

All Ears in Sacramento

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Bunnies for Sale – *HRS volunteer makes new friends, and makes a difference*

One day several months ago, traffic was too congested on Main Street in Woodland, so at the very last minute I took an abrupt left turn to a side street. In my mind I was asking myself what made me do that. Lo and behold, midway down the street I saw a cardboard sign advertising “Bunnies for sale, \$10.” Then I knew why I had taken the unplanned detour.

I got out of my car and approached the house. There were people in the backyard, and I hollered out to them. They came to the gate and I quickly realized they spoke only Spanish. The mother, Marina Norigea, was very nice and opened the gate to escort me to her backyard. It was beautifully landscaped and was like being in a peaceful sanctuary. It was a very warm and homey environment. With lots of hand language, head nods, my broken Spanish and her broken English, I was able to convey to her that I was interested in the rabbits.

Marina led me to the very back of the

yard, where there were many small, stacked, wooden makeshift cages. The bunnies in them were in mediocre conditions. The cages were in need of upgrading and cleaning. All the rabbits were separated by sex, but they were unaltered. On the other side of the yard was a mother rabbit with about seven kits. Again, they were not in the best of conditions; the babies were on a dirt floor with a wooden box to hide in, covered by a large tarp. The rabbits were mostly English Spot mixes and were very friendly. As expected with backyard bunnies, they needed nail trims and had urine stains on their fur.

continued on page 2



Marina Norigea with her rabbits for sale. Marina and her family have decided to stop breeding rabbits after hearing about the number of unwanted rabbits in area shelters.

Bunnies for Sale *continued from page 1*

Soon, the Noriegas' daughter, Lupe, arrived. Lupe spoke English and was able to translate (whew!).

Marina went to the house and brought back her husband, Raul. He did not speak English either so Lupe had her work cut out for her (other family members gathered around to listen in and help translate, too). Apparently, Raul was the primary caregiver and breeder of the rabbits. He had been breeding rabbits for two years trying to make extra money. He started raising the rabbits with no previous knowledge of rabbit care or breeding. Yet Raul seemed to genuinely care about the rabbits and enjoyed handling the little babies. He even snuggled them to his face when he showed them to me. Marina shared with me that Raul would sing to the rabbits every day! The family

thought that was very funny and would tease him about it!

I explained the House Rabbit Society's mission to them, and told them how much effort we put forth rescuing rabbits that are sold from backyard breeders just like them. They agreed that it is not the most profitable

venture, and we all laughed when I jokingly suggested that maybe I could hire Raul to work at my house painting for the money he made breeding rabbits. The family listened as I explained that the shelters are frequently overflowing with unwanted Easter bunnies and strays from people letting them loose, and that those sold will likely reproduce, creating even more bunnies and just adding to the overpopulation problem. I explained how my own home is full of unwanted rabbits who were almost euthanized at the shelter, and it was discouraging to see that they were contributors. (Ironically, friends of mine who live very close to the Noriegas had captured a rabbit, just like the ones they were breeding, that was loose in the alley. My friends wanted to take the rabbit to the shelter but I was able to encourage them to integrate him into their home. Sammy the rabbit is now very loved and even has another house rabbit companion, Paprika. I shared this story with the Noriegas so they could understand the trickle-down effect of backyard breeding.)

The best part was Marina and Raul were very receptive and understanding about what I was sharing with them. After we talked, Raul decided not to breed and took the "for sale" sign down from his yard. It was such a wonderful experience.

Afterwards, we spoke of making a bunny play area for them, how to make toys, proper diet, and ways to interpret bunny language. I brought timothy hay and toys by for the rabbits, and the family was amused to watch the bunnies investigate and play with their new toys.

I recently went to follow up with the family. They had just five bunnies. They still were unaltered, not bonded and in need of home improvements, but those are all improvements I look forward to helping them with. Thank you, Marina and Raul, for showing your compassion for these gentle animals by not creating more!

— Margaret-Rose Batterman



Lupe Noriega (above) and her parents are working towards improving their rabbits' living arrangements.



Rollin's Story: One Rescued Bunny Inspires a Volunteer's Mission

Margaret-Rose Batterman is one of the Sacramento House Rabbit Society's tireless volunteers – in addition to her full-time job as a registered nurse, she also spends 8-12 hours per week volunteering at the Yolo County Shelter. Her efforts have saved countless rabbits. Here she shares the story of how she became involved in rabbit rescue.

When I lived in Ithaca, New York, eight years ago, I was a volunteer at the local SPCA shelter. My focus was working with cats. One day I walked in and saw five cages of bunnies stacked up near the cat cages. All of them were in pairs except one "golden" bunny all by himself in a cage on the very top. He looked just like the Velveteen rabbit. I was completely mesmerized and taken by this beautiful little rabbit. It felt really strange to be so overwhelmed by this little bunny's mere presence – it was love at first sight, just like meeting another human and falling in love. I still find the experience interesting to this day.

