

Quarterly News from the
Sacramento House Rabbit Society

All Ears in Sacramento



Number 38
Fall 2008

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Hobart Van Gogh *An Unbreakable Spirit*

I have a foster bunny, Hobart Van Gogh, who will be up for adoption this fall. If you were to see him (in person or a picture), you'd think instantly that he's different from other bunnies. You'd be right...but not for the physical reasons that catch your eye.

Hobart came into my life last July. I had just adopted out my bonded pair of foster bunnies, Sugar and Pepper, who I'd had for over a year. They were my first rescue bunnies and the reason why I'd become involved with SHRS. The very day they went to their new home, I got an unexpected call from SHRS Chapter Manager Margaret Batterman. She

told me a heartbreaking story about a little guy who had been dumped overnight at the Yolo County Shelter, in a box so small he couldn't turn around or stand up. He was a Californian, but weighed less than eight pounds (underweight for a full-grown rabbit of that breed) and his bones were protruding and lacking muscle. He was soiled with urine stains, had mites, sore hocks, and appeared to have an abscess on his face. Worst of all were his ears – one was curled completely under, and the other had a hematoma (in simpler terms, it was a "cauliflower" ear). Margaret said this bunny had been receiving treatment at the shelter for nearly a week, but the staff was unconvinced he could survive and was prepared to put him down the following day. The shelter vet had seen something special in him, and thought perhaps the SHRS could save him.

Touched by the story, my family and I agreed to foster him, although at that point, none of us had actually seen the rabbit. When Margaret picked him up and brought him to my house, we were all horrified at his condition. He was so sick that he was off-balance and very clumsy. But with what little energy he had, he came to me and laid his head on my leg. My doubts melted away. When we saw

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Hobart enjoying some grass and sunshine at his new foster home, pre-surgery



HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY

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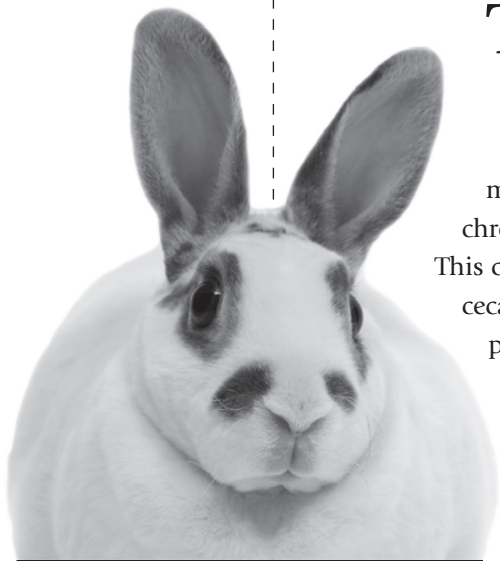
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"My name's Jimmy and I approve of this bathing method."

The Dry Bunny Bath

Over the years, I've seen many foster rabbits with chronically "messy bottoms." This can be due to runny stool, cecal overproduction or urinary problems (or a combination of any of the three – yuk). As much as I hate giving the requisite "butt bath" with warm water and gentle soap, the bunny almost always hates it even more.

Recently, I found an article by Dana Krepfels of the Miami HRS about different techniques for "butt baths." Dana is very respected among HRS educators, so when I read that she's recommending "dry baths" instead of the obvious wet baths for bunnies with chronic diarrhea, I took notice. According to Dana, the best way to clean up a messy rear end isn't with water ... it's with cornstarch.

I had an opportunity to try the technique just days later. My good friend (and former SHRS chapter manager) Jill Walker has a bunny, Fiona, who requires a regular "personal grooming session" about every two months. Fiona loathes being wrapped in a towel (the "bunny burrito") so cleaning her up is always a two-person job. Using Dana's technique, I took a small dish of cornstarch and worked it into the messy, wet fur on Fiona's hocks while Jill held her. I was able to easily separate and pluck off many of the matted clumps. The process did take some time – Fiona lost patience before I was done. But then I spent a few minutes holding her while Jill clipped off the biggest fur clumps that were left. By the time Fiona returned to her regular living area, she was indignant, but looking and smelling a whole lot better.

Holy mackerel, that was so much easier than dipping her in water! And, as it turned out, I wasn't even using exactly the right product. Upon re-reading Dana's article, I realized that she specifically recommends baby cornstarch, which can be found in the infant

section of most grocery stores. Unlike kitchen cornstarch, baby cornstarch contains pulverized silica, which, Dana says, "helps the poop slide off the fur." Though the kitchen cornstarch I used definitely helped dry up Fiona's wet fur, I wonder if the additional clipping wouldn't have been necessary if we'd used baby cornstarch. We'll definitely give it a try next time.

