

# The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund 2025 Round Up



# Year-End Round-Up: Reflecting on Rabbit Welfare in 2025

With a new year upon us, we reflect once again on the ongoing challenges facing rabbit welfare in the UK. The rescue crisis continues unabated: too many rabbits are being bred, too few suitable homes are available, and inappropriate housing and poor advice remain widespread. It is evident that much work remains to be done to raise standards and improve outcomes for rabbits nationwide.

As a small organisation, we must focus our limited resources where they can have the greatest impact. Our efforts in education, campaigning, and lobbying are designed to support the vital and often difficult work carried out by rehoming organisations across the country.



2025

# Key Facts About Rabbit Welfare

Many of you will be familiar with the following facts, but they bear repeating:

- An estimated **1.5 million rabbits** are now kept as pets in the UK, a significant increase from 1 million last year. Many new owners lack experience and understanding of the species' needs.
- When cared for properly, rabbits can live **10–12 years**, making them a long-term commitment.
- Rabbits are frequently misunderstood and are often kept alone, in inadequate housing, with poor diets and insufficient veterinary care.
- **Most commercially available rabbit housing is unsuitable.**
- **Incorrect care advice** is commonly given to owners.
- There is **no legislation** requiring accurate sexing of rabbits at the point of sale. This, combined with the rise in inexperienced ownership, has led to a surge in accidental litters.
- Female rabbits can become pregnant **immediately after giving birth**, a fact unknown to around one-third of rabbit owners.
- The COVID-19 lockdowns triggered a boom in **unregulated breeding and sales**.
- Online sales have increased dramatically, with little to no welfare guidance provided to buyers.
- Outside of Scotland, **rabbit breeders are not licensed or inspected.**
- These factors, compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, have led to a **rescue and abandonment crisis**. Pre-COVID, approximately 67,000 rabbits entered rescue annually; this figure is now estimated to be closer to **100,000**.
- Rescues report a sharp rise in rabbits being abandoned or dumped. Many are overwhelmed and unable to cope.
- Rabbits are also rehomed informally online, further contributing to the abandonment crisis, which is now considered the worst in over 25 years.
- Rabbits are not only kept in homes and gardens but are also found in farm parks, petting zoos, and agricultural shows, where welfare standards are often inadequate, causing suffering and setting poor examples for the public.



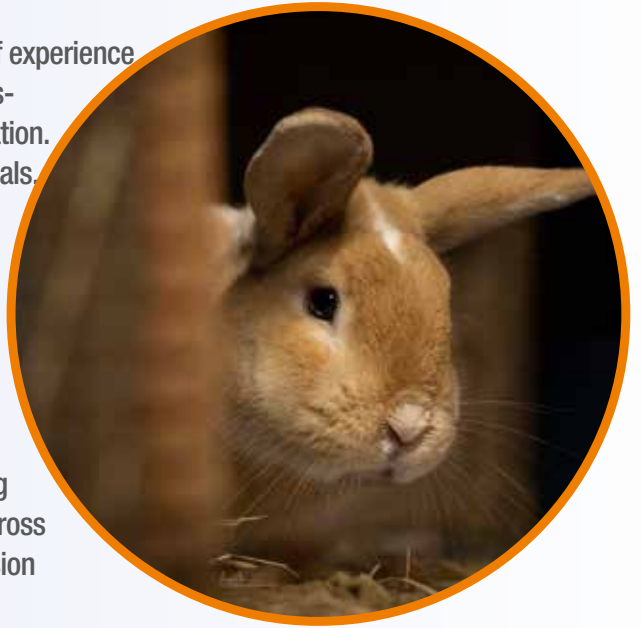
W  
O  
R  
L  
D

# The Abandonment Crisis

Currently, **anyone can legally breed and sell rabbits**, regardless of experience or knowledge. This has led to widespread irresponsible breeding, mis-sexing, and the sale of rabbits without proper checks or care information. The result is a growing number of accidental litters, abandoned animals, and overwhelmed rescue centres.

We believe that legislative change is urgently needed to improve welfare standards and reduce abandonment rates. Our campaign to close this loophole gained significant traction in 2025.

Our Easter broadcast campaign highlighted the lack of licensing requirements for breeders. We collaborated with adoption centres across the UK to share local stories with local media outlets, resulting in widespread coverage. The campaign achieved 39 million views across all media platforms, including national radio and a prime-time television appearance, including Good Morning Britain!



## Beyond Rehoming

Rehoming is only part of the picture. Many rabbits remain in unsuitable homes with owners unaware of proper care, unable to provide it, or unwilling to value their rabbits. Rabbits are still kept in schools, care homes, petting zoos, farm parks, and county shows in ways that compromise welfare and send the wrong message to visiting customers.

