



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

Winter - Spring 2013

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The Incurrable Alpha

by A. A.

We should've known when we first laid eyes on her. She was the energetic rabbit vying for our attention by running back and forth in her pen and standing on her hind legs, while the other rabbits glanced at us and went back to sleep. Every move she made screamed, "Look at me! Take me home!" I'm sure that if she had the ability, she would've donned a top hat and danced a number from A Chorus Line.

That was the day that H.P. Fluffcraft, our big puffball of a mini-lop, became our first rabbit. She was a handful from the beginning but we figured she needed time to adjust to new surroundings. However, as time went on, we realized that she's different. She tears through the room at amazing speeds and leaps over everything meant to contain her. She chews every varnished wood surface she can sink her teeth into. She's defiant and fearless. She is senseless destruction with a cotton tail. She rules her territory. She is the alpha bunny. If all of this sounds familiar, your bunny may be one, too. I knew I'd adjust to her personality, and that if she

wanted to run the show and put decorative gnaw marks on my furniture, so be it, but I know that a lot of people are apt to give a rabbit away or abandon it because they think a headstrong bunny is too difficult to deal with. So I'm sharing my tips on living with an alpha bun, with the hope that more people will open their hearts to bunnies with big personalities.

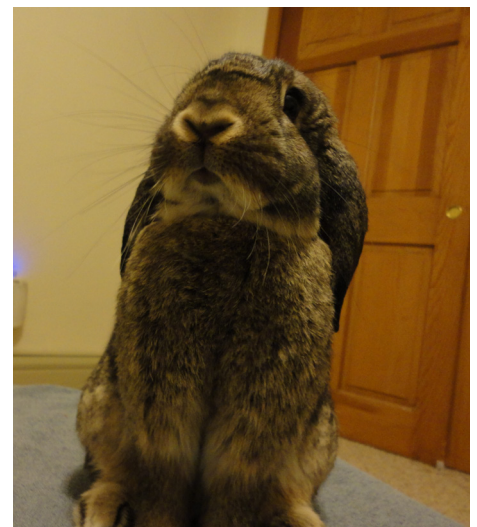
Stubbornness and Chewing

The first and perhaps most important point is that stubbornness doesn't equal aggression. Your alpha's destructiveness and reluctance to follow direction doesn't mean that she will turn vicious, or that she's inherently sad or angry. From an alpha's perspective, she is in charge, not you, and she's simply treating you like a lower-ranking rabbit.

Fluffcraft is a sweet, purring, licking bunny who loves my company but I know that she sees me as somewhat of a minion, which makes training nearly impossible. Saying, "No" in a loud, authoritative voice, and teaching commands, has never worked for me. She'll pause and look up to acknowledge that something was

said, and then go right back to gnawing. To quote Groundskeeper Willie from The Simpsons, "Willie hears ya. And Willie don't care."

I've found that redirection works better than anything else. Physically move your rabbit away from the chew site and distract her with one of her favorite toys. She'll probably go back to the area a couple of times, but eventually she will grow tired of being moved, and give up. My rabbit has now learned to leave the chew site after being moved once. Then, identify the areas that your bunny likes to chew the most and then rub Ivory soap onto the wood. There will be noticeable residue but in my experience, it's the only thing that works.



Toileting

Most people with bunnies will say that you must have a litter pan, as it makes cage cleaning easier, and that bunnies can be toilet trained

in no time. As an alpha owner, I call foul. I'll forever be perplexed by the fact that Fluffcraft decided to do her business in her cage rather than on the carpet, without any serious training, yet when a litter pan was introduced, she would grab it and toss it to other side of her cage, as if the very idea insulted her. After constantly trying to re-introduce it, we decided that a litter pan wasn't a necessity. Even a stubborn rabbit prefers to have a familiar toilet area, and our bun stopped going in her regular place when the litter pan showed up, because it upset the order she had established, so the litter pan was actually counterproductive. If your bun is toileting in her cage then don't trouble

yourself with a litter pan if she's really fighting it. Don't feel pressured just because other rabbit owners have had it work for them. They may have much more easily trainable bunnies.

