



Friends of Rabbits

RABBIT AND SMALL ANIMAL RESCUE NEWSLETTER

UPCOMING EVENTS

Columbia Bunny Headquarters Bimonthly Adoption Events + Grooming

Adoption events are held on the second and fourth Sundays of every month for approved adopters who have an appointment at Columbia HQ. To become an approved adopter (to adopt a single bunny or a new friend for your current bunny), please submit an Adoption Application. For more information, visit www.friendsofrabbits.org/adopt.

Columbia HQ also offers grooming services and nail trims. Schedule your appointment at www.friendsofrabbits.org/services/grooming. Grooming (brushing, matted fur removal) costs \$15 per half hour. More time may be required for bunnies with long and/or extremely matted fur. A nail trim costs \$15. Please note: You will need to book separate appointments for each rabbit and for each service.

Virginia Monthly Meet-n-Greet Educational Events + Grooming

Meet adoptable rabbits in Virginia and get your adoption questions answered on the first Sunday of every month from noon to 3 p.m. at Tango Pet Depot, 11213 Lee Highway, Suite N, Fairfax, VA 22030.

Does your rabbit need grooming? Please email info@friendsofrabbits.org to schedule an appointment for your rabbit during this event. Prices listed apply per rabbit:

- Nail trim only: \$15
- Grooming only (up to 20 minutes): \$10
- Nail trim and grooming: \$25
- Nail trim and extra grooming (heavy shedding, mats): \$35



HEALTH CORNER

Everything You Need to Know About E. cuniculi...So Far

By Melissa Hall

Encephalitozoon cuniculi (E. cuniculi), a disease that disproportionately affects rabbits, is a mystery that is difficult for exotic veterinarians, rescue organizations, and bunny owners to solve. Neither a virus nor a bacteria, E. cuniculi belongs to the phylum Microsporidia.

“E. cuniculi is both a parasite and fungus that can only live inside of animal cells,” said Dr. Michael Bignall, a veterinarian at Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services (SEAVS), in Fairfax, Virginia. “It is unlike other fungal infections caused by yeasts, valley fever, and Aspergillus.”

The House Rabbit Society (HRS) first investigated what was then known as “old-bunny paralysis” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. HRS collected deceased paralyzed rabbits and worked with pathologists to attempt to pinpoint what was causing weakness and paralysis in their hindlimbs. According to Dr. Bignall, the pathologists identified E. cuniculi but were unsure if it was the causative agent or organism.

So HRS reached out to veterinarians, who started collecting blood samples to identify and monitor carriers of E. cuniculi so they could track them going forward. Eventually, this scientific collaboration discovered that E. cuniculi did appear to be the causative organism.

E. cuniculi manifests differently in each

bunny and tends to migrate to the nervous system, the kidneys, and sometimes the eyes. “Bunnies infected in utero or very young can have the ocular form,” said Dr. Bignall.

Signs vary from rabbit to rabbit and may include head tilt, impaired coordination (ataxia), involuntary eye movements (nystagmus), partial or total muscle weakness (hemiparesis or paresis), tremors, seizures, rolling, hindlimb paralysis and/or splay, lack of appetite, and urinary incontinence. The disease can be acute, chronic, or recurring.

“Treatment for E. cuniculi is tricky as the clinical signs appear to be mainly from the tissue damage and inflammation caused by the immune response to the parasite[s] and destruction of the infected cells, rather than the parasites,” Dr. Bignall said. “That is why many bunnies with severe clinical signs don’t have a complete reversal, even with treatment.”

Continued on p. 8

Attention, FoR Fosterers!

Friends of Rabbits foster bunnies receive grooming and nail trim services for free! Please, make an appointment first.

Jo Fujito, Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services

By Melissa Hall



Licensed veterinary technician Jo Fujito examines a bunny patient at SEAVS. Photo courtesy of Jo Fujito.

For 3 years, Jo Fujito, a licensed veterinary technician at Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services (SEAVS), in Fairfax, Virginia, had aspirations of becoming a veterinarian. However, her nurturing side kicked in while working in the field; obtaining the title of doctor, she decided, wasn't her calling. "I like the hands-on part of it. My true passion lies in ... patient nursing care."

"As a nurse/technician, I get to act as an advocate for patients by connecting with them, closely monitoring their health status, and reporting pertinent observations to the attending doctor," she added.

A native of Bethesda, Maryland, and raised in Vienna, Virginia, Jo, who has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Virginia Tech and an associate degree in veterinary technology from Northern Virginia Community College, feels she was in the right place at the right time to step into the field.

In 2006, Jo took her dogs, Pancake, a tan Samoyed mix, and Tino, a Jack Russell Terrier, to Great Falls Animal Hospital for treatment of kennel cough. "I went in and asked specific and the right questions. The vet asked me if I wanted a job," she said. She eagerly accepted the role as vet assistant and learned the basics of companion animal veterinary medicine.

The veterinary occupation was a great fit.

