



# Rabbit Tracks

A 501(c)3 non-profit organization

Kerrie Bushway, Editor

Newsletter of the New Mexico House Rabbit Society

**Rabbit Advocacy Network** is a new organization to better focus efforts on fighting Whole Foods' decision to offer rabbit meat in their stores. Members of rabbit rescue groups across the country are joining in this effort.

If you are interested in getting involved, email Margo DeMello at [margo@rabbit.org](mailto:margo@rabbit.org)

[www.rabbitadvocacynetwork.org](http://www.rabbitadvocacynetwork.org)

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## Bunny Fun Facts:

- A rabbit's heart can beat 130 to 325 beats per minute. This is why they can easily die from shock if frightened.
- Beatrix Potter's first rabbit was a Belgian Hare by the name of Benjamin Bouncer, who she bought from a pet shop. Benjamin lived from around 1885 to 1892.
- Domestic rabbit kits open their eyes when they are 10 days old.

## Finding Sanctuary

By Dennell Sandoval-Newhall, NMHRS Board Member

In 2006 Best Friends Animal Society, the nation's largest no-kill animal sanctuary, took in an unbelievable amount of rabbits from a single location in Reno, NV. This was by far the "craziest bunny drama Best Friends had ever seen" and was referred to as "The Great Bunny Rescue."

It started with a rescuer who took in homeless bunnies, neutered them, and gave them nice lives. She did this for 28 years. But then her health began to fail, and nobody seemed to read the figurative sign on the door that said, "Don't drop any more bunnies off at this address!" Instead, folks kept dumping them over the fence. The rescuer didn't know how to return the little care packages to the people who had dumped them. She was too ill to take care of them, or to stay on top of the neutering, or know when another rabbit had been dumped in her yard. As the uninvited guests began to multiply, she went in search of help.

When the Best Friends team received the call about the rabbits, they couldn't quite believe what they were hearing. *What did you say? You have 80 rabbits?* "No," said the caller, "I have 800 and they are multiplying!" It was time for drastic

measures and time to put together the most ambitious bunny rescue ever.

The Best Friends team began their endeavors by putting together a new rescue center which included leasing additional property to house the rabbits, bringing in medical support to help spay/neuter and care for the ill, and reaching out to animal rescue groups throughout the country to help with housing these beautiful creatures, which by now was up to 1200 rabbits. One of these rescue groups was here in New Mexico.

In 2008, I started volunteering for this local animal rescue group to help make a difference in the lives of animals. While the animal rescue group rescued many precious animals, my heart was drawn to the rabbits who I felt needed special attention. After talking to one of the employees at the rescue group, I discovered that some of their rabbits were from The Great Bunny Rescue and every time I saw the beautiful rabbits, I wondered which ones were from Reno, NV.

A couple of years later the office manager handed me about 22 colored folders. To my surprise, *(continued on page 2)*

## Finding Sanctuary

(continued from page 1)

each folder contained the picture, microchip number, gender and brief medical description of the rescued Reno rabbits. Through the microchip number, I was able to identify the few remaining Reno rabbits from the rest of the rabbits. Over the years, some of them began to develop ailments and in 2013 NMHRS offered to take them all from the local animal rescue group and give them a safe and healthy forever home.

When NMHRS agreed to take in these rabbits, it was not without lengthy discussion and serious concern about the resources and finances involved. By the beginning of 2014, it was apparent that NMHRS was in danger of running out of funds and our pledge to care for these rabbits for the rest of their lives was in jeopardy. Our wonderful volunteers stepped forward to ramp up our fundraising. People like Matt Wasson, Palin Wiltshire and Iris Klimczuk-Massion organized bake sales, raffles, and estate sales, while Deb Velasquez made another wonderful quilt and people like Liz and Kevin Hogan ensured maximum ticket sales. All of this effort along

with the garage sale held at my house helped to ensure that we can continue to provide the level of care necessary to these now elder buns. The volunteer dedication to clean the Rabbitat is equally impressive. Ned Nevera, Kerrie Bushway, and Liz Sharp give up weekends to help with cleaning, Regina Schacht helps with purchasing straw, hay and pellets monthly, and Beth Wagner



Sanctuary bunny Lola gets some hugs.

picks up the dirty straw every week to dispose of it. Other volunteers like Victoria Perez, and Deb and Bill Velasquez have stopped by to help with nail trims and health checks. We have a great group of volunteers who have all had a hand in some

way supporting these bunnies so that they can live out the rest of their lives in comfort and dignity. We are very proud of each and every one of them.

