



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

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Cat and Rabbit: The Odd Couple

by Sadie MacMillan

Cats are predators, rabbits are prey. It's natural to assume that any relationship between them would have to be antagonistic. But house cats and house rabbits can live harmoniously under the same roof and can even become best friends.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, cats and rabbits can get along precisely because they're so different. When a social animal like a rabbit relates to others, whether one of his own or a different species, he's concerned with hierarchy – he needs to know who is going to be the boss of whom. A rabbit may get in a cat's face and push him around to show the cat who's top bun. But cats are generally more solitary and less confrontational. Faced with a pushy bunny, the cat may very likely back off; maybe he doesn't feel threatened, but he'd just rather not get into it with that guy.

And what of the cat's killer instincts? Rabbits are prey, yes, but as far as cats are usually concerned, if it doesn't act like prey, it's not prey. A bunny that charges head-on instead of fleeing isn't likely to show up as prey on the cat's radar. This isn't a fixed rule, of course.

House rabbits and house cats are domesticated animals, so they won't always behave exactly as their wild progenitors would. Individual animals' personalities vary, and sometimes two animals just don't get along.

Whether you'd like to add a rabbit to a cat-inhabited home or bring a cat home to cohabitate with your

“Cats are predators, rabbits are prey.”

rabbit, take heart: You have a very good chance of getting

them to be friends, or at least getting them to live together without turning your den into a *National Geographic* wildlife special.

Of course, bringing a cat home to live with a rabbit, or vice versa, is not always a good idea. If the cat in question is an outdoor cat or if it has been feral at any point in its life; if the rabbit in question is

reconsider attempting any introduction.

You're a lot likelier to achieve a peaceable kingdom if you take the introduction slowly and in stages. At no point will you get an unequivocal sign that the animals are ready for the next stage, but if you're observant and patient, things should go smoothly.

Getting ready:

If you get a chance to, try to bring the new guy's scent home with you before he comes to stay, so that the animals already living with you can familiarize themselves with it. Try to set up the animal's living area and accoutrements (food dishes, litter box, pet bed, cage or pen) ahead of time so that everybody has time to get used to them.

Homecoming:

It's a good idea to keep your new animal separated from the others at first. If possible, confine him to a limited area. Let him start to feel comfortable in his new home. During this period of "quarantine," you can pass the cat's and rabbit's scents to each other by handling the bunny then petting the cat, then going back to pet the bunny, and so on.



Barney (cat) puts his leg around his friend Bugsy (bunny). Photo by Janet Queen.

particularly shy and nervous or if it's still a baby – these are all red flags, and you should seriously

Initial introductions:

It's probably best to introduce the two animals while the rabbit is in its cage. Give the bunny a hiding place like a cardboard box inside the cage, so he has a place where he knows he'll be safe. (This is a good idea in general since most rabbits love hiding spots.) Ideally the rabbit's cage will be spacious enough to allow the rabbit to run around inside it. That way, the cat can observe the rabbit running around, without being able to chase it. If the rabbit is the new guy and you think he might end up being a free-range bun, it's still a good idea to keep him in a cage during the initial introductions.

Chaperoned dates:

The next step is a face-to-face interaction under close supervision. Sit on a couch with the bunny on your lap and the cat next to you. The cat will be able to sniff and investigate the rabbit, and you will have the option of lifting the bunny out of the cat's reach if you have to. Then try sitting on the floor with the cat on your lap and the bunny nearby, giving your bunny the opportunity to approach the cat at its own pace, while the cat remains physically under your control.

Eventually you'll put the cat and the rabbit together with nothing separating them. You'd do well to limit them at first to a blocked-off area or a single room, so nobody

can dash away and get lost elsewhere in your home. Then there isn't much else to do except to put the cat and rabbit on the floor and see what happens – but be prepared to step in if either of them starts behaving indecorously.

A spray bottle works well if you need to intervene quickly. But although negative conditioning may sometimes be unavoidable, positive reinforcement can also be a powerful tool. Try petting the cat and the bunny at the same time while talking in a gentle, soothing voice. If you can create a feeling of calm and relaxation, the animals will hopefully begin to associate those pleasant sensations with each other.



Marty (bun) and Owen (cat) say hello to each other.

Photo by Julie Almy.

Stepping back:

If all goes well, you'll eventually be able to leave the cat and rabbit alone together. How long it takes to get to this point will depend on the personalities of the cat and rabbit involved, and also on how often you can take the time to

chaperone their initial encounters. The important thing is not to force it. If the cat and rabbit are going to get along, they're going to do it in their own time.



This small bunny has no problem getting into the cat's personal space.
Photo by Kathleen Breen.

If they do become friends, you may find them snuggling, playing together, and even grooming each other. However, be prepared for the possibility that it might not work out. If the cat remains too aggressive or the rabbit too fearful, it may not be good idea to let them interact. Would you be able to manage keeping them separated at all times? If the answer is no, you may have a difficult decision to make down the line.

There is no guarantee that your cat and rabbit will get along the way you'd like them to, but the anecdotal evidence is promising. If you plan ahead, stay alert, and don't rush things, you can give them the best possible chance at a wonderful friendship.