Craftiness

"Honey, we have a Houdini bunny." That's what my husband said after the first time we had to corral Fluffcraft after an escape, and it's a fitting title. Alphas have a sense of curiosity that makes them craftier than the average bunny. We learned that a determined alpha can and will jump a

two-foot rabbit fence, open rabbit gates and slightly-ajar doors with her teeth, open the lid to her pellet container, jump straight up the walls and try to take the curtains down, and cause general mayhem. If you've seen the Raving Rabbids series of video games, where bunnies wreak havoc on society, then you've seen life with an alpha. This means



that unless you have a completely sealed off, totally bunny-proofed room, you're probably never going to be able to let your alpha roam unsupervised. This isn't the kind of bun who can have free range of a house, or even be alone in a room, not only because they'll destroy everything, but because they're fearless and will get into harmful situations. Our bun once ate plastic while my back was turned, which resulted in mild GI stasis and a day spent at the emergency vet. There was also a night in which she escaped her

room, and my husband and I found her in the bathroom, chewing on the laundry basket. I don't like to think about what would've happened if she's gotten into the bleach or detergent that was on the bottom shelf, or if she'd decided she wanted to go down the stairs. She's also taken some very high-flying leaps and crash-landed, in one case, over a fence and halfway into a trash can.

Their rambunctiousness can't be contained, so it's best to be as diligent as possible in both rabbit-proofing and monitoring. All doors should be kept completely closed, curtains pulled away from reach, wires well-hidden or removed, debris kept off the floor, and baseboard heating flaps closed so that your bunny's feet don't get caught. If your bun is a jumper and overly curious about windows and what lies beyond them, I recommend keeping them closed as well, especially if your screens aren't sturdy. Most importantly, keep a watchful eye. It will be inconvenient at times, but preventing escape and injury will save you a lot of stress and money in the long-run.

The upside to all this fearlessness is that your alpha probably won't be frightened by every little noise

she hears. Our bunny ignores thunder, music, lawn mowers, trash trucks, barking dogs, etc. The only sound that visibly upsets her is shrieking children outside, and I can't say I blame her on that one.

Digging

Female alphas may be more prone to obsessive digging. For us, this meant having a rabbit that repeatedly flipped her wooden house completely over and onto her feet, in addition to chewing a sizeable hole in the bottom of her first cage. After replacing the cage, we put a piece of untreated wood on the floor of her wooden house. This won't stop a rabbit from digging but the wood can be easily and cheaply replaced and I can't say the same about cages. Securing her wooden house so that she couldn't injure herself was the next step. We took two handles from an old cage, screwed them into the roof of the wooden house and latched them onto the sides of her cage. She can still knock the house around but she can't flip it over anymore.

Sexual Maturity

At around four months of age, the courting ritual started. Fluffcraft would circle my feet while honking and spraying poop like water out of lawn sprinkler. Dear Fluffcraft had chosen me as a mate. She aggressively humped my leg and bit my ankles while

doing so. She was obsessed with being near me and would cry and thump if she could see me but couldn't get to me.

All of the rabbit owners posting online said that these behaviors were distinctly male and that no female rabbit would ever do those things. Such statements are absolute nonsense. Remember, rabbits are not human. They do

*“ Food goes in bowl.
Simple, right? ”*

not have the socially-constructed gender roles that humans tend to project onto animals. Alphas of both genders tend to display more of the unwanted sexual behaviors such as spraying, humping, possessiveness, and distress at being separated, than other rabbits. If your rabbit is sexually aggressive, and you're unsure of its gender, don't assume it's male (the vet can sex your bun if you can't do it yourself.) Your honking, humpy, female rabbit is not abnormal. She's acting according to her biology. When it comes to rabbit courtship, there is virtually no difference in behavior between the sexes; any differences typically stem from an individual rabbit's personality.

Getting your bun fixed not only improves her chances of living a long, healthy life, but it usually eliminates these behaviors and makes your alpha easier to be

around because her hormones are no longer driving her to brink of insanity. Your alpha's psychological health will improve, which will make her a better companion. Unfortunately, you might have to endure a couple of months of this, as I did, until your bun is old enough to be spayed.

