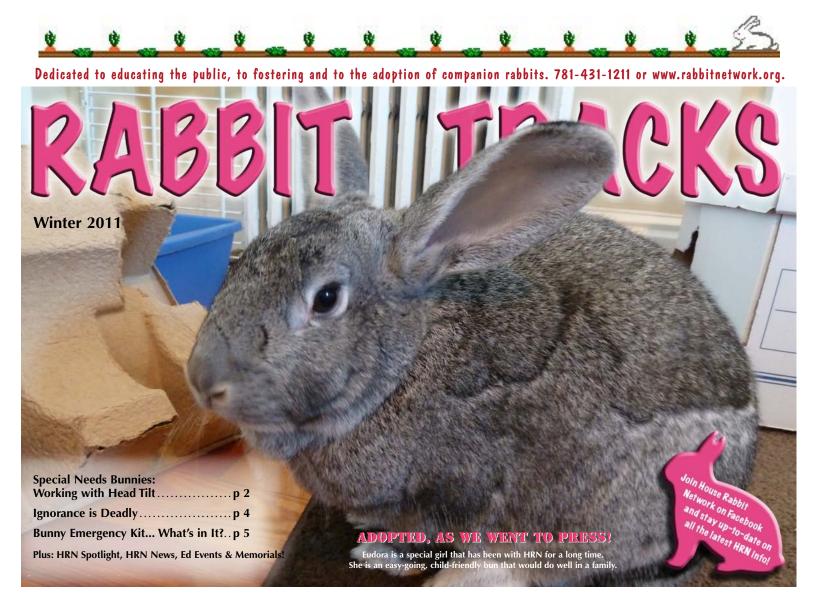


P.O. Box 2602 Woburn, MA 01888-1102





# **Special Needs Bunnies: Working with Head Tilt**

by Alicia Maria Rosa-Perrotti

Starting on this journey was not one that I had planned, or even wanted, but it has been a joy even throughout the struggles. In sharing my experiences, I want to show that a rabbit can continue to live a full life despite this debilitating condition. It doesn't make him or her less perfect or less happy than other bunnies. It just makes him special.

Head Tilt is medically known as vestibular disease or torticollis (Latin for "twisted neck") and can be caused by a variety of diseases. The symptoms can include loss of balance, rolling or spinning on one side, and a curled, twisted body with one eye predominantly facing upwards and the other facing the ground. The symptoms can come on suddenly or gradually, and be mild or severe.

I don't want to give the impression that I think every rabbit can live with this condition. I do believe, however, that you need to give your rabbit a chance to overcome it. I also realize that this isn't just about you fighting and willing the bunny to live. It is about the bunny fighting to live too. You make a team. You work together to get through the tough days.

At the beginning, I felt so overwhelmed, scared, and hopeless. If you are going through this, I urge you to seek out those who understand, and on whom you can lean during these difficult times. Sometimes those moments are brief, at other times long - just know that you will get through the muddy waters and see the sunshine again.

I think my strength and resolve in these moments come from my experiences growing up with a brother who is bipolar. I watched my mom fight every day for him. She strove to make people see that he wasn't different and that he was still just a kid. She taught us that when something is worth fighting for, you fight, and you choose your battles wisely. I chose my battle with Ringo, Apple, and Gabriel.

Ringo was my first Head Tilt bunny.

He had been sneezing from the first day we brought him home on July 8, 2005. I thought sneezing was normal because at the time I didn't understand rabbit health; I just knew about dogs. The very next day, a friend decided to present me with another rabbit as a housewarming gift. Not just any rabbit, but a Flemish Giant. Never before in my life had I seen a bunny that big!

(I should mention that I had only seen rabbits twice before in my life. Both times they had been backyard hutch bunnies.) This new bunny, Samantha, was aggressive, and I was scared of her. She had come from a bad situation, however, so I could not let her go back. Instead, I started to research how to help her and it was only then that I discovered that rabbits should see vets, and that Ringo's sneezing was not normal. Within a week, I had found a vet, and both rabbits were scheduled for an appointment in January.

