October 2025

RABBITATS

A Guide to Sanctuary Rescue

Rabbit Rescue, Control & Management



info@rabbitats.org www.rabbitats.org (604) 398-4980

Table of Contents

What is Rabbitats?

- Who we are — 3
- Our sanctuaries — 5

Construction

- Summary — 9
- Materials — 11
- Rabbit safety — 29
- Set ups — 32

Colonies

- Types of colonies — 42
- Adding new rabbits — 45
- Maintenance — 47
- Rabbit density — 49

Logistics

- Rabbit trapping — 53
- Feral rabbits — 55
- Breeding — 58
- Intake — 60
- Identification — 62
- Vaccines — 63
- Transportation — 65
- Diet — 67
- Medical issues & Health checks — 69
- Rabbit mortality — 73

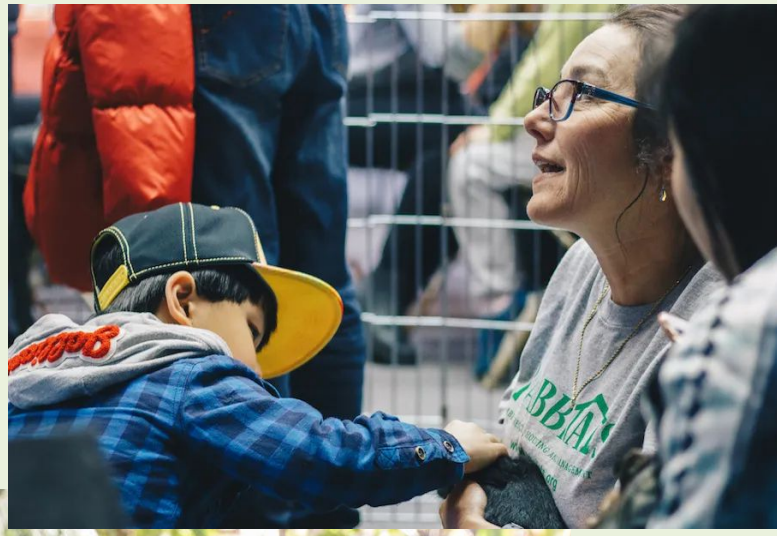


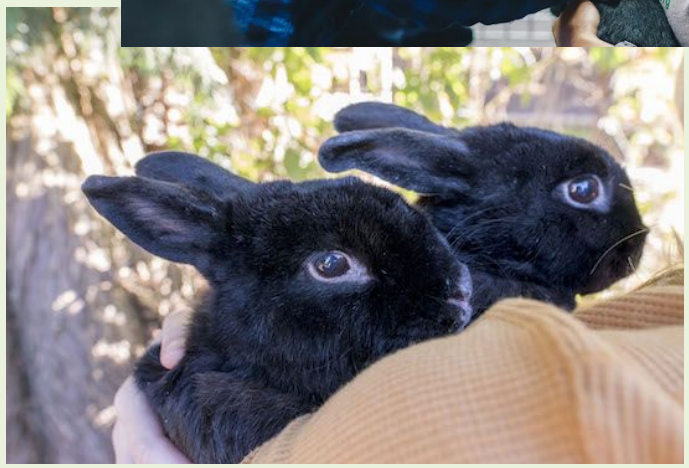
What is Rabbitats?

Rabbitats is a registered charity based in Richmond, BC focusing on abandoned and feral domestic rabbit rescue and control.

The society promotes natural environments, and designs predator-proof, sustainable, visually appealing and gently interactive colony enclosures for abandoned rabbits prioritizing low maintenance and sustainable care.

We seek out non-traditional destinations for adoptions and relocations.





RABBITATS



What is Rabbitats?

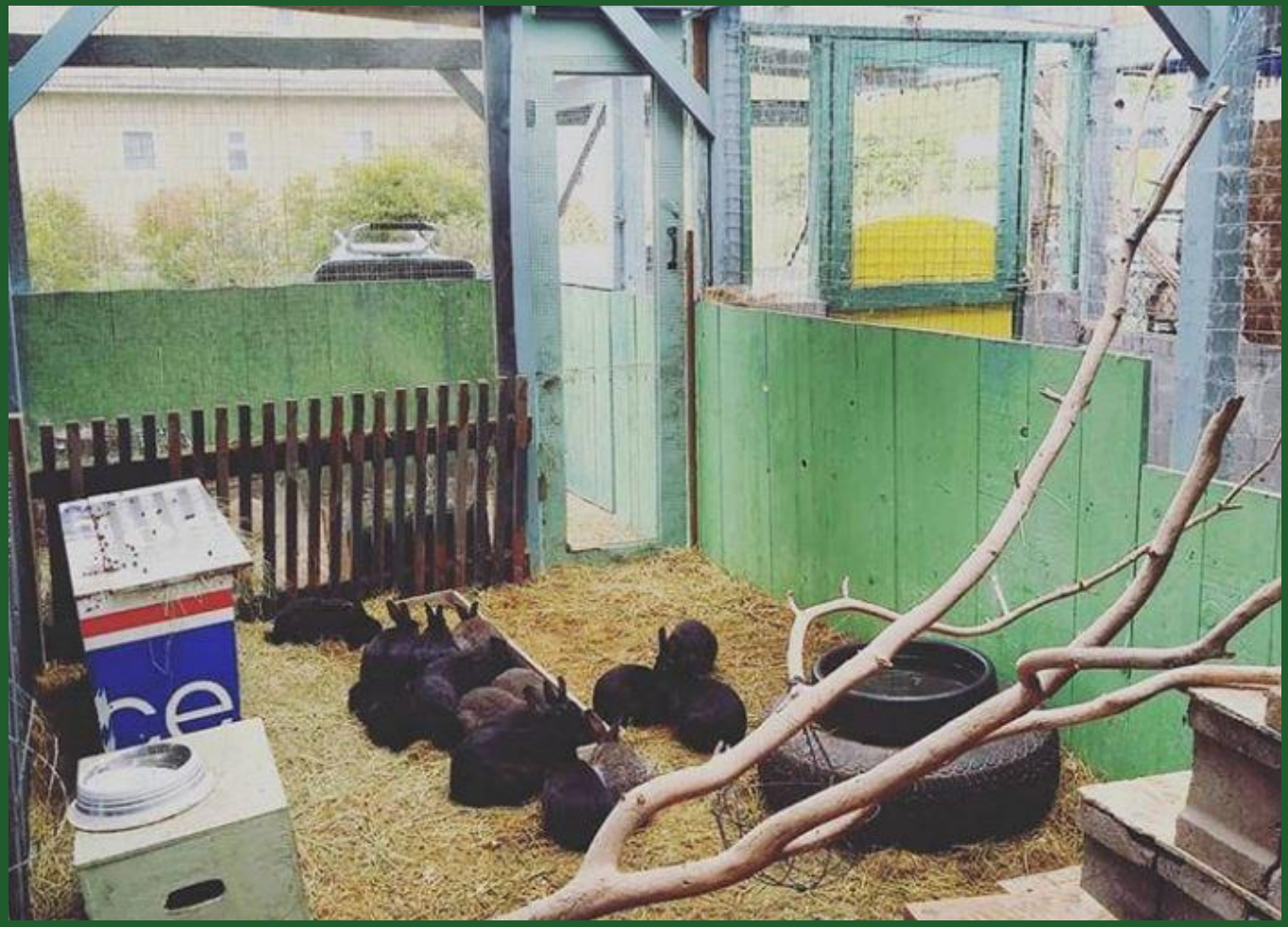
The organization was formed in 2011 by key entities involved in the rescue and relocation of close to 1000 rabbits from the University of Victoria campus the previous year.

Rabbitats has since rescued well over 3000 abandoned pets and their feral offspring.

The organization is headquartered on a farm in Richmond where it hosts a shelter and sanctuary. It also oversees a network of sanctuaries and micro-sanctuaries around the Lower Mainland.



