

Raising standards for rabbits - rabbit friendly vets recognised



The Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWAFF) is the only charity in the UK dedicated to improving the lives of pet rabbits through education and campaigning. Although rabbits are popular pets, they are often misunderstood and despite being seen as cheap and easy pets they actually have quite complicated needs. In veterinary terms they are classed as 'Exotics' and unfortunately many vet practices don't have the specialist skills and knowledge to provide the proper treatment and advise the owners accordingly. The RWAFF has held a list of 'rabbit friendly vets' for this reason for over 10 years now. We survey every vet that applies to be on the list and our Vet Specialist, Dr Richard Saunders assesses each application individually. We have just re-launched this assessment to make it more comprehensive. It covers a host of areas such as a rabbit waiting area and ward, pain management, diagnosis and the skills of the vet themselves. Those that meet the standard are awarded either 'Silver' or 'Gold' status and issued with a 'rabbit friendly' logo and certificate. We always advise rabbit owners that using a rabbit savvy vet is vital and our rabbit friendly vet list is a great place to start. It is available to anyone, just get in touch with us via hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk to check for rabbit friendly vets in your area.

To promote the new assessment, practices that applied to be included in the new rabbit friendly vet list were entered in to a competition to see who is the most rabbit friendly vet in the UK.

All Gold Practices are of excellent standards and will include a vet who has completed a further qualification to make them eligible to attain this highest award. Both the vets and the practices are at the top end of the scale and it would be impossible to choose one clear winner from this category.

We feel that Silver standard is attainable for all vet practices that have an interest in rabbits, and our assessment process allows for input from Dr Saunders so that practices can improve where possible. Silver practices do not have specialists based there, but they have still proven that they have good facilities and protocols in place, as well as a rabbit savvy vet.

We have decided to choose 2 winners from the Silver category, to commend practices that have raised standards and set an example that every practice can follow.

The 2 Silver Practices that are classed as Highly Commended, and are therefore our winners, are:

Dee Collins - Quantock Vet Surgery, Bridgwater, Somerset

Richard chose this practice because they recognise the importance of pain relief and go to great efforts to get rabbits to eat while they are admitted, offering herbs and forage. Companion rabbits are admitted, they are active in Rabbit Awareness Week, and have a great range of handouts for owners. They are well up on infectious disease control and have good systems in place for keeping rabbits warm after surgery and good airway management, and hospitalised rabbits are given IV fluid therapy. In terms of the facilities offered, they have a rabbit waiting room and exotic ward. They

use a range of dental radiography to assess patients, appropriate text books are available and both vets and vet nurses are working towards further qualifications.

Dee told us:

“Our whole team has a passion for rabbit medicine and welfare, and so we are delighted and proud to win this award. We look forward to working with RWAf and owners, continuing to create a better environment and quality of life for our rabbit patients in the future.”



Deb Stafford - Gilmoor Vet Surgery (Hare & Hounds branch)

Well, the branch name helped! Seriously though, again there are a host of reasons that this practice is a winner in our eyes. They treat each rabbit as an individual and don't have a one system fits all approach for things like neutering, so that they can do it as young as possible. They ask for rabbits to have their own pack lunch but also offer a range of diets including herbs and forage. They not only have a general rabbit ward, but also an isolation ward for small furrries. They are active Rabbit Awareness Week supporters and provide their clients with a range of literature, including our RWAf guide, On the Hop. They have a good system for keeping rabbits warm after surgery, use both ET and Vgel for airway management, have a very well thought out multi modal analgesic plan and use a range of drugs. Grimace pain scoring is used, they can do advanced dental surgery and have good protocols for gut stasis. Lastly, they have a good range of text books available for staff to refer to.

Deb told us:

I am delighted and honoured to receive the RWAf award on behalf of myself, and more importantly all the team at Gilmoor Vets, County Durham. It is wonderful to know that the hard work, time and

care we take over bunny patients is appreciated and recognised at such a high level. I also feel that this recognition carries a responsibility to continue to improve, making sure we provide thoughtful, innovative best practice for all the rabbits we treat, and the owners with whom we share our knowledge. I believe that every day provides an opportunity to learn a little more and I am lucky to work in an independent vet practice, with fantastic supportive colleagues, passionate and knowledgeable rabbit clients, and the RWAF there to help us all move forward towards the best rabbit care.”



All practices that were on the vet list before 2016 are now ranked as Bronze. They can reapply to be reassessed any time, although most are waiting until their membership is due for renewal.

If your vet is rabbit friendly, make sure you ask them to join and apply to be on the list. We want all rabbit owners to be looking for the rabbit friendly logo and certificate and to know that their pets are in good hands. If you love rabbits you will love Rabbiting On magazine, so why not join us? Rabbitwelfare.co.uk