

Inside the Lempster, NH Rescue

By Janet Queen, HRN Foster Home and Volunteer

On Sunday afternoon, October 2, 2011 Cathy Sullivan, my local animal control officer, left a message on my cell phone. She was at a location in Lempster, NH, where 75-100 rabbits were living in horrible conditions inside a dark, filthy shed, without adequate food or water. She said that the owner was overwhelmed and had given her permission to find homes for them. I contacted HRN that evening to inform them of

that I take him back.

On Tuesday, October 4, I followed Cathy to the Lempster residence for the first time. I had brought rabbit pellets and hay with me just in case. When we arrived and opened the doors to the shed, the rabbits literally came out of the woodwork looking for food. They had created tunnels behind old stored items along the sides of the shed that went underneath the flooring. The back of the shed was a dirt floor for the last 10 feet and I feared I would actually

shed. I couldn't see the back of the shed so I hoped that after I downloaded those photos and looked at them, I would be able to see exactly what was in the back part of the shed. We fed the rabbits and then left for the night.

The following two days on October 5 and 6, I went alone to the shed just before dark after work. I brought gallons of water, as well as more food and hay. It was so sad to pour the gallons of water into my aluminum pan as I



Janet, on her way to meet Cathy (local ACO) at the Lempster, NH rescue location.



Dave (Janet's husband) getting one of the rabbits to safety... at last.



More rabbits being brought to safety.

the situation. The very next day Cathy called me and said that the owner had caught 14 of the rabbits and they were now at her house waiting for me to take them!

I arrived at Cathy's house that night after work and brought home 11 of the rabbits. Three of them were sent to Upper Valley Humane Society in Enfield, NH. However, after about one month, I took back two of them at their request. One rabbit was quite cage-territorial and the staff was afraid of her. The other was so scared that the animal care person thought it was best

cave in their tunnels as I slowly walked back there.

They had NO food, NO hay, NO water in that shed. The food bowls were literally sunken into the build-up of waste on the flooring. We saw no water in sight. Cathy and I found a trickle of water from a tiny stream and used a plastic cup from her car to fill a pan that I had taken from my kitchen for the rabbits. The rabbits surrounded the pan of water and drank it all down in seconds, so we went to get more from the stream. I had my camera and took pictures in the darkness of the

watched so many rabbits drink and drink from it. I would wait until it was empty and pour more water in.

Meanwhile, HRN was putting together a plan to come and get ALL of the rabbits. I was overwhelmed with relief that we were going to get them all out of there and that they were not going to be used for food. The owner had said that he knew someone who would eat them if we couldn't take them. However, he preferred to see them go into homes.

On Saturday, October 8, approximately 12 volunteers arrived to capture and assess all of the rabbits. By the day's

end, we had rescued 84 rabbits from the shed. We later took 7 from the owner's primary residence. A few litters were born from a number of females who were too pregnant to spay. Within weeks we had over 100 rabbits from this rescue alone.

Approximately 25 emergency spay appointments were set up for the females, and about 35 males went to Turtle Hill Farm Animal Sanctuary in Reading, VT until HRN could pull them into foster homes. Eighteen of the rabbits were still at my house.

Many of the rabbits were injured, some seriously, as their desperate situation in the shed had led to some vicious

fight. Some had eye injuries and loss of eyesight. Others had ripped ears and wounds filled with abscesses. Many of the rabbits remain skittish and unsure of humans after living in such horrible conditions with little to no human contact.

On October 22, two HRN volunteers used their small plane to transport 14 rabbits out of the Claremont, NH airport to various points in Maine. I met Lucy, the owner of Turtle Hill Farm Animal Sanctuary, at the airport with 12 of the males from her sanctuary. Two of the females from my home were also transported. Some of the other rabbits went to rescues in CT as well.

I must say that it was very difficult for me to be at my job during that week after I found out about this situation, knowing that the rabbits were just waiting for me to get there to feed them all after work each night. I missed three days of work during the ordeal in order to help with the rescue of these animals.

As time goes on, many of the rabbits are making wonderful improvements and progress, and are becoming very adoptable - thanks to all the wonderful foster homes and volunteers who have helped with this incredible Lempster, NH Rescue.



Little Brown and her litter of six!

Little Brown came to us very scared, cowering at every shadow and incredibly depressed. While she would allow us to touch her and pick her up, it was never without flinching or trying to squish herself into a corner so we wouldn't 'see' her. After she had her litter, she was incredibly protective, even going so far as to throwing herself on top of her litter and screaming so we wouldn't steal them, when Aaron was trying ever so cautiously to clean her cage. I still shudder when I think of how terrified she was. If you've never heard a rabbit scream, consider yourself lucky---it's the most terrible sound I've ever heard. She was the most depressed rabbit I had ever come across and became our special challenge.

While Brown was not fond of humans, she was a wonderful mama and loved her six babes (five girls and one boy).

Three lovely gray chinchilla-colored girls: Izzy, Kiki, and Silva. One silver fox: Majico and one so special PEW: Cloverlee!

And one gray chinchilla-colored boy, PeeWee. He was the runt of the litter and L-O-V-E-S to be cuddled! On March 15th, the babies will be 5 months old and all will be spayed or neutered. Or at least getting ready for their appointments.

Little Brown has come a long way since her Lempster days. She is the most gentle rabbit, and we can now pick her up without her shying or being quite so

scared. She has a long way to go and still prefers to hide in her nesting box, but is coming along just great! It's nice to see her ears being up and perky instead of flattened to her head. She roams more now and I think will be a good bonding candidate for an older bunny.



PeeWee, the runt of Little Brown's litter.