



Grumpy Bunnies

Rabbits generally react in one of three ways when threatened by a predator - freeze, flight or fight! In most cases 'flight' is the option they go with and if you have ever tried to put your bunny to bed after an afternoon running around the garden you will know that their ability to run is very good! Other rabbits will go with the 'fight' option and often when a wild bunny is caught they will fight, bite, kick and/or scratch to try to get away. Rabbits can also use aggression as part of their normal lives to defend their territory and to establish the normal dominance hierarchy within their warren. During pregnancy or hormonal states many rabbits also become more aggressive. Many owners are worried as their rabbit is aggressive towards them, today's article looks at a few common causes of aggression and how to potentially deal with it.

Are your rabbit's hormones affecting their mood?

Male rabbits can get frustrated and grumpy, high levels of testosterone can make them less tolerant to lots of situations. They may be defending their territory against what they perceive as a threat or trying to spray urine to mark their territory. De-sexing often helps to minimize these behaviours and having the surgery performed before the behaviours are too established (ie when they are 3-6 months of age) will help to improve the chances of success.

Female rabbits fall into a similar situation as their behaviour can also be affected by their hormones. They can actually be more aggressive than males in many cases. Other than the high risk of uterine cancer (up to 80% of rabbits over 2 years of age will develop uterine cancer), behaviour is a major reason to desex your female rabbit.

Is your rabbit bored?

Rabbits are very intelligent animals and will get bored in a sterile environment such as a small hutch or pen. They need friends to interact and play with (other bunnies and their humans!). They also need puzzles and toys to spend their days enjoying. We sell a range of rabbit safe toys so for more information please see our website 😊

Is your rabbit scared?

Fear is a major trigger for aggression in a lot of pet rabbits. Being a prey animal many pets will react to being picked up, touched or handled as they would if you were an eagle or a dog. First they freeze, and then try to run and then bite and scratch. These rabbits are scared and it is important to be very gentle and patient with them to gain their trust.

There are a few steps to that you can take to encourage your bunny to enjoy human contact:

Step 1. Make up a hutch area inside the house, large enough for a human to get in and sit down. Being kept outside, every time a human approaches the hutch your bunny will react, if they are kept inside they will see humans doing day to day activities that do not threaten them and will get used to human presence. Being kept inside means that your bunny will get used to human presence and will learn not to react in fear. For the first week get in and sit in the hutch with your bunny, do not try and pick her/him up. Talk to them (or sit in there



and talk on the phone,



your voice so that they get used to your voice) and offer them treats. If they approach then lightly scratch or pat them. After your bunny is approaching you when you are sitting inside their hutch you can move to the next step.

Step 2. In the next week, after offering your bunny treats scoop them up and place them on your lap (while sitting on the floor). Make sure to support their hind legs and feed them treats, talk to them and scratch them. Once they are comfortable you can move to step three.

Step 3. For the next few weeks while your rabbit is inside you can slowly let him/her explore a room and interact with you, remember every time you pick your rabbit up, support their legs, get down to their level and scoop them up rather than leaning over them and grabbing them around the chest.

It is very important during this time to provide your rabbit with lots of toys and activities. If your rabbit gets bored, they may get aggressive and you will be wasting all your good work.

If you are patient and persistent your grumpy rabbit will generally turn into a lovely and interactive member of your house hold.

Is your rabbit in pain?

Rabbits hide their illnesses very well, if they didn't they would not survive long in the wild. Even though as pets we provide them with a safe and secure environment they still are very good at not letting on when they are hurting. We may not always see the reason for discomfort; it could be dental problems, bladder problems, or something even more serious. Your bunny will need a through check-up with your vet to make sure there are not any underlying medical problems causing aggression.

As a final word please never use punishment as a training method in rabbits. If you yell, hit or chase your rabbit when they are being aggressive you are being seen by your bunny as more threatening and their aggression problem will likely just continue to get worse.

If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

