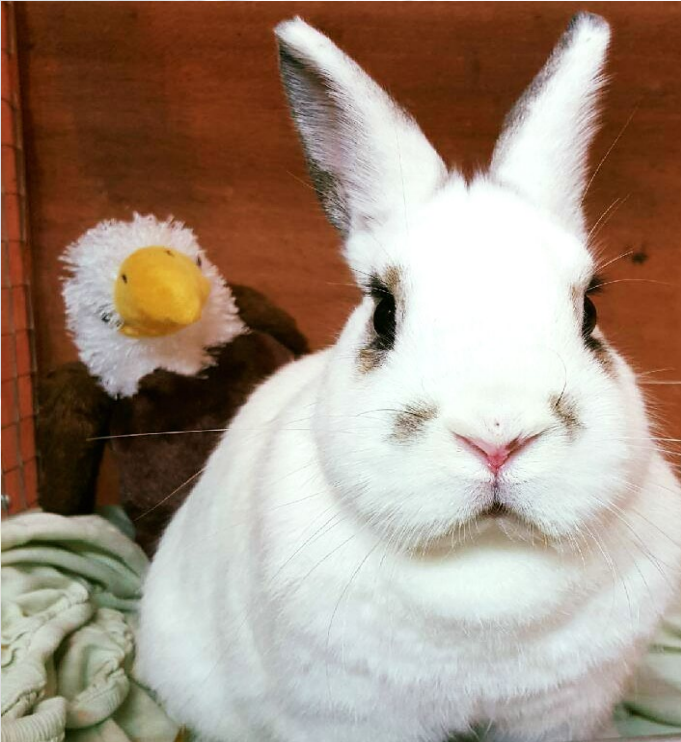




Rabbits as Commodities



My, my, Mama! This beautiful little bun-bun is Mama Vintage. She has the honor of being the first rescue to give birth here at Tamerlaine. One night, as co-founder Peter Nussbaum was closing up the farm and getting ready to leave, a taxi pulled up, its lights sudden and warm against the dark winter night. Peter walked over, confused, and waved as the driver got out. He was about to ask if everything was okay when the driver practically launched a rabbit into Peter's arms. He gave a short explanation over his shoulder as he walked away—she had been abandoned in the cold and he found her. Peter tried to explain that we couldn't just take a rabbit—that's not how rescues worked. But before the words were out of his mouth, the cab was down the drive, and Peter was holding and petting a small, shaking rabbit.

Peter brought the bunny inside to warm up. It was obvious she was an abandoned pet. Later that night, as she slept wrapped up and snuggled, the temperatures plummeted to single digits. Had she not frozen, she likely would have been

eaten by a predator or starved to death. She couldn't fend for herself. Although Peter and Gabby had already fallen deeply in love with her, watching her twitching whiskers as she slept trustfully in their arms, they knew Tamerlaine wasn't yet equipped for a rabbit. The plan was to foster her until a bunny-loving family they knew could take her in. But before that could happen, our little bunny had quite a surprise in store. Just a few days later, staff woke up to find...FIVE little bunnies!

All plans of rehoming her were off. Instead, the midnight bunny became Mama Vintage, and her babies, 'Tique, Bunnacula, Swanson, and Scooter. If you've never seen a newborn bunny, you're in for a treat. The newborns are about 2 inches long and covered with more wrinkles than fur. Like all rabbits, they were born blind and completely helpless.

Mama took excellent care of her babies, even using her own fur to make a nest for her babies to snuggle in and burrow under. To the non-rabbit person, Mama may have seemed



Aww! Adorable little newborns keeping warm in the nest their mama made.

disinterested in her kits. Instinctively, these prey animals will leave babies for hours at a time—deflecting predators from their nest. Rabbit moms only feed 1-2 times a day, and only when they feel safe. Unlike the pets we're more familiar with, such as dogs or cats, rabbits don't lie down to nurse while cuddling, but instead, remain standing. Again, this is to keep her newborns safe. Mama can be a better look out this way!



