



A 501(C)3 non-profit  
organization

# Rabbit Tracks



Newsletter of the New Mexico House Rabbit Society

Issue Number Six

## Volunteer Opportunities

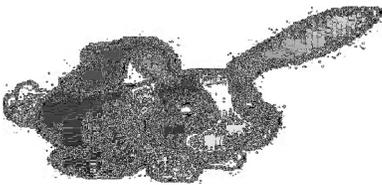
### CABQ City Shelter

Help with intake  
Contact Ned Nevera  
[nednever@aol.com](mailto:nednever@aol.com)

### NMHRHS

Help behind the scenes, with outreach  
events, or fostering  
Contact Bill Velasquez  
[Bill@rabbit.org](mailto:Bill@rabbit.org)

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events! Visit  
<http://newmexicohrs.org/> to  
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## HRS Education Director Mary Cotter Teams Up with Amy Sedaris to Make New Rabbit Care Videos!

See them @:

[http://rabbit.org/hrs-education-  
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## The Gift of Love

When you fell in love with that little ball of fur, you gave your bunny a wonderful gift. There is no greater gift one creature can give another than that of love. Bringing a life in to your home and giving her food, shelter, and protection is one of the most selfless acts you can do. You have formed a bond with a new family member and are permanently linked by all of the emotional attachments that you would have with any other family member.

Interacting with this new member of your family is very different than with more common companion animals such as a dog or a cat. Rabbits are prey animals, so the common misconception that they love to be held and cuddled does not apply. Instead, you need to interact with them at their level. That means lying on the ground with them and gently stroking the side of their face or massaging their backs. They will return the love by softly grinding their teeth and leaning in to your hand. If you are one of the very lucky people, you may even get bunny kisses if your girl starts licking you. Nothing is better than bunny kisses! Interacting with rabbits takes a new set of skills that must be heavily laced with intelligence and compassion.

Of course, we have lives to lead and work to do, so we are seldom able to spend many hours a day with our beloved bunnies. Bunnies are highly social creatures and live in groups in the wild. The greatest gift you can give your girl is the gift of love from another bunny to provide constant companionship. This isn't as easy as it sounds. First bunny meetings are like the first time you meet another person. The reactions range from love at first sight to "I can't stand being near you for another minute".

This is where we can help. In theory, boy-boy pairings should be the easiest because they only need to be friends, but they can also be the most volatile and it seems that once they fight, they often cannot overcome that. In a girl-girl pairing, if one girl is willing to be the dominant bunny and the other submissive, the bonding can work. The problem I have encountered is that in the vast majority of pairings, it is the girls that are dominant and usually both try to be in charge. The boy-girl bondings we facilitate are usually the easiest and seem to parallel human interactions in many surprising ways.

Regardless of the bonding you want to try, it is ultimately up to your bunny who she or he chooses as a lifelong companion. If you select us to help you with the bonding, we will bring in several bunnies to try before we decide on a bonding to pursue. I will work with the pair to get them started down the bonding path and make sure that you do not end up with two single bunnies. This is all included in your reduced second bunny adoption fee. We theorize that because bunnies mate for life, they are very picky about who they chose to spend their days with. Sometimes it seems humans could learn some wisdom from rabbits.

Rescue and shelter volunteering takes a lot of physical and emotional energy, and there are times when it can be overwhelming. For me, the most rewarding thing I do is helping a bunny to find his or her lifelong mate. The love two rabbits show each other is all encompassing and leaves me fascinated. If you ever wondered if animals feel pain, love, sorrow, and joy; then watch a pair of bonded bunnies. You can learn a lot about love and devotion by watching a bonded pair. "No matter that you can no longer hear, no matter that your sight has failed, no matter that your limbs can no longer carry you, no matter your sneezing fits, no matter if you need daily sponge baths, no matter if you are losing all your teeth, no matter that your fur is missing in spots, I will be here with you until you take your last breath. I will never leave your side and we will travel your last path together".

I am blessed to have been able to assist so many bunnies in finding their love. Watching the way they love each other, I am struck with the thought that if every human loved just one other human like a bonded pair of bunnies loves - we would far fewer problems. I wish you and your bunnies the gift of love.

