



House Rabbit Network

P.O. Box 2602
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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

Winter 2016

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Adopting a Second Rabbit

by A.A.

Despite domestication, pet rabbits have the same desire to be around other rabbits as do their wild counterparts. In the wild, rabbit warrens (a series of connected underground tunnels occupied by rabbits) can be quite numerous and in their close-knit community, they form lifelong friendships. A house rabbit who spends her days alone is living in an unnatural environment, which can cause depression and behavioral issues. Adding a second bunny to your family can have great benefits.

Rabbit owners often believe that two bunnies will be double trouble but although it seems counterintuitive, two rabbits often are less destructive than one. A solitary rabbit can get bored easily, which can lead to the type of unruly behavior that causes some to give their rabbit away. The problem is usually not the rabbit but the isolation. Bonded pairs become inseparable, spending so much time grooming and playing together that their energy is no longer channeled towards tearing the house apart. However, sometimes the bunnies can seem like tag teaming partners in crime and can get into mischief. Aside from playing, they'll also have someone to talk to. Bunnies communicate in their own *Lepus* language, which gives them mental stimulation that humans can't fully provide. Some lonely rabbits become withdrawn rather than destructive and have no interest in play or in forming a relationship with their humans.



Brothers Fernando Miguel (right) and Rafael Pedro enjoy a meal together. Photo courtesy of Yolanda Girouard.

Introducing a bunny buddy can completely change a sad rabbit's personality. The emotional aspect of having a best friend makes rabbits able to let their true personalities come through. A previously sullen bunny will start dancing with her new friend, playing with her toys, and become noticeably happier. A bonus is that some rabbits will form closer bonds with her human friends and will want to spend more time in

their company. There are some cases where they do become more focused on their new bondmate and will need less attention from you. This can be a good thing if you lead an active life.

Other than the benefits to the bunnies, there are some key things to think about when deciding if a second rabbit is right for you. One issue is cost. Most people find it affordable to buy extra food, bedding and hay, as rabbits aren't high-cost animals to care for. However, medical cost is often overlooked. Vet visits, especially to emergency facilities, can be shockingly expensive. Be certain that you can afford to address unforeseen illnesses that may arise as well as routine care.

Time and effort is also a factor. Like people, rabbits can have personality clashes that make friendship impossible, which is why you shouldn't adopt a second bunny without introduction to your current rabbit. Finding the right partner means time spent meeting other rabbits and monitoring their interactions to see who has potential and who will end up rubbing your rabbit the wrong way. Evidence suggests that typically opposite sex rabbits get along better, however if that isn't working, don't be afraid to try a rabbit of the same sex. Even bunnies who eventually become friends are usually hostile to each other upon first meeting because of their instinct to protect the warren from outsiders. Initially, you'll have to facilitate their friendship. Bonding a pair requires work and sometimes it takes months before they can be left in a room together without supervision. You have to be willing and able to set aside time for the process, particularly if your rabbits are physically fighting.

While rare, your bunny may genuinely have no interest in living with another rabbit. If this is the case, consider getting another animal, such as a pocket pet, to be a companion. Rabbits are often less territorial towards other species so a hamster or guinea pig can provide friendship without the initial rivalry.

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North American Veterinary Community Conference

by Betsy Hartman

I'm a veterinary student at Tufts and had the fortunate opportunity to attend the North American Veterinary Community Conference (NAVC) in January in Orlando, Florida. Conferences are one of the few times in vet school when students really get to focus on their particular interests, if they happen to fall outside of the dog-cat-horse-cow curriculum. It's inspiring to learn from and network with veterinarians who work with exotic species. It also serves to remind myself why I'm spending so many hours in the classroom.

Some of the conference talks were overviews, targeting the small animal practitioner who sees some rabbits or is interested in incorporating exotic mammals into her practice. At NAVC, I attended nearly a dozen talks that focused on rabbit health and treatment, and I'd like to highlight a few of those below. If you'd like more details about these or any of the other talks, please get in touch, as these are just brief summaries of ongoing research. This article is in no way intended to provide medical advice, but to present a look at recent developments in veterinary care for rabbits.



Natural sunlight helps prevent metabolic bone disease.

