



National Agricultural Youth Show

Rabbits Manual



2017

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rabbits make excellent pets and are a wonderful hobby. It is impossible to care properly for a pet, or to achieve much out of a hobby if one does not have the basic information about the subject. It is also rewarding to look for additional challenges with one's pets or hobbies. What greater challenge can there be than to enter ones animals on show? Entering shows could lead to great joy or deep despair, but it is always a great learning experience, even after a number of years.

Rabbit breeding is a farming enterprise and therefore it is very difficult to lay down hard and fast rules. What works for one person may not necessarily be the best way for the next person. It may therefore be necessary for you to experiment with different methods and then stick to the method that works for or suits you.

In this booklet I will try to give you the basic facts, and some of the variables on certain aspects of rabbit breeding and showing.

Further the best of luck to you with your chosen hobby, may it bring you great joy and fulfillment in you endeavours.

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2. WHAT IS A RABBIT?

Contrary to normal belief a rabbit is not a rodent. But how can we blame a layman for believing this, when zoologists for years classified them as Dupicidenta in the order Rodenta? This classification was due to the fact that the rabbit's incisors (front teeth) are actually two teeth growing one behind the other. It was only at a late stage that the Dupicidenta's were given their own order *Lagomorpha*. due to the fact that they have 28 teeth compared to a rodent's 16. *Lagomorpha* are divided into two species, the one including rabbit and hares whilst the other is for the pikas.

That is enough scientific facts for this booklet. This is just included to show you how involved the study of any pet can get, if you are interested enough.

Although rabbits and hares are the same species, (and (hey are often incorrectly named), they do not inter-breed. Amongst other differences rabbits and hues have different living habits, with a rabbit being a burrowing animal and the hare a surface living one.

Rabbits have been kept in captivity since 1 000 BC with domestication taking place in the monasteries during the middle ages. It would appear that this was due to the fact that unborn or newly born young rabbits were not regarded as meat and could thus be eaten during Lent.

A number of variations are recorded prior to the 18th century. These include colour variations, the Dutch colouring and the Angora "wool". Mutations, including the Rex and Satin fur that have been carefully bred to give us the wonderful animals we see on the show bench today, occurred at later dates. The Other breeds seen are either due to casual cross-breeding or more often the careful study of genetics and planned breeding.

Why are rabbits kept today?

There are a number of varying reasons. These include:

For pets
For meat
Commercially (to make money)
For therapeutic or rahabilitation purpose
For research or lobaratory work

No matter what the reasons for keeping rabbits, they will always be found to be one of the most interesting, wonderful and loving creatures one can find.

3. HOUSING / SANITATION

Rabbits are easy to please when housing them. Some people give their pet rabbits the run of their house or garden, whereas other people keep them in colonies. Most breeders, however, keep their rabbits in individual hutches (cages). No matter how one keeps your rabbits, there is certain criteria that should be adhered to. These include shelter, cleanliness, draught free and dry conditions.

Shelter

A rabbit can tolerate a large temperature range, especially at the lower end of the range, but can succumb to heat stroke. It is also advisable to keep rabbits, especially coloured ones, out of direct sunlight as this "kills" and discolours the fur. Some people, especially overseas breeders, believe in keeping their rabbits in dark areas for this reason.

Cleanliness

Although rabbits have bred and thrived in unhygienic conditions, they are susceptible to disease. It is therefore recommended that their environment be kept clean and hygienic to enable them to achieve their full potential. A sick or diseased rabbit will be refused on a show. If it should get past benching (the process that is followed when putting your rabbit on a show) it will be disqualified by the judge and isolated.

Draught Free

As stated, rabbits can tolerate large temperature differences, especially cold, but they are very partial to draughts. Draughts can cause numerous problems such as colds, sniffles (pasteurella), and even ear infections. These could all be fatal diseases and you could soon be sitting without any rabbits.

Dryness

Water is fine for fish to live in. However, all earth bound creatures need water to survive (drink), but find living in damp conditions most uncomfortable and distressing.

Size of Hutch

In the old days it was stated that a rabbit hutch should be 0,1 square meter per 500 gm adult weight. Today most breeders prefer standard size hutches. A breeding hutch is normally 900 mm (wide) x 600 mm (deep) x 450 mm (high) for most medium or large breeds. Small breeds are sometimes kept in smaller hutches. Some commercial breeders however prefer hutches 600 mm x 600 mm x 300 or 450 mm, and then place the breeding box on the outside of the hutch. When building or purchasing a hutch always remember to take the length of your arm into consideration. It is always difficult if you have to try and climb into a hutch to get a rabbit out of a corner.

