

Rabbits need special care

LAST weekend, the Easter Bunny made a special stop on the North Shore with a mission to leave chocolate and other candy treats.

A few weeks earlier, another rabbit was making the rounds of the area for a very different reason. She was homeless. The white, lop-eared bunny was rescued in North Vancouver after she followed a resident who was walking his dog. She was brought to a shelter that contacted the British Columbia Rabbit Rescue (BCRR) and is now in foster care.

BCRR spokeswoman Lisa Hutcheon confirmed that the North Van bunny they named Finnegan was definitely a domesticated bunny that had been set free in the area.

"People are buying them in pet stores as babies and keeping them for six to eight months," explained Hutcheon. "Then the novelty wears off."

Hutcheon said that at about eight months rabbits' hormones kick in and unless they are spayed or neutered, they become aggressive and they need to mark their territory resulting in stronger smells around the house.

"A bunny is not really a

kids' pet," said Hutcheon. She explained that bunnies do not really like to be held.

She said they are ground-loving animals and their instincts tell them that if they are picked up they are probably about to be eaten. Another important factor for parents to consider is that rabbits have fine bones that break easily if the pet is dropped or handled roughly by a child.

Another rabbit rescue group called Vancouver Rabbit Rescue and Advocacy (VRRRA) confirms on its website that rabbits need special care.

The website reports that rabbits can die of fright and they also need at least four hours of exercise a day so should not be left in a cage for long periods of time.

Both organizations note that rabbits also need vets with special knowledge about rabbit care, and suggest that since rabbits can live up to 10 years and have special care needs, they require serious commitment from adults in the family if they are chosen as pets.

For families that can no longer properly care for their pet rabbits, Hutcheon said it is important not to release the animals into the wild.

Hutcheon explained that

domesticated rabbits cannot survive in parks and woods. She said they are especially vulnerable to coyotes and other animals, and noted a case on the North Shore in which a bunny was found with a large portion of the skin on its head ripped off by another animal.

While rabbits are not recommended for children under

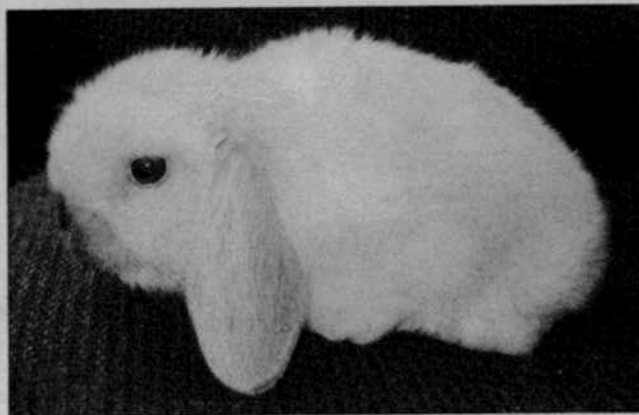


photo Lisa Hutcheon

FINNEGAN was rescued from the streets of North Van.

the age of seven, Hutcheon said they can make good pets for adults and seniors.

She urged anyone interested in purchasing a rabbit to consider adopting a bunny from a shelter or rescue organization since there are so many

rabbits in need of good homes.

For more information on BCRR, visit the website at www.bcrabbits.org.

For more information on VRRRA, visit the website at www.vrra.org.

— Rosalind Duane