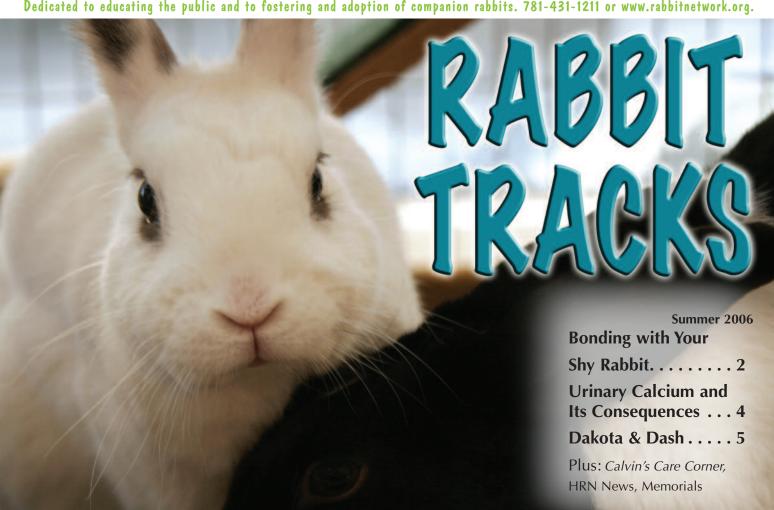


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Dedicated to educating the public and to fostering and adoption of companion rabbits. 781-431-1211 or www.rabbitnetwork.org.



Bonding with Your Shy Rabbit

By Karen DeGroat

Rabbits are unique animals that are a joy to have as pets. I currently have eight rabbits that live in my home. Some of my rabbits are more outgoing than others, but I love each and every one for who he is. I appreciate their wide range of behaviors; begging for attention, resisting attention, being shy or being aggressive. If you have a rabbit that is shy, with time and patience, you should be able to gain his trust.

Midnight is my extremely shy dwarf rabbit. She can also be quite aggressive, especially with her playmate, a male bunny named Velvet. Although Midnight's personality is often strange, I have worked with her and she has made a great deal of progress. But her innate shyness still shows through. For example, if I shake the bag of treats I keep for them, she will come running and gets so excited that she will jump on my lap to get a treat. At the same time, if I reach out to pet her, and she is not in the mood, she will either run away from me or grunt at me to say, "let me be!" I truly love Midnight, despite all of her quirks. Sometimes, she can be very humorous: if I lay on the floor on my stomach when playing with Midnight and Velvet, Midnight sometimes will jump on my back! Remember, this is the same bunny that will run away if she does not

want my attention. It did take her a long time to get this comfortable with me. If you have a shy rabbit, it is definitely possible for you to win him over. The following advice is what worked for Midnight; see if it helps you with your rabbit...

First, consider your rabbit's nature. You need to understand the "prey mentality." Rabbits are one of common prey animals that other animals will hunt to eat. They are naturally less outgoing than a dog or cat, because they have to constantly be on the alert for animals that will eat them. Many rabbits do not like to be held or cuddled and may never enjoy sitting on your lap. However, many can learn to enjoy attention and petting from their human caregiver. Imagine if a giant



Giddy-up Mom!

rabbit came toward you and you did not know this strange animal's intention. Personally, I think I would be so scared that I would try to run away or possibly bite the scary beast! Who knows what you would do if you felt cornered? So, let your rabbit get to know you slowly.

When you are getting to know your rabbit let him choose when to interact with you. Try not to force yourself upon your rabbit. Pushing yourself on a shy bunny can result in your little friend cowering from you, running away or biting out of fear. It may help if you find out as much about your rabbit's background as you can. For example, your rabbit may have been given to a person who had rabbit allergies, or worse, the previous owner just didn't want the rabbit and therefore the rabbit was ignored. The rabbit may have lived in an environment that was loud, had too many children or where he was picked up and prodded all the time. Perhaps your rabbit lived outside in a hutch and was not socialized.

