

All Ears in Sacramento

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Searching for the Perfect Space: *One Bunny's Journey to Finding her Niche in the House*

Da Big Bad Bun came into our lives as a timid young broken-marked chocolate brown Mini Rex. Although she always lived indoors, finding the perfect living quarters for her was a challenge and a learning experience for all of us. When we first brought her home, we kept her in an improvised cage consisting of a large dog crate, taken apart and taped door-to-door, with framed panels of chicken wire serving as a roof. She shared her spacious lodging with two female roommates — a Dutch-marked red Guinea pig named Cuddles, and a gray and white Abyssinian Guinea pig known as The Blob.

Cuddles and Da Bun were fast friends from the start, but The Blob

adopted a more combative stance toward the newcomer. She would hide in her favorite Capri Sun box and lunge out, chattering menacingly, whenever the rabbit passed by. But Da Bun quickly turned this into a game, moving just slowly enough to allow The Blob to think she was going to catch her. Blobby was no athlete; she earned her name by “blobbing” (a term my son came up with to describe her pastime of crouching motionless, doing abso-

lutely nothing, for hours on end). Da Bun really had to work at it to appear frightened enough for the game to continue.

The living arrangement between the three worked out very well; in fact, the bond between them grew quickly. When we had to trim Da Bun's nails (an activity that she

loathed), she would be nearly paralyzed with fright. Afterwards, we'd gently set her back in the cage and Cuddles would rush to her side, enthusiastically grooming her friend's face until her calm demeanor returned. Apparently, Bun was returning the favor while we weren't watching.

continued on page 2



Da Bun
(above)
and
Cuddles



Your Pet Rabbit: A Loving Commitment For Life

- The majority of SHRS foster bunnies were rescues from local shelters. SHRS volunteers choose rabbits according to need, not age. Although most of our adoptable bunnies are estimated to be between 1-2 years old, we do often have older rabbits and youngsters available in our foster program.
- A bunny is never too old to be litterbox trained.
- As a rabbit ages, her dietary needs change. For instance, while baby rabbits can safely eat alfalfa hay in large quantities, it's too high in calcium to be a dietary staple for older rabbits. Most adult rabbits are better off with timothy, oat or grass hays.
- Toys aren't just for the young 'uns! Even older rabbits need things to play with, for mental stimulation, physical exercise, and distraction from unwanted behavior (a busy bunny is a bunny who is less likely to chew your baseboards). Try giving your rabbit a (human) infant's teething ring (make sure it's hard plastic), or even a cardboard toilet paper tube stuffed with hay.
- The ideal ages for spay/neuter are about 6 months for a female and about 5 months for a male. Rabbits older than 6 years may be more sensitive to anesthesia; ask your veterinarian for advice.
- Exercise pens (like the one described in this article, and the ones our volunteers use at the monthly adoption days) are an excellent way to provide a leg-stretch for a rabbit who lives in small quarters. They can be purchased at pet supply stores for between \$50-\$100, depending on size.
- Exercise pens are also a great way to give your bunny some time outside on cool spring days. Be sure to provide shady areas and supervision at all times. Some bunnies will even train to a leash.
- A happy, healthy, spayed or neutered house rabbit can live 10 years or more. Never stop interacting with your pet...the lessons they teach us, and the joys they bring, can be endless!

*The Blob
looking for
his playmate*

Da Bun continued from page 1

One morning I discovered that the hair above the piggy's eyes was missing, making her look as if she were wearing dark glasses. Fearing some horrible mite infestation, I rushed her to the vet, who examined her in total perplexity, finding no cause for the overnight disappearance of hair. Then I mentioned that Cuddles was housed with a rabbit, and my vet sighed with relief, informing me that bunnies groom each other above the eyes and on the forehead as a sign of friendship. Da Bun had simply loved all that fur off. Not wishing to discover just how bald Cuddles might become, I regretfully separated them. From time to time, I'd let the gang romp around in the blocked-off kitchen, but found the cleanup too daunting, as the "guins" were not housebroken, and no one wants rabbit hair in their food.

