the rabbits by donating up to $25.

Your kind donations are much appreciated.

Joyce Aivalotis ▼ William Baldwin ▼ Andra Brodzetzky ▼ Kip Cosgrove and Julie Fisher ▼ Ching Ling Di-Savino ▼ Alisa Gravitz ▼ Skip Hall ▼ Jennifer Hicks ▼ Deborah Hollern ▼ Judith Hopper ▼ Moira Howard-Jeweler ▼ Deborah Kenny ▼ Beth Kolker ▼ Johnson Liu ▼ Athanasia Mantzouranis ▼ Gail Martens ▼ Wendy Martino & Martin Hobbs ▼ Mary Sue Green McLaughlin ▼ Melanie Moser and Greg MacNamara ▼ Brian Olson ▼ Yael Schloss (in memory of Caffeen) ▼ Michelle Thomas ▼ Roberta Vach ▼ Margaret Wogaman (in memory of Darcy)
Adoption

All rabbits are to be adopted as HOUSE RABBITS only—no exceptions! $50 donation per rabbit, plus $18 membership for non-members. Your other rabbits must be spayed or neutered. Pictures of all of our foster rabbits can be viewed at our web site, www.houserabbit.org/BaltWashDC/

ASHLEY is a lovely light brown young female mini-lop. She was left at the shelter with 11 of her siblings. We have three, Perry, Yoko, and Kira. She must be adopted as a friend for another rabbit or with one of her siblings. (410)889-4104

BENNY this cutie-pie minilop boy is a gentle guy who would love a rabbit friend of his own. He is very affectionate and sweet, not to mention handsome. (703)241-0867

BRAZEN AND CHEYENNE are a pretty pair of dwarf spotted sisters. Brazen is the troublemaker—leading her shyer sister into all kinds of explorations. They are young (6 mos old) spayed females. (703)241-0867

BULLET is a real character—he is personality plus. He will keep you laughing with his humorous antics! Bullet is a larger rabbit who would be an excellent choice for a family with children. (410)889-4104

CELESTE is a gorgeous minirex girl. She looks all dressed up for a formal occasion with white gloves! She is a very gentle and sweet rabbit with a playful, outgoing personality. (703)241-0867

DARBY AND ZEKE—what a pair! Darby is a little dwarf chinchilla-colored girl, very sweet, and Zeke is her “big guy”, a handsome minilop. (703)241-0867

DELTA This airplane ear girl is ready for take off! She’s a busy young girl who loves to run and dance. She will keep you laughing with her comical manner. (703)241-0867

ELVIS is a very sweet natured 2 year old black mini-rex. Here’s your chance for a black velvet Elvis! He lost one eye due to glaucoma but that doesn’t seem to slow him down too much. (410)889-4104

HOBBS would be a wonderful rabbit for a family with children. This handsome silver rabbit with his sturdy size and wonderful sweet personality make him ideally suited to family life. Hobbs is good with nice dogs too! (410)889-4104

JACKSON is a young orange and black harlequin boy, who was turned into the shelter as a stray. He loves to explore and play with his toys but is never too busy for some pets and attention. (410)889-4104

JENNIFER is a small friendly girl with lovely dark brown coloring. She adores attention and loves to play with her toys. She likes to lap, give kisses and loves to dance. (301)251-4428

KIRA is an sweet little white and brown fuzzy lop. She was left at the shelter with 11 of her siblings. We have 3, Perry, Ashley, and Yoko. Kira can be adopted as a friend for another rabbit or with one of her siblings. (410)889-4104

LUIGI! what a cute little package! This sweet little lop guy is shy at first, but quickly relaxes and enjoys lots of love. (703)241-0867

MERLIN this friendly guy is very charming. He was a shelter favorite and is happy to be safe in foster care. He rewards his fosterer with happy dances and relaxed flops. (301)251-4428

NADIA AND K.C. are an adorable pair of lovebird bunnies. K.C., little dwarf guy with a big personality, thinks his Nadia, a medium sized pretty black bunny, is just the ultimate. (410)889-4104

OLIVIA is a very petttably soft minirex beauty with a lovely orangey color. She has personality plus and has no problem at all with nice dogs and cats.

