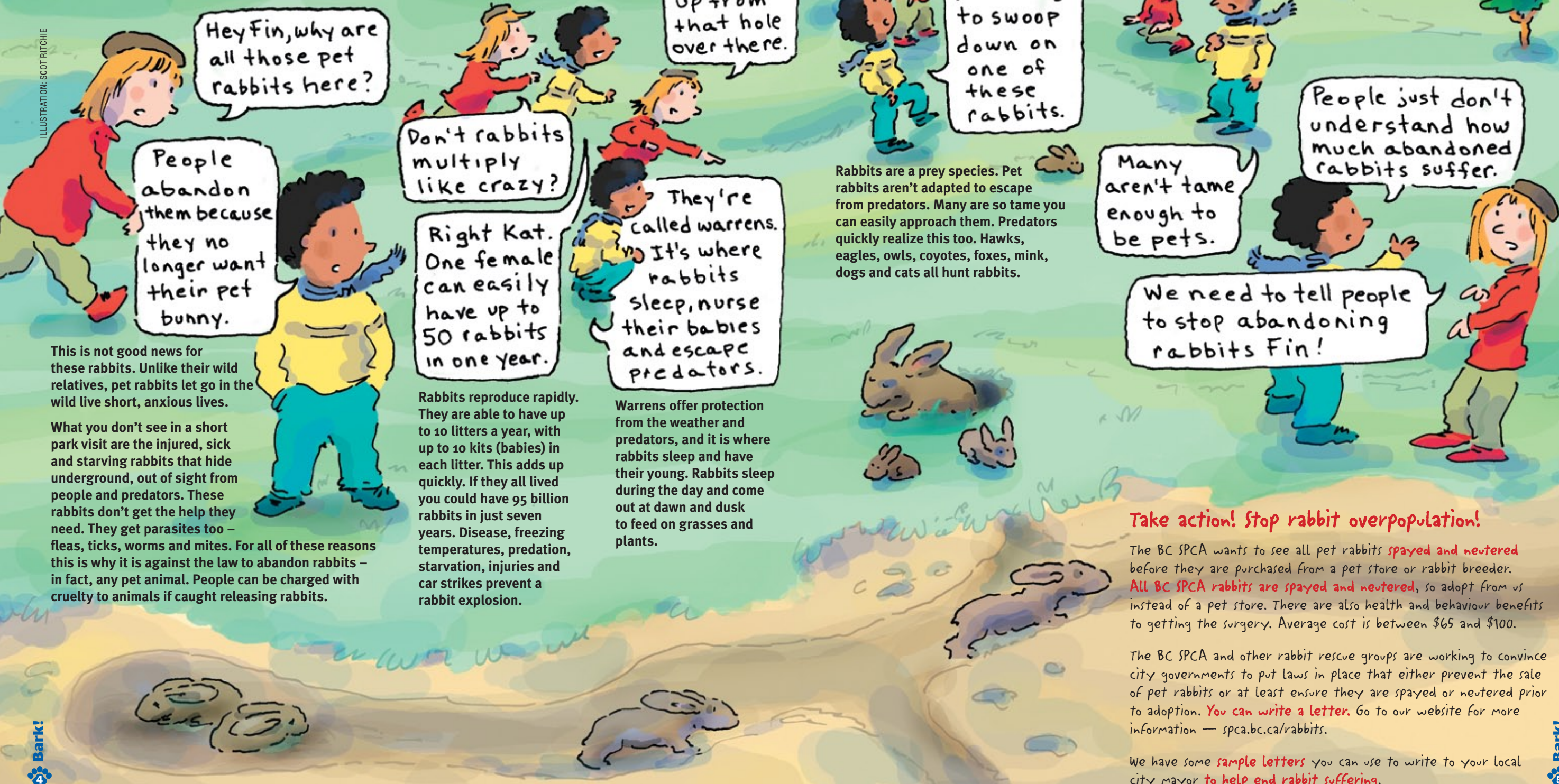


# Rabbit Woes

## Help end rabbit abandonment

Ever seen tame rabbits running free in a park? Wonder why they are there and how they got there? Sadly, solid colour rabbits – black, brown or white – or rabbits with patches of these colours are abandoned pets or their offspring. Rabbits that people have purposely let go.