**Bill Velasquez**  
NMHRHS President



## Vet's Corner

By Dr Holly Edwards, DVM

### Crying Rabbits – What Does it Mean?

Weepy eyes or increased tears in a rabbit are a common symptom. It can either be due to increased production or inadequate removal of normal tears. Called Epiphora, it can be linked to primary eye issues as well as dental disease. Normal tears of a rabbit are clear, but due to infection may be purulent or due to blockage of the nasolacrimal duct (duct that drains tears from eye into nose) may be milky in color. Owners may not notice the actual tears themselves but may notice wet fur or hair loss near the corner of the eyes. Determining if the problem is primarily an eye issue or related to dental disease is important to resolving the problem through the right treatment.

To determine the best treatment a thorough eye exam and oral exam is needed. Primary eye problems include trauma, abnormal eyelashes that can cause eye irritation, and infection or inflammation of the eye. Blockage of the nasolacrimal duct can be secondary to severe inflammation or infection associated with the eye itself or can be because of infection with the teeth because of this duct's path in relation to tooth roots. Tests to look into the reason for weepy eyes may include examining for scratches (ulcers) on the cornea, testing for tear production, looking for foreign bodies, and potentially x-rays of the mouth to look for dental issues.

Often with primary eye problems topical antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drops are enough to take care of the problem; however, if a systemic disease is playing a role, oral antibiotics may also be used. If the nasolacrimal duct is blocked, sedation and flushing of the duct may be required. Even if dental disease is playing a role, topical medication may help with the eye symptoms, though resolution may not be complete until the dental disease is addressed.

The important thing to remember is that weepy eyes for a rabbit can mean a lot of things, and despite the fact that being sad is probably not a cause, finding out the reason will make your furry friend a lot happier.

### Eyes: A View of Your Rabbit's Health

by Criss Starr

Rabbits can develop any number of eye problems including glaucoma and eye infections. Fortunately, advances in veterinary care have made many eye problems easily treatable. Look into your bun's eyes every day. If you notice any of the following abnormalities, take your bun to a qualified rabbit veterinarian right away. Your vet may refer you to an animal eye specialist.

Unusual thick, milky eye discharge.

Cloudiness of the iris (colored part of the eye) or pupil (center of the eye). Do not assume cloudiness is just cataracts!

Redness or swelling of any part of the eye. Dark spots on the iris or white of the eye.

Bulging of one or both eyes. (Some buns have normally bulgy eyes. Know your bun).

One pupil larger than the other (anisocoria).

Rapid movement of one or both eyes from side to side, up and down, or rolling (nystagmus).

Scratches or abrasions of the eye; foreign matter in the eye. The rabbit pawing at the eye obsessively; blinking or squinting.

Eyelids and eyelashes rolled inward (entropion).

Protruding, swollen third eyelid (cherry eye).



# Adoptable Buns



**Ranger was rescued from the Albuquerque shelter. He was not happy there and found himself on the euthanasia list due to aggressive behavior. Once he was placed in a foster home he has turned into a fabulous little guy. He was just unhappy where he was and who can blame him. Please give him a forever home so he will never have to see the inside of a shelter again.**

Mirame was dumped along with her mate, whom she lost before being rescued. Despite this, she is an absolute delight. Weighing in at 4lbs, she appears to be around 9 months old. She has the softest, black fur with two white socks on her front paws. She is inquisitive and a big jumper and an expert at unusually dramatic binkys. She is also affectionate and is known to jump in your lap and start licking any available hands. Her litter box skills are excellent. Mirame must be adopted as a companion to another bunny. She IS NOT available as a single.



Smokie and Archie were born in the city shelter. Soon their Mom and 6 siblings were taken in to foster care where they grew up fast. Now they are ready to find their own home together. They are fun loving pair who love adventure!



**Lacey Lulu is a beautiful lop girl currently up for adoption. She is a sweet girl with quite the personality.**

**Munchkin is not quite ready for adoption since he has not been neutered yet. That is happening soon and he will be available by mid December. He is a sweet and brave little guy with lots of love to give.**



Many other rabbits are looking for their forever homes and can be seen at <http://newmexicohrs.org>. Links to bunnies available for adoption through the City of Albuquerque and Santa Fe shelters can also be found there. All adoptable rabbits from New Mexico House Rabbit Society, City of Albuquerque and Santa Fe shelters are spayed/neutered.

