

## Indiana House Rabbit Society/Heartland Rabbit Rescue

PO Box 421746 • Indianapolis, IN 46242-1746  
(317) 767-7636 • [www.indianahrs.org](http://www.indianahrs.org)



### Guidelines for Finding a Safe Home for your Rabbit

Before you consider permanently giving up your rabbit, please note that our volunteers are trained to help you work through any problem you might be having with him/her, from allergies to litterbox training to destructive behavior, and even to the guilt you feel because you feel she's not getting enough attention. Most any rabbit-related problem is not difficult to overcome, with the right approach, and we hope you'll take advantage of our great willingness to make life happy for both you and your bunny.

House Rabbit Society's policy is to not accept abandoned pets. We do not have the foster space to take them, and it is not our policy to provide an easy solution for this complex and difficult problem. For every rabbit we would take in from the relative safety of a private home, another would die in a shelter. Therefore, we confine our efforts to rescuing abandoned, abused and neglected rabbits only, since they are in the most imminent danger.

As you might suspect, it is very difficult to find a reliable home for an unwanted pet of any kind. Placing a rabbit in a good home presents special challenges, since many people see rabbits as food, toys or worse. If you truly cannot find it in your heart to keep the rabbit and work out your difficulties, we can offer the following guidelines to help you find a safe home for your rabbit.

- 1. Network with everyone you know.** That includes people to whom you may have never mentioned your pet bunny before. Everyone--relatives, friends, co-workers, parents of the children with whom your children go to school--should be considered a potential source of information about a new home for the bunny.
- 2. If you have more than one rabbit, and they are bonded as a pair, do not separate them.** To do so would be as cruel as separating a loving human husband and wife, never to see each other again. Rabbits are very monogamous, and form incredibly strong bonds with their companions. We have known rabbits to die of grief when separated from a beloved companion. The stress of the bereavement simply causes them to shut down and give up. It is a terrible way to die, and a terrible thing to witness. Let your bonded rabbits remain a pair when they go to a new home.
- 3. Before you attempt to find your bunny a new home, it is best to have her spayed/him neutered, especially if you have a bonded pair.** This will eliminate the risk of unwanted litters, as well as reduce objectionable behaviors such as biting, poor litterbox habits, spraying and other problems. This will make your rabbit much more adoptable.  
Please visit <http://www.indianahrs.org/links/veterinarians.asp> for a list of rabbit-savvy veterinarians in Indiana.
- 4. Make a color poster** at a local print shop, featuring a picture of your rabbit, his/her personality traits and details about why you must find him/her a new home. Describe your bunny's positive attributes (beautiful; spayed/neutered; friendly; intelligent, etc.). Post this flyer in places which are frequented by the kind of people whom you feel would be responsible new parents for your bunny. Your church, a local civic organization, workplace, school bulletin board or veterinarian's office bulletin

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board are all good choices. The local supermarket is not a good choice, since the people going there may not be pet-oriented people, and may merely call you to take your rabbit on a whim. There's no telling what will happen to your bunny in such a situation. It is also a very bad idea to donate the rabbit to a school. Your bunny is as intelligent, social and sensitive as a dog or cat. S/he doesn't belong in a classroom where she will be poked, prodded and chased all day and then left to sit alone in a dark cage all night and all weekend. What would happen to her if she became ill when no one was there to notice? Sadly, many schoolchildren find out the hard way, when they come to school on Monday and find their classroom bunny dead in her cage. Some schools allow children to take turns bringing home classroom pets, but this is a very unpleasant situation for a rabbit, since rabbits are territorial and do not thrive in such an unstable situation. Changing homes every weekend is very stressful for a rabbit.

- 5. Do not mention the word "free" anywhere on your flyer.** Although you may not ask for money from the person who eventually adopts your rabbit, a flyer with the word "free" attracts the WRONG kind of people, such as those who would feed your bunny to a snake, use it to train a dog to hunt, race or kill, or even eat it themselves. Don't assume such a person wouldn't lie about his/her motives to get your rabbit.

### **WHEN SCREENING POTENTIAL ADOPTERS OF YOUR RABBIT, HERE ARE SOME THINGS OF WHICH YOU SHOULD BE AWARE:**

- 1. Some people eat rabbits.** Rescue organizations like Indiana House Rabbit Society receive a few calls yearly from people who will "take the bunnies off our hands because they are good to eat." Beware, especially, if your bunny is large.
- 2. Many people keep predatory animals as pets.** Some owners of monitor lizards, large snakes or other predatory reptiles have no qualms about feeding live mammalian prey such as rats, rabbits, puppies or kittens to their reptiles, especially if these "prey items" can be obtained for free or for very little money. If a potential adopter asks "How big is the rabbit?" or "How much do you want for the rabbit?" a red flag should unfurl in your mind! These are not the types of questions asked by a person who has good intentions for your bunny.
- 3. As unbelievable as it sounds, some people who own large dogs may be looking for a living toy to use in training their dog to kill.** Always ask what other animals live with the family and where that animal lives. Is it an outdoor animal or a pampered, indoor pet? Beware especially of people who have breeds of dogs which have been bred for hunting or chasing, such as greyhounds or shepherds. It's always a good idea to go to the potential home and check out the situation before you allow a person you don't know well to take your rabbit.

