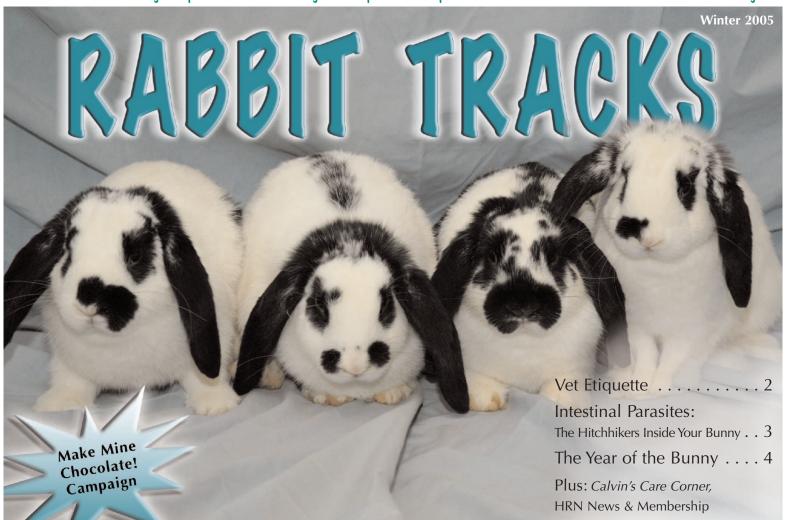


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# **Vet Etiquette**

by Kathy Smith

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A good veterinarian is a priceless asset and should be treated with appreciation and respect. Just as it is important for your veterinarian to understand that you are the expert on what is normal for your rabbit, it is important for you to remember that your veterinarian is a professional with years of training and experience. Although you want her to be open to information from outside sources, she is not likely to appreciate it if you walk in with a copy of an e-mail, an article from the Internet, or this book and try to tell her how to do her job.

Outside information should always be presented as a starting point for discussion with your veterinarian, not a request for specific treatment. If you participate in rabbit e-mail groups, you will find a tremendous wealth of rabbit medical knowledge among the members — both from official rescuers and from individuals who seem to be "magnets" for rabbits with medical problems. However, please keep in mind that most of the people giving medical advice are not veterinarians and their knowledge comes from personal experience rather than professional training. Be sure to discuss any medical advice you receive with your veterinarian before following it. Remember, your veterinarian is a trained professional who has actually seen your rabbit! She has both general medical knowledge

and information about your rabbit's history and condition that might make it inappropriate—or even dangerous—to follow the advice offered on e-mail lists.

When presenting outside ideas to your veterinarian, remember to do so with the appropriate level of respect for her professional expertise. Know how to ask questions and share suggestions in a way that won't make her feel you are questioning her professional judgment. Remember also that medicine is a rapidly changing field and most veterinarians keep up with new developments in the field. What an e-mail group is discussing as

a promising "new" treatment may be "old news" to your veterinarian. Before bombarding her with information, ask what she knows about the subject and ask if she would be interested in reading the information you have. If there is a specific article you really want her to read, ask if she has time to read it and share her opinions with

you during your next office visit—then, be prepared to listen with an open mind even if her reaction is not what you want to hear.

There are times when you will need to ask your veterinarian to consult with another doctor, but this should be the exception rather than the norm. You should usually feel comfortable trying your veterinarian's approach to treating a problem if not, start looking for a new veterinarian. If your veterinarian is having trouble diagnosing your rabbit's problem, if your rabbit has an unusual condition, or if the normal treatments don't seem to be working, you should be able to ask your veterinarian to consult with a doctor you know has experience with similar problems or with one of the Rabbit Specialists listed in the Resources section. If you do ask your veterinarian to consult, offer to pay for her time and the phone call in addition to any fee



Murray at his weekly checkup with Dr. Allan (left). (Photo courtesy of Lakewood Animal Health Center)

charged by the other doctor. This is only fair since consult calls can be lengthy and normally take place when long-distance charges are high.