## Falling in Love with Bunnies Across the Miles

by Iris Klimczuk

I knew from the first time I saw Wallace and Wowsky in October 2012 that they were a special pair of large lop rabbits. A gorgeous duo, Wowsky was a striking pure black female and Wallace was a handsome cream and gray male.

Lops are rabbits whose ears fall over instead of standing upright, and they are considered by some to be very desirable. It isn't often that one sees them pass through the Santa Fe shelter and it occurred to me to alert fellow volunteers of NMHRS, in the event that they might know someone looking for a lovely pair of lops.

Wallace and Wowsky are a bonded pair of spayed and neutered rabbits. Rabbits bond for life, and yet all too often, they are separated in shelters because singles are easier to re-home. I quickly placed the pair together in a roomy, oversized dog crate, complete with a shelf and a large cardboard box they could hide under, since the shelter environment can be scary for rabbits. Next, I hung a sign on their crate: "BONDED PAIR - MUST GO HOME TOGETHER".

Not long after sending out Wallace and Wowsky's picture to the NMHRS, I was surprised to learn that my fellow volunteers Matt and Victoria recognized these rabbits! They told me that the pair had passed through another NM shelter six months earlier. Like many small shelters in the state, this shelter was unable to properly care for the rabbits, so Matt and his wife Jackie had taken in the pair as temporary fosters.

Matt had soon found the pair a home with a family who promised to love them forever. Cathy, another dedicated NMHRS volunteer, donated a large dog crate home, food, hay, blankets and toys to get the buns set up in style. Matt told the family to contact him if ever they could no longer keep the pair. We were all heartbroken to learn that these were the bunnies that were surrendered to the Santa Fe shelter a few months later -- without any of their toys or blankets. The family had surrendered them without ever calling Matt, who would gladly have taken them back.

Despite my best efforts to find a home for the buns, it's always more difficult to place a pair of animals than a single, and the wait is often a long one. This proved true for Wallace and Wowsky. During the months they were in the shelter, rabbit volunteers worked hard to socialize, groom and exercise the timid - and sometimes moody - rabbit pair. In that time, the buns gained confidence, gentleness and exploratory acumen during their out of cage playtime. Soon we had all fallen in love with them, though I worried if they would ever find a home.

Then in February 2013, a miracle happened! A very special email forwarded from the Santa Fe Animal Shelter hit my inbox. A couple half a world away in India had been searching Petfinder.com, an online showplace for homeless animals. Maru and Michael who lived in Clovis, New Mexico, were in India for a friend's wedding and were dreaming of adopting a pair of rabbits. Their precious bun Nutmeg had passed away several months before and the couple still grieved.

When they stumbled upon Wallace and Wowsky on Petfinder.com, they felt in their hearts that these were the rabbits that could bring joy back into their empty home. Even better, it turned out that Maru had been an HRS volunteer and educator in her former state of Georgia. I knew right away that Maru and Michael would make excellent bunny parents. I eagerly replied to their email on behalf of the Santa Fe shelter to give them details about the rabbit pair and to set up a meeting.

As fate would have it, Maru and Michael were returning to the States on the same day as our next NMHRS adoption event in Albuquerque. The Santa Fe shelter graciously agreed to waive the customary hold fee for a few days until the couple arrived. Maru and Michael came straight to the adoption event from the airport after an exhausting 22 hour plane ride to meet the rabbits. After an hour spent getting acquainted, Wallace and Wowsky had indeed found their forever home. It was a very happy day for all of us!

This story demonstrates so beautifully how many caring rabbit people came together to surround Wallace and Wowsky with love on their tumultuous journey to find a good home. All rabbits deserve as much, and yet not all are so lucky. Despite being continents apart and thousands of miles away, Wallace and Wowsky -- with a little help from Petfinder.com, NMHRS and the Santa Fe Animal Shelter -- found just the people they needed. Thank you, Maru and Michael, for finding room in your hearts and home to give Wallace and Wowsky their forever family.



## When a rescue loses its heart

By Bill Velasquez

Every rescue is powered by people. Every person contributes in a different way. We all have our strengths and help in a capacity we feel comfortable with. I've always used the analogy that we are all parts of a body moving forward with a common goal. Some are the brains, some are the lungs, and some are the muscle. A precious few are the heart and soul. These are people that have the capacity of love and compassion beyond what many of us can imagine.