Materials required

If the hutch is to be kept under roof it could quite easily be all wire. The hutch can however be made from any material, as long as certain things are taken into account. Things to consider include that rabbits will chew on most things, especially wood. Steel gets very hot and cold. Asbestos gets cold and the rabbits will chew on it. Further, one must

remember that the hutch must be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Provision must also be made for food and water. If one decides on a solid floor instead of a wire floor, you must remember that it will require very regular cleaning. Thought should then be given to placing sawdust or straw on the floor.

Cleanliness

All food and water containers should be cleaned every day. The hutch should be cleaned once a week, more often if it has a solid floor, and disinfected once a month. All droppings should be cleaned away daily. Further, a watchful eye should be kept for any fly, insect or odour build up. The cause of these problems must be found and corrected immediately. Always remember, prevention is better than cure.

4. FEEDING / NUTRITION

As previously stated, rabbits are easily pleased and I personally have heard of rabbits eating and enjoying grapes, apples, mealie meal, porridge with milk and even chocolates.

Rabbits, however, do require a high protein diet, normally between 12% and 14%, although some people claim they need up to 18% protein. As a result, most people feed one of the commercial rabbit pellets on the market. Other animal feeds are sometimes experimented with. It is rumoured that feed that contains urea must be avoided. Pellets are easier to feed than other feeds and should contain a balanced diet for the rabbit. However, the different producers do use different ingredients and one should not suddenly change from one pellet to another. One must slowly introduce the new pellet or food over a few days, for example 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%. This method of introducing new feeds could eliminate a lot of problems with diarrhoea (runny tummies). It has been noticed that by feeding different feeds or pellets from different producers, certain problems could arise or disappear from the rabbitry. These problems could vary from rabbits not eating, scratching their feed out of the feeder, growth rate (feed conversion), the fur becoming coarser or softer, weaner mortalities or even varying conception rates. These problems do not manifest themselves overnight, but require constant monitoring over a period of time, 6 months or even a year. One must also be aware of any other factors that could have caused or corrected the problem.

Most breeders agree that adult "large" rabbits should receive between 110 gm and 120 gm of pellets per day. There is, however, two schools of thought on feeding, lactating does (female rabbits with babies) and weaners (rabbits up to 12 weeks old). The one school advocates ad-lib feeding (feed accessible at all times), the other school prefers feeding rations even from an early age.

If one feeds pellets one should feed some type of hay to supply bulk and roughage. The odd tit-bit green feed or vegetables can also be given, but once again too much at a time could cause runny tummies.

One can feed rabbits on greens only. You then have to feed larger quantities (approximately 1 kg per day). The rabbits must then also be fed twice a day as wilted greens should not be left in the hutch. Most greens can be fed. Some would naturally be

more nutritious than others and each rabbit would have its own preference. I have been told not to feed rhubarb, tomato plants, uncooked potato and onions as they could be fatal. As a result I have avoided these specific greens. I have, however, fed most other greens including grass cutting (which have not been splayed), pruning from trees, debudded flowers, etc. I have even fed "kakiebos" to breeding stock. It is claimed by some to cure worms. However, I find it assists in controlling flies in the rabbitry. Some people state that not too much lettuce should be fed to rabbits kept in confined spaces.

Rolled oats, sunflower seeds, peanuts, etc. have also been fed at odd times for specific reasons, normally before a show to luster of the coat. In the old days breeders developed their own rations. Because these rations were not in pellet form, the rabbits used to waste and this practice has almost ceased to exist. Further I have seen and heard of rabbits being fed on supplements of mealie meal, porridge and milk or even bread.

A further requirement of any rabbit is fresh water. When feeding pellet, it is necessary to supply water two or three times a day. As a rabbit could drink up to 1 litre per day, I have been told by somebody that his three rabbits have not drunk any water in one year. I found this very strange, and on further questioning was informed that they were fed solely on greens, five fresh lettuces a day being the basic ingredient of the meal. As lettuce contains a high quantity of water, this would appear to be the reason for this abnormality.

