



**House Rabbit Network**

P.O. Box 2602  
Woburn, MA 01888-1102



Dedicated to educating the public and to fostering and adoption of companion rabbits. 781-431-1211 or [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org)

# Rabbit Tracks

Spring 2018

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# FAQs: Bonding Your Buns

by Suzanne Trayhan



*Bumper (white bun) being bonded with Finn, Bubsie, and Cashew. Photo courtesy of Jessica Riel.*

Seeing two rabbits lie side by side kissing each other is so adorable to watch. If you're looking to bond a new rabbit with your current one, here are some tips to guide them safely to a happy ending.

## **What sex rabbit should I choose to bond my rabbit with?**

Either one. People mistakenly think they need to choose a rabbit of the opposite sex. While we tend to favor opposite sex pairings, between 25-33% of House Rabbit Network's pairings are same sex. We also have some trios where clearly there are two rabbits of the same sex getting along. Don't be afraid to try rabbits of both sexes.

## **Will my rabbit care which bun we choose as a mate?**

Yes! Bunnies have definite opinions about each other. This is why we recommend introducing your rabbit to multiple rabbits. You'll see differences in how they interact. Choosing the right bondmate will make bonding easier and typically results in a stronger bond.

## **What is speed dating?**

Speed dating is where you go to a shelter and introduce your rabbit to 4-6 rabbits for 5-10 minutes each in succession. It's a good way to quickly introduce them to several rabbits and get a read on which bunny might make a good bondmate. Typically, you

can see differences in how they interact with each other.

## **What if the bunnies don't seem interested in each other?**

That's fine! The most important thing is your rabbits need to learn to trust each other. As long as there isn't any aggressive behavior, they could be a good match. They are interacting in their own way—aware of the other rabbit. They need to feel comfortable to build trust and bond.

## **How long does bonding take?**

This is a hard question because there is a large range. Most bondings will take two to four weeks, however, there are some that take months and a small number that only take a week.

## **How long should a bonding session last?**

Start out with shorter sessions, 5-20 minutes. Pay attention to how stressed they are versus how relaxed they are. If they are more relaxed you can start increasing time, first to 30 minutes, then to an hour, and eventually several hours. If they are stressed keep sessions short.

## **Where should I bond?**

Bonding should take place in neutral space. By neutral we mean a place that neither bunny goes in and doesn't contain the scent of either one. This is important because if either bunny thinks it's their space they are more likely to be territorial and less accepting of the other rabbit. Also, if they are more out of sorts, they might be more likely to seek comfort from their potential bondmate.

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# FAQs: Bonding Your Buns Con't

## What size space do I need?

To start out, a space of about 6' x 6' to 8' x 8' is good. If you use a space that is too big, then the buns will just divide the territory in half. You also don't want something too small because it's stressful to be right on top of the other bun. This size provides enough space that they can move away from each other but are still very much aware.

## How frequently should I bond?

You can do several bonding sessions a day as long as they are spaced several hours apart. When you are starting and sessions are short, you can try three to four bonding sessions in a day. This is more difficult once your sessions are longer. Make sure you are doing at least one session each day.



*One happy, bonded bun family! Photo courtesy of Jessica Riel.*

## Should I let my rabbits fight it out?

Never let your rabbits fight it out. First, there could be a serious injury where your rabbit might need stitches and/or surgery or get a nasty infection. Second, it sets them back several steps in the bonding process.

## Should I let my rabbit mount the other rabbit?

No. When one rabbit mounts the other one, you should brush them off. While mounting itself is not harmful, the bun being mounting might be upset and bite the other bunny. This can start a fight and set the bonding back. If a male reverse mounts a female, in rare instances, she might bite his penis, causing serious injury.

## Do only boys mount?

Both male and female rabbits mount. Besides mating, mounting is a way of showing dominance over another rabbit.

## How do I prevent fights?

Try to read body language. Look for the ears partially back, tense, and tail up. Talk to your rabbit—tell them, "No bite." It can be good to wear heavy gloves or put sneakers on your hands to help separate them. You can also hold a dustpan or other similar item in between them.

