Give Me Shelter!
by Bill Velasquez, NMHRS Chapter President

I am often asked why we cannot take in more rabbits. The short answer is that we simply do not have the space. However, it gets a little more complicated than that and I hope that in a few paragraphs I can give everyone a better understanding of our resources. We do not have our own shelter and we only have a few active foster homes. We have lost many foster homes over the years due to “failed fostering”—it’s just too easy to fall in love with your foster bunny and adopt her instead!

As an official Chapter of the House Rabbit Society, we only take in rabbits from shelters. There are some extreme exceptions, but we try to closely follow this guideline. In the past we have had some bad experiences taking in rabbits from the public. In some cases people will tell you that the rabbit is a stray and in fact it was their rabbit and they simply didn't want her anymore. We also had a “stray” that we took in that ended up being a very sick bunny indeed and really seemed too unhealthy to have ever been on the streets for even one day. We suspect the people just didn’t want to pay his medical bills.

Things get even more grey when we are asked to “help a bunny in a bad situation.” Many times the bunny is in a hostile environment. This is not only dangerous for the bunny, but also for anyone trying to enter the property to remove the bunny. I will not subject any volunteer to that kind of danger. We have, however, assisted law enforcement in some cases and the bunny (or in most cases, bunnies) go to the city shelter. There are some very unpredictable and dangerous people out there. At one town hall meeting discussion, during the time when we were trying to hammer out the new Albuquerque animal ordinance, one man was heard to exclaim as he left the room, “My wife and my dog are both my property and I can beat either one whenever I please.”

I am very proud of our volunteers and the work they do at the Santa Fe and Albuquerque shelters. I feel we provide an assisting resource that the bunnies would not otherwise have. We have been instrumental in placing the adoption of hundreds of rabbits at both shelters. Prior to our involvement in Albuquerque, the rabbits were not spayed/neutered prior to adoption. That alone is a huge win and we will endeavor to ensure that practice continues.

There are circumstances where
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Give Me Shelter!
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our involvement has gone above and beyond. For many years one of our most dedicated volunteers, Dennell Sandoval-Newhall, took on the responsibility to care for and protect some forgotten rabbits at another local rescue. Several years ago we made the tough decision to commit the bulk of our resources and most of her time to take over the housing, care and medical costs of these rabbits. Dennell and her husband, Ryan, gave up part of their home for the rabbits. Sadly, we lost Dennell a year ago, but her husband continues to provide the primary care for the remaining rabbits. We are extremely fortunate to have a group of very dedicated volunteers who go every week to help care for these rabbits living in our only sanctuary. We are extremely grateful to Ned Nevera, Criss Starr, Regina Schacht, Kerrie Bushway, Victoria Perez, Beth Wagner and Liz Sharp for putting in the hours at this sanctuary to ensure that these rabbits are well cared for for the rest of their lives.

To some, the next logical question may be, “Why don’t we open our own shelter?” The response to this question is more complex. Besides the monetary, property, and insurance resources we would need to commit to such a project, there is also the need for even more dedicated volunteers to provide twice a day feedings and weekly cleanings. Right now we do not have all of these resources. Despite some extremely generous donations this year, the initial capital outlay and continued maintenance costs far exceed our modest holdings. Much of our recurring expenses are veterinary and spay/neuter costs. At this time we feel it is wiser to concentrate on what we do best and preserve our assets to guarantee that we will be providing public education/outreach, shelter assistance and behavior/medical costs for many years to come.

Some rabbits, such as Michonne, become “failed fosters” through no fault of their own!

We had a problem—one too-fat bunny and one too-thin bunny in the same Rabbitat. Bridgette came to us needing to lose some weight. We tried, but she gained more!

Brandon came to us just fine weightwise, but after abscess surgery and grueling aftercare, he was underweight.

We added a meal and treats for Brandon. Bridgette was so delighted! She’s very food motivated (surprised?) with no compunctions about stealing food right out of Brandon’s mouth. Now he was still underweight and she was too rotund to clean her “undercarriage”!