Please remember that baby cornstarch is different than regular baby powder! The talc in baby powder can cause respiratory problems, and it's not good for a bunny to ingest. Also – most importantly – don't forget that no matter how it's given, a "butt bath" doesn't address the cause of the problem. Make sure your bunny sees a knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian who can figure out what's causing the condition and prescribe a remedy. Both you and your bunny will feel much better once you ...uh...get to the bottom of the problem.

– Kirsten Macintyre

To read Dana's original article online, visit: www.bio.miami.edu/hare/buttbath.html

Recent Adoptions

Finnegan, Fiona and **Felicia** were adopted by their foster mom, Susan King.

Sugar and **Pepper** were adopted by Lacie Woodward.

Chablis was adopted by Travis Newberry (shown with girlfriend Krista).



Rabbits Available for Adoption

1. Our names (left to right) are **Mimi, Rosie, Smudge, Pudge, Oscar, Napoleon, and Peanut.** Five girls and two boys. We were rescued from the same location and have grown up as a family (or herd, in rabbit language). Oscar is our fearless leader and Mimi likes to act like a mom to all of us. We are spayed and neutered. Our foster mom said it would be most unlikely we would all find a forever home together...but that we could be adopted as pairs or more to very special homes. Thank goodness we all get along and take care of each other!

2. Hoppy Gilmore is a young active and playful boy.

3. Star, Joey, and Lilly are a beautiful, fun-loving trio of sisters born mid-May, 2008. They are a comical bunch who play and groom one another. It would be wonderful to keep them together, but we are open to splitting the herd, for the right homes.

4. Eleu is a male mini-rex who loves to play with toys.

5. Eliza is a two year old girl. She has excellent litter box habits and loves to explore. Her favorite hobby is deconstructing wicker baskets.

6. Mikey is a curious young boy who likes to play with his toys and give kisses!

7. Rhett Bunbler is an active young male. He loves to dig and has been having fun digging and shredding last year's yellow pages. He likes to be held and petted, but only after he has had a chance to race around and get his exercise.

8. Dakota is a year-old girl who likes being petted and held. She has good litter box habits.

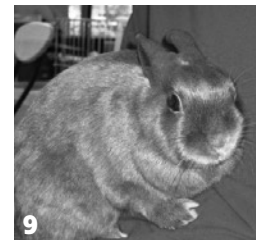
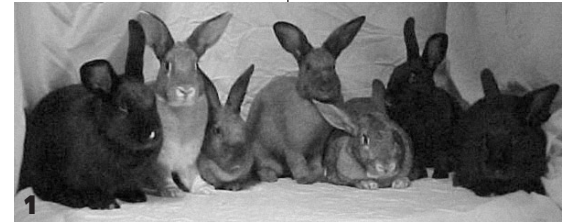
9. Misty needs a caring home due to a previous health challenge. She is a stable and very sweet girl who loves to be held.

10. Elvira is an active adult girl. She has great litterbox habits. She enjoys attention and being held.

11. Cole is a young dwarf boy who is smart, curious and enjoys being petted. He likes having plenty of space to roam!

12. Sophie was one of a bonded pair, until she decided she wanted all the attention for herself! She is a very sweet girl bunny who is very curious about her environment.

13. Hobart Van Gogh is a special boy looking for the special home he has awaited his entire life. After a rough start at the shelter, Hobart has fully recovered and has been neutered. He would do best with a family that has experience handling rabbits and time to give him the attention he deserves. Because one ear had to be removed, he must live where he will have air conditioning during hot weather.



Hobart

continued from page 1

him act like that, we couldn't turn him away.

And so, Hobart's road to recovery started. My boyfriend Joel, recent rabbit convert, began sharing with me a weekly regimen of administering medications several times a day. Within a few weeks, Hobart's internal infections and the mite situation were under control and we could turn our attention to the more obvious problem with his ears. Dr. Marianne Brick at the Madison Avenue Veterinary Clinic consulted with me and we decided to amputate the obviously broken ear because of the extensive nerve damage and potential for chronic infections in the future. Dr. Mira Sanchez performed the surgery and neutered him at the same time.

When I brought Hobart home, I couldn't help but wonder what was in store for us both. Would he adjust to his new life or would all these sudden changes be too much for him?

As it turned out, I had nothing to worry about. Two months after Hobart came into my home, I see the most rambunctious, energetic creature on earth. He's reached his optimal weight of 10 pounds and he's got the most amazing sparkle

in his eyes. More than anything, he wants human companionship. I've never had a rabbit that I could carry around and hold for so long ...if I walk by his cage, he chews on the door and pushes against it to get out. The minute the door opens, he runs to me and (still!) puts his head on my leg, or climbs into my arms and tucks his head under my chin.