Along with spring, our new outdoor set up for the rabbits arrived! They loved exploring the world and meeting their equally curious goat neighbors. While we have since lost Mama Vintage and Bunnicula, our three rabbits remain close to their little goat friends.

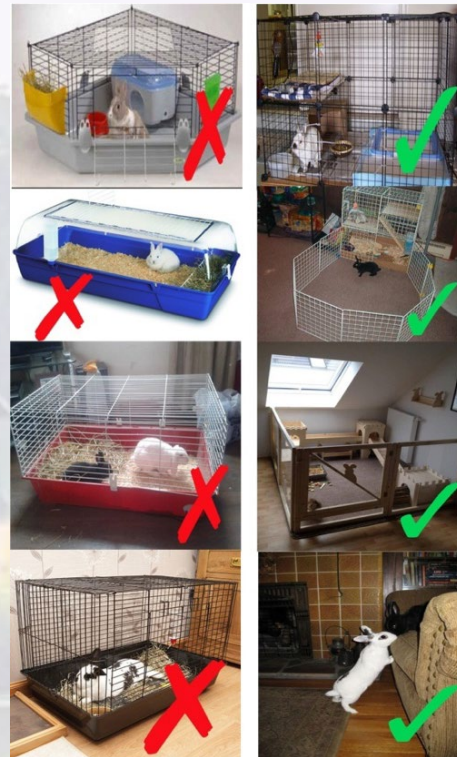
Sadly, Mama Vintage's story is a common one. In fact, a 2012 study revealed that rabbits are the 3rd- most common pet surrender at shelters in the United States. And they're not given up because of bad behavior. The most common reasons were that they were too difficult to care for, or that they had an unintended litter of litters. The vast majority of those surrendered—81%—were unneutered. These signs indicate that many people who adopt or buy a rabbit aren't educated about their new family member's needs before bringing them into the home. Most people see a rabbit as a cute, fuzzy pet that can be kept in a cage, and will live just a few short years: the perfect pet to "train" kids on. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, most rabbits go to new homes as a single new pet even though they live in bonded pairs. They crave companionship of other rabbits. They enjoy grooming each other affectionately. As prey animals, they feel safest when they have another rabbit in their "herd", and happiest when they have a friend to play and sleep with. And it takes a lot of work to convince them that we predators are safe. Most kids aren't interested in the effort and time it takes to earn a rabbit's trust. Rabbits also require plenty of exercise and mental stimulation. Without both, they can become destructive, chewing on wood furniture and engaging in dangerous play, like chewing plugged in wires—and they can become aggressive.

A final consideration most don't take into account: rabbits are classified as an "exotic pet." That means medical costs are higher, and more frequent. For example: bunny teeth never stop growing. They need constant enrichment of chewing surfaces, or a vet needs to "burr" their teeth regularly. What's worse, some owners try to perform this themselves, and wind up injuring and traumatizing their rabbits, who never trust them again.

We've all heard the phrase, "breeding like rabbits." And

yet, some people do not alter their pet rabbits due to cost or the belief that they are too young to mate. Unlike dogs and cats, rabbits do not go into "heat" during one season. They are happy to mate any time of year. Beginning as early as 3 months, does, or female rabbits, can have babies. Each litter can be between 1-12 babies! Just a few days later...she can become pregnant again.



Rabbits need much more space and activity than most new owners realize—they should be included members of the family. Photo credit: Advocates for Rabbit Welfare

We know that rabbits are

commonly given up to shelters, but it's difficult to get an exact number. This is due to the mistaken belief that domestic rabbits have the same skills as wild rabbits. In other words: people dump their rabbits to survive on their own. This is likely exactly what happened to Mama Vintage. In northern California, one shelter estimates that 2/3 of their rescues were abandoned outside. In cities, empty parking lots are often dumping grounds. The result? Urban parking lots overrun with rabbits who lack the skills to survive long.