Eager to expand her skills and advance

her career in the field, Jo accepted a position at Fairfax's VCA SouthPaws, a 24-hour specialty dog and cat hospital, in 2011. While at SouthPaws, she became passionate about the unpredictability, pace, and challenges of emergency veterinary medicine and took on leadership roles involving training, management, and community education.

In 2020, Jo expanded her veterinary technician role even further by accepting a position at SEAVS, which gave her the opportunity for her first "meet and greet" with a rabbit. "I had limited experience caring for rabbits before starting at [SEAVS]," she said. "But I'm happy that they're the most common species we see."

"I've learned so much about them in such a short time, and in my opinion, rabbit kisses are far superior to those of any other nonhuman species," she added.

Jo doesn't have any bunnies of her own yet. Her current menagerie includes Jelly Bean, a Husky mix; two bearded dragons; two crested geckos; one leopard gecko; an African bullfrog; one White's tree frog; one Russian tortoise; one box turtle; one diamondback terrapin; one Pueblan milk snake; one western hognose snake; one boa constrictor; one goldfish; one betta fish; and two hermit crabs.

In her free time, Jo enjoys doing craft projects, climbing trees, playing in the snow, putting together puzzles, growing plants, and eating Life Savers mints — specifically, Wint-O-Green.

Jo plans to put off retirement for as long as possible. Like the Energizer Bunny, she plans to keep going, saying, "Having a daily obligation keeps my brain happy."

House Rabbits Need Human Advocates

Bunnies have no voice. I chose to volunteer at my local rabbit rescue, Friends of Rabbits, after noticing how bunnies are often misunderstood and seen as food or cattle, or as worthless. I am disgusted by how people breed bunnies for money and neither care for their health nor show customers how to treat them. Then there is rabbit abuse, including an August 2023 case in Wisconsin, as well as people who feed baby bunnies to their reptiles, only to enjoy, record, and show the world how "educational" it is to enjoy a bunny's suffering while hearing its anguished screams.

I volunteer because even the justice system fails bunnies. In the Wisconsin case, a man was charged with three counts of mistreatment of animals/causing death. He had adopted bunnies from multiple rescues, only to hurt and kill them — this after the poor bunnies likely had been abandoned and had lived in terrible homes in the first place. The judge set the man's bond at \$500 cash. That's all these bunnies' lives were worth?

Usually only cats and dogs have humans advocating for them, and that upsets me. It takes only one bunny to show people what wonderful creatures bunnies are and comprehend how misunderstood they are.

I grew up around animals but only cats and dogs. I met a bunny about 2 years ago. It was the first time I ever interacted with a bunny, and I was amazed by how affectionate and perceptive, like cats and dogs, the little bunny was. I continue to be amazed by how bunnies perceive human emotions.

Bunnies are not starter pets and might not be good pets for children unless a family is prepared to make a lifetime commitment to them. But for those willing to make the commitment, house rabbits can be amazing companions and emotional support animals.

Manuel Suarez

Willow Tents: Safe, But No Substitute for Hay

By *Melisma Cox*

When my family and I adopted our two new rabbits from Friends of Rabbits, staff suggested I provide a willow tent for the buns to use as a chew toy and hideaway. Little did I know how much they would love this product!

As most bun parents know, rabbits' teeth never stop growing, so bunnies must continually chew to keep their teeth worn down to a safe length. While constant chewing is necessary, not all material is safe for rabbits to chew. Willow is safe, but is too much of it a good thing?

In my case, I noticed my rabbits weren't eating as much timothy hay during the day; they favored the willow tent. The nutrients in timothy hay make it a necessity in a bunny's diet. Willow tents don't contain those nutrients. I decided to take the tent away for a while when I saw the hay going untouched.

My veterinarian confirmed that timothy hay should take priority not only in the bunnies' diet but also as their regular nibbling material. So as much as rabbits find willow tents fun for chewing, too much is not a good thing. Willow tents should be enjoyed by rabbits in moderation.



Peanut: From Foster to Forever Home

By *Aleena Blank*

One day, my mom read the weekly newsletter at the school where she works and learned about a bunny that her principal's husband had recently caught. The bunny had been on the loose in her principal's neighborhood, but nobody noticed her. After asking if the bunny belonged to anyone, no one came forward, so she asked if anybody in the school was interested in taking it. Her principal's husband took the bunny in to give her temporary shelter before giving her to Friends of Rabbits.

My family members are massive bunny fans; we have one of our own, Shadow, a Netherland Dwarf! We talked about the rescue bunny and decided to foster her until she could find a permanent home. While I was at work, my parents drove to FoR's Columbia Bunny Headquarters to see the bunny and prepare for fostering her.

According to my dad, they INSTANTLY fell in love with her. But as soon as my parents picked her up to take her home from the shelter, they learned she already had a potential adopter, which worried them. But even though someone was interested in bonding her bunny with Peanut, the fosterers always have priority to adopt first.

Once I got off work, my dad picked me up and drove us home so I could meet our new foster bunny. I found out that this sweet girl was malnourished and pregnant. Unfortunately, her pregnancy had to be terminated because we were not able to provide the care that the baby bunnies would have needed. We agreed on the name Peanut, which was my mom's idea; the name fit Peanut perfectly because of the color of her fur.