We had to figure out how to fatten one while slimming the other. Since they already enjoyed daily supervised exercise hours outside their 8’ x 5’ Rabbitat, the solution for them would have to be food.

Having failed so far, we finally devised new strategies. They were cut down to 1/8 c. of BBT pellets and 2 papaya tablets twice daily, plus their veggies. Daily, each rabbit gets an individual “salad” on their own small plate. Bridgette’s is put in first, so while she’s engrossed in hers, Brandon gets his. Besides greens, on grape day Brandon gets two big grapes; Bridgie gets a little one. On banana day, Brandon gets a big, thick slice; Bridgie has a thin half slice. He wiggles his face into the greens for treats while she works on her greens. He’s already finished off the best treats before she’s finished and she’s not ready to help him clean his plate.

Brandon gets an acidophilus first; she gets a 1/2 tablet second. By the time hers is gone, so is his. (Despite being a smaller rabbit, she eats faster than he does.) Giving him food first lets him finish before she does. Our best trick comes from her love of the apple branches Brandon ignores; it works well to give him some grain and a bit more BBT while she innocently works on her beloved branches in another area of their space. Did you know grain-chewing sounds the same as branch chewing? And everyone’s happy!

She’s finally down to her correct weight, although it took several months. Now she can reach all her parts! Brandon’s at full weight (continued on page 6)
Adoptable Buns

View adoptable bunnies and adoption procedures at www.newmexicohrs.org

Ferris

Ferris started out at the shelter. As time went by and he got more sad and depressed, he started to become cage-aggressive. His time was up. One of our volunteers stepped in to foster him and Ferris has become a happy bunny, doing binkies and enjoying the non-shelter life! He’s still a little protective of his “space,” so he’s not ideal for children but rather an adult who respects and understands his personality and needs.

Piffles

Piffles is about 1 year old. He started out in life crammed into a hutch and covered in urine stains with his siblings, abandoned by his human family when they moved away. He loves his head pets but isn’t a fan of being picked up. As you can see, he loves his salads. His litterbox habits were terrible at first, but he’s just so smart he has fully learned how to be a neat young man and go potty in his box. Because of his separation from his siblings he’s a bit on the lonely side and would benefit from having a bondmate. If you have a female bunny looking for a handsome husbun, Piffles just might be The One.

Georgie

Georgie is a brother to Piffles, found in the same backyard hutch. Covered in urine and skinny, he looked nothing like the handsome young man he is today! While in foster, he has come out of his shell and loves to interact with humans. If you’re looking for a friendly bunny, look no further!

Sage

Sage is young and very curious. She’s a jumper and will readily jump up on desks, chairs, any high surface. She likes to take a run at any barrier you put up and hurdle over it. She’s not keen on being held, but likes being petted. Her litter habits are pretty good, but she’s smart and will only get better.

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 to verify.
Check our website or Facebook page for our next event and bring your bunny for a mani/pedi!
Bonding a Trio Takes a Village; Or, Finding Prince Charming
By Iris Klimczuk-Massion

The phone call came sooner than I expected. It had only been a week. “Marshmallow seems so depressed since Raven passed away. I think he needs a new bunny friend,” his mom told me over the phone on Thursday.

There were no eligible single females for adoption at the local shelters, only a bonded female pair that had been languishing there for months, as pairs often do. Would she possibly consider a bunny trio?

I recalled Marshmallow’s mom telling me her daughter had fallen in love with the Disney princess bunnies, Ariel and Cinderella, at a past PetSmart adoption event. I knew it would be very tricky to bond a trio. Would she allow a bunny speed-date?

She thought about it for a moment, then agreed. The next morning, I collected Marshmallow and took him to the animal shelter to meet the princesses. Ariel and Cinderella were wonderful, friendly rabbits, but a bonded pair, which are always harder to re-home than a solo bun.

I set up the exercise pen in the shelter hallway where the speed date would take place in such a way to ensure the bunnies would have to interact. I explained to the princesses that a sad boy bunny named Marshmallow was here to meet them and that if everyone got along, they would find themselves in a terrific new home soon. They appeared to understand what was riding on this introduction, because they couldn’t have been nicer to him! I observed healthy curiosity and grooming attempts by all three rabbits, which left me feeling excited that there was definitely potential for these bunnies. I had only bonded a few rabbit pairs previously and never before attempted a trio, but my gut told me this one might work.