Feeding

Food goes in bowl. Simple, right? Well, not with an alpha. To put it mildly, alphas can be impatient. Our bunny will lunge at the cup of food before I even have a chance to put it in her bowl. She bites the cup and pulls it down to her level, sometimes even holding on to it with her paws. It gets particularly bad when it's a favorite treat like pellets, which she spills in her haste. For a five pound animal, she's surprisingly strong. If her cage door is open, she'll bolt in and out of the cage, constantly checking her bowl and getting increasingly agitated if things don't appear fast enough. She'll climb on us run in frantic circles, and end up thumping or kicking out of frustration.

My husband and I use two different approaches. I give her a piece of food through the closed cage door. She gets distracted enough to allow me to open the door and put the rest in her bowl without her rushing for it. So far, this has always worked.

The other method requires a little

training, and isn't as reliable. My husband taught her the "wait" command by holding the cup above her cage, over the bowl, and saying, "wait." He lets her run in and out until she realizes that calming down is the only way to get her food. When she finally sits patiently by her bowl, he gives her the food. Sometimes it works quickly and other times it doesn't work at all, but we've had enough success that it's worth the effort. Vet visits. Routine vet visits can be very trying with a bunny that's used to doing as she pleases. Even our seasoned veterinary technician came away from Fluffcraft's pre-spay exam with a scratched, bleeding wrist. Fluffcraft was like a creature from a monster movie; you could tell where she'd been from the all the noise but by the time you looked, she'd already run to another part of the room. Fluffcraft practically performed parkour to avoid being touched by anyone other than me. If your bun reacts this way, the vet may ask you to assist with the exam. Your rabbit will probably calm down a little just by having you in the room, and she's more likely to sit still for her physical if you're the one holding her. Be prepared for the exam to run a little long, as it might take some time for your bun to settle down. Illness. If you're extremely lucky, your rabbit will never get sick,

but most likely you'll deal with at least one situation that requires administering medication and/or feeding of Critical Care. Some people claim that weak, sick rabbits won't fight when given an oral syringe, but your alpha bun almost certainly will. Fluffcraft decided to fight me every step of the way during her brief bouts with GI stasis and gas. After a day of not eating or drinking, she used all the strength she had to wiggle out of my grasp and run away from me, only allowing me near her to pet her head.

It is absolutely vital to syringe-feed your rabbit if she's not eating on her own, and the same can be said for any medication that your vet prescribes, so these are times when you have to be assertive. Of course, your vet will show you how to administer the syringe, but if they've already given your bunny pain meds she'll be a lot calmer in the office for the demonstration than she will be at home when the drugs wear off. My husband and I have to work as team to subdue her, and I recommend getting assistance if possible. The first step is to corner your rabbit or wait until she corners herself (my bun prefers corners when she's sick). I know how that sounds, but our rabbit backs up and runs away if there's space to do so. When in a corner, she's more resigned to the

fact that moonwalking out of the situation isn't an option. Step two is to immobilize her head so that she can't shake it side to side to avoid the syringe. Gently place one hand under her chin and close your hand around her jawbones. Fluffcraft calms down when she realizes that she can't simply jostle herself free anymore. Step three is to insert the syringe in the side of her mouth, since she probably won't obediently open her mouth for you. She may not stay calm for long, but you'll be able to do it quickly once you've done it a couple of times. It's an unpleasant experience to do things that put your bunny under stress, but her life depends on your ability to take charge. Life with my feisty alpha has been nothing but fulfilling. The issues that arise seem daunting at first, but once you know how to handle the situations, your stress level will be greatly reduced and you'll be able to spend more time enjoying your bunny's company, whether she's flopped over asleep or gnawing on the closet door.



HRN Fundraiser
Laugh for the Buns!
April 28 at 6:30pm
Giggles Comedy Club



Come spend an evening in the company of fellow rabbit-lovers and the good folks from HRN! Join us on Sunday, April 28 at the Giggles Comedy Club in the Prince Pizzeria in Saugus, Mass. for a night of pizza, laughs, and fun — all in support of our buns! Tickets are \$25 each and include unlimited cheese pizza from 6:30 — 7:30, and a 75-minute comedy show at 7:30. (You can also purchase food and drinks from the pizzeria menu.) The comics billed for that evening are Artie Januario, Graig Murphy, and Tony V.