5. BREEDING

So you have now bought your rabbits, you have housed them, experimented with feeding them and now you want to breed with them. What now? Do you just throw the buck and doe together and hope for the best, or do you carefully plan and organize the mating and breeding of your animals? The choice is yours, depending on what you wish to achieve. Once again you would require some basic information, and I have still not met somebody who can show animals from a pot-luck situation.

The gestation period (the time from mating until giving birth) of a rabbit is 30 to 32 days. I will give information on breeding in a controlled environment as I do believe it is the only way if one wants to show rabbits. There are different thoughts on when and how to breed rabbits. Commercial breeders breed on a five week cycle, that is, the doe produces a litter every 5 weeks, breeding the rabbits at an early age. This is done so as to produce the maximum number of offspring to try and make the venture as profitable as possible. Some showmen believe you must never breed a rabbit in stress. This would include whilst still developing or even when moulting (that is losing old fur and growing new fur). Other will only breed for shows; that is mate the rabbits that their offsprings is a certain age for the show. However, most breeders breed on a regular system, for instance a ten week cycle, thereby combining the "best" of both worlds.

The rabbits would be housed in individual hutches so that breeding can be controlled. As a rabbit is territorial one should take the doe to the buck's hutch. The buck should try and mount the doe within a short while of her being placed in his hutch. If the doe is ready, she will lift so that the buck can mate with her. On completion of mating, the buck will fall off, normally sideways but sometimes backwards. Some people will leave the doe until

mated three times, normally with 10 to 20 minutes, whilst others will remove the doe and put her back with the buck 12 hours later.

After this, things continue normally, for 28 days, except that some breeders increase the doe's ration after 14 days. At 28 days the doe is given a nest box (this could be a variety of styles and size depending on the breeder) with nesting material. As previously stated, this could be placed inside or hung on the outside of the hutch. The doe will then build her own nest. Normally just before having her kids (babies) the doe will pull her hair (fur) from her belly and place this in the nest. She will then have her babies and you are also a rabbit breeder.

Normally the doe will kindle (have babies) and look after the kits without any problems. If problems should occur, here are a few tips to remember. If the doe does not pluck fur after kindling, and it is cold, catch the doe and pull some other belly fur out, placing the fur in the nest. This action is normally enough to remind the doe to do the job herself. If the doe kindles outside the nest box and the kits are warm, they (and the fur) can just be placed in the nest box and rubbed with a handful of fur. However, if the kits are cold, hold them by the head and immerse as far as possible in warm water, rub them with a cloth and place in the nest box. As the doe only has eight teats, it sometimes happens that she has too many kits (and sometimes when only having a few kits) and she does not look after all of them. If you have another doe that has kits almost the same age, you could foster the kits out. This works well when the two litters are different breeds (types) but it could upset the records when the litters are the same breed and colour. I have, however, seen does with large litters make two nests in the box, split the kits and happily raise 12 beautiful babies. Some breeders say you should not disturb the nest for a day after the doe has kindled. Other says that you must first put Vaseline on the doe's nose before fostering kits to her. I have found neither appropriate in my program. I can work in the boxes even whilst the doe is kindling, although I would not advocate the practice. I foster kits by just rubbing them with fur from the foster mother's nest end then placing them between the other kits.

Once the mother has kindled, you should double her rations and if possible supplement with some green lucern or other green tit-bits to stimulate milk production. After 1 to 2 days the kits will start to grow fur, at about 10 to 12 days their eyes should open. During their third week the kits should start coming out of their nest box and start eating solids. The kits can be weaned (taken away from their mother) from 3 weeks old (normally commercial breeders). It is usually the practice to wean two weeks after remating the doe, unless of course if the babies are getting too big and the mother has not been remated.

Some breeders advocate that the weaners be left in the hutch and the mother be removed to avoid stress. Most breeders, however, wean into another hutch, hutches or even colonies. Whichever method is used, one should separate the sexes before the 14th week so as to avoid any unwanted pregnancies.

Most breeders advocate that a buck should be used 1 day and rested for 2 days to build up his strength. Here again I have successfully used a single buck three or four times in a day and then given him a week's rest. As a result of these "rules" one needs 1 buck and 10 does in a five week breeding cycle or 1 buck for 20 does in a ten week cycle.

