

All Ears in Sacramento

Volume 4
Summer 1999

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CRISIS IN SACRAMENTO: The Rabbit Population Suddenly Explodes

You may have seen it on the nightly news, read about it in the *Sacramento Bee*, or heard by word-of-mouth. Sacramento House Rabbit Society members and volunteers are working seven days a week, practically from dawn to dusk, to help save almost 300 rabbits who were confiscated by Sacramento SPCA humane officers in mid-June. These bunnies – found in horrible, filthy conditions in a residential back yard in Fair Oaks – were transported to the SPCA building on Florin-Perkins Road for temporary housing. The SPCA, grossly understaffed for such a crisis, turned to us for help.

**There Are
How Many Rabbits?**

The HRS's involvement started with a phone call from shelter manager Trish Keefer on June 19th. Her officers had called in to report they would be bringing in an estimated 75-100 rabbits. Our volunteers were there as the first trucks rolled into the SPCA parking lot – and they were shocked at what they found. Sick rabbits, baby rabbits, injured rabbits. All sizes, all shapes, all colors – and all very, very frightened and untrusting. Between 4:30 pm and 11:30 pm that

Saturday, 191 rabbits were brought to the shelter. "We had mere seconds to determine the sex and health of each rabbit as they came off the truck – they were hot, stressed and very upset by all the handling," explained Jill Raymond, Sacramento House Rabbit Society chapter manager.



Most of the adult rabbits had tattered ears and other wounds from fighting. These Angoras also had matted coats.

Over the next two weeks, the number of rabbits swelled as more were rounded up from the back yard and as some of the pregnant females gave birth. Soon the crisis spilled out of the air-conditioned building and into a barn on SPCA grounds. One shelter employee, a former 4-H member, offered to take 80 of the rabbits home and keep them temporarily in her garage. Meanwhile, our HRS volunteers came in droves and we began to work with the SPCA staff to

map out our strategies. In temperatures that topped 109 degrees, we worked to sex the bunnies and separate them to prevent any further pregnancies. Sick and pregnant buns were sent to a temporary "sick bay" inside the building. Funds were pooled, cages and supplies were ordered, the media was contacted, and we rolled up our sleeves and kept working.

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We welcome your submissions to All Ears in Sacramento! If you have story ideas, photos, illustrations, or article topics, send them to the address below. We can't return items, so please do not send originals.

All Ears in Sacramento is published quarterly by the Sacramento House Rabbit Society, an all-volunteer, non-profit organization.

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Crisis continued from page 1

The first two weeks alone, things began to come together. HRS member Misty Jones, concerned about the heat, contacted Home Depot and they responded by donating an industrial-size swamp cooler. Misty then contacted the *Sacramento Bee* and a lovely section-front article ran in the newspaper, along with four pictures of the buns and the volunteers.

Veterinarians donated medicines and supplies, and folks came from all over to help, including:

- The woman from an angora guild who brought her special grooming tools to help de-tangle badly matted coats;
- The rabbit breeder, his wife, and young daughter who drove from Chico to help volunteers sex the rabbits and determine the condition of the pregnant mothers;
- The local veterinarian who gave enough medication to treat all the bunnies for skin mites;
- The veterinary technician from Grass Valley who drove two hours in holiday traffic to help administer medicines to the rabbits in sick bay;
- The wildlife rehabilitator in Texas (!) who heard about our plight on the Internet and arranged for a pharmaceutical company to send us supplies; and
- Many, many other kind souls who stopped by to drop off supplies. Some did not even leave their names.



Kirsten Macintyre helped assess the health and sex of the rabbits

Where We Stand Now

Now, nearly a month into the crisis, a clear picture is beginning to form. It took this long just to get organized and figure out the legal ramifications of the situation – since the “owner” of these bunnies is being prosecuted for animal neglect, the rabbits were considered “evidence” for the court case when they were first brought in. The last week of June, the SPCA was formally notified that the bunnies were released to the custody of the shelter. Now we could start working together to begin adoptions. Our work was only just beginning.