It helps to have a good relationship with the entire staff at your Vet Clinic. Here are some tips to help you be the client everyone wants to help:

- \* Be on time—or even early—for your appointments. If you can't make an appointment—or know you are running late—call to let the office know.
- \* Schedule appointments as far in advance as possible. It is a good idea to check on all your family members before leaving for work in the morning. If someone seems "off", call your vet early in the day to discuss the situation and see if you should schedule an appointment. Unless you have a true emergency, don't expect to be able to call when you get home from work and have your rabbit seen that day!
- \* If you have an appointment scheduled and need to take an additional bunny, call first to see if your veterinarian has time or if you need to reschedule. Don't assume she can see two rabbits in the time allotted for one!
- \* If you need to speak to your veterinarian by phone, you will

- probably need to leave a message. If your question is not urgent, clearly state that in the message you leave. Your vet will appreciate this help in prioritizing her messages. True, it may take her longer to return your call, but she will probably also have more time for your question. And if your messages are normally "not urgent", an urgent message from you will probably result in a quickly returned call.
- \* Don't expect your veterinarian to diagnose and prescribe treatment over the phone.
  Unless you are dealing with a recurring problem, your veterinarian will probably need to examine your rabbit.
- \* If your rabbit is receiving periodic treatment from a technician (e.g. injections or sub-q fluids) and you have questions or concerns, schedule an appointment with the veterinarian herself to address these issues. At the appointment, be organized.

- Have a written list of the topics you want to cover.
- \* If you have an emergency and will be at the clinic when they open, leave a message to let them know you are coming in with an emergency. This will help the receptionist know not to schedule anything else new.
- \* Be patient if you have to wait for an appointment. If your veterinarian is running late, it means she gives every animal the time he needs rather than rushing to stay on schedule. Remember also that emergencies happen and you want a veterinarian who will "work you in" if you do have one.

If you have a veterinarian who is wonderful with your rabbit and a staff who cares about you, count your blessings. Take every opportunity to let each person know how much you appreciate them. Always take time to say please and thank you to every staff member who helps you.

# **Intestinal Parasites:** The Hitchhikers Inside Your Bunny

by Astrid M. Kruse, DVM

All animals have some number of bacteria, worms and assorted bugs living inside their gastrointestinal tract. Most of the time, these hitchhikers cause no problems. After all, they have been flourishing inside their intestinal homes for millions of years, and don't want to kill their hosts, just live off them. However, when parasite numbers reach a critical level, they can cause illness.

Coccidia (*Eimeria* species) are the most common parasites in rabbits, causing weight loss, diarrhea and dehydration, affecting younger rabbits the worst.

Coccidia are little, round many-celled organisms that infect the bunny when they are eaten. They hatch out of their shells once inside the intestines. One species of coccidia (*Eimeria stiedae*) will then travel to the liver and cause liver

and bile duct damage, while the others invade and damage the cells of the intestines. Their offspring are shed in the rabbit's feces, and after 48 hours in the environment, are able to infect the next rabbit that eats them. (Cecotrophs, aka cecal pellets, are eaten fresh and thus aren't infective.) Coccidia can live for years in an untreated environment because they have protective capsules or cysts, but they can be killed by thorough cleaning and

drying. They are mainly a problem in dirty, overcrowded living conditions, which occur at some breeding establishments and farms.

Your vet will be able to tell if your bunny is infected by analyzing a fresh fecal sample. This sample can be looked at in the clinic, but the most reliable test for finding fecal parasites in any species is by zinc sulfate centrifugation, which is done at a regional lab. However, even if there are coccidia in a sample, they may not necessarily be the cause of the intestinal problem, since most rabbits are infected without becoming sick. All parasites shed eggs in the host's feces only intermittently, so while one sample may show no parasites, the next very well might. Technically, there must be seven fecal samples collected at different times that are negative (meaning no eggs are seen) before we can be sure that the parasites are really all gone. Coccidiosis is treated with sulfa-based drugs,

usually Albon or Bactrim, for at least a week. Remember that the treated bunny can be re-infected if the living environment is not thoroughly decontaminated by cleaning and drying. Eventually, a rabbit will develop immunity.

Tapeworms and flukes rarely cause problems. They infect rabbits that eat fresh grass that has on it either mites or ants (for tapeworms) or snails (for flukes). The stomach worm *Obeliscoides cuniculi* can, with a heavy infection, cause weight loss and a decreased appetite. If you are keeping your bunny indoors and feeding hay from a reputable source, he or she will be safe. The rabbit pinworm *Passalurus abiguus* can sometimes be seen in the fresh feces (apx. 3/16-inch long, whitish).