Rabbitats Richmond Sanctuary





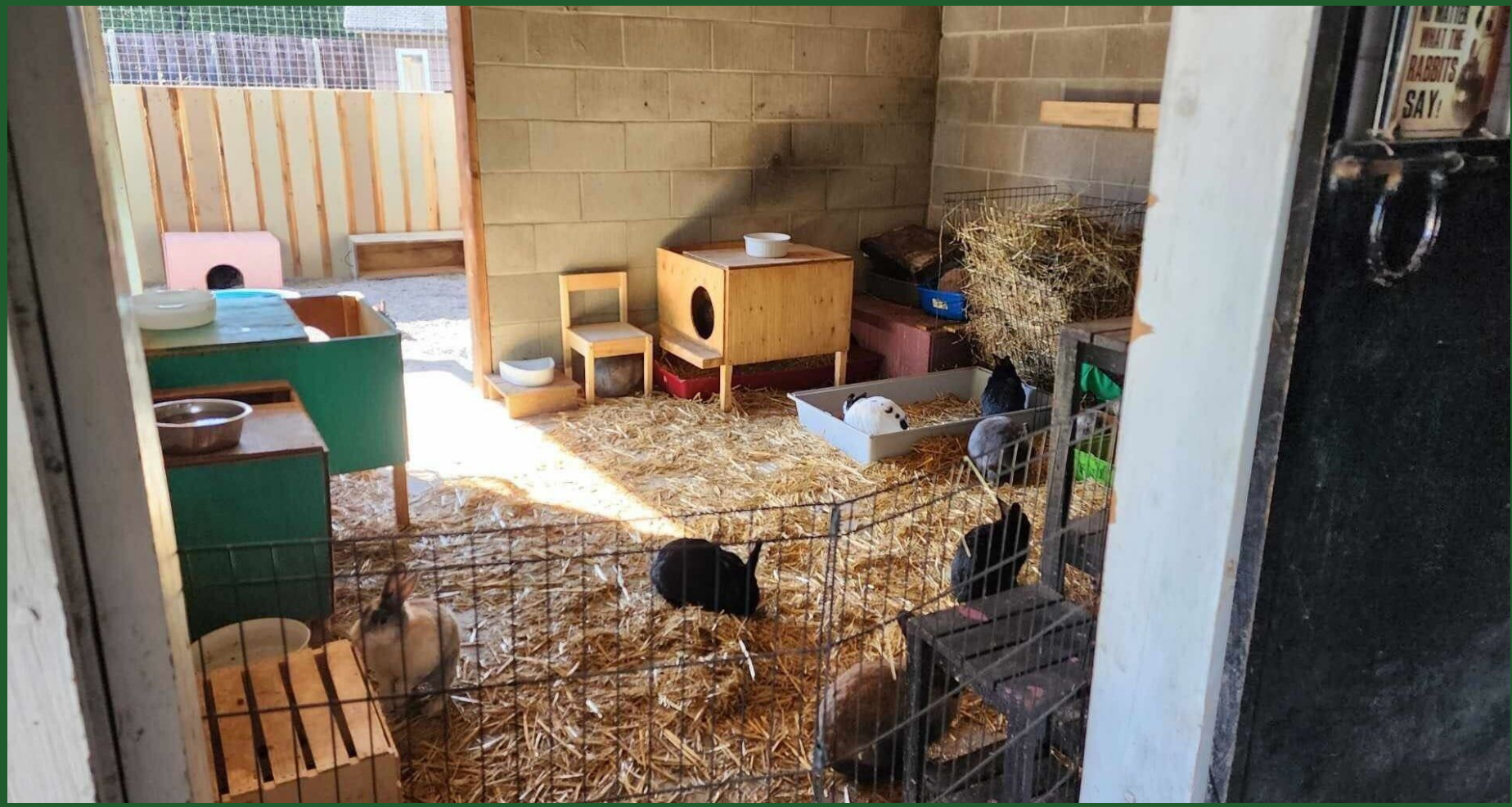






Under construction
2019/2020

Rabbitats Langley Micro-Sanctuary



Rabbitats at Kindred Farm Sanctuary







Construction





Summary

Rabbits can live healthy and fulfilling lives in colony settings.

- Enclosure designs depend on usage, area predators, available materials, furnishings and budget.
- Indoor / outdoor combinations are ideal.
- Enclosures should have overhead cover with solid roofing, wire or netting
- The ground can be cement, rock or wire to prevent burrowing.
- Small (9 mm) roadbase is a favoured ground cover.
- Walls can be wood and wire with sight and weather blockers



RABBITATS



Summary

- Building supplies should not include treated lumber, chipboard, oil-base paint, sod with pesticides or other toxic materials.
- Hay and other food needs protection from the elements, rodents and insects.
- If new rabbits are expected to be added to a colony, to alleviate territorial issues, at least two partitions are advised, allowing populations to be ‘shuffled.’



Rabbitats Richmond sanctuary plan

Ground

Burrows can extend dozens of feet and while they can protect the rabbits from predators, they can compromise structures and the safety of humans walking above them. They also make the rabbits inaccessible.

If possible, extensive ground wire or a solid ground cover is best to control or prevent burrowing.



Burrowing at the Precious Life Animal Sanctuary: While ground wire is installed six feet around the perimeter, the centre is understandably not protected at this ¾ acre facility.

RABBITATS

Ground



If an enclosure is being built from scratch, the ground should be excavated and then cement, rock or wire should form the base.

If ground wire isn't possible, gravel or pavers can be used to establish pathways and form barriers around structures. When possible, burrows can be filled in to at least slow down the process.

RABBITATS

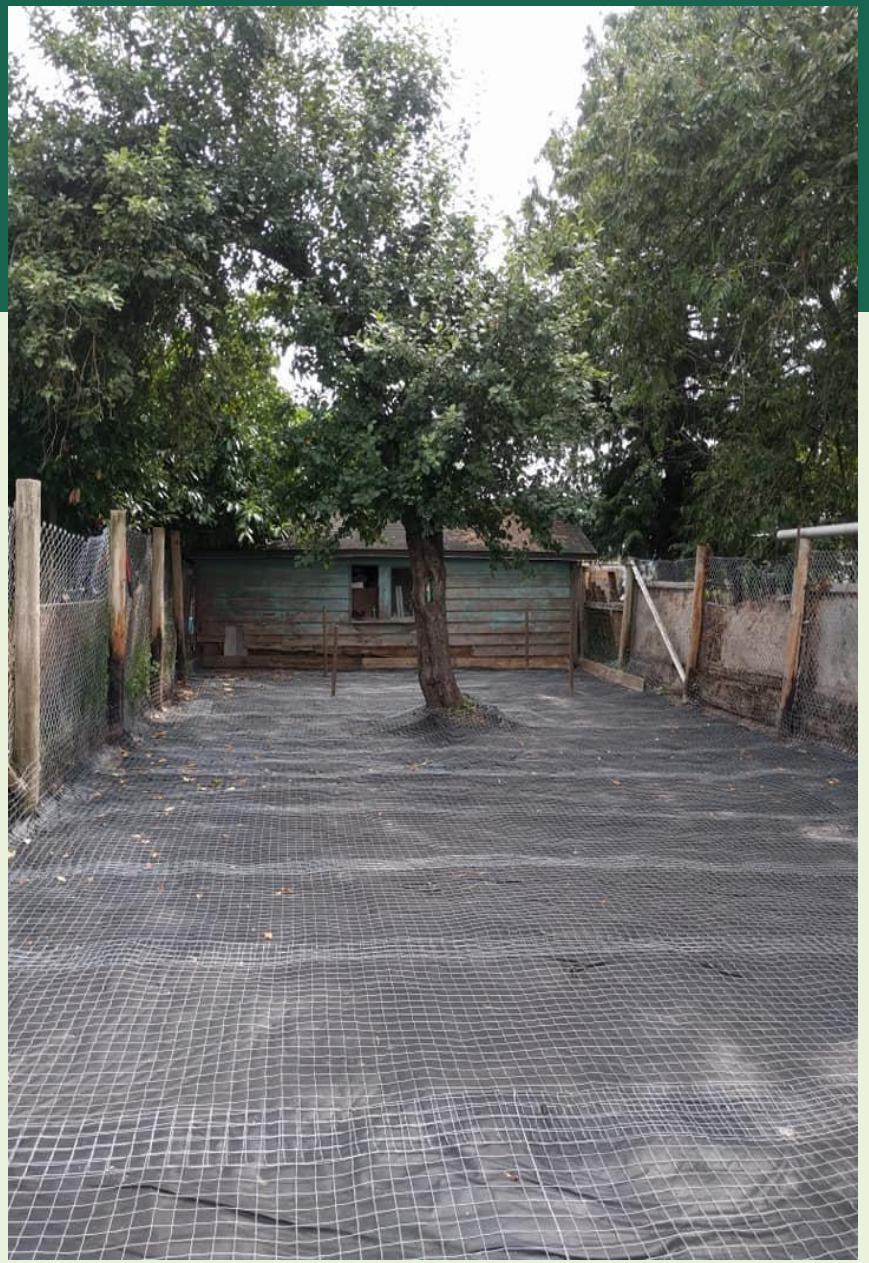
MATERIALS TO USE

Ground Wire

The ground wire is laid down on a flat surface and secured with garden staples or hooks. Landscape cloth can help with weeds.

