



**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](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org)

# Rabbit Tracks

Winter 2018

Table of Contents	
Rabbit Behavior.....	pg. 2
Alice's Eye.....	pg. 4
Success Stories.....	pg. 5
Volunteer Spotlight.....	pg. 7
HRN News.....	pg. 8



# Understanding Rabbit Behavior

by A.A.



*Kaylee demonstrates the loaf position.  
Photo courtesy of Deb McGillivray.*

For anyone new to the wonderful world of bunnies, you may sometimes wonder, “What on Earth is that bunny doing?” Here are common bunny behaviors decoded.

**Loafing:** Bunnies will often sit with all four legs folded under them so that they resemble a meatloaf or loaf of bread, hence the term loafing. Bunnies do this when relaxing.

**Flopping:** A rabbit will go from sitting or standing to suddenly flopping down on one side (sometimes with a mild thud) and being still. People become alarmed by this, thinking that the bunny has become suddenly ill but flopping is perfectly normal behavior. Often, bunnies are instantly asleep after flopping which is why they appear to have stopped moving.

**Superbun:** If you’ve ever seen a bunny with legs stretched out in a pose that looks like Superman flying through the sky, you’ve seen the superbun. This is a common relaxed bun pose and the further apart the back legs are, the more relaxed the bunny is.

**Melting:** This is similar to the superbun but takes it one step further. Bunnies flatten to the floor completely so that their whole bodies, including the neck and chin, are touching the floor as if they have no bones. This is a highly-relaxed state for a bunny.

**Binkies:** A fun rabbit behavior to observe is the binky, which is when bunnies leap into the air and spin, kick, and/or twist their bodies as if they’re dancing. The binky is said to be an expression of great happiness; it’s a literal jump for joy.

**Zooms/The Bunny 500:** When bunnies get very excited and have a lot of energy, they race around at full speed, which is why it’s important to give them room to zoom. Zooming is often followed by binkies.

**Digging/Chewing:** House rabbits often obsessively dig and chew anything they come across, especially anything made of wood. In the wild, rabbits dig networks of underground tunnels and chew through stems and roots. These are instinctual behaviors so rather than trying to stop them, give them approved materials, such as grass mats, apple sticks, and wooden toys. For those who are handy, you can also build your own cardboard fort or wooden bunny toys.

**Chinning:** You may notice your bunny rubbing her chin on things, such as toys, food, furniture, and even her humans. This is called chinning and it’s how rabbits mark their territory. There are scent glands in their chins (the scent is not detectable to people) that let other rabbits know “this is mine.”

# Understanding Rabbit Behavior Con't

**Purring:** Like cats, rabbits purr when content but the sound is produced differently. Rabbits rapidly chatter their teeth to purr. If your bunny purrs while being petted, you're doing a good job and your bun is happy to be spending time with you. A slow grind of the teeth can mean your rabbit is in pain, especially if the bun is sitting in an awkward position.

**The Butt:** When bunnies are upset, they'll turn their backs on you and refuse to acknowledge your existence. This is known as "giving the butt" and it happens during stressful situations, which can range from being brushed to being put into a pet carrier. Lucky for humans, buns forgive easily. A treat or some snuggles usually makes them your friend again. Sometimes they just need a little time alone.

**Thumping:** Unlike how it's portrayed in movies, rabbits don't thump for fun. The thump is a warning to other rabbits that there's danger close by. Thumps vary in intensity; the louder the thump, the more frightened or alert the bunny is. At home, rabbits can thump for seemingly no reason, but they're most likely smelling something humans either can't detect or don't see as a threat. If you hear repeated thumping but there's no danger to your bun, it can help to go to your rabbit and comfort her. Rabbits also thump when they're angry or mad.

**Nose Bonk:** People who have brought a bun into their home will soon start to experience the "nose bonk." As rabbits pass by, they'll nudge their humans or other buns with their noses. This is often a greeting. However, if you're blocking your bun's path, nose bonks can mean, "Get out of my way!" They may nose you a few times and then nip you if you don't move.



*Sunshine in her relaxed, melting pose. Photo by Jessica Riel.*



*Bunny uses periscope position to check out the area.*

**Periscoping:** When a bunny stands on her hind legs and looks around, it's called periscoping. They do this to get a better look at what's going on around them.

**Licking:** Rabbits groom each other by licking and it's a sign that they have a strong bond to each other. If your bunny licks you, she feels affection for you.

Once you understand bunny behavior, you can communicate more effectively with them.



# Alice's Eye Gets Fixed

By Dr. McNeil

Alice was found by an animal control officer, and she joined House Rabbit Network (HRN) with a unique view of the world. The upper and lower eyelid on her left eye were connected. Her normal eyesight was divided by a long stretch of haired skin leaving an abnormally small window on either side of the eyelid extension. This condition is officially called ankyloblepharon; this term is derived from the Greek words ankylo and blepharon meaning fused and eyelid respectively. Although reported in many other species, including children, puppies, kittens, cockatiels and leopard geckos, there is no official report of ankyloblepharon in rabbits.