PERRY is an adventurous male albino lop, just 4 months old when rescued in July. He was left at the shelter with 11 of his siblings. We have three Kira, Yoko and Ashley. (410)889-4104

PETUNIA AND BELLINI are true love birds. They would be an excellent first pair of rabbits. (703)241-0867

SAMUEL Take a look into these beautiful blue eyes and you will be in love! This dutch boy has wonderful markings, and he loves attention and is thrilled to be safe in foster care. (301)570-9152

SEYMOUR this little cutie seems to be a Holland Lop whose ears are not quite heavy enough to totally flop. If they catch a breeze, up they go! He is just an adorable sweetie with a very gentle, friendly personality. (703)241-0867

SYRINA is a spunky dwarf girl who acts tough but melts when you kiss her head. A lovely silver marten color, she is a little over a year old (301)570-9152

VIRGIL this handsome big boy would be a wonderful choice for a family with children. He is a sturdy, sweet-natured fellow with a cheerful, gentle disposition. (703)241-0867

YOKO is an adorable little white and brown fuzzy lop. She was left at the shelter with 11 of her siblings. We have 3, Perry, Ashley, and Kira. (410)889-4104

WATSON——this dapper boy is a lovely orangey color. Watson is a VERY busy guy and will keep you laughing with all his projects. He will stop though and wait for pets! (703)241-0867

ZOey is a pretty little 4.5 lb lop girl, agouti (wild) colored. She was turned into the shelter because she was an “unwanted gift”. How anyone could NOT want this beautiful cuddly girl is a mystery. (703)241-0867
Comforting the innocents
or what you can do to help the rabbits in your local shelter by Susan Easton

Most people venture to their local animal shelter either as good samaritans turning in a stray animal, in search of a new pet, or to discard one they no longer want or. Rarely do folks go with the intent of visiting the rabbits there and improving their lives, although I believe this is an important but unfortunately all-too-rare way to volunteer.

I work for the Montgomery County shelter part-time, conducting home visits and interviews for people who have applied to adopt rabbits. When I mention to folks that I work for the shelter, often their response is, “O h, how can you do that? I can’t even go to the shelter. It’s just so sad.” O r they say, “I could never visit the shelter; I would want to adopt them all!”

O kay, you’re right, it is sad. It’s heartbreaking that so many rabbits are without homes and end up in the shelter. However, if you feel strongly enough about homeless rabbits to feel such sadness, why not allow that feeling to become the impetus for helping them? Believe me, there are many ways to help those little unfortunates besides flat-out adopting them.

First off, go visit your local shelter and check out the rabbit situation. Observe how the rabbits are housed, what they are fed, whether they are given litterboxes and toys and what litter is used. Make a list of what types of food or supplies are lacking. Go and buy those items and donate them to the shelter, and specify that they are for the rabbits.

You can get what my shelter calls a “kennel clearance,” which enables you to handle the animals. W ith the shelter’s permission, you can pet and hold the rabbits to help socialize them; if you trance one on your lap, you are guaranteed to draw a crowd!

Grooming is another way to help; often rabbits come into the shelter with horribly long nails or matted fur. Be sure to ask about any rabbits in the shelter’s “sick room” or in quarantine; you don’t want to forget them.

If the shelter allows, jot short comments about your interactions with the rabbits on their cage cards; for example, if somebun really likes having his head scratched, write it on the card. O bviously, focus only on the positive and never make negative comments like “scratches and kicks” or is “shy”; those may well become a death sentence.

Also, you may be the first person to notice that a rabbit is sick, so don’t be shy about reporting it to the shelter so they can take the animal to a vet as quickly as possible.

Even just hanging around in the rabbit room at busy times such as Saturday afternoon is helpful; you are available to answer questions and share your experiences with potential adopters, other rabbit owners and just curious browsers. It is a prime opportunity to educate people on the lesser-known aspects of having a rabbit, such as they can use a litterbox and like to play with toys.