On Tuesday, July 6, formal adoptions to the public began. The HRS and the SPCA staff agreed to work together to screen prospective adopters and place bunnies in the best homes possible. The cost is a deposit of \$30 for one rabbit or \$55 for two, which is refundable upon proof of spay or neuter.

To some degree, the HRS volunteers are dealing with the situation on a day-by-day basis. Some days, there are enough volunteers that we can spend time petting, holding and socializing the bunnies. Other days, only one or two volunteers will be on hand to clean countless cages, refill water bottles, give medicine, talk to prospective adopters, and do countless other necessary chores. We are still trying to work out the kinks in the system, but considering how quickly we had to mobilize, and how much we accomplished in just a few weeks' time, we think that the situation has improved immensely from those first few, frantic days.

Looking to the Future

You may wonder how on earth we – both the SHRS and the SPCA – can find homes for almost 300 rabbits. The simple, sad, and truthful answer is that we can't. We're trying to do the best we can while also being realistic. We work hard to keep these furry faces in the media and the public eye, and in the meantime, we're scrambling behind the scenes to research other options. We have contacted animal sanctuaries as close as Vacaville and as far away as Texas and Utah. There has been some interest on their part in taking in and caring for some of the “unadoptable” rabbits (those

Our Wish List – What You Can Do to Help

Since the first reports of the almost-300 bunnies at the Sacramento SPCA, we've had hundreds of offers of help. Most often, concerned rabbit lovers want to know what they can donate or bring to the shelter. What we need most of all is your time – to get more volunteers to sign up to help clean cages, feed and play with the rabbits. Monetary and material donations are also useful. In general, we can always use the following items:

- Plastic spray bottles
- White vinegar
- Disposable gloves
- Paper towels
- Newspaper
- Clean, old tube socks (to make hay-filled toys to tie onto cages)
- Cardboard paper towel/toilet paper tubes (for toys)

Other items we may or may not need:

- Old cages in good condition (we have received a number of cage donations already)
- Fresh produce, particularly greens
- Bales of hay

Please contact the HRS prior to bringing these items, as we may not have a need – or storage space – at any given time.

All donations should be brought to the SPCA, 6901 Florin-Perkins Road in Sacramento. If you are unsure about a donation, call the SHRS hotline at 863-9690 and leave a message.

that are older, less social, or otherwise less attractive to potential adopters). We are only beginning to explore those options, but we are encouraged by the responses we have received so far. We will continue to keep you updated on those efforts.

In the meantime, as an organization, we need to implore our members to support us in this very important mission. Many have sent in monetary donations earmarked for the cause – those donations enabled us to purchase, among other supplies, nice, new cage banks for the rabbits in the barn, replacing the dilapidated cages that housed the buns for the first few scary nights. We are still accepting donations, which may be sent to Sacramento House Rabbit Society, PMB 48, 2443 Fair Oaks Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95825-7684. Write “SPCA rabbits” on the memo line.



Top: Because these rabbits are used to communal life, our goal is to adopt out in same-sex pairs or triples whenever possible.



Left: Volunteers put in long hours at the barn, using overhead misters and a donated swamp cooler to beat the heat, which reached as high as 109°.



SHRS volunteer Michelle McClure helped assemble the KW cages purchased by the SPCA and SHRS.

But even more importantly, we need hands – people who are willing to change newspaper on the bottoms of cages, refill water bottles and offer food, and, on some days, just to comfort and cuddle these buns. Weekday help is especially precious. To sign up for a volunteer shift, to get more information – or if you have a special skill or want to offer a particular item – call the Sacramento House Rabbit Society Hotline at (916) 863-9690.

And most importantly, we need loving homes for these rabbits. If you have room in your heart (and your home and your budget...) please consider taking one of these beautiful rabbits home. Stop by the SPCA at 6201 Florin-Perkins Road - there's a barn full of bunnies in the back.

