

Friends of Rabbits

Rabbit And Small Animal Rescue Newsletter

info@friendsofrabbits.org • www.friendsofrabbits.org • 703-627-7892

Remembering Chris Thurman

Friends of Rabbits volunteer and animal rescuer Chris V. Thurman, 19, passed away unexpectedly on January 8, 2019. Chris was a kind and compassionate young man who loved nature and was deeply passionate about saving animals, especially those in greatest need. Many of you may have met Chris at Friends of Rabbits adoption events, where he often volunteered. He also fostered many rabbits for us and was always ready to help catch stray or abandoned rabbits at any hour, in any kind of weather. We extend our sympathies to Chris's family and friends. He will be greatly missed.



Photo: Robin S.

Chris holds Zoey, a rabbit he fostered, at an FoR adoption event.

Inside this issue

In Memoriam
Remembering Chris Thurman

Feature Article
The Dangers of Outdoor Living

Health Corner
Head Tilt in Rabbits

News Briefs
Bunnacula Ball

Bunny Yoga

Holiday Party

Raffle Winners

Volunteer Spotlight
FoR Calendar

Classifieds & Upcoming Events

The Dangers of Outdoor Living

By Gail N.

Every year Friends of Rabbits (FoR) spends thousands of hours locating, capturing, and caring for rabbits that have been released outdoors. Overall, about 50 rabbits were rescued by FoR in MD, DC, and VA in 2018. Over a six-month period in 2018, FoR rescued 15 rabbits from one Alexandria, VA neighborhood alone. The rabbits that FoR finds and rescues are the lucky ones. These rabbits are provided with immediate medical care, given a behavioral assessment, and



Photos: Casey K.

Sugar Bee was found matted and filthy in MD (left), but after lots of work, Sugar Bee is clean, warm, and fluffy! (right)

adopted out.

There are multiple reasons that pet bunnies find themselves outside with no shelter, food, water, or companionship. Many rabbit owners do not spay or neuter their pets. According to Houserabbit Adoption, Rescue & Education (H.A.R.E.), one intact pair of rabbits can produce about 74 rabbits in a year. So many unexpected rabbit births may overwhelm an unprepared owner who sees native Eastern Cottontail rabbits and believe that domestic rabbits can survive on their own. Sometimes when a rabbit was obtained as a child's pet, or an older child moves out of the family home, no one in the family is prepared to take on the rabbit's care. Another reason domestic rabbits may be released outside is that people may believe that rabbits are easy pets. Rabbits require space and time to exercise, fresh hay and greens every day, lots of companionship, and medical care from a veterinarian whose specialty is exotic pets. The reality of how much work is needed to care for a rabbit may lead owners to change their minds about having a pet rabbit.

Some background into the origins of our domestic rabbits may help us understand why pet rabbits should never be let loose outside. First, all rabbits are prey animals, making them a prime target for predators. Second, the domestic pet rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, is from Europe and was domesticated hundreds of years ago. American Eastern Cottontail rabbits, *Sylvilagus floridanus*, have abilities to help them survive outside that domestic rabbits do not have. They mature faster at birth and have an agouti coat that allows them to blend in with their surroundings. Most domestic rabbits, with the exception of those with an agouti coat, cannot blend into the background. The domestic rabbits' varied coat colors make them easy prey for dogs, foxes, and cats. In addition, domestic rabbits are prone to internal and external parasites like fleas, ear mites, and bot fly larvae as well as disease when living outside. Lastly, since they have been bred as pets, they are not cautious in populated areas and are frequently injured or killed by cars.

FoR receives multiple emails, texts, and calls from the public about domestic rabbit sightings with requests for help to rescue the animal(s). FoR responds by recruiting people to verify that the rabbit is still present, checking the terrain, and assembling a rescue group. Sometimes, as in the series of rescues in VA, FoR, members of the public, and other rescue groups (a big shout-out to all the cat 'peeps' who help out with whatever we need!) coordinate to catch groups and single buns. These rescues are time intensive, involving two to four people texting and calling each other while attempting to corral the rabbit(s) with multiple pens.



