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### Cute, Cuddly, and Homeless

The majority of those who have ever coexisted with or been in the presence of a rabbit will agree that they are not only incredibly pleasing to the eye, but innocent and docile. Even those who have a strong dislike for rodents would most likely agree that this delightful animal has done nothing more than chew on their vegetable garden or nibble on their freshly cut lawn. The silent mistreatment of rabbits, although not as popular or inhumane as acts such as animal testing and puppy mills, is present. An increasingly well-known rabbit issue is animal testing, and although a disturbing and immoral matter, thousands of rabbits are suffering elsewhere as well. Rabbits are being over-bred and mistreated—sold not only in pet stores but also by individuals as well (Wilsbach 1). The worst part of this issue is that many are ignoring these acts of casual neglect. The issue that plays a huge role in my life is the neglect of rabbits from owners because of backyard breeding and lack of education.

Domestic rabbits have needs and feelings, just like other animals and humans. They require attention and comfortable housing. Something as simple as a wire-floor will cause immense pain and discomfort for the soft padding of the animal's foot (Kuscera 1). Diseases and infections are common, as is soreness in the rabbit if kept in a small environment. Certain beddings will cause respiratory problems and certain foods will cause stomach problems. Besides the issues of indoor housing, rabbits kept outdoors have an even greater risk of death (DeMello 1). They can be literally scared to death or suffer the grief of harsh climate. The sad issue of pain and irritation of pet rabbits can be solved by stronger commitment from an educated owner.

The cause of the lack of passion within the majority of rabbit owners comes from the fact that rabbits are backyard-bred and sold for money. Anyone can buy their own rabbit, despite their background or intentions. Many rabbits every year are bought because people want to give small children a cute gift. Children are usually incapable of treating such a fragile animal and in result are neglected. Surveys show that over 20,000 men or women admitted to breeding rabbits to be sold to pet stores (DeMello 1). Rabbits are sold before they are about to be taken away from their mothers so that they have a bigger appeal to young children. Rabbits do not make good pets for children, as they are incredibly shy and easily frightened. On Easter, hundreds of bunnies are bought as a gift to children and then later abandoned when the appeal fades. There are thousands of rabbits sitting in animal shelters in need of a home, yet people are adopting their pets from pet stores and backyards. After the unloving owner does not wish to have the rabbit anymore, it is likely to be released to the wild where domestic rabbits cannot live in.

The majority of rabbits are used for livestock reasons such as meat and fur (Kuscera 1). The owning of a rabbitry is completely acceptable to people because they are often unseen. If people saw for themselves the small, stacked wire cages, unsanitary conditions, and more rabbits than the rabbitry can handle, they would agree that this inhumane breeding needs a solution (Kuscera 1). Visual persuasion of this appalling system can spread awareness to all who do not know about these conditions for rabbits.

Over-breeding is the largest cause for the discomfort and pain of the rabbits. Homeless rabbits are either killed in the wild, slaughtered for meat and fur, or given to a home that will neglect them (Kuscera 1). 20% of pet store rabbits are left to die if there is

a defect in them that will affect the chances of it being sold (Wilsbach 2). If the rabbit is not left to die, it is taken to a crowded shelter struggling to afford to care for all animals. People continue to purchase rabbits elsewhere despite the alarming number of them in these shelters. Many breeders breed their female rabbits more than they can handle specifically for the Easter holiday. Kuscera states “In order to exploit this demand, many rabbit breeders will schedule the breeding of their rabbits so that extra litters of baby bunnies will be available at this time” (1). Because rabbits reach adulthood at the age of six months, they grow rapidly and therefore lose their “cuteness” factor quickly.

The most reasonable solution to this atrocious issue is to make the breeding and selling of rabbits strictly administered. Breeders should be required to be licensed and have a thorough interview with anyone wanting to adopt a rabbit from them. If they have rabbits that are not yet adopted, they should not be allowed to breed any more until the other rabbits have been given to pleasant homes. Through petitioning and educating of the public, backyard breeding and pet store selling can come to an end completely. Backyard breeding is done by people who know little about the process and are doing it for reasons that come from greed. Pet stores share the same trait of greed and usually do not care about the rabbit’s feelings or fate. Rabbits need to be adopted from shelters rather than unreliable breeders where they will only adopt the pets out to trustworthy and passionate owners.

Another important solution is to bring people together to start fundraising and donating money for shelters to have all rabbits spayed or neutered can prevent the over-population of the animal. Rabbits mate by instinct and therefore the domestic rabbit population is increasingly large. With the immense amount of domestic rabbits in the

world, many are abandoned and dumped. Many rabbits that are kept together will reproduce, causing bunnies by accident. If an owner does not want these bunnies, they will let them die some way or another. If the public is educated about the silent mistreatment of this cute and worldwide loved animal, I believe that many would lend a hand to the concern.

Even rescuing a rabbit from the horrid conditions of a pet store will not help the animals because a new rabbit will be put in that place (Wilsbach 2). Instead, not purchasing anything from pet stores that support selling animals and educating others about this issue will be more effective. Through tactfulness and kindness, reporting any mistreatment of rabbits can be extremely helpful for them in the long run as well. After someone is well educated and ready for the adoption of this great pet, they should definitely adopt from a shelter where hundreds of rabbits are currently living.

I chose the topic of over-bred and mistreated rabbits because I have adopted my own rabbits from shelters before and plan to in the future. I am currently raising a rabbit that was previously homeless, so this topic is near and dear to my heart. I know first-hand that rabbits make wonderful companions if given the attention they need. Animal testing on rabbits is another close issue to my heart, but simple problems like wire cage floors and underage rabbits being sold are often looked over and unheard of. I plan to fundraise and educate others and hope to spread the word in order to save many rabbits from the discomfort and pain that so many are silently living through. Another reason why I chose this topic specifically is because although other issues are important, this one is looked over and ignored. Many animals are treated this way every year and if I can stop it from happening to rabbits, the same can happen for them as well.

The rabbit is a timid and loving creature if given the admiration and attention they deserve. Their beauty and good looks cause the uneducated to buy them from the greedy who are only looking for money and have no care for the animal. They are neglected by their owners, have no home, kept in horrid environments, or put to death. The solutions that I believe to be the most effective are the complete stop of backyard over-breeding, fundraising to spay and neuter rabbits, and boycotting pet stores that support immoral treatment of the sweet animal. Also, education the public would stop the purchasing of rabbits when the owner is not prepared or committed. No animal deserves to be mistreated or ignored because they can feel, too. We as a nation and as a world need to stop the neglect of this wonderful, loyal companion and learn how to give them what they have always deserved.

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