Then there are rabbits bred for “cute” looks, lop-eared and brachycephalic (flat nosed) rabbits that suffer lifelong ear and eye problems. We want these rabbits in rescue to find loving homes with informed guardians, but we do not want more to be bred. Please never buy rabbits from pet shops or breeders, especially these breeds.

Add to this the flood of unsuitable products: tiny hutches, unsafe toys, poor-quality food and harmful myths like “rabbits are happy alone.” It’s easy to get it wrong, but the right information is on our website, along with our new Approved Products Scheme which should give care givers confidence in which products to buy for their rabbits.

## Rehoming and Adoption Centre Survey

We have been working to update the outdated figure of 67,000 rabbits entering rehoming centres annually. To do this, we launched a nationwide survey targeting adoption centres to gather current data and insights into the rehoming crisis.

One of the most alarming findings is that nearly half of the centres we contacted have closed, citing financial pressures, burnout, or health concerns. This represents hundreds of closures across the UK, making it even harder for unwanted rabbits to find safe rehoming options. Many are instead sold online, given away, or released into the wild.

We urge everyone to support their local rescue and adopt rather than shop.

### Preliminary survey insights include:

- Top reasons for surrender: lack of time, financial hardship, and changes in personal circumstances.
- Cost to prepare a rabbit for rehoming: £201–£400.
- Waiting time for a forever home: up to 12 months.
- 84% of rescues report that conditions have worsened since COVID.

### What You Can Do

- **Adopt, don’t shop:** Find a rescue near you at [saveafluff.co.uk](https://saveafluff.co.uk)
- **Make a thoughtful commitment:** Rabbits require care for up to 10 years.
- **Remember:** Adults are responsible for rabbit welfare, not children.
- **Support your local rescue:** Donate, share, volunteer, or check their Amazon wish list.



# Education and Support

Educating and supporting rabbit owners is central to improving welfare. Our website receives approximately **40,000 unique visitors per month**, and we work diligently to ensure the information is accurate, accessible, and comprehensive.

**Our free helpline** is available to all from rabbit owners to concerned neighbours.

Every 12–18 months, we print **50,000 copies** of our rabbit care booklet **On the Hop**, which are distributed to vet practices, rescues, events, and available for download on our website.

## Farm Parks, Petting Zoos, and Animal Encounters: A Welfare Concern

Animal encounters have been a major focus of our work throughout 2025. In response to growing concerns, we launched the **Don't Bug Bunnies** campaign to raise awareness of the welfare issues associated with rabbit and guinea pig handling sessions. If you have not yet done so, we encourage you to visit the campaign page and take the **Don't Pat-a-Pet** pledge to avoid participating in these activities.

### Don't Bug Bunnies

#### The Don't Pat-a-Pet Pledge

**Fun for us should never be frightening for them.**

Farm parks across the UK welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. While these venues aim to provide entertainment and education, they often fall short of meeting even the most basic welfare standards for the animals in their care, particularly rabbits and guinea pigs.

The Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWA&F) has serious concerns about the conditions in many of these establishments. Common welfare issues include:

- Rabbits housed alone, without essential companionship
- Inadequate housing lacking space and enrichment
- Inappropriate diets
- Lack of vaccination and veterinary care
- Repeated handling through daily “pat-a-pet” sessions, despite the stress this causes

## Legal and Ethical Responsibilities

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, all animal guardians, including farm parks, are legally required to meet the Five Welfare Needs:

1. A suitable environment
2. A suitable diet
3. The ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
4. Appropriate social housing (with or apart from other animals)
5. Protection from pain, suffering, injury, and disease



**Real Rabbits, Real Responsibilities**

**URGENT APPEAL!**  
BETTER LEGISLATION FOR RABBITS

Rabbits are in the midst of a welfare crisis in the UK

- Rabbits are active, social and intelligent creatures, yet thousands are abandoned, neglected and suffering from lack of proper housing, diet, companionship and veterinary care.
- There is a huge demand for adoption centres spaces and long waiting lists means rabbits are re-sold online without proper home checks.
- More and more baby rabbits are being bred and sold for profit, with no welfare standards and no home checks.
- Accidental litters adding to the numbers already needing a 'rescue' space because of incorrect sexing at breeders.
- There are no formal "Codes of Practice" like there are for other pets such as dogs.
- There is a lack of legislation to protect rabbits. Unlike dogs, rabbit breeders do not need to be licensed and inspected.

**What needs to change**  
The current legislation is inadequate, but with its recent review, we have a rare opportunity to push for essential updates. Such changes are exceedingly rare, and we must act now. This is a critical call to action: **your support is urgently needed!**

**We need immediate action to:**

- Update the legislation so that rabbit breeders need to be licensed and inspected, which would reduce the numbers and improve welfare.
- Make sure that rabbits are properly sexed to prevent accidental litters.
- Get the Good Practice Codes formally recognised.