At about this time, I discovered the HRS web site and was learning a great deal about rabbits, which led to the next phase of Da Bun's life. We gave her the run of my sons' bedroom. She had become affectionate and developed a special love for my youngest son, Brian, who was nine or 10 at the time. When he'd try to leave the room, she'd growl and grab his pant leg and attempt to drag him from the door. She loved the way he'd vigorously scratch her back, sending would-be hairballs flying everywhere. She'd even try to return the gesture by licking him (or whatever object was in her way) during the mutual grooming session. I was not so fortunate in my dealings with her. She enjoyed sneaking behind me and nipping at my pants, a trait that all but disappeared after she was spayed.

It wasn't long before our Internet connection and video game controllers fell prey to Da Bun's appetite for the off-limits. I became proficient at splicing cable, and the kids learned to keep their electronic gadgets out of reach (most of the time). But when she started gnawing on bed frames, bureaus, and doorjamb, I was forced to take action to save our furniture. Frustrated, I concluded that Da Bun would have to go back to spending most of her time in her cage. There she remained until Brian broke his leg ski jumping. Then we moved Da Bun to the living room in order to make the kids' room more accessible for crutches.

Now that she was in the center of things, our bunny grew more out-

going than ever. It wasn't long before I invested in a doggy exercise pen and attached it to the cage, forming an oval play yard. This arrangement has worked well for all of us. The pen folds up like an accordion, and we stash it off to the side when we need more space in the living room. It sets back up in seconds.



Rabbits Available for Adoption



Gwen (white rex) and **Mindy Lopper** (black lop) are a bonded pair of girls looking for a loving home.



Cream is a 2-year-old Florida White boy. He is very mellow and likes sitting on laps.



Oscar is an active and curious young adult. He is great with the litterbox and loves to snuggle.



Tidbit has good litterbox habits and enjoys being handled. He needs his teeth trimmed occasionally.



Vickie is a big, beautiful bunny who has excellent litterbox skills and is being leash trained.



Tallulah Belle is a mellow and affectionate young adult female Dutch.



Buster is an affectionate dwarf Dutch boy. He needs twice-monthly teeth-trimming.



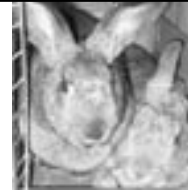
Tate is 2-year-old small New Zealand boy. He is shy at first, but loves snuggling with people. He is adventurous and likes to explore.



Enuff is an adult lop. Skittish at first, he soon will be kissing your hands. He needs his teeth trimmed every other month.



Fiona, Felicia and **Finnegan** (two girls and one boy) are friendly, playful siblings. They want to be adopted as a trio.



Sweetie and **Little Bigwig** are a bonded brother and sister. They are friendly to people, dogs and cats.



Skippy is a young boy with lots of energy. He loves to run and play.

Recent Adoptions

Licorice was adopted by Mark Wiest

Darby was adopted by Matt Rush

Hoppy Gilmore was adopted by Kieren Fitzsimmon

Gracie was adopted by Adrienne Graham

Boo was adopted by Matt Butler

Nanna was adopted by Keiko Silvert

Bonnie Blue was adopted by Allison Flower-Arledge

Jelly Bean and **Strawberry** were adopted by Cindy Giddings-Velez

Godiva was adopted by Kara Weber

Nico was adopted by Tracy Butler

Skippy was adopted by Elizabeth Henderson

Her new living quarters have not curbed her penchant for destruction, however. We protect our carpet with an old blanket and exercise caution when placing boxes in her playpen, as she will actually push them up to the cage to use as stepping stones to the roof and make her escape – a dangerous proposition when you consider how easily her little legs could get trapped and broken between the cage bars and how many unprotected electrical cords await her on the other side of her pen.

Those of you who have house rabbits know what a joy it is to have your bun race up to

greet you when you enter the room or to have them lying as close to you as they can get, stretched out on their belly or side, the picture of contentment and relaxation. Our use of the ex-pen has allowed us and Da Bun the freedom to interact and enjoy one another. If you haven't yet found the setup that works for you and your Bun, keep seeking and trying new things. As for me, I just bought a second ex-pen to enlarge our play yard and am looking forward to where that leads us. Hmmm... A bunny race track would sure be fun!

— Joan Hess

WOOD SHAVINGS!