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- 4. Although cats and rabbits can be wonderful companions for each other, beware of a home that has a cat who is a natural hunter, or where there are young, rambunctious kittens who could accidentally inflict serious injury.** Be sure that the prospective new "parent" of your rabbit has a copy of "The House Rabbit Handbook" by Marinell Harriman. There are several chapters in the book devoted to establishing a safe, multi-species home.

### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:**

- 1. People who have children under the age of eight or nine are probably too busy with their children to supervise interaction with the rabbit, let alone maintain the rabbit.** Young children are not sufficiently mature to be the primary caretakers of a rabbit. Though the rabbit should be considered a member of the family, and \*everyone\* should interact with her, the physical care of the bunny should be the responsibility of an adult member of the household.
- 2. Very young children can be hurt from the scratches and bites of a frightened rabbit.** Rabbits do not like to be held or carried. They can be seriously injured, breaking their back or one of their forelegs, when being held by a child who does not understand the difference between the live rabbit and a stuffed toy. Avoid sending your rabbit to a home with children under the age of eight or nine.
- 3. A rabbit released to the "wild" (meaning a park, wooded lot or other open area) will usually not survive more than a few days. In addition, it is against the law in the State of Indiana.** Wild rabbits live in warrens--a complex system of burrows where they can hide from predators. If you turn your bunny loose in a park, no matter how inviting that area may seem to a human, you are condemning her to a terrifying death. She has no warren and no place to hide from predators. If she survives even a few days, she is likely to contract parasites from eating the grass in the area, which may be frequented by wild animals. Your rabbit may not be able to find sufficient food and water. Many of our fosters who came in as strays were found severely emaciated, dehydrated and covered with painful mange from parasitic mites. We are sure you do not want your rabbit to end up like this. If you truly cannot care for your rabbit, and are thinking that your only option is to turn her loose, then please realize that a less cruel option is to take her to the veterinarian to be humanely euthanized (put to sleep). This is very sad, but it is kinder than consigning her to a terrifying, strange place where she may be eaten alive by predators or slowly starve to death.
- 4. Before you take your rabbit to a local animal shelter, consider that although the personnel of such facilities may not tell you, rabbits surrendered to shelters are at very high risk of being euthanized shortly after arrival.** Few shelters in Indiana have the facilities to keep rabbits, and in such shelters, rabbits are euthanized rather than put up for adoption. The huge numbers of companion animals being abandoned by their human families every day makes it impossible to keep up. Millions of companion animals will lose their lives this year simply because their humans have grown tired of caring for them. We know that you do not want to be part of this problem. Instead of taking your companion rabbit to a shelter, why not give her the chance to live her 8-10 year lifespan as a loving member of the family. If the reason you are trying to find a home for your rabbit is due to behavioral problems (poor litterbox habits, aggression, shyness, etc.), please be aware that most

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behavioral problems can be resolved by spaying or neutering and a little bit of patience on your part. Indiana House Rabbit Society will be very happy to assist you in correcting any problems that have made living with your rabbit difficult. To contact us, please call (317) 767-7636.

### **A FINAL THOUGHT...**

We hope that in reading the above you have realized how difficult it is to find a safe home for your rabbit. We hope you will reconsider your decision to give him/her away. If you do change your mind, we invite you to contact us for help in resolving the problems that made you decide to give the rabbit away in the first place. Our volunteers are experts in rabbit health, care and behavior, and can probably help you work through almost any problem, if you're willing to try.

A rabbit is an intelligent, social, sensitive creature, and adopting one should be a lifetime commitment. A rabbit is not a toy to be discarded when the novelty wears off or when it becomes too troublesome or expensive to keep. If you do not keep your rabbit, we sincerely hope you are able to find a permanent, loving home for him/her. It will not be easy.

If you do give away your companion rabbit, we urge you not to adopt pets in the future. Non-human animals may not be able to do calculus or write legislation--but they can feel love, fear, pain and grief, just as we can. Please understand that by abandoning your pet rabbit, you will be causing him/her great trauma and distress. We hope that you will not put another animal in the same situation again.

**For more information on rabbit care, please refer to *The House Rabbit Handbook* by Marinell Harriman. It is available for less than \$10 at most major bookstores. If your bookstore does not carry it, please ask them to order it for you: ISBN 0940920174.**