



House Rabbit Network

P.O. Box 2602

Woburn, MA 01888-1102



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

RABBIT TRACKS

Fall 2011/Winter 2012



HELP WANTED! HRN needs volunteers in all ways possible. Please contact us for more info!

Complications of a Spay - Part I p 2

Simple Beauty: In Praise of the New Zealand White p 4

Clicker Training Your Rabbit..... p 5

Plus: HRN Spotlight - The New Hampshire Rabbit Rescue and HRN News: Updates, Ed Events & More

Bootsie's babies. Bootsie was rescued from the Lempster, NH rescue in October 2011.

Complications of a Spay - Part I

By Kyle Eslinger

As Jen and I walked through the front door of a less-than knowledgeable rabbit owner's home, we were greeted with the exuberant bellows of a man who's properly, and proudly, nourished the family pet for the evening: "Come on in, I just gave her a big pile of dog food!"

If I had more athletic ability and a mean rebellious streak I would've grabbed the cage and leapt out the window with my new rabbit in tow in a manner that would have had Bruce Willis give me a standing ovation.

My girlfriend and I had become privy to an unwanted rabbit that was brought to our attention by the FedEx driver that delivers to our small business. He had told us that the rabbit's owners, which had acquired her through the means of a neighboring meat breeder as a pet for their daughter a year prior, were having a problem finding a taker for it, and he was concerned that the next logical step would be to "set it free" by opening up the back door and letting her make her way through nature's glory via the small tree line in their back yard.

Since we already owned a three year old mini-lop buck named Pippin, who is very territorial and temperamental, we contemplated this decision for a good week before deciding to oblige by taking the unwanted animal. The plan was simple – we would take her in and attempt the bonding process. If successful, we would have two very content bunny-mates – if unsuccessful, she would find temporary shelter at a nearby no-kill rabbit rescue where we acquired Pippin, and where I had the utmost confidence in her being well looked after.

Her current owners lacked anything above a middle school vocabulary, but they were easy enough to talk to, and in all honesty, seemed as though their intentions were good. The fact that she was sitting in a small 10x10x10 cage (which, for a seven pound blue Magpie Harlequin doe, is akin to a human making a bathtub with a roof his home) with her feet mired in her own urine, cedar shavings lining the perimeter, and a "big pile of dog food!" sitting in the corner, I was told all I needed to know about the first year of this rabbit's life. It also told me all I needed to know regarding the difference between good intentions and solid education regarding the care of an exotic animal. If her initial fate in this world was to be skinned, and butchered by her original owner, she hadn't taken too many steps further by moving next door and becoming the ignorant neighbor's glorified zoo exhibit.

Lying at my feet was an overweight Boston Terrier, sorrowfully looking up at me as if to inquire whether I could assess her living situation as well.

After repeatedly assuring them that we would most certainly NOT eat her when we got home (didn't I tell you their intentions were good?), we loaded her up in our car and made our way back home, with a quick stop to pick up a litter box along the way.

I could go on and tell you about the first week of her in our home, in

which we named her Harlett and she learned the value of a larger living space with an increased habitat size, about her very speedy two day learning curve of litter habits and the true value of a diet not consisting of dog food, but rather fresh timothy hay, timothy-based pellets and leafy greens, with a few fruity treats every night. All of that is for the rabbits to read and enjoy. No doubt what all of you rabbit owners may want to read about is what WE



This is what a typical bunny spay incision site looks like.

learned – what it was like to have an un-spayed rabbit roaming about the house during exercise time.

If the carpet and bed sheets could talk they would tell you how they left our house that first night in a manner that would have the FCC intervening. As happy as our new roaming rabbit was, with each subsequent binky, urine and poop would fly like deranged party favors at a "welcome home!" event. The bed sheets became urine spotted and the site of football training camp as she practiced hiking objects between her legs and across the room, all while attempting to make a cozy home

somewhere between the mattress and the box spring. Corner carpeting turned into frayed strands of loose fiber that made the floorboard look like it was ripping its hair out. My hands began to resemble raw hamburger with each attempt to calm her down and coax her back into her habitat, as she took on the personality of Mike Tyson, both boxing and biting in the ring.

This was all relatively new to us, as our neutered male finds great enjoyment in relaxing under a table, exploring the hall and living room. Then finally receiving his nightly massage on the bed when he's out of his habitat.