6. HEALTH /DISEASES

They say that a good stockman will pick up any problem in his stock before any signs manifest themselves. This is true, but there is no magic involved. The whole secret is that the person is involved with his/her animals and is observant to their habits. If one feeds and water one's own rabbits, you will immediately notice if they are not eating or drinking properly. By observing the droppings one will immediately notice any change (softness) in the droppings. Another give-away is that by observing the behavior of the rabbits, you will soon know how each rabbit behaves at different times. If you are observant you will soon pick up any strange behavior or listlessness in any rabbit. These are all tell tale signs that the stockman will note, thereby impressing people with this magic he/she possesses.

A happy contented rabbit living in hygienic conditions will normally not have many problems. But even in the best run rabbitries, the odd problem can and will occur. The idea of this chapter is not to make you a veterinarian but to give you an idea of some of the more common problems experienced as well as some cheap home remedies. This list is far from complete and further problems will require additional research.

EAR CANCER

This is caused by a mite in the ear. It starts in the base of the ear and looks like a scab in the ear. It rapidly increases in size and will eventually cover the whole ear and even more. There are a number of remedies offered. The cheapest is to drop a few drops of oil (baby, sweet, etc.) into the ear. This normally clears it up in a few days. The problem being that the cancer returns and regular doctoring is required.

SNUFFLES (PASTURELLA)

This is a highly contagious disease that can be found in most rabbitries. Onderstepoort has developed a vaccine for snuffles that must be injected every six months. The problem with this is that the rabbit has a lump in its neck where injected and the judge normally notices it. Snuffles manifest itself in the respiratory tract (lungs) and is noticeable by a white mucous in the nose. The rabbit has a wet sneeze and rubs the mucous off with its front paws, which become matted. The most effective cure is to cull the sick rabbit. However, if this is not possible, the rabbit must be isolated where it can not infect any others. The rabbit's health will deteriorate and it could develop secondary infections such as abscess before it dies.

ABSCCESS

An abscess is a lump on the rabbit's body filled with "puss". These could be caused through injury or as secondary infections. If the abscess breaks you are lucky, as you will be saved the trauma of opening the abscess. Once open, as much of the "puss" as possible must be pushed out, the wound disinfected and covered with either healing oil or a mixture of Vaseline and Flowers of Sulphur.

WOUNDS

These can be treated with either healing oil or the Vaseline mixture.

WRY NECK

This is when a rabbit's head turns to the one side, eventually leading to a complete loss of balance. It could be caused by breeding, injury or as a secondary infection (inner ear infection). In most cases there is no cure and culling is necessary.

MALOCCLUSION (BUCK TEETH)

A rabbit's teeth (and nails) grow continuously. The jaws are perfectly aligned to allow the teeth to wear down whilst chewing. If the jaws are not properly aligned, the teeth grow until the rabbit can not eat and dies. In some cases the teeth have grown out of the mouth and into the nose, or formed a complete circle in the mouth. Buck teeth can be caused by injury but is normally due to breeding. It is also more prevalent in some breeds such as the Netherlands Dwarf. The teeth can be clipped to allow the rabbit to eat. However, culling would be best. If one discovers buck teeth, it will be necessary to scrutinize your breeding records as to the original cause of the problem. The unfortunate part is that the problem may only occur three or four generations down the line. At this stage a large section of the breeding stock might be carrying the gene.

DIARRHOEA

This is noticeable by loose droppings and in extreme cases by dirty anuses. Remove all foods. Feed only dry grass or hay and give plenty of fresh water. One can get a sulphur base solution and add this to the drinking water. If the condition persists or there is a major outbreak in the rabbitry, and no changes in diet have taken place, it would be advisable to consult a veterinarian as the problem could be a virus.

SORE HOCKS

This is when a rabbit loses the fur under its feet and the skin breaks and is infected. The problem is usually found in the Rexes, when kept on wire floors, as they have a much shorter fur. It can also be found in other breeds, especially the heavier types. The usual causes are long toe nails, rusted or dirty floors or broken floor wires. Correct the cause, doctor with Vaseline mixture or healing oil and place a mat or plank in the cage for the rabbit to sit on.

This list is by no means comprehensive, books can and have been written on the problems that can occur. Luckily a number of diseases have not yet reached our country. As a result these are not even mentioned. There are still a number of other problems that you might encounter, whilst enjoying your hobby, but you will then have to do a bit more research on your own. Please note that I have given some tips to assist in handling problems. It is however, not my intention to take away from anybody. Therefore if any problem persists or something strange happens, please call on your veterinarian. If he does not know he is more capable to find out what is wrong.

