

All Ears in Sacramento

Number 27
Spring 2005

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Watching the Fur Fly: House Rabbits and Shedding

To someone who's new to the world of bunny companions, house rabbits can seem like the ideal low-maintenance pet: They don't require daily walking, you don't have to get out of bed to let them in or out of the house, and they don't bark or meow or otherwise make a lot of noise.

But as unique as they are, rabbits share many qualities with canines and felines. Just like cats and dogs, they require a lot of attention, they need regular veterinary checkups, and... they shed!

True, there are a few breeds (like the rex rabbit) that shed very little. But nearly every type of bunny molts, and regardless of the breed, there are some traits that most bunnies share.

- A rabbit's first real molt will occur when he's about six months old. After this first heavy shed, you'll see his adult coat. The color may be darker or lighter than his "baby coat," and the texture of the fur often becomes more coarse (rex bunnies are an exception—they will get silkier and softer).
- Following the first molt, your rabbit will shed regularly about every three months for the rest of his life. However, the sheddings will alternate between heavy and light. You may only notice every other one, and think he sheds only twice a year!



Zeus struts his fluff

- Darker bunnies may have a "tide mark," or a visible line that you can see as the darker fur comes out and the lighter, new coat grows in.
- Most rabbit molts will begin at the neck and shoulders, moving down the back and sides and ending in the haunch area. But some rabbits don't have any distinct pattern at all.
- A shedding period can last anywhere from a day to a month or more, depending on the breed of the rabbit.
- An extreme change in weather can sometimes trigger an "unscheduled" shedding!
Some also say that rabbits tend to shed the most right around their birthdays, but I'm not really sure if this is an old wives' tale. It

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Chapter Reorganization Update

Greetings! After scaling back our outreach efforts for about six months to restructure and refocus our growing chapter, we are now completely up and running. During our time off, I received an unbelievable number of e-mails, phone calls, and other miscellaneous correspondence from people needing assistance with their rabbits. It became very clear to me that we are very needed and depended on in the community for rabbit resources. Our organization is known, respected, and relied upon by many. We will meet the challenge and continue to develop our chapter goals to increase the ways in which we can assist area domestic rabbits.

The biggest change we have to report is that the Sacramento chapter of HRS will be incorporated as a nonprofit separate from the National HRS. Although we will continue to be associated with National HRS (which is based in Richmond, California), and we will continue to abide by their articles, bylaws and other policies, this change will enable us apply for a \$2,000 annual grant from National, as well as other grants for which we were not previously eligible. We look forward to enjoying the

same wonderful working relationship — including sharing resources — with National that we always have.

Because we will be applying for non-profit status as our own entity, the Sacramento chapter is obligated to form a board of directors. I am happy to report that we have four longtime volunteers who have agreed to help me steer the chapter. These new board members — myself, Brandon Chee, Susan King, Barbara Koenigsmark and Jill Walker — formally assumed our new duties on May 22. We will begin holding monthly board meetings while our nonprofit applications are being processed at the state and federal levels.

Our biannual meetings will continue to be held on the third Sundays of March and September at 1 p.m. (locations TBA). All SHRS members are welcome to attend — if you're interested in volunteering, we'd love to talk to you! Our telephone hotline, (916) 863-9690, and web email, available at www.allearsac.org, are also now up and running.

Thank you for your continued support!

— *Margaret-Rose Batterman*
Chapter Manager

Shedding *continued from page 1*

would be impossible for me to tell from my own experience, because all of my rabbits were rescued — I don't really know when any of them were born! But it's interesting food for thought.

How much is too much?

Though it would seem logical that longer-haired bunnies would shed the most, that's not always the case. The purchase of our heavy-duty vacuum was triggered by our dwarf rabbit, who loses his short fur in a fine "haze" that quickly covers the furniture around his living area and requires almost daily dusting.

