### Thinking Inside the Box: Litterbox Training Your House Rabbit

By Renee Argento

### Yes! My rabbits use a litterbox; we aren't barbarians here after all!

When someone new first visits my home, they are often greeted by the grey lop watching them intently as they enter the room. Nearly every time I get this surprised reaction from the visitor: "You ... you just let him wander throughout the entire house!?" Why of course, he's part of my family. They are even more shocked to know that rabbits can quite easily (in most cases!) be litterbox trained.

When I first brought my lagomorph overlord into my home, he was solidly accustomed to his cage and woodchip lifestyle. This might be quite the challenge I thought, having no previous experience in rabbit litterbox training. I purchased a very basic cat litterbox like those you can get at Walmart. I lined it with newspaper and topped it with hay, and Joe was instantly drawn to it. Rabbits like to



munch hay as they do their "duties" and by topping the box with fresh timothy hay this was an instant attraction.

Things went quite well for some time ... until puberty set in. It is very important

#### In this issue

Our Newest Volunteer! 3
The Buckeye HRS at BunFest
2014!6-7
Somebunny Needs YOU! 8
A Lifelong Commitment 10
All Today Every Day 11

to note that the single best step to make training easy on everyone is to spay/neuter your rabbit. On top of the many health benefits, it stops the marking of territory or spraying. Each time Joe used his litterbox I would treat him to a small piece of papaya; this was the only time he got this special treat. Rabbits react very well to positive reinforcement -- saying "Good boy/girl" with some head rubs goes a long way. Never yell or scold your bunny; a simple and firm "No" gets your point across very effectively. You do not want to scare or intimidate your rabbit; they are prey creatures and we work long and hard to earn their trust.

#### Tips, Tricks, and Challenges

Upon the arrival of my sweet girl, Zoe, I learned that single bunny litterbox training is easy mode. Zoe came from the Cleveland APL and not having much history on her, I guessed her life was a sad one in a cage. I had hoped for that same instant success that I had with Joe in his litterbox training, but if there is one thing to be said for bunnies it's that they are strong-willed creatures. Since she had only been spayed the week I got her, I figured many of her issues were attributable to a brand-new home and still-raging hormones.

Hormones can take a few weeks to calm down in a newly-fixed bunny. Generally speaking, the older the rabbit, the easier to litterbox train. I decided that I would use the exercise pen I had planned on using for bonding as a way to contain Zoe's marking. Often rabbits will leave stray poops as well as small urine spots to mark their territory. Exercise pens are convenient because they keep your rabbits safe when you aren't home, and they expand

Continued on page 4





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The Buckeye HRS Respects Your Privacy We know our members value their privacy and that's why we never, ever, sell our mailing list or distribute it to any other party. All of our members' information is held in the strictest confidence.

### **Special Thanks to:**

Jim and Laura Brown, for their very generous donation in honor of Raisin's 14th birthday!!!

Margo Reich and The Gloria Easterday Trust, for their wonderful contribution to our foster program. Gloria was a most generous supporter and a steadfast rabbit advocate. We're sad to learn of her passing.

Dorothea Mayerchak, for her kind gift in memory of her beloved Danny, who passed away on 04 November, 2014.

**Scott Edwards**, for his thoughtful in memoriam tribute to his dear Sonny.

**Kristen Doherty**, for her hard work and tireless dedication in directing our Sanctuary Sponsorship Program for many years.

Stephanie Lodge and Stephanie Ash, for taking over the coordination of our Sanctuary Sponsorship Program.

Margo Coniam and Jane Sidwell-Coniam, for their Christmas donations to our Fremont foster rabbits on behalf of their bunny, Malley, a Buckeye HRS

Janet Schandorsky, for her generous holiday donation to the Fremont fosters.

**The anonymous donor** who sent a box of Oxbow hay to the Fremont buns.

**SmallPetSelect.com**, for donating 10% of your timothy hay purchases to the Buckeye HRS. See our website for details (under Rabbit Supplies) and remember to use the coupon code "Buckeye" to receive free shipping and to help us help more bunnies.