We'll be having a prize auction, too, so be sure to check out the HRN website as the date of the event approaches to see what the prizes will be. And of course, all proceeds of the evening go to support the House Rabbit Network!

There are two easy way to buy tickets. First, go to the Giggles 2013 fundraiser page on the HRN website: www.rabbitnetwork.org/giggles.php

If you'd like to buy your tickets online, you can make the purchase securely with Paypal from that page. 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!

The fundraiser web page also has an order form that you can print and fill out, if you prefer to pay by check or money order. You can make your payment out to the House Rabbit Network, and send it by mail to HRN.

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

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

HRN Contact Info:

P.O. Box 2602
Woburn, MA 01888-1102
info@rabbitnetwork.org
www.rabbitnetwork.org

Prince Pizzeria Contact Info:

517 Broadway (Rte 1 southbound)
Saugus, MA 01906
(781) 233-9950
www.princepizzeria.com

2012 Adoptions:

The House Rabbit Network is very proud to announce that in 2012 we had 181 adoptions network-wide! We are deeply grateful to our foster families for the care they give the bunnies while they wait for their forever families. Given our success in 2012, it's thrilling to think of what we can achieve in 2013.

HRN at Years End

Also in 2012 was the grand opening of our Billerica rabbit shelter - the first of its kind in Massachusetts. The shelter houses about 14 rabbits of all sizes and colors, and is staffed by a crew of dedicated and loving volunteers. It opened in August of 2012, and by the end of the year it had already seen 15

adoptions – that's 100% turnover! This is a tremendous achievement and a very promising start for our shelter.

Many thanks to our members, volunteers, foster families and adopting families, for helping us give that many more rabbits a chance at a happy life.

Shelter Challenge

Vote early, vote often

You can help the House Rabbit Network win \$1,000!

The Animal Rescue Site's yearly online challenge is in progress, with animal shelters of all stripes competing for national and state prizes. The House Rabbit Network won Massachusetts once before — please help us win again by voting for us online!

Voting is easy and takes only a few seconds. And you can vote every day until the contest ends on April 28, 2013!



Help HRN Win \$1,000 in the Animal Rescue Site shelter challenge!

Here's how to vote:

1. Go to the Animal Rescue Site shelter challenge web page:
<http://www.theanimalrescuesite.com/clickToGive/shelterchallenge.faces>
2. Type "House Rabbit Network" in the Shelter Name search box, and set the country to "United States," and the state to "MA."
3. Click the search button. The page will reload and display the search results.
4. Where the House Rabbit Network is listed in the search results, click the vote button.
5. You will arrive at the "Confirm Your Vote!" page. Type the sequence of six letters and numbers in boldface and click confirm vote. That's all there is to it — you've voted for HRN!
6. Vote again from your iPad, tablet, and smartphone!
7. Tell your friends, and remember that you can vote once a day every day until April 28!

The prize up for grabs is a cool \$1,000, and we know our awesome members can vote us into first place. A vote for HRN is a vote for bunnies, so please vote as often as you can!

Stella Wins the Lottery

by Suzanne Trayhan

Life can take some interesting twists and turns. We are all accustomed to looking at things our own way, but it often takes a stranger to put a different perspective on things.

The House Rabbit Network was part of the “great angora rescue,” the name we used for the rescue of approximately 150 rabbits from Canada. Close to 75 rabbits came into our staging area, where we sexed, sorted, and then sent them on to other rescue groups. HRN took in several of these rabbits, too. One of the rabbits we kept was a pretty, young, gray girl with a severe infection.

She appeared to have a huge abscess covering both her shoulders and chest, and reaching all the way down her belly. HRN decided we would keep her, rather than send her to another rescue, because we had the means to treat her medically. I named her Stella.

The abscess was too large to operate on. Stella was treated with antibiotics in the hopes that it would clear up, or at least become small enough that we could do surgery. Remarkably, within a month it seemed like the infection was completely gone. We were thrilled. We gave her

another two weeks to really be sure, and to allow her to put some weight on, and we then scheduled her spay.

Two days before her spay, I went



downstairs to feed the bunnies. Stella didn't look right. She was lying over her litter box and appeared to be in serious pain. My first thoughts were that she was in stasis. I picked her up and flipped her over, wanting to palpate her belly. To my surprise, I saw a large red object that appeared to be coming out of her vagina. It was a couple of inches wide. She had either a bladder or uterine prolapse.

Of course, it was Sunday morning. I had to take her into Angell Memorial Hospital. Upon arriving, they immediately pulled

her into the critical care area and then came to consult with me. I was swamped, and while I would always do what is best for the buns, I was grumbling under my breath. I needed this like I needed a hole in the head. I had so many other things I needed to do, and Stella needed emergency surgery.

It turned out to be a uterine prolapse, two days before her scheduled spay date. Talk about bad luck! If only I had spayed her the week before, I wouldn't be spending a Sunday at Angell and getting a \$1,400 surgery on a rabbit. I was venting to my vet, who commented that this is so uncommon I would have a better chance of winning the lottery.

Stella came through her surgery with flying colors and I returned to Angell the following day to pick her up. I half-joked with the receptionist that I had a better chance of winning the lottery than dealing with a uterine prolapse, but do I win the lottery? No, I get the uterine prolapse. She looked at me and simply said, “Stella won the lottery.”

It was like a lightning bolt hit me. She was right, Stella did win the lottery. Well, almost, not quite. Stella started her life in horrid conditions. The rabbits were saved

from the squalor and the rescue began. She was lucky to be pulled with the group of rabbits coming into New England, and because we could medically treat her abscesses, she ended up with HRN. Next, most rescue groups would not have had the means to provide her with emergency \$1,400 surgery for her uterine prolapse. This

little girl was in the right place on several different occasions.

Stella could have been beyond



saving , or she could have ended up with people unable to cope with her medical needs. In some ways it did seem like she had won the lottery. But not quite yet, her story would not be complete unless we found the perfect home for her. Once again, Stella struck gold. Lorraine, one of the original volunteers who helped bring the buns through Maine, wanted to adopt her. She couldn't ask for a better home. Now Stella has truly won the lottery.



HRN After Easter: Four Seasons, One Message

By Sadie MacMillan

Easter has come and gone, and Spring is now officially underway.

Every year at Easter time, we at the House Rabbit Network put our hearts and souls into spreading the word that rabbits are not Easter toys, and this year was no different. This year we once again held education events at local businesses, put up flyers, and wrote letters to the editors of local newspapers, to tell the public that rabbits require care and commitment, and shouldn't be purchased on a whim just because it's Easter and they're cute. But although we may turn up the volume of our message at Eastertime in particular, the message itself remains at the core of the HRN mission.

We know that most people are generally ignorant about house rabbits, and don't necessarily realize that rabbits are thinking, feeling, social animals.

And it's because of this ignorance that people buy rabbits as presents at Eastertime, as if they were toys. But these families probably don't know that rabbits

have strict nutritional requirements. And they probably didn't imagine that not all rabbit behavior is cute and cuddly. Unprepared to care for an animal that could easily live for 10 years or longer, these families often just give up. They hand the rabbit off to a shelter, sell it or give it away to the first taker, or cruelest of all, just abandon it outside - sentencing it to certain death. With the Easter season over, we're fast approaching the time of year when we begin to see the heartbreaking fallout of this ignorance.

A key part of the HRN mission is and always will be to open people's eyes to the joys - and realities - of house rabbits as companion animals. A companion is someone whose well-being is important to you because come what may, their continued existence makes your world a better place.

A toy, on the other hand, is something you acquire for amusement, and something you set aside as soon as it has lost its power to amuse.

At Easter time and at all times, rabbits everywhere depend on us to make that distinction.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Contact House Rabbit Network:

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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.

Memberships run from April 1 to March 31 (donations received January–March will be credited for the following year). To join, fill out this page and mail it with your check payable to:

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

Choose your membership level:

- Dwarf.....\$ 15.00
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- Mix (other).....\$ _____

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