A wild Eastern cottontail rabbit (left image). Clover Boy, a domestic rabbit (far right), could be mistaken for a wild cottontail due to his agouti coat. He is shown with his littermates, both of whom have domestic coat colors.



Cuterebra or bot fly larvae were removed from Ashley (above) Ashley shaved so bot fly larvae could be safely removed (left)

Cottontail image courtesy "The High Fin Sperm Whale" Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported

Photos: Pam H.

Rescue efforts become more urgent when rabbits are sighted close to traffic, or before heat and cold waves or storms. As this article is being written, the 16th stray rabbit from one VA neighborhood was spotted close to a busy street. Volunteers were busy gathering resources for a capture.

A conversation with the primary coordinator of these rescues, Pam H., a twenty-year veteran of FoR, gave additional insights about the challenges rescuers and rabbits face when rabbits live outside. Examples of challenges faced during rescues include English as a second language, economic inequities, and varying attitudes towards animal welfare across cultures. Research from the Humane Society of the United States and the International Fund for Animal Welfare on the treatment of companion animals across cultures indicates that primary differences in companion animal care most often result from lack of access to information and services. Although based on research concerning cats and dogs, these principles appear to apply to many of



Fawkes lived outside for over a year and had severe abscesses (left), an overgrown incisor (center), but is now healthy and happy (right)

the situations FoR has encountered during rabbit rescues. FoR prefers education and offers assistance to help animals who are in danger of being released or abandoned, where possible.

In summary, domestic rabbits belong indoors, with their family! Educate yourself and others about the proper care of a pet rabbit. Since the average lifespan for an indoor rabbit is 8 to 14 years, plan who will care for her if she is a child's pet or if your teen leaves for college. Next, always spay or neuter your pet, and consider adopting from a rescue or shelter that spays or neuters before adopting. Spaying and neutering not only reduces health problems but decreases the number of rabbits in shelters and rescues. Rabbit rescue organizations like FoR offer assistance for specific care tailored to your family needs and has access to community resources to help integrate a rabbit into your family. Lastly, prepare yourself for the love and laughter than bunnies bring to your family's life.

References

The Clover Leaf, Newsletter of the Maryland/DC/ NoVA Chapter of the House Rabbit Society. *PETER, BUGS, or ROGER? Can You Tell a Cottontail from a Hare from a House Rabbit?* Spring & Summer 2000, Issue VII. By Kate McGinley, Retrieved from <http://rabbitsinthehouse.org/newsletter/TCLspringsummer2000.pdf>

The House Rabbit Society. *Indoor Living is Best for Rabbit.* Mar 8, 2017. By Amy Ramnaraine. Retrieved from <https://rabbit.org/indoor-living-is-best-for-rabbits/>

The Humane Society of the United States. *Pets for Life research and reports.* 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.animalsheltering.org/page/pets-life-research-and-reports>

International Fund for Animal Welfare. *Working with dogs across cultures.* Nov. 2, 2017. By Janice Hannah. Retrieved from <https://www.ifaw.org/canada/news/working-dogs-across-cultures>

Why Spay or Neuter my rabbit? Some Scary Numbers... by Dana Krempels, Ph.D. January 2006.

Retrieved from <http://www.bio.miami.edu/hare/scary.html>

Wildlife Rehabber. *Eastern Cottontail.* 1998-2019. Retrieved from <https://wildliferehabber.com/rehab-species/eastern-cottontail>

The Bunnacula Ball was a Spooktacular Success!

by Mara H.

Friends of Rabbits held our very first Bunnacula Ball on October 13, 2018 in Fairfax Station, Virginia. Guests dined on Halloween-themed vegan fare and enjoyed a specialty cocktail along with other beverages. The evening included a costume contest, silent auction (thank you donors!), very cool



Photos: Shari K.

