Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD) is an extremely contagious, lethal disease that causes organ damage and internal bleeding in rabbits. An outbreak of RHD in European (feral and pet) rabbits occurred for the first time in BC in February 2018. Most affected rabbits die suddenly, and there is often visible bleeding from the nose. Report suspected cases of RHD to the BC Ministry of Agriculture.

Did you know?
When it feels safe to let their guard down, their playful nature makes them a joyful neighbour. Rabbits are also a valuable prey species.

Common Conflicts

In urban areas, free-living populations of domestic European rabbits exist from abandoned pets or their offspring. These rabbits are commonly called “feral rabbits” and can be a variety of colours like black, tan, grey, white or spotted. Eastern cottontails are a wild species, they have brown bodies and short, fluffy white tails.

Rabbits are attracted to sheltered, landscaped yards with dense shrubs or undergrowth. Rabbits can damage smaller trees, like fruit trees, by bark stripping or girdling in extreme winters. Eastern cottontails do not dig burrows, but European rabbit burrows can damage lawns. Babies found alone do not always need help - it’s normal for a mother rabbit to leave babies hidden in the nest for long periods of time. Call the BC SPCA Provincial Call Centre for advice on baby rabbits if needed.

Conflict Prevention

Discourage people from abandoning pet rabbits. This is illegal, and domestic rabbits suffer when outside human care because they are not a wild species. Feral rabbits should not be relocated, but rabbits that are considered adoptable should be re-homed.
RABBITS
WILDLIFE CONTROL BEST PRACTICES

RECOMMENDED
Actions & methods for control
Remove thick brush, blackberry patches, and other plant cover with dense undergrowth. Plant edible wildflowers away from landscaped areas. Protect landscaping by fencing gardens and/or individual trees. Use chicken wire secured with stakes, or moveable fence panels at least 0.5 m high with a secure bottom edge to prevent rabbits from pushing or digging underneath – for European rabbits, the bottom edge of the barrier should be buried underground to discourage burrowing. Injured or orphaned rabbits should be taken to a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator for treatment.

NOT RECOMMENDED
Actions & methods for control
The BC SPCA does not recommend killing rabbits. However, legal regulated methods may be used for euthanasia to relieve suffering when animals are injured. They may also be used legally to control rabbits, but are not recommended as they can cause suffering, may be high risk to non-target animals, and/or are difficult to administer. Check local bylaws and/or regulations to confirm whether the method is legal in a municipality.

• Trapping and relocating (in accordance with the BC Wildlife Act – can only relocate within 1 km on Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands, within 10 km in the rest of the province)
• Blunt force trauma (baby rabbits only, pre-weaned < 150 g)
• Carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide
• Crossbow
• Cervical dislocation, only with a purpose-designed device for adults
• Falconry (with permit)
• Killing neck snare
• Captive bolt
• Shot to brain
• Spring trap (e.g. Conibear-style)

ILLEGAL
Actions & methods for control
• Bait poisons
• Blunt force trauma (adult or juvenile rabbits > 150 g)
• Drowning
• Suffocation
• Chloroform
• Electrocutation
• Fumigant poisons
• Leghold or foot snare
• Vehicle exhaust

Don’t Trap and Relocate
Trapping and relocating wildlife away from their home is generally not a permanent or humane solution. Animals often injure themselves and may die trying to escape a trap. Relocated animals have to set up a new home, may starve trying to find food or get into fights with other animals over territory, and may spend vital energy trying to return home.

When you trap animals, you also risk separating a mother from her babies. Even if you move an entire family, a mother may abandon her young due to the pressure to find food in a new area and care for the babies.