Peanut was only 8 months old when we took her in for fostering, so she was still a baby. When I first held her, I started crying, and then my parents started crying, and we were all a sobbing mess! How could any creature so adorable and sweet be abandoned? We noticed Peanut was shaking a bunch, and we think it might have been from past trauma, but we weren't sure because we don't know anything about her past. We immediately gave her lots of water, hay, and pellets in hopes of fattening her up. She also got medication for potential parasites.

As you can probably guess, we fell so much in love with our little Peanut that we decided to keep her. She's irresistibly



Peanut relaxes at her new forever home. Photo courtesy of Aleena Blank.

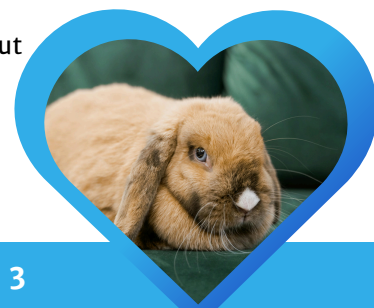
adorable and well behaved, and we have the space in our house to let her free roam.

Unfortunately, Shadow does not like Peanut. When we introduced them to each other, Shadow immediately rejected Peanut, and to this day, they are separated. We hope to work with FoR to bond Peanut with another rescue rabbit and eventually welcome another rescue bunny to our family.

This is a message to all the bunny owners who are thinking about abandoning or letting their rabbit free roam outside for the rest of their life. Once you bring a rabbit into your home, it must stay in your home. If you don't want the rabbit anymore, give it to your local rabbit rescue to ensure that it gets excellent care. Domesticated rabbits do not survive very long in the wild, so if you "set them free" thinking it will be good for them, it's actually the opposite and can result in the bunny's injury or death.

Peanut will continue to live a happy and healthy life in our loving home with a lifetime supply of cuddles and kisses.

We will love Peanut forever, and she will be our furry friend for as long as she lives!



Bunny Lounger Bed: A Labor of Love to Keep Buns Snug



These snuggle buns love to share their bed! Photo courtesy of Sara McClarnon.

By Sara McClarnon, aka Crafty Mermaid Sara

I started my “bunny business” in April 2020. I had recently lost my full-time job as an office manager for an events company, and the world was just beginning to figure out COVID-19. I already had an Etsy shop, Crafty Mermaid Sara, so when I decided to start making bunny products, it felt right to name my business Crafty Mermaid Sara’s Bunny Boutique.

I am a longtime bunny owner. My parents got me my first bunny when I was in second grade. Bugs Bunny was a beautiful chocolate Mini Rex. He lived to be 13 years old and passed away when I was in college. Over the years, between my mom and me, we have given homes to many rabbits, and they all have been so special, with their own lovely personalities!

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, my mom and I were talking about how our bunnies used to like to lie smooshed between things. From there, we came up with the Bunny Lounger Bed concept. We started with three sizes: small, medium, and large. Since then, we’ve refined the sizing to fit more bunnies, even an XL and XXL for the larger buns!

I shared what I was doing with a rabbit group in which I was active. Overnight, the four beds that I had made were sold out! I was completely taken aback by the amount of need there seems to be for products for pet rabbits, so I was really excited to help fulfill that need for other bunny owners like me.

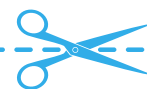
Part of what I think makes this business work is that I truly understand what all bunny owners want for their buns because I also want safe, high-quality products for my own bunnies, Rosie and Chewie! If I won’t give it to my own bunny, I won’t make it or sell it.

This business has brought so much joy to my life. I love seeing all the reviews and comments people leave regarding their purchases from my shop, and their photos are just amazing! It is so fulfilling to see a photo of a bunny truly relaxed and happy lying in a Bunny Lounger Bed!

When I started this business, I had no idea just how important it would become to me, in so many ways. About a year after opening the business, Rosie came down with an inner ear E. cuniculi infection. I got her to our exotic veterinarian right away and started treatment. We did 6 months of treatment and medications. Although it was tough for a while, Rosie is a fighter, so I kept fighting right along with her. She improved and adjusted to her new slightly tilted life. Her other signs resolved, but the tilt did not. She gets around really well, especially for her senior age of 12!

One of the biggest resources for Rosie has been the Bunny Lounger Beds. She has two in her padded enclosure at all times. They really provide so much comfort for her and enable her to rest her head when she needs to. We use the large size with her even though she only weighs 3 pounds because it provides enough wiggle room for her to move around. When she was in the early stages of her illness, doing lots of rolling, we used the medium size to help give her stability.

The bunny community, both online and in my area, Tampa Bay, Florida, has been so supportive of my business, and I am truly grateful for it. I also have been lucky enough to be a vendor at Southeast Bunfest and Tampa Bay Bunfest in Florida. I look forward to traveling to more Bunfest events to connect with even more members of our wonderful bunny community!



Score 10% off for all your bunny needs from Crafty Mermaid Sara’s Etsy shop!

Go to www.etsy.com/shop/CraftyMermaidSara and enter code **FOR2024** at checkout.



