



**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

Fall 2018

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## Special Feature

# Rabbits and Children: Hunter Fedan

by Dawn Lewis

In this newsletter series, we'll be highlighting a few children who have had awesome experiences with their bunnies, and have them talk about their bonds with their buns and why (or why not) a family should adopt a bunny as a pet.

At House Rabbit Network (HRN), we're often asked if rabbits make good pets for children. The answer is absolutely—with the parent being the primary caregiver and the child/children involved in the overall care of the bunny. We never encourage parents to adopt a bunny (or any pet) as a gift, and absolutely never as a "starter pet" meant to teach a child



*Hunter and Penelope sharing "floor snuggles."  
Photo courtesy of Stace Fedan.*

responsibility or as a way to earn a larger pet. Rabbits make wonderful family pets that bond very well with children, and together with adult supervision, owning a rabbit can be a fantastic and enriching experience for a child.

Fourth-grader Hunter Fedan grew up around rabbits, and caring for them comes as second nature. It's not uncommon for his mom, Stace, to walk into the living room and find 9-year-old Hunter snuggled under a blanket, watching TV with their beautiful Flemish Giant, Penelope, stretched out next to him. Lovable Penelope joined the Fedan family in 2016 after Stace saw a Facebook post and photos where Penelope was looking for a forever home.

Even though Hunter snuggles with Penelope, he knows that bunnies enjoy affection on their own terms and says that he thinks bunnies make such wonderful pets because "they are quiet, lovable, cute, soft, calming, and loyal." In fact, when we're asked at HRN if a rabbit will be good in a family with small children, we try to focus on their gentle and often skittish nature, helping a family understand that a bunny may not want to be scooped up for love and pets, and may enjoy simple head pats and "floor snuggles." Hunter states that "bunnies are better for older kids and people that know they get scared easily." One of the key factors with bunnies and children is making sure that a child understands that a bunny is fragile. It's important that a rabbit is picked up correctly to prevent injury to the rabbit, and that children are always supervised when handling a bunny.

In the Fedan household, Stace cleans the litterboxes while Hunter enjoys feeding and brushing the rabbits. "I feed them and give them fresh water, fresh romaine lettuce, dill, cilantro, parsley, green leaf lettuce, basil, and mint. I brush them and give them snuggles. I make sure they have lots of chew toys. I make sure they are not bored and that they have so much fun."

*continued on pg. 7*

# Cow Pile Syndrome

by Gabby Savage

Cow pile (cow pat) syndrome isn't a medically-recognized condition but rather a symptom of other illnesses. Cow pile feces are soft, voluminous, unformed rabbit droppings, often resembling a cow pile.

What causes cow pile syndrome? Plausible causes include but may not be limited to inappropriate diet, antibiotic use, bacterial changes, stress, parasites, and genetic predisposition such as megacolon.

First look is at diet; what do they eat? Many feeding guides for buns online promote the need for grass hay first, veggies second, pellets without the colorful bits third, and treats last, and of course always allow access to fresh water. For the majority of rabbits, this diet guide followed in good proportions keeps our furry companions happy and healthy. If you're not following this guideline, you may want to think about changing their diet up a bit. Some rabbits don't tolerate treats, for some it's pellets, and some need less greens, different greens, or no greens. But first and most important is the hay. More information on proper diet can be found at [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org).

Sometimes we need to use antibiotics in our furry little friends for several reasons. Some rabbits take them in stride and never have an issue, while others, especially those on long-term use, experience a major upset to the bacteria in their gut killing off the good and allowing the bad to overgrow. The result is undesirable fecal output. In most cases, a probiotic can help get your rabbit's gut back in order. Please discuss this with your rabbit-savvy vet if your furry companion is on an antibiotic.

Stress isn't anyone's friend, and unfortunately for buns it can have a serious impact on their gut. For some the result will be stasis, and for others it will be cow-pile-syndrome-type poop. For the latter, most can be helped by eliminating or at least reducing their stress. Cutting back to hay only for a few days until symptoms improve, and possibly the introduction of a probiotic, may be helpful. As always check with your rabbit-savvy vet before making any drastic changes to your rabbit's diet.



*Oval and oversized poop is a symptom of megacolon. Photo courtesy of Gabby Savage.*

Our rabbits can sometimes fall victim to parasites, whether they come to us with them or pick them up at an outing, the best way to address parasites is to identify them. A fecal sample should be taken to your rabbit-savvy vet to determine what the parasite is, so they know what medication to prescribe to eradicate the parasite. Some parasites will cause temporary side effects, and others, if they damage the intestinal tract, can lead to long-term-megacolon-like issues.