Before any bonding was going to happen, the new addition to our family (because let's face it, if you're tolerant of the species and you get to know one over the course of a few days, you're not letting it go) was most definitely going to be spayed. This was knowledge that, bad rabbit habits aside, was obvious to me for medical reasons alone, concerning a female rabbit's 80% chance of uterine cancer by the age of five.

Utilizing a nearby humane organization, we scheduled her spay surgery at an animal clinic about an hour away. Knowing how difficult it is to find a rabbit savvy vet when it comes to anesthetics and the proper protocol for a major invasive surgery such as a spay, I was extremely happy to learn that the doctor had altered hundreds of rabbits.

After dropping her off at the clinic at 9am, I spent the rest of my day reading by the town's lake until returning to pick her up at around 4pm. As I waited in the lobby, I went over, in my head, some of the questions to ask the doctor or technician who brought her out to me. I'd done a fair amount of research

on the post-op care instructions of a spayed rabbit, but I definitely wanted to clarify the necessity of pain medications and the alarming situations that can occur, such as refusal to eat, and ripped-out stitches.



“Wuji”, a bunny that recently came into HRN foster care. This is what her belly looks like right after a spay surgery.

When she was brought out to me, she was alertly sitting in the corner of her carrier cage, being toted along by a vet tech. I approached the vet tech with a smile and asked her if Harlett was doing all right, to which the tech responded that everything had gone as smoothly as possible, and there were no complications. I asked her if they'd be prescribing any pain medication for her during the recovery process, to which she looked at me as though I'd asked her to, in detail, describe the Big Bang Theory.

“Well, um, you should've circled that on your form?”

I said, “Oh There wasn't an option on the form.”

“Well we don't usually give pain medication to rabbits I don't think.”

“Ok,” I said hesitantly, “What else do I need to know about the process I'm about to go through?”

“Make sure she doesn't pull at her stitches.”

“...and if she does?”

“Bring her in right away.”

“Is there a good way to attempt to prevent that from happening?”

“Just keep a close eye on her.”

Unsatisfied with the dialogue I was having with the vet technician, as well as reading that pain meds aren't always completely necessary, and confident enough in my knowledge of taking care of Harlett throughout her recovery period, I left the clinic and headed for home so that she could get comfortable and return to a normal, healthy, less aggressive life.

For a day and a half, everything was as it should be. I put Harlett back in her habitat when we got home, and provided her with all of the necessities of her normal diet so that she could eat when she felt like it. I inspected the incision site, which was incredibly small and precise, and had been sewn together with interior dissolvable stitches. On her floor I laid down a heavy, soft blanket for her to lie on. Finally, I draped a beach towel over the back, top and sides of her home, so that she had a semi-darkened environment to recover in peace, leaving an exposed side of her cage facing us so we could look in on her.

She began eating straight parsley within four hours of returning home and shortly followed that up with some hardcore drinks from her sipper tube of water. We encouraged more eating with three grapes that night, which

she gladly accepted. Within 24 hours she had finished her greens, including romaine lettuce, and had begun to nibble her pellets, as well as pay attention to the hay ball sitting in the corner. Her litter habits retreated a little, and

I assume this was because of her altered environment. She would choose several spots of the blanket to urinate on, on top of using her litter box. I kept the area clean and dry, so as to not risk any sort of infection of the incision,

and let this behavior go, willing to rectify it when her life was back to normal.

Then, on day 2, everything fell apart.

To be continued...



Simple Beauty: In Praise of the New Zealand White

by Suzanne Rubins

As ice cream flavors become more and more elaborate, with chunks of various things mixed in, surveys show good old vanilla remains the most popular flavor. Unfortunately this is not true for the plain vanillas of the domestic rabbit world: the New Zealand Whites. Nearly everyone who calls our adoption line with a specific type in mind wants a dwarf or a Holland Lop, and most people don't even want to meet the big white rabbits with the red eyes. Shelters who help out overcrowded affiliates by taking transfers sometimes ask them specifically not to send the whites because they are unlikely to be adopted. We sometimes pair them with a more colorful companion to increase their chances of finding a home, but they often wait a very long time. Lightning has been at the MSPCA Boston for six months.