## How long after a spay neuter should I wait before bonding?

You need to wait at least three weeks after surgery to make sure your rabbit has healed from their surgery. In a small number of cases, you might need to wait longer if your rabbit had very strong hormones and the hormones still need to subside a bit. You can do some preliminary bonding while waiting—things like having them in cages where they can see each other and swapping litter boxes so they get used to the other rabbit's scent. Just hold off on any physical contact for at least three weeks.

## Should I have a litter box in the pen? What about a carrier?

Neither one should be in the bonding space, at least when you start. If you place a litter box in the pen, sometimes one bunny will hang out in the box, claiming it as their space and acting territorial. That interferes with bonding. So, for the first several sessions, avoid a litter box. Never put a carrier in there—

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# My Bunny is Living with Cancer

by Astrid Kruse, DVM

My bunny is living with cancer. Eight months ago, I noticed that Petunia was breathing more quickly and her eyes were bulging slightly. Being a veterinarian, I knew that this meant she most likely had a tumor in her chest cavity. I brought her to work with me, where the stress of the carrier and being outside of her house made her breathe heavily and her eyes bulge alarmingly. Having seen bunnies die from the stress of taking x-rays, I was understandably nervous about putting her on that table in radiology—but I knew the radiographs would give me information that was important. And sure enough, there was a large space occupying mass in her chest. Her lungs had less than a third of their normal room to expand, and everything in there was getting squished.

If I were a client or pet parent, I would have offered the option of seeing a specialist for an ultrasound guided biopsy of the tumor under sedation (no wiggling allowed with a needle near the heart). If this were a thymoma, surgery or radiation are options. Thymomas are surprisingly common in bunnies although rare in other species, and are caused by cancerous mutation in the thymus, which is the lymphoid organ that sits in the front of the chest. In some cases, thymomas cause other autoimmune diseases, and I've seen several rabbits develop sebaceous adenitis, in which the skin thickens and all the fur falls out. While I've not treated a bunny that has had the surgery, one of my former bunny patients was cancer free for years after receiving radiation therapy for a confirmed thymoma. If this were lymphoma, chemotherapy protocols for bunnies are experimental and can cause severe and even fatal side effects. Knowing the risks and invasiveness of open chest surgery, the risks of chemo, and the stress of daily radiation treatments (nevermind the logistics of raising small children and working two jobs while driving my bunny over an hour to daily appointments), I declined referral. I also took into consideration that my bunny is at least nine—she was brought in to HRN pregnant and had her babies at Christmas in 2009.

I decided to start her on palliative prednisone. Palliation means that you know the medication won't cure a disease, but it will hopefully make the patient feel better and improve quality of life. Steroids like prednisone are rarely used in rabbits because the species is highly sensitive to them. Profound immunosuppression, where the immune system shuts down and can't fight disease, can occur and bunnies can become septic and die. Bunnies can develop life-threatening ulcers in their digestive tract. However, despite my concerns, Petunia was lucky and was breathing normally after only two doses.

Two months after the diagnosis, we went on a family trip and our friend who was pet sitting had to deal with a bunny emergency—but not the older bunny with cancer. Petunia's husbun, Thor, suddenly stopped eating and then passed away in the hospital from heart disease that hadn't been evident on exam and had no symptoms. (Thor was Petunia's third husbun, which is why her nickname is Black Widow.) Eight months later, I've had to double the dose of prednisone for Petunia after a period of her eating poorly and breathing more heavily. She's currently looking great, with an oddly thicker fur coat, which I suspect is secondary to the



*The beautiful Petunia.  
Photo courtesy of Astrid Kruse, DVM.*

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# Adoption Success Story

## Tuning in to Bosco Radio

by Jessica Riel

Bosco the bunny has mismatched ears: "One up, one down," says his mom, Suzanne Atkocius. "But he can raise and turn both of them, and it looks like he's tuning his radio to listen better."

He may be trying to listen to his bondmate, Luna, whom he met just over a year ago when he was adopted from House Rabbit Network (HRN) on May 13, 2017. Back then he was known by the name of Lenny. "We have a cat named 'Penny,'" says Suzanne, "so I didn't want them getting confused when I called one."