I knew nothing about rabbits and immediately picked him up like a cat, holding his little face near mine. He started grinding his teeth in my ear, and I was smitten. I had never felt a creature so soft. I put him back, and hunted down one of the SPCA volunteers who happened to have a house rabbit herself. I asked her what it meant when he had ground his teeth in my ear, and she told me that it meant he was happy. Those were the magic words that brought my very dear Rollin into my life.

Rollin had been a college student's pet rabbit. He was an unneutered orange rex about eight months old. The student moved out of the apartment and abandoned him. Much later, the landlords came to clean the apartment and found Rollin in his cage starving with no food or water. They then brought him to the SPCA.



Margaret relaxes at home with Rollin and Ellie

Since Rollin and I found each other, we have been through a lot of adventures together! He flew with me when I moved from New York to California and has traveled lots of other places with me up and down both coasts. Now, he finally has settled down with me in my new home. He also has a beautiful white Rex girlfriend named Ellie to put even more love on him. Ellie was a rescue from the Yolo County Shelter.

I truly consider Rollin an angel for all rabbits. Having him in my life has led to the rescue and help for so many other rabbits. I tell him every day that it is because of him that my rabbit room is full of other rabbits in need. We (the foster rabbits and I) are all very grateful to him. I really think we all have rabbit "angels" that come into our lives and change our life's path. Our lives are enriched by these wonderful and greatly misunderstood creatures. My thanks and great love to Rollin.

— Margaret-Rose Batterman

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ALTERED CONCIIOUSNESS —

Why it's Important to Spay or Neuter Your Pet Rabbit

One of the House Rabbit Society's most common mantras is "spay or neuter your rabbit!" Yet we don't often stop to think about the reasons behind this good advice. If you only have one pet rabbit – and there is absolutely, positively no chance of an unexpected or unwanted pregnancy – is there any valid reason to put your bunny through such a surgery? Absolutely! Read on...

Rabbits recover from their spay or neuter surgery quickly.



Litterbox habits tend to improve post-surgery.

- **Health reasons.** A spayed or neutered house rabbit will live years longer than an unaltered bunny – this is especially true for girl rabbits. According to a 1958 veterinary study, 80% of unspayed female rabbits will develop uterine cancer sometime in their lifetime. Another study, done in 1964, put the rate even higher. Those aren't statistics to challenge.

- **Behavioral Reasons.** Altered rabbits are much calmer and less aggressive than unaltered rabbits. They are less likely to chew "forbidden" things around the

house, such as baseboards and phone cords, and they won't be as aggressive, because they aren't fighting hormonal urges all the time.

- **"Marking" and Litterbox Training.** An intact male rabbit is likely to spray urine when excited (we won't tell you that a

neutered bunny will never, ever, spray, but it's a whole lot less likely). Spayed females and neutered males are also easier to litterbox train, and they're less likely to have accidents around the house.

- **Companionship.** A rabbit who is altered can safely have a companion of the opposite sex – and in some cases, the same sex. Rabbits who have mates are happier and less likely to be bored while their human companions are at work or otherwise occupied. Interestingly enough, bonded pairs of rabbits (in which both bunnies are altered) may still show – how can we say it delicately? – "mating behavior" from time to time. However, this is an act of dominance, and has little to do with reproductive urges. If your rabbits have been "fixed," you can look the other way, guilt-free, knowing that you're not contributing to the overpopulation problem!

It's true that only a small percentage of veterinarians are qualified to perform spays and neuters on rabbits, but the House Rabbit Society can help you find a veterinarian who is comfortable and experienced in rabbit surgery. A knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian will not make the rabbit fast beforehand (this is recommended with cats, but not rabbits). He or she will also use isoflourane as an anesthetic during the surgery, and treat the bunny with appropriate painkillers afterwards. Recovery time for both males and females is relatively brief, and although no surgery is ever 100% risk-free, we can comfortably tell you that when performed by a qualified vet, the spay and neuter procedures are relatively routine. The National House Rabbit Society reports statistics of more than 1000 rabbits spayed or neutered with only approximately .1% mortality due to anesthesia.

Finally, even though we started this article



Bunnies who have been spayed or neutered make better companions for people and other rabbits. They tend to mark their territory less, nip less, and of course, will not contribute to the number of rabbits who wind up in area shelters.

Quick Guide to Spays and Neuters – What You Need to Know

Q: How soon can I spay or neuter my rabbit?

A: Ideally, between three and six months of age, although older is often all right, too.