On the other hand, we once had an American Mini Lop who would molt in dramatic, large clumps. The fur would gather at the bottom of her cage, and if I didn't pick it up and discard it, at the end of a week it would look like I dumped a few bags of cotton balls

into her living area. Dana Krempels of the HRS in Miami, Florida, calls this type of heavy shed a "coat blow" (and if you've got a bunny who does this, you know what a wonderfully descriptive term this is!). Your rabbit may even end up with bald spots — my Mini Lop would have a bare rear end throughout each summertime — but the fur definitely will grow back.

Besides necessitating more housecleaning, shedding periods can trigger human allergies as well. If you're sneezing through your bunny's molting, it can seem like forever. (Lots of people think their allergies are triggered by rabbit fur. But actually, it's not the fur that causes the sneezing. It's the dander — or skin flakes — that sometimes accompanies a heavy molt.) If your nose doesn't take well to your rabbit's shedding, you may want to invest in a good vacuum and an air cleaner. (We love our

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Rabbits Available for Adoption



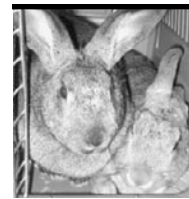
Bandit is an escape artist who loves attention and socializing with his foster mom.



'**Eleu** is an adventure-some mini-rex. He is good at using his litterbox and escaping from his pen.



Baby was found wandering the street shortly after Easter. She is a sweet, active snuggler.



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.



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



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



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.



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



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



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



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

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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 11
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

July 9
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Folsom PetCo
855 E. Bidwell Street

August 13
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Arden PetCo
1878 Arden Way

September 10
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
Fair Oaks PetCo
8840 Madison Avenue

Willie: One Rabbit's Amazing Will to Live

These photos show Willie after his veterinary treatment. Top: the aftermath of a severe ear infection; middle: sore hocks; bottom: his front leg laid bare from urine scald and filthy living conditions.



The shelter staff suggested euthanization, which was totally understandable given his condition.



Last summer, I received a phone call from the Yolo County Animal Shelter saying there was a bunny that had been dropped off in the night deposit box. According to staff, he "didn't look good." When I got to the shelter, I found one of the worst cases of neglect and abuse to a rabbit I personally had ever seen. Someone had left him in the drop box with a bag of food.

He must have weighed only a pound or two and was beyond emaciated. Every bone was protruding. His ears were so infected and heavy with exudate and blood they were hanging down like those of a lop-eared bunny. His hip was sticking out as though it was broken. He had burned, bare skin all over his belly, legs and feet, most likely the result of urine scald from having to sit in a filthy cage atop urine and feces. There were numerous areas where the urine had completely burned through his skin, leaving raw and angry sores. I was shocked at the sight, and even more shocked that he could still be alive in such a terrible condition.

The shelter staff suggested euthanization, which was totally understandable given his condition. But I was struck by the brightness in his eyes. He had a spark that seemed to indicate that he wanted to live, as he had come this far already. That light in his eyes is what prompted me to see what I could do to help him.

Before I left, I assessed a second bunny that had come into the shelter at the same time. The two boys looked very similar and were probably brothers. This second rabbit was very docile and let me pick him up to examine him. As I turned him over on his back to look at his teeth, I noticed his foot was swollen like

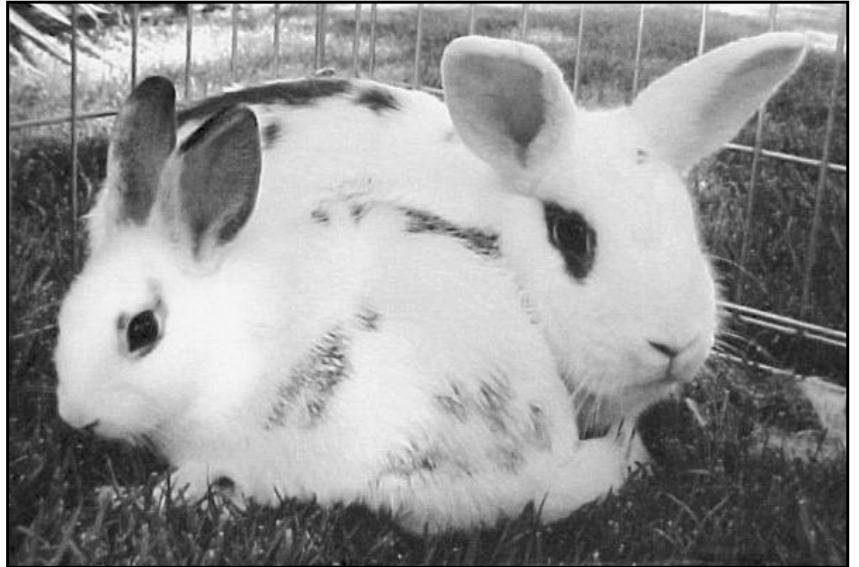
I looked into his eyes and was struck by what seemed to be his will to live.