Hobart is amazingly self-sufficient and doesn't need the kind of high-level maintenance some special-needs bunnies require. He has trouble cleaning both of his ear canals (his remaining ear doesn't bend forward) and so he needs a gentle swabbing with a Q-tip once a week, but that's all. He has been my best patient yet – when we were medicating him regularly, he would suck the medicine out of the syringe. It's almost as if was thinking, "Do whatever you guys need to do. You're helping me and I trust you."

Ideally, I'd like Hobart to go to someone who doesn't have too many other animals and who has the time to spend with him that he craves and deserves. He'll need a home with air conditioning (because rabbits self-regulate their body temperature by releasing excess heat from their ears, and he's only got one). Otherwise, he's going to be a perfect house rabbit – he's working hard on his litterbox training, and he's shown no interest in chewing. It would be nice if his new home had a yard or small patch of grass where he can play once in a while. Even as a house bunny, he loves to smell the fresh air, and there's nothing cuter than his big, clumsy jumps for joy when he's outside.

It's always hard to part with a foster rabbit you've loved and cared for (even when you know he's going to a wonderful home). It's going to be especially hard for me to adopt out Hobart. He's the kind of rabbit that, as a fosterer, you secretly hope never gets adopted. If I could sum up Hobart in three words, I'd say he is "Easy to Love." What he lacks in one ear, he's made up for with his heart. And when he goes, a piece of my own heart will go with him ... but for the right family, it'll be worth it.

Top photo: Hobart was facing a lot of health issues when he was dropped off at the shelter

Bottom photo: Post-surgery, Hobart is enjoying much better days



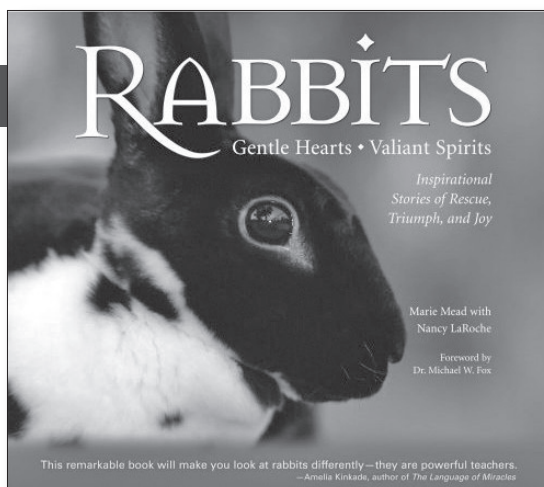
Book Review

Rabbits: Gentle Hearts, Valiant Spirits

The SHRS is offering a wonderful new book, *Rabbits: Gentle Hearts, Valiant Spirits*, for sale at its Adoption Days events and through the web site. This book consists of 24 heartwarming true stories of discarded or mistreated rabbits and their ordeals to survive. At 141 pages, it's a captivating read for both the experienced rabbit owner and those who have never experienced life with a house rabbit.

Written by English author Marie Mead, the book includes full-color photographs and beautiful pencil illustrations. Each tale concludes with interesting and informative facts about house rabbits' behavior, such as housing needs, litter training tips, deafness in rabbits, and why bunnies are not good classroom pets. But the real charm of this book is in the uplifting tales themselves. Some reviewers have even compared it to the popular bestseller *Marley and Me* by John Grogan.

This wonderful anthology is offered through SHRS for \$15 (less than the list price of \$18.95) and each copy ordered through SHRS is signed by the author. The book has already earned the stamp of approval from the National HRS (Colorado HRS Chapter Manager Nancy LaRoche was a collaborating writer, having contributed two of the stories, and HRS Executive Director Margo DeMello is acknowledged in the credits). The book has also been named as a Finalist in the 2008 Benjamin Franklin Awards in the Best New Voice (nonfiction) category by the Independent Book Publishers Association.



Rabbit lovers will find *Rabbits: Gentle Hearts, Valiant Spirits* to be a wonderful companion tome to the *House Rabbit Handbook*. Many thanks to SHRS member Karin Boston for bringing this great book to our attention!

Rabbit Cages Available Soon!

SHRS recently discovered a cleverly designed bunny cage made by IRIS, a Japanese company that specializes in plastic storage containers. This unusual cage features a built-in litterbox that slides out for easy cleaning, an enclosed compartment under the main floor (which provides the bunny with a secure place to hide or hang out), and four casters. It has both a front and a top opening, making it easy to clean or to lift the bunny out, and it's made of durable, lightweight, nonchewable plastic (no metal – no rust!). The approximate size is 24" W x 30" D x 31" H, so it's best suited for a small-to-medium rabbit.