Exotic Companion Mammal Dental Disease: Standards of Care

Peter Fisher & Christoph Mans

Drs. Fisher and Mans discussed the primary causes of acquired dental disease in rabbits and other exotic small mammal pets. The most common cause is inappropriate diet. While most of our readers are well aware of the importance of hay for good dental health, the lecturers also emphasized the importance of a proper calcium:phosphorus ratio of 2:1 (best obtained by not relying on grain-based pellet diets). Calcium, vitamin D, and natural sunlight all help prevent metabolic bone disease that can lead to dental disease.

In order to evaluate dental disease, ideally six radiographic views should be taken in order to assess the teeth and jaws of a rabbit. An even better option is a CT scan. Some veterinarians, including the lecturers, have started using endoscopes (a medical device consisting of a long, thin, flexible or rigid tube which has a light and a video camera) in rabbit oral exams. Not only does endoscopy provide illumination and magnification inside tiny mouths, it also allows for a more thorough exam of hard-to-see areas, and includes a video component so that vets can show clients what's going on in their rabbits' mouths. The speakers also discussed equipment for dental procedures, anesthesia, and nerve block techniques, and evaluated the benefits of incisor removal in rabbits with dental disease in order to reduce the risk of frequently using anesthetic to continually trim teeth.

Critical Care in the Rabbit

Jennifer Graham

Tufts' own Dr. Graham spoke on Rabbit Gastrointestinal Disease Syndrome (RGIS), a new name that recognizes that "stasis" is not a disease itself, but rather a collection of symptoms secondary to a primary disease process (e.g., dysbiosis [microbial imbalance], stress, liver disease, pain, etc.). Different factors that can lead to RGIS include, but are not limited to, changes in diet, obstructions, sepsis, rodenticides, Frontline

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North American Veterinary Community Conference con't



Hay is important for good dental care.

flea preventative, and lead toxicosis — especially relevant in New England! In Dr. Graham's opinion, the most useful diagnostic tool in cases of RGIS is radiography of the abdomen. Radiographs can help detect acute physical problems such as obstructions, respiratory disease, or liver torsion. Blood tests remain extremely useful in diagnosing the ingestion of particular harmful substances, and critical veterinary care is always necessary to determine the best way to respond to any given case of RGIS.

E. Cuniculi in Rabbits: Making Sense of Clinical Signs and Diagnostic Tests

Carolyn Cray & Peter Fisher

Drs. Cray and Fisher are trying to come up with a combination of testable parameters that more accurately detect *E. cuniculi* infection. As many of us know all too well, *E. cuniculi* is a common, chronic infection transmitted by spores and may affect immunocompromised humans as well as rabbits. Head tilt, "rolling," ataxia (loss of full control of bodily movements), and paralysis are all common symptoms of long-term infection in rabbits and point to the eventual neurological effects of *E. cuniculi*, though it can also impact the lungs, kidneys, liver, and eyes. The immune system can adapt to the presence of the spores in the body, but not eliminate them, and illness, stress, or age can cause symptoms to re-emerge years after the initial infection. Different blood tests for *E. cuniculi* antibodies have been developed over the years, but these tests have been unreliable due to the way in which the disease can go into remission. A new test using immunoglobulin (antibodies) found that rabbits that showed clear signs of disease could show positive results 90% of the time, but that the same rabbits could test positive at a much lower rate in a matter of months, even though the underlying infection was still present. Combining different types of tests may yield better results in the future, but the work is still ongoing.

Rabbit GI Flora: What's Been Identified and Why It's Important

Micah Kohles

Historically, studies of rabbit gut flora (the microbe population [tiny organisms] living in the intestine) have relied upon cultures, but more recent studies employing DNA sequencing show more promise in identifying flora, as some microbes do not grow well (or at all) in culture. Past studies have also focused primarily on the hindgut of the rabbit, whereas more recent studies also evaluate the foregut. There are a lot of organisms in the rabbit GI tract that have been isolated but not identified because their DNA sequences don't match those in the current scientific library — they're unique. 90% of the microbes of the stomach and small intestine, and 10% of the microbes of the cecum (pouch or large tubelike structure considered to be the beginning of the large intestine) and colon are currently unclassified. This is an area where new research should really help us understand our rabbits' digestion more fully. One interesting finding is that *Lactobacillus* (type of "friendly" bacteria) is not present naturally in the rabbit GI tract, nor are many of the ingredients included in commercial pre- and probiotics.