Ringo was prescribed one medication after another, each working for only short span of time. By April 1st I knew something was wrong. He did not want to come out of his cage. When we took him out he ran back in. Then he hid under the couch, but when we went to pull him out he just started to roll. From my research



Ringo, the first Head Tilt bunny that came into Alicia's life.

I knew instantly what was going on. He was rolling and was trying to wedge himself against anything that would offer support. His head had gone from a straight position to almost past a 90 degree angle. I called the vet to let him know we were coming. I then emailed someone I knew from a yahoo group, begging her for help. Thank goodness she answered my plea, and she put me in contact with someone who had been through this before. That person told me what questions to ask and what to watch

out for. Most importantly, I was warned that if I was told he needed to be put down I should run the other way because that meant the vet had no clue about rabbits.

Thankfully, I already had a good start on this having found a good vet before we really needed one. At the vet's office the first thing I heard was: "We don't have to put him down, we can treat this." I was told that the road to recovery could be long but that it was possible. It is a battle we have fought for four and half years (we have had Ringo for five and half years.) He went through several



Gabriel, an angel who needed a helping hand. He has learned to adapt to the Head Tilt.

treatments before one finally helped him. This was a result of my own research. What finally worked was a zithromax/pen-g combo taken for a month. Since then, he has been healthy for the most part, with small flare ups that are quickly treated and kept in check.

Ringo has had a few more battles and there are still issues. For example, we were not able to get him neutered. There are risks in not doing so, but we decided to let it slide due to his fragile health. We also give him a little more food than he needs. In the bad times, I would rather Ringo carry more weight that he can afford to lose, than weight he can't afford to lose. I pick

and choose my battles when it comes to him. With Apple, other than just making sure she has a safe space in case she rolls, there isn't much I have to do. With Gabriel, we are simply helping him learn to adapt to the tilt after his treatment.

Apple was stepped on when she was just a week old. It was an accident she was not expected to survive but she did. A few months shy of her second birthday, she made her journey from Ohio to Connecticut. We believe that she has permanent nerve damage but other than that her condition is not severe. In Gabriel's case, however,

he was untreated for several months. Sadly, with no treatment for so long, his tilt is permanent.

The expense in Ringo's case is honestly kind of scary (it goes into thousands of dollars) but that is because we have been fighting so long. Apple was treated before she came to us, and Gabriel's bills are handled by the rescue. Now that Ringo is stable, we can get away for a few days and my brother will stay with them all.

So what should you do if you suspect your bunny has Head Tilt? First, allow yourself a moment to panic. Trust me, it's normal to panic. Your baby is sick and you know it. You have a right to be afraid. Your heart freezes and then breaks when you know the battle that is ahead. Be strong but don't be afraid to lean on somebody. Many Head Tilt cases are caused by an infection deep in the inner ear. Try to get a culture done to see what is causing it. It can be different things. With Ringo it was pasteurella and with Gabriel it was yeast. Have the vet run a sensitivity test to find what medicine would work best. Make sure you treat all

the symptoms not just the infection. To treat the dizziness, my vet would prescribe bonine. Treat the pain as well, because there can be slight pain. As each case and each bunny is different so the protocol varies too. The most important piece of advice I can offer is that you find a vet before you really need one. Seek one out before the need arises. Have more than one and make sure you have someone to turn to at night and on the weekend. My vet's office is open throughout the week and there is always at least one vet available that understands small animals.

Ringo is my main reason for doing what I do. When our little Teresa came down with Head Tilt, our fast response was because of our prior experience and we were able to make sure that she made a 100% recovery. When I heard about Apple, we didn't realize that we were starting on new journey, one that led us to Gabriel, an angel who needed a helping hand.

Ringo has not, at any time, ever let the Head Tilt stop him. He heads into everything at full speed and bowls everyone over with his zest for life. Apple is a speed demon and a notso-secret member of the Dutch mafia. She can be the sweetest thing on the face of the earth but can make sure you know where you stand with a well placed nip. Gabriel is a sweetheart who is still finding his footing in his tilted world. With their will to live they show everyone just how special they are. They do not let the tilt stop them. They make sure that if you meet them you will fall in love and know that there is something extraordinary about them.