Since the early days of our group, Deb Schaefer has been the person who has given our organization its soul and heart. Whenever I need to talk to somebody about the right way to deal with something or get help with a medical issue, she is the person I turn to. She is one of the most loving and intelligent people I have ever met. She has the ability to look beyond our humanity and in to the essence of who we are.

My first reaction to a situation is often anger and an irrational knee jerk. It is Deb who has always given me, and our group, the loving soul that creates our compassion. I always knew that one day Deb would leave Albuquerque - I just never thought it would be for St. Louis. Her absence will be felt throughout the organization, but perhaps no more than during those late nights at a vet office or on the phone.

We will miss her beyond words. We wish Deb and Dave all the best as they move on with their lives. I know that so many animals will be worse off without her here and so many will be better off in St. Louis. We will struggle to move on without her.



## Age Related Behavior

By Marinell Harriman

Experienced rabbit people know it's just a passing phase, but if this is your first bunny and you brought her home last spring, you are seeing a number of transitions and personality changes. Your Easter bunny is now a teenager. You have learned that you are living with an intelligent creature, which is curious about the world and investigates it with her teeth and toenails. This is the time of year that many of last Easter's impulse buys wind up in animal shelters. But that won't happen to your Easter bunny, because you are willing to learn how to cope with rabbit adolescence. Rabbit adolescence is one of several phases that you will see in your rabbit. Other stages also include behavior changes. Some changes are obviously age related. Others are more obscure.

### *Misdirected blame*

The stage of intense curiosity, hyperactivity and frantic chewing and digging occurs at the height of adolescence. This is also about the time that we recommend spaying or neutering. People often expect an overnight cure for what they consider behavioral problems. But what are we trying to "cure," hormonally induced behavior or age related behavior? The former will be eliminated by spay/neuter surgery, but the latter will still have to run its course. Sometimes the surgery itself is blamed for behavior that has nothing to do with the surgery but commences at the same time. "She didn't chew and dig before the surgery, but she does now." A possibly reason is that she was spayed before she reached adolescence. Now that she's experiencing adolescent urges, it may appear that nothing (behavioral) has been accomplished. I tell people not to expect dramatic or abrupt changes and that it can take as long as eight months for a recalcitrant rabbit to calm down. I'm implying that it takes that long for the hormone level to drop in some rabbits, but that also allows some time for maturity.

One rabbit adopter asked if neutering could have been the cause of increased cecal droppings. He didn't have the problem before the surgery, I was told. The surgery just happened to coincide with his living in a new home and indulging in a richer diet.

We know for a fact that some rabbit behavior is of a developmental nature and not hormonally induced. In some shelters where animals are spayed routinely, rabbits are spayed or neutered at a very young age. These bunnies grow up in a normal way and express their adolescence at the chronologically correct time. Their adolescent stage may be a little less intense than with intact animals. But we should not expect and should not want our rabbits to entirely lose their natural urges to chew, dig, explore, and claim territory. It is our human responsibility to provide outlets for these needs.

## *Bi-level bunny proofing*

Some rabbits from our earliest rescues were never adopted and have continued to live with us. As they settled in, they became very easy to manage. I assumed this was due to my impeccable bunny-proofing techniques. I forgot for a while what it was like to have a teenage rabbit in the house-then along came Ruby. I thought our phone cords were hidden well enough. I had forgotten that a computer chair must be pushed all the way under the desk when left unoccupied. Otherwise it can be used as a springboard by a whiskered explorer to access the desktop. The expression of adolescence took its toll on two of our phone cords and a modem cord in one day. We then lost our mouse, printer cables, S-video, and BNC cables (and I have given classes on bunny proofing!).

As I pondered my slip-ups in bunny proofing, I realized that what had been appropriate for Bandit, our office rabbit, is not adequate now for Ruby-Jewel, his teenage bride. Maybe we should reclassify bunny proofing into different safety levels, depending on the ages of the rabbits, but when mixed ages are involved, maximum security must be used.