Bunnacula Ball attendees enjoying the festivities.

swag bags, a spooky scavenger hunt, and a chance to gather around the fire pit and share scary (and not so scary) stories! Special thanks to Sherry R. (our resident Halloween aficionado) for heading up the planning committee and providing all the fantastic decorations, as well as the awesome prizes. We raised over \$1700 for the rabbits and many attendees were eager to know if the Bunnacula Ball will become an annual event – we hope so!



Bunny Yoga

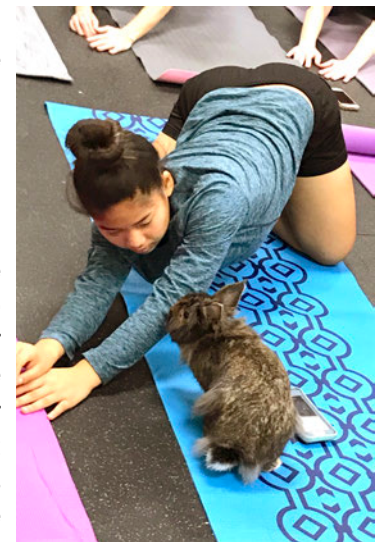
By Mara H.

Bunny Yoga with Colt and Shannon returned to the **Veterinary Holistic Center** in Springfield VA on November 3. Just as popular as our first Bunny Yoga event, the class completely sold out. Amazing volunteer instructors Colt and Shannon led participants through a fun and invigorating hour of yoga. Meanwhile, a curious herd of foster rabbits, along with some bunnies who already found their forever homes, mingled with practitioners under the watchful gaze of our Rabbit Wranglers. (A certain rabbit, who shall remain nameless, once again camped out on one yoga mat.) Attendees also had an opportunity to visit with adoptable bunnies before and after the class, leading to two new adoptions! Special thanks to Dr. Kocen for again donating the use the VHC facility – and to his wife and daughter for volunteering! We hope to hold another Bunny Yoga with Colt and Shannon later this year. But in the meantime, Rise Well-Being Center in Reston, VA is sponsoring a Bunny Yoga fundraiser for Friends of Rabbits on March 30 – watch your inbox for details!



Photos: Shari K.

Bunny and human yogis meet.



The Friends of Rabbits Holiday Party

By Mara H.

The annual Friends of Rabbits holiday party was held at Bunny HQ in Columbia, Maryland on Sunday December 16. A wonderful group of volunteers, donors, adopters and friends turned out to enjoy a delicious vegan buffet and the company of fellow bunny lovers. After two years at alternate venues, it was also great to return to Bunny HQ to see recent changes and updates and especially to visit with our many adoptable rabbits. What better way to celebrate another successful year of rabbit rescue!



Photo: Shari K.

Recent Changes to FoR Leadership

By Mara H.

The new year has brought some changes to the board and leadership positions. Friends of Rabbits has bid farewell to Executive Director and Board member Alex Deckert. After working very hard for the rabbits, Alex has moved on to pursue her passion for rescuing farm animals. Note: If you previously communicated directly with Alex about bunny sitting, grooming appointments, buying supplies, etc., please be sure to send your future requests to: info@friendsofrabbits.org - or - admin@friendsofrabbits.org

We're also very happy to announce two additions to our Board: Stefani McGregor, a great supporter (and creator of those beautiful hand-thrown bunny bowls we've been selling) and Board Secretary Beth Rosenfeld, a longtime volunteer and bunny lover, will join Susan Wong, Pam Hurley and Mara Hurwitt on the Board of Directors.

Thanks to everyone who purchased tickets for our 2018 holiday raffle. We raised \$550 for our rescue rabbits! Here's a photo of Max and Ruby (formerly Raven and River Song) enjoying their Grand Prize, a Kessler Bunny Castle!

volunteer spotlight

Creating the 2019 Friends of Rabbits Calendar

By Taylor S.