The elusive megacolon is hard to get a definitive diagnosis on. Formed poops are often long ovals and oversized, often accompanied by soft voluminous, unformed fecal droppings, or fecal smearing or simply an oozing of liquid feces that leaves brownish spots where the rabbit sits. The above-mentioned issues can lead to temporary, or in some cases permanent, damage to the intestinal tract, creating megacolon. Therefore, addressing and fixing the issue as soon as possible is so important.

*continued on pg. 4*

## Cow Pile Syndrome Con't

Unfortunately for some rabbits, megacolon is genetic, inherited due to En/En gene, also known as a double broken, or Charlie. What this means is they received a double copy of a recessive gene. What to look for: En/En rabbits are usually considered to have less than 10% of color markings, a few spots on their body, eye markings, a broken butterfly (nose marking that's lopsided and doesn't resemble a butterfly across the nose), a simple stripe of color down their back that may or may not be interrupted, or any combination of those markings. These help to identify the En/En gene, but some who are marked sparsely don't always carry the En/En gene. The tricky part is albinos can also carry En/En genes. En/En gene is commonly found in breeds such as the English Spot, the Checkered Giant, the Blanc De Hotot, Lops, Rex Rabbits, Satins, and Rhinelanders, as well as any of those mixes.



*An En/En rabbit.  
Photo courtesy of Gabby Savage.*

What does this mean for your rabbit? If they're having symptoms that appear to be megacolon, the chances are higher that it's due to genetic inheritance than any of the other issues previously mentioned, but always rule them out first. Our En/En rabbits have two recessive genes, so some may be prone to chronically being ill and more susceptible to catching other illnesses.

Megacolon isn't curable at this time, but in most cases, it's manageable. It's believed that congenital megacolon is caused by a malfunction or improper development of the colon/cecum, that causes an inability to properly draw the right nutrients into the body, leading to difficulty in maintaining a proper weight.

Every megacolon rabbit is different, and what works for each can be different. One must remember to treat each rabbit as an individual. Diet is trial and error, some can't eat greens without excessive leakage from the rectum, others have difficulty with pellets, for some it's the type of pellets. Often hay that's too rich and green can also affect them in the same way. Once you find a feeding schedule and food that works for them, you don't change it. Some may need dietary supplements, or motility drugs, and pain management when their megacolon flairs up. Finding a rabbit-savvy vet who will help you treat your megacolon rabbit is key.

Please remember that this article shouldn't be considered medical advice and shouldn't take the place of contacting your rabbit-savvy vet. There are so many things we have yet to understand about our rabbit companions, cow pile syndrome / megacolon is one of those mysteries. Some veterinarians are studying further into it, while others deny its existence. Finding the support of a good vet, and hopefully others who may share their lives with a furry companion that suffers the same ailment can help.



# Adoption Success Story

## A Moose on the Loose

by Jessica Riel

Moose had his holiday wishes for a forever family answered last December when he was adopted by Kerstin Mendelsohn. Back then, he was known as Buster, but, says Kerstin, “Within hours of having him we renamed him ‘Moose’ as he’s such a large guy with huge ears and coloring like a moose.”

Kerstin had not planned to bring home such a large and fabulous fellow. “We visited the HRN website a few times before going to the shelter and meeting some rabbits,” said Kerstin. “We had a much smaller bunny in mind and met/played with a few rabbits before meeting Moose. Immediately his sweet disposition, fun whiskers and binkies charmed us — it was love at first sight.”

Moose is still the same sweet and energetically happy boy he was back then. “We hope he doesn’t outgrow his hilarious habit of literally hopping into the air and doing his running binkies or flops,” says Kerstin.

He’s an affectionate fellow, too. “He loves cuddles and attention — often nudging us if we stop petting him.”

Moose lives in a two-floor cage, surrounded by an exercise pen, filled with blankets and toys. “He has a log

that he likes to chew,” says Kerstin, “and he has fun moving paper shreds around his space and making a ‘nest’ and then rearranging everything.”

Next door to Moose lives his “older sister rabbit,” who has been in the house for several years. Though the two are not bonded, they seem to enjoy sharing a room with separate cages. “He’s content just relaxing in the sun and being in his space, but he’s also happy when we take him out and let him run loose in the home.”

Moose on the loose in the house is a site to behold. “We love watching Moose binky on the couch and run around the family room,” says Kerstin. “He’ll run and jump for several minutes at a time and then flop out next to one of us.”

Moose’s love for life is contagious, and his family loves him just as much right back. “He just has so much love and energy and curiosity and brings us joy every day.”



*Moose making himself at home.*

*Photo courtesy of Kerstin Mendelsohn.*



# Volunteer Spotlight

by A.A.

Deb McGillivray has been a volunteer at HRN since spring of 2014. She fosters bunnies, answers hotline calls, and performs adoptions. When Deb bought a rabbit from a pet store in 2013, she needed information about how to care for the bun. When searching the internet with rabbit-care questions, HRN continually popped up with answers. Like many people, it wasn't until finding a rescue agency that Deb realized rabbits can be adopted rather than purchased.