*Alice's eye prior to surgery.*

Ankyloblepharon can occur prior to birth, secondary to eyelid trauma, or secondary to severe infection prior to the eyes opening after birth. Although Alice's history is unknown, we suspect Alice was born with ankyloblepharon as her eyes were normal outside of the extra eyelid connection.

Surgery was required to fix Alice's eyelid. Unfortunately, the surgery was not as easy as snipping the top and bottom of the eyelid connection. The margin of the eyelid was reformed as not to damage the cornea (the surface of the eye) and so that the eyelid contacted the cornea as not to be too loose (ectropion) or too tight (entropion). Dr. Ruth Marrion, a bunny-savvy ophthalmologist, performed the surgery.

To restore the eyelid to normal, an incision was made along the top and bottom of the extra eyelid connection. The cut edges of the conjunctiva and eyelid were sutured close. The suture was placed to ensure it did not rub on the eye. A second cut was made along the eyelid to ensure the eyelid contacted the cornea normally.



Alice recovered well from surgery. Two months later her eye is normal. Unfortunately, after surgery Alice was found to have a mass in her chest. The thoracic mass is not affecting her day-to-day life and currently Alice is living happily in foster care. She loves to explore and say "hi" to her bunny neighbors. She takes her medicine with gusto, begs for her veggies, and loves to eat hay. Her foster mom says, "She will snort and growl at me when I clean her space or say 'hello,' but then melts with pets. She is a young, enthusiastic diva that doesn't know she has a problem. She is funny and has the softest fur."

## **Bunny Fact:**

Rabbits almost have a 360-degree field of vision, and they can see well above their heads. They do have a small blind spot of about 10 degrees right in front of their noses and below their chins.

*Alice after surgery. Courtesy of Cheryl Arena.*



# Adoption Success Stories

## Bananas for Frito

by Jessica Riel

Frankie Conrad and her mom, Linda Conrad, had been going through a difficult time a few years ago. After the sudden loss of their bunny, Moose, a Netherland dwarf who died of stasis at two years of age in 2014, their senior Netherland dwarf, Nester, passed away in 2015 from old age and cancer.

"During the time of grief between the year we lost both bunnies, Frito kept popping up on Petfinder," says Frankie. Frito was about three when he was transferred to HRN from another shelter that was having difficulty finding him a home. Frankie says that she thought Frito was "so adorable," and he peaked her interest.

One day Frankie got a call from Linda after a visit to HRN. "She called me and told me he flopped right down next to her and he loved being petted. She said she thought he was the cutest bunny there," says Frankie, "and we both loved his crooked stripe!"

On August 7, 2015, Frito went home to his forever family. "When we adopted him," says Frankie, "he was scared. He would hide behind doors and under the couch. He was very timid. Then eventually he warmed up to us."



*Frito being cute.  
Photo courtesy of Frankie Conrad.*



*Frito and Frankie enjoying the moment.  
Photo courtesy of Linda Conrad.*

Frankie worked to earn his trust. "He never was held," she says, "and I eventually started to get him to trust me. Now he loves being held like a baby on my shoulder. He is the sweetest bunny we have ever had!"

Frito is clearly the prince of his home. "We recently celebrated his fifth birthday with a bunny carrot cake!" says Frankie. Frito is also bananas for his favorite yellow treat. "He loves them so much he follows my grandmother all over the house and begs and nudges her until he gets a slice of banana."

Frankie and her family are happy again in a home full of bunny love. "We are so glad we adopted Frito! He's very spoiled and loved," she says. "He's so happy now I see him do a flop often on the floor! We love House Rabbit Network!"

# Adoption Success Stories Con't



*Oliver at play. Photo courtesy of Mariah Lovejoy.*

## Love at First Boop

by Jessica Riel

In January of 2017, a six-month-old bunny named Spirit was waiting at the HRN shelter for his forever family. Meanwhile, Mariah Lovejoy and her family were looking for a little bunny to love, so they set up a time to visit the shelter.

"The appointment at HRN was wonderful," says Mariah. "The volunteers were fantastic and educated and let us meet as many buns as we desired." When Mariah and her mom met Spirit, "he approached us and booped me on the nose. How could I have said 'no' to that?"

It was love at first boop. "When we brought him home, my mother renamed him Oliver," says Mariah, "and he seemed to like that name more."

The bunny formerly known as Spirit quickly settled into his new home. "Oliver was binkying by day one and flopping by day three," says Mariah.