When I started creating the 2019 Friends of Rabbits calendar I wanted to help spread the word about Friends of Rabbits and our goal. The last calendar we did was in 2014, I thought that reviving this calendar would be a great project for the volunteers of Friends of Rabbits and others who just enjoy rabbits. I wanted this calendar to include different animals with rabbits to reach a broader audience, but also to show how rabbits and other animals interact. I started by creating an online photo contest and reaching out to animal shelters, animal hospitals, and of course the Friends of Rabbits volunteers. Over the course of about a month I got around 30 entries of mainly rabbits, but some of other animals. I used judges from the Arlington animal shelter that Friends of Rabbits often corresponds with and a few veterinarians from Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services. All the judges were very kind and happy to help Friends of Rabbits. I initially created the calendar with Adobe InDesign, but couldn't find a cheap way to print. We ended up using Vistaprint, which helped a lot because their prices were fair and we could print on a larger scale. Overall I'm glad I could do this project for Friends of Rabbits and bring awareness to our cause. I'm really thankful for Susan, Mara, and all the participants for making this process as easy as possible.



**Friends of Rabbits 2019 Calendars
are still available!**

Email info@friendsofrabbits.org to
purchase yours — they are
Hare today, gone tomorrow...



Head Tilt in House Rabbits

By Maxine K.

It's a bunny parent's worst nightmare. You come home and discover your bunny frantically rolling around in circles or falling over when standing. He appears disoriented and his head is tilted to one side. There's a good chance that your bunny has head tilt. Time is of the essence; you need to get him to a rabbit-savvy veterinarian immediately.

Head tilt, or "wry neck," is a medical condition known as torticollis (Latin for "twisted neck"), or vestibular disease. "It is a condition when a rabbit's neck twists and causes its head to tilt to one side."¹ However, this is not the best term because head tilt is really a symptom of disease rather than a disease itself.

"Signs of torticollis may develop gradually or appear quite suddenly, but the result is the same: a bunny is walking around with her head on sideways."² Head tilt can affect male and female rabbits of all ages and breeds. While there are multiple causes of head tilt, the two most common causes are *Encephalitozoon cuniculi* (*E. cuniculi*) and untreated ear infections.

E. cuniculi, or EC, is a parasite that attacks a rabbit's central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord). It is transmitted through exposure to the urine of infected animals. EC travels through the blood stream and body tissues and targets organs such as the heart, lungs, and liver. Eventually, it can make its way to the brain, kidneys, and eyes. Some infected rabbits never show symptoms and live normal lives. Others, often when faced with some type of stress – such as illness, injury, or disability – may start to exhibit more overt symptoms. Left untreated, EC can lead to death, which is why you should always contact a rabbit-savvy veterinarian immediately if your bunny exhibits signs of head tilt. Permanent head tilt can result from a bout of EC.³

Untreated ear infections can also result in temporary or permanent head tilt. A rabbit's ear canal consists of three parts: the external canal, the middle canal, and the inner canal. All three of these parts have the potential to develop an infection. When the infection reaches the inner ear canal, it causes inflammation in the vestibular tract, which affects the rabbit's balance. Sometimes nystagmus will be present, a condition in which the eyes are moving sideways or up and down. Although inner ear infections are the most severe and most likely to cause head tilt, middle ear infections can lead to head tilt as well. An ear infection could be caused by bacteria, mites, or an upper respiratory infection. A very severe ear infection can cause pus to form and prevent the vestibular system from functioning properly (leading to potentially permanent damage).

Other potential causes of head tilt include trauma to the head or neck, toxins such as lead paint, stroke, cancer, an abscess, and even poor nutrition.

Symptoms of head tilt range from mild to severe, and aside from the obvious tilted head, can include:

- An inability to lift the head
- Dizziness or loss of balance, including moving in circles
- Rapid back-and-forth eye movements that seem involuntary (nystagmus)
- Head swinging from side to side



Photo: Robin S.

- Tremors
- Nasal and eye discharge
- Signs of ear infection — pain, fever, ear discharge

How is Head Tilt Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian will start by doing a complete physical examination. This will help her to rule out other conditions that may present with symptoms similar to head tilt. Next, your veterinarian will perform a complete blood count (CBC) and biochemistry blood panel as well as a neurological exam. She will then most likely want to perform an *E. cuniculi* test.