What You Don't Know Could be Hurting your Rabbit

Wood Stove Pellets in July?

The winter months are flush with wood stove pellets at local Home Depot and Lowe's stores, but what to do once the weather warms up? There are still a few places around town that carry pellets year round. One place you can always check is your local Raley's store — they tend to carry them much longer than just the winter season. Here are some other options:

Custom Fireside Shops

5545 Auburn Blvd
Sacramento
331-2423

Muschetto's Firewood

7108 Antelope Road
Citrus Heights
725-9663

Orchard Supply

Hardware
3350 Arden Way
Sacramento
480-0337

If you've lived with a pet rabbit for any length of time, you've probably been down the "bunny aisle" in a pet store at some point and noticed different-sized bags of softwood shavings for sale. Often made of pine, cedar or even redwood, they smell wonderful to the human nose, and they're advertised as being the perfect odor-absorbent litter material for small pets. Logically, it would seem that anything natural would be safe to keep around a rabbit, but now we know this is not the case. Once you know the risks, you may want to consider some of the other, safer options available for litter material.

What's Wrong with Wood Shavings?

Back when we were kids and had pet hamsters and Guinea pigs, softwood shavings and old newspapers were pretty much the only choice for lining cages. But veterinary medicine and our knowledge of small animals has come a long way in the past few decades. In the Bay Area, where the House Rabbit Society was founded and where it's headquartered today, some unofficial studies definitely seem to be on the road to proving that softwood shavings cause elevated liver enzymes. After losing several foster bunnies to liver disease, HRS volunteers there began to compare notes, and soon realized the pattern. The affected bunnies differed in size, weight, sex, breed and age, but all had one thing in common — all used pine or other softwood shavings in their litterboxes and/or cage trays. It is thought that when the shavings

get wet, they emit fumes that contain toxins that enter first the lungs, and then the blood. (For the full story, see Marinell Harriman's article at: <http://www.rabbit.org/journal/1/liver-disease.html>).

What About Other Kinds of Commercial Litter?

Many people who are just learning about rabbits assume that it's safe to use regular cat litter in their bunny's litterbox, but actually, that's just as dangerous (or more so) than softwood shavings. Regular cat litter is too dusty for a rabbit's nose, and the clumping kind can be especially dangerous if ingested. (Although the rabbit may not intentionally eat the litter, some can be swallowed accidentally if the bunny is grooming her feet.)

Organic corn hull litter is often found in pet stores these days and advertised as a safe alternative to cat litters. Some HRS members swear by it; others find that it doesn't do a great job of suppressing urine odors (generally a problem if you have more than one bunny using the box). But it's relatively easy to clean up, especially if you line the litterbox with newspaper before filling it.

Other popular litter materials that the HRS endorses include Carefresh (which is a dust-free, lightweight paper material that works wonderfully, but is expensive) and wood stove pellets. The latter is our personal favorite... although it can be a little difficult to find this time of year, this material is inexpensive (about \$4 for a

Comparison of Litters

LITTER TYPE	DUST	ABSORPTION	HEALTH HAZARDS	DISPOSAL
Paper Pulp	Low	Good	None observed	Can be flushed, bagged or composted
Dry Grass Pellets	Low	Good	None observed	Can be flushed, bagged or composted
Generic Clay litter	High	Good	Irritating to eyes and respiratory tract	Heavy. Unsuitable for garden compost
Dustless Clay litter	Low	Good	Irritating to GI tract if swallowed	Heavy. Unsuitable for garden compost
Shredded Paper	Low	Fair	Excessive ingestion may cause blockage	Can be bagged for disposal service
Corn Cob litter	Medium	Fair	Fungal spores may cause mold, can cause fatal blockages if ingested	Can be composted for garden
Straw	High	Poor	None (unless allowed to mold)	Bulky but light. Can be composted
Pine Shavings	High	Good	Phenols may cause liver damage	Can be composted
Cedar Chips	Medium	Fair	Phenols may cause liver damage	Use as mulch around trees & shrubs
Chemical Sand	Medium	Good	Causes deadly blockages in GI tract when ingested	Can be flushed
Peat Moss	Medium	Fair	High in nitrogen (swallowing unlikely)	Can be added directly to garden soil
Compressed sawdust (wood stove) pellets	Low	Good to Excellent	None observed	Can be bagged or composted
Silica-gel litter	Medium	Good	Toxic if eaten; must be placed where rabbits can't eat	Must be bagged for disposal service
Pectin-based litter	Low	Good	Will cause GI problems or obesity if eaten to excess; will not hold down bacterial growth	Can be bagged or composted
Oat-hull litter	Low	Good	Will cause obesity if eaten to excess; will not hold down bacterial growth	Can be bagged or composted

