



House Rabbit Network

P.O. Box 2602

Woburn, MA 01888-1102



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

RABBIT TRACKS

Winter 2007

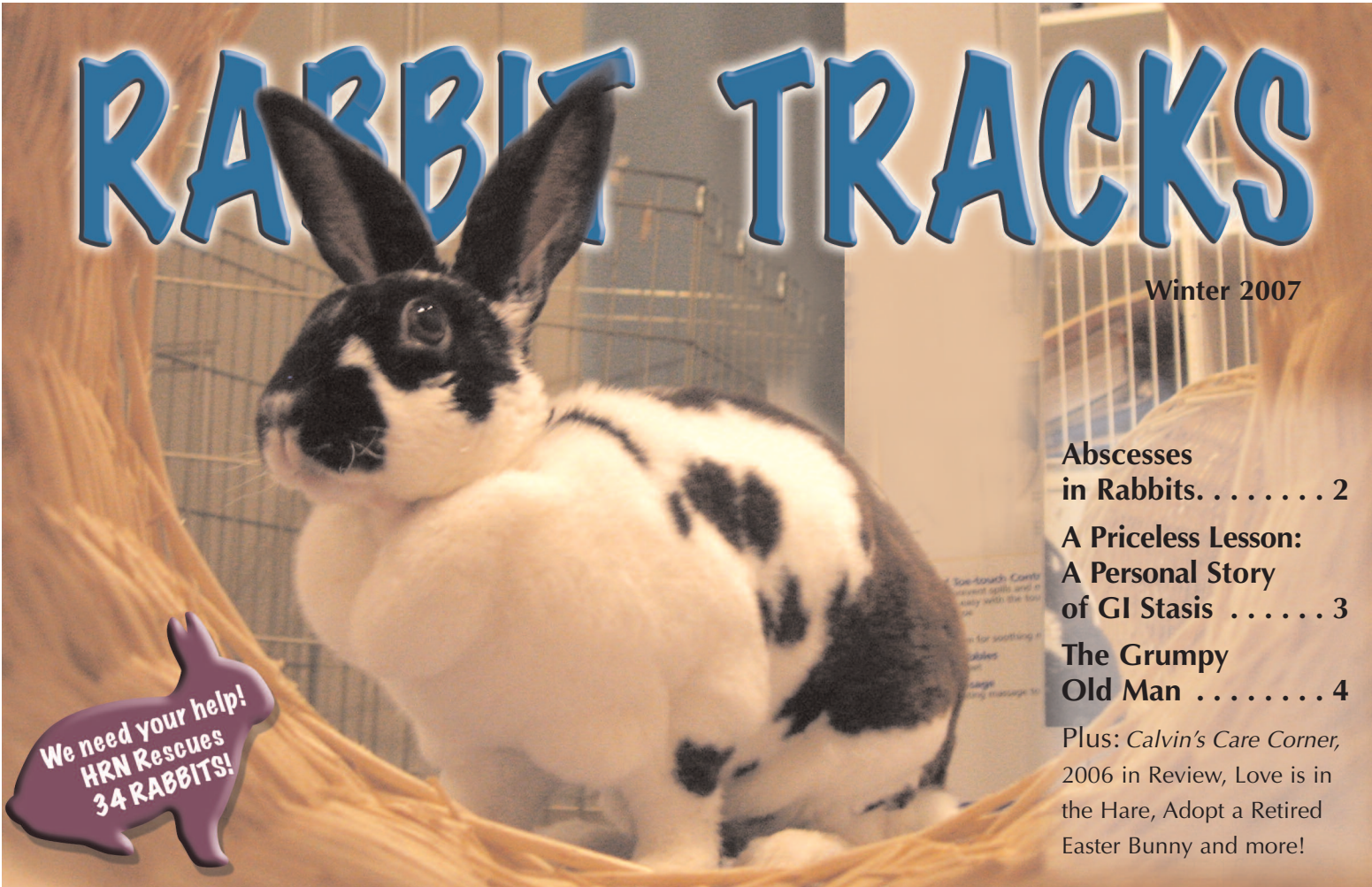
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the Hare, Adopt a Retired
Easter Bunny and more!