A CT scan of the head may be performed to verify trauma, injury to the central nervous system, or issues with the inner ear. Sometimes, pus is visible inside the ear and the vet can take a sample for identification. This will reveal the type of bacteria most likely responsible for the infection and the types of antibiotics most likely to kill the specific bacteria causing the infection.

Your bunny's recent health history will also play an important role in the diagnostic process. Be sure to note exposure to other rabbits, recent illnesses, present diet, and recent trauma, if any. ⁴

Treatment of Head Tilt

Treating the source of the head tilt is the key to your rabbit's recovery. Depending on the cause of the illness, head tilt may become a permanent part of your bunny's life, but as long as your bunny is able to eat, drink, groom, and move around, there is no need for euthanasia.

Your veterinarian may decide on one or more of the following options for therapy: Antibiotics for inner ear infections, fluid therapy in the beginning to help your rabbit improve his hydration and appetite, nutritional aid, physical therapy, pain medication or anti-inflammatories, and even surgery.⁴

A combination of antibiotics is often more effective than a single one. However, it is critical that your veterinarian be familiar with the specific needs of rabbits in terms of antibiotics, as some of them (e.g., any oral penicillins such as amoxicillin, and any lincosamine antibiotics such as clindamycin) can be deadly to rabbits, even if they can be used safely in other species.

If *E. cuniculi* infection is suspected, your veterinarian will conduct a urinalysis and blood tests. Treatment for EC will include anti-parasitic medication (usually Panacur®, or fenbendazole), anti-vertigo medication, and anti-inflammatory medication. Your bunny may also need hospitalization for a few days until he is stabilized. *E. cuniculi* is not curable, but prompt treatment can stop the progression of the disease and reduce or eliminate the clinical signs.

Supportive Care

To help your rabbit with head tilt, you'll need to make some modifications:

1. Special Housing

Add padding to the sides of bunny's cage or pen (rolled towels, pillows, or crib liners). If he is rolling, spinning, or struggling to maintain his balance, confine him to a smaller space. This will keep him safer and actually help him to feel more grounded. A laundry basket makes a good safety enclosure during rolling periods. Line the bottom of the basket with some puppy pads, then some soft towels and a top layer of fleece to keep them comfy and dry. Then pad the sides with rolled towels for support.⁴

Although some rabbits with mild head tilt will continue to use their litterboxes, most head tilt rabbits will require a 'cut down' litter pan. You can accommodate your bunny by cutting the side of the litter pan to make

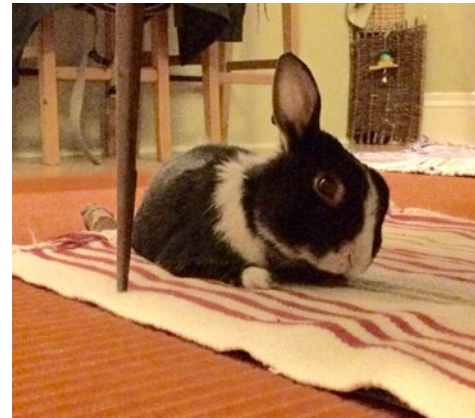


Photo: Beck B.

it easier for him to hop into it. Another option is to create a 'litter tray' instead of a litter pan using a container with very low edges.

If your rabbit is having trouble eating or drinking on his own, you will need to adapt his dishes for easier access or provide assisted feeding with Critical Care or other supplements fed via syringe. It's important that your bunny gets plenty of nutrients during his recovery.

2. Special care in keeping the 'down' eye and ear clean and healthy

You will need to keep a careful watch on your rabbit's "down eye" to prevent it from getting scratched on bedding or cage bars. Be sure to ask your vet for some ointment to keep the eye from getting dry.