If your rabbit has a cage or some other confined living arrangement, instead of reaching in to take him out, open the door and let him choose when he wants to come out; that way your rabbit will feel like he is in control. You should sit quietly in the area where he is living. It may take days or longer before he chooses to come out with you around. Perhaps you can catch up on reading

your mail, or find another way to occupy yourself. If you ignore your bunny, he may be curious to see what is going on. Sooner or later his curiosity will get the best of him and he will come out. Always keep the door to his living area open. If he is scared, let him go to his safe

space. Rabbits like dark spaces, so you may want to set up a place for your rabbit to bolt to, such as his cage, a hiding place, or a simple corner. Rabbits also love to explore paper bags and may use them as hiding places or even toys. Patience is a virtue when making friends with a shy rabbit. Rabbits really are sociable creatures and their need for human interaction will eventually shine through.

Next, turn on the charm. You should speak calmly and lovingly to your rabbit. In other words, "sweet talk" your rabbit. Do not make sudden moves or noises. If your rabbit approaches you, have a special treat available to see if you can tempt him to come near your hands. When his curiosity gets the best of him, he will come close to you. Praise your rabbit with your "happy" voice for being so brave. When you feel he is getting used to your hand, you can offer him a treat. After a few days of your rabbit accepting a treat from your hand you can slowly try to pet him on his head. If he resists or runs away, try again next time. Your new friend may want to sniff you to learn that you are not a predator. As the days go by, your rabbit will accept more touching, may climb on you, and will soon look for and accept your attention. You will recognize the day that comes when your rabbit acts happy to see you. You will have wonderful feelings when you see bunny binkies or a side-flop near you. A "binky," when a rabbit does a series of runs and jumps high in the air, is an expression of extreme joy and happiness. When a rabbit side-flops, he is saying, "I am so

relaxed that I can flop on my side right next to you."

As I described above, I love to lie on the floor on my stomach to let my rabbits jump on my back and sniff



Midnight has a box that she can hide in for comfort.

my hair. They often use my legs as a ramp up to my back. My husband likes to lay on his back and let the rabbits jump on his stomach. Two out of our eight bunnies enjoy this activity. We offer the rabbits a special treat and pet them when they seem to be in the mood for attention. Sometimes they would rather run around and be left alone instead of having our attention. Either way, I enjoy watching their antics.

Finally, there are several important things to remember about rabbits. First of all, they do not like a hand in front of their face. This is because bunnies' eyes are on the side of their heads, so they can't see as well directly in front of them. You should speak to your rabbit as you approach so your hand doesn't take her by surprise. A startled rabbit can give you a painful nip. Do not push your rabbit to be your friend faster than he is ready. Each new person that comes in contact with your rabbit should be introduced to your bunny gradually. Your rabbit may bond with some members of the family but not others. Spending time with your rabbit when you feel the most relaxed will make a difference with the

experience, but keep your bunny's natural waking and sleeping hours. Rabbits are the most active during the dawn and evening time and enjoy rest time during the afternoons. Never shout or holler at your rabbit, even if you think your rabbit is "misbehaving".

Sometimes, you will need to pick up your rabbit, such as when it is time to take your rabbit to the veterinarian or when he needs his nails trimmed. It is very important that you remember that a rabbit must never be allowed to kick his or her back legs to try to get away from you, because doing so can cause your rabbit to fracture the spine. Sadly, this often results in a rabbit that has to be humanely euthanized, something that is totally preventable with good handling techniques. Always support the bunny's back legs when you must hold him.

Please be sure to have your male rabbit neutered and your female spayed. Although altering your rabbit is essential for his or her health, it will also improve behavior. Spaying may prevent or diminish a female from being cage protective and neutering will prevent a male

from marking you with his urine, which is quite unpleasant! I had a male rabbit that was "in love" with me. He would spray me with his urine to tell other male rabbits I was "his". Even though I knew this was normal behavior of a male rabbit, I still did not find it pleasant.

I had the male rabbit neutered, and the behavior stopped. To say the least, I was thankful when I no longer went through multiple changes of clothes each day!

I have different relationships with each eight of my rabbits. Some of my rabbits enjoy more attention than others. Midnight, although she will always be a bit shy, is a smart, active, adorable rabbit whom, after time and patience, has been won over!

Urinary Calcium and Its Consequences

By Astrid M. Kruse, DVM

Most mammals, if consuming more calcium than necessary, will get rid of the extra calcium in the stool. However, rabbits excrete any excess calcium they take in through the urinary tract. Because of this metabolic quirk, urinary problems caused by calcium are common in pet rabbits, including stones in the bladder and kidneys, as well as urine that is sludgy with calcium to the point of resembling concrete.

