

Rabbit Bonding Advice

Bobtails Rabbit & Guinea Pig Rescue

44 Arundel Avenue
East Ewell
Surrey
KT17 2RG

Tel: 020 8393 2016
Fax: 020 8393 5390

bobtailsrescue@aol.com
www.bobtailsrescue.org.uk

Rabbits LOVE company!

Hopefully the days of a lone rabbit living a solitary life at the bottom of a garden are a thing of the past. Wild rabbits naturally live in large colonies within a complicated hierarchy, all living and working together as a group. Once you have cared for a pair of rabbits and enjoyed watching them interact with each other, mutually grooming, snuggling and playing, you will appreciate how much they love the company of their own kind.

Suggested Pairings

Two does, preferably siblings or at least if introduced very young, are usually happy to live together. They should both be spayed, not only for health reasons but female rabbit hormone induced moods are something to behold, and minor scraps can occur. It can be quite tricky to introduce adult does together, unless both are subordinate.

Two bucks, ideally siblings or introduced very young, will usually live very happily as a pair but **both must be neutered as soon as possible** to avoid fighting which can become a learned behaviour. Introducing two adult males is extremely difficult and should not be attempted unless you are very experienced.

A doe and buck pair is the best combination, certainly for introducing as adults. The buck should, of course, always be neutered **as well as** the female spayed.

A colony of rabbits can live very happily with a large amount of space but introductions should be carried out very carefully. The gender and ages of the rabbits to be introduced is very important, and all should be neutered or spayed.

Please ask for further advice if required.

The Introduction

When introducing the rabbits, a **neutral area** must be used. **Watch them** very carefully and be ready to intervene if any real aggression occurs but **do not touch or talk to them if all is going well**. They need to be allowed to bond with each other and if you intervene unnecessarily by introducing your scent, you will have to go back to square one. After 24 hours, their relationship will be a little more established and you can have more contact with them, but do not separate.

Even if they seem to bond very quickly, they must remain in the neutral area for at least a further 24-48 hours. By then you should see mutual grooming and snuggling. Before re-introduction into your existing rabbit's accommodation, always completely clean out and safely disinfect the area and change anything you can to make it more neutral for the newly bonded pair.

You must ensure your rabbits have plenty of space to live and play in their daily lives – any of us would end up squabbling if we were confined to a small area with someone 24/7!

There is another way to introduce your rabbits which works just as well but will take longer. House them side by side for a period of time, swapping over their living quarters daily so they become familiar with each other's scent and all areas are neutral. It can make the actual face-to-face introduction easier but note they **must still meet on neutral** territory and the earlier advice on **close supervision and intervention should still be followed**.

Important Points

As mentioned before, all males and females to be introduced should be neutered and spayed. At the very least, bucks should have been neutered for a minimum of 2 weeks before being introduced to a spayed female, or 4 weeks to an entire female.

Both rabbits should be fit and healthy before being introduced – an animal in discomfort or pain is likely to feel vulnerable and possibly defensive.

With thanks to our sponsor



Minor squabbles can occur between happily bonded pairs if another rabbit is brought into close proximity. This is a form of misplaced aggression and should be avoided.

Rabbits form very close relationships with each other – **do not** separate a happy couple for any reason. They are likely to pine.

Some times of the year are easier to bond rabbits than others. Even if neutered and spayed, November, December and January are good months, whereas spring and late summer may prove to be more difficult.

Don't be put off if all this information sounds daunting – pairing rabbits is not rocket science, if you're lucky it can be love at first sight.

Remember – it will be worth it in the end!

Getting Them Together

As mentioned, all introductions **must be on neutral territory**. Here at Bobtails we offer a 'blind date' service. We have pairing pens (minimum size 8ft x 4ft) which contains lots of toys for the rabbits to play with and run through etc. Food and water should be placed at both ends to ensure access is not restricted if either rabbit 'claims' an end in the early stages. There must not be any opportunity for any rabbit to become trapped and any boxes or tunnels should have an entrance **and** an exit. A cornered animal may resort to the 'fight or flight' behaviour. Make the area as interesting as possible and sprinkle treats around.

All items in the bonding pen must be neutral to both rabbits – this means litter trays as well as toys and bowls. Note it is not usually a problem if other rabbits have been in contact with these items. Other scents seem to slightly confuse the bonding pair, often making them less concerned about their new partner and more about the rabbits they can smell but not see.

Once the pen is set up, there are different ways of actually getting the pair together. One method we use is to put both into the neutral area together and just let them explore for a while. They will hop around and often initially ignore the other rabbit until they have checked out their new environment. This will usually be followed by a considerable amount of chasing and mounting by both sexes whilst they sort out their hierarchy. One may take refuge in a litter tray or box looking very sorry for itself, but so long as there is no aggression and he or she has access to food, hay and water, don't worry. The more dominant rabbit may take control of the rest of the pen, chinning everything. They may approach the subordinate rabbit, sniff then hop away. This may continue for up to 24 hours. During this time, the subordinate rabbit will slowly become braver and begin to venture around the pen. As the dominant rabbit will have established their own 'Top Bun' position by then, he or she will usually be quite happy with the other rabbit's new found confidence.

It is at this point that the real bonding can begin.

There may be more chasing and scuffling which can initially look aggressive when in fact it is not – e.g. two rabbits chasing in a circle like a puppy chasing its tail. Often they get themselves in this situation and cannot stop as each has a rabbit chasing them! Break it up with a loud noise or even gently using a soft broom to separate them – this is likely to make them both as scared as each other.

Be aware of the difference – **real aggression** is directed at the face or genitals and can often be typified by two rabbits locked together in a 'cartoon-type' roll with one on top of the other.

When this occurs, the rabbit is not just trying to determine their hierarchical position – they are trying to hurt each other and they must be separated as quickly as possible before one or both of them become seriously injured.

**If you need any further advice,
please contact us via bobtailsrescue@aol.com
or telephone 020 8393 2016.**

