



# The Plight of Unwanted Rabbits

*Providing Solutions to the Growing Abandoned Rabbit Issue*

# RABBITATS

Rabbitats is an innovative rabbit rescue exploring and developing non-traditional methods of rescue, housing, and re-homing.



**Housing a large number of rabbits in a stress-free, safe, and natural environment.**

Rabbitats Rescue Society was formed by key entities involved in the relocation of close to 1,000 rabbits from the University of Victoria campus in 2010/2011.

Rabbitats continues to work on control projects for corporations and municipalities. Rabbitats has built and maintains sanctuaries of various sizes around British Columbia, and is and currently assisting rescues in Alberta and counseling others in the United States through it's Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease News Network.

Rabbitats also runs Abandoned Rabbits, a tracking and advocacy organization.



**Rabbitat's South Surrey Sanctuary**



**Rabbitat's Richmond Sanctuary**

## What are “Rabbitats”?

Rabbitats in effect are ‘micro-sanctuaries’, enclosures designed to be escape proof, predator-proof, visually pleasing, gently interactive, sustainable and low maintenance.

The designs, size and capacities depend on the land and/or building dimensions and layout, area predators, the natural vegetation, available materials and the budget.

They are designed to hold small to large rabbit colonies comfortably in a natural ‘warren’ environment. They are constructed to keep the rabbits in and the predators out.



Rabbitat's South Surrey Sanctuary

## Where do these rabbits come from?

Rabbit abandonment is a large scale issue happening not only in the lower mainland, but throughout North America.

The lack of education regarding proper rabbit care is a large contributor to the issue of pet rabbit abandonment. Many pet owners are unaware that “setting their rabbit free” is harmful to both their pet, and the environment. People see wild rabbits and believe that their domestic rabbit is the same, and therefore, will also thrive in the wild. However, this is not the case.



Feral rabbits in Richmond, B.C.



Abandoned Rabbits is the advocacy and education arm of Rabbitats. Our main goal is to track the large number of abandoned pet rabbits and the resulting feral colonies to bring this issue to light. Our map has over 900 user-reported sightings of abandoned rabbits throughout North America.



## Dumping pets is cruel and illegal

A newly dumped domestic pet rabbit will stand out to humans and predators alike, thus they typically do not last long in the wild. They will often die from starvation or are killed by a predator or a car as they do not have the natural survival instincts of a wild rabbit. That said, they breed faster than they die off, quickly creating colonies of unwanted rabbits.

### ***Dumping of pet rabbits is not only cruel, it is illegal.***

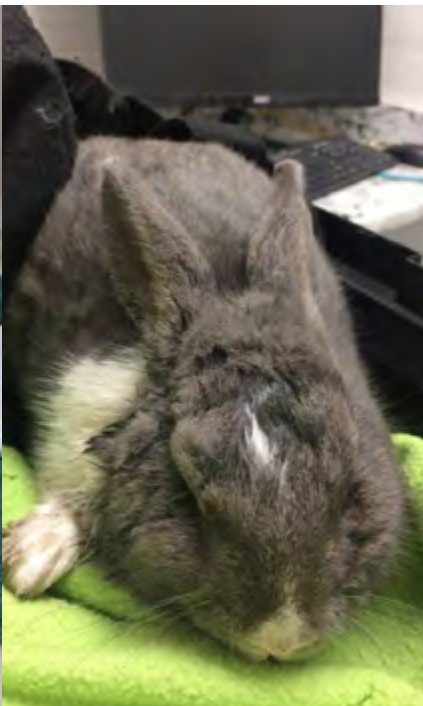
It is a criminal act under the Criminal Code of Canada<sup>1</sup>.

In British Columbia, it is also an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (BC)<sup>2</sup>.

It is also illegal to abandon an animal in most states in the USA, whether by dumping it in a public place or leaving it anywhere without providing for its needs.

<sup>1</sup>Government of Canada, 1985, Cruelty to Animals. Criminal Code of Canada, Section 446.1b.

<sup>2</sup>Government of British Columbia, 1996, Offences. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, Section 24(1).



**Rabbits receive a large number of sick and injured feral and dumped pet rabbits. They aren't built for a life in the wild.**



## A danger to native rabbits and the environment.

### Spread of Disease

The European rabbits naturally live in warrens with large numbers in small spaces. The density provides a prolific conduit for the Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease virus, which initially only affected European rabbits but has now jumped to native rabbits and hares.

### Environmental Damage

Unlike the natives, the European rabbits are prolific burrowers. They dig under structures and into hillsides compromising buildings and roadways. Disturbing the soil allows invasive and noxious weeds to take hold. The rabbits are eating gardens and landscaping and destroying young trees. In time they can affect farmland and compete with native species.



Dumped pet rabbits.



## Prevention + Control

Animal control and animal welfare agencies play a big role in prevention and control. We all need to work together on this issue.

Two dumped rabbits quickly become hundreds without intervention.

## More Research is Needed

More research needs to be conducted to accurately gauge the species' habits, population growths, the effects of climate change, and the epidemiology of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease.



Surrey Animal Resource Centre



BC SPCA

Visit our websites and join us on social media to learn more about abandoned domestic rabbit issues and solutions.



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**email** info@rabbitats.org  
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