Let your shelter know that you have experience with rabbits and are interested in helping out. After expressing my willingness to help, I was given the opportunity to do presentations for the teenage volunteers on rabbits (and to my joy, noticed a marked increase in the attention they gave to the rabbits after that). If I hadn’t offered my services, the opportunity would never have come up.

Keep the shelter in your thoughts. W hen you hear a friend, co-worker, relative or even a stranger you happen to be sitting next to mention they are going to buy a rabbit from a pet store, refer them to the shelter instead. Most people are surprised to hear the shelter adopts out rabbits.

W ell, they do!

Why do rabbits end up in the shelter?

In fiscal 1999, which ended in June, Montgomery County Humane Society received 161 live rabbits, more than two-thirds of which were give-ups (105) and 56 were strays. About half (83) were adopted and the remainder were euthanized, for a rabbit adoption rate of 56%. The shelter’s overall adoption rate for all animals was 64%.

The most frequently cited reason for taking a rabbit to the shelter, by far, was “no time,” given by 38 owners. Then came a tie between “allergies” and “too many,” reasons given by 16 people apiece. Six people said they were “moving,” and four said the rabbit was “aggressive.” Reasons cited by just one or two people include “landlord,” “too big,” “travel,” “litter,” “cost,” “sheds,” “new baby,” “child problems,” “other pet” and the animal was a gift.

Compare the MCHS rabbit adoption rate to that for other small animals in FY 1999: 100% for ferrets; 99% for guinea pigs; 71% for hamsters; 68% for rats; 43% for gerbils; and only 5% for mice.

W hat’s next?

Future projects at the shelter include a rabbit adoption fair and a newsletter that includes rabbit care tips. If you can handle such a task, please make contact with the shelter.

Editor’s note: Susan Easton is a fosterer and educator with the House Rabbit Society. She also works part time with the Montgomery County shelter.

Susan Easton examines a shelter rabbit and gives her some love.
Best wishes for another commend a “bunny” companion. Prospective adopting 2 rabbits has been most beneficial grateful.

Barbara Miller has done an outstanding job “trained me well.”

In July of this year, I decided to adopt another rabbit. I met and spoke with you, Susan Wong at a Petco store in Arlington, Virginia. Everyone suggested I adopt a pair of bonded rabbits.

I was somewhat hesitant, because I had never owned 2 animals at the same time. However, after seeing many rabbits, I fell in love with Sullivan and Noelle...brother and sister.

After 9 days, I can tell you I made the right decision. Sullivan and Noelle give me great pleasure, and they have become constant companions. In other words...they have “trained me well.”

Barbara Miller has done an outstanding job fostering Sullivan and Noelle. She has shown them love, and in return, they give me their love... Barbara has always been available when I needed questions answered. When she delivered the bunnies to my home, she gave me hay, toys, etc. For this, I am very grateful.

In conclusion, I can honestly say that adopting 2 rabbits has been most beneficial to me. For those having one rabbit, I recommend a “bunny” companion. Prospective owners should seriously consider adopting more than one. Best wishes for another record year of adoptions, Fred Ostfeld

We get many lovely letters and emails from our adopters. Unfortunately, we don’t have the space to print them all, but keep them coming! We’re LO VE to read them; it’s what keeps us going.

HRS Baltimore/DC Chapter
Welcome to Fall 1999! Our chapter has been hard at work through the summer, and it has paid off—we currently have had 88 adoptions since January of this year. Lots of new members heard about HRS via the Internet or word-of-mouth; lots of new bunny people learned for the first time the joys of living with a house-roaming lagomorph; lots of “old friends” decided to expand their bunny family by adopting friends for their bunny (or bunnies!).

Kay Bannon organized our second annual Fall cookie sale fundraiser of baking kits from Uncle Ralph's Cookies. The cookies come as frozen cookie dough drops or frozen brownie batter already in a pan, and are perfect for holiday baking. The delivery date for the cookies was November 13th. The chapter made almost $1,000! If you are interested in participating next year, contact Kay Bannon at Navbuny@aol.com or (301) 695-3269. If you are interested in participating in the Spring Easter Candy Sale, please contact Laurie Kuhn at laurie.kuhn@eudoramail.com or (410) 661-0581.

