

There are not enough homes available for thousands of "normal", short coated rabbits, let alone these demanding long haired bunnies. No one should ever breed from a long haired rabbit without first considering how difficult it is to find the very special homes needed by these very special bunnies.

"Rabbits are becoming the second most common animal dumped on us. Many are left because their owners can't cope with their long coats. They're difficult for our staff to cope with and we need very special adopters to take them on and care for them properly. Prospective owners should think long and hard before acquiring a long-haired rabbit" (Chief Veterinary Officer, RSPCA)

Flystrike

Any rabbit (but especially those with long hair) whose coat becomes soiled with urine or faeces is at risk of flystrike. This gruesome condition occurs when flies lay eggs on the soiled fur, which hatch into maggots and literally eat the rabbit alive. This can happen within hours in warm weather. Always check your rabbit's bottom twice daily.

"I have never seen a long-haired rabbit with a well cared-for coat. Several have been presented to me "unwell", and on examination their bodies have been covered with a single matt of hair, like a thick blanket glued to their back, underneath which was a seething mass of maggots."

(Veterinary surgeon, Northumberland)



This rabbit is at very high risk of flystrike unless all the caked faeces is removed.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Ask your local pet shop (or write to the head office of pet superstores) to make a policy never to sell long haired rabbits. They are simply too specialised to be obtained from anyone other than a rescue centre or expert breeder.

- If you have a long haired rabbit, please don't breed from it.
- Make a donation (payable to the Rabbit Welfare Fund) towards the cost of producing rabbit welfare leaflets like this.
- Support your local rabbit rescue. Every year around 30,000 rabbits end up in rescue centres - if you're thinking of obtaining a rabbit, why not save a life and adopt a rescued bunny?



This leaflet is brought to you by the Rabbit Welfare Fund - the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association.

If you love rabbits, please consider supporting the Rabbit Welfare Fund.

You can make a donation, or you may like to join the RWA. As well as fund-raising activities, most RWA members kindly make a small donation to the RWF in addition to their annual RWA membership fee. RWA members receive a fabulous quarterly magazine packed with health, behaviour and care advice to help you to build a wonderful relationship with your bunny - whether she/he lives indoors or out.

To contact the RWA/Rabbit Welfare Fund:

Ring the RWA National Helpline on 0870 046 5249

Write to us at PO Box 603, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 SWL.

Log onto our websites

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk>

<http://www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk>

Contact the National Helpline to order bulk supplies of leaflets or send SAE for single copies.



Rabbit Welfare Fund
Write to us at PO Box 603,
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 SWL.
e-mail: hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk
Registered Charity Number 1085689

The Long and the Short of it

Caring for long haired pet rabbits



This leaflet explains how to look after long haired rabbits and some of the problems that arise with these animals bred by man without nature's common sense.



Long haired rabbits have been prized for hundreds of years. But few people appreciate the effort that will be required to maintain the coat of these very special bunnies and rescue centres are taking in increasing numbers of long haired rabbits with neglected coats.

IDENTITY PARADE

ANGORA

The Angora has a long, silky coat that can be spun into fine wool.

SWISS FOX

Medium-large breed with upright ears. Swiss Fox have a long coat that lies flat with a parting along the spine.

CASHMERE LOP

Long haired dwarf lop with a coat similar to the Swiss Fox. There's also a Cashmere version of the Miniature lop.

LIONHEAD

Recent creation with a "ruff" of long hair around the head and sometimes on the flanks. It's not clear yet whether Lionhead litters also contain rabbits with long hair all over.

"WOOLLIES"

Woollies are throwbacks: their short coated parents carried the recessive long-haired gene. Woollies are the most difficult long haired rabbits to care for. Keeping them free from matts is such a struggle that some experts feel they are best put to sleep as soon as they are identified as babies.

WHY GROOMING IS SO IMPORTANT

- To remove loose hair and matts.
- To allow close examination of the whole rabbit - even short haired bunnies can get matted underneath.
- To help you health check and bond with your bunny.

SHORT COAT CARE

- Use a soft-bristled brush for day to day care. A weekly groom is usually enough, except when bunny is moulting.
- Slicker brushes and cat moulting combs are useful for thick or moulting coats.



Angora in show coat

LONG COAT CARE

- The entire coat (including armpits, groin tummy and feet) must be combed or clipped. Grooming takes 20 to 40 minutes a day whereas clipping is a lot of work every 4-6 weeks with less work in between.

Grooming

- Start with a wide-toothed comb. When you've done the whole rabbit, repeat with a fine toothed comb. Finish with a flea comb between the ears, round the vent, under the chin, and in the armpits.
- Soft brushes are hopeless on long haired bunnies - the top may look lovely, but there may be a matted mess underneath.
- Matts should be teased out with fingers or carefully cut off - it's easy to cut the skin. Combs with revolving teeth work well.
- Even if you're keeping the coat long, consider a "sanitary clip" around the vent area.
- Metal-toothed slicker brushes are effective, but can scratch - take care!
- Cat moulting combs are great at removing dead undercoat.

Clipping

- Get someone to teach you how to do it safely!
- Use scissors 2 inches long from pivot to tip. Round bladed scissors are safer, but won't penetrate mats as well as scissors with sharp ends. Rest a comb against the skin as protection. Don't "tent" the skin.
- Normal dog clippers clog with rabbit fur. Adapted blades are available, but costly.
- If your rabbit is clipped in cold weather, bring him indoors or provide a bunny-proofed heat lamp or heated mat.



Cover bunny minus his matted fur!

"We have seen many horrific sights. Rabbits with huge matted balls of fur under the chin which have prevented them from lowering their head to eat; coats that have become so tangled that the matted fur has pulled the legs together and the animal has barely been able to move. Underneath the matts is bleeding raw skin"

(Rabbit Rescue, Horsham)

Tricky Bits

- Step up the grooming when bunny starts to moult. If droppings become small, seek veterinary help.
- Young long haired rabbits can be impossible to keep tangle free. Clip off the baby coat and keep the coarser adult coat groomed as it appears.
- Neutered rabbits are happier, healthier pets, but neutering may make the coat more woolly and difficult to care for.
- Don't keep long haired bunnies on woodshavings: use a thick layer of hay or straw instead. Fix a weld mesh cover onto litter trays.
- Don't allow long haired rabbits outside in wet weather.
- Unhandled rabbits may find the whole process so distressing they have to be de-matted under sedation or general anaesthetic.
- Introduce grooming into your bunny's routine as soon as possible - short sessions at first!
- Get help if you are struggling to cope with your rabbit's coat. Rabbit rescue centres and breeders of long haired rabbits will probably be able to help. Some accept rabbits for clipping for a small fee.



Matted fur being removed from a neglected Cashmere Lop

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

However much we may admire magnificent long-haired rabbits, we must ask ourselves whether it is right to create animals with fundamental welfare problems. Even properly groomed long coated rabbits are at increased risk of serious health problems such as fur balls and flystrike. They are also uncomfortable in hot weather.