After learning everything she could and caring for her own bunny for four months, Deb decided to volunteer. Since becoming a foster, she has had over 50 bunnies come through her home and still remembers her first foster, a sweet blue-eyed grey and white Dutch bunny that was with her for a month. She calls fostering, "one of my most rewarding endeavors."



*Deb enjoying the company of K.K. and Dust Bunny.*

She started out with mild-mannered buns and then moved on to more difficult ones. "Fostering is a good way to help HRN rehabilitate and socialize mistreated or neglected animals," Deb said. Precious was her first challenging foster; showing attitude, boxing, and grunting when she was approached. "I sat with Precious for an hour or two every day, working to gain her trust, teaching her I was not her enemy." Precious was with Deb for three months until she was adopted by a woman whose bunny had recently passed away. Socialization is crucial for bunnies; they often end up returned to shelters or abandoned outside because of behavioral problems.

Getting shelter rabbits into permanent, loving homes wouldn't be possible without volunteers like Deb, who welcome all types of bunnies into her home, including those who need extra attention, such as injured buns and moms with babies. "With day-to-day time spent with each foster bunny, I develop a true investment in the well-being of my foster buns," she said. It's always sad to see her fosters leave but when she gets updates and photos of them, it brings joy to know they're happy in their forever homes.

Deb has two bunnies of her own, Dust Bunny and K.K., whose relationship she describes as "the epitome of what it means to be in love." Dust Bunny is five and has a cinnamon color with the short ears and "pug nose" of a Dwarf. K.K., a four-and-half-year-old grey and white Polish, was adopted by Deb from HRN shortly after she began volunteering. The bunnies are a quiet pair and spend their time grooming each other, lounging around the house together, and lying next to Deb to watch TV.

Deb's advice to those considering volunteering is to be guided by what they're passionate about. "That way all the hard work will be worth it, you'll be more committed to the cause and as a result, your impact will be that much greater."



## Special Feature Con't

Penelope interacts often with Hunter, whether it's coming in for a flop next to him, or trying to figure out a remote-control toy he's playing with. One of the main reasons they work so well together is that Stace and her husband have spent time teaching Hunter to be patient and gentle with rabbits, and have worked to develop trust with Penelope as well as their two other bunnies, Edison and Moo. While Hunter says that "the best part (of owning a bunny) is they will play with me and keep me company," he also knows that Penelope trusts him, and that they have built a friendship this way. With little ones, the urge to reach out and pet or hold a cuddly-looking rabbit can sometimes result in a grunt or a nip. It's important that a parent works with their child to build that trust with a rabbit and teach that a bunny that nips may be scared or feel nervous, but isn't acting out because of meanness.

It turns out that Penelope has occasional pee accidents, which encouraged Stace and her business partner Avril to start up Penelopads Eco-Friendly Machine-Washable Pet Pads ([www.penelopads.com](http://www.penelopads.com)). You'll spot Hunter helping his mom (and Penelope) market Penelopads online, or you'll see him at an HRN event chatting with other bunny fans as a junior volunteer.

Hunter played a big part in caring for Lady Einstein, another Fedan bun, before she passed away suddenly in the summer of 2018. After Lady lost the use of her back legs, Hunter helped his mom care for her, holding Lady and talking to her gently because he was worried about her and wanted to help her relax and know she was loved.

For Hunter Fedan, owning rabbits is a natural part of life as they are part of the family. And, I think the rabbits would argue that he's the greatest "brofur" they could ask for!

If you're interested in learning more about rabbits as special pets who live indoors as part of the family, please call our Adoption Hotline at (781) 431-1211.



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## HRN News

### **Stranger Than Fiction Improv Night!**

Laugh your buns off our Improv Comedy "Bunefit" on Saturday, December 1, 2018, from 7 p.m.–8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6 p.m.) at the American Legion in Woburn., MA. Stranger Than Fiction is the premiere improvisational comedy troupe for the Granite State. Improvisers take suggestions from the audience. Actions, characters, relationships, and storylines are shaped and defined by the offers they receive. It's a truly interactive theatrical experience. Tickets are \$25 each. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/events/460770144432723> or our website [www.rabbitnetwork.org/improv](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/improv) for more information and to register. We'll have a prize auction too!!

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### **Bunny Yoga Fundraiser**

Yoga with shelter bunnies hopping from mat to mat is the best way to exercise. Our next event will be in Worcester on Thursday, November 29 at 6:30-7:30 p.m. It will be at The Crompton Collective in the White Room. Each ticket is \$26.95. To sign up, visit <https://bit.ly/2OELCy0>.