While observing wriggling worms in your bunny's poop might be disturbing, these actually do not cause a problem for the rabbit, and are treated more for aesthetic

reasons. All of these parasites are easily treated with deworming medications. Luckily, even if a human were unfortunate enough to be eating bunny poop full of parasite eggs, none of these parasites can infect humans. However, pets like dogs and cats often carry parasites that cause blindness in children, skin problems, and potential birth defects, as well as illness in rabbits and other pets. For public health reasons and the safety of your rabbit, dogs and cats need to be dewormed and have their stool checked regularly. Ideally, cats should not be allowed to hunt outside.

#### Winter Wonders

#### Can I give Bunny my flu or cold?

Don't fret—you can still pet Bunny while you're sick. You won't pass along, via casual contact, the influenza virus or the bacterial infections that cause the common cold and pneumonia.

# The Year of the Bunny

by H. Loh

You could say I was a resolution junkie. Every December, I'd compile endless lists and notes about Goals and What I Wanted to Achieve in the coming year, Habits to Kick, Things to Strive For. All this would culminate on New Year's Eve with a Master List of Resolutions that I painstakingly wrote out while champagne flowed and others partied around me—and yes, I kept them all, logging in milestones and

checking off goals in my various logs and notebooks. This year, however, I stunned my friends when I announced that I had only one Resolution. "One?" my husband asked. "For the entire year?"

The answer is yes, and the resolution is simply this: To be more Bunny-like.

The idea hit me when I was watching Oolong one day. She had played with her toys all morning and was pooped, so right in front of me, she

flopped down and took a nap, in the middle of the kitchen, while I was moving back-and-forth trying to prepare lunch. I had to step over her each time I headed to the sink, but no matter—she had a sound little snooze and then right afterwards bounced back to her toys for another round of chewing and ring-tossing.

I envied Oolong because around that time I was suffering from insomnia and overwork stress. I was recovering from a serious illness and was pushing myself to get back on my feet and back into a punishing schedule. Although I was basically healthy and athletic, it seemed as if Oolong had a connection to her body that I was lacking. When she was energetic, she played full out, but when she got tired, she flopped down to rest immediately—none of

that "I'll try to force myself to stay awake" business, or pouring coffee down her throat like many of my friends (I only drink tea). When she was tired, she rested, period. What a concept!

Then I got to thinking, maybe life would be simpler if I were more bunny-like. Hmmm.

#### **Diet and Nutrition**

Let's see—plenty of fiber, veggies and some fruit every day. The ideal bunny diet, but one that would work well for us humans too.

Minimal heavy starches and lowfat, low-calorie. And another thing—all that chewing should slow us down when we're eating and aid digestion. They should forget about the Food Pyramid and advocate the Bunny Diet. I can just see a new diet book hitting the bestseller's lists, interviews, and talk shows.

Oprah, here I come!

#### **Exercise**

Lots of bunny hops and binkies, plus furious ring-tossing can really burn up the calories. Cancel that gym membership and hop or skip everywhere you're going. It puts a smile on your face as well, a real mood-



Oolong contemplating things.

lifter. (Would anyone be interested in a Bunny Aerobics video featuring Oolong and the gang?)

Oh, and that bunny yoga is good for you too—long stretches (accompanied by yawns), and being able to pretzel yourself to fit any small space or hole can come in useful.

#### Rest

Oolong's example should serve to remind us all that sleep is important! (And naps are the way to go when our energy is flagging).

#### **Relationships**

Now here's a great one. My bunnies show their feelings very quickly and easily. "Cut that out" or "that's not funny" they say, turning their backs on me. I know when they're mad, but they always give a chance to win back their favor with a treat or lots of stroking. Wouldn't all our relationships be easier if we were honest with each other and as ready to forgive? My bunnies don't hold grudges. When we've made up, there are no references to past mistakes or hurts. We always start from here, now.

And as for romantic relationships, I noticed that even my most loving bonded pairs spend a healthy amount of time apart. Saves money on a lot of therapy!