**We need your help!
HRN Rescues
34 RABBITS!**



Abscesses in Rabbits

by Jacqueline Warner, DVM

Abscesses are one of the most commonly seen disorders in pet rabbits. Abscesses are collections of pus (bacteria, white blood cells, and cellular debris) that can occur for a variety of reasons. Rabbit abscesses are very different from those that occur in cats and dogs. Cat and dog abscesses usually result from bite wounds. They grow quickly, usually cause fevers, and are characterized by liquid pus. Rabbit abscesses can be secondary to wounds, but are usually associated with underlying disease. They grow slowly, usually do not cause fevers, and are much more difficult to treat. Rabbits are very good at walling off their abscesses from the rest of their body with a thick fibrous capsule. Rabbits form thick, toothpaste-like pus which makes their abscesses almost impossible to drain. Although abscesses can occur anywhere in the body, most occur on the face or the feet. Facial abscesses are usually associated with dental disease, while foot abscesses are associated with ulcerative pododermatitis (sore hocks).

A thorough physical exam should be performed in order to assess a rabbit's overall health and uncover any potential underlying problems. A veterinarian will ask lots of questions about what the rabbit is fed, how he is housed, and whether there is any history of other medical problems. Abscesses can usually be diagnosed by feel. Sometimes rabbits can have other lumps and bumps. If there is any uncertainty, a veterinarian can insert a needle into the lump (called

a fine needle aspirate) to determine whether there is pus inside. Dental exams are routinely performed. Many rabbits resist evaluation of their teeth, and sometimes anesthesia is required. Radiographs (x-rays) can also be helpful in assessing tooth problems, and determining if the abscess has spread to involve the nearby bone. Blood work may be recommended for some rabbit patients.

Most people think of *Pasteurella* when they think of rabbit abscesses. *Pasteurella* is a bacteria that can live in a rabbit without causing disease. It can, however, cause lots of problems from respiratory infections (snuf-

This is an incredibly useful test that allows the vet to figure out which bacteria are causing the problem, and what antibiotic is most likely to be successful in treating the abscess.

Medical approaches are varied. Antibiotics are always warranted, and are often used long term. Rabbits are notoriously sensitive to many different kinds of antibiotics, and they must be chosen wisely. Commonly used antibiotics include enrofloxacin (Baytril), trimethoprim-sulfa (Bactrim), chloramphenicol, and metronidazole (Flagyl). Antibiotics that are commonly avoided when used orally, like cephalosporins or penicillin, can



(Left): Duke had a huge abscess under his chin. It was attached to his jaw bone and ruined several molars. (Center): Hugo had an iris abscess. Antibiotics were tried, but things got worse. Unfortunately the eye had to be removed. (Right): Flash was found as a stray with a severely infected eye with a ruptured retina. Unfortunately his eye also needed to be removed.

fler) to ear infections. While *Pasteurella* is frequently isolated from rabbit abscesses, it is not the only organism known to cause problems in bunnies. Other bacteria that have been found in abscesses include *Staph*, *Pseudomonas*, *Proteus*, and *Bacteroides*. A veterinarian will likely recommend that a sample be submitted for culture and sensitivity testing.

be given injectably to rabbits with abscesses. As with any medication, rabbits on long term antibiotics should be closely monitored for potential side effects. Unfortunately, recurrence is common even with long term therapy.

The treatment of choice for abscesses in rabbits is surgery. In general, abscesses are treated as if they

were tumors. Many times the entire abscess and capsule can be surgically removed. Even when surgery goes perfectly, there is a good chance that an abscess will recur. Sometimes it is not possible to surgically remove an abscess, as is often the case with foot and jaw lesions. Other surgical approaches may include implanting antibiotic impregnated beads, gauze, or specific types of dental material into the infected site. With some severe foot abscesses, amputation is often the best alternative. Rabbits can do remarkably well with 3 legs.

Some abscesses are treated topically. They may be flushed with disinfectants like chlorhexidene or iodine. Some veterinarians use strong sugar solutions or honey to manage infections, with frequent re-evaluation of the abscess site. Some wounds can be treated topically with silver sulfadiazine (Silvadene), while others are bandaged to facilitate healing. Alternative therapies may include herbal medications, acupuncture, or physical therapy (especially useful if the feet are involved).

Rabbit abscesses can be time consuming and expensive to treat.

Veterinarians experienced in rabbit medicine can evaluate each rabbit on an individual basis, and provide the best options for treatment. The prognosis for rabbit abscesses can be varied, but sadly, many rabbit abscesses are resistant to treatment. In some cases, euthanasia may be the best option.

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A Priceless Lesson: A Personal Story of GI Stasis

By Lisa Evelyn Murphy

Dahlia and Whitebunny were my first pair of rabbits, and the beginning of my obsession with bunnies. I learned a lot from them as a pair, but it was Dahlia that taught me - over the course of 24 hours - some of the most important lessons of rabbit care.