Review: Best in Show

By Aleena Blank

Crafty Mermaid Sara’s Bunny Lounger Beds are perfect for your bunny companions. Covered with soft cotton or cotton flannel fabric, the beds most definitely will make your bunnies feel like they’re on clouds! The beds will help them feel safe and secure.

Since rabbits are prey animals, they often need to calm down and relax; however, not all of them have the option to do so. With help from the amazing Crafty Mermaid Sara, whose shop, Crafty Mermaid Sara’s Bunny Boutique, is on Etsy, your bunnies will be happier than ever — as snug as a bug in a burrito (or a rug)!

It’s important to provide bunnies with the care and security they need. For just under \$30, you can purchase a handmade bunny bed that comes in various patterns and sizes! If your bun’s size/weight can’t be accommodated by the products offered, custom orders are available. The beds contain polyester fiber fill, providing just the right amount of cozy and firm. Happy buns mean lots of fun. “Hoppy” shopping!



Francesca: From a Dumped and Worthless “Object” to a Spoiled Bunny Princess

By Francesca With her Bundad, Manuel Suarez

My first adoptive family took me away from my mommy and my brothers and sisters and said I was cute. They gave me food, water, and hay. I was still a baby. One day, they decided they didn’t want me anymore, so they abandoned me outside, against my will. Some scary men caught me and took me to a shelter.

Bundad had been looking to adopt a bunny for 2 years and had been researching a lot. He spent weeks visiting the shelter, only to play with bunnies.

The first time I saw Bundad enter the room, I fell in love, and I pushed my nose through the cage. I wanted him to take me home. I wanted him to choose me as I chose him as my hooman. He walked in with a carrier and petted me. Then he left, and before I realized what was happening, a lady from the shelter opened my cage, picked me up, and put me inside that carrier. I was heading to a home with a loving family. I would begin a new life with lots of love, toys, and treats. I felt so comfortable in my new home, it took me less than 2 hours to flop inside my playpen.

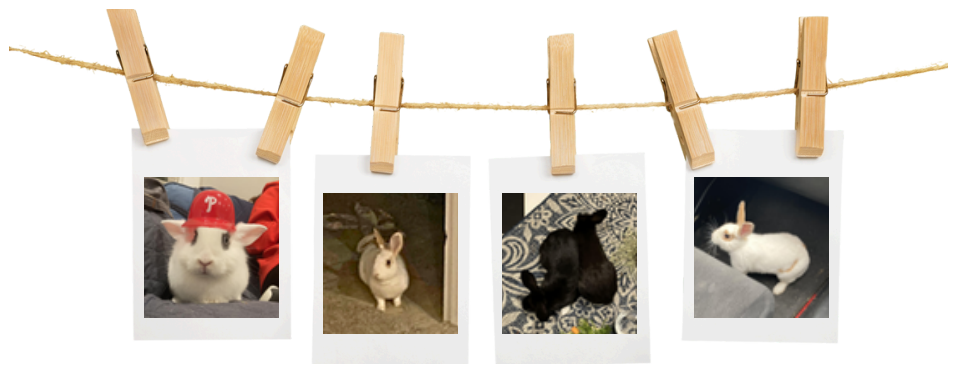
Now I have my own bathroom, living room, dining room, and “hidey-box.” Bundad loves me unconditionally, and I always wait for him to come home from work to cuddle with me and give me a chance to do zoomies and binkies. I let Bundad pick me up and hold me with only one hand. I always show the two dogs who’s the boss in the house and who rules. Their bed became my bed, Bundad’s bed became my bed, and all the couches in the house are mine, all mine!

Whenever I want something, I throw tantrums. I throw my plates around, chew my cardboard, and even flip my water bowl. I even bite the walls of my playpen to wake Bundad up and demand food and cuddles. I established my dominance over my hooman and my new home.

I once was treated like a worthless object; now I’m a spoiled and loved princess.



“Princess” Francesca poses in her forever home. Photo courtesy of Bundad Manuel Suarez.



Wascally Wabbit Wrangling: A How-To Guide

By Melisma Cox

For those of us who have and love house rabbits, the thought of a domesticated bunny being left out in the wild to fend for itself is unfathomable. Pet bunnies simply do not have the instincts to survive in the wild and can easily succumb to predators or the elements.

Fortunately, there is a dedicated group of Friends of Rabbits (FoR) bunny wranglers who come to the rescue of dumped bunnies and give them a chance to be fostered and adopted.

One of these good Samaritans is Pam Hurley, FoR Board of Directors president. A rabbit owner for more than 25 years, Pam says that a lot of well-meaning rabbit owners keep their rabbits in outside hutches or cages, and those rabbits often break free. “There are a variety of stories. In general [these owners] love rabbits, but they don’t want to have them in the house. They do the same with their dogs and chickens. They want to keep the house animal free,” Pam said.

Rabbit rescues might get a call from concerned citizens, or there might be a post on an online forum about a rabbit sighting. “Sometimes we see emails or [a post] on Nextdoor [a neighborhood social networking service] saying there is a [domesticated] rabbit [on the loose],” Pam said. When the call comes in, the rabbit wranglers come to the rescue.

