



House Rabbit Network

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Dedicated to educating the public and to fostering and adoption of companion rabbits. 781-431-1211 or www.rabbitnetwork.org

Rabbit Tracks

Fall 2016

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Teaching Your Rabbit to Jump

by Sadie Macmillan

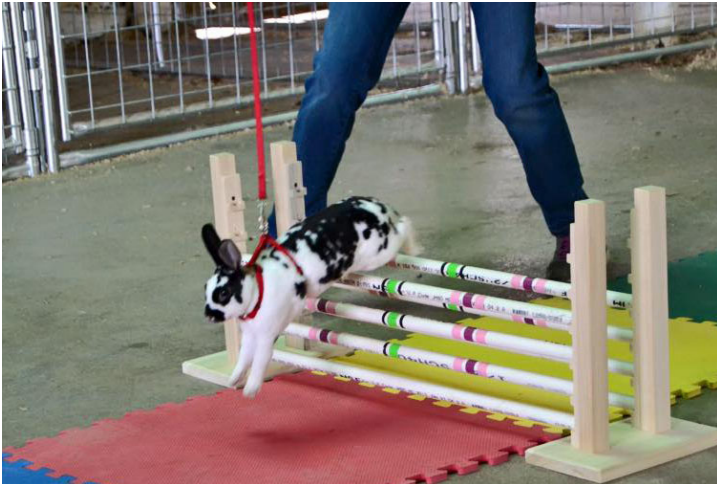


Photo courtesy of Alexis Steele.

If you're looking for a new way to bond with your rabbit, consider trying your hand at rabbit jumping. In the competitive sport of rabbit jumping, the handler takes her bunny along a course set up with jumps of various heights. The people involved love it, and the rabbits seem to love it, too, since they're doing one of the things they do best. How do you get started?

First, determine if your rabbit is a good candidate for the sport. Jumping is a high-impact activity that could cause joint injury in young rabbits, older rabbits, and larger-breed rabbits. You should always clear it with your veterinarian before you begin training.

If your vet has approved it, the first thing you'll need is a harness and leash. There are many kinds of harnesses, but the safest for rabbits is the H-style harness. (There's also a shoulder harness, but these aren't available in the usual pet stores, and must be custom-ordered.)

Wearing a harness will feel foreign and a little frightening to a bunny who's not used to it, so start by massaging him gently before you put anything on him. Target the places where he might be most sensitive, like his "armpits." Your goal is to desensitize him and make the experience enjoyable.

Your bun's first introductions to the harness should be brief. As he grows more comfortable, let him hop around his living space while wearing the harness, but without the lead attached. The key is to start slow and expand his comfort zone gradually. When you first attach the lead, let him hop wherever he wants. You don't want him to panic and bolt, and possibly injure himself. You eventually want him to understand that the lead will limit his movement, but that he's still safe.

Rabbit-jumping competition courses take place on mats, with a hurdle that is specifically designed for the sport. They're available to purchase, but they're not necessary for practicing at home. You can jury-rig your own hurdles by balancing wooden dowels from a building supply store on top of items from your home, like a couple of tissue boxes or two stacks of magazines. The important thing is to build a hurdle that will allow the dowel to fall away in either direction, to prevent possible injury to the bun.

Only set up the hurdles during practice time, so that it becomes a special, fun activity and he doesn't get bored with it. Start with just one hurdle, and set your bunny in front of it. Wait until he approaches it to sniff it or check it out, and just as he's about to lose interest in it, lift him up and over. As you lift him, speak the simple voice command (like "Up, up!") that you will use as his cue to jump. Or if you're already using a clicker, you can incorporate that into his training.

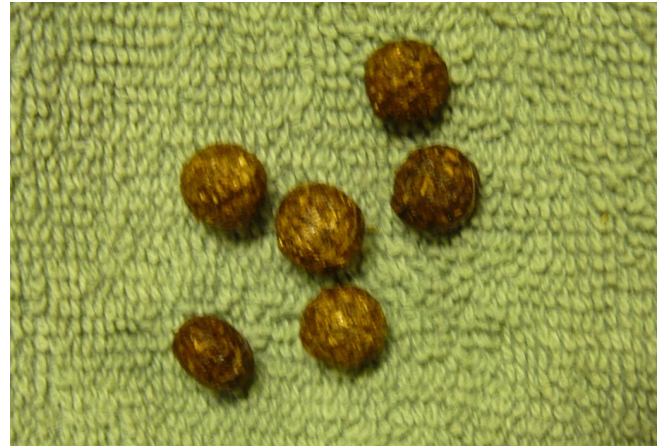
When your rabbit starts to jump over the hurdle on his own, reinforce it, no matter which direction he jumps from. Eventually you'll train him to move and jump in a single direction, which is how the courses work, but in the beginning your goal will be only to get him to enjoy the jump.