When I think about the history of our sanctuary rabbits, I think about the Reno rabbits and their journey from Reno, NV to 7104 Osuna Rd NE Albuquerque, NM. I think about the time I read about the Great Bunny Rescue and how it touched my heart so much that I kept the article. Little did I know that I would some day be a part of that story and the rabbits would touch my heart in such a special way.

*Editor's Note: It is important to recognize the time and commitment that Dennell and her husband, Ryan, have put in to this effort. They gave up part of their home and hearts to make sure that these bunnies were saved. They are burdened with the daily care including vet visits and making sure that everybun is cared for every day. They also take on a significant part of the financial burden. They do this, not for recognition, but because of the love in their hearts for those that have been discarded by society. We owe them our deepest gratitude for all they are doing.*



## The Joys of Simple Observation

By Palin Wiltshire

Now that our household enjoys the company of four house rabbits, I find that some of my favorite times with our furry companions are spent simply observing them. With each one possessing a very distinct personality, let me introduce you to them.

Patches, a Mini Holland Lop,

is our oldest. We acquired Patches and her sister, Bandit, a little over seven years ago when they were just youngsters. Sadly, Bandit passed at the age of four. We had observed how important their relationship was and took steps to find a new best friend for Patches. Little Queen Patch has always been very inquisitive and

active. When we introduced her to the kind volunteers of the New Mexico House Rabbit Society for her "speed dating" appointment, she took it all in stride.

Allister, a Himalayan, seemed to be the best candidate for our little girl. Allie is a doting mate and never seems to tire of grooming his darling, Patches. I'll often come upon him

(continued on page 6)

Looking for their forever home!

# Adoptable Buns



### Gizmo

Gizmo is a super handsome Angora. He's a bit timid and fearful, but a new family with love and patience could help him trust again. With his long fur, he requires a lot of grooming to prevent mats from forming. We had to trim and shave off old mats, and his fur is growing in nicely, softer and fuller than ever. Gizmo is a bunny who needs a companion so if you're looking for a mate for your bunny, Gizmo could be her Mr. Wonderful! Our bonding experts will help facilitate the bonding procedure.

### Cole



Cole is a sweet young boy with immaculate litterbox habits. He has been waiting for his forever home since July 2012. He loves his supervised outdoor romps in a secure area and would love to give you years of love and happiness. Please consider adopting Cole and making him a member of your family.

See all our adoptable bunnies and adoption procedures at [www.newmexicohrs.org](http://www.newmexicohrs.org)

### Olive

Olive and Daisy are a bonded pair. Olive (*right*) is the smaller of the two and loves to sit in your lap or by your side. She's a sweet little lady who will allow you to pick her up and hold her.



Daisy (*left*) is the dominant bunny of the pair. She isn't keen on being picked up (like most rabbits) but is very happy to keep her feet on the floor while she is petted and loved.

### Daisy

### Archie and Smokey

Archie and Smokey are two very independent-minded sisters in need of a forever home. They were born at the Albuquerque city shelter in 2012 and have looked out for each other ever since. They are wary of outsiders and tend to be very shy. Archie is a gorgeous, pink-eyed, pure white diva and Smokey's lovely sable coat lends her that mysterious aura. If you can handle two strong women who are as independent as they are beautiful then Archie and Smokey are your girls...I mean ladies (sorry, Smokey).



### REMEMBER!

Free nail trims are almost always available at NMHRS events! Email [bill@rabbit.org](mailto:bill@rabbit.org) to verify.

Check our website or Facebook page for our next event and bring your bunny for a mani/pedi!



## It's All About Diet!

### Avoiding Gastrointestinal (GI) Stasis in Rabbits

By Julie Blossom, DVM - Smith Veterinary Hospital

Gastrointestinal (GI) stasis is one of the most common and potentially life-threatening medical emergencies that veterinarians see in pet rabbits. Fortunately, it is also one of the most avoidable!