40-lb bag), absorbent and holds in odors well. We have yet to find a rabbit who eats wood stove pellets, and they're dust-free and keep your housekeeping duties to a minimum. Best of all ... there's no health hazard to your rabbit with wood stove pellets.

How Do I Know What Will Work Best for My Rabbit?

For many of us, finding the right litter material has been a matter of trial and error. Some bunnies will kick litter material out of their litter boxes if they don't like it! You may have to try a few things before you find something that's both safe and pleasing to your bunny. The chart above is a helpful guide to some of the other products out there, and the plusses and minuses for each. Don't give up if the first one you try is rejected by your rabbit! And remember, you can always call the SHRS hotline if you have questions about litterbox material.

Many thanks to Marinell Harriman, and to Carolyn Harvey, DVM, and Marliiss Geissler, DVM, who collaborated on the original story on the National HRS web site.

Check This Out!

The Sacramento House Rabbit Society is now offering a new way to show off your bunny, thanks to PetChecks. You can order personalized bank checks with our logo, and you can even have your own bunny's photo on the check! A portion of each sale goes to SHRS. For more information, visit www.petchecks.com.



New Digs for the Rabbits at Yolo County

Finally, the bunnies at Yolo County Animal Services have a new home! The shelter hosted an Open House on March 19 for the new T.S. and K.D. Glide Annex. It houses cats and has a room for the rabbits and other small animals.

This is really something to celebrate for the SHRS volunteers who have spent countless hours working to improve the rabbits' living space at Yolo. And it's an achievement that's been three years in the making! Our involvement started in the summer of 2001, when SHRS Chapter Manager Kirsten Macintyre was contacted by a volunteer in Woodland to assist with the rabbits and care at the shelter. At the time, the rabbits, their room and the cages were all in desperate need of TLC, supplies, air conditioning and upgrading. The rabbit room

was actually shared by all other small animals (hamsters, rats, birds, mice and Guinea pigs). The few cages left for the rabbits were not really suitable.

Soon after the original call came in, a crew of SHRS volunteers arrived on the scene. I recall Sharon Lowrey and Anne Hitchcock spending most of a Saturday cleaning cages, clipping nails, disinfecting the room

and grooming. It was a long, hot day! We recognized that the rabbits were also in need of more attention and proper accommodations. Tracey Dyer of the Yolo SPCA was very receptive to our suggestion to get rid of the pine shavings lining the cages, and she agreed to try using litter boxes. We supplied the litter boxes, wood stove pellets and Timothy hay. Susan King loaned two large double-decker cages to the shelter, while our chapter donated six more cages and incurred the cost of needed spays and neuters. Other volunteers donated hay, toys and baskets. Eventually, even the loaner cages were replaced with new ones, and the other nine cages were upgraded with urine guards and wheels.

After the initial cleanup, Susan King and I tag-teamed, working with the shelter for the next three years. For the first two years, we would try to stop in the shelter almost every day. It was a huge challenge, especially on weekends. Susan personally donated fans, hay, litter boxes, food, grass mats, and air conditioning coolers, among other supplies. She was amazing and an angel for these bunnies. The shelter finally decided to hire some full- and part-time help to care for the animals – up until then, the officers, inmates, parolees and volunteers had shared the duties. The rabbits were soon blessed with another angel to watch over them, Crystal Clark. She has been very interested in learning to care for all the small animals properly and came to the shelter on her day off to help with one of our on-site adoption days. She and her husband, Ryan, even drove all the way to HRS headquarters in Richmond to attend a daylong seminar on shelter care for rabbits.