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What's Your Poo Telling You?: Lagomorph Edition

By Betsy Hartman

Anish Sheth's and Josh Richman's book *What's Your Poo Telling You?* offers a guide to what we humans can learn about our health from the character of our stool. But to the rabbit enthusiast, human feces are not nearly as fascinating, nor celebrated, as rabbit poop! Not many species produce two kinds of poo, and when our buns have been ill, we exclaim over their meager production as if they'd laid golden eggs. A casual survey of house rabbit Facebook groups and websites reveals that many bun owners, while familiar with the basics, still have questions about the deposits their rabbits leave in the litterbox (or outside of it).



Normal rabbit poop. Photo courtesy of Stacey Paiva.

Rabbits are hindgut fermenters, which means that microbes in the large intestine and the cecum digest cellulose (plant starch) for the animal. The animal derives volatile fatty acids as products of the breakdown of cellulose by the bacteria, and the bacteria themselves provide protein. One could even say that you're not feeding your rabbit so much as you're feeding the microbes that inhabit your rabbit! The composition of rabbit gut flora is poorly understood, but we do know that it's extremely sensitive to even small changes. Without normal gut flora, a bun cannot go about its business of eating and pooping. Pathological changes are often first noticeable to the rabbit owner as a change in the bun's carefully monitored and scrutinized poop.

So, without further ado, what is your rabbit's poo telling you?

Size

Depending on the size and diet of the bun, fecal pellets, affectionately referred to by many as "Cocoa Puffs," could be smaller than a pea to as large as a marble.

Color

Color should be pale brown to almost black.

Consistency

Fecal pellets should be firm but soft when first produced, and quickly become harder but still easily crushed. Cocoa Puffs should be dry, not sticky, and should appear like they are full of hay and other fiber when smashed and examined.

Rabbits that are on a more dry diet, like mainly pellets and hay, will produce lighter brown droppings, big in size and full of visible fiber / chewed pieces of hay. When a rabbit is on a more wet diet, including fresh vegetables, the droppings become darker and smaller in size, and it becomes very difficult to see pieces of hay/fiber (which does not mean there is none inside; it's just that fiber from fresh plants is different from pieces of chewed hay).

Cecotropes, cecotrophs, or cecal pellets – These soft, shiny clusters, which are also generated by buns, are made up of individual "Raisinettes," smaller than normal fecal pellets. Produced in the cecum and full of bacteria and fungi needed by the rabbit in its upper GI tract, the cecals are regularly produced and eaten by

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Teaching Your Rabbit to Jump Con't

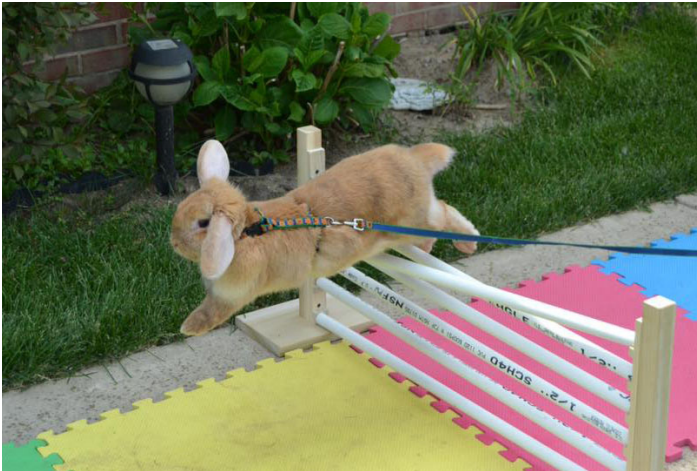


Photo courtesy of Alexis Steele.

Just as important as knowing how to train your bunny is knowing how much to train your bunny. You want it to be enjoyable for him, which means not pushing too hard. The early training sessions should be short (15-20 minutes), and limited to a few times a week.

Every bunny is different, and not every bunny is going to enjoy jumping hurdles. But learning to jump hurdles is a good way to spend time together, and that's what it's really all about.

You can investigate this fun sport further by visiting:
www.rabbitspring.com
www.canadianrabbitspringclub.com
www.nhnetherlands.com/hurdling.html



What's Your Poo Telling You? Con't



Normal cecotroph. Photo courtesy of Esther van Praag, PhD, www.medicrabbit.com.