Luna was a persnickety bun when it came to finding her soulmate. Not just any bun would do. "We had been to the HRN shelter the month prior," says Suzanne. "Luna met every single rabbit there, male and female, and didn't click with anyone. We waited for a whole new round of adoptable rabbits and tried again. She and Bosco took a liking to each other right away."

Back at their house, Bosco and Luna moved into their temporary digs and spent three weeks in "The Bunnymoon Suite," an exercise pen in the cellar, as their bonding dates progressed. Suzanne says it was "slow going," as Bosco could be a rather jealous and aggressive fellow, particularly around food. "Bosco loves kale and Craisins (dried cranberries). When he finds a big piece of kale in his salad, he runs under the table with it so no one can steal it from him."

Before long the two bunnies fell in love and moved into their own room together in the main part of the house. "When we're home to supervise, they get half the house," says Suzanne. "He loves to do binkies and run zoomies around the living room rug. They also have a double exercise pen that I set up in the backyard. He loves to eat grass, dig in the dirt, and run his binkies and zoomies outside."

Several weeks ago, Bosco underwent treatment for e. cuniculi that had settled into his right eye, causing a cataract and an ulcer. His right eye had to be surgically removed. "It's healed well," says Suzanne. "Luna has been taking good care of him, and I tell him every day that he's my handsome one-eyed bunny! He just had a follow-up, and the doctor is very pleased. He never seemed like he was in pain, but whatever he felt is all better now that's it's gone."

Every bunny faces challenges, and Bosco has taken his in stride, keeping his happy spirit. "Bosco flops all the time!" says Suzanne. "In all my years of rabbit ownership, I've never seen anyone flop as much as he does. It's so adorable. He looks so happy and relaxed."

Perhaps his secret is in his happy union with Luna. "They still have their differences sometimes, but they're very much in love. They snuggle and groom each other and sleep together."



*Bosco and Luna cozy as can be.  
Photo courtesy of Suzanne Atkocius.*



# Volunteer Spotlight

by A.A.

Volunteers are the heart of HRN. Natalie Darmohraj and Abbie Loewenstein are volunteers who organize Bunny Yoga fundraisers. Abbie, who calls herself “HRN’s unofficial bunny yoga coordinator,” works with various yoga studios to hold the events. Natalie, who is a certified yoga instructor, has organized many such events and also teaches the classes. Bunny Yoga is open to people of all experience levels and is like a typical yoga class but with the bonus of shelter bunnies playing around the studio and interacting with the participants. The bunnies get exercise, socialization, and attention with the goal of encouraging people to adopt or foster as well as raising money for HRN bunnies. The bunnies are available for adoption though the adoptions don’t take place at the classes.

Natalie and Abbie had previous experience volunteering with rabbits at Sweet Binks Rabbit Rescue and MSPCA at Nevins Farm, respectively. Natalie came to HRN in 2017. She lives too far away to be a shelter volunteer at HRN, so she began looking into working remotely and doing events. Yoga fundraisers were a perfect fit for her and she began teaching and coordinating the classes as well as volunteering at special events, such as Bunny Spa Day. Abbie found HRN online in 2016. She adopted Peanut from HRN and then began fostering. But with four bunnies at home, she was running out of space to foster and looked for other ways to volunteer. After attending a yoga event, she became interested in helping to coordinate the events.

Using yoga to bring bunnies and people together is rewarding for Natalie because many shelter rabbits have been “let down by people,” she said. They get to experience love with the shelter volunteers and ultimately, with a forever family. HRN gives “neglected and abandoned buns a chance at life,” she said.



*Natalie at yoga class with a shelter bun.*



*At their adoption appointment: Abbie and Peanut .*

This sentiment is shared by Abbie, who said, “Bunnies are so mistreated and so misunderstood that I want to get the word out and create fun and engaging ways for bunnies to interact with the public.” The events combine two of Abbie’s favorite things and as she puts it, “I feel so excited to raise moneys for bunnies!”

Abbie has four bunnies: Peanut, Pumpkin, Patchouli, and Papa. Peanut, a Netherland Dwarf and Cinnamon mix, was Abbie’s inspiration to get more involved with HRN. Peanut is a certified therapy bunny as part of a Visiting Rabbit Team with Bunnies in Baskets. Abbie, who is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, also brings Peanut to work almost every day. He’s clicker trained, can pick up cups and Slinkies on command, and loves interacting with clients. Pumpkin, a mini-Rex, who will be nine

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## FAQs: Bonding Your Buns Con't

again one bun may claim it and if they start to fight, it would be difficult to reach in and separate them.