The wire must be completely flat and secured:

- Avoids the ground cover falling through the wire and causing it to raise up
- Avoids exposed raised wire that the rabbits can chew or catch their feet on, and
- Avoids wire catching on the teeth of a rake when raking the surface.



Richmond sanctuary ground prep: stucco wire over landscape cloth (weed control)

RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Wire

The wire used for the ground was a galvanized, a heavy gage and sometimes plastic-coated.

Chicken wire, hardware cloth, etc, will not withstand the corrosive rabbit urine or their chewing practices.

We used six-inch ground staples to secure the wire flat, with limited success.

Thin metal plates and pavers were used to help flatten problem areas.







RABBITAIS

HOW TO INSTALL

Attaching Wire to Fencing

The fencing needs to be installed before the ground cover.

The fence boards need to be flush to the ground to avoid a burrowing space between the bottom of the fence and the wired ground.

The wire can run up or under the fence.

The wire must remain flat on the ground and be perfectly perpendicular to the fence to avoid the wire lifting up and allowing the ground cover to fall through.

Trim pieces or planks can be used to affix the wire and cover sharp edges.



RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Ground Cover

Grass isn't an option for multiple rabbits, it will turn to dirt very quickly.

Soil is messy and will turn to mud.

Rabbitats has been using two inches or so of 9mm roadbase with success.

A base too sandy can be messy, and sand and dust can potentially be inhaled by the rabbits.

Cover too rocky is hard on the rabbits feet and it's hard for them to get good traction.

Roadbase open to the rain will harden, but it remains loose and pliable undercover. Both options work.



MATERIALS TO USE

Ground Cover







Covered enclosures are raked to take out soiled hay and mix in the rabbit urine and droppings. A hard surface can be swept.

A 5-10 mm roadbase is ideal, although the most common size is 19mm, which needs the bigger rocks removed. Crusher dust has also been used in the mix but it was too dusty for covered spaces.

Products vary by location. Given the cost of transport, the best ground cover is often what can be found close by.

NOTE: Cedar chips still need to be researched.

RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Fencing





Most rabbit predators hunt by sight and movement more so than smell, thus solid fencing is a deterrent.

Enclosures with all-wire fences should ideally be built on a property with an existing solid fence but even then a small line-of-sight and wind blocker of at least 24" inches of wood, metal, plastic, landscaping cloth, etc, can lessen the stress from encounters with cats, dogs, raccoons, etc.

RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Fencing



Enclosures with wire fencing can also incorporate burrow boxes with high backs for housing.

Wire (a 1” to 2”mesh is recommended, smaller if weasels and rats are issues) encapsulating the entire space is the best level of predator security.

Rabbitats traditionally builds a three-foot wood fence with roughly four feet of wire extending to the roof.

The closer to areas with predators, the taller the solid fencing (eg: the fence may just be 3ft at the front of a run but 6ft at the back). The types of predators in an area need to be considered.



RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

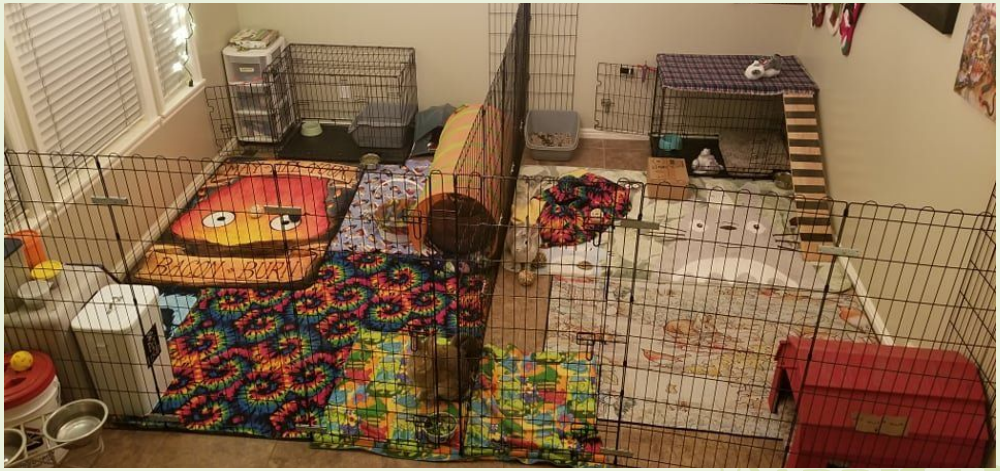
Fencing

Interior fencing separating enclosures should be at least four feet tall with no lip or furniture close by that the rabbits can use as a launching point.

Designs may need to take human access and viewing into consideration, especially when in a public space.

Double fencing for extra protection is preferred.





RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Metal Fence Panels

Recently Rabbitats, faced with the high costs of wood, discovered a type of metal fence panel that sits flat enough to the ground (no feet) and is light and strong enough to be used for rabbit enclosures..

The 9.5 ft panels weigh 40lbs to 60 lbs each and are easily zip-tied together to form a solid pen. The panels are also being used to predator- proof the roof.

- The enclosures have wire on the ground and sight blockers.
- Roofing can be a canopy or be constructed from regular roofing materials.



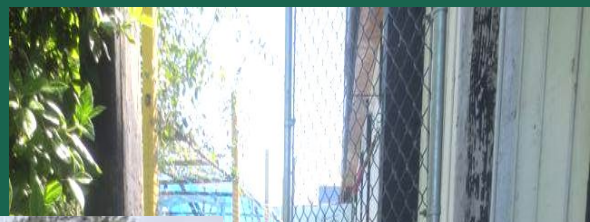




RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Gates











All entrances should be double gated if there isn't double fencing (an enclosure within an enclosure).

In some cases a cubicle is constructed to house a second entrance.

A **'stop board'** will need to be installed flush to the ground and the gate swinging to meet it to keep rabbits from burrowing under the gate. If the board is higher than the fill, it will also serve as a slight barricade causing the rabbits to hesitate before attempting to escape.

The board can cause problems for wheelbarrow access, etc, so consideration can also be given to removable boards and ramps.

RABBITAIS

MATERIALS TO USE

Roofing

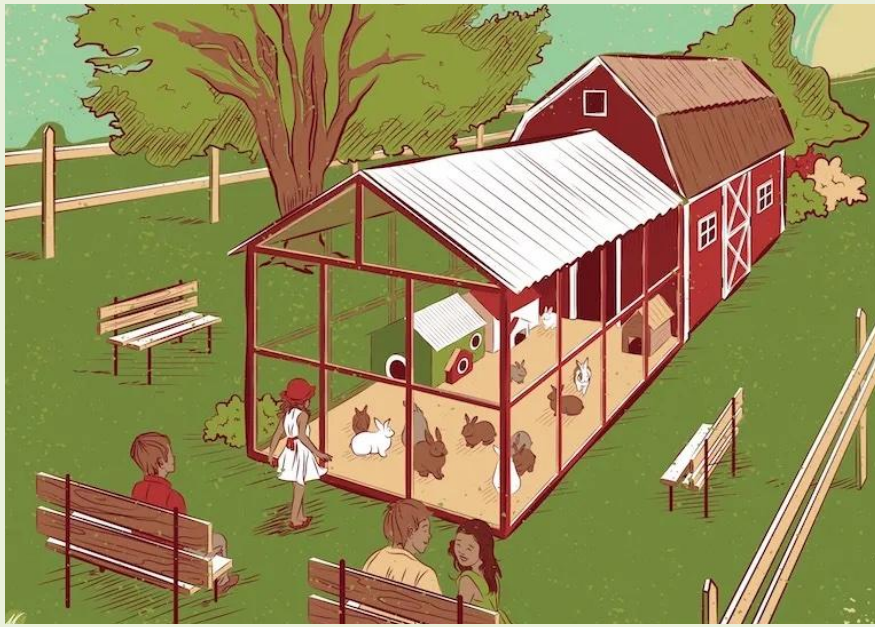


Roofing needs to deter flying and climbing predators and provide proper weather protection and drainage.

Smaller housing structures within an enclosure can keep the rabbits dry, but solid overhead cover is better for volunteer comfort and the integrity of the rabbit food.