I am well aware that not every rabbit can survive; some just don't have the strength. You need to determine what your bunny can cope with. It is up to you to make sure your bunny doesn't suffer, and this may mean making the decision to end his or her pain. If that is the case, please know that you are doing the right thing and they know you love them. Another scenario may be that you cannot

afford treatment or handle the level of care required. Not everyone can. If so, it is your responsibility to find someone who can. Please don't let the bunny suffer. There are people like me out there who will take these bunnies in, and who will love them



The three angels: Ringo, Apple and Gabriel.

and care for them. Don't be ashamed if you can't. It is hard and those of us who have dealt with it will understand.

Our babies have made a big difference to how my husband and I view things. They have each taught us something different. Ringo taught us to live and have hope. Apple taught us to fight and have courage. Gabriel taught us to forgive and be joyful. Their medical conditions gave us a jolt that has spear-headed us into a goal of creating a sanctuary for bunnies like our three angels. It opened my eyes to the need for people who can foster, for people who can donate, for people

who can speak out for those who can't. To be a voice for the rabbits we love. Rejoice in the knowledge that their disability does not stop them from being active loving rabbits and that they live each day in harmony.



# **Ignorance** is **Deadly**

by Alison Colby-Campbell

Sometimes I read irate comments from posters on rabbit blogs and fan pages that spew such animosity for people who don't know about rabbits and my stomach tightens in the knowledge that I would have absolutely been on the receiving end of that vehemence about 15 years ago.

It was around Thanksgiving when our large group of about 8 people aged 10-70 got out of our cars at a trailhead on Mount Desert Island, ME near Jackson Laboratories. We all saw a large white rabbit in the underbrush that didn't seem all that alarmed to see us or all that interested in bolting to safety. I remember saying aloud to

the rabbit "Wow I didn't know the rabbits that turned white in winter lived this far south. And this poor guy turned white before any snow could provide camouflage". I stopped a few seconds to see if I could get closer to the animal. I did - not enough to touch him but pretty close - and he just edged away a bit; he never ran away. I wished him well then went ahead and caught up with the rest of my group. I am an animal lover and it never occurred to me that this rabbit had been discarded, that someone could look this creature in the eye and drop it off on the edge of the woods. I was an uninformed adult at the time.

I've since learned so much about rabbits (with tons more still to learn)

but whenever I read about how white rabbits abandoned to the wild are the easiest target because they are so visible to predators, I hate myself a little. I could have saved a rabbit but missed my opportunity, and that poor rabbit most likely met a cruel and horrifying death after having spent some time as a pampered pet as long as it held its owner's interest. Someone didn't take the time to learn the depth of his/her responsibility for caring for a rabbit or honor the commitment he/she made to keep a rabbit they brought into their home. Maybe they think they did the honorable thing by returning the rabbit to nature. I mean the rabbit eats hay, there's grass in the woods, and there are all those other wild rabbits to

chum around with. And they would be wrong, dead wrong, as far as the rabbit is concerned.

Now I know that people abandon rabbits. Last year my sister found and rescued two abandoned rabbits in a reservation, and several years before that I rescued an abandoned guinea pig in a nature preserve. But that's because we "know" now. I don't think the animals I've rescued or adopted or transported can ever make up for that one bunny in Maine, and every time I pick up my rescued 10lb Californian and look into her beautiful ruby eyes I thank God someone else knew that this was an animal that needed saving.

I'm not writing this article to get the forgiveness I can't give myself, but to ask that more



Mystic and Bullwinkle. Rescued, because a little bit of education helped save a furry life!

people do a better job educating anyone who will listen. I'd like to recommend creating a media campaign that educates people that domestic rabbits are not being "returned" to nature when they are set loose - they are being sentenced to a horrible death. Sure there are some people out there who won't care (the cruel, evil people who get pleasure from torturing animals who I will denounce in the harshest of terms), but for the rest of us who want to do the right thing but don't know what it is, before we draw and quarter them for their stupidity, let's see if they're open to a discussion pointing out the error of their thinking. With a little luck, they (as I did) can become advocates for our bunny friends.