Our Fabulous Fall Festival was held October 23rd at Jamie Johnston’s house in Springfield, Virginia. As always, it was great fun socially, and very successful financially for our chapter; we raised $840 from the sale of such items as t-shirts and sweatshirts, CareFresh, hay, Busy Bunny baskets, and other great rabbity knick knacks. Joe and Sandi Monaco were there, and Sandi sold some of her incredible hand-made, hand-painted quilts to benefit the Monaco’s Sanctuary.

We continue to periodically have tables at Petsmart’s Adopt-A-Thons and other pet supply stores. We’ve had some really exciting education opportunities with area shelters this year. Several area shelters have requested programs for their volunteers or staff on rabbit care. It’s very rewarding to see the animal shelter staffers change the way they look at rabbits when they hear more about them. Liz DiNoma and Kay to announce that after a year-long paper struggle, HRS is once again able to rescue rabbits from the Fairfax County shelter. We have already taken the opportunity to save rabbits from there again, including the recently adopted Vernice and one of our newer foster rabbits, Zoey.

In July, Educator-in-training Laurie Kuhn and volunteer Jean Hillstrom gave a rabbit education talk to children in a day camp at Ring Factory Elementary School in Bel Air, Maryland. The kids were between 5 and 12 years old, and the program was part of “animal week” at the camp. And Susan Wong gave a rabbit care presentation to the Montgomery County 4-H Club.

We set up education tables as part of National Geographic Society’s Passport Friday program three times already this year, and we’re pleased to announce that National Geographic’s Nancy Boyd, who coordinates these programs, is now an HRS member and proud mom of Maeve (formerly Jett) and Pippin.

HRS yard sales have turned out to be really great fundraisers, thanks in large part to the generous donations of high-quality items from our members. Volunteers Mikki Staab and Tom Peters hosted a yard sale this summer in Falls Church, Virginia which raised over $400 for the Monaco’s Sanctuary. Susan Wong hosted a very successful yard sale on October 16th in Olney to benefit the chapter, which raised almost $2,000 for the chapter. Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers for making it such a success!
Dr. Pam Slack  
As most of you already know, in May we tragically lost one of the great rabbit veterinarians in our area, Dr. Pamela Slack, when she was killed in a small plane crash. She is sorely missed, both for her knowledge and expertise and for her wonderful caring personality. Our chapter has donated $100 to the Arlington Animal Welfare League in her memory, and we also received donations from some of our members to honor her memory. She is gone but will never be forgotten.

Other News  
Susan Wong attended a party at the local home of Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy celebrating the release of a new book by HRS member Mary Jane Checchi, Are You the Pet for Me? Choosing the Right Pet for Your Family ISBN 0312967934. The book is a great resource for anyone looking to add a companion animal to their household, and has gotten rave reviews from all sides. Ms. Checchi interviewed Susan Wong and other HRS representatives across the country for her rabbit information, and the book provides a good overview for a prospective adopter of what’s involved in caring for a rabbit. Incidentally, the Kennedys have a house rabbit living in their kitchen!

In the more mundane chapter news, we held our second Board Meeting in June, and have scheduled our next one for January. These meetings have been very productive and we feel our organization is really moving and growing. There have been a few personnel changes - the position of Director of Education has been split to make the job more manageable; Susan Wong’s title has changed to Director of Special Projects and she heads up large projects like our annual Easter Campaign, and Liz DiNorma is now the Director of Education and works on coordinating the more long-term and ongoing educational programs. And one of our educators, Lynn Little, has relocated to Tennessee. We’ll miss her, but wish her all the best. We would like to welcome Jamie Johnston, who also began fostering this year, as our new Chapter Treasurer. Laura Smith no longer had sufficient time to devote to the position because of other job responsibilities. We would like to thank Laura for her past hard work. It was due to her efforts that we were able to successfully submit all the necessary paperwork to achieve our 501(c)3 non-profit status. Also, it was decided at the board meeting to change our chapter name from the Baltimore/Washington DC chapter to the MD/DC/Nova Chapter to better reflect our membership, especially our Northern Virginia contingent.