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### **New HRN Facebook Group**

Join our new group for friends of HRN where we share HRN events, adoption news, and welcome others to share stories about their bunnies.  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/friendsOfHRN/>

# HRN News

## HRN Annual Summer Bunny Hop!

Every summer we have a party for our bunny friends. This year's event was held on July 29, 2018, at Nara Park in Acton. Attendees brought pot luck meals and their bunny brag books. It was a great day to hang out with fellow bunny friends and share our obsession with rabbits. A huge thank-you to everyone who came out. Thanks to everyone who helped out, including Dawn Lewis for helping to spearhead the event and Deb MacGillivray for bringing tables.



*Silas enjoying the party.  
Photo courtesy of Paula  
Santos-Shevett.*

HRN exists because of all the hard work done by our volunteers. Thank you to all of the volunteers for making a difference in the lives of bunnies! Each year we give out volunteer awards. This year's recipients are:

Maureen Bossi for consistently taking adoption appointments and helping to place the bunnies into homes.

Julie Langhill for stepping up and feeding buns many times when we didn't have someone to cover a shift, and helping with training.

Paula Santos-Shevett for frequently helping to transport buns wherever they are needed.

Abbie Loewenstein for helping to set up and run several yoga events which have been very successful fundraisers.

Natalie Darmohraj for helping set up yoga events and teaching classes.

A special Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Suzanne Trayhan to honor her for all the hard work she's done for rabbits. It all started 18 years ago when Suzanne and a small group of people started HRN. Since that time, HRN has helped improve the lives of an incredible number of buns and humans.

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## The New HRN Calendar is Here!

Our 2019 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 \$12 each (plus shipping), and all proceeds go toward the care of our shelter and foster buns. Order online with PayPal at [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org). If you'd prefer to pay by check or money order, make your payment out to the House Rabbit Network and mail it to:

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

Shipping rates:

1 calendar...\$4.00

2 calendars...\$5.00

3 calendars...\$6.00

4 calendars...\$7.00



To order 5 or more, please send an email to [info@rabbitnetwork.org](mailto:info@rabbitnetwork.org), and we'll let you know what the shipping rate will be.



## Annual Flatbread Benefit a Success!

HRN's annual Flatbread Benefit Night took place on September 25 and raised over \$3,077! This is the 12th 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 for every flatbread sold that night. More than 300 HRN members, volunteers, and friends came to the restaurant to enjoy food and bid on wonderful auction prizes. Visit [www.flatbreadcompany.com](http://www.flatbreadcompany.com) for more information about this generous local business.

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

A Spa to Remember	Gentle Giant Rowing Club	North Shore Music Theater
A&J Steampunk Jewelry	Lorie Gols	The Original Penelopads
Applebee's	Mary Sue Hackett	Margo Penelope Pyne
Andrea Arena	Lesa Hall	Rabbit Ridge Winery
Belmont Pet Shop	Susan Hegarty	Red Sox
Cheryl Arena	Home Depot	Paula Santos-Shevett
Bertucci's	Keurig	Gabby Savage
The Chateau Restaurant	Kings Bowl America	Jennifer Sears
The Cheesecake Factory	The Langhill Family	Taza Chocolate
Wendy Cook	Cora Lewis	Trader Joe's
Bonnie Courtemanche	Robin Long	Suzanne Trayhan
Dawna Diorio	Janie Matocha	VCA Wakefield Animal Hospital
Debra's Naturals	Deb McGillivray	Pam Weir
Essex River Cruises	Melissa McNeil	
Gailyn Gaskell	New England Aquarium	

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## Other Fundraising Efforts and a Grant for the Buns

HRN won a \$5,000 grant from the Massachusetts Animal Coalition (MAC) to help spay and neuter our rescued rabbits. Please consider getting one of MAC's "I'm Animal Friendly" License Plates to support animal rescue at [www.petplate.org](http://www.petplate.org).

Our Cuddle Baby Bunny Fundraiser had several events in Billerica where people came to cuddle baby bunnies and enjoy the buns hijinks. They paid \$25 for 20 minutes, all to benefit HRN. From June through September this effort raised \$3,179.

Our July Facebook Auction raised \$1,422. The auction included bunny-themed items like pajamas, socks, jewelry, kitchen towels as well as gift cards and other fun stuff. All goods were generously donated by local businesses and friends of HRN: Amy Agerhard, Boston Duck Tours, Pam Chatis, Bonnie Courtemanche, Betsy & Jeff Hartman, Theresa Leung, Dawn Lewis, Sue McDowell, Rachel Minnie, Suzanne Trayhan, Laura Udden, and Pam Weir.

## Adoption Totals

**260 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)

781-431-1211

P.O. Box 2602

Woburn, MA 01888-1102



## 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:

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

- Netherland Dwarf \$ 20
- Mini Lop \$ 30
- New Zealand \$ 50
- Flemish Giant \$ 100
- Mix breed (other) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Choose your newsletter delivery preference

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

Membership \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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