You should be sure to clean your buns' litterboxes every day and keep an eye on what they're producing. This is an important part of monitoring their health and making sure that they're eating and eliminating properly.

Problems

Fecal pellets that are consistently smaller than normal, wetter than normal, or strung together with hair, fiber, or copious mucus can all be signs of digestive problems.

Small, dry pellets might mean your rabbit isn't drinking enough or getting enough fiber. Make sure that he or she has a constant supply of hay and plentiful fresh, clean water. Decreasing size and/or quantity of fecal pellets can signal the onset of GI stasis.

the bun. You may not notice these droppings, since the rabbit will usually eat them directly from the anus. Seeing cecals in your bun's habitat infrequently is not a concern, but the over-production and/or non-ingestion of cecotrophs can be a sign of a problem. Obese, arthritic, or disabled rabbits often can't reach down to snag fresh cecotrophs, and the soft poo can end up sticking in the fur on their bottoms. Uneaten, often smashed, cecotrophs, whether on the cage floor or on the fur of your bun's bum, should not be mistaken for true diarrhea, which is a medical emergency!

Frequency

Constant! Even small buns produce dozens of poops every day.

What's Your Poo Telling You? Con't

A “string of pearls” connected with hair may simply be a reminder to brush your rabbit regularly. It means also that the digestive system is functioning normally and rejecting the ingested hair. While it may mean more brushing in rabbits with regular short fur, these strings appear daily with long-haired rabbits, in spite of regular brushing. Unlike cats, who are happy to vomit hairballs onto our newest piece of furniture, rabbits are unable to vomit, and ingested hair must come out the other end.

Mucousy poop can be a sign of intestinal parasites (worms), or can appear after a bout of stasis.

Poops that look wet or mushy and aren't fully round might indicate an imbalance in your rabbit's diet. Too much protein or sugar can be the result of too many treats (carrots and fruit should be given only occasionally, and yogurt drops and other dairy avoided altogether). You should also make sure that your rabbit is getting a reasonable quantity of timothy hay pellets – about a quarter cup per day for a five pound rabbit – and no more! Hay is the most important part of your rabbit's diet, and pellets and fresh greens should just supplement the main course.

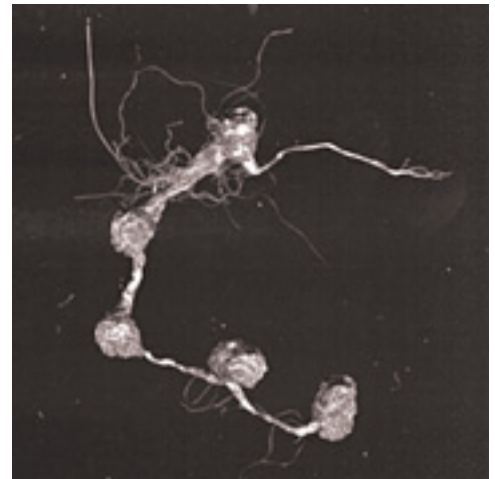
Soft stool the consistency of toothpaste, with a foul odor, is indicative of a coccidia (a parasitic protozoa) overgrowth in your rabbit's gastrointestinal system.

“Cow pie” stool often results when a rabbit has a condition called megacolon (also known as aganglionosis of the gut). Megacolon is the paralysis of the muscles of the wall of the large intestine, resulting in a dilated colon that doesn't do its job to move ingesta along the course of the GI. A rabbit with megacolon is born with this condition. These straight- or lopped-eared rabbits all have the particularity of being very white, with a few black or brown spots. Generally, the condition becomes worse when the rabbit gets older and most don't live longer than 4 to 6 years. A good diet, including fresh vegetables, can help avoid problem of the digestive tract.

Poop with a whitish coating is not generally a concern. Rabbit urine has a high calcium content, and if your bun pees on its poops, the dried urine appears as a white crust on the outside of the fecal pellet.

True diarrhea is watery and requires immediate veterinary attention. Blood in the stool is likewise a medical emergency. The former can indicate a profound dysbiosis (colonization of the gut by “evil” bacteria rather than the normal, healthy microbiome), and the latter advanced intestinal disease.

So your bun's poop can tell you a lot about how your bun is feeling. If you see something unusual, it's always a good idea to check with your vet.



Hair in feces. Photo courtesy of Esther van Praag, PhD, www.medirabbit.com.