Whitebunny and Dahlia - she pulled through a bout of stasis.

Dahlia, a brown and white mini-lop, had been with us for about 3 years when I came home one day after work to let her out with Whitebunny for their daily play time. But something was different this day—Dahlia had not bounded out to enjoy her new found freedom as normal. At the time, I chalked it up to the all too familiar

bunny mood swing, and left her on her own for a moment. When I returned to check on her, she still had not budged—and this time I noticed her body position seemed odd, almost hunched.

I grew more concerned when it dawned on me that she was not eating as much as usual either. I grabbed a carrier and quickly rushed her over to Tufts Veterinary Hospital, where I was employed at the time.

Dahlia was initially triaged by a veterinary student who clearly was not comfortable with rabbits. He had simply peered inside the carrier, and stated that she “looked ok” before taking her back to the ER. It was late in the evening, so I knew that the exotics doctor, who also happened to be Dahlia’s regular vet, was gone for the day. The veterinarian on call that night was well regarded, and I waited anxiously for his update. After a few hours he came out to let me know she was in stasis, and that her x-ray showed a blockage. She was on pain medications and fluids, and was stable at this time. The goal was

to keep her stable overnight, and wait for the exotics doctor in the morning. I went home feeling apprehensive, but still hopeful.

In the middle of the night, my phone rang - it was the ER doctor. My heart sank. Dahlia was getting worse - her temperature was low and she was becoming dangerously close to going into shock. The ER doctor recommended immediate emergency surgery to remove the blockage. Knowing how risky surgery could be for a stable rabbit, let alone a rabbit in Dahlia's condition, surgery seemed like a death sentence to me. I declined the request, opting to wait for the exotics doctor, and just hoped that Dahlia would make it through the night.

Dahlia did pull through, and when the exotics doctor came in the next morning he was glad I had not elected surgery. Dahlia's prognosis, however, remained grim. According to the doctor, this was the worst blockage he had ever treated. The fluids, pain

medications, and hope continued to flow throughout the day. It looked like we were waiting on a miracle. As the day drew on, and Dahlia did not improve, euthanasia became an option. There was no need for her to suffer futilely if this was not going to pass. Still, I could not give up on her.

At 4pm, the doctor came running over to excitedly deliver the news: "...there is poop!!" We ran back to the wards and there at the bottom of the cage were a few small poops. Although it seems odd to write this, I was never more excited to see poop (a statement bunny owners everywhere can relate to). Dahlia, now looking brighter, started nibbling on some hay. By the next morning, she had worked her way through all the hay in her cage and was much more active, thumping at any of the technicians who came in to check on her. She came home that night, already back to her old self. Everyone involved marveled at her miraculous recovery.

Throughout the ordeal, the lessons I gained from Dahlia were priceless. First, spending time with your bunnies every day is more than just fun - it can save their lives. Rabbits, being prey animals, are programmed to hide any illness or pain. The time I spent with Dahlia allowed me to recognize all the nuances of her normal behavior, and therefore realize more quickly when something was abnormal. Second, never underestimate the importance of a rabbit-savvy veterinarian. While many general practice veterinarians are excellent, having a veterinarian who specializes in rabbits is invaluable - and in some cases the difference between life and death. Finally, never give up hope on an animal. You will be amazed at what their spirit can pull them through, as well as what you can learn from them...like sometimes a few poops can be something to celebrate.



The Grumpy Old Man

by Suzanne Trayhan

It was eleven years ago when I first met Louis. I was working at a house rabbit booth during a Pet Expo when a lady named Laurie approached. She had recently adopted a second bunny as a mate for her Louis. Since she was disabled and couldn't reach the floor, she was having trouble bonding them. As fate would have it, she lived in my town. I agreed to help her bond her bunnies.

For several months I regularly went to Laurie's house and worked on bonding Louis and Jillian. That was how Louis got to know me. I was the mean lady who would come and force him to get along with Jillian. Louis was a handsome brown Netherland Dwarf, a 3.5 pound rabbit with the attitude of a giant. He loved Laurie, but if he didn't like something, he let you know. Grunting and boxing were favorite pastimes. He didn't want to be with Jillian and he didn't

like me for forcing him to be nice. Eventually he learned to love Jillian, but he still hated me. Years after I had bonded them he would still thump when he heard my voice. His memory was good, and he knew how to hold a grudge. It was fair to say that Louis didn't like me.