Oliver now spends his days surrounded by the love of his family. "Oliver is a free-range bun but spends most of his time in a shared bedroom with me. He loves to greet people at the bedroom door as they walk by," says Mariah. "He has an expen area for his food and water, but he spends most of the time running around the living room and bedroom. When you come home from work he is right there to greet you hoping to receive a head pat or a treat. He will often sit on the couch with my mother during breakfast in the morning or in the evening while she folds laundry. He's a very attentive bunny."

Sometimes, though, Oliver needs his alone time. "His favorite hiding spot is under the bed," says Mariah. There he ponders deep bunny thoughts, like where do bananas come from and how can he perfect his begging face for dill, two of his favorite foods.

Oliver enjoys the simple things in life, like "wicker bird toys and cardboard cup holders from Dunkin' Donuts," says Mariah. "Go figure." He knows that the early bun gets the treat. "He wakes up at 4 a.m. every morning for snacks and pets," says Mariah.

Though he has a new name, Oliver is still quite spirited, and he knows what it takes to stand up for what he believes in. "Oliver is a very stubborn bun," says Mariah. "When he is forced into the living room so his area can have a deep cleaning, he will fight to the death to get back into his space."

This sense of entitlement is understandable—after all, Oliver is an only bun and has his whole family to attend to his needs and whims. "The entire family is in love," says Mariah, "and he has us completely under his spell."



# Volunteer Spotlight

by Dawn Lewis

In 2017, Lauren Franco started volunteering at HRN by answering HRN's Adoption Hotline. She answers questions about rabbit care and talks to potential adopters. With her caring demeanor, endless energy, and sincere desire for rabbit welfare, Lauren shares her enthusiasm for helping bunnies.

A lifelong animal lover, Lauren always enjoyed rabbits. It wasn't until she took in her first house rabbit as a rehome and later connected with a local indoor-only bunny Facebook page that she learned about HRN. Since becoming involved and connected, Lauren has proven herself an unstoppable force when it comes to the bunnies!

For Lauren, volunteering for HRN is important because she feels that rabbits are often overlooked, while dogs and cats naturally have a larger audience nationwide. "Rabbits in shelters aren't often considered, and it's important to be their voice and advocate for them as the wonderful pets they are," Lauren says. Of HRN and its volunteers, Lauren believes that "they go above and beyond for rabbits in need. Every volunteer goes beyond their call of duty to save rabbits and educate the public. Since starting to volunteer with HRN, I have met so many compassionate and amazing people. We all have the same goal in mind and we all work together to bring that mission to fruition."

One only needs to look at the great life Lauren's 4.5 lb. Harlequin-Lionhead mix, Piglet, lives with Lauren and her husband to realize what an awesome companion a rabbit can be! Though Lauren grew up with rabbits and other pets, Piglet is her first free-range house rabbit, and definitely opened a door in Lauren's heart into the plight of rabbits everywhere. One only needs to see Piglet's special Boston Bruins bedding on her IKEA bed to know who the real queen of their house is!

Since bringing Piglet home, Lauren feels like she makes more conscious choices in her daily life, and is passionate about choosing products that consider animal welfare first and foremost. She believes strongly that animals are beneficial to our growth as humans, and jokes that even though Piglet occasionally likes to nip at her husband's ankles, neither of them could imagine life without her for a second.

Lauren spends some of her hotline time assisting with sensitive issues that arise. Recently a devoted rabbit owner reached out to us to tell of Lauren's special compassion while she went through the difficult loss of her beloved pet. The rabbit owner's email read, "I called the hotline in a state of grief over my loss, wanting to know what I had done wrong in caring for my rabbit. My call was returned by Lauren, who was so kind and knowledgeable. We must have spoken for over an hour. I was very impressed by her commitment, passion, and dedication to rabbits and the House Rabbit Network." We certainly feel lucky to have Lauren living our mission, and going above and beyond for rabbits everywhere.

If you'd like to find out about volunteer opportunities with HRN, please visit us at [www.rabbitnetwork.org/support/volunteering](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/support/volunteering) or contact us at [info@rabbitnetwork.org](mailto:info@rabbitnetwork.org).



*Lauren and Piglet taking a selfie.  
Photo courtesy of Lauren Franco.*



# HRN News

## Bunny Yoga

It's a bunny lover's dream: yoga with shelter bunnies hopping from mat to mat. HRN held its first Bunny Yoga classes in Weymouth in November, and then followed up with classes in Burlington. There was a \$25 minimum suggested donation per ticket. The classes raised \$2,080 for HRN. Our next Bunny Yoga classes will be in March. Visit [www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork](http://www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork) for details and to register.

Thank you to Open Doors Yoga Studio in Weymouth and Roots Yoga Studio in Burlington for donating the studio time. And thank you to our fantastic volunteer Yoga Instructor, Natalie Darmohraj, and our wonderful Bunny Yoga Coordinator, Abbie Loewenstein.