How do you catch a loose domesticated bunny? It can take as little as two people and minimal equipment. Pam stated that when she was an active bunny wrangler, “I would usually have about four or five pens in my car.” She continued, “You combine the pens ... and make a big circle around [the rabbit] and slowly close the circle.”

“The circle could enclose a bush or a car. We would get a broom and nudge the rabbit out from under the car [or bush]. In that situation, we can catch a rabbit with two people. I caught a rabbit once by myself, and I had a pen with me,” Pam said.

Another person who is a deft bunny wrangler is Coleman Hopkins. A government contractor by day, Coleman became a part of FoR back in 2019 after the death of his first rabbit, Penny. After fostering a number of rabbits, he was asked to help wrangle a dumped bunny. “It was not too far from my parents’ house at the time. I think that is where I met Pam,” Coleman said. “She had a spare pen, and we were able to get the little guy distracted with a banana.”

Coleman described ways to wrangle even the most “wascally wabbits.” “I have been able to get them with not too much equipment. [Once] I forgot one of the x-pens and I was able to pick [the rabbit] up. I feel I have gotten better at it.” One might think that Coleman’s previous activity running track makes him a good wrangler. According to Pam, however, you should never chase a rabbit. “They run away, and then you can’t find them,” she said. “You try to be really calm.”

The good news is that once wrangled, dumped bunnies are taken in by an individual or rescue, are treated for illnesses and injuries, and can be adopted again. As every rabbit lover knows, that’s always the best outcome.



RHDV2 Vaccine Clinics Protect Local Rabbits

By Melissa Hall

While we humans were in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, our bunnies were dealing with the threat from their own widespread deadly infectious disease — rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 (RHDV2).

Considered to be endemic in most Western states, RHDV2 is an extremely contagious and fatal calicivirus that affects domesticated and wild rabbits of all ages. The virus emerged in Europe in 2010 and spread worldwide, with cases reported in the United States as early as 2018. Reported cases, however, escalated in 2020, mainly in the Southwest and in Western states. As case numbers spiked, *The New Yorker* devoted more than 10,000 words to an RHDV2 [article](#) by Susan Orlean.

Since March 2020, RHDV2 has spread rapidly across the Western United States, affecting both domesticated and wild rabbit populations, according to RHDV2.org. A case affecting a 4- to 5-year-old neutered male rabbit in Hawaii was confirmed in June 2022. As of January 1, 2024, the organization reports the virus has been confirmed in 29 states.

Medgene, a Brookings, South Dakota-based animal health company, developed an emergency two-part vaccine and made it available to veterinary clinics in the United States. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Veterinary Biologics authorized the vaccine for emergency use in September 2021.

Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services (SEAVS), in Fairfax, Virginia, held RHDV2 vaccine clinics in October 2021 through January 2022. Pet owners remained in their vehicles as a COVID-19 precaution with SEAVS staff providing curbside vaccination appointments, picking up and dropping off rabbits through car windows and doors.

"We vaccinated about 1,000 rabbits," said Jennifer Hutchins, licensed veterinary technician and practice manager at SEAVS.

"We wanted to vaccinate as many rabbits as possible, and the clinics were the best way to keep up with it."

Other clinics, including one at Blue Ridge Veterinary Associates, in Purcellville, Virginia, were held in other parts of the D.C.-Maryland-Virginia area.

In Maryland, Dr. Jeffrey Rhody vaccinated more than 200 rabbits in January 2022 at Lakeside Veterinary Center (now closed), in Laurel, and another 100-plus rabbits received their immunizations at Emergency Animal Hospital of Ellicott City in May 2022. In addition, Dr. Taylor Frey and Dr. Amanda Jones of Emergency Animal Hospital traveled to Friends of Rabbits' Columbia Bunny Headquarters to vaccinate rabbits.

Also in Maryland, the Eastern Shore Rabbit Rescue and Education Center, in Rock Hall, along with Dr. Lucille Otero of Galena Animal Medical Clinic, in Galena, held an RHDV2 clinic in January 2023. The goal was to vaccinate at least 25 rabbits. But even with social media advertising and an email blast, only seven vaccines were given, said Kerry Covey, office manager of Galena Animal Medical Clinic. Kerry believes that the low turnout can be attributed to the fact that there had been no reported cases in Maryland and that the vaccine requires two visits.

In addition to Maryland, no cases of RHDV2 have been reported in Virginia or Washington, D.C. However, veterinary professionals encourage all rabbit owners to have their rabbits vaccinated. "We will vaccinate a bunny even without an exam," SEAVS' Jennifer Hutchins said.

Signs of RHDV2 may include sudden death or blood-stained noses as well as lack of appetite, fever, difficulty breathing, or nervous signs (e.g., convulsions, wobbliness, paralysis). If you suspect that a rabbit is showing signs of RHDV2, contact your local veterinarian or state animal health official.