If your rabbit shows signs of urinary difficulties, such as straining to urinate, abnormal urine appearance (pasty, bloody) or a urine-soaked back end, he needs to go to the vet. X-rays will be taken to determine the cause; calcium stones and calcium sludge show up very well on the radiographic films, as will signs of arthritis. Together with a physical exam and a urinalysis, the radiographs will help your vet make a diagnosis and plan treatment.

Unfortunately, bladder and kidney stones can only be treated surgically. The type of stones rabbits develop cannot dissolve with dietary change — you can only help prevent more

from forming by reducing dietary calcium. While bladder surgery is relatively straightforward, surgery to remove kidney stones is not and the risks and benefits should be carefully evaluated with the help of your vet.

Sludgy urine is like a semi-liquid version of a bladder stone — the urine becomes sticky and pasty. It is very uncomfortable for the rabbit, and it is truly amazing how thick the urine can become — the texture and color resemble quickdrying concrete. Normal urine can still be produced when the thick stuff settles to the bottom and the bunny urinates off the top watery layer, which just compounds the problem for the remaining sludge. This condition can be managed with bladder expression, fluids, pain medications and antibiotics. Sometimes the bunny needs to be sedated for the bladder to be expressed effectively or to pass a urinary catheter. It often takes several treatments to get on top of the problem.

Both stones in the urinary tract as well as urine sludge predispose a rabbit to urinary tract infections, so antibiotics are commonly used

in treatment. Signs of an infection include abnormal urine color or smell, loss of litter box habits, and frequent urination, sometimes with straining due to irritation. Often there are no signs at all. The best method to determine if there is an infection is culturing the urine. A sterile sample needs to be taken from the bladder using a needle (this is called "cystocentesis"), and results take several days to come back, along with a list of antibiotics effective at treating the specific bacteria causing the infection. If a culture cannot be done for financial or medical reasons, antibiotics can be used to cover your bases.

Attempts to prevent these problems center on reducing dietary calcium intake in healthy adult rabbits. Please remember that rabbits who are still growing need calcium for healthy bone development and should not be on a calcium restricted diet! At 6-9 months the youngster can be transitioned from alfalfa to an adult diet. Timothy hay should be the staple of the adult diet — it is high in fiber, and lower in calories and calcium than other

types of hay (this lagomorph trifecta of nutrition can also help prevent gastrointestinal problems and obesity). If pellets are being fed they should also be timothy based. Alfalfa based pellets and hay are too high in calcium and calories for most adult rabbits and will cause obesity if not urinary stones or sludge. While many people are careful to feed their bunnies only low calcium vegetables such as lettuce and parsley, I believe that feeding a range of vegetables in moderation is preferable if the rabbit has not had previous urinary problems. Vegetables are high in water content which may help flush out excess calcium by diluting the urine. Also, a dietary deficiency of calcium and perhaps natural sun-

light may be one of the underlying causes of malocclusion and tooth spurs in some rabbits; I see more dental disease than urinary problems in my patients. If a rabbit has a history of urinary problems, however, I will discourage feeding high-calcium vegetables such as broccoli, kale, and spinach. All rabbits should be encouraged to drink water by always having a fresh supply available.

Obesity and arthritis are other risk factors for urinary problems. In both, the rabbit is unable to posture normally to urinate — they may be too fat or too stiff to lift their tail and curve their spine appropriately, which leads to incomplete bladder emptying and accumulation of the

denser calcium-rich urine. Sore hocks, in which inadequate bedding, obesity, or other health problems have caused the feet to develop tender spots, can be a cause (and consequence) of urine problems as well.

It is important to remember that even very vigilant bunny parents who feed a good diet and take excellent care of their fur-kids can have rabbits with chronic problems, urinary or otherwise. Also, some owners who feed poor quality hay and alfalfa pellets may have rabbits who never develop a problem. All we can do, as vets and as bunny parents, is try to head off problems, try to treat what we can, and hope for a bit of rabbit luck.