## *Mature Behavior*

We have watched over the years as our rabbits have become more mellow. The behavior of an older rabbit differs in several ways. Senior rabbits, move about a little slower, but they are still willing and able to learn new routines. Litter box habits are still present, but some older rabbits have trouble getting into the box (cutting down the side is suggested). They sleep a lot more but wake up plenty eager for their treats.

We don't worry that much about property destruction from our elderly rabbits. We work towards encouraging them to chew. We keep them supplied with toys and exercise, and we revel in the fact that some are passing their tenth year.

Few people want to adopt older rabbits, probably due to fear of losing them too soon. A consideration in adopting a healthy older rabbit is that, while you may not be able to look forward to a prolonged period of time with your bunny, it can be a good trouble-free time.

## *May-December Matches*

The fact that young and old rabbits have very different behavior may cause some reluctance on the part of adopters to mix the ages. A study conducted at U.C. Davis in 1991 suggested that there was less fighting among rabbits of the same age.

In our foster homes, we have not found this to be necessarily so, even though behaviors do differ with age. Once bonded, rabbits tolerate a wide range of behavior in each other. Bandit and Jewel, mentioned above, both meet us at the door. She springs; he hobbles. Her affection to him is shown in activity. She dances, pushes, nudges, and thrusts her head under his chin to be groomed. His affection to her is shown in relaxation, by grooming her ears, then stretching out beside her with his rear legs extended. Jefty lost his companion last year. In his grief, he started wasting away, and his hair fell out in large blotches (metabolic derangement, our veterinarian called it). He lost coordination and was unable to make the small jump into his cage at night. The tonic for this middle-aged gentleman of 6 years has turned out to be the matronly 11-year-old Sieglinda, who had also lost her companion last year.

Only a person with Sieglinda's experience, wisdom, confidence, and gentility could restore Jefty's will to survive. He has regained his weight, his hair, and his coordination. When Sieglinda was younger, she was more aloof and would not have offered Jefty what she does today. At this moment in time, their needs are perfectly matched.

## *Through the ages*

In our companion rabbits we can expect many behavioral changes during the course of a lifetime. Most of these are of a developmental nature brought about by normal aging cycles. We monitor behavior not so much to alter it but to provide outlets for our rabbits' psychological needs and to alert ourselves to abnormal behavior changes that may indicate illness. Our job is to keep them safe through the age of intense investigation and to pay attention to them during the age that they demand less attention.

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# Pain in Rabbits

*By Joanne Paul-Murphy, DVM, Dipl. ACZM*

*\*Reviewed and approved by the HRS Health Committee 9/06*

Pain is defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage. It is not well understood, either in humans or other animals. Since it is complex and cannot be measured directly, pain is subjective. I'm sure you can think of two people who might undergo the same unpleasant experience, but each will have a different description of the pain. We assume that as each person interprets pain differently, each individual animal also experiences pain differently. Animals cannot communicate with us verbally, making it especially difficult to identify, classify and quantify their pain. Yet the anatomic and chemical pathways of pain and its perception are similar in all animals. Therefore we work with the premise that conditions that are painful to a human are also painful to animals, such as our rabbits.

**ATTITUDES ABOUT PAIN ARE CHANGING:** Because rabbits can't talk to us, caregivers and veterinarians have traditionally relied on the observation of pain-induced behaviors to decide when it is time to intervene. We interpret pain as an indication that there is an underlying problem, and in the past, the approach was to correct the problem and assume that the pain would then resolve. The current thinking is that we want to be sensitive to the subtle signs of pain, because the treatment of pain itself can aid healing. It is not only rabbit owners and veterinarians who are changing their attitudes. Human infants are similar to rabbits in many ways, because they also communicate in ways that can be obscure and challenging for parents and doctors to understand. Professionals in both pediatric and veterinary medicine are learning that subtle changes in behavior may be the only indication that an animal or child is in discomfort. Pain is being actively studied in both human and veterinary medicine over the past 15 to 20 years.

Researchers in veterinary medicine are asking questions such as:

- 1) How can we recognize signs of pain in our patients?
- 2) What types of benefits are associated with adequate pain control?
- 3) How can we differentiate pain from anxiety?
- 4) What types of drugs are effective in alleviating pain?
- 5) How do different types of animals respond to different treatments?