— Kirsten Macintyre

The Heat is On: *Keeping your Rabbit Comfortable During the Sacramento Summer*

Adoptions

Regina was adopted by Farla Kaufman and family as a companion for their bunny Furry White

Theodore was adopted by Jason Lind

Kelsey was adopted by Leanna Lamb

Robin was adopted by Cindy Velez

Rikki was adopted by Verna Branco as a companion for her bunny Joey

Clover was adopted by Catherine Walkner Petry as a friend for her bunny

Ursula was adopted by Elizabeth Meyer

Nick was adopted by Kimberly Wheatfill

John and **Abigail** were adopted by Brandon Chee

Congratulations, everyone!

It's that time of year again – time for air conditioners, swimsuits, and sunscreen. For our rabbit companions, though, this isn't a time of rest and relaxation. Your rabbit is depending on you to help keep him cool and comfortable during the hottest time of the year. His life could depend on it.

Rabbits and Heat: A Little Biological Background

Rabbits, like dogs, don't sweat. They lower their body temperature in two ways: they pant, but even more importantly, they use their ears to dissipate heat. If you look at your bunny's ears in the light, you'll be able to see a number of large blood vessels. When it's warm, they'll become large and easily detectable. That's because the blood goes to the ears, where it's closest to the skin's surface. The surrounding air then cools the blood down before it passes back into the rest of the body. A rabbit's normal body temperature is about 102 degrees – still much warmer than the air on a hot day – so the “ears as air conditioners” system works perfectly for them.

Incidentally, this is why rabbits from warm climates, such as jack rabbits, have large ears, while rabbits from cold climates, such as Netherland Dwarfs, have small ears.

If your bunny has hot ears, don't panic. This sign in and of itself is not a bad thing; it just means the “air conditioning” is working. Unless you see other signs of overheating (read on!), there is nothing to worry about.

Precautions and Prevention

Even if your bunny lives indoor all the time, and you have the air conditioner running constantly in the summertime, it's still important to monitor your bunny's behavior and take precautions that he doesn't overheat. Remember that you're much taller than he is, and the room's temperature at his level may be higher or lower by a few degrees than what you can feel. Also remember that he's wearing

a fur coat. If he's in a cage, make sure it's away from the sunlight. Even if he can move out of the direct path of the rays, remember that the sun will quickly heat up a metal cage and your bunny's drinking water.

After those basic precautions have been taken, consider some of the following solutions, which might suit your needs and make bunny more comfortable:

- The most obvious (and tried-and-true!) solution is to get a water bottle – either an old plastic milk jug, or perhaps a bottle of drinking water – and freeze it. You can put the solid bottle directly into the cage with the rabbit. Some bunnies will curl up directly next to the frozen bottle and sleep next to it as it melts. Other rabbits won't actually go near the frozen bottle, but will still reap the benefits as the ice melts and cools off the surrounding air.
- It may help to set up a fan so it blows over (but not directly or continuously on) your rabbit's cage. Some people drape a wet towel over the top of the cage and let the fan blow onto that to encourage quicker evaporation.
- Put a large piece of ceramic or tile into the cage; make sure it's big enough for the bunny to stretch out on. Ceramic and tile are poor conductors of heat and will stay cool and comfortable even when the surrounding air is heating up.
- Remember to brush your bunny regularly – preferably at night or early in the morning, when he won't mind being held against your warm body so much. Now, more than ever, it's important to get all that loose fur out of his coat. He doesn't need the extra insulation! If you have a long-haired rabbit, you might consider using blunt-nosed scissors to trim his fur back a bit. Comfort is more important than beauty this time of year.
- Some people find that their rabbits like to

be misted with a spray bottle, especially around the ears. Be careful with this technique, though – some bunnies may hate this!

- Try offering a salt block. Not all rabbits care for them, but if he'll lick it, it will help him retain water.
- Keep giving your bunny fresh vegetables. Rinse them in the sink before offering them, and don't bother to shake them dry. The extra water will do him good.

Warning signs, and what to do in case of emergency

You may notice that your rabbit will do certain things to make himself more comfortable – he may lie down in the path of the floor fan, for instance, or drink more water than he usually does. If he isn't making any effort to stay cool, though, you may have a problem on your hands. Summer laziness is normal, but true lethargy is the first sign of a bunny in trouble. Other signs of heat exhaustion can include:

- Lying on side.
- Rapid, shallow breathing (the bunny's sides heave with the increased effort).
- Wetness around the nose and mouth/drooling.
- Slight bleeding from the nose (not always present).
- Slight nasal discharge and sneezing on overly hot days.

