

All Ears in Sacramento

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Rabbits and Children: *When Does it Work?*

The Eastertime image of children with adorable baby bunnies causes distress to HRS volunteers and members, who know all too well how many of those bunnies will wind up in shelters – or worse. The impulse purchase of a pet for a child is never a good idea, and unless the parents are willing to be the primary caretaker, the results are usually disastrous for the animal.

However, that's not to say that rabbits and children can't happily coexist in the same household. As some of our long-time SHRS members have learned, it's a necessity to adjust when a human baby comes into a family that already includes bunnies! With training and patience, children can be taught to treat the family rabbit with respect and love. Here are the stories of three Sacramento families whose children are growing up in rabbit-friendly homes.



The Macintyre Family

When I first joined the House Rabbit Society in 1997, my family consisted of a cat, a fox terrier, and two girl rabbits who lived in separate cages in my living room. Within a year, each of my girls had a new boyfriend and upgraded to a two-story bunny condo; soon after that, I began fostering shelter rabbits. In late 1998, I got married and my new husband Corey moved into our home as well.

I thought we had a full house – until our daughter Kathryn was born in 2001. This was a new adventure for bewildered new parents and pets alike! Everyone, especially my nervous mother, was worried about how everyone would get along. Mom once even suggested that we just “get rid of the rabbits,” due to fears about allergies, pet dander and biting. But that was out of the question, as the rabbits were as much a part of our family as our new baby.

Lucky for us, we had several friends who had previous experience making a smooth transition from “bunny parent” to “kid parent.” One of the first advice calls we made was to our friends Don Sherman and Rita Kwong of Elk Grove; their son Donnie is about a year older than Kate.

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A very regal Kate demonstrates how to gently pat a bunny.

The Story of Holly and Rocky

Before Holly and Rocky came into my life, I had no idea what it was like to live with a house rabbit, let alone two of them! I had rabbits when I was a kid, but they lived in a hutch in the back yard. I fed them pellets and occasional vegetables, and let them out to play when it was convenient for me. I did not think it was even possible to keep rabbits as house companions, and I had no idea how important it is to spay or neuter them.

About a year ago, I began thinking about getting another pet companion. When I decided to bring home a rabbit I assumed I would build a hutch in the back yard, as many people do with pet rabbits. But as I began to surf the web looking for information on rabbit care, I stumbled upon the web site of the House Rabbit Society. That was probably the best thing that could have happened to me and my future bunnies! I learned everything there was to know about the care and behavior of rabbits, so when I brought them home I was prepared to be the best bunny mom I could be.

Shortly thereafter, an acquaintance's rabbits had several unplanned litters. I planned on adopting one rabbit, but I came home with two six-week-old babies. One was an adorable Holland lop and the other was a velvety Mini Rex. I named them Holly (short for Holland)

and Roxy. We soon found out that Roxy was really a boy and changed his name to Rocky (I figured that was close enough that he wouldn't get confused).

They are now one year old and they are spoiled little bunnies! They are spayed and neutered and live in a two-story house rabbit condo. They are very social, and very good with children – they have to be, because I run an in-home daycare and have up to eight kids in my home at a time. The children do really well around the rabbits; sometimes they help with feeding (under close supervision, of course!) and I explain to them about how rabbits are prey animals, and therefore we have to be really gentle with them. I also teach them how to read rabbit body language, and how to tell when the rabbit would rather be left alone. I've never had a problem with the kids and the rabbits, and I think it's a good experience for the children to be around animals.

During the day, the bunnies relax in their condo. It's on wheels, so I can also roll it out onto my covered patio for short breaks when needed (when the house is too noisy!), and when the weather is nice. In the evenings, after the children have gone home, Rocky and Holly spend a lot of time in my large kitchen, which I block off with a baby gate so they can't chew the furniture or carpet in the living room. I also eat dinner with them in the kitchen every night. When it's time for bed, I put a carrot or a piece of apple in their condo, and they hop right in.

When people come to visit on the weekends, they are always shocked at the site of rabbits running around my house. I simply share some of the information I learned from the House Rabbit Society. But the most convincing evidence of their happiness is the sight of two happy rabbits doing their binkies across my floor. Now who could give up moments like that?

— Shanell Weber

*Holly and Rocky
enjoying some downtime*



Rabbits Available for Adoption



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



Spice is a sweetie who would like a calm environment with friendly laps to sit on, and possibly a bunny companion as well!



Oscar and Mabel are a sweet, gentle bonded pair of mini rexes. Both are about 3 years old.



Mr. Bunny loves attention and to be petted. He enjoys playing with toys. He is being litter trained. The vet thinks his ears were surgically removed earlier in his life.