Our chapter now has its own bulk mail account. The Spring newsletter was our first test, but this time around we will be old pros. Many thanks to the Post Office for their patience in answering the thousands of questions that seem to go along with this. Bulk mail is not forwarded or returned to us so it becomes extra important for you to notify HRS when you have a new address.

Our Volunteer Coordinator, Laurie Kuhn, held our first ever volunteer meeting on December 5 at the home of Susan Wong in Olney, Maryland.

If you haven’t visited our chapter web site lately (http://www.houserabbit.org/BaltWashDC) you’ve missed some great additions! Our webmaster, Kate McGinley, has added a wildlife page with excellent information and links regarding cottontails and the contact information for local wildlife rehabilitators. There’s also a page with places (both local and mail order) to get supplies for your bun, and a page that links to other small animal adoption pages.

And speaking of the Internet, we’re working on becoming more consistent about contacting our members via email with periodic updates, notices of upcoming events, etc. If you’re interested in being included on our email list, please drop our chapter secretary, Liz DiNorma a line at hrsli@yahoo.com. You can also subscribe yourself to the announcement list on by filling out the egroups box on our web site front page.

Looking Ahead...

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HRS Baltimore/DC Chapter
Obese Rabbits At Risk

by Dr. Jackie Schulman, DVM

Editor's note: Dr. Schulman is a veterinarian at Companion Animal Clinic in Gainesville, Virginia. She adopted a beautiful fuzzy lop girl named Freda from the House Rabbit Society.

Those of us with house rabbits know that any rabbit worth his weight in carrots loves a good snack. Treats are often used as training rewards, as expressions of love, and as coaxing tools during unsolicited games of hide and seek. Many rabbit owners delight when their pet hops onto the sofa for a nibble of popcorn or cookies during a movie. Unfortunately, choosing the wrong snacks can lead to obesity, a condition which puts rabbits at risk for potentially serious health problems.

Obesity can detrimentally affect many body systems. Severe skin conditions, for example, may result from excessive weight and inevitable diminished activity. "Sore hocks," or ulcercative pododermatitis, involves severe and often infected lesions on the bottoms of the feet. Irrefloored cages, soiled bedding, and a sedentary lifestyle can predispose a rabbit to developing these lesions. Excessive body weight places added pressure on the feet, both contributing to the problem and complicating treatment. This frustrating condition can even escalate to bone infection, called osteomyelitis. This complication can become so severe as to require limb amputation.

Another skin problem related to obesity is urine scald. Urine scald can contribute to sore hocks, but most commonly involves the delicate skin of the ano-genital area. Obese rabbits may be more likely to remain in one place after urination, allowing the urine to extend contact with the skin. These big bunnies also have difficulty reaching this region to groom themselves. Dedicated bathing and application of medication may be required to treat this problem. In severe cases, surgery must be performed to remove excessive skin folds where urine and feces collect.

Diminished ability to access the rear end can also keep rabbits from engaging in cecotrophy, or consumption of cecotropes. Cecotropes, are vitamin-rich fecal bundles produced in the cecum. These nutritious meals are usually eaten directly from the anus, but obese rabbits have difficulty accomplishing this maneuver. They may even become too sedentary to turn around and ingest deposited cecotropes, leading to poor overall health and intestinal problems. Owners of obese rabbits may have to collect cecotropes and feed them to their rabbits.

Furthermore, an obese rabbit who has stopped eating due to illness or other reason is at risk for hepatic lipidosis, a life-threatening liver disease. Rabbits may go off feed due to heat stress, stomach blockage, or dental disease, for example. A state of negative energy balance leads an obese rabbit's liver to undergo fatty changes that may only be reversible with dedicated nursing care and supplemental nutrition.

Finally, an obese rabbit with an orthopedic disease such as arthritis will have a much more difficult time maintaining mobility. The added weight places further stress on the joints and bones. Heart Disease is also becoming more common in rabbits. Quality of life as well as lifespan may be diminished unnecessarily due to continued overzealous feeding.

