

Dear Rabbit Owner,

You are receiving this letter because somebody is concerned about your pet rabbit(s). It may be that your rabbit is kept alone, is confined to a hutch for most of the time, or both.

This letter is not judgemental; no personal criticism is aimed at you. We are sure that you do not intend to be cruel towards your pet(s). There is a great deal of poor advice about rabbit care out there, and often the advice given at the time of the purchase is wrong. The great thing is that it is never too late to put it right!

In the wild, rabbits live in large social groups, and this socialisation is a key part of their make-up. **To keep a rabbit alone is cruel.** Research has proven that rabbits suffer from stress when kept alone and without the companionship of at least one other rabbit. Domestic rabbits should be neutered and kept in pairs (opposite sexes work best) or in compatible groups.

Rabbits are also athletic animals, and in the wild they would cover an area of 4 tennis courts each day. They need to be able to run, jump, dig and forage every day to keep them happy and healthy. **To keep a rabbit locked in a hutch all the time is cruel.** Rabbits who are confined to hutches develop painful spinal deformities, which are a problem in themselves, but also make the rabbits difficult to handle, which can result in injuries to both the rabbits and owners.

Rabbits kept outdoors need a good deal of space. They must be provided with a large shelter (hutch) and permanent access to a large safe exercise area (run). The RWAFF recommendation is a 6x2x2ft hutch and attached run of 8x4ft as a minimum.

Rabbits need unlimited access to clean hay or grass, not only to prevent boredom, but also to keep their teeth and guts healthy. The specific chewing action when eating hay causes the teeth to wear down naturally and prevents serious dental problems which are often suffered by pet rabbits with an inadequate diet and a bunny who is chewing hay all day is not going to be bored.

It is a fact that it is cruel to keep a single rabbit alone and confined in a hutch. If this applies to you, please invest in better accommodation for your rabbit, get him/her neutered and adopt a neutered friend from a rescue centre.

At this time of year it is especially important that you keep a close eye on your rabbit(s) and make sure they have a covered and dry area in their run, plenty of fresh water, and lots of clean dry bedding. Consider moving the hutch and run closer to the house so that you can see them more often and more easily, or think about putting them in a garden shed to provide extra protection.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, we hope you'll see this letter as positive advice rather than criticism. Rabbits are seriously misunderstood pets and we are trying to get accurate information out to the right people, to improve the welfare of these beautiful creatures.

These rabbits on the right have toys, and a tarpaulin cover, which protects them from hot sun and rain. Why not use this as inspiration for your own rabbits? Just attaching the hutch to an exercise run will improve their life, go on, give it a try.