The Bunny Houseguest

by Donna MacMillan & Jerry Miller

We weren't sure how we felt about having Harley come and stay with us – at first. After all, we knew nothing about taking care of a rabbit, but he was the beloved companion of our daughter and he needed a place to stay temporarily. So it was with some nervousness that we welcomed Harley into our home. He brought his own pen, crate, and some toys. He moved into the space between the dining room and living room so he could be part of all the activity.

Little did we know how quickly Harley would become a part of our life, and how much he would teach us. Here are a few life lessons from the rabbit who came to stay:

1. Keep a daily routine.

Harley adapted quickly to our routine. He would greet us in the morning, sometimes as early as 4:30 a.m., with his dance in and out of his litter box. If he got too excited, he didn't pay attention and jumped into his water bowl. On many days we got a good morning nose-to-nose "kiss." A morning snack before we went out to run was followed by a family breakfast. On the rare occasion that we forgot to give him his breakfast, we would feel his disapproving bunny look.

Harley "read" the *Wall Street Journal* with us over breakfast. We

would give him a page and he would shred it with great enthusiasm. Then "Papa Jerry" would give him a late-morning snack before leaving for work – enough hay to make it through to supper. Whoever got home first was greeted by another dance.



*Harley is a very well-traveled bunny.
Photo by Donna MacMillan.*

He had a snack while we cooked supper, then he would join us for the family dinner. He had playtime outside the cage after dinner, followed by a bedtime snack for him and evening tea for us.

2. Eat a varied but healthy diet.

Harley came with some herbs (flat-leaf parsley, basil, and cilantro) and hay. He didn't complain about this menu, but we thought he might want some alternatives. Our first alternative was store-bought bunny treats – too much

of a success! They quickly became a favorite part of the daily routine and you could see the impact on his formerly lean figure. We eventually substituted botanical hay for the bunny treats. The new hay was acceptable, but it took him a while (with a few disapproving looks) to kick the treat habit.

Presentation is important, so in addition to the hay in his box, we hung a small manger on the side of his cage for more fresh hay. Of course, we had a fresh supply of paper towel tubes stuffed with hay ready for his entertainment. We were surprised at his fondness for chewing on cardboard and newspaper. We were fortunate that Harley was well-behaved, and not interested in tasting the many power cords and books in our living room.

3. Playtime is important.

It's hard to know how Harley entertained himself while we were away. We were not reduced to installing a bunny-cam! Playtime is important, whether it's inside or outside the cage. After supper we would open the door to the cage so he could jump out and hang out with us in the living room. He preferred to wait for us to pick him up rather than take the initiative to jump out. But it wasn't that simple!

Even that became a game. As we reached in to bring him out he would run into his crate, turn around, and look at us playfully (can bunnies smile?). Inevitably there were two rounds of hide-and-seek before he let us lift him out to play. Harley would sit in our laps for a short time, usually only a minute at most, before playtime started. He did not bring any toys with him to play with outside his cage, but before we knew it there was an obstacle course in our living room: newspaper tunnels, a cardboard box to jump on or over, a stack of magazines to push over, and a plastic accordion tunnel from the pet store. Harley's speed and route seemed to be determined by his mood, the time of day, and even the weather (if there was a fire in the fireplace, he would stop and snooze in front of it). For an added degree of difficulty, he would add his famous binkies as he ran across the room,



*Playtime is fun, but not as much fun as an unguarded box of hay.
Photo by Jerry Miller.*

crashing through the tunnels. Finally, completely exhausted, Harley would jump back in the cage just in time for bedtime snacks.

4. Pay attention to personal hygiene.

There is a universal reaction from those unfamiliar with rabbits: They are dirty and they smell. But we learned this is not true. Harley

had excellent habits. He used his litter box at all times with no accidents, he washed his face and paws, and he carefully monitored our skills at cleaning his box and cage. We always took him out when it was cleaning day. He would stay close to the cage and watch every step very carefully to ensure we put everything back. Once restored, he would spend a bit of time rearranging the box and toys until everything was just to his liking.

When the time came for Harley to return home five months later, we had to prepare ourselves for the empty nest. There was no bunny to greet us in the morning or play with at night. Silently, he had burrowed his way into our hearts and our home. We miss Harley and will be happy if he chooses to come back to visit. We learned a lot from him!



When Your Bunny Needs a Vet

by Astrid Kruse, DVM

Seizures, maggots, bleeding wounds; pus, blood, snot – gruesome but obvious signs your pet needs a vet. Most bunny owners also know that a bunny that misses a meal needs medical attention – gastrointestinal stasis (when the intestines stop moving normally) can be life-threatening in a rabbit. There are, however, other signs that your bunny needs to be treated by a rabbit-savvy veterinarian.

A change in litter box habits, especially if the bunny

is urinating or drinking more than usual, needs to be looked into. Kidney disease is fairly common in rabbits, especially in older rabbits and those with *Encephalitozoon cuniculi* (*E. cuniculi*) infections. Urinary tract infections also manifest this way, as well as sludgy urine from too much calcium in the urinary tract. A simple antibiotic or anti-parasitic drug may be the fix, or the bunny may need fluids and diet changes to manage urinary sludge.