GI stasis is a condition of slowing down or stopping altogether of digestion. It is also known medically as "ileus." In any mammal, this is not a good thing, but it is particularly troublesome in rabbits because of the way their complicated gastrointestinal tract works.

Rabbits are strict herbivores and **must** obtain all their dietary nutrients from digesting large amounts of cellulose and fiber found only in plants, particularly stemmy plants and grasses. Their digestive system has evolved to process and extract nutrients from **only** this type of fibrous plant material. Grasses, while readily available as a food source, have less nutrients per square inch than other foods, and all the nutrients are bound up inside tough cellulose fibers. This requires two things: first, a large quantity of the fibrous plant food from which to squeeze out an adequate amount of nutrients; and second, a huge digestive effort to free up the nutrients from tough cellulose plant fibers so the bunny can absorb them. This is why rabbits must eat or graze constantly!

The plant material is processed in their extra large cecum. The cecum

is a large intestinal pocket where fermentation occurs and nutrients are extracted from their food. Rabbits don't have enough room in their gut to store the large amount of excess fiber that they must ingest. Therefore, the excess fiber must be moved through quickly and excreted constantly in small droppings. This is why they should poop pretty much *all the time!*

If the rabbit is fed something besides fibrous plants, the "other" food will not have enough fiber to stimulate this normal gut motion. In the worst cases, this can lead to stopping of digestion (stasis). When digestion stops moving things through the gut, the rabbit is susceptible to excessive gas accumulation in the stomach and cecum, which causes excruciating pain. Stasis can also allow normal bacteria to cross into the bloodstream and cause a blood infection (sepsis). Obviously, a bun with severe pain and a blood infection will not want to eat, thereby worsening the digestive problem in a cyclical fashion.

The first signs of GI stasis include:

- Not wanting to eat as much or just being "pickier than usual" about food
- Decreased frequency of feces or noticeably smaller, drier fecal balls

This is the best time to intervene with a veterinarian. DO NOT

WAIT!

Advanced signs of GI stasis include:

- Refusing to eat altogether
- Bloated appearance of the abdomen
- No fecal output
- Pain or vocalization
- Breathing with more effort—this is due to pain

These signs indicate GI stasis has advanced to the point of an emergency—immediate veterinary attention is needed!

When I see a rabbit who I suspect is suffering from GI stasis, I usually advise immediate intervention and treat the rabbit with aggressive IV fluids, pain medicines, prokinetics (medicines that help get the GI tract moving again), force-feedings and occasionally judicious use of antibiotics. Many rabbits that we catch early do well after about 24-48 hours of supportive treatment. There are a few other things besides improper diet that can result in GI stasis: dental disease, metabolic disease (organ failure or insufficiency), dehydration, reproductive problems, ingestion of foreign objects, and treatment with antibiotics. However, if you don't want to deal with a GI stasis emergency, feeding a proper diet is the best thing you can do to help avoid it.

Here are some tips:

- Rabbits should be offered a continual supply of long, stemmy plant material (high quality grass hay, **not** legume hay such as alfalfa). Timothy hay is my favorite.
- Rabbits should **not** be fed more than 1/8 cup of high quality,

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## Bringing Bunny Home

By Iris Klimczuk-Massion

You've just adopted your rabbit from your local rescue/shelter and you're excited to bring bunny home! Here are some tips for a smooth transition to home living.

*Try to set up bunny's living quarters beforehand, if possible.* Bunny will need spacious housing—at least 6 times its outstretched length, to hop about and live in—more space is better. New Mexico House Rabbit Society recommends x-pen living for rabbits which affords several advantages over other types of housing sold in pet stores: x-pens are spacious, sturdy and available in several heights. They are also portable, can be covered with binder-clipped sheets to allow more privacy and deter jumpers, and the 8 panels can be configured into whatever shape needed. Place a litterbox with wood-stove pellets or other rabbit-safe litter and hay, a sturdy cardboard 'hidey' box with two openings, and two heavy ceramic crocks: one for food and another for fresh water, inside the x-pen. Provide sturdy, non-slippery flooring such as vinyl/laminate flooring, foam/seagrass mats, fleece blankets/quilts/towels/rugs for traction. Toss in a pinecone or other toy for recreation.