Book Your School's Guest "Squeaker"



By Diana Oo

Friends of Rabbits volunteers Mara Hurwitz, former vice president of FoR's board of directors, and Olivia Devescovi spearheaded a multiday rabbit education event in collaboration with the PTA at Laurel Ridge Elementary School, in Fairfax, Virginia, March 21–25, 2022, during the FoR Newsletter's pandemic hiatus.

FoR's goal for such events is to educate students of all ages and the adults in their lives about the joys — and responsibilities — associated with caring for house rabbits and welcoming them into our homes as beloved pets and family members. These events help people gain a deeper understanding of the significance of rescuing animals in need and giving them a forever home.

Gaby Keener, a Laurel Ridge PTA Board member, contacted FoR, asking about the possibility of volunteers and bunnies visiting the school as part of the school's special reading project: All students and staff members were reading *Because of the Rabbit*, by Cynthia Lord, a lovely book about a girl who rescues a rabbit.

The entire school of nearly 800 students and their teachers attended the 5-day event, featuring a room where several X-pens held visiting "guest buns," including foster rabbits and rabbits chaperoned by their owners. Students rotated through the room to visit, and often pet, the guest buns.

Please contact info@friendsofrabbits.org to coordinate a rabbit education event at your child's school in D.C., Maryland, or Virginia.

FoR volunteers, including Aurora Thomas, Stephanie Mui, and Bobbie Pontzer, along with their bunny charges, took shifts participating in the event. One day, volunteers Beth Rosenfeld, former FoR board secretary, and her husband brought their FoR rescue bun, Laramie, who loved the attention. Laramie was totally chill about letting almost 50 kids pet him!

FoR hopes that events like these encourage the next generation to be kind to — and value the lives of — precious, sweet, innocent rabbits everywhere.

DMV Resources to Report RHDV2

District of Columbia: Executive Director, Health Regulation and Licensing Administration, D.C. Department of Health, 202-724-8813

Maryland: State Veterinarian, Animal Health Program, Maryland Department of Agriculture, 410-841-5810

Virginia: State Veterinarian, Division of Animal and Food Industry Services, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 804-692-0601

Click [here](#) for the U.S. Animal Health Association's comprehensive list of animal health officials.

Boost Your Bun!

Our rabbits depend on us to get them vaccinated against RHDV2. For continued protection against RHDV2, bunnies need an annual booster shot. Contact your exotic veterinarian for more information.



Rabbits: Excellent Companions for Patients, Their Families, and Medical Providers

By Jordan Bank and Catherine Marcucci, M.D.

Rabbits — “bunnies” to most people — are known for being cute, fluffy pets who can ease everyday stress and anxiety. But rabbits have also “hopped” into more formal roles — as therapy and emotional support animals (ESAs).

Therapy, Emotional Support, and Service Animals: The Difference

Therapy animals are usually incorporated into a patient’s treatment plan to complement treatment or help the patient face a challenging situation. Animal-assisted therapy takes place in homes, hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, hospice centers, schools, and disaster and other settings. ESAs actually live with patients who need long-term support for their conditions.

Only dogs, and in some situations miniature horses, can be certified as service animals, which are trained to perform specific tasks for people with disabilities. The Americans With Disabilities Act gives people with disabilities the legal right to have their service animals accompany them in most public places (e.g., restaurants, theaters, shops, hotels).

The Magic of Rabbits

Rabbits can make a big difference for patients navigating short- or long-term physical or mental health conditions. For example, stroke or traumatic brain injury patients can develop their fine and gross motor skills while feeding, petting, or brushing a rabbit. Also, participating in a rabbit’s care can help improve patients’ communication with relatives, who may experience their own challenges as they support a loved one undergoing medical

treatment. Rabbits can be a salve for entire families.

Many rabbits are small enough to sit on someone’s lap and travel easily from one place to another. In hospitals and other health care settings, therapy rabbits can reduce a patient’s anxiety about procedures and lengthy hospital stays. Rabbits also are small enough and docile enough for pediatric patients and children; some breeds feel just like softest stuffed animal.

As ESAs, rabbits top the list of animals as having the most desirable attributes. They are highly social animals and readily bond with their companions — either human or bunny. An emotional support rabbit may sit by someone’s side for hours. Rabbits can be a great fit even for patients with limited mobility and patients and families with limited time or limited space.

Because they lack strength, large teeth, and strong claws, rabbits must use their exceptional senses of smell, sight, and hearing to survive in the wild. Domesticated rabbits have retained this exquisite receptiveness to their environments and, coupled with their agility and gentle playfulness, can be effective ESAs for patients with depression, bipolar disorder, or attention deficit disorder.

Bunnies are particularly good pets for people who would benefit from companionship but who cannot tolerate a lot of noise or other sensory triggers. Rabbits can ease people’s anxiety and loneliness and bring them joy with their playfulness.

Getting an Emotional Support Rabbit

Getting an emotional support rabbit does require some careful thought and planning. The first step is to obtain an ESA letter from a licensed

medical provider. The letter provides the legal protection needed to live with an ESA in places where animals are otherwise prohibited.

This legal protection is provided under the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in living accommodations based on disability.