### Should I take my rabbits on car rides?

Not necessarily. Stress bonding can be a useful tool if your rabbits are fighting or not getting along. However, if the bonding is going smoothly, why stress them out?

### What are trust dates?

Trust dates are where you sit in a pen with your rabbits but don't let them interact. You keep them two feet apart. This allows them to get used to each other. They start to relax as the other bunny has not attacked them. They don't realize that you're preventing it.

### Is there love at first sight?

There's love at first sight but it's very rare and you shouldn't expect it. Fewer than 1% of the bondings are love-at-first-sight bonds. Just because your rabbits seem to get along when they first meet, please don't place them together in a cage on the first day. You should also not expect kissing, snuggling, or grooming on the first few dates.



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## My Bunny is Living with Cancer

medication.

I know she could fall apart at any minute. I try not to think about losing her and try to live in the moment that I have her and be comforted that she has a good quality of life. She was doing a full body bunny smile when I sat and gently stroked her cheek last night. One day at a time!



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## Volunteer Spotlight Con't

in September "started it all for me," Abbie said. She was a therapy bunny until retiring when Peanut was promoted. Patchouli, a two-year-old foster fail, was found on the street by Abbie and a friend. Papa is around twelve years old and came to live with Abbie two years ago.

Natalie has two Holland Lops: Poli and Moki. Poli was found four years ago with a badly broken hind leg that had to be amputated, and Natalie adopted him shortly after his surgery. His condition hasn't stopped him from zooming around the house. As Natalie said, "We soon realized that his special needs are extra treats and attention!" Poli was also bonded with bunny Maxy, and stayed by Maxy's side when he passed away last summer at age 14. Moki was four weeks old when found as a stray over two years ago and Natalie adopted him right away as he was too little to be cared for at a shelter. Moki can be shy, but he and Poli are making progress with bonding.

We'll be planning more bunny yoga this fall. Information will be posted on [www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork](http://www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork) and [www.rabbitnetwork.org/yoga](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/yoga).



# HRN News

## Bunny Yoga Fundraiser

Yoga with shelter bunnies hopping from mat to mat is the best way to exercise. HRN continued its Bunny Yoga classes during the months of March, April, and May. There was a \$25 minimum suggested donation per ticket. Over \$6,100 has been raised so far for HRN with about 250 participants. Thank you to Shrine Yoga Studio in Warren, RI; Providence Power Yoga in Providence, RI; Summit Health + Fitness in Bedford, MA; Roots in Burlington, MA; and Samara Yoga Studio in Somerville for donating the studio time. And thank you to our fantastic volunteer yoga instructors, Natalie Darmohraj, Christine Ahlgren, and Wendy Cook; our wonderful bunny yoga coordinator, Abbie Loewenstein; Natalie Darmohraj and Julie Langhill for providing baked goods; Alan Tannenwald for donating water; Harbor Sweets and Unreal Chocolates for donating chocolate goodies; and Joey Phoenix for photography. Visit [www.rabbitnetwork.org/yoga](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/yoga) for information on upcoming classes in the fall.



*Kelly Turley poses with a bun.  
Photo courtesy of Paula Santos-Shevett.*

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## Las Vegas Bunny Rescue

Unfortunately, there are many “dumpsites” in Las Vegas where people have abandoned their pet rabbits. Needless to say, it’s not easy for domesticated rabbits to fend for themselves—especially in the desert! Since many of these buns were never fixed, the bunny population there has increased tremendously. Luckily, there are also a number of rescue organizations in the area to help find the bunnies new homes.

More than 300 rabbits have been rescued so far. There are about 50 buns left running free, but if they have litters that number could easily change. The rescuers are working hard to round up that last batch of buns. Recently, HRN took in 20 of these Las Vegas buns: Sally, Joy, Carmello, Ruth, Blaze, Race, Norbert, Carl, Heather, Olive, Pete, Jimmy, Fluff, Naomi, Cherry, Hayley, Renegade, Rover, Jasper, and Tyrone. We’ll be getting six more in June.