Over time, we have worked with the rabbits, shelter, and SPCA staff to provide improved care and attention to these wonderful animals. I also worked closely with the Yolo County SPCA President, Kerry Duncan, who was instrumental in providing a point SPCA staff member to oversee the rabbits. It worked out

Officer Vicky Fletcher welcomes a new charge



New signage points visitors in the right direction!



Upcoming Events

Adoption and Information Clinics

Are you thinking about adding a bunny to your household? Or are you just looking to learn more about the one you've already got? Regardless of whether you've had a rabbit for years or if you're new to the joys of rabbit companionship, you'll have a great time at our monthly Adoption and Information Clinics. Come ask us questions about bunny behavior, care, grooming, nutrition, or anything else you can think of. We have free printed information on a variety of topics, and, of course, we also have our fabulous fosters on hand, waiting for just the right family to come along! The adoption donation is \$50 (\$75 for two), and includes a copy of *The House Rabbit Handbook*.

If you already have a bunny, you're welcome to bring him or her to the Clinic in a secure carrier. We do offer nail trims for a \$5 donation, but please call our hotline at least 48 hours in advance to set an appointment time (so we'll be sure to have someone available for you!). Please also bring your own, sterilized clippers. Grooming and de-matting services are also available outside of Clinic hours, but by appointment only. Call our hotline for more information.

June 12

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Arden PetCo
1878 Arden Way

July 10

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Folsom PetCo
855 E. Bidwell Street

August 14

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

beautifully – we have rescued more than 50 rabbits from Yolo County Animal Services. Many have been placed into our fostering system while others were adopted out directly. Unfortunately, we have not been able to rescue them all.

The new air-conditioned building will improve both awareness of the rabbits and their adoption rate, and now there is room for potential adopters to interact with the

rabbits (to get to know them and increase their chances of adoption). The shelter has put together a wonderful booklet for adopters, including much literature from the HRS. It's a very well-done presentation.

I was able to attend and watch the unveiling of the new sign and dedication of the new building. Speakers included the Yolo County Sheriff, the trustee from the T.S. and K.D. Glide Foundation, and Vicky Fletcher,

Chief Animal Services Officer. It was quite a ceremony, and everyone agrees – it's been a long time in the making, but it's a new and wonderful start for the animals who will pass through these doors.

— Margaret Batterman



Volunteer Lisa Hernandez and son Cody spend some quality time with the rabbits

Drop us a line!
We welcome your submissions to *All Ears in Sacramento*. If you live in the Sacramento area and have story ideas, photos, illustrations, or article topics, send them to the address below. We can't return items, so please do not send originals.

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membership
 expiration date



Not a Member?

Sacramento House Rabbit Society depends on donations to keep running. Please fill out the form below to keep receiving *All Ears in Sacramento*, and to support local rabbits in need! *SHRS does not sell or share our member's information with any other organizations or companies.*

Keep in Touch!

Time to renew your membership? New to the House Rabbit Society? The annual membership to the House Rabbit Society is \$18. This includes a subscription to the quarterly *House Rabbit Journal*. The annual membership fee for the Sacramento Chapter, which includes the quarterly *All Ears in Sacramento*, is \$15. The House Rabbit Society is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. All membership fees are tax-deductible and go towards care expenses for the rabbits and for providing educational materials, such as these newsletters.

- Please sign me up for the National Membership, \$18
- Please sign me up for the Sacramento Membership, \$15
- Please sign me up for both for \$30
- I have enclosed an additional donation of \$_____
- I would like to volunteer with SHRS (see choices to the right)

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

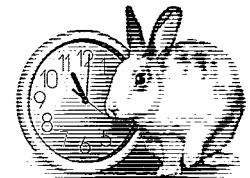
email address: _____

*Return with check payable to House Rabbit Society to:
 Sacramento House Rabbit Society, P.O. Box 19850, Sacramento, CA 95819-0850*

Volunteer!

Would you like to help local rabbits and bunny-lovers? We could use volunteers in the following areas:

- Public Events (staffing education tables)
- Fundraising Events
- Distributing Literature
- Working with Shelters
- Transporting shelter rabbits to local adoption days
- Fostering



HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY