

# Don't Dump Rabbits

My passion to help unwanted rabbits

by Debby Widolf



Photos: Clay Myers

The current popularity of rabbits as companion animals has a dark side: in the US and many European countries rabbits are the third most abandoned and euthanised animals, after cats and dogs.

Sadly, many people believe that an unwanted rabbit released into a park, woodland, or empty lot will have a happy, 'free' life. Nothing could be further from the truth. Companion rabbits do not know how to fend for themselves. Although they have instincts, survival skills must be learned, and a pet rabbit has not had that opportunity. Left on its own without a known food and water source and no safe hiding places, a rabbit becomes vulnerable to disease, starvation, predators, and dangers such as vehicles and abuse by humans.

If an unwanted rabbit is fortunate enough to be released into an environment that provides some of what rabbits need, dangers such as vehicles and predators remain. The very colouring of domestic rabbits, which often has white, makes them an easy and obvious target for predators of all kinds. Furthermore, if the environment provides some food and shelter other dumped rabbits will find their way there, and if any are unspayed and un-neutered they will breed and a colony of community rabbits will develop. The colony rabbits will burrow and nibble at vegetation, sometimes becoming a nuisance to a

town or city. Rescue organisations simply can't take in all the rabbits, and local governments may resort to culling.

While working at the Best Friends Animal Society I did an on-site assessment of a colony of over 1,000 rabbits in a crisis situation. As I took my first look my breath was taken away and my commitment to helping unwanted, un cared for, and abandoned rabbits became an abiding passion and my life's work.



The first step in addressing the problem of abandoned rabbits is to understand why people dump their rabbits. Some formal and informal studies and observations have shed light on why rabbits are abandoned. Surprisingly, behavioural and financial reasons are not the primary cause of abandonment. It is simply that people no longer want to care for their rabbits: care becomes a burden, kids lose interest in the rabbit, adults no longer want to spend time on the rabbit because a baby arrives or they bring a new dog into the home.

I ask everyone who loves rabbits to please help with the ever growing problem of rabbit abandonment. Here's a few ways you can help:

**Education.** Help educate people about the time and care a companion rabbit requires before they commit to an adoption. Also help educate people as to the true fate of dumped rabbits. If you have a website, link it to [dontdumprabbits.org](http://dontdumprabbits.org) with our logo on your home page.

**Volunteer.** Give your time and/or financial support to the efforts of rabbit rescue organizations to round up and re-home dumped rabbits. Attend open meetings of your local shelter and offer your time and talents.

**TNR.** Help develop trap-neuter-return programs for abandoned rabbits in areas where rescues and shelters are overwhelmed and cannot take all the rabbits in. This will prevent the colony from growing.

**Fostering and adoption.** Offer to foster or adopt an abandoned rabbit rescued by an organisation.

If everyone does what they can to help the plight of dumped rabbits, even if it is only a little, our combined efforts will make a difference.