*Don't fuss over bunny.* It's tempting to hold and play with bunny straight away, but what bunny really needs is to be left alone for a while upon arrival to chin/scent and leave some territorial droppings in its new abode. This will make bunny feel more comfortable in your home, where nothing yet smells familiar. Try to leave bunny in its area without immediately forcing your attention on it. Sitting on the floor near the

rabbit's pen and quietly reading or working is ideal. This allows your rabbit to observe you from a safe distance and encourages its natural sense of curiosity to investigate you and its new surroundings. Always allow your rabbit to exit/enter the pen on its own, rather than lifting the rabbit out of/into its enclosure or carrying it.

*Be patient.* Building trust with your rabbit may take some time. As prey animals, rabbits are wary of anything larger than them, including people. Once bunny learns to associate you with positive things like food, toys, treats and playtime, bunny should let down its guard. Every rabbit is unique, and has experienced different things during the course of its lifetime. Some may be quite confident, and some may be extremely fearful due to their nature and experience. However, even the most skittish rabbit can be made to feel more comfortable over time with patience and understanding on your part. Place a healthy treat just outside bunny's area to start,

and then have it investigate a treat held in your hand or lap. Take it slowly at the bunny's pace, and revel in the small successes when bunny approaches.

*Always allow bunny to emerge from and re-enter into its pen on its own, without lifting or handling whenever possible.* Rabbits do not like being handled as a general rule. Be sure to rabbit-proof your home, hiding/blocking access to electrical cords and phone/computer rechargers, etc. as bunny's roaming space is enlarged. Anything left on the floor or elsewhere that your rabbit can reach may be nibbled, including clothing, shoes, briefcases/purses and books. Loud noises and quick movements generally will frighten your rabbit, so avoid them. If you have other animals at home, don't introduce bunny to them right away, but after bunny is feeling a bit more comfortable at home, and then slowly and always under close supervision.

*If bunny is extremely shy and won't leave its pen, try this.* 'Play dead' on the floor near the rabbit by lying  
(continued on page 6)



Some books are to be tasted,  
others are to be swallowed,  
and some few to be chewed and digested.

Francis Bacon, *The Essays*

## Observation

(continued from page 2)

patiently and thoroughly cleaning Patches' back feet as she lounges. Allie has quite a different demeanor from his girl. He is reserved, timid and very sensitive.

Our two other house rabbits, who live in the kitchen, are Mirame and Evander. Mirame, a Havana, was our third foster and she definitely stole our hearts. From day one, she was very athletic, jumping up on the dining room table. After a while, she figured out the exact length of this table and executed perfect run/binky routines along it. "Meme" is a licker and it's hard to get by her... without her licking your feet. She is very friendly and one could describe her as fierce and fearless at times. Upon her permanent adoption, we once again contacted New Mexico House Rabbit Society to help facilitate finding a best friend for our Mirame. Although we encountered

lots of great candidates, it was Evander who Mirame chose.

Evander, a French Lop, was rescued from the Rio Rancho Shelter by a dedicated NMHRS volunteer. He came from an unfortunate and very abusive background. One of his lovely, floppy ears had been ripped off by a dog in his former life. At first, he was always frightened of us humans. With time he seems to have warmed up to me. I feel so honored when I get down on his level and he'll lick my face. Evander and Mirame are quite bonded and content to have each other's company. Turns out even though Evander might appear a bit chubby, he can run a hundred and he can do flying binkies with ease.

All four of our house rabbits have very different personalities, but they all have one big thing in common... My husband and I couldn't possibly imagine our lives without each and every one of them.

## Bringing Bunny Home

(continued from page 5)

motionless until bunny approaches you. Expect bunny to nudge you repeatedly and perhaps even to hop up onto your back or stomach out of curiosity. When bunny is comfortable doing this, try to speak softly to your bunny and/or reward it with a healthy treat afterward. Positive reinforcement will help bunny associate you with good things!

Using these tips, even a very shy

bunny should eventually feel more comfortable at home. Every rabbit is different, however, and some may take months to "settle in" rather than a few days. Don't give up on your rabbit—be patient and bunny will reward your efforts. Contact New Mexico House Rabbit Society's helpline for assistance if you and your bunny should find yourselves at an impasse: (505) 435-9916 so we can provide more helpful tips on how to befriend your rabbit!