Adoption Success Story

By Jessica Riel



Agatha Bess has the Munchies

"Who wants a cookie?" Linnea Krajewski calls out. Five bunnies come running to the cupboard door looking for their Oxbow digestive tablet "cookies."

One of those bunnies is Aggie, short for Agatha Bess, who was adopted as "Bess" from House Rabbit Network (HRN) in May. Her friends are Olivia, Duster, Gigi, and Jules, and all enjoy a free-range lifestyle in their home.

Olivia and Agatha Bess just hanging out. Photo courtesy of Linnea Krajewski.

"Agatha has an incredible vertical leap," says Linnea. "She can go from the floor to the bed in one jump." So far, the only sites too high are the dining room table and kitchen counters.

When Linnea has her back turned, Aggie looks around slyly and jumps into the open refrigerator, looking for the goodies she can smell in the crisper. Her favorites are kale, carrots, cilantro, and parsley – she's hopped right into the rubbish bin looking for scraps when her mama was preparing cilantro and parsley.

Most of all, Aggie loves blueberries. "Give her a blueberry, and she will be your friend for life!"

Because of her mighty appetite, "Aggie eats her breakfast in the kitchen," says Linnea, while the other bunnies eat elsewhere. "When Agatha is almost done with her meal, she will thump as loudly as she can – a warning to the other rabbits in the house that she is on her way out of the kitchen and will be looking to 'share' their food."

Aggie is also an avid consumer of books and other literature. "She's shredded an entire shelf's worth," says Linnea. "She also has a particular love for copies of *Hemmings Motor News*. I have to make sure that when the magazine comes in, it goes on a shelf that she can't reach. I think she's a budding gearhead bunny."

In addition to being a star hopper, Aggie is a magnificent flopper. "The second day that Agatha was home, she wandered into the living room, went under a chair, and unceremoniously flopped onto her side," says Linnea. "She scared me half to death. I was sure that she had suffered a heart attack or a stroke." Linnea rushed over to see what she could do to save Aggie. "I gently stroked her leg and she sat up, startled and a bit upset at me for interrupting what was certain to be a nice nap. Since that time, I have learned that the flop is Aggie's way to become totally relaxed and one with the universe."



The Codman Farms Rescue

By A.A.

Over the summer, HRN assisted in a large rescue, known as the Great Rabbit Liberation of 2016. Codman Farms in Lincoln, MA surrendered over 135 rabbits – mostly New Zealand and Californian – after agreeing to stop raising meat rabbits. This was due to the efforts of Wendy Cook, a Buddhist yoga teacher, who found out about the farm in June and decided one day to walk over and talk to the farmer.

Wendy described the subsequent discussions as “intense but intelligent” with the result being all rabbits relinquished to her for a fee, and the farmer saying he’d make up lost revenue by raising crops instead. Since the living conditions had been approved by the MSPCA and Animal Control, this was a somewhat atypical situation, in which there was no alleged abuse or neglect.

Wendy viewed this rescue through the lens of the Buddhist practice of Animal Liberation, in which an animal is saved from slaughter, given a Buddhist blessing, and provided with an environment that lengthens its life. The practice is said to generate good karma. It seemed to be kismet that the farmer and the Codman Farms’ Board of Directors began their talks with her on July 6th, which is the Dalai Lama’s birthday.

Taking in and caring for so many rabbits took considerable time, money, and effort. First, Tibetan monks in cranberry and ochre robes arrived to bless the rabbits, chanting prayers and ringing bells. Then rabbit aficionados, many associated with HRN, moved the bunnies into larger cages so all the buns had room to stand



Buns getting their first cuddles. Photo courtesy of Wendy Cook.

up comfortably. They were given clean hay and fed their very first fresh greens, since meat rabbits are raised on pellets. The rabbits had health assessments and were tended to for ear mites, sore hocks from the wire cages, and other issues. They even got their nails clipped by loving volunteers. With this past summer being particularly hot, Wendy had to make sure that the rabbits had blocks of ice, like frozen water bottles, to sit next to so that they didn’t overheat.

By August 11th, 77 rabbits had been placed in shelters, 34 were being fostered, 21 had been adopted, and 3 were in a sanctuary. Although Wendy no longer has these rabbits in her care, financial support is greatly needed to cover the medical costs, including

spays and neuters, water bottles, carriers, high quality food, financial support to the foster guardians, and other supplies. Wendy would like to contribute as much as possible particularly to those foster families who welcomed several buns, and to the organizations like House Rabbit Network and St. Hubert’s Animal Welfare that took buns in. So far she has raised almost \$4,000 of her \$15,000 goal. In addition to money, many of these rabbits still need permanent homes.