Louis lived like a king for several years. Laurie spoiled him rotten, he had an entire room to play in, and a girl, Jillian, whom he loved. However, great times never last forever. Jillian



Louis and his big, white girlfriend Abby.

got sick and passed away. Laurie, sadly, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She asked if I would take Louis once she died. That is how Louis became my rabbit. While Laurie knew I would take good care of him, I wondered if this was Louis' worst nightmare.

Louis surprised me with how well he adjusted. He knew that something was different and would let me pet him, if he was in the right mood. Despite being an elder bun, he still had tons of attitude and let me know every time he didn't like something. I got used to his grunts and laughed at his attitude. He definitely was full of himself! I tried bonding him with my rabbits, but he wouldn't have anything to do with it. Amazingly three pound Louis would pick fights with my 12 pound Daisy. I tried a few other rabbits, and eventually gave up. Everyone knew Louis was my grumpy old man. When friends came to visit, they liked to pet him and listen to him grunt. Don't touch his food, toys or litter box. Treats are welcome. He sure was a feisty one!

Louis was ten years old and had been with me for two years when a new

rabbit, Abby, arrived at our shelter. She was a nine year old New Zealand White rabbit who was dumped because her owners were having a baby. She had virtually no chance of being adopted. Since I didn't want Abby to spend the rest of her life stuck in foster care, I decided to try her with my

bonded pair, but they just didn't take to each other. On a lark, I tried her with Louis. Abby was immediately enamored. Louis seemed somewhat interested, but still had his grumpy moments. As luck would have it, she was oblivious. He could grunt and snort all he wanted, and she would lay happily by his side. He would box at Abby, and she wouldn't even notice. It was amazing to watch Louis try to act tough, and Abby would never react. Abby would snuggle her eleven pound body right up against my three and a half pound dynamo. She showered him with kisses, and eventually he melted. After a few weeks, she won

him over. Once smitten, he eagerly returned her kisses and didn't even get annoyed when she stepped over him trying to get treats. Abby brought out a softer side that Louis didn't want anyone to see.

It was amazing to see Louis so much in love. Over the years he grunted less and seemed happier than he had ever been. The attitude was gone, and Louis was no longer a grumpy old man. Friends couldn't believe the transformation in him. Abby has always been just a love. As long as she is snuggling with someone, she is in heaven. Louis and Abby enjoyed 2.5 wonderful years together when Louis sadly passed away at 13. Both Louis and Abby spent their last few years filled with love and contentment.

Many people have wondered if their rabbit would be interested in another bun after being alone for many years. Abby, at nine years old, became a first time bride and absolutely adored her man. Louis gave up his bachelor ways for her, after being widowed for 2.5 years. Senior rabbits can be happy lovebirds, and while Louis clearly had a softer side, he will always be my grumpy old man.



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Finding the Perfect Litter Box

Hello readers!

I am often asked what kind of litter box rabbits prefer. Well,

let me tell you,

each rabbit is unique, and understanding your bunny's personality will go a long way in helping you find the most appropriate litter box. There are, however, some basic factors to consider beforehand.

CHOOSING A LITTER BOX FOR YOUR BUNNY:

The most important thing is to make sure the box is big enough for your rabbit to put his entire body in and also make sure the sides are not so high that the bunny can't jump into it. The sides shouldn't be too low either, as your bunny may hop in and pee over the edge! Typically, a simple cat litter box is a good place to start.

CHOOSING A LITTER: There is a wide array of litters to choose from. You can use a recycled paper litter like

Yesterdays News or Carefresh. These work well at eliminating odors and are also biodegradable. However, for multiple rabbit households, recycled paper litter gets expensive and you might want to try wood stove pellets instead. These are tiny, pressed pellets of wood used for fuel. They might not be available in stores (like Agway) during the summer months; however, they come in 40 lb. bags that last for a long time!

DON'T USE CORNCOB, PINE, CEDAR OR CAT LITTER: Corncob can cause problems for your rabbit's digestive system and pine or cedar is harmful to a bunny's respiratory system. Also, never use clay litter designed for cats. If this litter is ingested it could be fatal to your rabbit.

Once you have your simple cat litter box and chosen litter, simply fill the box up. You may only need an inch or two of litter. (Try to avoid overfilling the box which will in effect lower the sides – we want to avoid those over the edge “accidents”!) Many rabbits like a fresh layer of hay on top of the litter each day. This is also a good idea if you are training or re-training your rabbit. This way, your rabbit is attracted to the box and will be more inclined to do his business there.