The best way to prevent these problems is to prevent obesity. Obesity prevention can be as simple as making educated decisions regarding food choices. Regulated portions of a high quality pelleted diet (1/4 to 1/2 cup or even less per day depending on your rabbit's size), high quality grass hay such as timothy, and 1 cup or more of fresh vegetables (try to include at least 3 different "green" things, for example, kale, parsley and romaine). If your rabbit does not consume all the vegetables in several hours then you are feeding too many vegetables. Believe it or not, even too many vegetables (esp. carrots) can make a rabbit fat or cause him to eat less hay than he should. Sweet treats can contribute to obesity and cause intestinal upset. This includes sweet fruits as well as "junk food." Overweight rabbits should not have either in their diet. Most rabbits will attack their favorite vegetable with as much enthusiasm as a morsel of forbidden food. In addition, all rabbits should be weighed regularly and their diet adjusted accordingly. You might even consider taking periodic ariel view photos like the one at the bottom of this page to monitor weight gain.

It is essential to encourage play and exploration, rather than accepting sedentary behavior. Rabbits should have supervised play time every day for as long as possible. You can provide more exercise time with a suitably bunnyproofed indoor space where your rabbit can exercise even when you are not available to supervise. If your rabbit occupies a cage when unsupervised, the cage must be large enough to allow comfortable activity. Finally, a yearly visit to a rabbit-friendly veterinarian should be an essential part of any rabbit's health maintenance plan. If your rabbit is already obese, or if you are uncertain how much is too much, your veterinarian will help formulate a plan for safe and effective weight loss. Responsible feeding will ensure that your rabbit escapes the many perils of obesity.

A rabbit of ideal weight.

When feeding a pair, be sure that one isn't eating up all the food!

The rabbits pictures on the left are actual, unretouched pictures of obese rabbits (both males). The arrows indicate "obesity hotspots"—i.e. elbow pouches, bulging chests (not normal for a male rabbit). The images on the right are the same pictures, retouched by computer to show the ideal appearance of these rabbits.

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Sanctuary Section

Brady

Not all of the rabbits who come into the sanctuary have obvious problems at the time we take them. One day a driver for UPS came to the door and said there was a small domestic rabbit living in the bushes in front of a townhouse about a block away. Only about a month before, someone from our neighborhood had tried to get us to take a rabbit who they didn’t want anymore. We had given them information about finding a home for their rabbit, but they didn’t seem to care that much, and coming to our door was probably the maximum amount of effort that they were willing to spend. We figured this was more than likely the bunny they had thrown away. Sandi went to see about the little bunny and he came right up to her. She brought him home. We named him Brady. Aside from being undernourished and having fur mites, he seemed healthy. We took him to the veterinarian, and had him checked over. He just needed to get some nourishment. After a couple of weeks, we took him back to be neutered. We thought we would soon be able to find him a good home.

Brady was a sensitive (we had no idea how much), shy little guy, who would hide frequently. However, when you picked him up he would lie contentedly in your arms. He liked to stay in his room and would bark noisily any time you disturbed him there. Finally we took him to an adoption day. Brady was not adopted that day. We took him home. The next morning, it was obvious that he had not eaten or drank anything. We did some things to stimulate his appetite and gave him some fluids. Brady did not respond immediately, but by the following day he was eating again. We took him to the vet and he appeared to be healthy with no lingering problems.

Six weeks later, we tried to get Brady adopted again. He stopped eating immediately. Brady went to the vet. He received fluids. Nothing showed on the x-rays or the blood tests. We tried everything to get his appetite going. Brady’s system shut down. We were going to lose him. Brady stayed on a heating pad, in our bed that night. We didn’t think he would last until the following morning. During the middle of the night he started moving around and eating the parsley that we had laid in front of him. There was hope after all.

We watched Brady very closely for the next few days, and he ate and drank as before. Brady appeared to be fine, but we would not try to adopt him out anymore. Brady would become a permanent resident of the sanctuary. Brady would come to love Precious until she died two years ago. He now plays with Teddy and Huckleberry, two little boys who have also lost their mates.