I arranged with the shelter staff to foster the princesses for two weeks, placed the trio into a pet carrier together and drove home. I set them up in my casita, enclosures side by side. I had only four days before I needed to leave town and I knew this bond would probably take longer. I needed to enlist help.

I messaged experienced NMHRS bunny bonder, Victoria, hoping she might be able to take over the bonding after I left town. She needed to think it over, having just taken in new fosters and was short on both space and time for a trio. It wasn’t the firm ‘yes’ I was looking for, yet I completely understood. Determined to give bonding my best shot in what time I had remaining, the next few days were filled with daily car rides, pet stroller outings and close encounters together in small, neutral spaces. I remained hopeful, as the bunnies grew more and more comfortable with one another each passing day.

I spent the night with them in the casita during their first shared night together. I awoke the next morning to see them resting comfortably together in their shared enclosure. Overall, I felt the bonding was progressing well between Cinderella and Marshmallow, but Ariel still required convincing. As the dominant rabbit, I knew no trio could be accomplished without Ariel’s acceptance of Marshmallow.

On Sunday afternoon, Victoria informed me she would take the trio on Tuesday. I thanked her profusely, and dropped the trio to her on my way to the airport. I reassured her that I was confident the trio bond was on track, with Ariel and Marshmallow’s relationship still needing work.

Victoria promised to keep Marshmallow’s mom and me updated via daily photos. Although I was a thousand miles away, Victoria’s texts brought smiles to my face as I saw the bond was indeed progressing under her skillful direction. Ariel, it seems, was finally persuaded to come around, and by Friday the bunny trio was deemed ready to go home! The bonding had only taken a week. How fortunate!

So it was that Ariel and Cinderella found their very own Prince Charming in Marshmallow, just as in the fairytales. And Marshmallow had gained a new lease on life with two new bunny mates. Now the trio is living happily ever after in Santa Fe together with their doting family.
The Eyes Have It
By Dr. Holly Delanoy, VMD

Have you ever wondered what a rabbit sees as you stare into their eyes? They say that eyes are the windows to our souls, but what does a rabbit see when it stares at us? Their eyes, though similar, are obviously different from ours, created with the sole purpose of helping them survive. The position of the eyes, placed high and on the sides of the skull, allow rabbits to see almost 360 degrees around them. This adaption is perfect for a prey species that needs to be aware of any potential threat from a predator.

Unfortunately, this adaption does have a price in the form of a small blind spot directly in front of their face. Though their spoon-shaped ears and forward placed nostrils help with this blind spot, you may notice your bunny friends have a hard time finding a treat when it is placed directly in front of them. It also influences their depth perception, since the overlapping views from each eye is what gives us depth perception, or a three dimensional view of things. Rabbits only have about 30 degrees of overlap in front of them, so for the most part they only see things in two dimensions. Rabbits also do not see well up close and tend to be far-sighted—again to help identify predators in time to run.

Rabbits, like humans, have two types of photoreceptor cells in their retinas that help with vision; rods and cones. Cones function best with bright light, which allows high resolution (sharp, defined images) and, depending on the types of cones, allow the ability to see different colors. Rods are more sensitive to differences in light, which help in low light situations, but provide far less resolution, making images seem more "grainy." Rabbits have a higher number of rods than cones. They are best able to see in low light situations, which makes sense given that in the wild they are crepuscular (most active at dawn and dusk). As for how they see colors, research indicates that rabbits can distinguish between greens and blues. So though their eyes contain the same components as ours, the differences result in a more grainy/less clear image than what we see and, of course, the colors are different.

Another difference that you can see is that rabbits have a third eye lid, or nictitating membrane, which humans do not. This is a clear or translucent membrane at the corner of their eye that provides additional protection for the eye while still allowing them to see. What we can see secondary to that is that rabbits seem to blink less frequently than we would expect. Another visual difference that we often see are rabbits with red or pink eyes. While uncommon in humans, it is very common in rabbits and an effect of intentional breeding for white rabbits. It is because of a complete lack of pigmentation.