# **Bunny Emergency Kit... What's in it?**

by Shannon Cail and Mary Lempert, author of The Rabbit Advocate (www.therabbitadvocate.com)

As we go through the months and years being bunny slaves, most of us eventually realize (and sometimes learn the hard way), that bunny is going to get sick. And as we all know, this almost always happens during the night, or on a weekend when "rabbit savvy vets" just aren't available. So instead of panicking, we must be prepared.

Over the last 14 years of being a bunny slave, my "bunny emergency kit" has grown in more ways than one,

and for different reasons and illnesses. One item you always want to have on hand is Simethicone, better known as infant gas drops. This can be found in any drug store such as CVS, Target, Wal-mart or the like. This is used for when bunny has gas, which can be indicated by lethargy, depression and inappetence, and can escalate into full-blown gastrointestinal stasis if left untreated. I would also suggest a heat source such as a Snuggle Safe, as well as Critical Care, Metacam and 100% pure canned pumpkin. All of these items will help in dealing with gas and getting bunny to eat again. A heat source (you can also use the top of a

hot dryer), along with belly massages and Simethicone, will hopefully help to break up the gas bubbles that are causing bunny pain and discomfort. I also always have Metacam on hand for pain (by vet prescription only please ask your vet about possibly obtaining this ahead of time so that you can have it on hand for emergencies). A bunny that is in pain is NOT going to eat. If he doesn't eat, you're now looking at possible stasis. You'll also want to tempt him to eat by mixing up some Critical Care with pumpkin mixed in, if need be. So that the entire can of pumpkin does not go bad, I freeze pumpkin cubes in an ice



cube tray and then pop them out as needed. Defrost for about 30-60 seconds in the microwave and you're good to go!

Due to my extensive care over the years with sick and elder rabbits, I also have the subcutaneous fluid set-up with bags of LRS (Lactated Ringers Solution) on hand. My subcutaneous set-up includes the IV set, a 60 cc Luer-Lock syringe, 18 gauge needles, as well as 21 gauge butterfly needles. Fluids given subcutaneously help a great deal when dealing with a bunny in stasis. In addition to that, I sometimes have injectable Reglan left over from previous times (also known as Metochlopramide – by vet prescription only). I have dealt with stasis more times than I ever care to remember over 14 years, so my protocol is always the same (and given alongside the advice of my veterinarian).

Now, cutting nails is another story. Sometimes we cut a little too close to the quick, which will often result in bleeding. Don't panic! Making sure that you have styptic powder/gel (such as Kwik-stop) or even simple cornstarch on hand is a life-saver and a great item to have in your bunny emergency kit.

It will stop the bleeding almost immediately and provide some relief to bunny.

Other items worth mentioning are a digital thermometer, baby wipes, Bene-bac (probiotics in gel or powder form), pill cutter/crusher, different sized small syringes for meds (1 cc, 3 cc, etc.), stethoscope, otoscope (yes, I even have the last two mentioned items - call me a crazy bunny slave). I also have first aid antibiotic ointment such as A&D Ointment or Original Neosporin (NOT the Plus), Bag Balm and Silvadene Cream (vet prescription). Additional items that are great to have on-hand are hydrogen peroxide for cleaning wounds, puppy pads for incontinence, latex-free gloves, lube for the thermometer, and ace bandages for possible wounds that need pressure.

As your bunny knowledge expands, so might your "emergency kit". This is just a sampling of what I personally have in my "kit". Please note that some of these items DO require a vet's prescription (as noted) and may not be available to you unless your bunny is seen by a veterinarian. ALWAYS take your bunny to a vet if s/he is exhibiting absolutely any signs of illness.