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Bunnies Agree: “Massage is Tooth-Purring Good!”

by Jessica Riel, Certified Animal Massage Therapist

Have you ever had a massage? If your answer is “yes,” the question alone might have made you think about getting another. If you’ve never had a massage, you’re missing out on an affordable and relaxing get-away from daily stresses and relief from your aches and pains.

Massage for Your Bunny Bestie

Just as massages are good for you, a massage does wonders for our furry friends. Whether a young binky-wonder or an older flop-n-snoozer, your bunny can benefit from a health-enhancing massage at any stage in his/her life.

Bunnies love to explore Bunlandia, climb Mt. Couch, and leap down into Water Bowl Quarry. By helping to keep muscles toned and relaxed and increasing flexibility and range of motion, massage helps reduce the chance of injury. If your bunny is injured, massage also helps to reduce pain, stiffness, and soreness and can even help to detect abnormalities early on, so a problem that you might not have noticed otherwise can be quickly addressed by a veterinarian.

Is your bunny prone to digestive issues?

Massage helps to remove waste and bacteria from all over the body and helps to break up gas, stimulate digestion, and relieve constipation. Massage is contraindicated (should not be used) during stasis and other acute illnesses, but massage before or after an episode can help to make your rabbit’s digestive system healthier.

Massage is especially beneficial to rescue animals whose prior life experiences can make them fearful and aloof. Massage teaches bunnies to trust and look forward to touch — and not just to touch from the massage therapist, but from you and the bunny’s other family members as well.

How is a professional massage different from petting?

Petting and massage are both great ways to bond



Circular strokes work out a knot on Marie’s thigh.

your right hand and gently compress the soft tissue in the palm of your hand, moving your thumb in a slow, circular motion. You can even massage your fingers this way. Feels good, doesn’t it? It’s miles away from the petting you did first, and now you may even be wishing someone would come over and massage your back...

Olivia’s massage story

During my internship, I worked on a very special rescue rabbit named Olivia. At approximately two years old, she had already given birth twice. During her second pregnancy, she developed a debilitating condition. Her family was unable to care for her, and surrendered her to a rabbit rescue.

Olivia suffers from the effects of a chronic *E. cuniculi* infection, a parasite that attacks the central nervous system, causing head tilt (also known as “wry neck” or “torticollis”), vertigo-like difficulties with balance due to the effects on the cerebellum, and even seizures.

Over the course of a month, I massaged Olivia in three sessions. When I met her, Olivia had knots along her spine and in her right thigh. Her neck was extremely tight and ropey — I could feel how her muscles had twisted and tightened, locking into place. The muscles on the left side of her neck lacked tone, while her right neck muscles were pulled taut. Because of her balance issues, Olivia had difficulty moving around. Her entire right hind limb was very atrophied — I could feel the bone under the skin with little to no muscle tissue providing padding.

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Adopting a Second Rabbit con't



Fluff (left) and Fella are husband and wife. Photo courtesy of Janie M.

"getting to know each other" period between them.

For an existing two-rabbit family, creating a bonded trio can be an option, as there aren't "third wheels" in rabbit society. They eat, flop, and play together just as pairs do and a trio is beneficial when one rabbit passes on. Death is not a subject any pet owner likes to think about but when one half of a pair dies, the survivor experiences intense grief. Having another friend in the home helps a grieving rabbit adjust to life without her partner.

If you don't have a rabbit yet but have decided to adopt one, consider getting a bonded pair. Rabbits often become friends in shelters or foster homes and it's important for their well-being to keep them together. They'll adjust better to a new home and people if they have each other and there won't be an awkward,

Whether adding another rabbit or other animal companion to your family, always adopt rather than buy from a pet store. You'll not only be rescuing the one you bring home but freeing up a space for another animal.

Remember that all rabbits in your home should be spayed or neutered. This is of utmost importance if you're bonding opposite sex rabbits. Far too many rabbits end up being euthanized because people allow their pets to breed but can't care for the numerous offspring.