ILLUSTRATION: SCOT RITCHIE



Hey Fin, why are all those pet rabbits here?

People abandon them because they no longer want their pet bunny.

Don't rabbits multiply like crazy?

Right Kat. One female can easily have up to 50 rabbits in one year.

They're called warrens. It's where rabbits sleep, nurse their babies and escape predators.

Hey look, a hawk is circling overhead.

I bet she's planning to swoop down on one of these rabbits.

Can't those rabbits be rehomed?

Many aren't tame enough to be pets.

People just don't understand how much abandoned rabbits suffer.

We need to tell people to stop abandoning rabbits Fin!

This is not good news for these rabbits. Unlike their wild relatives, pet rabbits let go in the wild live short, anxious lives.

What you don't see in a short park visit are the injured, sick and starving rabbits that hide underground, out of sight from people and predators. These rabbits don't get the help they need. They get parasites too – fleas, ticks, worms and mites. For all of these reasons this is why it is against the law to abandon rabbits – in fact, any pet animal. People can be charged with cruelty to animals if caught releasing rabbits.

Rabbits reproduce rapidly. They are able to have up to 10 litters a year, with up to 10 kits (babies) in each litter. This adds up quickly. If they all lived you could have 95 billion rabbits in just seven years. Disease, freezing temperatures, predation, starvation, injuries and car strikes prevent a rabbit explosion.

Warrens offer protection from the weather and predators, and it is where rabbits sleep and have their young. Rabbits sleep during the day and come out at dawn and dusk to feed on grasses and plants.

Rabbits are a prey species. Pet rabbits aren't adapted to escape from predators. Many are so tame you can easily approach them. Predators quickly realize this too. Hawks, eagles, owls, coyotes, foxes, mink, dogs and cats all hunt rabbits.

### Take action! Stop rabbit overpopulation!

The BC SPCA wants to see all pet rabbits **spayed and neutered** before they are purchased from a pet store or rabbit breeder. **All BC SPCA rabbits are spayed and neutered**, so adopt from us instead of a pet store. There are also health and behaviour benefits to getting the surgery. Average cost is between \$65 and \$100.

The BC SPCA and other rabbit rescue groups are working to convince city governments to put laws in place that either prevent the sale of pet rabbits or at least ensure they are spayed or neutered prior to adoption. **You can write a letter.** Go to our website for more information — [spca.bc.ca/rabbits](http://spca.bc.ca/rabbits).

We have some **sample letters** you can use to write to your local city mayor **to help end rabbit suffering.**



**RABBIT NOMENCLATURE:** KIT = Baby    HERD = Group  
DOE = Female    BUCK = Male



$1+1=8$   
 $8 \times 2 = 16$   
 $16 \times 2 = 32$   
 $32 \times 2 = 64$   
 $64 \times 2 = 128$

### → Did You Know?

Theoretically, a doe can have up to 8 litters a year with an average litter of 8 kits.

Depending on their size and breed, rabbits can reproduce at 4 to 6 months of age.

... so you think **Cats can Multiply**

# Meet the MULTIPLYING CHAMPION

Think about this mathematically. Say Mopsy has a litter of 8. Let's assume that half of Mopsy's litter is female. How many litters will Mopsy and her 4 daughters have in a year?

Well, the 4 daughters will mature at 4 months. Then, in 30 days, each doe can have her first litter. That's a total of 5 litters per doe in the year. Mopsy will also have another 8 litters. When you add it up, that's 28 litters — 224 baby bunnies. Yikes! That's an a-BUN-dance of bunnies!

### Why Neuter a Rabbit?

The most OBVIOUS reason the SPCA encourages neutering of rabbits is to help control pet overpopulation, but did you know that there are many other good reasons to neuter your pet rabbit?

- ➔ Does your rabbit spray urine? Rabbits spray, especially bucks, to "mark" their territory when they reach sexual maturity. Neutering your rabbit will help prevent this unpleasant behaviour. Neutering can also:
  - ✓ Decrease aggressive behaviours such as biting, lunging, circling and growling
  - ✓ Reduce excessive chewing and digging
  - ✓ Make litter box training easier
  - ✓ Prevent cancers from developing (almost 80% of unspayed does will develop uterine cancer)



**Neutering my pet will positively change my pet's behaviour.**

**Fact:** Behaviours like aggression, spraying (cats & rabbits) and wandering (escaping) are usually no longer a problem once an animal is neutered because these behaviours are connected to hormones that are reduced by the surgery. Good behaviours aren't affected.