a balloon and grossly infected. He was in a great deal of pain, which was why he allowed me to handle him so easily.

I took both of the bunnies to Dr. Kris Dailey at Animal Wellness Center in Davis. When Dr. Dailey saw the emaciated bunny she just shook her head, and after examining him, she too recommended euthanization. Again, I looked into his eyes and was struck by what seemed to be his will to live. At that moment I named him Willie, and I asked Dr. Dailey to give him a chance and do whatever she needed to do to help him.

Dr. Dailey warned me he probably would not survive being put under to debride his ears, clean and suture his wounds. He would need IV fluids and x-rays, too. I didn't feel comfortable risking our chapter monies for a bunny that might not make it through anesthesia, so I assumed the cost myself, and off he went into the surgery room. I was not feeling very optimistic but wanted Willie to decide what his fate would be.

I turned my attention back to the other bunny, who needed his toes amputated. Mostly likely his foot became infected after a nail broke off, and the quick was exposed directly to the poor cage conditions. This rabbit, who I named Oscar, made a full recovery. He was adopted out through SHRS and now has a fabulous home in Sacramento where he is quite spoiled.



But there was good news ahead for Willie as well. Dr. Dailey called to tell me that Willie had survived the anesthesia and began eating ravenously as soon as he awoke. My heart leapt with relief and happiness for him. I knew then that Willie had spoken to me, asking me to give him one last chance. That was the best \$300 gamble I could have made. And to this day, Dr. Dailey is in disbelief that Willie survived.

With great fortune, one of our new SHRS volunteers and her family were able to take Willie home to allow him recuperate and receive ongoing treatment for his many medical problems. Lori Olvera and her sons did a remarkable job tending to Willie's daily needs, providing wound care, antibiotics, fluids, and lots of TLC. Today, Willie is handsome and healthy. Knowing what he went through, Lori decided that she couldn't let him out of her sight again. She made him a permanent member of her family, and got him a lovely girlfriend to boot. Cheers to you Willie!

— Margaret-Rose Batterman

Willie (sitting behind his girlfriend, Alice) now has a permanent, loving home. He will never have to experience such horrible neglect again.

Shedding *continued from page 2*

Ionic Breeze—you can buy them just about anywhere these days, and they're worth every penny if you have a sensitive nose and a rabbit who sheds heavily.)



Either Clyde has three tails, or it's shedding season!

Staying on top of it

When your bunny is going through periods of excessive shedding, it's important to help him keep up on top of the sudden "extra maintenance," not for aesthetic reasons, but because he can ingest the extra fur when grooming, and it can cause a stomach blockage. In long-haired bunnies, molting can be impeded if the old fur doesn't come off (the old fur will then mat). The result will be long, ropelike mats that are difficult to remove. This is another reason why it's important to run a brush over your rabbit regularly.

Although there are many grooming products on the market, I've found that the simplest ones are the best. A wire brush with rubber tips works wonderfully for medium- to long-haired rabbits. Fine-toothed combs can work, too, but rabbit skin is very fragile, so don't tug too hard. Brushing shouldn't hurt your rabbit; if he shows any signs of discomfort, ease up.