Roofing design is often at the mercy of the budget and/or donated or available materials, which can include tiles, cedar shakes, plywood, metal, or corrugated plastic or fibreglass panels.

Consideration needs to be given to weight from snow, strong winds, available shade, the availability of dry feeding stations and volunteer access.



Illustrated examples of ideal enclosures

RABBITAIS

MATERIALS TO USE

Roofing



Rabbitats found a good deal on light corrugated plastic panels which, when installed correctly, have kept the areas dry and stayed secure in wind storms, although some enclosures have required additional tarps in the winter.

Given the climate in BC, we have yet to have an issue with snow, but ‘broom slots’ were incorporated. (Note: the design pictured needed modifications to keep the interior dry).

The alternating solid and transparent panels provide sun and shade.



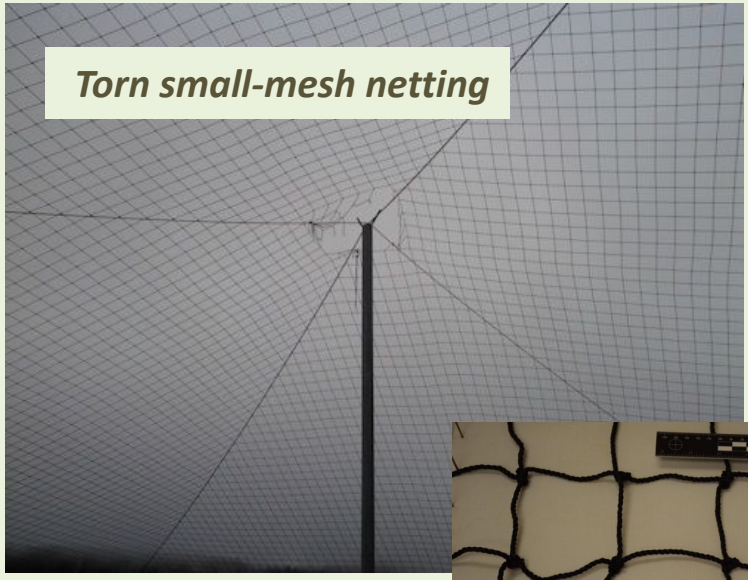
RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Netting

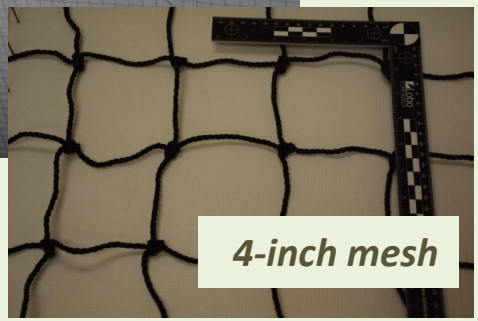

Precious Life Animal Sanctuary

For netted roofing, a lighter gage netting with a large mesh (4-inch measured corner-to-corner is ideal) allows snow to fall through and prevents small birds from getting tangled.


Torn small-mesh netting

Rounded plastic discs (eg: tupperware lids) on top of posts holding up the netting will help reduce tearing.

Netting in this manner has a five-year life span although repairs via weaving, strapping or tying together tears can extend that.


4-inch mesh

RABBITAIS

MATERIALS TO USE

Indoor/Outdoor



Indoor/outdoor housing presents great predator proofing and enrichment options.

The rabbits can easily be lured or herded from a covered run in the daytime or back into a shed or barn at dusk.

This is a higher budget option when building indoor housing capable of housing dozens of rabbits from scratch, but existing structures like barns, sheds and coops can be modified with ‘bunny doors’ and proper runs attached.







RABBITATS

MATERIALS TO USE

Barn Stalls





Housing rabbits in a barn stall is a comfortable option for the rabbits and their caregivers.

A 10x10 barn stall can house a dozen rabbits or even two dozen with the proper furnishings to increase the square footage.

Sawdust can be used to cover rough cement and horse stall mats, and swept out as needed.

Neither sawdust nor straw should be used to cover smooth cement or linoleum. Rabbits require traction.



MATERIALS TO USE

Barn Stalls

Our South Surrey barn had road base covering a wired dirt floor.

Litter boxes containing pine pellets and hay were placed strategically to lighten the feces load on the ground and be more ‘garden-friendly.’

Straw is best used only used in wet areas and for bedding.



Rabbitats’ barn stall
Surrey sanctuary



RABBITATS

RABBIT SAFETY

Aerial Predators











Hawks, eagles and owls are among the most predominant rabbit predators.

Solid roofing is always advised for safety as well as the comfort of the rabbits and the volunteers.

Netting will also keep away birds of prey although some kinds can harm small songbirds and it's not great protection against some climbing predators.

If the area is too large or the budget too small to be fully roofed or netted, the ground needs **a network of small shelters (two exits), tunnels, woodpiles, thick bushes and bird flight deterrents** like criss-crossed wires, flags, umbrellas and reflective tape.

When incorporated for weather, **shade cloth, tarps, etc, also provide raptor protection**, as will vines and other vegetation growing on the wire.

RABBITAIS

RABBIT SAFETY

Ground Predators



Ground predators can dig, climb or use brute strength to get at the rabbits.

The combination of ground wire and a few feet of solid wooden fencing will prevent most of the burrowers. Solid roofing and strong wire will deter most of the climbers.



Spaces using the recommended 4” netting also need robust electric and angled barbed wire as a deterrent from predators like bobcats and raccoons.

Weasels and snakes may be able to both climb and slip through wire, however they’re only a danger to babies and are not known to do much damage to adult rabbits in colonies who can mount a defence.



RABBIT SAFETY

Ground Predators



Be careful when using small mesh in enclosures with babies and special needs rabbits, and house rabbits lacking basic instincts, as they can also be at risk.



Strong posts, heavy-gauge wire and solid roofing are best for areas with bears and cougars, along with **blocking the rabbits from their line-of-sight.**



SET UPS

Furnishings



Rabbits like small, dark spaces, small entrances and multiple levels mimicking their natural burrows.



They also stake out territory so every rabbit should have a space.

The interiors can include ‘burrow boxes’, purpose-build bunny houses, reconditioned dog houses, elements of chicken coops and other housing.



Benches can have small access holes to double as hiding boxes or houses for their homes/burrows. (This will allow the rabbits to feel safe and avoid human contact if they choose to). Holes the size of a gallon paint can lid are the average.

RABBITATS

SET UPS

Furnishings





The benches, boxes and houses can be floorless for easy cleaning and emergency rabbit access.

If the box has a floor, there should be hinged lids and the entrance holes should be ground-level to allow cleaning.

Food areas must be completely dry.

Waterproof sheds are recommended for uncovered enclosures. Spaces viable by the public should be visually pleasing.

RABBITAIS

SET UPS

Feeders







Our favourite hay feeders are a wall or fence-mounted angled container able to hold a large volume of hay.

The bars are typically 1.3 inches apart. Too wide will allow small bunnies to get into the feeders while to narrow makes it difficult for the rabbits to remove the hay.

Rabbitats has converted small cages into feeders with good success.

The tops of all hay feeders must be covered to keep the rabbits from jumping on top and soiling the hay. Extended tops and solid wood sides will help keep the feeders dry.

RABBITATS

SET UPS

Feeders

Rabbitats uses pans for salad and pellets and removes them immediately after feeding.

Water containers are on raised platforms and/or away from well-travelled paths to prevent the rabbits kicking in hay and dirt.





RABBITATS

SET UPS

Storage



Hay bale and other food storage within each enclosure is recommended as the bales and pellet bags can be heavy to haul.

The hay and pellets need to be kept bone dry while being transported, stored and fed. Moisture can cause harmful mould.

If running water sources aren't available, jugs of water can also be stored in the enclosure sheds, as can the dishes.

RABBITATS

SET UPS

Enrichment









Rabbits can be allowed to dig into earthen embankments in play areas.

Indoor and outdoor spaces can have multi-levels, low tables, ramps, tree stumps and other fun stuff.

(Note: Live tree trunks must be wrapped with wire and the roots blocked off to prevent damage).

Hanging or covered edible plants (to protect the roots) can be incorporated as a cost-effective food, treat and enrichment source.

SET UPS

Weather-Proofing



Shade cloth will keep the hot sun off the rabbits. Rabbitats also uses staggered transparent and opaque roofing panels to allow both sun and shade in the enclosures.

Shelter placement is important, eg: windows facing south or west may result in overheating.