Friendship leads to a happy rabbit and a happy rabbit means more joy for the entire household.

North American Veterinary Community Conference con't

I also attended talks on the care of amphibians, waterfowl, bearded dragons, guinea pigs, and chinchillas, along with overviews of Giant Panda and Polar Bear Medicine, Geriatric Large Carnivore Medicine, Lemur Pediatrics, Walrus Medicine, and wildlife diseases. One of the only rescue groups represented was House Rabbit Society, who staffed a table with volunteers and some disabled spokesbuns. I'm all for collaboration between the rescue and veterinary communities and was happy to see our favorite animals front and center!

After the lectures on the final day of the conference, I spent the evening at EPCOT. As I wandered down a dark, little used walkway, a wild cottontail hopped into the path in front of me and paused. He sniffed at me and then went calmly on his way into the rosebushes on the other side of the walk. Seeing him made me think of my own buns and foster rabbits back at home. Hearing so much about rabbit medicine was an incredibly valuable experience. Next, I look forward to heading to ExoticsCon in August, which is a more specialized conference for exotics nerds.

You can contact me at info@rabbitnetwork.org or 781-431-1211.



Bunnies Agree: “Massage is Tooth-Purring Good!” con’t



Chloe went to the rainbow bridge in 2015. She is my inspiration.

After the first session, Olivia gave me a few kisses, and I went home to re-search what else I could do to help. During the second session, I focused much of my attention on Olivia’s spine and back, using spinal stretch, compression, and deep-tissue techniques, including one specifically for head tilt. I also showed Olivia’s caregiver how to do the spinal stretches and compressions.

Olivia’s condition improved between the second and third sessions. Her spinal muscles felt much looser and softer and even her fur looked much healthier and shinier, as though she was able to better groom herself. Her caregivers reported that her mobility had improved. Because her muscles had softened so much, I was able to use compression to fully straighten her body several times and begin moving her neck into a more normal position to alleviate some of the strain. I rocked her whole body and vibrated her spine, on the joints of her limbs, and on her neck to help improve her sense of balance.

Olivia now happily lives at a rabbit rescue as a permanent sanctuary bun. She won’t be adopted out, and they are trying to bond her with another bunny with head tilt.

More about Jessica Riel and Chloe’s Paws Animal Massage

Jessica Riel is a certified animal massage therapist and graduate of the 200-hour accredited small animal massage program at Bancroft School of Massage Therapy in Worcester, MA. Animal massage is a complementary therapy and does not replace veterinary services. You can contact Jessica at info@chloespaws.com. Learn more at www.chloespaws.com.

Adoption Success Story

by Allison Lynch

Scooter

For all of us who have adopted bunnies over the course of our lives, we know their magical therapeutic powers. Their soft fur, nimble movements, and peaceful presence can help us relax in times of stress. That’s exactly how HRN alum Scooter helps owner Brian O’Neill, and the two have been bonding wonderfully for the past few months.



Scooter

Scooter was adopted in November of 2015 at about 6 months old. Brian was looking for an ESA (Emotional Support Animal) to help him with his anxiety and depression. Brian’s sister has an emotional support rat, which has helped her immensely. Since Brian was allergic to rats, he searched for another animal that might be able to help him, but wasn’t too big. A bunny was a perfect solution!

Brian contacted House Rabbit Network (HRN) and set up an appointment to meet some rabbits. He felt a fondness for Scooter right away, and the volunteers agreed that Scooter seemed to like him. Brian adopted Scooter, and since then has learned a lot about rabbits and discovered Scooter’s unique personality.

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Adoption Success Story con't

Scooter is an active bun and loves to run around, chew things, and get into trouble. However, he has impeccable litter box habits, which makes taking care of him easier. One of Scooter's more unique personality characteristics is his strange fascination with belts. Also, he's very fond of licking people's noses, and he isn't scared to climb up on top of you.

Scooter's antics make for a lively household, while his presence helps relieve Brian's stress and anxiety. He is the perfect therapy bun for Brian.