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## Cuddle Baby Bunnies Fundraiser

HRN is holding Cuddle Baby Bunnies Fundraisers. For a \$20 donation, you can play with baby bunnies for 15 minutes, helping to socialize them while you get to soak up all the cuteness. The first event on May 24 was sold out. Since a stray bun we recently rescued just had a litter, we are expecting to hold a few more of these fundraisers in June. Check out [www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork](http://www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork) for more information.

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## Thank You

A big thank you to IBM for awarding a \$2,000 cash grant to the House Rabbit Network in recognition of the volunteer service of Suzanne Trayhan.



## Bunny Spa Day

Bunny Spa Day on April 8, 2018, at Domino Veterinary Hospital, 29 Domino Drive, Concord, MA was a great success. More than 70 bunnies enjoyed getting the spa treatment from 24 volunteers who offered nail trims and grooming, professional animal massage, a photoshoot, and Reiki sessions. Bunnies went home to enjoy their new apple and pear sticks, handmade reusable and washable pee pads from The Original Penelopads, and all sorts of goodies from Rhody Bun Mobile Market. Thank you to the volunteers: Christine Ahlgren, Cheryl Arena and her daughter Syrah, Jenny Baustert, Sara Christensen, Tunde Cser, Natalie Darmohraj, Beth DiGiulio, Josi Fatta, Hunter Fedan, Betsy Hartman, Jeff Hartman, Karen Lachapelle, Dawn Lewis, Lindsey Meyers Bertone, Deb McGillivray, Joan Pilch, Melanie Powers, Erin Riel, Jessica Riel, Bernadette Saccoia-Quirk, Tracy Smith, Andrea Stuart, and Suzanne Trayhan. The day raised over \$3,700 for HRN! Keep your eyes on [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org) for future spa day dates.



*Penelope enjoying her spa treatment by Melanie Powers. Photo courtesy of Josi Fatta.*

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## Upcoming Fundraising Efforts—Donations Needed

We'll be holding another **Facebook Auction** in July. Dates are being determined right now. Also, HRN's annual **Flatbread Benefit** will take place Tuesday, September 25 from 4:00-9:00 p.m. at the Flatbread in Bedford, MA. Flatbread will donate to HRN \$3.50 from every large flatbread and \$1.75 from a small flatbread sold that night. Mark your calendars and join HRN members, volunteers, and friends to enjoy food and bid on wonderful auction prizes. For event information, please visit [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org) or [www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork](http://www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork).

Speaking of auction prizes, we could really use your help. We're looking for donations for both the Facebook Auction and the Flatbread Benefit. For the online auction, items that can be easily mailed like gift cards, certificates for services, and tickets to events would be ideal. For the Flatbread benefit, prize baskets or items to be added to baskets work well. Gift cards for Flatbread would also be a great option. Please contact [info@rabbitnetwork.org](mailto:info@rabbitnetwork.org) if you have something to donate. Your donation will be acknowledged on our website and in our next newsletter.

## Adoption Totals

**141 rabbits from HRN have gone on to happy homes with their forever families so far in 2018. We wish them well.**

# Join HRN ... or ... Please Renew Your Membership

Through our network of dedicated volunteers and members, HRN is making amazing strides to improve the welfare of house rabbits everywhere. Your support can only further our goals, so become a member and get involved.

**Visit our website to find out how to help:** [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org)

**If you are not already a member, please join HRN!**

Your membership dollars will go toward rescue and rehabilitation, community outreach and education, and veterinary expenses.

**Help make a difference in a rabbit's life. They're counting on you!**



Contact House Rabbit Network:

[info@rabbitnetwork.org](mailto:info@rabbitnetwork.org)

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## House Rabbit Network Membership and Ordering Form

Your membership donation is tax deductible and will be used for medical costs (spays/neuters, veterinary bills) and education expenses. All members will receive a copy of our newsletter, *Rabbit Tracks*, when it is published. Currently, we are publishing three issues per year. You can join online at [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org) or just fill out this page and mail it with your check payable to:

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