Pregnant females, overweight buns of both sexes, and small babies surrounded by too much bedding are particularly susceptible to heat exhaustion. In the latter stages of heat prostration, the blood vessels in the ears will enlarge and the mouth may turn blue. At this stage, the condition is usually fatal.

If you suspect that your bunny is truly uncomfortable, dampen his ears. You can hold an ice pack to his head or wrap his ears with a cool, wet washcloth. If he still doesn't respond, get him to the vet clinic right away! Do not wait any longer. A truly overheated rabbit needs professional medical care, possibly including fluid injections. Do NOT try to submerge your rabbit in water – this will likely send him into shock and could easily kill him.

Finally, there is one other health concern

that crops up during warm weather. This is also the primary season for fly strike – a very serious and potentially fatal condition in bunnies. Fly strike occurs when a fly lays eggs on a rabbit's skin. Most commonly, this happens in an open wound, but it can also happen to bunnies whose fur has become matted or caked with urine or feces (moisture, warmth, and odor all attract flies). All it takes is just one insect in the house.

At particular risk for fly strike are older rabbits, disabled rabbits, or overweight rabbits who are unable to clean themselves. Also keep a careful eye out if your bunny has a temporary case of loose stools. Check your rabbit to make sure he's keeping clean and healthy. It's a smart thing to do anyway, but this time of year, it could make the difference between life and death.

— Kirsten Macintyre

Madeleine knows how to keep cool - now if someone would just turn on the fan!



Bunnysitters

We have started compiling a list of people in the Sacramento area interested in bunnysitting for a fee or for a sitting exchange arrangement. Rates and experience varies, so please make sure you are personally comfortable with your bunnysitter, and ask for references. The Sacramento House Rabbit Society provides this list as a service, and holds no liability for bunnysitters. If you would like to have your name added to this list, (or if we have accidentally left your name off the list!) contact us at (916) 863-9690.

Bunnysitter Exchange

Karen Blaine.....726-4637
Danny Popp.....966-7805
SteviLynn
Saunders.....344-8917
Sharee and
Thomas Tinti.....641-0540

Sacto Bunnysitters

Dawn Dacy852-8233
Christine John722-5301
Sharon Lowrey344-1266
Kirsten
Macintyre443-4102
Garleanne
Mason.....(530) 644-1306
Bonni McMurray ...451-6389

Folsom to Foothill Bunnysitters

Brian Barry...(530) 644-7387
Sandy Gallagher....983-6413
Ravilla Irvin...(530) 676-2273
Cathy Shoeman.....933-0895
Charlene Welty933-0530

Elk Grove Area Bunnysitters

Wanda
Turner.....(209) 933-0895

Rabbits Available for Adoption

All of our bunnies are spayed/neutered (age permitting), and litterbox trained. Adoption fee is \$40.



Ineka is a high-energy girl with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. She is beautiful and friendly, and weighs about 4 lbs.



Flint (right) and **Jessica** (left) are pals who love to play, flop, chew apple twigs, and check up on your activities. Flint is bold and Jessica is shy, and together they are irresistible!



Alexander is a young white angora mix who was also among the Fair Oaks rescues. HRS took him because he was injured; he's now made a full recovery and follows his human roommates around the house. He has a curious streak that gets him into amusing predicaments, is absolutely fearless and loves to be the center of attention.



Henri is an English Angora, who was among the first wave of rabbits rescued from a Fair Oaks backyard (see cover story). When the HRS took him in, his coat was so badly matted that he could not turn his head. He loves to sit on your lap and will lick your arm if you stop petting him. When his sheared grey/black coat fills in, he'll be a beauty.

Moose is an exceptionally affectionate bunny who would love nothing more than to be gently scratched behind his ears all day long. He is curious, friendly and quickly makes friends with humans and cats.