Last year, Brady started to have accidents. He had always been a very neat bunny who had great litterbox habits. It was time for a check-up. Tests showed that his kidneys were slowly failing him. Brady still lives with us. Like all of the rabbits at the sanctuary we will keep him happy for as long as possible, no matter what it takes. As long as Brady can live a quality life, free of pain, we will do everything we can for him. Brady is very sweet and will lie in your arms for hours. Like all of the rabbits at the sanctuary, he gives more than we could ever give. Please, help us take care of Brady and the other special needs bunnies.

Foster bunnies at the Monaco Sanctuary

**Boomer** is a sweet love-bun who would do well with a quiet family. He is a sturdy calm fellow who loves to sit quietly for cuddling.

**Tony** this sweet boy first lost his home then his beloved companion passed away. He is a gentle boy who is looking for a permanent home with a bunny love to call his own.

and a new girl, no pictures yet: **Annabelle**. She is probably close to a year old, brown, has big doe eyes, and is very sweet. For more info. on all rabbits at the Monaco sanctuary, call (703)830-8359 or email bunrescue@juno.com

Many thanks to the following people who contributed to the Monaco Sanctuary between April, 1999 and December, 1999:

- Cynthia Boshelle & Max Elsman
- Andra Brodetzky
- Ted & Phyllis Buff
- Marion Davis
- Mary Gamunev
- Cindy Hogan
- Larry Miller
- Mary Nishioka
- Mary Anne Padget
- Linda St. Germaine
- Alice Seery
- Melodye Traupel
Thank you to the following Special Friends who donated $25 or more to help the rabbits:

Alexandria Public Library, Duncan Branch
Janet Aker
Irma Arispe
Bell Atlantic
Shelley Barber (in memory of Cheyenne)
Liz & Kevin Bertha
Phyllis & Ted Buff (in memory of Pam Slack)
Colleen Coughlin
Marion Davis
Brad & Julia Edwards
Michael Fisher & Sura Yakowitz (in memory of Pam Slack)
Barbara Fuechsel
National Geographic
Bunny Heaven
Jean Hillstrom
Liz Huffman
Jamie Johnston
R.B. Lasco
Susanne Faux
Wendy Martino & Martin Hobbs
Jeremy McKeever
Mary Nishioka
Fred Ostfeld (in memory of Bunny)
Petsmart
Indira Palanki-Bucci
Nicole Roberts (George’s 3rd Birthday)
Linda Sinclair
Connie Tjoumas
Melodye Traupel
Anne Witty (in memory of Jacques)
Sherrie Yutzy

Special thanks to the following vets who provided discount services, making it possible for us to rescue many needy rabbits:

Blueridge Veterinary Associates
Brookeville Animal Hospital
Falls Road Animal Hospital--24 hr Emergency
Kentlands Veterinary Hospital
Kingsbrooke Animal Hospital
Muddy Branch Veterinary Center
Ridge Lake Animal Hospital

Tips from our members
The following tips were sent into us from our membership. We are including them for your information, we are not endorsing any particular products.

From Barbara Miller:
Eric Morris of Sandy Hook Woodworks will make custom condos. He will work with you on design & size. The condo he built for my rabbits measures 52" long x 24" deep x 41" high. It is a 2 level hutch with a ramp connecting the levels. Both doors open in the front for easy access (for the rabbits) & easy cleaning (for me). While Eric has his shop in Luray, Virginia, he came to my house to help with the planning. When the condo was completed, he even delivered it! Total cost, $500, unfinished. You may contact Eric at: 540 743 1800, 971 US Highway 340 North, Luray, Virginia 22835

Several tips from Jennie Langdon:
Tears Naturale Free by Alcon are artificial tears without the preservatives that might irritate a rabbit’s eyes. They are available in tiny plastic vials of 0.3 fl. oz each—a nice amount for washing a rabbit’s eyes and cheeks—so maintaining sterility is not the problem that it is with larger bottles. Available in supermarkets and pharmacies.