Finally as said before, prevention is better than cure.

7. BREEDS

For a number of years now, there has been a ban on the importation of rabbits. When people could import they did not always receive top quality stock. Also, South Africans have a tendency to cross breed, especially when breeding commercially. As a result of this, there is limited stock available for showing. There are also difficulties to be watched for when breeding with certain breeds. I will try and give a short overview of most breeds available in the country, as well as mention some of the breeds available in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately we can not import any of their rabbits, but if you are in Zimbabwe you could try and see some of their breeds.

FANCY BREEDS

Angora

Three types of Angora were imported into this country. Each is different and has its own characteristics. Unfortunately they have also been crossed and one must be very careful with them.

English

A small rabbit of approximately 2,7 kg, round in shape, like a snowball. The English Angora has a very fine (soft) hair. The hair shaft (some people incorrectly call it wool) is very thin if measured individually and is used to knit garments (jerseys, etc). It is often mixed with other fibres such as wool when spun to give it additional strength. The English Angora is seldom seen on shows today as it does not produce as much wool as the other two types. Sometimes coloured Angoras are shown as English Angoras, but these are usually either crossed breeds or coloured German Angoras.

German

A large rabbit of up to 5 kg with a thicker hair than the English. The German Angora also has a large number of guard hairs (very coarse. long and straight hairs) interspersed. The combination of these hairs enabled the "wool" to be spun on its own. This "wool" is used overseas for thermal underwear. When shown, these animals are required to have good furnishings (that is have fairly large amounts of longish hair) on ears and feet.

French

These rabbits were imported in the 1980's during the "angora wool boom". Their hair was supposed to be between the other two breeds, making them ideal for knitting garments. However, the animals imported did not conform to any show standard.

Unfortunately it is very difficult to find "pure" Angoras of a breed today. There are a number of people still looking after the odd Angora, and there is an "Angora farm" in Oudtshoorn, but only one regular showman in KwaZulu-Natal. An Angora must be plucked or clipped regularly (it is kept for its hair) otherwise it will become an unruly mat and could die. On a show one is looking for hair length of almost 100 mm. Therefore, trimming and grooming is very important.

Belgian Hare

Although this is a rabbit, it looks like a hare and hence its name. It is a large animal of 4kg, but because of its shape requires a cage larger than any other rabbit of a similar weight. It also has a slightly shorter fur than most other rabbits and it is therefore advisable to keep them on solid floors. The hare requires a lot of training to sit properly on the show bench. There is only one breeder showing “hares” in KwaZulu-Natal.

Black and Tan

A beautiful little rabbit of 2,2 kg, which unfortunately was crossed with the Fox, causing it to become too large and to lose a lot of its tan colouring. A few dedicated breeders in Gauteng have persevered and are now showing the odd animal

Dutch

A very popular breed, often incorrectly sold in pet shops as “dwarfs”. A small rabbit, 2 kg with distinctive markings, roughly front half white, and back half and head coloured. This rabbit receives most of its points on a show bench for its markings. It is very difficult to breed a perfect Dutch but they have done very well on shows. Dutch are bred in the following colours: black, chocolate, blue, yellow, tortoiseshell, steel-grey and brown-grey.

Tri-coloured Dutch

A slightly larger rabbit than the normal Dutch. Bred by crossing the Dutch with a Harlequin. Only Heather Heron in KwaZulu-Natal would have the patience to tackle a project like this, considering the stock available.

English

Called the English Spot or English Butterfly because of its distinctive markings. This is a white rabbit with a coloured butterfly on its smut, a herringbone mark down its spine and a large number of spots at specific places on its fur. It is claimed that you can only paint a perfect English, but can never breed one. There are, however, a few people who will always look for a challenge and breed the English. This is another breed which receives most of its points for its markings. The English are also very popular with the public at shows although they are slightly larger, being between 2,6 kg and 3,6 kg in weight. The English can be shown in five colours, namely black chocolate, blue, tortoiseshell and grey.

Flemish Giant

This very large rabbit is often incorrectly thought of as an ideal commercial rabbit. The Flemish is a fancy rabbit and is shown in this class. The British Rabbit Council (BRC) only recognizes one colour, steel, whereas the European Standard recognizes a number of colours. The European Standard, however, calls for a larger rabbit than the BRC. As the breeders are presently battling to achieve weights, this is a major problem.