An ESA letter can be obtained through the patient’s therapist or other medical provider or by going online. The websites for obtaining an ESA letter generally require the patient to be interviewed.

ESA letters must be renewed annually. It is important to keep in mind that an ESA letter does not automatically confer legal rights to take an emotional support rabbit into places such as restaurants or hotels or on buses, trains, or planes if animals are otherwise prohibited.

After obtaining an ESA letter, a reputable rabbit rescue should be contacted. It’s important to discuss the patient’s needs and inform the rescue that an emotional support rabbit is wanted to enable the rescue to match the patient with a rabbit who meets the patient’s requirements for size, temperament, and level of care (e.g., if the patient has arthritis, a rabbit that requires extensive grooming, such as an angora rabbit, is likely not a good fit).

While an emotional support rabbit can be obtained from a reputable breeder, this avenue isn’t recommended, given the number of wonderful rescue bunnies who need a home.

Continued on p. 9



Everything You Need to Know About *E. cuniculi*...So Far

Continued from p. 1

Currently, a 28-day cycle of fenbendazole, which also goes by the brand name Panacur, is an effective and the safest treatment for rabbits. Panacur is a dewormer, but Dr. Bignall refers to it as an anthelmintic, a medication used to destroy certain parasitic worms. "We know that it takes 28 days to potentially eliminate *E. cuniculi* or at least get on top of an active infection," Dr. Bignall said.

However, long-term medical management isn't well known or established for preventing future flare-ups. "One protocol is to try to interrupt the parasite's 3- to 5-week life cycle by giving 7 days of Panacur once monthly," Dr. Bignall said. "This is done to try to strike a balance between signs and potential side effects from the medication."

Some veterinarians are concerned about long-term usage of Panacur to treat *E. cuniculi* in rabbits. Long-term intermittent usage could lead to bone marrow suppression. Dr. Bignall has seen about five rabbits in his career treated with Panacur in this manner whose white blood cell counts decreased. "For that reason, I strongly recommend checking complete blood counts in animals that are on it for extended periods," he said.

Integrative Approach Helps Bunnies

Dr. Bignall urges veterinarians to be on the lookout for secondary infections, too. "We know chronic carriers of *E. cuniculi* are more likely to develop clinical signs during times of immunosuppression and stress, which other infection types can contribute to," he said. "Therefore, antibiotics may be appropriate if signs of a bacterial infection are present alongside the *E. cuniculi*."

It's important to treat the inflammation associated with the invading/replicating parasites. "Physical therapy can help retain muscle mass and stimulate the undamaged nerves to help prevent weakness due to nonuse or injury secondary to weakness and incoordination," Dr. Bignall said. He has taught bunny owners how to safely extend their rabbit's hindlimbs into a static stretch and rotate each hindlimb in a circular motion, as if the bunny is riding a bicycle, illustrative of dynamic stretching.

Low-level light, aka cold laser therapy, and acupuncture also are helpful, reducing local inflammation. Three Northern Virginia exotics facilities — SEAVS, Veterinary Holistic Center in Springfield, and Pender Veterinary Centre's Fairfax Campus — offer laser therapy. At the Veterinary Holistic Center, Dr. Jordan Kocen provides acupuncture to dogs, cats, and rabbits. Dr. Danielle Shearer recently expanded her acupuncture capabilities to rabbits at Pender's exotics department.

Friends of Rabbits Board of Directors Vice President Susan Wong teaches bunny owners how to safely administer bunny massage therapy, which touches on acupressure points. Keeping rabbits limber through these methods between laser or acupuncture appointments can help them through the effects of *E. cuniculi*.

If appropriate, veterinarians can prescribe meloxicam for reducing inflammation and gabapentin for controlling pain associated with *E. cuniculi*.

Controlling Contagion Through Disinfection

People became familiar with the terms "shedding virus" and "stopping the spread" during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike COVID-19, *E. cuniculi* is not airborne. Rabbits shed *E. cuniculi* spores through their urine over a contagious period that can last for several weeks or months, typically topping out at 3 months, according to a 2021 [article](#) in the peer-reviewed *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Spores in the urine can live on surfaces — and remain infectious — for more than a month, depending on temperature and humidity, the researchers found.

Surfaces that have been urinated on need to be disinfected extensively. Bleach, 70 percent alcohol, 1 percent hydrogen peroxide, and quaternary ammonia-based cleaners are all effective on the organism.

Humans and other animals can get *E. cuniculi*, especially those who are severely immunocompromised. However, this is extremely rare. For bunnies with *E. cuniculi*, it is best to

change their litter boxes at least once a day and keep their enclosures clean. Rabbit owners should wash their hands thoroughly after cleaning up after their bunnies and before handling other pets.

A Test, But No Vaccine

Laboratory testing for antibody levels can be useful, particularly after the first diagnosis, but it's a bit complicated. "We know that many rabbits that are infected with *E. cuniculi* do not develop signs, so just testing for previous exposure or the presence of the parasite doesn't tell us if a rabbit is truly ill," Dr. Bignall said.