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



Major is a big gentle boy who likes snuggling with you in between jumping and racing!



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



Finley and Phoebe are cuddly sisters who enjoy sitting on your lap while you brush them.



Henry is an active young fellow who likes to survey his surroundings and rearrange towels.



Buster is an affectionate dwarf Dutch boy. His incisors have been removed and he no longer needs teeth trimming.



Natalie is a very affectionate Mini Lop who enjoys being held.



Michaela Rose is a sweet, playful Himalayan Netherland Dwarf.

Recycle. Good for the Rabbits and the Environment

House Rabbit Society participates in a fundraising program with Cash for Critters, an organization that recycles used laser and ink jet printer cartridges. HRS will receive between \$1 & \$12 for every cartridge returned. Tell your friends, family and co-workers to save spent cartridges. (All models EXCEPT Epson for ink jet.) If you live in the Bay Area, please feel free to drop cartridges off at HRS in Richmond. Otherwise, please mail them to:

Cash for Critters
P.O.Box 42293
Phoenix AZ 85080

Be certain to include a note specifying that the donation is to be sent to HRS, including the HRS address:

148 Broadway
Richmond CA 94804

Recent Adoptions

Enuff was adopted by Rose Zahnn

Peter was adopted by Liz Baker

Abby was adopted by Rick Carter

Tidbit was adopted by Amanda Cugini

Tallulah Belle was adopted by Jill Johnson

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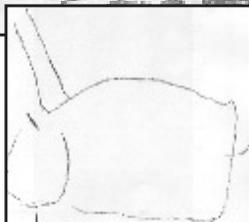
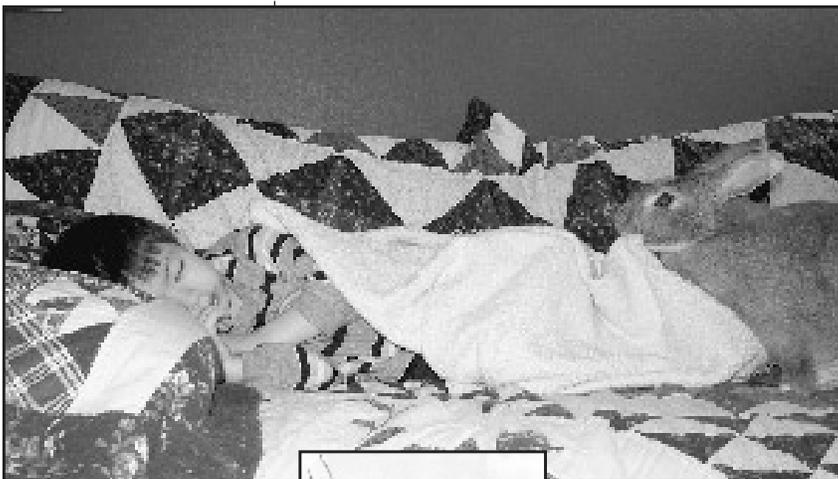
The Sherman-Kwong Family

The Shermans had Bun Bun several years prior to the birth of Donnie. Bun Bun has also outlived two very sweet male rabbit companions, and today, at six years old, she rules the roost as their home's sole four-legged resident. She and four-year-old Donnie are inseparable buddies. "Donnie grew up with Bun Bun. She grooms him; if he's sitting on the couch she'll jump up and fuss with his clothes and lick his hand or foot or any exposed skin," explains Don. "She's been doing that since we brought him home from the hospital. That very first day, we put him on the couch and let her jump up next to him. She smelled him a lot at first, and then started licking his hair."

It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship... and a maternal role for Bun Bun. Even now, she's very protective of her boy. "At Halloween or anytime when people come to the door, if Donnie goes to the door, she goes with him. If visitors step towards Donnie, she'll approach them and push them back with her nose. She's not afraid of anything... you'd expect a bunny to be, but she's not."

We asked Don about the pitfalls of introducing a new baby into the house. There were none when Donnie was a baby, he says, but the dangers increased in the toddler years. "He

*Bun Bun makes sure
Donnie is tucked in*



*Donnie's portrait
of Bun Bun*

sometimes wanted to pull on her fur when he was really tiny, but she has loose skin and we were always close enough to get his hands loose. I don't think he ever hurt her, and she never nipped him," Don says. "We had to watch out for her when he was learning to walk... he would fall an awful lot, and since she always wanted to be close to him, she was sometimes in the way." Don also remembers one time when he and Rita found Donnie sitting in Bun Bun's litterbox... she didn't mind sharing, though mom and dad weren't too thrilled.