The following members, whose monetary and in-kind donations allow us to meet our ongoing fostering and educational goals:

Gay Marie Goden, Liz Claytor, Bob and Holly Piekarczyk, Janet Reed, Stacie Hecht, the Covert family, Renee Argento, Jann and Mark Kuntavanish, Barbara Galambos, Mary Zimmerman, Judy O'Neil, Lori Fair and Mark Kotzbauer, Linda Gardner, Jim and Laura Gills, David Truelsch, Shannon Bailor, Carmella Coia, Irene Levy, Carrie Goglin, Cathy Montiegel, Katie Straka, Christa Billerman and Fayaz Bhanji.

Our new and continuing Sanctuary Rabbit Sponsors! This program would not be possible without your compassion and generosity. We wish we could acknowledge each of you individually!

As always, the **Monks Copy Shop** of downtown Columbus, for their discount on printing our newsletter.

# Introducing Our Newest Volunteer!

My name is Stephanie Ash and I am a rabbit advocate. I am the Adoptions and Retail Supervisor at the Cleveland Animal Protective League. Educating adopters on rabbit care and the joy of having a companion rabbit is one of my favorite things to do! I also foster rabbits for the Cleveland APL and have helped rehabilitate and socialize rabbits from all "hops" of life. Before I came to the Cleveland APL, I was a lawyer. After two years of practicing law, I was really unhappy and decided to quit my job and pursue something that was a better fit for my personality and what motivates me. I volunteered at the Cleveland APL at that time and when I applied for a position supervising a new offsite adoptions center, I got it!

My family consists of a wonderful, loving husband named Tom (who also adores rabbits) and a 70-pound lap dog named Salsa, a four-year-old Boxer mix we rescued from the Cleveland APL in 2013. Recently, we experienced the loss of our first rabbit and dear friend, Erwin, who was an 8-year-old mini-Rex. We miss our little hopper so much and are grateful for the years we spent together creating the best memories. Erwin was an important part of our family -- he went with us to Columbus when I took the bar exam (and helped me study for it!), visited our friend in Indianapolis for Thanksgiving a few years ago, travelled to the Dayton area for a friend's wedding, and even went with us on



Stephanie and Erwin (inset)

our honeymoon to West Virginia. He made me into a "Crazy Bunny Lady" (a badge I wear proudly) and inspires me to be a voice for bunnies every day. I am thrilled to be a member of the Buckeye House Rabbit Society and I cannot wait to meet everyone and work together educating others about these little creatures and rescuing rabbits in need. Contact me at bhrs-sash@ohare.org.

# **Holiday Raffle Results**

And the winner is ... Leah Shumney of Cincinnati! Congratulations to Leah and many thanks to all who supported the Buckeye HRS through the purchase of raffle tickets. Proceeds will allow us to make the future brighter for more homeless bunnies in Ohio.



to many sizes and configurations. I used cheap shower curtain liners to protect the carpeting and covered them with old towels and blankets.

Other great liners include plastic tablecloths that you can get cheaply at a dollar store, tarps, puppy pads, and rubber tiles used for children's playrooms. Sometimes it's necessary to make the space small to better encourage the bunnies to use the litterboxes, if they aren't quite getting the hang of it. Start small and expand from there. Many people use multiple boxes as well.



Buster likes to munch hay as he tends to business.

or cat litterbox liners can make all of this immensely easier. I often provide this for my bun-sitters to make clean-up fast and effortless for them.

You can use a variety of options for the litterbox -- corner boxes, old busboy pans, storage containers, and cat litterboxes. They also have grates you can install over the litter material to make scooping easier, as well as keeping your rabbit clean.

### Preparing The Litterbox

When I had a single bun it was no big deal to line his litterbox with just newspaper and junk mail that

I had lying around the house. It forced me to change it often and it cost me nothing. Upon the arrival of a second bun, I would need to come up with a better solution. Stephanie Lodge from the Buckeye HRS suggested that I try wood stove pellets. I highly recommend them. They can be purchased for around \$5 from any Tractor Supply or equivalent store. Line the bottom of the box with newspaper and sprinkle the wood pellets in a

single layer on top of that. Next top it off with fresh hay. These wood pellets are not only rabbit safe, but

SUPER absorbent. For the price they can't be beat. Of course you can use any shredded paper litter, such as Carefresh, EcoFresh, and Yesterday's News, all of which are bunny safe. Do not use clay cat litter; this can cause respiratory issues in rabbits. Do not use any softwood shavings like pine or cedar, which contain harmful chemical compounds.

I find plain white vinegar the best solution for litterbox

cleaning and wiping down. It's cheap, super effective at getting rid of any nasty odors, and bunny safe. You simply dump the soiled litter, wipe down the box with vinegar, and you are good to go. Also, trash can liners



When you let your rabbit out for exercise and exploration, you must pay close attention to him the entire time. If you see that tail go up, you can react quickly by picking up the rabbit and placing him in the

litter box. If you do not catch him when he goes where he shouldn't, the training will take longer.

Patience is one of the biggest gifts our rabbit friends give us. Not everybun will learn impeccable litter habits right away. Some may veer off their once-perfect path when a mate or another animal is introduced into the home. It's extremely important to be very aware of your rabbit's normal behavior, so you can

distinguish what is normal from what is not. Shortly after getting Zoe and being challenged daily to teach

her where I wanted her to go, I saw that her bottom was getting wet. What had been just small marking spots became bigger spots. When a rabbit has a wet bottom this is cause for concern. Are you noticing sludge-like urine? Does he have a urinary tract infection (UTI)? I took Zoe that same week to have her checked out by my rabbit-savvy vet. We believe she has a UTI. She's doing much better now on her antibiotics. Urinary





Buster waits patiently for his

gal Sterling to finish in the

bathroom.

tract infections can be uncontrollable for a rabbit; the constant need to go, piddling, or dribbling are common symptoms. Since rabbits by nature tend to hide pain or discomfort, it is up to us to have a special



BaoBao and Luna have a roomy litter box. connection with our beloved housemates so that we can properly care for them.

#### Persistence, Patience, Love and Understanding

"Patience is not the ability to wait; but the ability to

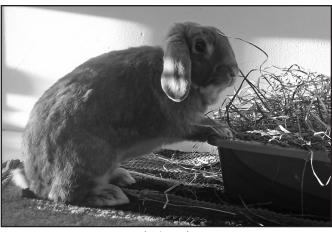
keep a good attitude while waiting."-Author unknown

What is going to make litter training the biggest success? You. How you react, how you talk, and how persistent you are will matter greatly. Litterbox training can be frustrating, but a persistent and loving bunny parent will have the most success. Finding stray poops? Keep scooping

them up and putting them where you'd prefer them



happy house bunny.



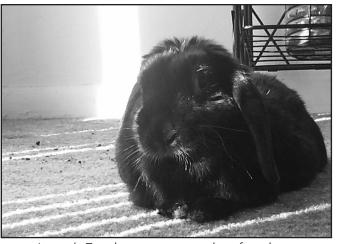
Joe aced Litterbox 101.

to be -- in the litterbox. Gently carry bunny to her box if you see that tell-tale sign of her tail going up. Our pets gather a great deal from our emotions. When we are sad they snuggle up to us; when we are angry they get fearful. Always remain calm and loving, and success will be yours in the end.

> If certain things are not working, don't be afraid to reach out for advice. Nearly all of us have been there at one time or another. Let your bunny tell you when she's ready to be free roam full time. Be patient and cheerfully clean up any mishaps quickly; the cleaner her surroundings, the less she will have reason to make those mistakes. Soon you will have a well-mannered,



Obi likes to nap in his box.



It took Zoe longer to earn her freedom.

### The Buckeye HRS at BunFest 2014!

With a new and larger venue and a record crowd, BunFest was once again an enormous success and a great deal of fun! We loved seeing so many old and new faces and learning more about rabbits. If you've never experienced BunFest, come join us this coming November!



Sue and Keith Zimmerman, with our fully-loaded table early in the morning.



Visitors checking out our many fundraising items.



Janet Schandorsky and David Sharpe, sharing a laugh with a customer.

### The Buckeye HRS at BunFest 2014!



Clockwise from top left: Herta Rodina, Shawnna Lemerise, Jann Kuntavanish, and Janet Schandorsky, with our top-selling bunny slippers in the foreground!



Janet Schandorsky, Jann Kuntavanish, Debbi Braunschweiger, and Stephanie Lodge were an immense help all day long.



Chatting with some bunny folk.

### Adopted!

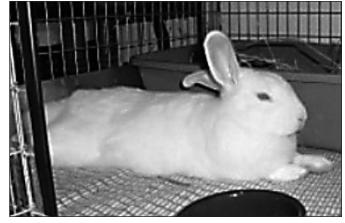
We're happy to announce that long-time foster bunny **Carmen** has finally found her forever home with the Marcello family. Carmen has adapted very quickly to her new home. Congratulations Elizabeth, Julie, and Jacob! Y Kierra (Kia) has a new home with Eli West of Deshler, Ohio. • Garfield was adopted by Alyssa Kochan of Plymouth, Mich. Sweet **Squiggle** has found her forever home with the McCarthy family, where she's becoming best friends with Clare. Tobias hopped his way into the heart of Gretchen Zarle of Akron. Tavi finally found a home with Madeline Good and bunny pal Murphy of Canton. \*Figaro Cooke was adopted by Grace Flanagan of Westlake, Ohio, where he has a new bunny friend, Pippin.



# **Somebunny Needs YOU!**



Louise Bailor is a beautiful white mini lop found just a mile away from my home. Young, active, and curious, she is especially enjoying freedom outside of her pen and exploring around her. Louise Bailor was named by Shannon Bailor in the "Name Our Next Foster Rabbit" program. Shannon chose the name in memory of her own bunny, Louise. Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrs-sue@ohare.org) 419-355-8433.



Meet Leo! Leo is a handsome, curious young fellow who enjoys the company of humans and likes to be held. He is very neat with his litter box and keeps his house nice and clean. Leo is an all-around good bunny. Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrssue@ohare.org) 419-355-8433.

Bunny is a sweet girl with us since she was three weeks old. She enjoys hanging out in her pen until she gets her courage up to venture out for exploring and binkies. Note the unique marking on her nose. Depending how you look at it, you will either see the head/face of a rabbit or the back profile of a bunny (aka bunny-butt). Here's a bun who is two-for-one! Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrs-sue@ohare.org) 419-355-8433.



Meet Raven, she is a big, beautiful and sweet rabbit with shiny black fur. Although shy at first, she is curious and playful. If Poe had met this Raven, he would have rewritten his poem for her ... Quoth the Raven, "my forever home". Please contact Michele Roth (bhrsmichele@ohare.org) 859-261-0556.

Meet **Barley and Hops**, aka "The Beer Babies". Barley and Hops are a pair of super friendly "BWBs" (Big White Buns). Barley is a sweet boy and likes to be involved in whatever you are doing. Hops is a cute and curious little girl. We would like them to stay together. BWBs grow to be larger than average bunnies, but they have the sweetest temperaments. They are mostly laid back and easy going. BWBs are good for families with younger children. Come see for yourselves how wonderful these guys really are. **Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrs-sue@ohare.org) 419-355-8433.** 



Nikki is a Dutch/English Spot mix with unique black and white markings on her fur. The most adventurous of all the Indiana babies, she is friendly and will be your best friend (for the low, low price of one baby carrot). Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrssue@ohare.org) 419-355-8433.







Meet **Sahara**! This goofy bundle of cuteness has a mighty personality to match her lionhead looks. Dumped at an apartment complex in Athens, Sahara was rescued by dedicated animal lovers who finally corralled her when she took refuge on a metal shelf beneath the radiator of their car. How this 4 lb. bunny was able to survive on her own surrounded by dogs, cats, cars, and wild predators is anyone's guess. Sahara's age is unknown, but her excellent health and speedy recovery from her spay suggest she's a young adult. Calm for a small bun, Sahara loves pets and lap time and will really warm up to you once you've earned her trust. **Please contact Herta Rodina (bhrs-herta@ohare.org) 740-797-3085.** 

**Lindsay** is an active girl with beautiful markings on her paws, ears, and tail. She is outgoing and enjoys running around and climbing on you. Just like a young bunny, she doesn't sit still and is quickly off for another adventure. **Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrs-sue@ohare. org) 419-355-8433.** 



Meet Lacey! Lacey is the mother of the Indiana babies featured in our Fall 2014 Harelines. She was dumped on the porch of a cotton-tail rehabber only to give birth to eleven kits the next day. (She raised the seven babies who survived right here in our foster home.) Lacey is looking for her fur-ever home. She loves baby carrots, cardboard boxes, hay munching (and long walks on the beach – just kidding). White bunnies with pink eyes are the hardest for us to adopt out. Please give her a chance at the life she deserves and show her that she is anything but disposable. Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrs-sue@ohare.org) 419-355-8433.



Addison is a young and playful little girl who is always busy. She enjoys head pets, giving kisses, hopping through tunnels, and running the "Bunny 500". Her adventurous personality makes a large pen a necessity. Addison is a perfect example that small bunnies can have BIG personalities. Please contact Stephanie Lodge (bhrsstephanie@ohare.org) 216-571-1088.

Meet Allie. Available for adoption now. She comes with a free stuffed cow!!! Please contact Sue Zimmerman (bhrs-sue@ ohare.org) 419-355-8433.



**Daphne's Babies:** Now that they're neutered, these two sweeties are showing exactly how neat and friendly they can be. Both boys are very loving to people and to each other. There's nothing more precious than watching them snuggle and groom. Living in a large pen with space to run around gives them a safe place and room to race and jump. Both are excellent with their litterbox.



Kinsey, although slightly smaller than Dok, has an equally funloving personality. Please contact Stephanie Lodge (bhrs-stephanie@ ohare.org) 216-571-1088.

**Dokken** (**Dok**) is largest of his brothers and sister. He's adventurous and super sweet. His hindquarters have more black



than his brother's. Please contact Stephanie Lodge (bhrs-stephanie@ ohare.org) 216-571-1088.

## **A Lifelong** Commitment

#### By Michele Roth

You're standing at the cash register and all around you are items known as "impulse buys." It could be a pack of gum, a nifty flashlight, or even instant stain remover. Something you notice and think "I'll give that a try," so you grab it and throw it on the conveyor belt. There's nothing wrong with making an impulse buy as long as it's not a living creature. Adding a new member to your family should be a well thought-out decision. The Buckeye House Rabbit Society does its best to educate people on the care and commitment required when adopting a companion rabbit.

The Buckeye HRS has several fosterers across Ohio and everyone gets calls and emails from people who purchased a rabbit as an impulse buy then realized they weren't ready for the commitment. Chapter Manager Herta Rodina shares: "Pet rabbits require just as much (if not more) care and money as a dog or cat. They live on average ten years and require total commitment by the adults in the family. Children grow up and change too quickly to take on this responsibility. There is no such thing as a starter pet." As with any animal, it's always best to collect as much information as possible and educate yourself so you know that animal is the right fit for your household.

Another important factor to take into consideration is inevitable change -- from jobs to living situations. "The top reasons I hear from people wanting to surrender their rabbit is that the children have lost interest, they're moving, or the bunny needs too much care," says educator and fosterer Debbi Braunschweiger. Keep in mind that any of these situations can happen to you. Unless you're willing to make the necessary accommodations for changes that occur, a rabbit (or any other pet) may not be appropriate for your household.