Shade from trees and transpiration from plants will cool the area, so (edible) vines can be incorporated on the roof and sides.

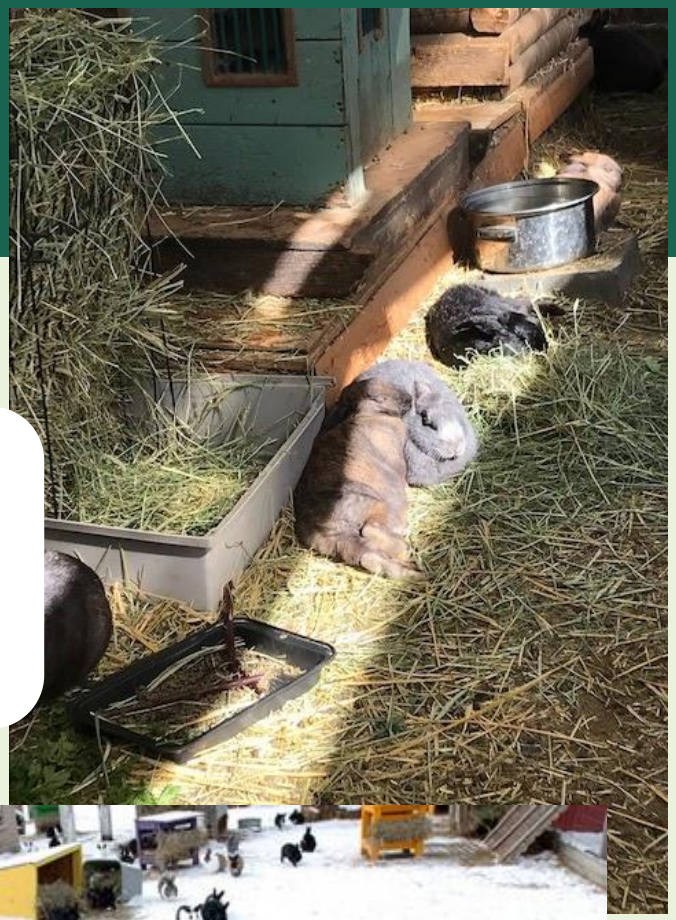
During the winter, Rabbitats' wooden fences act as a wind guard while the wire above it is wrapped in plastic sheeting.



RABBITATS

SET UPS

Weather-Proofing



In our experience, the rabbits do not always like straw in their houses and tend to soil and move it, possibly because they find it slippery.



For an animal like rabbits that is chased by everything, traction is critical. A soft grass hay works better.

For freezing water, a heat lamp or a heated pet water bowl with the cord not accessible at all to the rabbits, can work.

Rabbitats is currently experimenting with solar fans for air flow and will be looking at power to keep water heated or moving.



RABBITATS

SET UPS

Security



As noted under ‘Predators’, the outer perimeter fence should have an electrified wire running its entire length.
Barbed wire should be used sparingly as it can be a hazard to wildlife.



Security ‘Bunny Cams’ should be incorporated as should trail cameras to assess predators





When the area isn’t encapsulated, wooden 'stockyard' fencing -- pointed wooden posts or pickets – can block the line of sight and somewhat deter larger predators from climbing over.



Combination letter locks are incorporated to prevent human interference.



RABBITAIS

Colonies





Sanctuary Rescue

Rabbits are most affordably and easily housed in sanctuary settings where they can be sterilized and allowed to live out their lives in large groups.

Adoptions attempts can be labour intensive, time consuming and most often fruitless. And some rabbits just don't like humans.

Surprisingly few sanctuaries exist. Even farm sanctuaries taking rabbits are rare.

There is largely a lack of knowledge and education about keeping rabbits. Farm rabbits have traditionally been unsterilized and housed in cage systems, and pet rabbits are stuck in hutches.

Education promoting converted coops, horse stalls, sheds and runs and well-fenced pastures is needed.



RABBITATS



Non-Traditional Destinations

Most municipal shelters and almost all rescue groups attempt to adopt out single and paired rabbits to indoor homes, another effect of the House Rabbit Society's strong presence.

While rabbits shouldn't be housed in backyard hutches, they can (and many should) be adopted to safe outdoor homes with the right criteria.

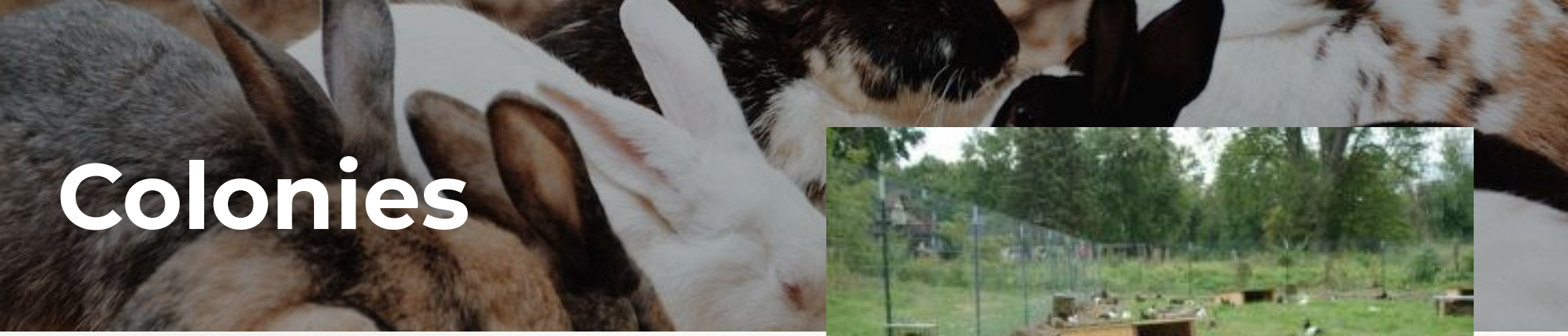
Chicken coops, barn stalls, indoor/outdoor shed set-ups and other methods should be normalized.

Rabbits can also be adopted out in colonies, allowing many more to be rehomed in a happier and healthier natural environment.

Hobby farms, sanctuaries, green businesses, markets, developers, institutions and community projects can also house rabbits under the right circumstances, eg: rooftop gardens, community centres, schools, city parks and others positioned to take small colonies of contained rabbits.



RABBITATS



Colonies

Rabbits will mostly get along when put together in a new space at the same time.

Rabbits fight over territory, but if the space and structures are new, their territory hasn't been established.

Some scuffles will happen as they claim their spots, and a few rabbits will need to be removed if they are bullies, or being bullied, but the remainder should form a cohesive colony.

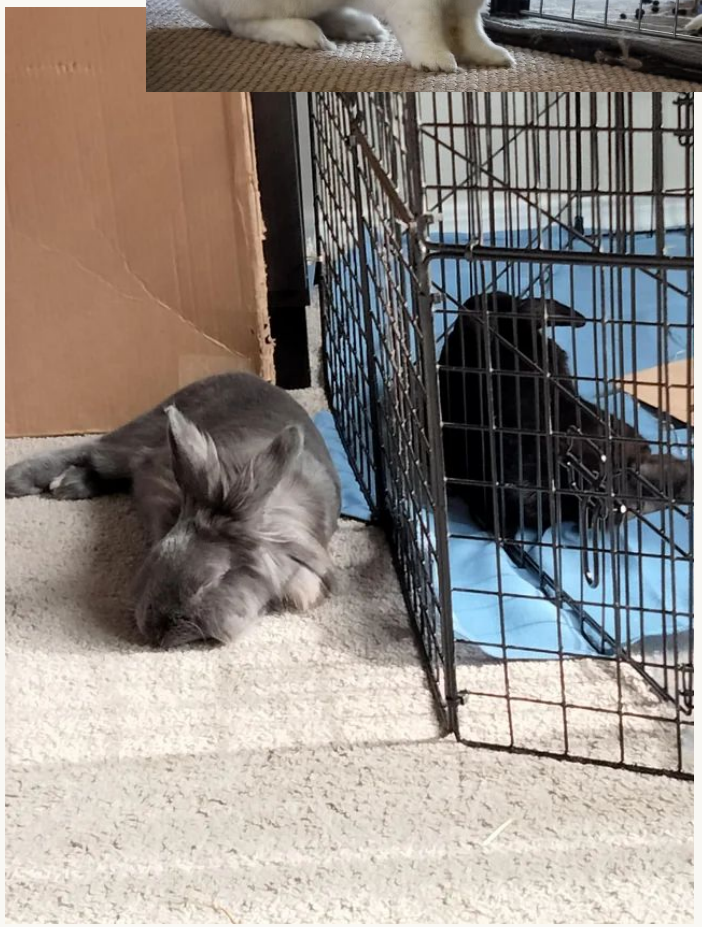
Some rabbits will pair up and shouldn't be separated, but others will form small groups that can change over time.