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HRN NEWS

Giggles Fundraiser a Delicious Success

On April 28 the House Rabbit Network held its much-anticipated fundraiser at the Giggles Comedy Club, where about 70 people joined us for an enjoyable evening of comedy, pizza, and auction prizes. Thanks to the generosity of local businesses and individual donors, we had a lot of great prizes up for grabs, including gift baskets, handmade blankets, and gift certificates to local dining, entertainment, and retailers.

With event tickets and auction tickets we raised \$1,385 that night! HRN is extremely grateful to the volunteers, guests, and donors who made this night possible.

Giggles Fundraiser Donors

Applebee's	NYR Organics
Boston Duck Tours	Sea Dog Brew Pub
The Butterfly Place	Stoneham Theater
Cape Ann Whale Watch	Town Line
Cruelty Free Consumer	Luxury Lanes
Dance This Way	Trader Joe's
Jolie Tea Company	Winston Flowers
Natural Food Exchange	

Online Shelter Challenge: HRN Takes 2nd Place!

The House Rabbit Network won second place in Massachusetts in the Animal Rescue Site's online shelter challenge this year.

Every year the Animal Rescue Site invites people to vote online to win grants for their favorite animal shelters. Prizes are awarded nationally and on the state level. The competition for Massachusetts was fierce, but in the end Dakin Animal Shelter took first place and won a grant of \$1,000. HRN came in at a close second and received a grant for 100 cat or dog

vaccinations, which we donated to the Lowell Humane Society.

Second place is quite an achievement, considering how much smaller HRN is than a lot of the other animals shelters in Massachusetts. But we have a wonderful support network of volunteers and members – so to everybody who voted, thank you! We'll see you at the Animal Rescue Site next year for a first-place win!

Upcoming HRN Events

Flatbread Fundraiser

The House Rabbit Network's Flatbread Fundraiser will take place on September 24, 2013, at the Flatbread Restaurant in Bedford, MA. Be sure to save the date!

Summer Bunny Hop

Our next Summer Bunny Hop will take place on August 18, 2013, in Billerica, MA. The Bunny Hop is a social event, where we get together on a summer afternoon for fun and relaxation. So stay tuned for more details!

Check our website at www.rabbitnetwork.org/events soon for more information about both of these events!

HRN To Receive Petco Foundation Grant



The House Rabbit Network will receive a grant of \$5,000 from the Petco Foundation later this summer. This grant will help pay for

the spay and neuter surgery that many of our foster bunnies require. Because we're constantly taking in new rabbits, spay and neuter surgeries are an ongoing expense. We will be able to give a lot of bunnies this life-extending procedure, thanks to the Petco Foundation's

generosity.

If you would like to make a donation to help defray our bunnies' medical expenses, please contact us at info@rabbitnetwork.org or 781-431-1211. Thanks!

When Your Bunny Needs a Vet Continued



Dr. Kruse is an associate veterinarian at VCA Wakefield Animal Hospital in Massachusetts.

Diarrhea is life-threatening in rabbits since they have such a delicate and complex digestive tract. Any liquid, squirting stool is an emergency, and points to severe intestinal bacterial imbalances. Often it can be treated with antibiotics (metronidazole), probiotics (not those found in

yogurt – those are human gut bacteria and useless in rabbits), fluids, and dietary adjustments. Sugary treats like fruit and carrots are the enemy. Diarrhea should not be confused with normal cecotropes, which are discrete oblong mushy balls of stool a rabbit should be eating directly from the anus.

Drooling is often the sign of dental disease and overgrowth of the molars, which occurs secondary

to poor genetics and/or poor diet in bunnies. The tongue can be severely cut if these tooth spurs are not fixed, and the condition is painful and will lead to eating less as the tongue gets more injured. A bunny with dental problems will need to be sedated at regular intervals to have the crowns of the teeth corrected by filing – rabbit teeth do grow continuously, so a one-time corrective treatment is rare.

Severe flaking dandruff in rabbits is not a cosmetic issue – often it is secondary to Cheyletiella (walking dandruff) mite infestation, which is treated fairly easily. Even rabbits that are not around other rabbits will develop this mite overgrowth. These mites can inhabit humans and other pets, so don't delay treatment.

Bulging eyes are a sign of potential disease in the chest cavity. Of primary concern is thymoma, a tumor that is fairly common in rabbits. It can be medically managed for a time, rarely be surgically removed, and definitely treated – though not cured – over the longer term, with radiation therapy, which can be cost-prohibitive for many bunny parents.

Worms in a rabbit's stool are usually not a reason to panic. Rabbit pinworms do not harm the rabbit, and are species-specific, so they won't infest humans. Most people choose to treat them anyway because they are disgusting – but actually kind of cool!



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 web site 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:

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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.

Memberships run from April 1 to March 31 (donations received January–March will be credited for the following year). To join, fill out this page and mail it with your check payable to:

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

Choose your membership level:

- Dwarf.....\$ 15.00
- Mini Lop.....\$ 25.00
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