**How You Can Help**  
The UK's rabbit welfare crisis demands action. Thousands of rabbits suffer due to weak legislation and a lack of public awareness. Together, we can create meaningful change but we need your support.

We want you to write to your MP (Scan the QR code for more information) or click the link here: [Better Legislation for Rabbits | Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund \(RWA&F\)](#)

**PLEASE SUPPORT THIS URGENT CAMPAIGN WITH A DONATION!**  
Just scan the QR code to donate.

Your donation can achieve:

- **£10** funds the creation of **more leaflets and posters**
- **£20** funds **LEGAL RESEARCH** (via [www.rabbits.org.uk/legislation](#))
- **£100** supports **social media campaigns to reach more people**

Every donation helps us educate the public, fight for better legislation, and protect rabbits from neglect and harm. We are on the side of rabbits, are you on our side? Whether big or small, your contribution moves us closer to better tomorrows for all pet rabbits.

**Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund**  
11 Bridge Street, Kingston, Surrey, UK  
Registered Charity No. 1102025

## Why "Pat-a-Pet" Must End

Daily handling by large numbers of visitors may appear harmless or educational, but for the animals involved, it can be deeply distressing. Rabbits often remain still not because they are comfortable, but because they are frightened - a phenomenon known as **learned helplessness**. Initially, they may attempt to escape by biting or wriggling, but over time, they stop resisting, having learned that their efforts are futile.

This behaviour is frequently misinterpreted as calmness, when in fact it may be a sign of silent suffering.

## Take the Don't Pat-a-Pet Pledge

We urge all visitors to **pledge not to participate in rabbit or guinea pig petting sessions**. A few minutes of handling for a person can result in hours of anxiety for the animal, repeated day after day.

People are already pledging their support, but we need many more to join this movement. Please take the pledge today.

**Because fun for us should never come at the expense of their wellbeing.**

## Bucklebury Farm broadcast day

In October half term we appeared live on Good Morning Britain once again! This time we were at Bucklebury Farm, who we had been working with all year. Not only had they upgraded all of the rabbit accommodation and signage, but they had also stopped the 'pat a pet' sessions with both rabbits and guinea pigs, and have introduced alternative activities, that the animals participate in willingly (because it involves food!) and it has been an overwhelming success.

We spoke to lots of visitors on the day, as did one of the film crews and they resoundingly understand the concerns and support the move to a more welfare friendly approach. The broadcast day went really well, with three lives slots during the programme, we also had several ITV news slots and radio interviews across the day, and we could not believe it when the results showed that we had a reach of 1 billion people! Yes one billion people. This is a great start to the conversation that we know will take a long time to see real progress because petting sessions are so ingrained as part of these establishments.

## Empowering the Public to Take Action

To support concerned individuals, we have added complaint templates to our website. These resources are designed to help animal lovers raise formal concerns about welfare standards at farm parks, petting zoos, mobile zoos, and pet shops. By making the legislation accessible and actionable, we aim to empower the public to advocate for better treatment of animals in these settings.



## Demanding Legislative Change

In response to the Post-Implementation Review of the Licensing of Activities Involving Animals (LAIA) legislation, we produced a comprehensive response, submitting three key recommendations aimed at significantly improving rabbit welfare in England:

1. **Amend the LAIA Regulations to make rabbit breeding a licensable activity, and require that all animals sold are correctly sexed.**
2. **Provide additional resources to Local Authorities (LAs) to enable more effective enforcement of the LAIA Regulations.**
3. **Elevate the Good Practice Code for the Welfare of Rabbits to a Statutory Code of Practice.**

Our recommendations were shared with relevant Members of Parliament, Government Ministers, and bodies including Defra, and we have campaigned vigorously to ensure these proposals are considered in any future legislative updates. We also attended the Companion Animal Sector Council (CASC) Forum in March, where we engaged directly with key stakeholders to advocate for these changes. Our efforts will continue.

To support this campaign, we created a template letter and encouraged our supporters to write to their MPs. We are grateful to everyone who took action, and hope others will follow suit. Our voices are vital.

In addition, we met with DAERA in Northern Ireland to discuss the many welfare challenges facing rabbits and to encourage their inclusion in the next iteration of the Animal Welfare Pathway.

## RVHD2: Another Year, Another Strain

In 2025, we responded to the emergence of a new strain of **Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 2 (RVHD2-HV)**. Our work focused on combating misinformation and educating both veterinary professionals and rabbit owners about the need for an updated vaccine alongside the existing one.