RABBITATS

Adding New Rabbits





Maintaining at least two separate enclosures will allow the rabbits to be easily switched to a new-to-them area making it easier to add new arrivals.

The partitions should be solid to prevent the rabbits from seeing each other.

A solid **‘sight blocker’** will reduce territorial posturing and marking).

Furnishings and other structures can also be changed around to break territory holds.

If partitions or multiple spaces are not options, and the space is large, groups of rabbits – preferably seven or more – can be added at once, preferably while the original colony is eating or otherwise distracted. Extra furnishings should also be added.

Adding New Rabbits

Rabbits bullying other rabbits can be separated temporarily.

Generally rabbits bullying and being bullied should be pulled from the colony and tried in other colonies.

If unsuccessful after many tries, a solution will be for the rabbit to be housed, adopted out alone, or paired with just one other rabbit.

We follow a “three-strikes” model as a guideline.



RABBITATS

Maintenance

Larger colonies need a ground cover and not a bare floor to keep the rabbits from stepping in urine and feces and to keep maintenance manageable.

Toilet areas will most frequently be where the rabbits eat their hay as well as in ‘communal corners’. They also tend to mark territory throughout the colony space.

In some cases, corner litter pans and pans under the hay feeders will catch the majority of the rabbit output and keep the ground cleaner longer. Undercover areas should be occasionally hosed down.

Stalls and sheds with sawdust should be frequently swept and moped or washed.

Houses with wood floors need to be washed with a strong vinegar solution. (Vinegar is ALWAYS the best cleaner for rabbit urine).





The top enclosure using road base was the easiest to maintain. A bare stall floor needed daily cleaning. The plywood floor below was soaked with urine and needed to be removed in just a year.

RABBITATS

Maintenance

Road base provides the easiest maintenance.

It can be raked weekly and heavily soiled areas removed as needed. Hay will get mixed in from the feeders and can be put on the ground, but too much hay will make it hard to rake.

The road base usually needs to be refreshed annually.

Hosing it down on hot days will also keep the space cleaner.



Road Base

Rabbit Density

Rabbits do well in large colonies and being able to house them in groups of 15 or more allows mass rescues to work.

Rabbitats' South Surrey sanctuary had four pens averaging 20 rabbits per pen. The pen sizes average 200 sq. ft. The colonies remained stable with few fights, although rarely a rabbit would suddenly get picked on.

Rabbitats' Richmond headquarters has multiple enclosures ranging from 4 to 40 occupants including 10x10 and 10x20 enclosures with an average of 10 and 20 rabbits respectively.





Rabbit Density

A North Surrey ‘micro-sanctuary’ had a 10’ x 12’ shed with a larger attached run very comfortably holding 20 rabbits.

Alternatively, the ¾ acre enclosure at the Precious Life Animal Sanctuary held just 100 rabbits, which allowed them space to retain a level of grass and foliage.

Multiple rabbits living on grass can take the grass to dirt pretty quickly.





RABBITATS

Backyard Bunnies

Rabbitats has recently started a Backyard Bunnies campaign, encouraging and designing spaces for smaller numbers of rabbits.

Outdoor housing is more available than indoor housing so we are encouraging this practice in most cases.

Traditional backyard housing is woefully inadequate, so this is also an educational campaign addressing proper housing, protection, enrichment and care.



Logistics



Rabbit Trapping: General

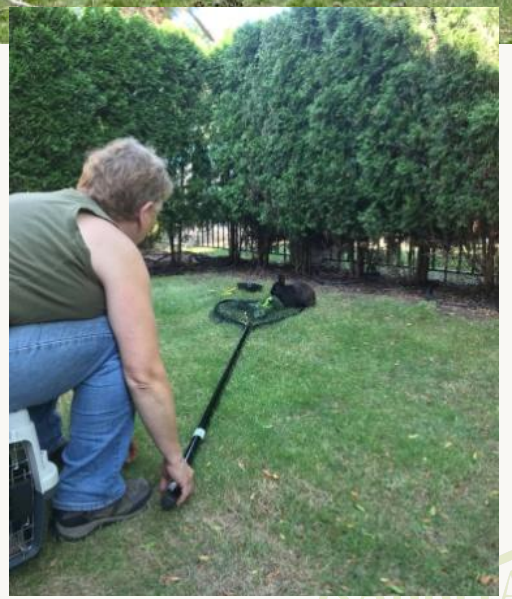
Rabbitats are more easily trapped by gaining trust with food.

Rabbitats will most often use exercise pens to surround rabbits and scoop them into a carrier once their escape routes are blocked. Remember to have a volunteer and a carrier on the inside.

We have also used “Havahart” live traps baited with herbs, vegetables and cereal.

Note: Traps are frequently stolen and need to be monitored unless in secure areas).





Rabbit Trapping: General

Nets will also work.

We lie our long-handled nets flat on the ground with treats in the centre, and be quickly lifted up when rabbits were in position. (Note: care must be taken to have a large enough mesh to prevent the rabbits from getting solid footing to launch themselves out).

An inspection camera to see into burrows and bushes is also a handy tool.







RABBITATS

Feral Rabbit Definition

Rabbitats considers rabbits ‘feral’ when they are born outside and not contained.

“Abandoned pets” are rabbits born in captivity and then set loose; the ferals are the offspring of abandoned pets.

We differentiate between feral rabbits, house rabbits and farm or hutch rabbits because we try to provide housing based on their comfort zones. A rabbit born outside most often prefers outside, house-born rabbits prefer life inside. (Farm and hutch rabbits can go either way).



Feral Rabbit Trapping

Feral rabbit trapping is best from November to January when their numbers drop.

It's less likely babies will be left in the nest, and the rabbits will come into the traps for food. Trapping is almost impossible in the spring and early summer as the bait is no match for sweet spring grass.

Trapping takes place in early evenings.



RABBITATS

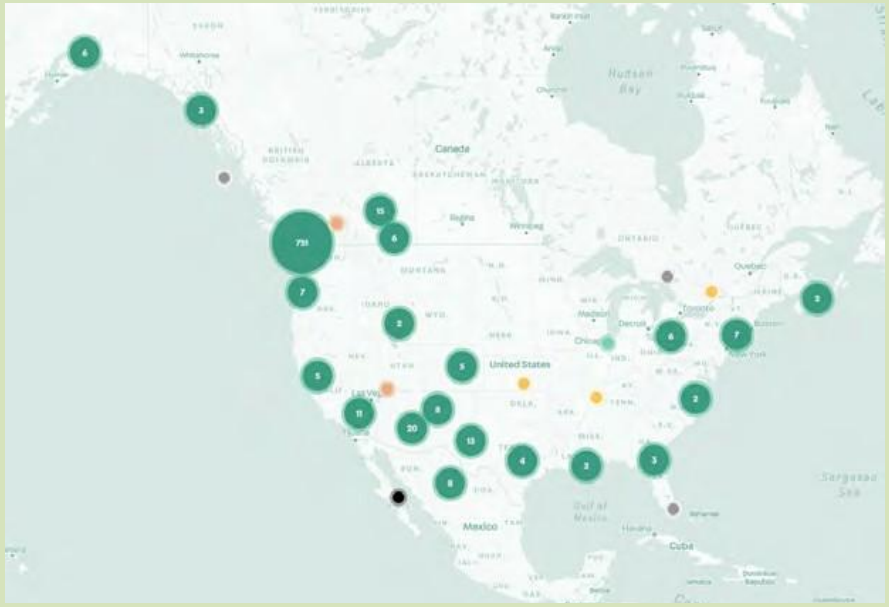
Feral Rabbit Trapping

Feral rabbit control cannot be random, each area needs to be cleared methodically and completely, no rabbits can be left behind as they will quickly repopulate.

Rabbitats will not trap part of a colony or in an area where other colonies are close by.

Rabbitats operates a tracking map at abandonedrabbits.com that allows us to identify area borders and numbers to determine the best long-range effectiveness of a trapping project.

abandoned rabbits



abandonedrabbits.com

RABBITATS

Breeding Like Rabbits





Calls about at-risk babies flood the rescue in the spring and summer.