Know your limitations before you bring an animal into your home. For rabbits the worst-case scenario is becoming unwanted and released outside. Fosterer and educator Sue Zimmerman says, "I came across a rabbit who had been illegally dumped at a local ravine. Luckily someone witnessed the dumping and contacted me. I made space for him even though our foster home was already full, because he had nowhere else to go." Herta added, "Domestic rabbits cannot survive long outdoors. They don't have the instincts to avoid predators or traffic; other dangers are pesticides and parasites. Releasing a pet rabbit outdoors is not freedom; it's a frightening and painful death

In the right home, rabbits can make wonderful companions. The rabbits fostered through the Buckeye HRS are spayed/neutered, litterbox trained, and socialized. They have very distinct personalities, are intelligent and affectionate, and they enjoy companionship. If necessary, for a move or travel, they can be mobile. "With advance planning, rabbits can travel even long distances by car and some airlines allow them in the cabin in approved carriers," Herta said. With proper care, rabbits kept indoors can be a part of your family for many years.

With that in mind, remember that getting a rabbit should not be an impulsive decision. Consider your lifestyle, changes that may occur, and the time, money, and attention that are needed. These beautiful, sensitive creatures are depending on you to make the right decision for them, so please educate yourself and only make them a part of your family when you can make a commitment for life.





# All Today **Every Day**

By David G. Sharpe

Duffle, my slight, four-pound, five-year-old rabbit, began to sit in one spot. He wouldn't toss the tube from a paper towel roll that is his favorite toy. He held his left hind leg awkwardly. We knew these were signs of trouble he may not be able to recover from on his own, so we lifted him into his carrier and I drove the hour and a half to Dr. Oglesbee in Columbus. The underlying cause of his malaise was found to be pain from a kneecap that had shifted out of position. Dr. O massaged it back into place and prescribed the medicines that would help Duffle recover over the next several weeks.

But when Duffle returned to his pen, he lost control of both his hind quarters. He could drag himself by his front feet, but he mostly lay flattened on his left side, unable to reach his cecals, peeing on himself. Phone calls established that my little guy was suffering from the protozoa that most rabbits carry – E. Cuniculi.



Duffle

The infection stays dormant until the rabbit's health is compromised, then it rages into action. The trip to Columbus, essential as it was, had stressed him into paralysis.

Our beloved Richmond suffered from that parasite for years and never recovered. The rabbit guidebooks say paralysis from E. Cuniculi is permanent. The clinic said permanent.

I began reading about living with a special needs rabbit. This would be Duffle for the rest of his little life - crippled. I learned about the 'downside' that needs to be kept clean to prevent urine scald. The massages that might help. I prepared for a regimen of pressuresore-prevention. In When Your Rabbit Needs Special Care, by Lucile C. Moore and Kathy Smith, I read some remotely reassuring words from a rescue volunteer:

Inside every special-needs rabbit is a normal rabbit constantly trying to be like every other rabbit. They are not burdened by self-pity or the possibilities of what might have been. They do not consume endless hours of wondering "Why did this happen to me?" Their complete and total acceptance of their condition paves the way for them to have as high a quality of life that they can, given their situation. (159)

At one point, I walked into the room to check on him. He was lying at the door of his pen, flat on his downside, and as I entered, he tossed -- as best he could -- his paper tube. I'm happy you're here. I'm playing. At that moment, I saw what is beyond the capability of most of us. Absolute acceptance. More than "complete and total." Absolute. A more intensive intensifier. Absolute Zero isn't just Complete Zero or Total Zero. And the acceptance shown by Duffle is a kind of power within powerlessness, like Absolute Monarchy. With our life up-ended at one stroke, could we play? Even if we are pretending to be well, as an instinct for survival, could we play? We predators have a lot we can learn from prey.

We were giving him the medicines he needed, especially Panacur. But we also bombarded him with attention and love. Saturation love. Thanks be to the strength in these vulnerable creatures, Duffle began to move his hindquarters again. Within days, he came back from the edge of permanent disability. Now, I'm proud and happy to say, he is running, standing as if he always could, eating like there's no tomorrow. Because a rabbit is all today. Absolutely.



### **Buckeye House Rabbit Society**

P.O. Box 5767 Athens, OH 45701



Buy a bunny a little time...

### MEMBEDSHID FORM

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Your \$33.00 annual membership in the Buckeye HRS includes:			Please make checks payable to:	
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• Local membership (\$15.00) and issues of Harel	Buckeye			
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Bunnies' names and special dates				