Dakota and Dash - Sanctuary Bunnies Extraordinaire

By Jane Kavcak

Dakota and Dash — what can I say? From the first time I saw their picture on the HRN website, I was in love. I remember thinking how sweet they looked together, and how it was as if they had always been together and always would be. It also didn't hurt that they were two gray and white Dutch bunnies. My heart will always have a very special place for Dutch bunnies.

So, even though I really wasn't looking to adopt two more bunnies, I called and asked about the pair. I was told that they were older bunnies, with chronic health problems, who would most likely

never be adopted. After just a few seconds of thought, I said I would like to bring them home as sanctuary bunnies. Their age and health problems really didn't matter. I just knew that my heart had been touched and I wanted them to share our lives for however much time they had left.

On November 21, 2004, Dakota and Dash arrived at our home in Pennsylvania. They seemed none the worse for wear for the trip and immediately settled into their condo. Having been "warned" that they were avid chewers who loved cardboard and wicker, I gave them a cardboard box filled with

paper for entertainment and exercise. It was so funny watching them shred, shred, shred...everything in sight! First they destroyed the paper, and then attacked the box. They worked together beautifully — Dash digging, and Dakota tossing and shredding. It made me smile. And I knew I had made the right decision in bringing them home.

Within days of their arrival, Dash started sneezing and had some nasal discharge. I knew he suffered from chronic upper respiratory infections and so was glad I'd had the foresight to book a vet appointment in advance of their arrival. Their first vet visit revealed Dash

had yet another URI, plus some bladder stones. The stones didn't seem to be causing any discomfort so we decided to take the wait-and-see approach. Meanwhile, we put him on antibiotics and Benadryl for two weeks. Aside from the sneezing and discharge, Dash never did seem sick. He and Dakota both have very healthy appetites (she more so, despite being the thinner of the two).

The first few months were an adjustment period for all of us. While "the Ds", as I now affectionately called them, brought much joy to my heart, Dash continued to battle chronic respiratory infections. He did

improve after

his antibiotic therapy, only to have symptoms reappear within a few weeks. At around this time, Dakota also started showing URI symptoms. So, we did a month long course of treatment with antibiotics for both rabbits.

Besides their health issues, Dakota and Dash were not exactly the tidiest of bunnies. Despite being litter box trained, they peed and pooped anywhere they wanted. Dash also liked to lift his butt over the edge of the litter pan, flooding their condo. It was a challenge just to keep their area clean. We tried

several different types of litter pans, with some success, but finally gave in and realized the bunnies enjoyed having us humans cleaning their house several times a day. I must admit, it did give them lots of exercise! Whenever I changed their litter pans, and swept and washed their condo, the Ds delighted in terrorizing me. They would grab the dustpan and brush from my hand — Dash grabbing one,



Dakota & Dash posing for the camera!

Dakota the other — and immediately dig out any fresh litter placed in their pans. And, I do mean DIG! Woodstove pellets would fly in all directions. Once, I was bombarded with a hailstorm of pellets that would make a machine-gunner envious. But, all of this only made me love them more. I laughed every time they did something mischievous, and smiled when I watched them groom each other.

By the end of May, their respiratory problems had improved but I noticed that Dakota was starting to have that bony look that old

bunnies get, and she had obviously lost some weight. She was never a big bunny to begin with, weighing just 3+ pounds when we brought her home. So, off to the vet we went for another check-up. Dash was doing well but Dakota's weight was down to 3 pounds. It didn't seem possible, given how much she eats. She is one of those bunnies that eats constantly. If she's not munching hay, she's eating

salad or pellets. Our vet quickly discovered the cause of the weight loss: Dakota had a large tumor in her stomach that was most likely cancer. It was preventing her from getting adequate food intake because of its size. We discussed options but, due to her age and health issues, sur gery was not pos-

sible. I brought my Ds home that day, knowing I would do whatever I could to keep them comfortable. My heart was breaking because I also knew I would be saying goodbye to Miss Dakota sooner than I wanted to think about.