Tidy Tray is a good litterbox for multiple-rabbit households or for infirm rabbits who cannot hop into other litterboxes. Made in England, a tidy tray is 22” x 24” x 7.5” in back, the front is 3” tall and even that height can be reduced with a saw. Available in the free Lee Valley Garden Tools catalog: 1-800-871-8158

Carpet Saver is a roll of soft, foam-backed fabric 2.5 feet wide. It absorbs urine, protecting carpets or other surfaces; it provides traction on floors or boxes; it can be cut with scissors. Machine wash and dry. Caution: some rabbits might chew it or tunnel under it. Seen in Alsto’s Handy Helpers catalog. Call 1-800-447-0048

Send in your tips! We love hearing great ideas from our members. We can’t publish them all, but we will be featuring a few in every issue of the Clover Leaf.
A Call to Action!

Damaging Domestic Rabbit Exhibit at the National Zoo

Much to our dismay, the National Zoo, Washington D.C., has decided to add an exhibit to the park of domestic rabbits housed in conditions that we and most other humane organizations consider substandard. They have acquired 7 rabbits, all females of large or giant breeds, who will live in outdoor hutches and exercise in an outdoor enclosure in what the zoo calls a "natural" setting. During periods of bad weather, they will be confined inside the hutches. They will cohabitate in small groups, assuming they will be able to learn to get along with each other. At last viewing, text for the exhibit consisted of color pictures of the different breeds of rabbits and a few lines about their breeding for meat and fur.

We are laboring to try to elevate the status of rabbits from livestock to companion animals, and an exhibit like this by our own National Zoo is a huge setback. This will be the first time domestic pets are put on exhibit at the zoo. We believe the housing conditions are deplorable and the message it will send to the public completely undermines the HRS philosophy. Remember the Zoo in part is federally funded, so this is YOUR tax dollars at work! If you are a member of FONZ or Smithsonian Associates, your donations are helping to fund this exhibit! Call, email or FAX your opinion to the Zoo!

Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ): Clinton A. Fields, Executive Director, 202/673-4951, cfields@fonz.org, fax: 202/673-4738
Zoo: Director: Dr. Michael Robinson, 202/673-4721, mrobinson@nzp.si.edu, fax: 202/673-4607

Petco Stores Selling Rabbits Again

We have discontinued having educational tables at area Petco stores. According to HRS reps in Illinois, Missouri and Colorado, Petco has started selling rabbits in these states. In 1994, Petco had pledged to stop selling rabbits because of the number of unwanted rabbits at animal shelters all over the country. While Petco stores in our area have not started selling rabbits, this could change at any time.

We are encouraging our members to call or write to Petco politely but firmly expressing your displeasure with this decision. Ask them to honor the promise they made not to sell rabbits and be consistent in their efforts to help unwanted animals.

PETCO, 9125 Rehco Road, San Diego, CA 92121 (619) 453-7845 Fax (619) 453-6585.

We also encourage our members to purchase your pet supplies elsewhere, preferably at stores that do not sell animals. Petopia.com is Petco's Web-based partner so you may wish to take your Internet business elsewhere as well.

I would like to Volunteer:

- Public events (staffing education tables)
- Rabbit bondings
- Classes
- Seminars
- Working with shelters
- Fund raising events (candy, cookie and yard sales)
- Distributing literature
- Driving rabbits to vet appointments
- Driving rabbits from Maryland to Northern Virginia
- Hosting rabbit matches
- Hosting and organizing social events
- Counseling
- Mailing
- Design projects
- Newsletter
- Fostering
- Bunnysitting

I would like to donate money:

- To pay for vet care of rabbits with special needs
- To pay for routine vet care of foster rabbits
- To pay for litter, food and other supplies
- To help pay for advertising in the PawPrint Post
- To help with the cost of copying and mailing rabbit care info
- Please use my donation wherever it is needed most

Membership Enrollment

- Local and National HRS membership $26
- National HRS membership $18. Members receive quarterly issues of the House Rabbit Journal
- Local HRS membership $8. Support our local rabbit rescue efforts and receive local newsletter 2 times per year. **Must also be a national member.**