### **BUNNY EMERGENCY KIT**

- Simethicone (infant gas drops)
- Snuggle Safe
- Critical Care
- Pumpkin, 100% pure, no spices
- Lactated Ringers Solution
- IV Set
- 60 cc Luer-Lock syringe
- 18 gauge needles
- 21 gauge butterfly needles
- Styptic powder/gel
- Digital thermometer
- Baby wipes
- Bene-bac
- Pill cutter/crusher
- Different sized syringes: 1cc/3cc
- Stethoscope
- Otoscope
- First aid antibiotic ointment
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Puppy pads
- Latex-free gloves
- Lube for thermometer
- Ace bandages

# **March Buns of the Month**



### **Newton & Einstein**

Einstein lives up to his name with his bushy white head of hair and his smarts. Einstein takes the lead for his shyer brother Newton. Newton is a spotted, brown dapper boy, that is slowly building up trust with humans. However, Newton, when given the time and the room to run, shows his true personality. He shines when out and about while Einstein likes to observe from the second shelf of a bookcase. Definitely characters! Both love to shred their cardboard and run and explore. Hay bobs are a must



for this loving pair. They both love lots of pets, are very gentle, and love getting attention from their human friends. They would blossom in the right home and with the right loving human. Is that you?

#### Likes:

Treats

- Hay bobs
- Running and jumping
- Cardboard

Greens

• Bookcases for naps





### **HRN News**

### **Easter and Rabbits**

Before we know it, the Easter holiday will be upon us. Those of us in rescue cringe when this holiday approaches. It is very discouraging to see the sale of live bunnies during this time, knowing what future is likely in store for them, especially after the holiday. When the novelty of the rabbit wears off, the rabbit is all too often banished to the back yard in a cold, lonely hutch and will most likely be forgotten; dumped in a local shelter where the meaning of the word responsibility is left at the door of the shelter; or discarded outside (which is illegal and a crime in many states) where the rabbit will ultimately

meet its fate in a matter of hours.

HRN has many flyers that people can print out and hang up around their town to discourage the purchase of rabbits during Easter and promote adoption and education.

Here is a link to several articles, flyers and campaigns that we run:

http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/east er.shtml

You can help stop impulse buying of Easter bunnies. Encourage parents and grandparents to buy stuffed bunnies or chocolate bunnies for their children. Help spread the word that rabbits are NOT disposable pets! Take part in the national Make Mine Chocolate campaign and help spread the word by hanging up Make Mine Chocolate flyers in your neighborhood: vets offices, libraries, grocery stores, pet stores, community bulletin boards. The flyer can be found here: <a href="http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/MM">http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/MM</a> C.shtml

We also ask that people write to their local newspapers about a month or so before Easter to spread the news about rabbits as house pets and not novelty Easter pets. Tell your newspaper how great rabbits are as house pets, how they can be litter box trained,

that they should be spayed and neutered, that they do not

Make Mine Chocolate!™

smell (contrary to popular belief!) and that they do NOT

make good "starter pets" for children. They are a living, breathing, 8-12 year commitment. With everyone's help, we can try to make this Easter a better one

for all rabbits!

# Flatbread Fundraiser... Another Success!

On September 28, 2010, HRN raised over \$3200 from our 5th Annual Flatbread Benefit Night. Many thanks to our sponsors, Flatbread Company, as well as all of our families and friends, who contributed to making this night a huge success. HRN cannot do what we do for the buns without the help and generosity of people like you!

Lesa Hall • Green Mountain Coffee

- Davis Farmland
   Celebrities for
   Charity, Inc.
   The Cheesecake Factory
- VCA Wakefield Animal Hospital
- Heather Toland Yankee Whale Watch





and Deep Sea Fishing • Middleton Golf Course • Starz Salon • The House of Seven Gables • Time to Clay • Essex River Cruises & Charters • Edaville USA

