

RABBIT HABITS!

Rabbits are the third most popular pet after cats and dogs. Yet many people – including their guardians – misunderstand them. Rabbits have unique behaviours that make them very different from cats and dogs. Even though they have been domesticated for more than 2,000 years, they still behave much like wild rabbits do. And, while they may not bark or meow, rabbits “talk” to us and to each other using special body language.

Rabbits are a prey species. So, even in the safety of a home, they remain on the lookout for potential danger. When alert, rabbits often stand up on their hind legs to gather information about their environment. Then, should they feel threatened, rabbits thump a hind foot against the ground as a warning to other rabbits to watch out.



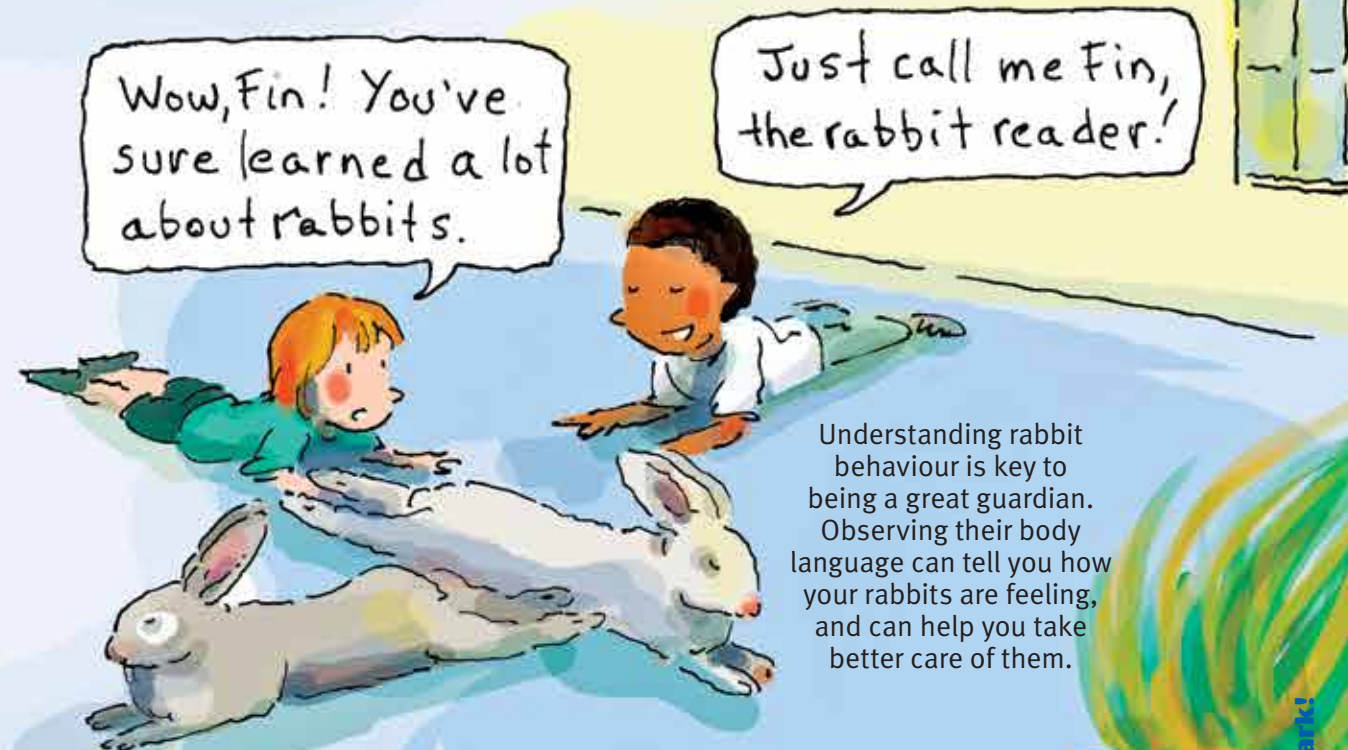
Rabbits also communicate via scent marking. They have a special gland under their chin that releases a scent when rubbed on objects in their environment. This behaviour – called “chinning” – is used to mark territory. Rabbits may even rub their chin on their guardians to say, “You’re mine!”



As a social species, rabbits spend time each day grooming one another. Mutual grooming is a sign of acceptance and affection. Rabbits often ask to be groomed by pushing their head up under the chin of another rabbit. They may nudge their guardians too, as a request to be stroked on their forehead, cheeks and ears, and along their spine.



Being prey animals, rabbits need to be ready to escape from danger at any moment – even in the middle of a nap. Resting in an upright position allows them to easily get up and move. Sometimes, though, rabbits suddenly flop over to rest on their side or back. When rabbits sleep like this, they feel very safe.



Understanding rabbit behaviour is key to being a great guardian. Observing their body language can tell you how your rabbits are feeling, and can help you take better care of them.



WABBIT WORLD

Rabbits are intelligent and social animals. These intriguing long-eared creatures can be endearing and comical yet sometimes frustrating, which is why you need to understand your inner rabbit.

Rabbits are prey animals. By nature, they do not like to be cuddled and picked up by humans, who they see as predators. It takes a while for a rabbit to trust you. Allow your rabbit lots of time to explore you and your home. Provide him places to hide when he feels threatened. Eventually, he'll feel safe and will relax in a home environment.

Enriching Your Rabbit's Life

A rabbit **CANNOT LIVE IN A CAGE** without daily exercise and bonding time with the family.