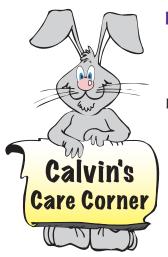
We celebrated Dakota and Dash's one year anniversary with us in November. It's been a year of ups and downs but this bonded pair of Dutch bunnies has amazed us with their resilience and devotion to each other. They were recently at the vet for a check-up and Dakota had gained weight. Dash

has not shown any signs of respiratory problems or discomfort from his bladder stones. Dakota still has a large mass in her stomach but continues to enjoy her pellets, hay and salads. When she was diagnosed with cancer, I decided she could have as much to eat as she wanted and that's exactly what I've

been doing. They get a full bowl of pellets every day with unlimited hay and a huge nightly salad. My only goal is to keep them happy and comfortable. One day I know I will have to say goodbye to my precious Ds but, for now, I enjoy each and every day with them and am so grateful they are in our lives.

And, yes, they still attack when we clean their area. You just have to love bunnies with attitude!

Editor's Note: Sadly, Dash passed away Memorial Day week. He will be greatly missed by all those who knew his brave little soul.



Bunny Sitting 101

Hello readers! Calvin here, and I bet you're wondering "What do I do with Lucky when I go away this summer?"

Every rabbit owner wonders this when making their vacation plans. Do you hire a pet sitter to come to your home or board your beloved bun? Hiring a pet sitter is most likely your best option, but boarding them with qualified pet sitter is a great alternative too. Either way, the pet sitter who watches Lucky MUST know all about rabbits, their needs, their body language and common illnesses that can occur with a bun.

There are pros and cons to boarding your rabbit:

BOARDING PROS

 Your rabbit will be under close supervision 24/7, so any change in behavior will be noticed almost immediately

- If your rabbit is caged at your home, most likely with boarding, she will have lots of "free time" and be allowed to roam more often and get lots of exercise and activity
- Your rabbit will get round-theclock attention and TLC, just like at home

BOARDING CONS

- By bringing your rabbit to a sitter, her routine may be a bit disrupted
- New surroundings could make your rabbit very uneasy and could cause stress
- Depending on where you board your rabbit, there could be other animals that you have to take into consideration

If you feel as though boarding would be a good option for your rabbit, you can make her stay even more enjoyable by doing a few things. Bring familiar things with her — her bowls/water bottles, litter box, toys, even her Bunny Castle. Anything that makes her feel like she's still at home will help her to adjust and feel secure in her temporary environment. Another good idea is to bring the food/pellets she is currently eating. If she eats Oxbow

Bunny Basics T and the caretaker doesn't feed the same to her rabbits, be sure to bring enough for your rabbit's stay. You don't want her system to be interrupted with a new food.

As far as having a pet sitter come to your home, there are pros and cons to that as well:

IN-HOME PET SITTER PROS

- Your rabbit's routine will not be interrupted and she will be able to stay in her own home and surroundings
- The pet sitter can also provide home security while you're away (lights on/off, bring in mail, etc.)

IN-HOME PET SITTER CONS

- You need to find a person that is trustworthy with the keys to your house and your "furbaby"
- If your rabbit becomes sick, she may not get the immediate care and medical attention she needs (rabbits should be checked on AT LEAST once a day, preferably twice a day)

Whether you decide to board your rabbit or have a pet sitter come to your home, be sure to leave all necessary information with the person caring for your rabbit such as:

- where/when you can be reached (numbers, hotel information, flight information, etc.)
- an emergency contact (name, number, address)
- veterinary information (regular rabbit savvy vet and back up or emergency vet) with a signed veterinarian release
- home care information (if having someone come to your home lights, mail, newspaper, water plants, etc.)

- your rabbit's schedule such as feeding times/amounts, exercise, etc.
- your rabbit's likes and dislikes (favorite greens and treats)
- any special needs or restrictions for your rabbit
- any recent illnesses/surgeries and/or health issues the sitter should be aware of:
 - current medications (if any)
- your rabbit's personality and any little quirks your rabbit may

have that would be helpful for the sitter to know

When looking for a reputable pet sitter for Lucky, ask your veterinarian, a friend or family member that has used a pet sitter or contact your local rabbit rescue. These people will be able to offer their experiences and let you know if the pet sitter will take the utmost care of your rabbit.

Harrison:

Middle-aged bun seeks a quiet home to relax

6.5 lbs, 5 years, Rex — Harrison is a gorgeous red rex whose fur is so soft and velvety! He thoroughly enjoys being petted. So much that your hand will tire before he does! He's a gentle soul that will steal your heart once you and he get to know each other. Harrison can be a little protective of his cage, but that's because he needs to be able to do what bunnies do...BINKIES!!!!