When possible we also try and trap the mother, as hand-raising babies is time consuming. When that is not possible, we try and place the babies with surrogates. Trapping is difficult given that every female will be pregnant or nursing or both.

Leaving babies to perish in the nest is a major concern. Advance research on the rabbits being trapped is always strongly recommended.

Especially in the spring and early summer, they are pregnant again the day they give birth. (Rabbitats trappers observed a mother giving birth on a lawn while a male mated with her, and 31 days later, she had another litter).

Breeding Like Rabbits

Babies are problematic as they challenge the rescue's capacity quickly.

They also need to stay under observation until they're old enough to be sterilized, which can be up to six months.

Offspring born and raised in a house become 'house rabbits' requiring hard-to-find indoor homes.

Observation tells us the litters have been bigger and more frequent the past few years. This is literally a growing problem.



RABBITATS

Intake

For large-scale rescues, Rabbitats' incoming rabbits are best placed in an indoor holding area for assessment and documentation.

Abandoned house pets will continue to be housed indoors while the ferals and sturdier unadoptable pets are housed in outdoor enclosures or barns. With feral colony control, all feral females, along with babies and young juveniles, are housed together to await their spays.

As noted, a 10x12 horse stall can hold 30 rabbits if necessary.

The older males are housed separately and neutered as soon as possible.

A month or more after their spays and neuters, the rabbits can be merged into colonies.



RABBITATS

Intake

Rabbitats, like all legitimate rescues, spays and neuters our rabbits.

Our mortality rates have been very low and we have been fortunate to have supportive veterinarians offering substantial discounts or volunteering their time outright.

Our current **spay/neuter costs** range from $125 to $200 per rabbit.

If we're **buying supplies and using volunteer vets at donated clinics**, the costs can be reduced to $50 to $60 per rabbit.







RABBITATS

Identification

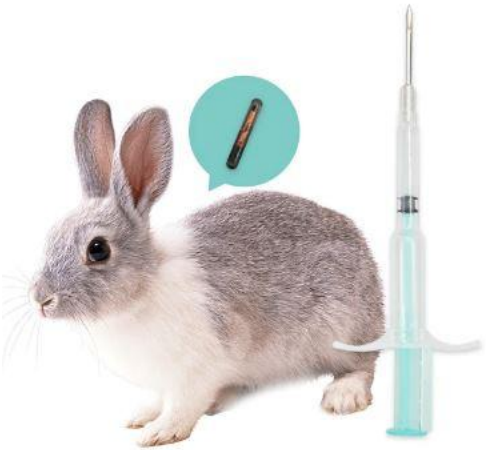


Rabbitats initially were tattooed all sanctuary rabbits with our own tattoo numbers identifying males and females while only using the vet registry numbers for adoptable rabbits.

However we are now using the vet registry number for all rabbits while also trying to tattoo and additional ‘n’ or ‘s’ to easily determine the sex. The tattoos fade over time.

More recently, we have been switching to microchips, costing between $5 and $15 per rabbit, depending on the company. We are using the smallest 7mm microchip.





RABBITATS

RHDV2 and Vaccines

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV2) first appeared in Delta and Vancouver Island in February of 2018, the first major outbreak in North America.

It killed thousands of domestic European rabbits, including ferals, pets and breeder rabbits.

In 2020 a new variant of the virus, this one affecting native hares and rabbits as well as the European rabbits, broke out in the US Southwest and has spread to Alberta, Montana, Idaho and Oregon, making mass vaccinations here in BC critical.



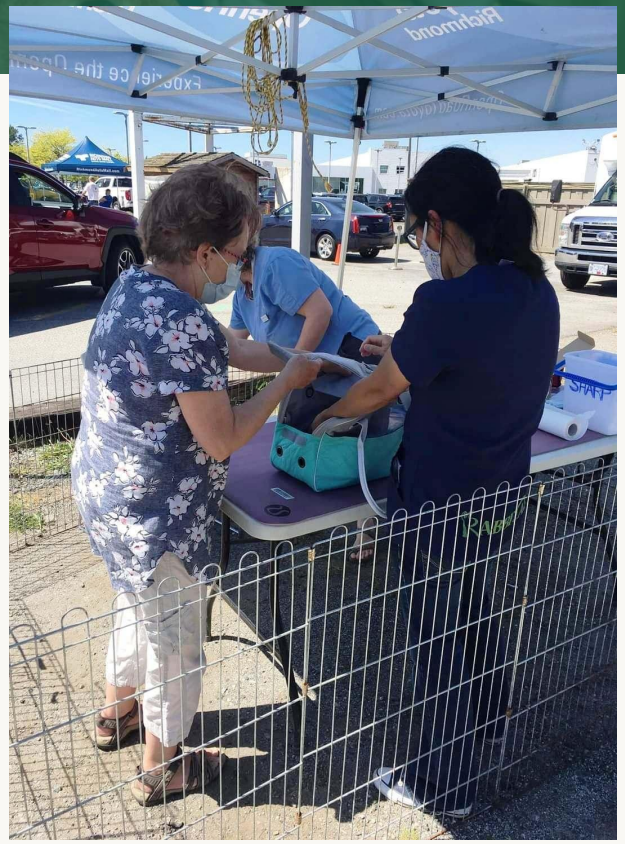
RHDV2 and Vaccines

Rabbitats vaccinates and provides boosters for 1000+ shelter and sanctuary rabbits annually.

We previously purchased bulk vials containing 50 vaccines with a 2-hour expiry date from our local vet clinic, and vets donated their time, however those vials have been discontinued.

We have also staged low-cost clinics for the public and positioned them as fundraisers to cover our own vaccine costs.





Transporting



A small to medium cat carrier with solid walls and top and holding at least two rabbits is the most comfortable form of transport for them.

They prefer to travel in small cramped (to us) quarters, the comfort zone of a 'burrow'.

Strange rabbits housed together in the carriers rarely fight, especially while the vehicle is in motion.

Our Dodge Caravan has held up to 60 rabbits.



RABBITATS

Transporting

For long trips, we put wood pellets on the bottom of the carrier and layers of newspapers on top thus if they soil the paper, the top few layers can be peeled off for a fresh dry start.

We'll put hay and wet greens in the carrier, but no water as they can get enough hydration from the veggies without having spilled water or water bottle spouts sticking through the door.

The rabbits require very few breaks to ‘stretch their legs’, although that can be accomplished by putting carriers inside exercise pens.



RABBITATS

Diet



The primary diet for contained rabbits is grass and hay which can be augmented with dandelions and other forage (pesticide-free, pulled not cut, and unsoiled by other animals).

Fruit tree branches like apple and pear, leaves intact, are popular, as is willow.

Note: fruit trees bearing seeds are recommended, but not fruit trees bearing pits.

The rabbits also can eat cast-offs from producers and grocers like carrot and fennel tops, beet greens, celery and broccoli leaves, radish tops, parsley and cilantro stems, kale and chard stems, the outer cabbage leaves and more.

RABBITATS

Diet



Our rabbits also get a limited amount of rabbit pellets. The pellets should be consumed in one setting and not left out for free-feeding.

The brand should not contain fruit, seeds or grains. The fibre content should be over 20% and the protein 14% or less.

Timothy hay pellets are optimal.

Rabbitats mixes multiple brands together but prefers denser extruded pellets for dental health and to lessen the choking hazard. The pellets are spread out on trays and not bowls, also to help prevent choking.



Medical Issues



The level of medical issues often depend on the rabbits' origins.

The feral rabbits have proved healthier than regular house rabbits when it comes to common issues like stasis, dental disease, respiratory, ear or urinary tract infections. Rabbits from hoarding situations, fancy breeds, inbred rabbits, etc, however, can have poor health in these areas.

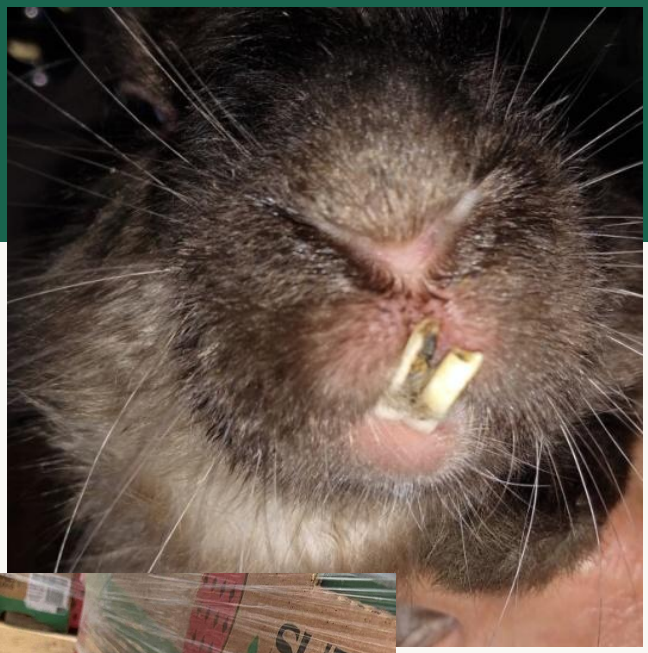
Colony rabbits in general have proved to be healthier than house pets. The most common issue is bites.