Q: How can I find a qualified veterinarian?

A: The Sacramento HRS keeps a list of local vets who work with rabbits (<http://www.alllearssac.org/sacvets.html>). If you live outside the area and don't know what questions to ask, we can provide you with some guidelines to take along when interviewing for a new bunny doctor (<http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/vet.html>).

Q: How much does a spay or neuter cost?

A: Prices vary widely; neuters are generally less expensive, at between \$35-\$80, while the more invasive and complicated spay can cost \$65-\$200 or more.

Q: How complicated is the surgery?

A: For a male rabbit, it's pretty simple – the testicles are removed through a small incision in the scrotum. For a female, it's more a complicated procedure, involving removal of both the uterus and ovaries.

Q: How long is recovery?

A: A good bunny vet will send you home with pain medication for your pet and good instructions on care and detection of any complications. While girl rabbits typically take a few days before they're feeling up to snuff, boy rabbits will sometimes bounce back within hours (it depends on the bunny). Keep in mind that even if your bunny's back in good spirits, it will still take several weeks for all the hormones to get out of the system. And male rabbits can still be virile for up to three weeks post-neuter, so don't be tempted to let him fraternize with the opposite sex when he comes home from the vet's office!

by alluding to the most obvious reason – reproduction – it still bears repeating. Many, many well-meaning people get pet rabbits with the intention of breeding them “only once” – for the experience, or to “allow” the rabbit to indulge in its natural urge to breed (this is a common misconception...honest, your female rabbit won't spend the rest of her life wondering what could have been if she never has a litter. We promise.).

Please remember, after dogs and cats, rabbits are the third most commonly euthanized animal at shelters. There aren't enough homes for the rabbits who have already been born, let alone for the litters to come. Spaying or neutering your pet is an act of kindness and compassion, and will help ensure a happy and long life for your beloved companion.

For more information, visit the National House Rabbit Society's web site at www.rabbit.org.

— Kirsten Macintyre

Congratulations to our December raffle winners:

Kings Tickets: Mark Thompson

Mondavi Center Vouchers: Margaret Cascarella

Professional Massage: Sharon Lowrey

PetCo Gift Certificate: Vera Buss

Thanks to everyone who participated, and helped raise more than \$400 for SHRS!

Recent Adoptions

Margaret was adopted by Andrea Pomposo

Polly was adopted by John Moist

Morsel was adopted by Shirley Bunk

Elderberry was adopted by Terry Velarde

Bigwig was adopted by Anne Hitchcock

Mopsy was adopted by Laura Frost

Cameo was adopted by Cindy Kazee

Jerome was adopted by Rose Morales

Elvin was adopted by Heather Corfee

Henry was adopted by Rebecca Koelling

Banjo was adopted by Allison Flower

Peanut Butter was adopted by Linda Barr

Lucky was adopted by Marie Bryan

Pierre was adopted by Julie Justham

Rabbits Available for Adoption



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



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



Darby is a young sweet girl.



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



Strawberry and Jellybean are bonded young girls who are sweet and playful.



Fiona, Felicia and Finnegan (2 girls and 1 boy) are friendly, playful siblings. They want to be adopted as a trio.

Gracie is a busy adult girl who enjoys the company of humans and other animals.



Licorice is an active adult Rex boy. He is playful, social, affectionate and curious.



Hoppy Gilmore is a young, active, playful boy.



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



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

Available rabbits not pictured:

Godiva is a gorgeous chocolate rex, very gentle and good with her litterbox.

Nico is a beautiful, friendly young male mini-lop who loves to explore and be petted.

Boo is a young New Zealand who is both curious and mellow - a real sweetie!

February is "Adopt a Rescued Rabbit Month"

The House Rabbit Society is teaming with the ASPCA and Petfinder.com to sponsor the third annual Adopt-a-Rescued-Rabbit month in February. Marinell Harriman, founder and president of HRS, explains that the timing of this educational effort couldn't be better. "As we move into the months preceding Easter, it is critical that we get the word out. There are thousands of rabbits in shelters around the country waiting for homes; many of these rabbits were babies purchased as a whim during last year's Easter season by families who didn't know how to care for and interact with them. Now the kids have grown tired of them, and parents have dropped them off at already-crowded shelters."

Help HRS spread the word about being a responsible pet owner, and adopting abandoned rabbits from shelters instead of breeders or pet stores. Visit www.aspc.org to learn more about Adopt-a-Rescued Rabbit Month, and for their free downloadable goodies.





Sacramento House Rabbit Society
 P.O. Box 19850
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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: _____

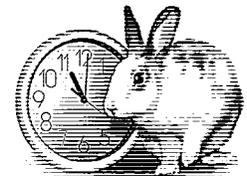
email address: _____

*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