OTHER TYPES OF LITTER BOXES: If your bunny does not seem to want to use a rectangular litter box but is still using a corner of the cage, try negotiating by using a corner litter box. Typically, these boxes have a low front and are designed by pet stores for ferrets, small rabbits and other rodents. There are also various litter boxes with no rim on the front...these are very useful if you have a disabled or older rabbit who is having trouble getting into a traditional litter box.

REDUCING THE ODOR OF THE LITTER BOX WITHOUT HAVING TO CLEAN IT DAILY:

You can try using different types of litter to see which will take care of the odor. You can also buy a litter box with a hood. These can be found in the cat section of your pet store and can be the answer for rabbits who are free roaming. A covered litter box looks better, too – your guests may never even know you have a rabbit!

WHAT TO DO WITH A DIG, DIG, DIGGER? This can be very annoying... your bunny uses his litter box perfectly, and then proceeds to dig it up spreading litter all over your living room floor. First, look for potential reasons why your bunny is doing this...is the litter box dirty? Perhaps your bunny doesn't like foreign material like hay in the box. If it is just that your rabbit enjoys digging, the best solution I have found is to buy a litter box with a grated bottom. Usually, this type of litter box is actually a combination of two boxes with an inner box that has a grated surface. This helps in two ways; one, you can put most of the litter underneath the grate where your bunny can't dig at it and two, the unpleasant sensation of digging against a grate might curb your rabbit's love for digging. A hooded litterbox can also be a good solution for a digging rabbit as it is covered entirely.

You might have to experiment with various litter boxes before you find out what is best for your bunny and your family. Rabbits are easily litter box trained, but not all of them have the same needs when it comes to kinds of litter boxes.



HRN News: Thank you to everyone for making 2006 such a great year for House Rabbit Network! Following are highlights of our most recent successes.

HRN Wins Awards/Grants!

For the second time in three years, HRN was awarded an Animal Rescue Grant from Oxbow Pet Products! This is an annual award offered to recognize and support "outstanding animal rescue and rehabilitation programs". HRN was one of three recipients in 2006 awarded a \$1000 grant. This much appreciated contribution will go towards the medical bills of our foster bunnies.

We are also delighted to report that HRN is the recipient of a \$1000 grant from Wal-Mart! The Wal-Mart/Tewksbury "Community Matching Grant Program" offered HRN the opportunity to match a portion of funds raised through our Yankee Candle Fundraiser up to \$1000 and HRN received the full amount. Wal-Mart is also receptive to the idea of conducting an HRN Education Day at their busy Tewksbury location which would be excellent exposure for us.

Flatbread Benefit raises \$2000!

HRN's special



benefit at the Flatbread restaurant in November was an enormous success! Flatbread's donation from the sale of pizzas combined with the proceeds from the Chinese Auction raised just over \$2000 for the bunnies! It was a fun event with wonderful prizes, delicious food and a chance to socialize with other bunny lovers.

Thanks to the following sponsors for making this night so successful: North Shore Music Theatre * Larcom Theatre *

Hawthorne Hotel * Winston Flowers * Salem Witch Museum * Trustees of Reservations * Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum * Trader Joe's * Putnam Pantry * Henry Derby House Bed & Breakfast and Boutique * Donna Martinez * Winfreys * Peabody Essex Museum * Pangea, the Vegan Store * New England Aquarium * Rubicat Design and Photography * Busy Bunny * Dodge Grain * Joan Taylor * Sharon Reebenacker * Something for All Occasions * Muscular Therapy Associates * Chez Biggles * Sweet Meadow Farm * Whole Foods * Bunny Hugs Petsitting * Starbucks * Giles * Oxbow Hay * MFA Boston * Belmont Pet * PetSmart * Build a Bear * Beverly Wild Bird and Pet Supply * Essex Preferred * Barbara Foye * Salem Maritime Museum * Vicki Bilafer

Medway EFP Partnership

Medway Especially For Pets chose HRN as part of their community outreach for 2006. HRN received supply donations, which went to the foster homes and customers donated almost \$300. Additionally, the in-store bulletin board gave us some much needed publicity.

Adoptions and Ed Days

HRN placed 141 rabbits into good, indoor homes during 2006! This number far exceeds the number of adoptions in 2005 and includes both single rabbits and bonded pairs.

Additionally, HRN held 43 Education Days at locations throughout Eastern Massachusetts including pet shops, fairs and even Starbucks.