**HOW CAN WE RECOGNIZE PAIN IN RABBITS?** When working with rabbits, the practitioner must infer the presence of pain by observing changes from normal behavior. A normal rabbit is bright, alert, active, inquisitive, has a smooth coat and good body condition. Pain may be evident as a limp or a change in gait, withdrawal or protection of an injured part, awkward or abnormal postures, licking, rubbing or scratching at an area, or indicated by decreased food and water intake. It is important to know that rabbits evolved as a prey species, an animal that normally needs to hide any handicap in order to escape predation. Signs of pain may be subtle, such as an increase in respiration, reluctance to move, sudden aggression, persistently squinting the eyes, a loss of interest in the surroundings or an inability to rest or sleep normally. If there is abdominal pain, a rabbit may sit in a hunched posture. A rabbit with sore feet may lie stretched out; however a rabbit stretched out with feet kicked back can also be showing that he is content and relaxed. Loud tooth grinding can indicate pain, particularly if it is associated with the other signs listed above. However, rabbits can normally exhibit quieter, infrequent tooth grinding as a sign of contentment. It is unusual for rabbits to vocalize, but when they experience sudden pain or anxiety they may give a high-pitched squeal, quite unnerving to any person hearing it. Very often the presence of pain in rabbits is under-diagnosed by both caregivers and veterinarians, and when it is recognized it is often underestimated. It is very difficult to differentiate pain from anxiety in rabbits, especially since they are often combined and may be manifested by similar changes in behavior. Differentiating pain from anxiety may be simplified by a basic acceptance that rabbits will be anxious whenever they are placed in an unfamiliar environment.

**IS IT USEFUL FOR AN ANIMAL TO FEEL PAIN?** Veterinarians were taught for many years that animals needed a certain level of pain when there was an injury, or post-surgically to prevent the pet from further injuring himself by moving around too much. However, we now know that excessive pain can be detrimental, and even life-threatening in animals, particularly the prey species. Current medical thinking has led practitioners to try to understand and minimize the detrimental effects of pain. Excessive pain can prolong recovery time from illness or injury. It can cause a rabbit to stop eating, with the consequence being a slowing and eventually shut down of the gastrointestinal tract and death. Rabbits in excessive pain also can go into shock and die within 24 to 48 hours despite the fact the illness or injury itself may not have been life-threatening.

**WHAT BENEFITS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH PAIN CONTROL?** We still have a long way to go both in evaluating pain in rabbits and in effectively managing it for their benefit. Human medical researchers have tried to document the benefits of pain control. Most of the veterinary studies have looked at dogs and cats because these are the most common animals brought to veterinary practices. Some of the benefits of pain control include improved breathing functions, decreasing stress responses surrounding surgery, decreased length of hospitalization, faster recovery

to normal mobility, improved rates of healing and even decreasing the spread of cancer after surgery. Almost all studies show people and animals return to normal eating and drinking habits sooner when given relief from pain. Therefore prevention, early recognition and aggressive management of pain and anxiety should be essential to the veterinary care of rabbits. Rabbit owners are justified in requesting support from their veterinarian on this issue. It is a good idea to assume that any invasive surgery can potentially be painful for a rabbit. Rabbits tend to return to eating and recover faster following spay and neutering surgeries when provided an analgesic to relieve pain during the surgery and for at least 24 hours following the surgery.

**WHAT CAN WE DO TO REDUCE PAIN?** Pain is only one of many stress factors that sick rabbits must face. Sick rabbits need to cope with their disease or injury in addition to stressful changes that come with the problem. A sick rabbit usually has to leave his familiar surroundings and travel to the veterinary hospital, a strange environment with threatening noises and smells. He may also be separated from his human and/or rabbit friends. The veterinarian, usually a stranger to the rabbit, palpates pokes and moves painful parts of the rabbit's body. The doctor may need to restrain him and take blood or perform other diagnostic procedures. We need to try to see the environment from the rabbit's perspective. We can reduce frightening and/or painful aspects of a procedure by petting the rabbit, speaking in soft tones, using good nursing practices and providing a home and hospital environment that is conducive to making the bunny feel safe and reducing anxiety. Rabbits respond better and may recover faster if returned to their familiar home environment as soon as possible. It is a strongly held belief by many rabbit owners that rabbits are comforted by being with a familiar companion rabbit whenever possible during a veterinary hospital stay. However, caregivers must also listen to the veterinarian's decision because there are occasions that warrant keeping the rabbit alone for observation and sample collection.