Let's talk about Easter. Rabbits are a problem for shelters all year, but all agree that the weeks after Easter are worse: People who adopted a cute fuzzy bunny now have a lonely, aloof, destructive teenage bunny and realize what they've done. Rabbits live 10-12 years. At Tamerlaine this year, we



had about 4 calls a day for a few weeks, with one caller confusedly lamenting that the bunny they purchased kept growing after he was told it would not.

Sadly, poor ownership is not the worst fate rabbits face. Rabbits are raised for food in factory farms, just like every other animal humans eat now. In fact, the times in which we live are being referred to as “the cage age”, because of the vast numbers of animals held worldwide in extreme confinement. Rabbits are one of them. In the United States alone, about 2 million-8 million rabbits are raised for meat a year, not accounting for the approximately 75,000 breeding rabbits that are used as production machines until they are spent. The huge estimate range speaks to the fact that the USA government *does not require inspection of rabbit “meat” raised here*. The FDA only requires that imported rabbits be inspected. As a result, it’s estimated that 75% of rabbit meat sold has *not* been inspected—for decomposition or “contamination by filth.”



A rabbit suffering from a painful necrotic ear, living in filthy factory farm conditions. Photo credit: JoAnne McArthur/We Animals Media

When you consider the conditions in which the rabbits are kept, that’s incredibly disturbing. In factory farms, called “rabbitries,” rabbits are stacked in tiny wire cages, usually atop a pit for their wastes. The USDA suggests that “the deeper the pit, the less often it needs to be emptied.” Rabbits like Mama Vintage have a sensitive nose, and she’d have suffered immensely from the toxic air inside such a windowless shed, alongside thousands of other rabbits locked in cages too small to move.

Rabbits in the wild love to jump long distances and run. In the wild, they burrow underground and thump their giant feet to communicate danger to the many other rabbits in their underground warrens. In rabbitries, they live in about as much room as a sheet a paper. The ground below their feet is not solid, but wire mesh. Wastes fall from one layer to the next on their way to the pit below all of them. Illness and injury are common in these facilities but are rarely treated. Most rabbits raised to become food are killed at just *90 days*. Treating a sick rabbit is an unnecessary expense. The conditions are not unlike battery cages for hens, which have finally sparked outrage and action. Aggression also occurs more than it should at factory farms. Had Mama Vintage been an industrialized breeder, her kits may have cannibalized each other due to stress. Up to 40% of kits won’t even live long enough to be weaned.

Most “food” rabbits are killed where they are raised, most likely by having their becks broken, or being hit over the head. Rabbits are not covered by the Humane Slaughter Act, so have no protection. Some are transported to one of 55 rabbit slaughterhouses in the USA. As you may have guessed, there are no federal standards dictating the amount of space, water, food each rabbit has during transit, nor the temperatures at which they are kept. Many travel hundreds of miles this way. Rabbits are one of the few animals that families keep as indoor pets, that are also factory farmed in our country. Yet, we are outraged when we hear of other country’s eating animal we consider family pets, such as cats and dogs. What we do in this country to rabbits is no different. The magical thinking that allows anyone to believe we are different or better needs to be corrected.

Rabbits are also used for their fur and skin. Most Angora wool today comes from China, where animal welfare is even more lax than here. There are over 50 million Angoras in China today. Rabbits raised for fur are a different breed than those raised for meat—Angora rabbits. However, they, too, are raised in extreme confinement. Like sheep, they have been bred to produce much more wool than is healthy. They also have been bred to have short ears and cannot regulate their body temperature efficiently.



Between the wool and the ears, many rabbits die of heat. Because they groom themselves constantly (and neurotically in the filthy conditions they are forced to endure) they ingest a lot of hair that they are not made to digest. The excess hair impairs eyesight, too. Also like sheep, they are prey animals who naturally fear being held down for shearing. Yet every three months they are sheared in a painful process. Shearers are more concerned with volume than rabbit welfare, so their sharp cutting tools often cut the rabbits, leaving them bloody and uncared for.