Instead of looking at just one parameter, the test that is commonly used in rabbit medicine (at least in the United States) looks at three: a long-term antibody, a short-term antibody, and a protein that increases during inflammation. "Looking at those three data points allows us to make the best evaluations not only that the parasite is present but that it's actually causing the signs we're seeing in that animal," said Dr. Bignall. The test was specifically developed by the University of Miami, and its lab currently is the only lab that offers testing.

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine for *E. cuniculi*. "Fungal vaccines are difficult to develop in comparison [with] viral/bacterial vaccines. Even in human medicine, they are far less developed than other types of vaccines," said Dr. Bignall. "Sadly, in the end, it probably comes down to funding," he said. "Microsporidian parasites are rare in humans, so it's unlikely that there is much research [and] money available for this type of vaccine research."

E. cuniculi in many ways remains a mystery, more than 30 years after its initial diagnosis. Today's rabbit lovers can mitigate *E. cuniculi*'s potential harm by learning as much as they can to keep their bunnies healthy.



Rabbits: Excellent Companions for Patients, Their Families, and Medical Providers

Continued from p. 7

Caring for a Rabbit

Rabbits need daily care and attention. They are neither low maintenance nor tolerant of neglect. Rabbits require as much love and care as any other family pet, including regular health care by a veterinarian, ideally one who is trained to treat exotic animals. Rabbits also need a dedicated play area that enables them to run and frolic for exercise and mental stimulation as well as a large x-pen for resting and eating.

It is important for patients and their families to do their research before bringing a rabbit into their home and to exercise patience, which is key to integrating any pet into a home.

Becoming Part of a Rabbit Therapy Team

Hands down, animal therapy is often the most enjoyable treatment for patients who are facing difficult situations, especially children and older patients. A study published in 2020 in the peer-reviewed journal *Animals*, "Examining the Effects of Rabbit-Assisted Interventions in the Classroom Environment," reported positive effects of therapy rabbits placed in two elementary school classrooms, one of which was for special needs students. The study found that during animal-assisted

periods, students' anxiety decreased and teachers' effectiveness improved.

Therapy animal visits are usually handled through reputable animal rescue organizations, such as Love on a Leash, in Oceanside, California. The animals these organizations place for therapy visits must meet certain requirements, such as being healthy, well-socialized, and well-groomed.

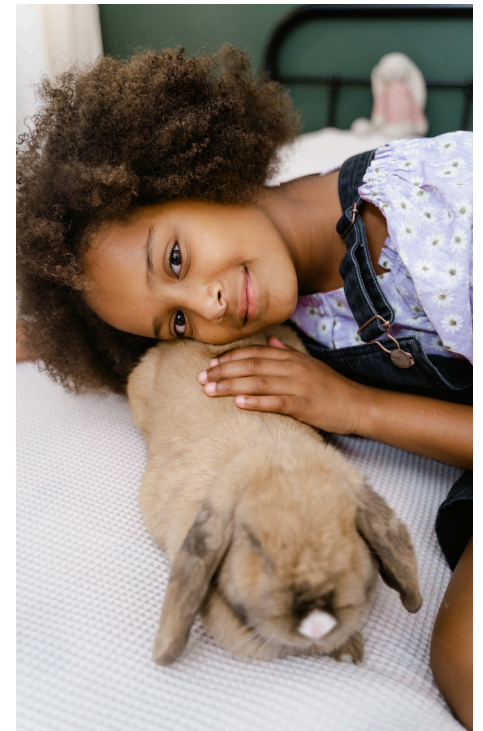
Animal therapy organizations are interested in certifying both the rabbit and the owner as a team. The humans on animal therapy teams are almost always volunteers. Pet owners typically go through an initial evaluation to determine whether they and their rabbits are appropriate for serving on a bunny therapy team.

Rabbits as Pets for Medical Providers Rabbits also make excellent pets for medical providers. First, rabbits do not require outdoor walks early in the morning or late at night, when it's often difficult for medical providers who work shifts to take an animal outside. Second, rabbits do not require care in the middle of the day. Third, rabbits do not require bathing or carry serious communicable diseases, which is extremely important because doctors, nurses, and other medical providers must always be vigilant to avoid infectious diseases they could transmit to their

patients or bring into clinics and hospitals.

Bunnies Are for Everyone!

Because house rabbits are such fantastic animals, anyone — including patients, patients' families, and medical providers — who wants or needs a companion should consider adopting a wonderful bunny who needs a good home.



No Break for Your Buns!

As we spring into summer, it is the perfect time to remind everyone that when you go on vacation, your rabbits need the same care as they do all the other times of the year. Fortunately, Friends of Rabbits offers bunnysitting services! Go to www.friendsofrabbits.org/services/pet-sitting for more information.



Friends of Rabbits

RABBIT AND SMALL ANIMAL RESCUE NEWSLETTER

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FoR Newsletter, Spring/Summer 2024

Managing Editor: Christine Grimaldi
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Thank you to all of our volunteer writers!

EVENTS CALENDAR

2024

OCT
27

Midwest Bunfest,
presented by Ohio
House Rabbit Rescue