#### **Focus**

Ever see a bunny try to seek out a treat? All motivational speakers and corporate trainers should show film clips of bunnies hard at work tracking down and sniffing away for that dis-

tinct scent of a craisin. Talk about being in the flow and goal-oriented!

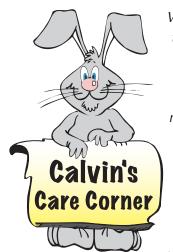
#### Adventure and Growth

Studies show that new neural connections are made in our brains whenever we learn something new. So explore a new part of the house, climb up on a chair you've never been on and survey the view from there. Dig into the grocery bags that are lying around when your parents are unloading the car-you just might find something yummy in there. And be adventurous with food as well! Just because it's a candle, doesn't mean you can't have a good chew on it, and experiment with new spices. Some buns like Oolong just looooove ginger.

#### Home

All I can say is, find someone else to clean your litterbox!

So yes, I'm sticking to my One Resolution this year. There's a lot to learn from my bunnies and I think it's catching on. Some of my friends are starting to see the benefits of a bunnier lifestyle. Who knows? It just might be the new Zen.



Welcome to the New Year, Readers! Have you made a resolution to eat a more balanced diet and decrease your treats? This idea is equally

important for your rabbit. Here's a refresher on rabbit treats for all you doting parents. There are several resources available on the web and in books which discuss diet in greater detail. I urge you to read them as this is only an overview.

An adult rabbit's **daily primary diet** is basic.

- 1) unlimited grass/timothy hay
- 2) restricted high-fiber pellets [apx. 1/4 c. per 5 lbs. body weight]
- **3)** fresh veggies [apx. 2 c. per 5 lbs. body weight]
- **4)** unlimited fresh water, especially in hot weather

Anything else is secondary, and thus a treat. It is generally held that daily treats combined can be approximately 1 heaping tablespoon per 5 lbs. body weight. Did you know that a 5-pound rabbit requires approximately 170 calories daily? Here's a suggestion: put together what you would typically feed your rabbit in a day. Take out a measuring cup, tablespoon, and food value guide. Read the pellet label, and see how your portion sizes (and associated caloric values) compare to the suggested daily guidelines for your rabbit.

What is a treat? A treat should be something special that you give sparingly and in rotation. Good treats are fresh fruits (e.g., apple or pear, 1/4-inch slice, no seeds; banana, 1/2-inch slice) or dried fruits (e.g., raisins or craisins, 2-3 pieces). A good treat could even be a green that is normally hard to find, a hay-cobb chew, or a grass mat. (Some consider oat flakes, rolled barley, or an almond OK.) If you give your rabbit 1/2 a carrot daily as part of her veggies, or papaya enzyme tablets, remember to consider them part of her daily sugar and calories. Not-recommended items are ALL of those available commercially, such as formed and colored puffy things, cereal- or mueslix-based chews (i.e., having seeds and nuts), yogurt drops, and pellet mixes that resemble "bunny trail mix." Never-ever items are those that are predominantly sugar and fat (e.g., chocolate, chips, crackers, candy, spicy or salty foods), rhubarb, raw beans, potato peels, or any spoiled produce.

There are health risks. House rabbits are rather sedentary, and excess calories that aren't burned off can lead to several health risks, especially obesity. Foods high in fat can lead to fatty liver disease or fat deposits in the arteries. Foods high in simple carbohydrates [sugars or starches can convert to fat OR will pass unconverted into the cecum. and spur a bloom of "bad bacteria," which can lead to several serious digestive system ailments. Rabbits have delicately balanced flora in their guts; it doesn't take much to "upset the applecart."

Don't believe the hype. Prepared store-bought treats are designed for you the paying consumer, not your rabbit. Do you think we rabbits really care about fun shapes or chew logs that claim to "simulate natural feeding habits" or "provide dietary variety?" No, we don't! NONE of those items provide any nutritional value (does the term "empty calories" ring a bell?). Rabbits get ALL of their necessary nutrients and energy from their daily primary diet. If you want to give your rabbit variety (and save money on pricey, packaged "junk food"), introduce a new green or fruit, or hide a couple of raisins in a cardboard or willow chew toy.