This required extensive research, and we issued regular evidence-based updates to both groups. We were pleased to receive the support of the **British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS)**, who co-signed a joint statement endorsing our findings and recommendations.

## Veterinary Knowledge and Support

Rabbits are classified as exotic pets due to their complex care needs, a fact that often surprises owners. Unfortunately, veterinary training typically includes very limited instruction on rabbit care, and this varies significantly between institutions. Becoming “rabbit-savvy” requires additional training and ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

To support this, we maintain a **Rabbit-Friendly Vet List** on our website, which is regularly updated and widely used by rabbit guardians.

In 2025, we sponsored five places on a rabbit-specific CPD course run by Just Exotics. We also collaborated with the British Veterinary Receptionist Association (BVRA) to provide online training on:

- **Recognising rabbit emergencies over the phone**
- **Creating rabbit-friendly waiting rooms**
- **Managing challenging situations in reception areas**

We attended the BVRA Annual Congress, where our Veterinary Specialist Advisor Richard Saunders delivered a presentation, and we were on our stand chatting to the delegates.

We were also delighted to officially welcome John Chitty, RCVS Advanced Practitioner in Zoological Medicine, to lead our **Rabbit-Friendly Vet Scheme** alongside Elaine Line. In 2025, we launched a modular version of the vet application process, allowing practices to showcase their strengths in specific areas so their scores across different areas can be seen. This ensures transparency and recognises practices that exceed the required standards.



# Responding to Welfare Concerns

We remain committed to responding to reports of rabbits being kept in unsuitable environments, whether in schools, cafés, mobile animal encounters, or other public settings. Our response typically involves contacting the establishment directly and notifying the relevant Local Authority (LA) to encourage appropriate action.

# Supporting Public Complaints

Local Authorities are responsible for enforcing legislation that protects rabbit welfare. However, enforcement is inconsistent and often inadequate due to limited resources and varying priorities. In 2024, we submitted a Freedom of Information request to every LA in the UK. The responses revealed that only **six licensed rabbit breeders** exist nationwide — a clear indication that the ‘business test’ within current legislation is not being applied, and that breeders are operating without welfare checks.

To empower the public, we have developed a range of **complaint templates and supporting materials**, now available on our website. These resources enable individuals to report welfare concerns effectively, referencing the relevant legislation. Notably, the first use of our template resulted in the cessation of small animal sales at a local auction.

# Sponsor a Rescue

For over a decade, we have supported the invaluable work of rabbit rescues across the UK. To date, we have raised over £60,000, which has been distributed to support their efforts. In 2025 alone, we shared an additional £2,800 among the adoption centres we partnered with.

# Raising Awareness Where It Matters Most



To close 2025, we are proud to launch a powerful advertising campaign at a major London Railway Station aimed at challenging public perceptions of rabbit care. The advert is prominently displayed at Vauxhall Station, one of the capital’s busiest transport hubs, and is expected to be seen by over one million people during its six-week run.

This campaign is designed to make people stop and think, not just about rabbits as pets, but about the reality of how they are often kept. By placing the advert directly in front of commuters, we hope to reach individuals who might never otherwise seek out information about rabbit welfare. It is a bold and emotive message, intended to provoke reflection and, ultimately, change.

We know that rabbits are among the most misunderstood and neglected companion animals in the UK. Through this campaign, we aim to bring their welfare into the public consciousness in a way that is impossible to ignore.

This is just one example of the work we do that no other organisation carries out, and we do it with limited resources, driven by a deep commitment to improving the lives of rabbits nationwide. We are grateful for your continued support, and we hope this campaign will inspire even more people to join us in advocating for better standards, greater awareness, and lasting change.



# Retailer Engagement and Product Standards

We launched our **Approved Product Scheme** to help rabbit care givers identify high-quality products and to guide retailers toward meeting appropriate welfare standards. We are pleased to have two housing manufacturers already enrolled in the scheme. Though still in its early stages, the initiative is growing and has opened important conversations with retailers about improving product design to meet our criteria.



## How You Can Help

We have made significant progress this year, but there is still much to be done. You can support our work by:

- **Become a member you can join for only £3 month, and you get so much in return**
- **Sharing our social media posts with your networks**
- **Reporting welfare concerns at farm parks or any location where rabbits are kept. Contact both the business and the relevant Local Authority.**
- **Continuing to support us through donations, advocacy, and engagement**

We need your support to continue doing the work that we do.  
We can't do this on our own:

- We support you, bringing you the most up to date information that we have, fighting for the right vaccinations for your rabbits and running the rabbit friendly vet scheme.
- You support us, allowing us to do all of the advocacy and campaign work that we do.
- Together we all support better tomorrows for rabbits.



**You don't need to have  
rabbits to stand with us.  
Thank you for being on  
our side.**



W  
R  
O  
N