Foster is a beautiful rabbit looking for her true bunny love. Foster is very friendly and loves being petted but not being held.



Max is an energetic little guy who likes to have his head rubbed, shred newspaper, and run around.



Moe is a dainty, shy sweetheart who spent 4 of her first 10 months of life living at the SPCA. Now that she's in a foster home, she's eagerly learning to be handled and loved. If the white smudge on her nose doesn't win your over, her tendency to nuzzle into your neck will.



Patches is a sweet 5 lb. Hotot boy who is friendly, mellow and likes to be picked up.

Upcoming Events

Adoption Days

Come and meet our fabulous foster rabbits! All rabbits available for adoption are spayed/neutered (age permitting) and litterbox trained. Adoption fee is \$40 per rabbit.

August 14

10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Premium Pet
8840 Madison (at Hazel)

September 11

10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Arden PetCo
1878 Arden Way

October 9

10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Premium Pet
8840 Madison (at Hazel)

Nail Trimming Clinic at Adoption Days!

Have Flopsy's nails gotten a little long? Bring her by any of our Adoption Days for a \$5 nail trim. We use sterilized clippers and give pointers on proper nail trimming.

We Need Bakers and Auction Items!

July 31, 1999

PetCo Bake Sale/Silent Auction Fundraiser

10:00 am – 5:00 pm

PetCo has planned an excellent fundraiser for the SPCA rabbits (see insert) for July 31, 1999. We need to help fill the bake sale table, as well as stock the silent auction. If you would like to bake some goodies, or know of a local business willing to donate any items (which are tax-deductible), please call the HRS hotline at (916) 863-9690 and leave your name, phone number, and a brief description of the baked goods or auction items. If you've wanted to come volunteer at the shelter but haven't been able to, this is a great way to get involved with caring for the homeless SPCA bunnies!

Education Day

August 8, 1999

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

So you've adopted an adorable little fuzzy creature or two...now what? Are you curious about what kind of food to feed the little fellow? Wondering what it means when she runs non-stop then flops over on her side? Pondering what to do when he outgrows his cage? Skittish about giving her a manicure? No question is a dumb question...rabbits are endlessly fascinating and mystifying creatures. Join us for our summer Education Day on August 8 from 1 pm to 4 pm at Premium Pet (6067 Greenback Lane at Auburn in Citrus Heights), and spend an afternoon with other local folks who understand the trials, tribulations, and endless joys of living with house rabbits.

This Education Day will feature a slide show, information handouts on a variety of rabbit-related topics, and nail trimming and rabbit handling demos. Feel free to bring your bunny (in a secure carrier) so we can see how he is blossoming!

ATTENTION NEW BUNNY PARENTS!

SHRS T-Shirts are Here!



Be the first on your block to wear this irresistibly stylish t-shirt that says you are a proud supporting member of the SHRS as well as a fashion maven!

These all-cotton, heavy-weight T's have a color graphic on back (as shown in photo) and a small black & white graphic on the front, and are available in large and extra-large. These are available at all of our events for \$12. To purchase by mail order, please fill out the form to the right.

Name: _____

Address: _____

QUANTITY	TOTAL
large	
x-large	
shipping & handling*:	
total:	

Please mail completed form with check or money order to: (allow 2-3 weeks for delivery)

Sacramento House Rabbit Society, PMB 48, 2443 Fair Oaks Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95825

*SAVE on shipping & handling charges when buying in quantity!
1-3 shirts ordered is \$3.00 s&h
4-6 shirts ordered is \$6.00 s&h, etc.



Sacramento House Rabbit Society
 PMB 48
 2443 Fair Oaks Blvd.
 Sacramento, CA 95825-7684

membership
 expiration date



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

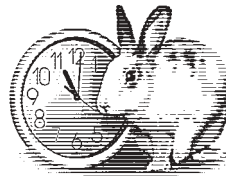
Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

email address: _____

Return with check payable to House Rabbit Society to:
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HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY



Sacramento House Rabbit Society
 PMB 48
 2443 Fair Oaks Blvd.
 Sacramento, CA 95825-7684

Complimentary Copy
 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!

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