The product has been discontinued and is not available locally, but we were able to special-order several of them for resale to our members. SHRS will be offering them for \$75, starting this fall. Quantities are very limited; please call our hotline if you would like more information.



There's the Rub!

Massage Therapy Can Do Wonders for Your Rabbit



Flurry enjoys having his shoulders stroked

What human doesn't enjoy a nice massage? It reduces stress and increases wellness. Massage for animals is gaining in popularity because it offers the same health benefits, and rabbits are no exception.

Massage is the touch of the physical body with a healing purpose, specifically working the soft tissues—the muscles and circulatory fluids. It reduces stress and muscle tension, increases muscle tone, expands range of motion in the joints and speeds recovery from injury.

Massage also affects the nervous and endocrine systems. Increased circulation helps transport oxygen to muscles and aids in eliminating cellular wastes and toxins. This flushes muscles with nourishment so they can func-

Rabbits already engage in a form of massage with each other: grooming.

tion optimally. Improved circulation leads to healthier skin and coats and strengthens the immune system.

For rabbits that are especially active, massage can help to increase joint flexibility and relieve muscle spasms. Muscles that have been overworked or under worked can create adhesions (literally places where muscles become stuck to the surrounding tissues). Massage can help to break up these adhesions, allowing muscles to function at their best.

Massage is also helpful for emotional issues, particularly in re-socializing rabbits that have been abused or neglected. A caring touch speaks volumes and is often the first step in rebuilding trust.

Massage can even help ease the stresses of daily life, such as a visit to the veterinarian. A rabbit who is used to being handled in a caring way will have a higher threshold for stressful situations. This makes the caretaker's job easier when it's time to cut nails, give medications or examine teeth.

Rabbits already engage in a form of massage with each other—grooming. Mother rabbits lick their kits after birth to stimulate their bodily functions, and adult rabbits lick each other and their human companions to show affection and bonding. Sharing massage with animals is a great way to strengthen the animal-human bond.

Daily touch also gives you baseline knowledge of what is normal for your pet, their muscle condition and their overall health. Massage is a low-cost, safe and natural supplement to your pet's care. It has no harmful side effects; it is non-invasive and supports the body's own healing process.

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.

October 11 10:00 am – 3:00 pm Folsom PetCo 855 E. Bidwell Street	November 8 10:00 am – 3:00 pm Arden PetCo 1878 Arden Way	December 13 10:00 am – 3:00 pm Fair Oaks PetCo 8840 Madison Avenue	January 10 10:00 am – 3:00 pm Folsom PetCo 855 E. Bidwell Street
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Massaging Your Bunny

How do you begin? Massage for rabbits uses lighter pressure than for humans because of their relative size, and focuses on one area of the body rather than a full treatment all at once. No oils or lotions are used when massaging rabbits. Your own hands are the only tools you'll need.

Try this simple *effleurage* stroke down the back. Most rabbits enjoy this relaxing technique, making this a good way to introduce your pet to massage.

With relaxed hands, begin light, long strokes that start at the nose and pass across the top of the skull to the base of the neck, then down the sides of the body, taking care to avoid putting pressure on the spine. Use your fingertips or the palms of your hands, molding your hands around the body's curves as you go. Stroke all the way to the end of the tail, then quickly return to your starting point. Repeat this stroke several times using a little more pressure with each pass. Try varying the speed and see how your rabbit likes it. Vary this move by strumming across the big cheek muscles with your fingertips at the start while letting your thumbs slide across the skull, then continue with flattened hands down the sides.

Repeat this long stroke from the neck to the tail, but this time make small circles with your fingers over the muscles on either side of the spine. Finish with some light feather stroking, barely touching the fur, then just rest your hands on your rabbit's back, and let the effects sink in.

– Chandra Moira Beal

Chandra Moira Beal is a longtime HRS volunteer, and the author of *The Relaxed Rabbit: Massage for Your Pet Bunny*. She is currently producing a DVD version, available at rabbits.chandrabeal.com.



Milo settles in for the full massage treatment

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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 \$20. 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, \$20
- Please sign me up for both for \$35
- I have enclosed an additional donation of \$_____
- My employer _____ will match my donation to SHRS

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

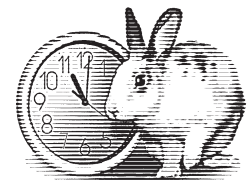
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Volunteer!

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



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