What's worse, it isn't uncommon for shearers to simply rip the hair out without pain relief. "Plucked" fur sells for more. Either way, the rabbit's paws are either tied or held so they cannot escape. Afterwards, the rabbits will be put back in a metal cage to recover. In three months, they'll go through it again and again—for about two years. At this age, wool production drops, so they are killed for their meat.

There is a light of hope. Thanks to brave undercover investigators releasing videos of the plucking process, many big-name clothing companies, like Calvin Klein and H&M agreed to stop using Angora. In the videos, they could see that the rabbits were plucked to bareness, while they screamed in fear and pain. Other rabbits nearby watched.

There is absolutely nothing glamorous about rabbit fur. There is nothing soft about the pain and terror rabbits suffer when it taken for them just so a hat, coat, sweater, or scarf feels nice to us.

Perhaps the most well-known abuse suffered by rabbits is at the hands of experimental tests. The cosmetic, pharmaceutical, and other industries still use rabbits in tests. In the United States, more than 160,000 rabbits are used each year in tests. Why? Because they are relatively docile and easily scared, making them easier to handle.

Rabbits are particularly preferred for a test called the Draize test, because they do not possess tear ducts. The Draize test has been in use since 1944 to test chemicals for eye and skin irritation before they are used in products. In an eye sensitivity test, a rabbit's eye will be held open with clips as his body is restrained. A drop of an unknown substance is then placed in the eye. To keep the chemical from being

blinked out, the eyes are held open—often for days at a time. And remember: rabbits eyes will not water or tear. Many of these chemicals are in fact irritating, and cause pain, swelling, and even blindness. All the while, experimenters take notes, and rabbits struggle helplessly to relief the pain. Draize tests are also used on skin. Layers of skin are pulled off with tape, and the substance is placed on the skin and covered in plastic. The substance might burn, itch, and bleed. These tests are always performed without pain relief.



*Food and fur rabbits endure a life and death of pain and terror.
Photo credit: Jo Anne MacArthur/We Animals Media*

Rabbits are also subject to poison tests. For these, they are force-fed substances to measure their toxicity. Rabbits may be used for multiple tests. Once they have been used up, they are killed and thrown in the garbage.

Lab tests are not only unbearably inhumane, but also unnecessary. There are more reliable options available today that do not require the use of any animal. Many scientists agree that these tests can provide more reliable data. Animals, even mammals, vary in terms of their ability



to tolerate substances. For example, aspirin is toxic to cats, but can help humans.

In stark contrast to factory farms, rabbits in labs are isolated in individual cages and live in unnaturally bright environments. Their sensitive hearing makes the constant loud noises of a lab painful. Many rabbits resort to self-mutilation due to a lack of any stimuli to relieve their nerves. Just like a factory farm, the rabbits usually live in wire boxes that hurt their feet and leave them feeling incredibly vulnerable.

Think of it: millions of rabbits raised in the industry for meat, fur, or use in experiments will die without experiencing a soft surface underfoot. They will never feel the rain or jump high and far on a moonlit night. They will never smell a flower, or dirt, or dig a tunnel.

They won't form close bonds with their family and friends.

Mama Vintage was abandoned by an uneducated or uncaring former "owner." However, she was able to live out her last days in a warm, safe home, loved by everyone who met her. Her kits will only know love, sunshine, and fresh air. The cab driver that picked them up had his heart in the right place—and likely saved their lives. You, too, can save lives. Choose cosmetics and cleaning supplies that are not tested on animals. Don't wear clothing made from rabbits. Share posts and tag brands so they know you aren't using their products. Working together, we can ensure all rabbits have an opportunity to experience a natural life...and joy.



Mama Vintage and her boy 'Tique, were always close to one another. Their loving bond was obvious—and not just because they look so much alike!