Eyes are so important to a rabbit’s well being that any concerns or

Are You Bunny Ready?
By Ashley Ramirez, NMHRS Volunteer

Growing up, my mother never condoned owning a rabbit. Five years ago, now that I was on my own at college, I thought it was a great time to finally get one. I started looking for rabbits and found one through the NM House Rabbit Society. Unfortunately, the apartment that I was in didn’t allow rabbits, so I wasn’t able to get one at that time. Luckily this sparked a motivation in me to find out as much as possible about rabbits before I decided to finally get one. Here are the top 5 things I did before committing to my fuzzy baby.

1. Buy (and read) the book Rabbits for Dummies. It talks about what to do when you bring home a bunny, taking care of them, their psychology, behavior, and playing, and different signs about if they need a vet visit.

2. Next, go to rabbit.org, the site of the House Rabbit Society. It has loads of information including a list of rabbit friendly vets. Read up and check the FAQ for any of your unanswered questions.

3. Now that you’ve knowledge-up about rabbits and their habits and needs, it’s time for you to research (continued on page 7)
Rabbit Tracks

Rabbit Round-up
By Brittany Bannerman, NMHRS Volunteer

I saw the shadow of black furry feet coming through the bushes. Sounds intensified as I listened to the rustle of dried leaves below and cracking branches overhead. My ears began to roar and my pulse pounded. Was she headed my way? Or was that a glimpse of feet running in the opposite direction?

I was at the edge of the wooded area, looking into brambles and undergrowth that tangled into a near solid mass I couldn’t see past. I wanted to capture this outlaw but she had avoided my efforts and thwarted the efforts of the posse to surround her and place her in custody. She was the worst kind of fugitive; fast, frightened, willing to jump towering obstacles in a single bound, turn on a dime, and lash out with her powerful legs to topple her pursuers.

My name is Brittany and I proudly carry the title of Warrior Princess Volunteer for NMHRS, an organization so powerful we’ve brought in several fugitives every year, despite all their subterfuge and herculean efforts to avoid capture! Our reward? Peace on Earth—or at least peace of mind.

The first bunny outlaw that I had caught had been dumped on a hiking trail in the woods near Tijeras. NMHRS had sent an email to the volunteers alerting us that a search and rescue attempt would be made within the next few days. I decided to attempt a reconnaissance mission the next morning. But, after imagining a poor domestic rabbit (or rabbits!) outside without any food or water, or much in the way of survival skills, I decided to spring into action that evening. I lived close to the trailhead so I thought I should at least try to catch a rabbit.

Upon my arrival, I almost immediately spied a white rabbit with black spots. I attempted in vain for perhaps twenty minutes to catch the bunny who by that point was quite afraid of me. Dejected, I returned to my vehicle. At that time a bicyclist was loading up his bike. We exchanged greetings and I noticed his curious and seems proud of his bunny-linebacker shoulders.

What we learned during 9 months of diet-dinking-around we learned from the rabbits! What does he like? What does she like? Who eats faster? Who eats slower? How do they behave when fed?

How Brandon behaves during petting sessions (or fails to behave) relates to hunger. Full, he’s mellow. Hungry, he’s cranky and impatient with petting. On those days, he hops onto his shelf to dig. If we don’t feed him anything in response to his request, he bites at the shelf while digging until we finally get the point. This only happens a couple times a week now since his weight is normal. Basically, we will have to continue this same feeding program for her to maintain her svelte bunny figure, and he will occasionally require a nice, healthy bedtime snack from time to time.

By tailoring their feeding program to their personalities, behavior, and preferences, we’ve accomplished the seemingly impossible: we’ve slimmed one bunny while fattening the other.

Fat and Skinny
(continued from page 2)

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Volunteer Highlights

Everything you do makes a difference to the rabbits of New Mexico!