We soon found that Don and Rita were right. For the first year, I'm not even sure the rabbits noticed Kate. (They were just pleased to find more teething rings and plastic toys on the floor!) As Kate grew older and began to crawl, she grew fascinated with the bunnies, often sitting, mesmerized, in front of their condos. Sometimes she'd poke her fingers at them, but they were always quick to move away. As soon as she could speak, we began to explain to her about the importance of being gentle. We'd sit on the floor with her and guide her hand, teaching her to pet softly. We also taught her how to feed them, and they soon didn't fear her at all. In fact, they seemed pleased to see her coming, as though they were hoping she'd have a few Cheerios in her pocket to share (she usually did).

The Bergdahl Family

Heidi and Stephen Bergdahl live in a midtown apartment with their two bonded girl rabbits, Jessie and Chloe, and their three-year old son Raymond. Though they are not "lap rabbits" who enjoy being picked up or held, Jessie and Chloe live together in the Bergdahls' hallway, which is blocked off by baby gates. They like to interact with the family members at their own level.

Like Donnie, Raymond has never known life without rabbits. When he was a baby, Chloe and her first mate lived in a large four-story cage in his nursery. That worked out well, Heidi says, until Raymond became a toddler. Too

young to know better, he grabbed onto the cage and shook it. His parents moved the cage out of his room – Raymond was sorry to see them go, but the move was necessary in order to teach him the importance of being gentle.

“He got nipped a few times when he was about two, but he learned as he got older,” explains Heidi.

Now, with bunny/baby gates instead of cages, there is a whole new set of challenges to overcome. Heidi laughs, “Actually, in our case, (the setup) is impeding toilet training, because Raymond has to get over the gates in order to get to the bathroom, and he doesn’t like to ask for help.”

And that’s not the only frustration those darn baby gates pose for Raymond. Just recently, Heidi says, Raymond was sitting beside the gate, pretending to feed a bagel to a teddy bear. When Jessie caught his eye, he decided to “pretend feed” her as well – until she nipped the bagel from his hand, pulled it through the gate and gleefully ran off with it. “Raymond had tears running down his face, crying, ‘Jessie, back! Jessie, back!’ His father was watching the whole thing and trying to be sympathetic, but he was laughing too hard.” Now, Heidi says, Raymond almost automatically holds food over his head when he walks by those baby gates. He’s not going to get duped again.

Our Kate is now three years old and knows more about rabbits than many adults. I grin when I hear her explaining to visitors that we don’t put things in the rabbit cages, open their door without permission, or (especially!) try to pick them up. That’s not to say she’s never rambunctious; sometimes we have to get her attention when she’s being loud, and point out that the rabbits’ ears and eyes are indicating discomfort. She will often apologetically whisper to them, “I’m sorry, bunnies!” But because they have always been a part of our family, she treats them with respect and care. (Interestingly, I have noticed that she’s not always quite as gentle with our friends’ rabbits – and I think that’s because at her age, she doesn’t yet understand that our own

house rules apply to others as well. We’re still working on that lesson.)

The rabbits, for their part, are very calm around Kate, and her now one-year-old brother Alex, too (we think we saw them rolling their eyes when we brought the new baby home last summer, but they’ve been very good-natured about it). They have never nipped any little fingers, and they’re so easy-going around kids that I take them to visit Kate and Alex’s daycare every spring. They seem to enjoy the outing as much as the children.

Overall, I’ve found the drawbacks to having both children and rabbits to be minimal. It’s probably true that I don’t spend as much time with my animal companions as I did before we had children, but I try to make the time I spend with them – usually after the kids have gone to bed – really quality time. The rabbit condos are in our computer room, so I often converse with my little companions as I’m checking email. They’ll come up to the second story of the cage, and I’ll scratch them behind an ear or slip them a cranberry or two as I’m typing. (Hmm, they’ve all gained a bit of weight since we had Kate and Alex... but then, so have Corey and I!)

— *Kirsten Macintyre*

Is a Rabbit Right for Your Family?

Please remember that a child should never be given the responsibility of caring for a rabbit. All animals should have an adult as the primary caretaker. Keeping a house rabbit (or any pet) is a very serious responsibility. Before you commit, also consider other factors such as space (cage or pen size and location), how much time you’ll have to spend with your animal companion, and financial considerations (for veterinary bills or supplies). House rabbits are not the right choice for every household.

That said – house rabbits can coexist peacefully with children, as long as it’s in a household where the adults are patient, diligent and responsible. Try to remember that with any child, positive reinforcement is more effective than negative reinforcement. Of course, you must object and redirect if the child behaves inappropriately. But help the child find things he can do with the rabbits – feeding them, for instance, or sitting quietly on the floor and petting properly. Praise those actions enthusiastically, and the child will quickly come to enjoy interacting with the rabbit.