New Zealand rabbits were selectively bred to have a high incidence of albinism to create a standardized white coat for testing dyes and cosmetics. Albinism is a relatively rare genetic defect found in most species of animals—including humans, including me—which limits production of the melanin which gives color in the hair/fur, skin and eyes. This results in poor vision and sensitivity to light, but otherwise there are no health problems. However, all unwanted rabbits are at risk, and the New Zealand Whites have an even tougher time than most finding good adoptive homes. So here I go to sing their praises and help them along a little.

I believe all true rabbit lovers must also love the New Zealand Whites, the Alice in Wonderland rabbits. Their snowy coats (well, sometimes they get smudged a little!) provide no distraction from our appreciation of their shapes and features. They have not been bred to look like stuffed toys, but have classic rabbit features: pear-shaped bodies, chunky back feet, feminine little dewlaps, noses with "character" and those sweet round cheeks. Some have slender faces and feet, but most are pretty hefty and muscular—plenty of bunny to love.

The shorter fur on their ears allows delicate seashell colors of pink or lavender to show through. Finally, their gentle eyes have a range of shades from clear pale pink to ruby red. Even if this feature is not particularly appealing to you, remember that very little of your enjoyment of your pet rabbit depends on gazing intently into his eyes anyway! You may find yourself coming to appreciate their tenderness or just learning to ignore them.

Of course appearance is much less important than personality, and the New Zealands have a lot going for them on the character front. They generally share the calm, friendly disposition of other large rabbits, though of course individual differences and how they have been handled in the past are more important than breed. We have known many sweet and gregarious New Zealands that are very personable. So please consider one of these simple, beautiful animals when you look for a companion rabbit. Chances are there are several in the area waiting for a good home. Owning a New Zealand White will automatically give you credentials as a hard-core rabbit fan. Plus—if you already have an all-black bun, the combination makes for a cool "photograph and negative" effect!

Article reprinted from 2001



Clicker Training Your Rabbit

by Joan Orr and Teresa Lewin

Jump! Spin! Come when you call – YES you can train your rabbit to do these things and beyond. More than just wriggling noses and long ears, rabbits go way beyond cute and are intelligent fun-loving pets.



Clicker training with Oreo on his bridge.

Clicker training is a marker-based system of teaching in which a click sound is used to tell the rabbit, “Yes – that was right!” The precision and consistency of the click sound make this a far superior approach to the use of food without a marker or to the use of just a verbal marker (such as “good” or “yes”). The click is always followed closely with a food treat so that the rabbit comes to associate the click with something desirable. Soon the click becomes a positive reinforcer for the rabbit and he will begin to try to elicit a click and treat from you. There is no scolding, correction or punishment in clicker training. Mistakes are simply ignored.

Training is fun for you and your bun, and helps to develop a bond between human and animal. Finding food, creating homes, and staying safe all

require various activities and problem solving, most of which are not required of a rabbit living in a cage or a human house. By providing training sessions for your bunny you are allowing him to use his natural abilities and providing mental and physical stimulation.

This will contribute to a happier life for your pet. Rabbits can have lots of fun doing tricks, but if you are not interested in tricks, you can use clicker training to teach your bunny to be more confident and learn useful and even potentially life-saving skills such as coming when called, going back to his cage on cue, cooperating

with nail clipping, getting into a basket or carrier, and eating when he is ill. Shelter rabbits can benefit from clicker training since they can be taught to come happily to the front of their cages and interact with potential adopters, thus making them more adoptable.

Getting Started

To begin with clicker training, you need a clicker and treats that your rabbit loves. Be sure that the rabbit has free access to ample hay and fresh water at all times. The best treats to use for clicker training are small and able to be consumed quickly. Give only a very small amount of sweet or new foods at one time.

Wait for the rabbit to do something, take a step, look at you, move a paw, any movement and then click and treat. The click must occur at the

exact moment that the bunny performs the movement that is being marked. A few short sessions may be required before the rabbit seems to get the idea. Soon the rabbit will try to repeat behaviors that earned a click and a treat - and the game is on!

Adding a Cue

A cue tells the rabbit what you want it to do in order to receive the click and treat. This can be a word or a hand signal. Once a rabbit is reliably offering a behavior, a cue can be added at the same time as the behavior is happening. For example if you have placed a low jump between the rabbit and his litter box and the rabbit jumps over the jump in order to get to the box, you can click during the jump (and treat when the rabbit lands) to indicate that this is desired behavior. When the jumping is happening reliably, you can start saying the word “jump” as the rabbit jumps and then before the jump. Now you have a rabbit that jumps in response to the verbal cue “jump” and you can begin to make the jumps higher or longer or add more jumps to the sequence.

Touch a Target

You can teach a rabbit to touch and then follow a target (a ping pong ball on the end of a pen for example). Hold the target in the vicinity of the rabbit and click/treat for looking at the target, then for any movement in the direction of the target, then for actually touching the target with his nose. This incremental building of a behavior one small step at a time is called shaping. Soon the rabbit will follow the target and you can use this to lead him and to teach other

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Be sure rabbit is healthy, is receiving adequate nutrition, and has free access to hay and water at all times in its condo.
2. Use good treats – the reward must be more interesting to the rabbit than distractions in the environment.
3. Be patient – allow the rabbit ample time and opportunity to explore the training area (this may take more than one session).
4. Provide the rabbit with a comfort zone – a non-slip mat and litter box and perhaps even a covered box where he can hide if necessary.
5. Click and treat in the cage at first if the rabbit is nervous on the outside.
6. Work in a low distraction environment at first – use barriers and remove anything that you do not want the rabbit to investigate.
7. Keep sessions short – 5 minutes is plenty at first.
8. Rabbits are easily bored – repeat one thing only a few times per session.
9. Use several different types of treats in each session and reserve special treats only for training.
10. Use jackpots – larger or special treats to acknowledge especially good performance.



Favorite Treats: Raisins (max 3 per day), Carrots (max 3 inches per day), Romaine lettuce, Dandelion leaves, Parsley, Timothy hay pellets, Banana (max 1 inch per day), Apple (max 10 bites per day)



Teaching bunny to “touch a target” and then follow.

things such as come when called, go into or come out of his cage, and get into a basket.

Fading the Clicker and Treats

Every time the rabbit hears a click he must receive a treat. This establishes a bond of trust. It is not necessary to use the clicker forever, though. Once a behavior has been learned and put on cue,

the click/treat can be faded by using it less frequently and then only intermittently to keep the behavior strong.

You will simply be amazed at how smart your bunny is!



Joan and Teresa are the co-creators of the Doggone Crazy! Board game and Clicker Puppy training DVD (www.doggonecrazy.ca), co-founders of Doggone Safe (www.doggone-safe.com) and co-authors of the newly published book, “Getting Started: Clicking with Your Rabbit” (www.clickerbunny.com). Teresa offers consulting and workshop services to shelters and rabbit clubs wishing to implement clicker training programs.



The New Hampshire Rabbit Rescue

The House Rabbit Network recently worked with local animal control to remove 86 rabbits from a hoarding situation in Lempster, NH. The rabbits were living in filthy conditions, with urine and feces piled high on the floors. The rabbits were thirsty, plagued with numerous injuries and parasites, and were very frightened. Despite this, the bunnies have been remarkably resilient. They are sweet, gentle bunnies that are looking for love, a good meal, and an endless bowl of fresh water.

Animal hoarding occurs when someone keeps a larger than usual number of pets without the ability to properly care for the animals. Although the owners deeply cared for the rabbits, they lacked the ability to provide critical veterinary care to the injured rabbits, they lacked the space to prevent fighting among the rabbits and they were



unable to spay and neuter the rabbits in order to prevent the continuous breeding that was occurring.



Several of the bunnies have been treated for various injuries including broken limbs, lacerations, and abscesses. Most of the females have already been spayed and some of the males have begun to be neutered as well.

The House Rabbit Network wants to thank the following groups who have taken in rabbits and helped with this rescue:

* Cotton Tail Rabbit Rescue, CT
<http://cottontailrescue.weebly.com>

* Hop Along Hollow, CT
<http://www.hopalonghollow.org/>

* House Rabbit Connection, MA/CT
<http://hopline.org/>

* Hoppity Haven Rabbit Rescue, ME
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hoppity-Haven-Rabbit-Rescue/232777300105645>

* The Animal Welfare Society, ME
<http://www.animalwelfaresociety.org/>

* Animal Refuge League of Greater Portland, ME
<http://www.arlgp.org/>





* My Hope's In You Small Animal Rescue, NY
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/My-Hopes-In-You-Small-Animal-Rescue/321590637634>

Please support these rescue groups too!

Thank you to Oxbow for their donation of pellets, and many of our supporters and volunteers for their donations of pellets and hay as well.

HRN is also seeking:

* Adoptions!! We need to place as many of the rabbits we currently have in order to make room for



these guys as we get them fixed. If you are interested in any of the rabbits that are available for adoption, please call our Hotline at 781-431-1211 or email us at info@rabbitnetwork.org

* Leads on shelter space in the 93/128/495 area - primarily Burlington and surrounding cities and towns

* Donations to help pay for all the spays and neuters

* Foster homes to care for the rabbits. If you are interested in fostering or learning about what is involved in fostering, please email us at foster@rabbitnetwork.org

* Pellet and hay donations

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

For monetary donations you can contribute either by check, Chip-In or with PayPal. Paypal and Chip-In options can be done via our site at the bottom of the



page here:

<http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/articles/newhampshire.shtml>

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

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

The bunnies thank you for all your help and support!

HRN News

HRN 2012 Calendar

Get your 2012 HRN calendars before they sell out! Only \$10 per calendar. Order online and have it shipped via snail mail. All proceeds go to the care of the rabbits in HRN foster care.



You can either purchase the calendars online using Paypal or send HRN a check to:

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

Shipping rates:

- 1 calendar = \$3.00
- 2 calendars = \$4.00
- 3 calendars = \$5.00
- 4 calendars = \$6.00

If you are interested in buying 5 or more calendars, please contact us for shipping rates at info@rabbitnetwork.org.

Facebook and Twitter

HRN is not only on Facebook, but Twitter too. Follow us on both for the latest adoptions, adoptables, education events, bunny trivia, bunny rescues, volunteer activities and more!

Facebook link:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/House-Rabbit-Network/201518592185?sk=wall>

Twitter link:

<http://twitter.com/RabbitNetwork>

Rabbit Education Days

We hold education events at various locations in Eastern Massachusetts. All dates and locations are on our web site at <http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/events.shtml>. Please stop by to visit, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have about rabbits and their care. Information about adoption, along with a listing of rabbits currently up for adoption, will also be available. We do not adopt out on-site.

* Lowell Humane Society, February 2012 - Date and Time TBA

Sponsor a Rabbit

The House Rabbit Network has many rabbits that require extra expenses. If you can not foster, but would like to help, sponsoring a rabbit might be right for you! If you can assist with the veterinary and medical bills of our rabbits, you will directly assist in our mission to improve their quality of life. In some cases we are looking to raise a sum of money to pay their bills. Other rabbits require ongoing care with monthly costs. We realize that most people can not afford a full sponsorship, so you can elect to partially sponsor a bunny.



Mattie came into the House Rabbit Network after she was viciously attacked by a dog. She had multiple, severe fractures in her back leg and because infection had already set in, it became necessary to amputate her back leg. Mattie has recovered and has finally been adopted! If you can donate to help defray the costs of her surgery, which came to \$1714.50 that would be great!

The dollar amounts listed are our financial goals to which you may contribute all or part. All donations are tax deductible. <http://www.rabbitnetwork.org/sponsor.shtml>

Sponsors will have their names appear on our web site. Of course you can also choose to remain anonymous if you prefer. We PayPal enabled our sponsorship program.

Help Wanted!

When we mention the House Rabbit Network, we often get people telling us that they wish they could help, but they aren't sure what they can do. Truth is, we can use a lot of help. Some things are very simple, others require a lot more work. Here are some examples:

- * Spread the Word
- * Help a Foster Home or Be a Foster Home
- * Fund Raising
- * Make a Donation
- * Educational Materials
- * Drivers Wanted
- * Adoption Days, Information Booths
- * Computer Services

Anything you can do, even volunteering a few hours here and there, will be appreciated. info@rabbitnetwork.org



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 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 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**) 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

Please send me _____ copies of *Rabbit Health in the 21st Century* 2nd Edition

at \$20.00 each: \$ _____
 Membership: \$ _____
 Other Contribution: \$ _____

Total: \$ _____

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