*Carolyn Cronin enjoying bunny yoga.  
Photo courtesy of Joey Phoenix.*



*Mums enjoying her exercise.  
Photo courtesy of Stacey Paiva.*

## Sponsor a Rabbit to Cover Medical Costs

Recently, HRN has had several rabbits with medical issues. Mums had granuloma of the uterine stump, a rare reaction to her spay surgery. She required hospitalization and a complicated surgery. Luckily, she has recovered well! She is the sweetest bunny you will ever meet. Her medical bills came to \$2,896. This is just one of the buns who have needed extra medical care. Even a small donation would help. Please visit [www.rabbitnetwork.org/support/sponsor-a-rabbit](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/support/sponsor-a-rabbit).

## Petco's Holiday Wishes Grant

We are so excited to announce that we won a \$10,000 grant from Petco's Holiday Wishes Grant program. Thousands of adopters shared their stories with Petco about the animal welfare organizations that helped get their loving animals to them. A huge thank you to the Petco Foundation and to Gabriella Carroll, who sent in our winning submission about her HRN alumna bunny, Phoebe. Gabriella wrote about her life with Phoebe at Boston College, and how the bun is helping her through the stress of grad school. You can read this sweet story here: <https://www.petcofoundation.org/love-story/rabbit-earns-grad-student-adopter/>



*Suzanne Trayhan, Gabriella, and Phoebe.*





Harley Quinn enjoying massage at Bunny Day Spa. Photo courtesy of Sara Christensen.

## Bunny Spa Day

Bunny Spa Day on October 29, 2018, at Domino Veterinary Hospital, 29 Domino Drive, Concord, MA was such a success, that we've already planned on **our next one April 8 from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. at the same location.** To register, email [info@rabbitnetwork.org](mailto:info@rabbitnetwork.org).

In October, fifty bunnies enjoyed getting the spa treatment from seventeen volunteers who offered nail trims and grooming, professional animal massage, a photoshoot, and reiki sessions. Bunnies went home to enjoy their new apple sticks, fruit "leather" from The Microbarkery, handmade reusable and washable pee pads from The Original Penelopads, and all sorts of goodies from Rhody Bun Mobile Market. Thank you to the volunteers: Jenny Baustert,

Lindsey Meyers Bertone, Meg Caveney, Suellen Champagne, Natalie Darmohraj, Beth DiGiulio, Betsy Hartman, Jeff Hartman, Karen Lachapelle, Dawn Lewis, Janie Matocha, Deb McGillivray, Joan Pilch, Melanie Powers, Jessica Riel, Andrea Stuart, Cheryl Arena, Hunter Fedan, and Suzanne Trayhan. The day raised \$1,800 for HRN. Anyone interested in learning more about in-home massage for their bunny can email Jessica Riel, Certified Small Animal Massage Practitioner of Chloe's Paws Animal Massage, at [info@chloespaws.com](mailto:info@chloespaws.com) or visit [www.chloespaws.com](http://www.chloespaws.com).

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## A Great Season for Fundraising

Thank you so much to Critters In Need, Inc., who generously fundraised for us and sent us a surprise check in December. Critters In Need supports rescues, shelters, sanctuaries, and foundations, regardless of geographical location, working to save the lives of our furry (and not so furry) friends.

Our fall Facebook Auction raised \$1,784. Some wonderful items were auctioned, including rabbit jewelry, bunny socks, clothing, towels, gift certificates, and lots more! Thank you to everyone who donated items: A&J Steampunk Designs, Andrea Arena, Michelle Bossi, Debbie Carron, Lorie Gols, Betsy Hartman, Nadine Heaps, WAITT for Community, Susan Hegarty, Roni Karnis, Kim Kennedy, Julie Langhill, Amy Litchfield-Kennedy, Vicki Papscoe, Quirk/Elliott Family, Jess Riel, Gailyn Rooslet, Laura Scafati, Suzanne Trayhan, Laura Udden, and Carol Youngclaus. Keep your eyes on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork](http://www.facebook.com/houserabbitnetwork) for information about future auctions.

## Adoption Totals

**We are so happy to announce that we had 237 adoption total in 2017. That's our best year yet! 31 rabbits from HRN have gone on to happy homes with their forever families so far in 2018.**

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

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

**Visit our website to find out how to help:** [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org)

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

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

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



Contact House Rabbit Network:

[info@rabbitnetwork.org](mailto:info@rabbitnetwork.org)

781-431-1211

P.O. Box 2602

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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 [www.rabbitnetwork.org](http://www.rabbitnetwork.org) or just fill out this page and mail it with your check payable to:

**House Rabbit Network  
P.O. Box 2602  
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

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Other Contribution.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_

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