Harlequin / Magpie

The marking on these two rabbits are supposed to be identical, only their colours differ. The Harlequin being black and yellow, whereas the Magpie is black and white. The standard calls for the head to be half white / yellow and half coloured with the ears being

the opposite colour to the head. The body is banded, with the feet being opposite colours. There is only one person showing these breeds in KwaZulu-Natal. The British Standard allows for brown, blue and lilac as well as the black.

Himalayan

A small snaky rabbit of 2,2 kg. The Himalayan is a white rabbit with pitch black on its nose, ears, feet and tail. A very good show rabbit when in condition, but requires perfect timing. Young rabbits normally show bridling (brownish hairs) on the feet or the smut (nose marking), is not fully developed, whereas older rabbits develop eye stain (eyebrows). Normally only a few exhibits are seen on the shows.

Netherlands Dwarf

Everybody's favourite and a fancier's nightmare. This small rabbit (1.12 kg maximum) does not breed like other rabbits. Pure-bred Dwarf litters are seldom as large as three, therefore demand exceeds supply. As a result people are often misled into buying "dwarfs" which are in reality crossbreeds or just baby rabbits. The most distinctive features of the Dwarf, apart from its size, are its short ears and flat looking face. The Dwarf is shown in red eyed white (rew), blue eyed (bew) or coloured. They come in almost any conceivable colour or pattern. People, however, tend to cross the "rew" and "bew" which gives a mismarked "dutch" pattern which requires a lot of perseverance to achieve show quality animals. This breed is achieving great success at Gauteng shows and is very popular with showmen but breeding is a problem.

Lops

The English Lop, with its very large ears, would be a very popular rabbit if it was available in this country. I have only seen one and this was apparently then crossed with a French Lop. A breeder managed to get of the offspring, but could not get to either of the standards. Most Lops seen in this country are due to the rabbits having weak ear carriage and therefore not having the muscles to hold the ear/s upright. There seems to be the odd English Lop as well as Dwarf Lops in Zimbabwe.

NORMAL FUR BREEDS

Beige

A beautiful, smallish rabbit with a wonderful colour. This rabbit has a sandy under colour with a bluish tinge over the top. When a good one arrives on the show bench it normally goes far. I can only think that the Beige's size and slight variations in colouring has prevented these rabbits from being seen outside KwaZulu-Natal. In Britain they have been almost overwhelmed with a very dark tinge, this has led to the Isabella standard being accepted.

Californian

One of the two most popular commercial breeds in the country. The Californian was developed in America as a meat rabbit with a usable pelt. This white rabbit with coloured markings on its nose, ears, feet and tail should weigh between 3,4 kg and 4,5 kg.

Dedicated breeding has got the animals on the show bench back to size. Problems are still being experienced with the coats as well as the depth of the colour on the extremities. The Californian is judged according to the American standard, with one proviso: chocolate markings are allowed in Southern Africa (as per British Standard).

Chinchilla Giganta

A very large rabbit with a wavy blue and white patterned coat. The coat colouring is due to the distinctive colouring of the hair, slate blue, then a band of white, followed by another band of blue, interspersed with black guard hairs. As this is a rather long rabbit, it does not dress out very well when slaughtered, but has been used in commercial rabbitries. This is another breed where difficulty is being experienced to achieve adult weight on a regular basis.

Cinnamon

Another American meat breed imported into this country to cater for the blacks who did not like a white rabbit with red eyes. This large breed is brown in colour with darker extremities (nose, ears, feet and tail) and a, black (smoke grey) tinge over the coat. Unfortunately it was not successful as a meat rabbit and is now only seen on the odd show. The Cinnamon comes in different shades and apparently only the dark shade is breeding in Zimbabwe. This is not a problem in South Africa. The problem, like all large breeds, is to consistently achieve adult weight.

Deilenaar

One of the newer entrants to the local show scene, this rabbit was developed by a breeder trying to improve the tan in the black and tan by crossing it with a red rabbit. The animals arriving on the show bench are showing improvement. However, problems are being experienced with adults exceeding the 3,5 kg maximum weight. The other problem is that there is still too much variation in both the red and black shadings of the rabbits, even in a litter. This rabbit is mainly seen in Gauteng.