Stick to the basics. We rabbits can be exceptionally cute and often feign "being put-upon," but giving us extra calories, sugars, and fats is NOT the way to "treat" us or show us love. We need you to be thoughtful about our diet and not succumb to bunny begging!

If you are concerned that your rabbit is overweight or may need a diet modification, **consult your vet!** Weight loss and a diet change are best done with medical supervision.

#### Winter Wonders

The power went out, and we have no heat! Is Bunny OK?

Rabbits do fine in cooler temperatures
—remember all that fur they have?
Even if the house falls to 50 degrees,
they are fine (you, not so much).
If you're worried that Bunny is too
cool or "in a draft," clip an old blanket
or some cardboard around the pen.
(The real culprit for rabbits is heat;
ideally rabbits should be kept in an
environment under 80 degrees.)

## **HRN News**

In 2004, HRN rescued 142 needy rabbits (augmenting our alreadyexisting rabbits in foster care). Through diligent work, we adopted out 132 rabbits to their new forever homes!

#### **Murray Foundation Bestows Generous Grant**

The House Rabbit Network is extremely pleased to announce that we received a \$10,000 grant from the Arthur C. Murray Foundation Fund. This charitable foundation awards grants to local organizations that promote the humane treatment of animals and focus on rescue and adoption. The grant money was donated to help HRN realize our goal of establishing a rabbit shelter. We are currently looking into renting or purchasing appropriate shelter space. The ideal location for HRN would be north of Boston, preferably in the Woburn or Burlington area. If anyone knows of affordable property in that general area, please contact us at info@rabbitnetwork.org.

#### **HRN Wins Oxbow Rescue Grant**

The Oxbow Pet Products Company chose HRN to be one of only three recipients of the 2004 Animal Rescue Grant of \$1,000. HRN competed against diverse applicants in this third year of the grant's offering. Oxbow chose HRN because of our demonstrated excellence in the areas of educational outreach, public awareness, and fiscal responsibility in the rescue

#### A Message from the HRN President

It's fantastic that HRN received two grants in 2004. The Murray grant is specifically for establishing a shelter, and the Oxbow grant will help our overall rescue efforts. However, it is important to remember that these awards are simply foundations, not solutions. For example, \$10,000 could cover approximately six months of a shelter's annual operating expenses. \$1,000 could cover a portion of our yearly veterinary bills. So you see, we still need your membership dollars, special gifts, and other donations to maintain HRN as a strong rescue and education organization. Thank You!

and rehabilitation of rabbits. The other two winners were Rattie Ratz of CA and the Peoria, Illinois Animal Welfare Shelter. Oxbow established this annual grant to acknowledge the tremendous effort of "small animal" rescue groups in the pursuit of their individual goals. HRN thanks Kathy King, Tracy Lotko, and House Rabbit Connection for their assistance in preparing the grant application.

#### Join our new email lists!



**HRNChat** is a public list, not just for House Rabbit Network volunteers. Here friends

of HRN can discuss their bunnies, their experiences or issues, local suppliers, HRN events—basically anything rabbit related. Anyone may post, and there could be several messages per day. Make other local friends!

The HouseRabbitNetwork list is strictly for announcements coming from HRN. You are unable to post to this list. There will only be 2-3 emails per month. This email list is best for people who do not have time to chat about their rabbits, but want to stay informed about HRN events.

Subscribe to either or both lists at HRN's homepage: www.rabbitnetwork.org.

### Update—the **Williamsport Rabbits**

In July 2004, HRN and associates rescued 17 rabbits from a closing meat farm located outside of Williamsport, PA. Over the last six months, HRN has provided them all with spays or neuters. Unfortunately two does died during their

surgeries.







Happily, five rabbits have been adopted! Please check our website to see the available Williamsport bucks, does, and bonded pairs! One of the remaining rabbits, Jenna, is going blind. She is being treated by a vet and will need an extraspecial home. HRN wants to thank again everyone who made a special donation to assist with the Williamsport rabbits' medical bills.

#### **HRN Rabbit Sweatshirts**

Proudly display that you consider your rabbit a valuable part of the family, not to be used for commercial purposes. They have pictures of a dog, cat and a pair of rabbits and state "I don't eat or wear your pets, please don't eat or wear my pet."