### First Adoption Option

Looking for a new family pet? A rabbit perhaps? Is your entire family ready to make the commitment and contribute to care for a new pet? IF SO, MAKE THE SPCA YOUR FIRST ADOPTION OPTION. Many people don't think about the SPCA as the place to go to adopt a rabbit or small animal. But the truth is, in some shelters we have more small animals than cats and dogs! Shelters are full of animals awaiting new forever homes. Give SPCA animals the second chance they deserve!



$6 \times 2 = 128$      $128 \times 2 = 256$   
 $256 \times 2 = 512$   
 $512 \times 2 = 1,024$



# 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.



Look, Fin, Max is begging for attention.

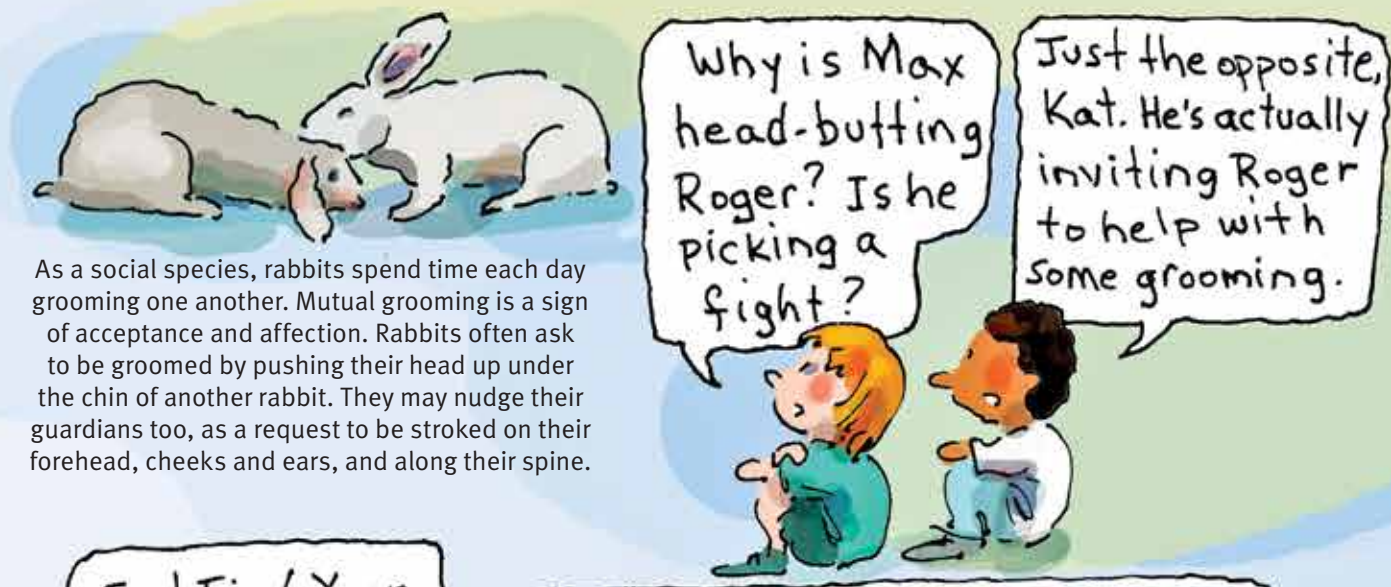
Actually, Kat, sitting up means Max is on alert, scanning for possible danger.

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!”



Wow! Roger sure has an itchy chin.

That's called chinning. Rabbits do that to leave traces of their scent, the same as cats rubbing their cheeks on stuff.



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.

Why is Max head-butting Roger? Is he picking a fight?

Just the opposite, Kat. He's actually inviting Roger to help with some grooming.



Fin! Fin! Your rabbit just fainted.

Relax, Kat. He's flopped into sleep mode. Rabbits only do that when they feel super safe!

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.



Wow, Fin! You've sure learned a lot about rabbits.

Just call me Fin, the rabbit reader!

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.





## 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.

# 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](http://www.spca.bc.ca/kids) for a list of recommended treats and veggies for your bun!





## 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.**