Want to get involved?
Contact a volunteer coordinator:
Ned (ABQ): nednever@aol.com
Iris (Santa Fe): iris.klimczuk@gmail.com
Victoria (Rio Rancho): pereztori10@aol.com

Above: Criss gives a grooming demonstration at the Albuquerque Eastside Animal Shelter.
Right: At our summer Petco Eastside event in Albuquerque, Iris educates the public on rabbit care.
Right: The prep party for the Santa Fe toy and treat workshop.
Rabbit Round-Up  
(continued from page 6)

glance at the pet carrier I was holding. I told him about the elusive rabbit and how disappointed I was that he had evaded capture. The man then offered to assist me. With his invaluable help we were able to catch the bunny. I was elated. I had had only a faint glimmer of hope of actually catching a rabbit when I set out for the trail, and I left with a rabbit in the carrier.

The last bunny I captured when I was alone, and fortunately for me, he was the easiest to catch. On a recent frigid morning I was suiting up to go outside and shovel some of the two feet of snow that had fallen the previous two days. I opened the blinds to let in some sunlight and maybe some warmth. As I looked out, thankful the snow had stopped, I saw something that caught my eye. There in the snow, huddled against the back of my garage was a domestic rabbit. He was white and it took me a second to be sure I was seeing what I thought I was seeing. I rushed outside, hoping the rabbit wouldn’t run from me. Once outside, I willed myself to approach him slowly. I spoke quietly and his ears turned toward me. Thankfully he made no attempt to flee as I got close and picked him up. Inside, I pet him gently, disturbed that I could feel every bone in his body because of his emaciated condition, but relieved that he was eating and drinking. This was one fortunate Snowbunny. I am also fortunate to be a volunteer for such an altruistic organization as NMHRS, whose relentless pursuit of helping rabbits has resulted in hundreds of saved bunnies.

Bunny Ready  
(continued from page 5)

breeds to find which is the right fit for you. Large/small, older/baby, male/female. For instance, a small rabbit such as a Netherland Dwarf may be tiny but they are energetic and need lots of space to spend that energy! Can’t handle hyper? Flemish Giants are generally more laid back and calm. Younger rabbits are usually more active (and trouble-making!) than older rabbits. Think teenagers. The *Rabbits for Dummies* book has some breeds in it. I would look at your local shelters to find a rabbit you’re interested in, find out its breed, and then see if it’s the right fit for you.

4. Go to a local pet supply store and start looking at all the basic necessities for a rabbit. Check their prices, the sizes, and what they’re made out of. Starting out fresh with new supplies is important but also very expensive. If you already have a bunny in mind, you’ll know better what size of cage/ex-pen to get. Buy all of the supplies and set them up at home before you get your bunny. Don’t make your bunny wait in a carrier while you get his new living quarters arranged!

5. Bunny proofing! They may look cute and innocent, but they’re mischievous chewing and digging machines! Both the book and online resources talk extensively about bunny proofing. Make sure you follow what they advise. Your carpet, floor boards, charging cords and plants will thank you later!

So you know what binking is, you’ve lined every inch of your home with rubber covers and baby gates, you’ve stocked up on veggies and hay, and you’ve found The One! The final thing you need to do:

**Think 10!**

With all the research you’ve done and the money and prep time you’ve spent, you’re obviously committed to being a bunny parent. However, keep in mind that rabbits live for 10 years. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? If you have to move, will you dedicate the time and effort to finding a place that accepts bunnies? If you have a baby, will your bunny still get attention and love? Although you can’t see into the future, make sure whatever your future brings, your bunny stays a part of it. They bond for life and they love unconditionally, and if you’re ready for that commitment, then you’re definitely Rabbit Ready!

The Eyes Have It  
(continued from page 5)

changes should not be taken lightly. Redness, swelling, discharge, and squinting the eye are all signs that something could be wrong. Unfortunately, eye signs can mean primary eye problems like infection or irritation to the eye itself or can be evidence of a more systemic broad ranging disease or even dental disease. Simple things to help prevent irritation or problems at home include limiting dust and potential irritants from bedding and play areas. Any issues noted with the eyes should prompt taking your furry friend to a veterinarian to make sure their visual future continues to be bright.

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