3. Tips and tricks to help with seizures and spinning

Try to handle your rabbit as little as possible. Rabbits with head tilt struggle with keeping their balance, especially when they do not have their feet on the ground. If you must pick your bunny up, hold him tightly to your chest and brace his sides as much as possible.

During recovery, try to keep your bunny's living area as quiet and calm as possible. This can be a particularly scary and vulnerable time for your rabbit, and loud noises, bright lights, etc., can cause unnecessary anxiety.

Prognosis

Treatment for head tilt can take weeks or even months of medication and supportive care. Symptoms sometimes get worse before they get better. Although head tilt is difficult to treat, it *is* treatable, and many rabbits recover and go on to lead happy lives. Even those with a remaining tilt learn to adapt, but patience is key. With proper medication, therapy, and some modifications on your part, your bunny can make a full recovery and live a happy life as your loving companion for many years to come.

¹ <https://rabbit.org/health/tilt.html>

² <http://www.bio.miami.edu/hare/tilt.html>

³ <http://www.disabledrabbits.com/head-tilt.html>

⁴ <https://wagwalking.com/rabbit/condition/head-tilt>

Friends of Rabbits Columbia Supply Store

Open Daily

If you need information or assistance, please contact info@friendsofrabbits.org



Address: [10706 Vista Rd, Columbia, MD](https://www.google.com/maps/place/10706+Vista+Rd,+Columbia,+MD)

We carry all your bunny needs!

Standlee Timothy Hay and Orchard Grass-half and full bales

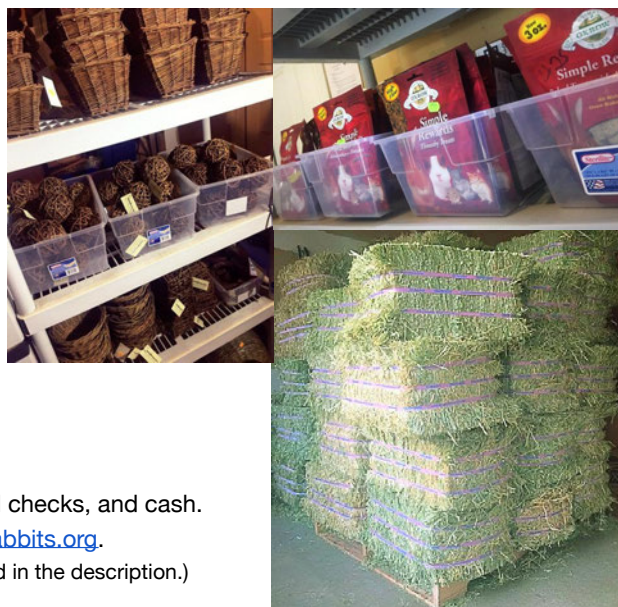
Binky Bunny Willow Toys & Tents

Oxbow food, treats & hay

We can accept purchases made with credit/debit cards, personal checks, and cash.

Payments can be made through PayPal to donations@friendsofrabbits.org.

(If you choose to pay with PayPal, please list which item(s) you purchased in the description.)



bunny personals

by Sharon H.



Desire

Pick me. Pick me. Pick me. I like being...pick me... petted. I am a...pick me...good bunny. I am...pick me...house trained. In conclusion, I would like to say... PICK ME!



Cova and Nova (Guinea Pigs)

Cova: Why are *we* in this newsletter?
Nova: Eh...A magician came and turned us into... ***RABBITS!***
Cova: No...that can't be right.
Nova: We're rabbits, I tell you! We're rabbits!
Cova: Okay...you're the smart one.



Pinky and Binky

Binky: Hi. I'm Pinky. This is Binky. We are both friendly and brave.
Pinky: *I'm* Pinky and you're Binky.
Binky: No, no...*I'm* Pinky and you're Binky. I had dibs on the name Pinky. Remember?
Pinky: Fine, I'll be Winky.
Binky: What? No, I wanna be Winky.
Pinky: Oh, brother.



Tiger

Younger buns say,
"No one will come
For you today."
My heart is large,
Too large, I'm told.
And I am small,
And I am old.