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   Liz Huang
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   Lori Martinez
- Karla Cook, Reservoir Farm Studio
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   Shore Music Theatre NY Hop on Etsy,
   NY Illustrations Rock Spot Climbing
- Swan Boats of Boston Castle in the Clouds • Shannon Cail • Angela Donahue, Leash Love • Life Alive
- Aimee Guthinger of Bedroom I's Boutique, Inc.
   Littleton Animal Hospital
   Especially For Pets
   Dorinda Billings
   Whole Foods Market, Woburn, MA
   White Rabbit Beauty
- Medieval Manor
   Starbucks (and Ziggy)
   Ellen M Walker, RMP, IARP, Reiki For Your Pets
   Vicki Bilafer
- Best Friends Animal Society
- Vyvyane Loh Erica & Andy Locke
- Legacy Beads, Wilmington, MA
- Brooklyn Bunny Lush, USA
- Diane Thomas, Heavenly Hands
   Massage
   Oxbow Hay
   Stephanie
   Vandette
   Ali Thomson, Pet Rabbit Toys

### **Rabbit Education Days**

We hold education events at various locations in Eastern Massachusetts. All dates and locations are on our web site at *www.rabbitnetwork.org*. Please stop by to visit, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have about rabbits and their care. Information about adoption, along with a listing of rabbits currently up for adoption, will also be available. We do not adopt out on-site.

- Especially For Pets in Acton, Canton, Medway, Newton, Sudbury, Wayland and Westborough - HRN will be there during March and April. Dates and times TBD. Please check the website for updates.
- April 9, Marshfield High Pet Adoption
   Day, 167 Forest St, Marshfield MA,
   10 AM 2 PM
- April 30, American Gerbil Society Show, Middlesex Community College, Bedford MA, 11 AM - 5 PM

### Memorials

Every time I lose a rabbit he takes a piece of my heart with him. And every new rabbit who comes into my life, gifts me with a piece of his heart. If I live long enough, all the components of my heart will be rabbit, and I will become as generous and loving as they are.

~Author Unknown

### **Oliver**



Dear Oliver,

You are with Ms. Marlo, the love of your life now. You wanted to be with her. As much as you loved and were loved by Fieni and Grisu, you always wanted to be with Marlo. I adopted you after seeing your little chubby picture on the Internet. I just fell in love with it, wanted to have you. Once you came home with me you exceeded all my expectations. You were so perfect. I loved you so much and enjoyed every minute with you. You loved Marlo so much and gave

her all the support she needed during her fight with cancer. After she left it looked like you would start over new, live a life more free within less constraints. But this life wasn't what you wanted. You just wanted to be with Marlo again.

I still hear you making buzzing noises like you would do when you were happy or thought you were left out for treats. I hear you running into walls making happy jumps, falling into bathtubs and trashcans. I see you lying there doing a dead bunny flop (just like I thought yesterday when I found you) and I hear you stamping upset like you would do when you disapproved. You always were so expressive!

Besides Marlo, food was your second love. You would stuff as much food into your mouth as you could (not surprising I yesterday found you with hay in your mouth). No matter how much you loved the bunny girls, you were convinced you should get most of the food. You deserved it, since you took care of the territory so well. You would chase cats and mice away and one time even intruders, thinking you were a giant. Not just a 4lb bunny.

We had a lot of fun together and I will never forget your kindness. I wished you had allowed me to say goodbye. But like always, you didn't want to make much fuss about yourself. You didn't want others to cry over you.

Fieni and Grisu miss you too! They are lucky to have known you and learned all your tricks. They are bored since you are gone. They were both madly in love with you. We all hope to meet you again one day (you and Marlo).

~Your Mom Corinna, and third wives Fieni and Grisu

# You're Nobunny Until Somebunny Loves You











- \*Having two rabbits does not adversely affect the human rabbit bond.
- \*Bonded pairs seem healthier, happier, and are less likely to get into mischief, or suffer from boredom.
- \*The cost of caring for a bonded pair is not that different than that of a single rabbit.
- \*Rabbit language is seen in grooming activities, skillful dancing techniques, and subtle shifts of body position, something only another rabbit can provide.

# ...Adopt a bonded rabbit pair...

House Rabbit Network, a 501c3 organization

www.rabbitnetwork.org

781-431-1211

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# 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 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 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*) to:

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

Choose your membership level:         □ Dwarf	Choose your newsletter delivery preference:  PDF format via email (significant savings for HRN)  Hard copy via U.S. Mail	Please send me	•
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