To make a donation or for more information on the rescue, please visit:

www.crowdrise.com/the-great-rabbit-pardon-of-2016/fundraiser/wendycook1

www.facebook.com/greatrabbitliberation



Rescued buns in larger, cleaner cages. Photo courtesy of Wendy Cook.



HRN News

Annual Bunny Hop & Volunteer Awards

A huge thanks to Deb McGillivray for hosting our annual summer bunny hop and to everyone who attended. It was a lot of fun! It was so nice to see everyone and spend time together. This year's recipients of our volunteer awards are:

Vinny Battista: Shelter Support

Dawn Lewis: Email Support

Rachel Minnie: Social Media

Alan Moyer: Website Support

Laura Scafati: Treasurer

While we are honoring these people, we also want to thank all of you. We are who we are because of our fabulous volunteers and all the hard work you do. You all deserve awards! The bunnies are so much better off because of your hard work.

Grant Received

HRN is proud to announce that we received a \$4,000 grant from the Massachusetts Animal Coalition (MAC) to help spay and neuter our rescued rabbits! Supporting MAC either through donations or through their license plates (www.petplate.org) helps support HRN. The funds were already put to good use with Hope, Blossom, Gia, Sherman, Paloma, Ollie, Bella, Averil, Franklin, Alexis, April, Gwendolyn, Sherman, Franklin, Pipkin, Georgia, Mopsey, Audrey Hepbun, Hannah, Heidi, Tucker, Timmy, Happy, Flopster, Pixie, Tulip, Spirit, Poco, Ariel, Mia, Nicky, Chelsea, Hawthorn, Pangloss, Smokey!



The New HRN Calendar is Here!

Our 2016 calendar is available and it makes a great gift for the rabbit lover in your life...or for yourself! And don't forget that the holidays are right around the corner. Calendars are only \$11 each (plus shipping), and all proceeds go toward the care of our shelter and foster buns. You can order online with Paypal at www.rabbitnetwork.org. Or, if you'd like to pay by check or money order, you can make your payment out to the House Rabbit Network and mail it to us at:

House Rabbit Network
P.O. Box 2602
Woburn, MA 01888-1102

Shipping rates are as follows:

- 1 calendar.....\$4.00
- 2 calendars...\$5.00
- 3 calendars...\$6.00
- 4 calendars...\$7.00



If you would like to order 5 or more calendars, please send us an email at info@rabbitnetwork.org, and we will let you know what the shipping rate will be.

Annual Flatbread Benefit a Success!

HRN's annual Flatbread benefit took place on September 27 this year and was a great success, raising over \$3,100! This is the 10th year in a row that Flatbread has included HRN in its charitable contributions. Tuesday nights at Flatbread are Benefit Nights, when the restaurant makes a donation of \$3.50 for every large flatbread and \$1.75 for every small flatbread ordered that night. More than 350 HRN members, volunteers, and friends came to the restaurant that evening to enjoy the food and bid

on auction prizes. We had an array of wonderful prizes up for grabs this year, donated to us by both businesses and individuals. Check out their website for more information about this generous local business: www.flatbreadcompany.com



Our warmest thanks to Flatbread, our supporters, and the following donors:

A Spa to Remember	Home Depot
Amanda Bosh	Keurig
Andrea Arena	Lesa Hall
Betsy & Jeff Hartman	Lindt & Sprungli
Brown Dog Pet Photography	Lori Martinez
Carol Youngclaus	Merrimack Repertory Theatre
Celebrities for Charities	Montira Suksomboon
The Chateau Restaurant	New England Aquarium
Cheryl Arena	Pelham Saddlery
Dan Aronovitz	Red Sox
Dawna Diorio	Suzanne Trayhan
Essex River Cruises	Tavern in the Square
Functional Bodywork	VCA Wakefield Animal Hospital
Janie Matochie	

2016 Adoption Totals

So far 2016 has been a good year for buns. 144 rabbits from HRN have gone on to happy homes with their forever families. 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

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

781-431-1211

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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 or just fill out this page and mail it with your check payable to:

**House Rabbit Network
P.O. Box 2602
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Choose your membership level:

- Dwarf.....\$ 15.00
- Mini Lop.....\$ 25.00
- New Zealand.....\$ 50.00
- Flemish Giant.....\$ 100.00
- Mix (other).....\$ _____

Choose your newsletter delivery preference:

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(significant savings for HRN)
- Hard copy via U.S. Mail

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