Sweatshirts are white, 50% cotton. \*NOTE: These sweatshirts are created with heat transfers, not screen printing. They can not go in the dryer, must be washed inside out on delicate cycle. Price of \$22 incl. shipping. Sizes are M, L & XL.

#### In Memoriam

It's not the years in your life that count, but the life in your years.

~ Abraham Lincoln

#### Mandy

Mandy as we called you. Vivian was your name at adoption. The short time we had you, you brought much joy to our lives. The car rides to the park, the walks on your leash and just being the best bunny anyone could every have. You always greeted us in the morning for your snacks and greens. You loved to lay on the couch with us. Malory your cat partner laid by your cage. You will always be in my heart.

Deb, Ben & Bill



# Make Mine Chocolate!

by Kathy King

This year, House Rabbit Network is partnering with the Columbus, Ohio, chapter of the House Rabbit Society as we help expand the "Make Mine Chocolate" campaign [MMC] to the national level. Because unwanted former Easter bunnies are a problem for virtually all rabbit rescues and animal shelters, the goal of this campaign is to address the problem at its source, by reducing the number of uneducated, impulse purchases of live rabbits as Easter gifts. This is a very difficult task, as the public is bombarded with this familiar symbol of Easter in television commercials, candy packaging, and toy stores.

By educating the public about the costs and responsibilities of rabbit

ownership, House Rabbit Network hopes to reduce the number of Easter bunny "dumps" at shelters, as well as "set free" bunnies that are in danger from predators, weather, cars, illness, and starvation. We are encouraging those not prepared for rabbit ownership to purchase chocolate Easter bunnies or stuffed toys.

HRN will be featuring this campaign on their website at <a href="https://www.rabbit-network.org/MMC.shtml">www.rabbit-network.org/MMC.shtml</a>. The general website for this campaign is <a href="https://www.makeminechocolate.org">www.makeminechocolate.org</a>.

House Rabbit Network has added our contact information to the MMC flyer, a copy of which has been added to this newsletter. If you would like a PDF copy of the flyer, please send an email to us at info@rabbitnetwork.org. We also have the MMC business cards or postcards available, with House Rabbit Network labels to go on one side.

We are promoting the MMC merchandise, especially the pins, which will be useful as conversation starters, giving us the opportunity to share our message with the general public. The pins will available on our website in our Gift Shop, www.rabbitnetwork.org/newshop.html and will also be available in selected veterinary offices and retail pet supply stores. The pins, magnets, t-shirts, and sweatshirts can be seen at <a href="http://www.makeminechocolate.org/products.htm">http://www.makeminechocolate.org/products.htm</a>.

The Columbus, Ohio, chapter of the House Rabbit Society initiated this campaign in 2002. They should be commended for inviting partners from other organizations; any rabbit rescue, humane society, veterinary clinic, or individual is welcome to join.

Help spread the word—rabbits are NOT disposable pets!



# Make Mine Chocolate!"



Before you bring a pet rabbit into your home at Easter, please consider these facts:

- Rabbits are NOT low-maintenance pets!
   They require as much work as a dog or cat.
- Rabbits can live 8 to 10 years, sometimes longer.
- The necessary spay or neuter can cost \$100 or more, and rabbits require routine veterinary care.
- Rabbits are not cuddly they can become frightened when held!
- Pet rabbits cannot be set "free" it's a death sentence.

This Easter, why not make it a **CHOCOLATE** bunny or a cuddly stuffed toy instead?

Let's make it a Happy Easter for bunnies, too.

Help spread the word that rabbits are NOT disposable pets.

www.makeminechocolate.org

Tel: 781.431.1211

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

House Rabbit Network is now in its 5th 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.



HRN Members: Hop to it — it's time to renew your membership!

Annual memberships run from April 1 to March 31.

Make 2005 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:	Choose your newsletter delivery	Please send mecopies of
□ Dwarf \$ 15.00         □ Mini Lop \$ 25.00         □ New Zealand \$ 50.00         □ Flemish Giant \$ 100.00         □ Mix (other) \$	preference:  ☐ PDF format via email (significant savings for HRN) ☐ Hard copy via U.S. Mail	Rabbit Health in the 21st Century 2nd Edition at \$20.00 each  Membership:  \$  Book(s):  \$
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