Injuries are frequently seen in feral street rabbits although they tend to heal quickly.



RABBITATS

Medical Issues



While head tilt is common in pets (mostly originating from ear infections) ataxia (wobbly) from unknown or various causes including trauma and parasites is more common in ferals.

Many of the rabbits brought in from the streets have coccidia, roundworms, syphilis and parasites like e.cuniculi, but there have been next to no transmissions.

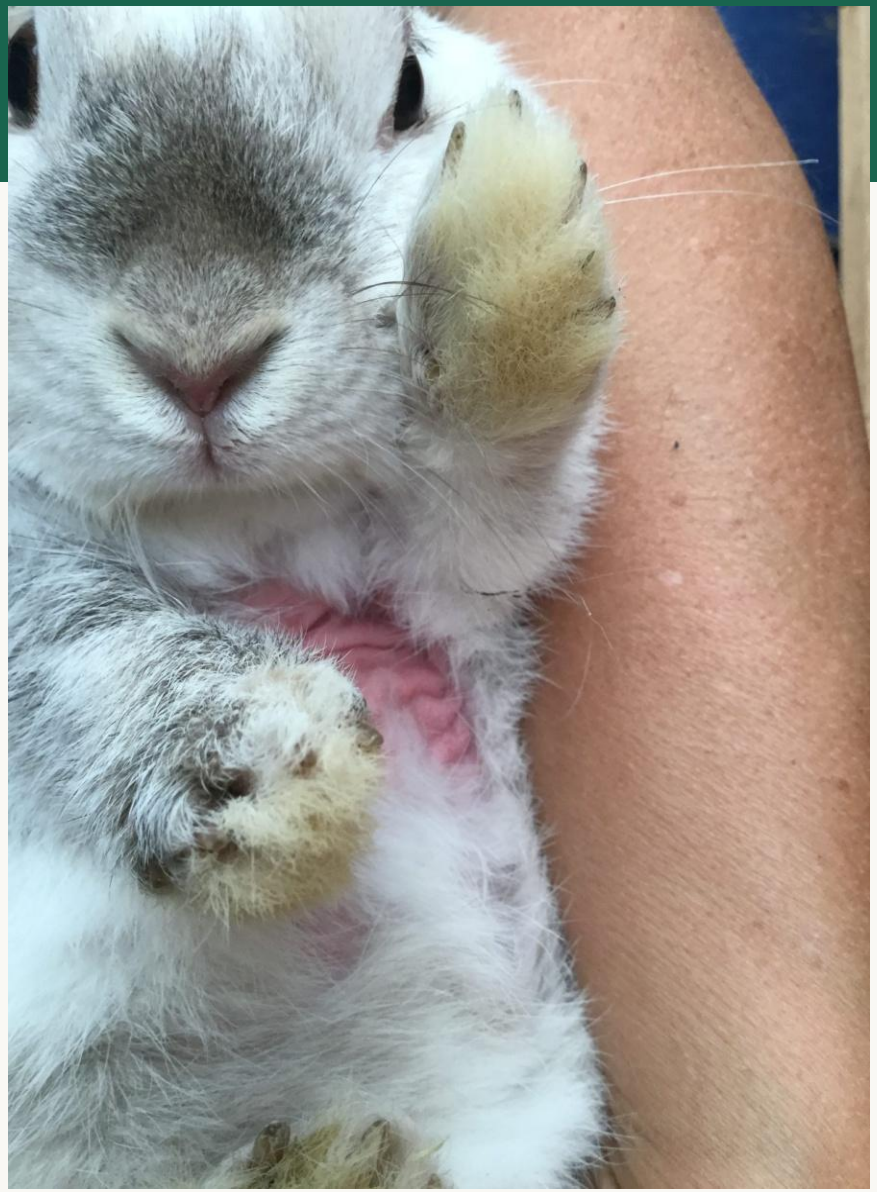
Communicable respiratory diseases have been rare, although occult pneumonia has been seen in individuals.

Flystrike has also been surprisingly rare in colonies.



RABBITATS

Health Checks



Health issues are almost always caught quickly.

Sanctuary volunteers identify ailing rabbits by assessing them when fresh food is put out for the colony. Observations are made re: rabbits who may be moving slowly to the feeding dish, and the volunteers check all the houses to make sure there are no rabbits not eating.

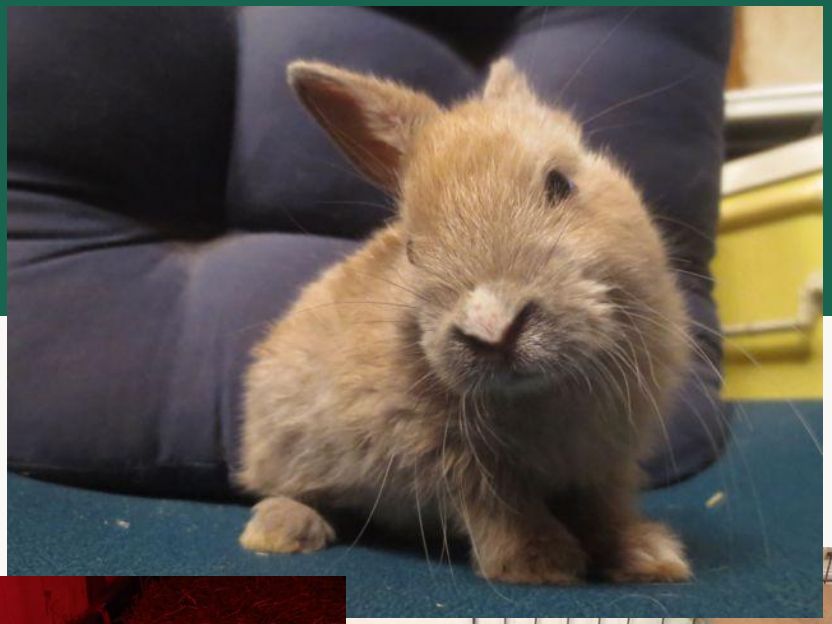
Full health checks are scheduled every few months along with any grooming needs.

Bites are best assessed the day after a fight when they are starting to scab over, as fresh bites are hard to spot.

The wounds are treated with betadine.

RABBITATS

Health Checks



Our ataxia bunnies are often housed together in a special needs colony, as are our ‘tripods’ who have had limbs amputated although the latter don’t require extra care.

As the population aged, we prepared a ‘retirement colony’ space that was easier to monitor with heat lamps and weather protection. We also purchased a large heated construction trailer.

The aging feral rabbits will most often have untreatable ailments like cancer, kidney or liver failure. We follow advice from our vets and will euthanize and not prolong their suffering.

The house rabbits, who are more often special breeds like lops, dwarfs, etc, tend to present more with ailments like URIs, sinusitis, dental issues, ear infections, etc, than feral and colony rabbits.





Rabbit Mortality

Rabbits are considered seniors at 7 years, and living to 10 or 12 is common.

Our Surrey sanctuary had a peak of 125 rabbits with colonies of adults caught between 2012 and 2016. Attrition was slower than expected.

By September of 2023 when the rabbits were moved to our Richmond sanctuary, 50 rabbits were still surviving.

While we we don't have data at hand re: the current number of survivors, out of our 357 Richmond rabbits, we had 63 deaths in 2024.

Sudden death from an unknown cause has been rare at both our shelter and the sanctuaries.



Rabbit Mortality

The infant mortality rate at the shelter, however, especially during large rescue projects, has been high, particularly early in the winter with newborns from recently trapped mothers.

Adult rabbit deaths at the shelter not from age-related issues were usually rabbits already challenged when they came to us.



RABBITATS

RABBITATS

Thank you to the Animal Welfare Foundation Canada and the Microsanctuary Resource Centre for their support of this project.