But I have faith,
And I have hope.
I choose to hop,
Instead of mope.
And on the day that
they choose me,
My heart will smile
so gleefully.



Iris Nicole and Jack a-tack

Jack: Well...
 Iris: Jackie, tell them that we're easy-going bunnies.
 Jack: Okay, so...
 Iris: And, and that we're gentle.
 Jack: Okay, so...
 Iris: And tell them we can use litter boxes, really well.
 Jack: Ah, Geez!



Evangeline

I'm cute. I'm cute! I'm cute. Dang it, I'm cute!
 I don't like being held, but I like being petted. I
 never met a litter box I did not like. *And*, I have
 long, beautiful fur, although I'll need daily
 grooming. Did I mention that I'm cute?



Oscar

I'm a Flemish giant mix, but I'm not even large. And you don't
 have to worry about bonding me, because I like being single. Hours
 of laying on the carpet and petting me await you. Sounds good?
 Alrighty then. Step on up, folks, single file. No pushing, please.
 That's it. That's it.



Tubs

I am...shy...very shy. I need some who is...
 patient. I am also sweet...Okay...Hmm, is
 someone really going to read this? Can I
 have a do-over...Please?
 This ad sucks.

upcoming events

Adoption Day at Columbia HQ

2nd Sunday of the month- email info@friendsofrabbits.org for more info and to schedule 'bunny speed dates.'

FoR Grooming and Adoption Days!

4th Sunday of the month

At these Adoption Days, Friends of Rabbits in Columbia also offers grooming services and nail trims: Please email info@friendsofrabbits.org to schedule an appointment! Walk-ins are welcome, but have the possibility of a long wait time. Nail trim \$12, Grooming \$15, extra charge may apply for matting.

Events at **PET SUPPLIES PLUS**

Every Saturday 11AM – 12 PM – Adoption Event, featuring New Rabbit of the Week and a short Q & A. [11054 Lee Highway Fairfax, VA](https://www.pet-supplies-plus.com/11054-Lee-Highway-Fairfax-VA) call Pet Supplies Plus to confirm (703) 359-2659

1st Friday of the month, Join Friends of Rabbits for Yappy Hour at Pet Supplies Plus in Fairfax. Donate to Friends of Rabbits and received 20% off a toy or a free self serve dog wash.

We need your help for resuming Adoption Events at **bark!**

We want to bring back our regular adoption events at the Bark! stores in Maryland. If you are interested in coordinating Bark! events or can help out, send an email to info@friendsofrabbits.org

Adoption events at **Kingstowne**



3rd Saturday of the month, 12:00-3:00pm.
[7875A Heneska Loop, Alexandria, VA](https://www.petvalu.com/7875A-Heneska-Loop-Alexandria-VA)
Located in: [Hilltop Village Center](https://www.petvalu.com/hilltop-village-center), Pet Valu is located next to LA Fitness and Navy Federal CU.

"The Mitten" at Robinson Nature Center

Sunday February 24, 11:30am – 1:00pm
Robinson Nature Center, [6692 Cedar Ln, Columbia, MD 21044](https://www.robinsonnaturecenter.org/6692-Cedar-Ln-Columbia-MD-21044)

Join Friends of Rabbits at the Robinson Nature Center for an event based on the children's book "The Mitten." Learn more about rabbits and hedgehogs!

Ready to Volunteer?

Friends of Rabbits needs volunteers, especially at Bunny HQ to help feed rabbits, clean habitats, groom rabbits and for admin/clerical support. You can also volunteer at events in Virginia or help online with social media, our website, fundraising, adoption screening, etc.

We can always use more volunteers for our Virginia adoption events at the Pet Valu, Fairfax Pet Supplies Plus, and other locations.



Editors: Amy S., Robin S.
FoR Board: Beth R., Stefani M., Susan W., Pam H., and Mara H.
Managing Editor: Beck B. editor@friendsofrabbits.org

Printed by: **PRINT O STAT**
Linthicum, MD
www.printostat.com