HRN News

HRN's 7th Annual Summer Bunny Bash!!

This year's Summer Bunny
Bash will be held Saturday
July 29th at 1:00 pm in
Wilmington. Come join our pot
luck and meet HRN members,
volunteers and fellow rabbit owners.



It's a great opportunity to meet other rabbit owners, trade stories and show off

your bunny brag book! For more information and directions, email *info@rabbitnetwork.org* or call *781-431-1211*.

Yankee Candle Fundraiser

HRN will be running our annual Yankee Candle fundraiser this August 1-15th. This has traditionally been our best fund raiser. If you are interested in purchasing candles or selling them for HRN, watch our website for more details or send us an email at *info@rabbitnetwork.org*.



Upcoming Education Events

We hold information booths at various petstores in Eastern Massachusetts and will list the dates and locations on this web site. Please stop by and visit. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have about rabbits and rabbit care. We will have information about adopting rabbits along with rabbits available for adoption. While we have listings of available rabbits, we do not adopt out on site.

- June 24 **Especially For Pets**, Newton, 11:00 am -2:00 pm
- September 9 Tufts Open House, Grafton, MA, 10:00 am -3:00 pm
- September 10 Pet Rock
 Pet Fest, Worcester, MA

Parlee Farm Easter Egg Hunt!

HRN continues its efforts to educate the public about the joys and responsibilities of keeping companion rabbits. No time is more important than in the run-up to Easter when so many

He bbit Network.or

Amanda, Melinda, Easter Bunny, Maysoon & Diane.

people impulsively purchase baby buns. This year, HRN volunteers set up a booth at Parlee Farm in Chelmsford during the weekend of their annual family Easter egg hunt. In between egg hunting and hay rides, curious children and their parents stopped by to say hello to 2 ambassador bunnies and learn about bunnies available for adoption. As you can see, we even had a visit by an unusually large lagomorph!

Memorials

Nicholas

In Memory of Nicholas, my Holland Lop

There is so much that I miss about you...the way you would light up when I said your name...your happy talk at meal time...watching you run laps around the living room, ears flying...the way you would snuggle with me as closely as you could...your big wet kisses...the loud "oink" that would announce

your arrival on the sofa...and most of all, waking in the morning to find you asleep in my arms. You were such a loving rabbit, it's hard to believe that your former owner could have treated you so badly. I'm grateful that you knew happiness

at last, even if it was for such a short time. You live on in my heart until we meet again.

Love, Diane

Roger

Roger was a sweet, gentle guy who just wanted to be petted and loved. He was returned to HRN through no fault of his own. For a few years he was his adoptive family's "child" – until a real human child entered their world and Roger became just



a pet. As time went by, he was noticed less and less until finally there was no time for him at all and he was returned. His former foster mom took him back and he thrived on all the attention and love showered upon him. Roger was once again the top dog of the house. But little did we know his time on earth was ending, and he left us as quickly as he came. Goodbye sweet one. You have taken a piece of our hearts with you.

Love, Your foster Mom, Cherryl

"He who binds for himself a joy Must the winged life destroy. He who kisses the joy as it flies Lives in Eternity's sunrise." William Blake

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

House Rabbit Network is now in its 7th year—and we continue to grow.

Through our network of dedicated volunteers and members, we are 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!

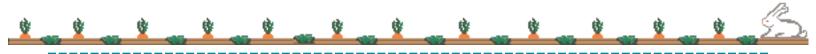
Your membership dollars will go towards rescue and rehabilitation, community outreach and education, and veterinary expenses.



Make 2006 a year of change—for you and for house rabbits alike!

Contact HRN at info@rabbitnetwork.org or (781) 431-1211.





House Rabbit Network Membership and Ordering Form

Your membership donation is tax deductible and will be used for medical costs (spays/neuters, vet 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 in Jan.–March will be credited for the following year). To join, fill out this page and mail it with your check (payable to the House Rabbit Network) to:

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

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: PDF format via email (significant savings for HRN) Hard copy via U.S. Mail	Please send me	•
Name Street	Apt.	Total:	\$
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