HRN News

Our Facebook Following is Growing

We now have over 7,500 likes on our Facebook page. Thanks to the outstanding Facebook team for all their hard work keeping the page interesting, informative, and fun. On our page we have adorable rabbits looking for their new homes, updates on HRN alumni, tips on caring for rabbits, and more. If you haven't already, please "like us" on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork>

Oxbow Grant

We won a grant from Oxbow for \$1,000 of their products plus a \$1,000 check. A huge thanks to Betsy Hartman who put together the grant application for us!

2016 — A Wonderful Year for Buns

We had the highest adoption number ever last year with a whopping 211 adoptions. That's the first time we have crossed 200 since we opened in 2000. Thank you to our volunteers, donors, and other supporters for all of your help! You are making a difference for our buns in need. And let's make 2016 an even better year for bun adoption.

Treat Your Bun to a Spa Day

When: Sunday, April 24, 2016, from 11 am to 5 pm

Where: Domino Veterinary Hospital at 29 Domino Drive in Concord, MA

Bring your bun to Bunny Spa Day to enjoy a day of pampering that will help support HRN. For a fee of \$30 per rabbit, your bun will get a relaxing, full-body massage by Jessica Riel, a certified small animal massage practitioner. Buns will also get nail trims and a fine grooming/brushing.

We'll also have goodies for sale for your bun like dried papaya and gift certificates for massage services will be available for purchase. Bunny Spa Day will be a great chance to meet other rabbits and their people. At the end of all that indulgence, you and your beautiful, happy bun will get a glamorous portrait together to remember your experience.

Payments on that day can be made with cash or check. If you have any questions, please contact info@rabbitnetwork.org or 781-431-1211. Please bring your house rabbit in a pet travel carrier.

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Giggles Fundraiser

Enjoy a night of comedy and help raise money for the buns. Join us on Sunday, April 10 at the Giggles Comedy Club in the Prince Pizzeria in Saugus, MA for a night of pizza, laughs, and fun — all in support of our buns!

Tickets are \$25 each until March 31, and \$30 after that. We'll be selling tickets at the door but the number of tickets is limited, so we encourage you to order ahead. The ticket price includes unlimited cheese pizza from 6:00-7:00 pm, and a 75-minute comedy show that begins at 7:00 pm. (You can also purchase food and drinks from the pizzeria menu.) The comics billed for that evening are Tony V., Mark Riley, and Brad Mastrangelo.

There will also be a prize auction, so be sure to check out the HRN website to see what the prizes will be. And of course, all proceeds of the evening go to support the HRN!

There are two easy ways to buy tickets. Go to the Giggles 2016 Fundraiser page on the HRN website: www.rabbitnetwork.org/giggles.php. There you can buy your tickets securely online with Paypal. Please make sure to double-check that you've entered your email address correctly, because we'll be sending the ticket(s) to that address! On that same fundraiser page, you can choose to pay by check or money order by using the order form. Make your payment out to the House Rabbit Network, and send it by mail to HRN:

P.O. Box 2602

Woburn, MA 01888-1102

info@rabbitnetwork.org

Prince Pizzeria contact info:

517 Broadway (Rte. 1 southbound)

Saugus, MA

(781) 233-9950

www.princepizzeria.com



What a fun and easy way to support HRN and the bunnies. We'll see you there!

Please note: The event tickets are non-refundable and the comics are subject to change. Please contact HRN if you have any questions.

2016 Adoption Totals

19 rabbits from HRN have gone on to happy homes with their forever families.
We wish them well.

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

Through our network of dedicated volunteers and members, HRN is making amazing strides to improve the welfare of house rabbits everywhere. Your support can only further our goals, so become a member and get involved.

Visit our website to find out how to help: www.rabbitnetwork.org

If you are not already a member, please join HRN!

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

Help make a difference in a rabbit's life. They're counting on you!



Contact House Rabbit Network:

info@rabbitnetwork.org

781-431-1211

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House Rabbit Network Membership and Ordering Form

Your membership donation is tax deductible and will be used for medical costs (spays/neuters, veterinary bills) and education expenses. All members will receive a copy of our newsletter, *Rabbit Tracks*, when it is published. Currently, we are publishing three issues per year. You can join online at <http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/join.shtml> or just fill out this page and mail it with your check payable to:

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Choose your membership level:

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