For a great step-by-step guide to how to teach children (at all age levels) about how to respect their rabbit companions, please visit: <http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/children.html#baby>

It's That Easter Time of Year Again...

Spring is a difficult time for us in the rabbit rescue community, because we know with it comes Easter, and with Easter comes the baby bunny boom. There are still many, many people who can't resist taking one home, without understanding the responsibility that goes along with the adorable little ball of fur. We know that a few months from now, when these baby bunnies turn into temperamental adolescents, they will start showing up in area

shelters and we will be scrambling to find new, permanent indoor homes for them.

The best defense against this situation is spreading the word, and the best way to spread the word is at the grassroots level. That means that you can be a very effective advocate on behalf of rabbits. Here are a few easy ways for you to help:

- Hang the enclosed flyer in a visible location. Your children's school, church bulletin board, office lunch room, the local grocery store, anywhere people will see it and absorb the message. Better yet, photocopy the flyer and post it everywhere you can!
- If you know someone who is thinking about getting a rabbit for Easter, talk to them about it, and ask them to visit the House Rabbit Society web site at www.rabbit.org to make sure they understand the responsibility that comes with bringing a rabbit into the family.
- Be fashion-forward! Contact shrs@macmail.com to order your "Make Mine Chocolate" pin for \$5, which is a great conversation starter. You can also visit the Make Mine Chocolate web site at www.makeminechocolate.org and click on "Partner With Us" to check out the brochures that are available for download.

Easter Bunny

by Mary Brandolino

In memory of all the bunnies we couldn't save.

I remember Easter Sunday
It was colorful and fun
The new life that I'd begun
In my new cage.

The cat and dog raced by me
Playing with each other only
While I sat there feeling lonely
In my cage.

I was just a little thing
When they brought me from the store
And they put me on the floor
In my cage.

Upon the fresh green grass
Children skipped and laughed all day
I could only watch them play
From my cage.

They would take me out to play
Love and pet me all the time
Then at day's end I would climb
In my cage.

They used to take me out
And let me scamper in the sun
I no longer get to run
In my cage.

But as days and weeks went by
I saw less of them it seemed
Of their loving touch I dreamed
In my cage.

Once a cute and cuddly bunny
Like a little ball of cotton
Now I'm grown up and forgotten
In my cage.

In the night outside their house
I felt sad and so neglected
Often scared and unprotected
In my cage.

I don't know what went wrong
At the home I did inhabit
I just grew to be a rabbit
In my cage.

In the dry or rainy weather
Sometimes hotter sometimes colder
I just sat there growing older
In my cage.

But they've brought me to the pound
I was once loved and enjoyed
Now I wait to be destroyed
In my cage.



Upcoming Events

Healthy Habits for Healthy Rabbits

Join us for our first "Healthy Habits for Healthy Rabbits" fundraiser, March 22, 2005, from 4-8pm at Healthy Habits Fitness and Yoga Studio, 2224 J Street, in downtown Sacramento.

SHRS is teaming up with Rose Zahnn, owner of Healthy Habits, to raise money for area rescue rabbits and to heighten public awareness about these little creatures that are so misunderstood. This time of year is especially crucial for education, as there is an increase of baby rabbits purchased at Eastertime (many of whom will be abandoned within the year, creating an overflow at local shelters and increasing the number of stray bunnies who are vulnerable to predators).

This casual evening event will include a silent auction featuring wonderful local items and gifts, and we'll have lots of surprises and activities for all ages. Bunny care items for your long-eared friends will be available for sale, and our rabbit-savvy SHRS volunteers will also be on hand to answer questions about your bunnies (or to give information if you are



thinking of adopting one). We also will have some of our locally rescued rabbits to greet you.

No reservations needed – just come and join the fun, and help support our rescue and education efforts at the same time!

— Margaret-Rose Batterman

The SHRS booth at a December Healthy Habits event was a hit. This time, though, it's going to be all about the rabbits!

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.

March 12
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

April 9
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Folsom PetCo
855 E. Bidwell Street

May 14
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Arden PetCo
1878 Arden Way

June 11
10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

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 on page 3. We can't return items, so please do not send originals.



Sacramento House Rabbit Society
 P.O. Box 19850
 Sacramento, CA 95819-0850

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: _____

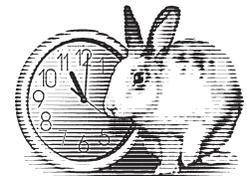
email address: _____

*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