HRN In the Press

In the past year, HRN managed to receive substantial exposure in the press thanks to the efforts of volunteers who contacted their local papers. This resulted in several newspapers, including the Somerville Journal,

Nashoba Valley Chronicle and the Woburn Advocate, covering HRN's adoption and educational outreach work. A recurring topic was the issue of strays and the reasons why domesticated rabbits should never be set loose in the wild. At Easter, a prime time for impulse buying of baby rabbits, HRN was prominently featured in the Boston Globe. In this article, Suzanne Trayhan (HRN's founder) was interviewed on rabbit rescue work, the responsibilities involved in caring for a pet bunny, and the common misconception that rabbits are good pets for young children.

PETCO Selling Rabbits!

The House Rabbit Network is saddened to learn that PetCo has abandoned its "Think Adoption First" initiative and has unfortunately started selling rabbits in their stores. Since HRN is against selling rabbits in stores and cannot in any way condone it, HRN will no longer be able to continue its relationship with PetCo. HRN is pleased to see that many people have contacted PetCo to express their concerns with this development.

Upcoming Education Events

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

- Mar. 3 - **Agway**, S. Chelmsford, MA 12:00-3:00 pm

February is Adopt a Rescued Rabbit Month

Sadly, rabbits are the third most common animals abandoned in shelters across the country. Many people are not aware that rabbits are in shelters and are in need of adoption, just like dogs and cats. We encourage you to make **adoption your first option** when thinking about adding a companion rabbit to your family. Please call us at 781-431-1211 to speak to us about adoption.

To download the flyer:

<http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/flyers/FebAdoptABunMonth.pdf>

FEBRUARY IS Adopt a Rescued Rabbit MONTH



Did you know rabbits are the third most common animals abandoned at shelters and in need of loving homes? They are intelligent, social animals capable of forming life-long bonds with their human companions.

The House Rabbit Network is an organization dedicated to educating the public and to fostering and adoption of companion rabbits. We encourage you to make **adoption your first option** when thinking about adding a companion rabbit to your family.



Visit us at www.rabbitnetwork.org or call us 781-431-1211

HRN Rescues 34 Rabbits in Fitchburg!

On January 25, 2007 HRN took in 34 rabbits from a law enforcement case in Fitchburg MA. We were given only 48 hours to make arrangements and take the rabbits in. The last few weeks have been very hectic as we have scrambled to pull in the rabbits, sex them, and get them into temporary housing. To say this is a huge undertaking would be putting it mildly. Right now we are hopefully looking to place 10-20 rabbits in other rescue groups. Thanks to the following groups for taking some rabbits in:

- * Sweet Binks * 3Bunnies
- * Hop Along Hollow



Please support these groups too!

HRN is also seeking:

- * **Adoptions** of the rabbits we currently have, in order to make room for these guys as they are fixed
- * **Donations** to pay for spays/neuters
- * **Foster homes** for these buns. Many need to be held for a couple of months until they are old enough to be fixed
- * **Adoptive homes** for some of these rabbits that will be available for adoption in the next 2-3 weeks



For monetary donations you can contribute either by check or with PayPal. Paypal options are on the web site: <http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/fitchburg.shtml>.

If you prefer to pay by check, please make it out to **House Rabbit Network**. In the memo section, write **Fitchburg** and mail it to:

House Rabbit Network
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Woburn, MA 01888

If you can help, please send us an email at info@rabbitnetwork.org or call 781-431-1211.



This Valentine's Day, won't you be mine?

House Rabbit Network has many pairs, even a trio, available for adoption. They have each other, now all they need is YOU!!!

Noelle & Spirit



Reeses & Juju B



Alto & Maya



Skittles & Tootsie



Ice & Cole



Chloe & Clover



Darcy, Alfalfa & Buckwheat



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Members: Time to Renew Your Membership Not a Member? Please Join!

House Rabbit Network is now in its 8th 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.

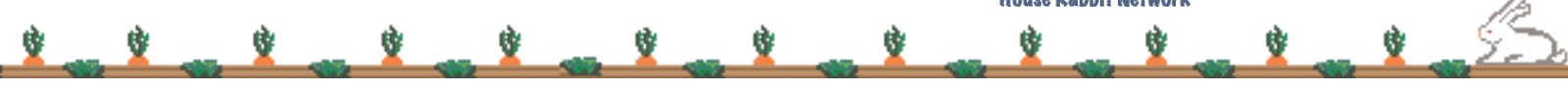
Visit our website to find out how to help: www.rabbitnetwork.org.

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.

Help make a difference in a rabbits 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 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

- 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:
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