## Your rabbits produce GOLD!

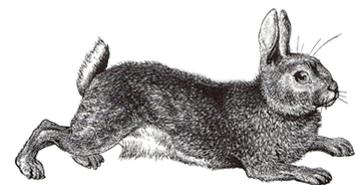
Rabbit manure is packed full of the nutrients that a garden loves. There is a reason why gardeners call bunny manure "Garden Gold!" If you garden, or know anyone who gardens (or a friend of a friend is a Master Gardener) put the word out that you have some and they will gladly take it off your hands and keep this magical stuff out of the landfill!

## GI Stasis

(continued from page 4)

timothy hay pellets *per day* and should never be fed any other type of pellet. (Pellets do not contain the long, stemmy fibers that aid with proper digestion.)

- Vegetables (particularly long, stemmy greens) can be fed to rabbits, but most don't contain enough fiber or nutrients. So grass hay should really make up 85% or more of their total dietary intake.
- **Forbidden foods** that are known to stop digestion include: Any type of grains, beans (of any kind), breads, cereals, chocolate, corn, nuts, oats, peas, refined sugars, yogurt or yogurt treats, milk or other dairy, seeds, wheat.



# My Big Fat Bunny

By Criss Starr

*This is a multi-part series of articles about one big bunny's journey on the road to healthy weight loss. For the first installment, check out our Summer 2014 issue!*

So my new rabbit was a little chubby. So what?

Truth be told, my "Big Fat Bunny" was morbidly obese and I was worried. Overweight rabbits face numerous health problems. Obesity negatively impacts nearly every aspect of a rabbit's delicate constitution.

Our beloved companion rabbits are the descendants of wild European rabbits who survived by grazing on a diet low in nutrients and high in fiber. Rabbits are herbivores and require relatively little dietary protein and carbohydrates. As "hind-gut fermenters" they create vitamins, minerals, and volatile fatty acids in the cecum as a means of nourishment when cecal pellets are ingested.

Flash forward to modern America

where our companion rabbits no longer have to scavenge for food. Sadly, many live in cages and do not get to run and play. Their lives consist of a full bowl of pellets and nowhere to go. The following is only a partial list of the health dangers facing obese rabbits:

- Breathing difficulty due to compression of lungs.
- Cecal overproduction from a diet too rich in carbohydrates.
- Cecal pellet smearing due to inability to reach hindquarters.
- Depression is common among less active rabbits.
- Heart problems and hypertension can be caused by carrying extra weight.
- Intestinal and cecal flora imbalances often occur.
- Liver damage due to hepatic

lipidosis must be carefully avoided.

- Pododermatitis, a.k.a. sore hocks, especially in buns living on wire floors.

If you are concerned that your rabbit might be overweight, talk to your rabbit's veterinarian. It is important that a rabbit never be put on a "crash diet." If a heavy rabbit loses weight too quickly, the liver can become clogged with fat causing a potentially fatal condition called hepatic lipidosis.

In the next installment, find out how My Big Fat Bunny safely and slowly dropped four pounds!

For more information, check out [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org) or read *The House Rabbit Handbook, 5ed.*, by Marinell Harriman.

## Are you a supporter of New Mexico HRS?

How you can help:

- **Volunteer** to be a Petco Rabbit Pal, shelter volunteer, fosterer, or outreach volunteer!
- **Use** your skills to help us with our website, PR and outreach, newsletter, and more!
- **Join** NMHRS and become a member!
- **Make** a donation to support our work helping homeless rabbits in New Mexico!

We also accept donations of food and other needed supplies.

- [ ] I would like to join New Mexico House Rabbit Society.
  - [ ] \$30 for combined national House Rabbit Society and New Mexico HRS membership
  - [ ] \$20 for combined national House Rabbit Society and New Mexico HRS membership **for Students or Seniors**

[ ] I would like to make an additional donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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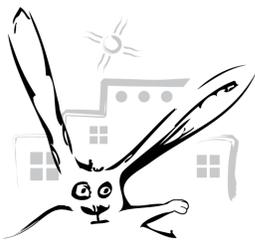
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*New Mexico*

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