How do you know if your cage is big enough? At a bare minimum your rabbit should be able to:

- ✓ Stand on his back legs
- ✓ Stretch out his whole body

Always get the largest possible cage you can. Remember, think of your rabbit's cage as his bedroom. Rabbits also need plenty of out-of-cage exercise!

Fresh Hay, Grass & Salad Bar

Rabbits are herbivores. Provide lots of fresh hay and limited rabbit pellets daily. Your rabbit also needs a variety of **fresh veggies and grass**. Fruit should only be fed as a treat. Check out www.spca.bc.ca/kids for a list of recommended treats and veggies for your bun!

Free-run Buns

Your rabbit also needs to have the freedom to exhibit natural behaviours including **climbing, hopping, jumping, running, crawling, chewing, exploring** and **digging**. Your rabbit should be given the opportunity to spend **at least** two hours outside his cage each day under your supervision. When the weather is nice, patio and fenced garden time are excellent exploring opportunities!

Some good toys that will keep your bun entertained and your home and possessions safe:

- ✓ Plastic bird toys that hang from the side and top of the cage
- ✓ Plastic baby toys – keys, rattles
- ✓ Old towels to push and scrunch
- ✓ Cat toys – round plastic toys that roll and can be thrown
- ✓ Willow balls



Rabbit Pairs

A pair of sisters make wonderful companions – you can watch them groom each other, play together, sleep together and more. It's best to have them both spayed so they have decreased territorial issues. If you spay and neuter

them, you can also keep a female and male or two males together.

Remember if you decide to adopt two buns, you'll need a bigger cage and more space for them to play.



Play Domes

Make your bunny an area in your home where he can go to chew and dig. A **cardboard box** or **covered cat litter box** are good options, but remember to give your bun at least two entrances/exits so he doesn't feel trapped when inside. Fill them with shredded paper or old phone books and watch your bunny shred, chew and dig away!



In the wild, rabbits live in warrens underground. Try filling your Play Dome with soil and peat moss.

Tip: You might want to save this soil-filled Play Dome for your patio and **keep a broom and dustpan handy!**



Bunny Binks!

Does your bunny jump up and twist his body in the air? That's fantastic! This action is known in the rabbit world as "binking." When your rabbit binks, you'll know that he's happy and healthy.



Bunny Massage: If your bunny enjoys being petted, try this massage technique: in a gentle, circular motion, massage the cheek area – they feel like flat plates. You'll know your bun likes it if he lightly grinds his teeth and flattens his head to the floor.



Bunny Bedroom Basics

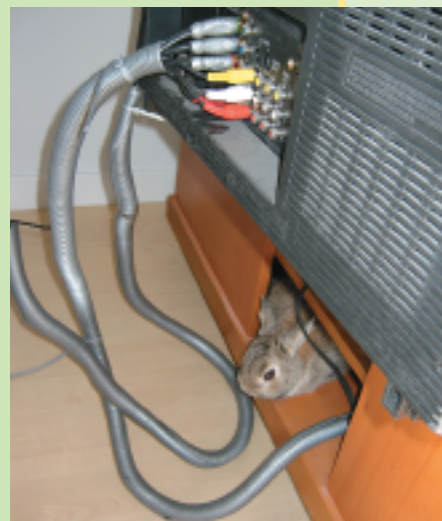


Considering Adopting a Rabbit? Keep in mind...

- Rabbits are a 5 to 7 year commitment
- They cannot live in a cage without exercise time
- You must be prepared to bunny proof your home

Bunny Proofing:

- Many plants are poisonous to rabbits – place all houseplants out of reach. The dirt is also very tempting for them to dig up!
- Rabbits like to crawl into small, dark spaces so you may have to arrange furniture to avoid them getting into these spaces.
- Rabbits love to chew! Cover electrical and phone cords with spiral cable wrap – available at home centres, hardware or computer stores.
- Anything within their reach will be fair game. Rabbits are known to chew holes in clothes, gnaw on toys and shred books. Put your valuables away!



If you are ready to adopt a rabbit, don't forget to make the SPCA your First Adoption Option.

Small scale entertainment

Ways to play with small animals

When you head to a pet supply store, you will see aisles of toys made for cats and dogs. But what about small animals? Animals like rabbits, guinea pigs, rats and gerbils like to play too!

Check out these small animal toys – they're bound to be a hit with your little critter.

Knot Nibbler

A wooden puzzle with a bonus toy in the centre. Perfect for gerbils, hamsters, rats, mice and degus.

Small animals will find this toy challenging. As it tumbles around, they try to gnaw through it.

Treat-K-Bob™

A hanging toy to hold veggies, fruits and other treats. Suitable for all small animals.

Small animals will have to be creative to get at treats hung from this toy.

Farmers Market Barbell

A barbell-shaped toy made from willow and fruit tree twigs. Ideal for rabbits, guinea pigs, rats and chinchillas.

Small animals will get great satisfaction from tossing this toy about and chewing it up. (Just remove the bell once the toy has been chewed to pieces!)



Jimmy enjoys chewing his Knot Nibbler to splinters!



Normally picky about his toys, Jack spends days playing with his Farmers Market Barbell.

Do-it-yourself fun!

You don't need money to have fun with your small animals! Here are some great toys you can make from a few items around your home.

Timothy tube

Take a toilet paper roll and stuff it full of Timothy hay. Suitable for all small animals.



Cheerios® challenge

Thread plain Cheerios® onto a pipe cleaner and hang it in your small animal's habitat. Great for hamsters, rats, mice and gerbils.



The Treat-K-Bob™ makes Digory work for his peppers and greens.