For short-haired bunnies, you might not even need a brush. A damp (not wet!) washcloth can be used instead. Use it to stroke your rabbit's back as though you were petting him, and the fur will stick to the cloth. If you don't have a cloth handy, you can use damp hands instead. Just rub your hands together afterwards and the loose fur will ball up, making it easy to throw away.

Krempels wisely writes that grooming time is a great opportunity to check out your rabbit's skin and look for any potential problem spots. It's normal for the skin pigment to get a little darker where new fur is growing in, but keep an eye out for crusty skin, excessive flakiness (beyond just normal dander) and any kind of inflammation or sores. Any of these conditions warrant a trip to your veterinarian, to rule out mites, ringworm, and other problems.

Last but not least...

During a molt, it's especially important to keep feeding your rabbit hay, fresh vegetables and lots of water, all of which are necessary to keep any ingested fur moving through the intestines. Rabbits can't vomit (as cats can) when they get hairballs, and blockages are therefore a common cause of untimely death in rabbits. If you have a bonded pair of rabbits, make sure both bunnies are eating normally and staying hydrated. Bonded friends groom each other, and the rabbit who is shedding may not be the one who is most at risk for a blockage!

Finally, during periods of heavy shedding, monitor your rabbit's droppings to make sure they still look normal. A rabbit who is having intestinal trouble will have smaller, hard droppings that may be strung together with bits of hair. If you see this, call your veterinarian. You may be able to treat your bunny at home with Petromalt or a similar product, but it's best to ask for a professional opinion. It's always better to be safe than sorry!

— Kirsten Macintyre

Healthy Habits Fundraiser Update

Wow! Our first annual "Healthy Habits and Rabbits Spring Social and Easter Event" on March 22, 2005 was a great success! Between our silent auction, selling of education Easter eggs (each of which contained a gift certificate for a free class at Healthy Habits), and donations from attendees and vendors, almost \$2,000 was raised for our foster and education efforts! That is huge.

This event, which was the idea Rose Zahnn, owner of Healthy Habits Fitness and Yoga Studio, included vendors for pet and people massages, animal communicators, henna tattoos, skin care, and jewelry. The silent auction was also very popular, with its wide range of items (including a tooth-whitening session with a local dentist, jewelry, massage certificates, animal communicator certificates, homeopathic products, pet products, an eye exam, and even a river-boat cruise!). It was fun to see people perusing the tables with plates of hors d'oeuvres and glasses of soda or wine. Everyone had a delightful time.

The SHRS owes a very big thank you to Rose and her staff for hosting this event and for doing so much of the prep work beforehand! We were so pleased, and we are hoping to put together an even bigger event next year!

Thanks also to all of our generous vendors and businesses that donated to our silent auction, and to our SHRS volunteers who contributed to make this a fantastic event for all!

— Margaret-Rose Batterman
Chapter Manager



Left: Rose Zahnn shows her spirit, while Enuff takes a little time out from the festivities.

Below: Barbara Koenigsmark and Susan King are two of the friendly volunteers who greeted guests.



Thanks to our Fabulous Donors!

Mary Argo	Lindsay Howe	Terry Lutz
Bach Remedy	Roberta Firoved	Kirsten Macintyre
Margaret Rose Batterman	Robert Garcia	Michelle Maclellan
Dr. Amy Bronen	Eric Geiger	Itara O'Connell
Erin Brown	The Gifted Penguin	The Pet Factory
Bunnies by the Bay	Grocery Outlet	Danny Popp
California Natural Pet Services	Jill Johnson	Raley's
JL Cerutti Salon and Spa	Susan King	Room and Company
Ann DaPrato	Laura Knox	Sharon Sampsel
Heidi Delaney	Renu Lal	Evelyn Williams
Angelee Harris	Dr. Peter J. Laurendeau	
Hayes Feed	Dr. Ellen Liebowitz	

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: _____

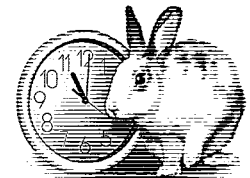
email address: _____

*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