**WHAT IS ANALGESIA?** Analgesia literally means absence of pain sensation. The realistic use of analgesia is meant to relieve pain and discomfort through medication. There is not one drug that abolishes pain without complete anesthesia or loss of consciousness. Unfortunately, not all medications work exactly the same in every animal or human. This makes it difficult for the veterinarian to determine how effective or even how long a treatment may be effective in an individual. Treatment may involve many different levels of providing comfort.

**WHAT TYPES OF MEDICATION CAN CONTROL PAIN?** When a rabbit needs to be hospitalized, the veterinarian may choose to give medication to reduce anxiety, such as midazolam. Rabbits require high dosages of this type of drug and may appear quite drowsy, yet when they are moved or examined, they become very alert. Your veterinarian will assess your rabbit and his disorder prior to prescribing any medication. There are no drugs developed specifically for rabbits, but many analgesics have been evaluated for rabbits, and dosages are available. There are several different categories of medication to control pain, and these will be briefly described:

Local anesthetics, such as Lidocaine, provide excellent analgesia provided that the local block is given over the entire surgical area. Veterinarians use local anesthetics for minor surgical procedures such as skin biopsies, or they can be used in the immediate area of surgical incision as a supplement to general analgesia.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), such as aspirin, Carprofen, Flunixin Meglumine, and Meloxicam are able to decrease swelling and inflammation. The potency of different NSAIDS varies with each drug, dose and type of pain. Rabbits require high dosages of aspirin, but it can be a very effective analgesic. It can be administered at home, but should be used only under veterinary supervision. Caution should be exercised if NSAIDS are used for very long time periods because they may produce negative side effects in the gastrointestinal tract and the kidneys. When rabbits require NSAIDs for chronic conditions such as arthritis, the veterinarian may want to re-examine and take blood from the rabbit to make sure these organs stay healthy.

Alpha-2-Agonists, such as Xylazine, are powerful analgesics especially for the treatment of abdominal organ pain. But these drugs also produce deep sedation and depression of the heart rate and blood pressure. Therefore, this type of drug is not often used for relief of pain after surgery, although it can be used as part of the surgical anesthesia drug combination.

Narcotics include a diverse group of drugs in the opioid family. Opioids are the strongest and most effective analgesics for the treatment of pain but there are well-known side effects and disadvantages. Veterinarians often use narcotics for rabbits just prior to surgery, during surgery and immediately following surgery. Most opioid drugs are controlled by the Federal Drug Administration and can be difficult for veterinarians to prescribe for home use.

Your veterinarian should be able to recommend an appropriate plan to alleviate your rabbit's pain once a diagnosis has been made. Do not try to develop your own home remedies for pain relief. Each medication has side effects that could be very dangerous for your rabbit. As a caregiver, you can do a number of things to minimize your rabbit's discomfort such as careful handling of the sick rabbit, prompt communication with your veterinarian, gentle nursing care and rest to improve your rabbit's comfort, access to food and water and a palatable diet to keep the rabbit eating. It is important to prevent changes in gastrointestinal motility especially when the rabbit is already stressed by disease.

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# Are you a supporter of New Mexico HRS?

Here's how you can help:

**Volunteer** to be a Shelter volunteer, fosterer, or outreach volunteer!

**Use your** administrative skills to help us with our web site, PR, outreach, and more!

**Join NM HRS** and be a member!

**Make a donation** to support our work!

We also accept additional donations of food and other needed supplies.

I would like to join New Mexico HRS.

I would like to make an additional donation.

I would like to volunteer.

Membership fees:

\$30 for combined national House Rabbit Society and NM HRS membership

\$20 for combined national House Rabbit Society and NM HRS membership for Students or Seniors

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please add my email address to your list for periodic announcements. We do not share this list with anyone.

Enclosed is my donation to NM House Rabbit Society in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed (Payable to NM HRS)

Charge my Visa or MC

Card# \_\_\_\_\_

Exp Date \_\_\_\_\_

Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**New Mexico House Rabbit Society is a nonprofit organization. Donations are tax-deductible as provided by law. Send your tax deductible contribution to: NMHRS, PO BOX 95226, Albuquerque, NM 87199**



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