# Adopt a Rescued Rabbit Month: February

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

RABBIT RESCUE

For some pets, a good home can be hard to find. Every year, thousands of unwanted animals are brought to humane societies and animal shelters worldwide.

Worse, many former pets are turned loose in the wild - left either to fend for themselves until premature death or to invade and wreak havoc on the environment. These scenarios are especially true for small pets, who - despite their diminutive size - require care just as passionate and involved as the care given to larger animals. In fact, there is nothing about these "pocket pets" that can be tucked away. As with all pets, behind the cuddly fur, affectionate personality, and adorable behavior is an animal wholly reliant on her human companion to offer what nature and instinct cannot while she is caged.

In particular, the influx of rabbits into humane societies, animal shelters, and rescue organizations is further complicated by the rabbit's iconic stature in both the United States and the world. The popular symbol of the Easter holiday, rabbits are also a staple in television, stories, and movies - especially those geared towards children. As such, rabbits are used to relate to the human condition; therefore, they seem easily accessible and the casual pet owner often assumes that rabbits make ideal pets. In truth, a rabbit can be a wonderful pet - for the right person or family who understands a rabbit's needs and behaviors and can eagerly cater to them.

However, rabbits are often brought into an unprepared home. Thus, many are turned over to animal groups or organizations. Because of this, the House Rabbit Society (HRS), an international nonprofit animal rescue and education group, along with Petfinder, celebrate February 2007 as "Adopt-a-Rescued Rabbit Month." The goal of this campaign is twofold: to educate the public about these often misunderstood companion animals, and to help rescue and "rehome" domestic rabbits.

Mary Cotter, Marketing/Education Director of the Richmond-based HRS, says that the timing of this educational effort couldn't be better. "This allows rabbit rescue groups such as House Rabbit Society to educate the public on house rabbit care well before the Easter season in order to prevent the purchase - and eventual abandonment - of thousands of rabbits," she explains. "Rabbits can be wonderful indoor

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companions. They get along with many other companion animals (including gentle cats and dogs), are intelligent, affectionate, and inquisitive."

Cotter also notes that most rabbits can be trained to use a litter box. "But they can also be destructive," she says. "The ideal 'rabbit person,' in addition to being calm, patient, and eager to get to know a rabbit on his or her terms, must be willing to rabbit-proof their home to prevent damage from chewing."

But if you have been considering a rabbit as a pet, there is no time like the present to educate yourself and, if you still feel prepared, adopt a previously abandoned rabbit from a humane society, animal shelter, or rescue organization.

**The Adoption Advantage**

A common misconception is that humane societies, animal shelters, and rescue organizations are filled with undesirable animals. While there are instances when a sheltered animal is problematic, it is not the norm. In fact, most often an animal is either turned in to an animal group or organization or abandoned because of "human" problems, not issues with the pet. Allergies, pregnancies, and ill-preparedness are the top reasons a pet is no longer wanted in a home. They are often active, normal animals who need better care - through housing, diets, treats, and/or toys - to satisfy their instincts and the boredom that often ensues when the need to nest, chew, or play is left unchecked.

The greatest advantage to adopting a pet from one of these organizations is that they honestly care about the well-being of the animal and will work with you to ensure your choice is the best possible match for your interest, attitude, home, knowledge, and resources. As such, you may be required to fill out an application, be interviewed, and open your home for a friendly inspection. This is done to ensure both you and your new pet experience the least stress possible. Thus, your new life together can start off right and quickly become as rewarding as good companionship should be.

Further advantages of adopting a shelter rabbit is that they are usually older and have been neutered, litter-trained, and exposed to people. In short, many shelter rabbits have already completed the more difficult adolescent stages of life. In addition, the knowledgeable shelter staff have observed the rabbit for signs of behavior or health problems. The only aspect of your chosen rabbit's life a shelter may be unaware of - unlike a breeder - is the rabbit's genetic history and parental lines. However, since many shelters have access themselves, or can refer you, to a knowledgeable, local veterinarian, your rabbit is sure to have adequate, professional care throughout her life.

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