Fox

In my opinion one of the most beautiful rabbits around (especially the black or "silver" fox), unfortunately previously not viewed in the same light by the general public. This medium sized, coloured, rabbit has a white belly and white markings on its jawline, nostrils, inside its ears as well as white tickings on its flanks and rump. At one stage it was not often seen but due to some dedicated breeders, it is now back with a vengeance. Mostly seen in black, the odd chocolate is shown, with blues being few and far between. The standard allows for lilacs as well, but I have not seen one for a number of years.

New Zealand

The New Zealand White (NZW) is the most popular commercial rabbit. As a result it is the one breed that has been crossbred the most. The American Standard, to which it is judged calls for a rabbit in excess of 4,2 kg. A large number of the exhibits seen are either underweight or have the wrong coat (fur). Most exhibits on the shows are either young or intermediate (between 6 and 8 months old) animals. In KwaZulu-Natal some New Zealand Reds are to be seen, but it would appear that they have the same problems as

their white counterparts. The black coated variety seems to have died out, whereas I have never seen a blue in this country.

Sable

Two types, Martin and Siamese, that are not often seen on shows due to their habit of being in continuous moult. This is a smallish / medium sized rabbit seen in different shades of "brown".

Smoke Pearl

A rabbit identical to the Sable, but with a blue (grey) colour.

South African Red

Due to the cross breeding of the different "red rabbits" imported into this country, a standard was drawn up to accommodate the offspring of these animals. At one stage there was only a single breeder in Gauteng breeding this breed but due to its meat producing abilities, this breed is now becoming more popular.

Other Varieties

At odd times other varieties do appear on the show bench. Recently *Perlflee* and *Lynx* have been shown in KwaZulu-Natal whereas Chinchillas and Havannas have been seen in Gauteng. It is therefore incorrect to say that other breeds do not exist in this country. However, one should always check to ensure that there is a standard for the "new breed" one has discovered before purchasing such breeds.

SPECIAL FUR BREEDS

Rex

A medium sized rabbit with a short coat (fur) of approximately 12 mm in length. The standard calls for a very dense coat, resulting in a beautiful velvet appearance especially in a good black specimen. Due to its short coat the Rex requires special attention and it is advised to keep Rexes on solid floors. Rexes come in a large variety of colours and patterns with dwarf Rexes now being very popular in Britain. The special attention Rexes require as well as the narrow heads (snippy faces) and lack of density in some specimens prevent more of these animals being seen on shows.

Satins

These rabbits have the most beautiful sheen (satinisation) on their coats, thence their name. Most Satins shown in South Africa are of the British type, which is small and cobby (round) in shape. In Zimbabwe the American Satin is seen more often. This is a larger, meat type animal. KwaZulu-Natal normally only shows the Ivory (white) Satin, which does very well on the shows. In Gauteng one will often see coloured varieties that normally lack density. Britain regards the Satin as a normal fur today, whereas Natal has a separate section for Satins. It is therefore imperative to ensure your animal is entered in the right section when showing.

8. SHOW PREPARATION

A lot will depend on which breed you choose as to what show preparation is required. Certain breeds such as the Belgian Hare and Polish (only seen once) require to be taught to pose on the show bench from an early age. Some breeders claim that the Dwarf must be taught from a young age to sit on a small block of wood so as to enhance its cobby shape. The Angora, especially the English variety, requires constant grooming to prevent matting, without over grooming and thinning of the coat.

There are, however, certain rules that apply to all breeds when showing them. You could get away without applying some of the rules sometimes, but a well-prepared animal will normally get the top honours. One should always ensure that the animal conforms to the standard of the breed, or as close to the standard as possible. Check for any disqualifications. These include bent bones or deformities, buck teeth, runny eyes, ill health, white toe nails in coloured rabbits and under or over weight in some breeds. Any rabbit being entered on a show should be handled regularly. It be removed from its hutch, placed on a "table" where it is taught to sit as quietly as possible, even when placed next to other rabbits. The rabbit must then be handled the same as when it is going to be judged.

The rabbit must be clean, no hutch stains. Therefore, the hutch must be kept clean. Any hutch or other stains should be removed / cleaned before the show. Sometimes, if time allows, the rabbit will clean itself if the stained area is wet. In emergency cases one can use a potato or lemon to clean the animal. The rabbit's toe nails should be cut about two weeks before the show, toe nails should be clipped regularly anyway. When cutting the toe nails be careful of the blood vessels in the nails. These are easily seen in white nails but are more difficult in the darker nails.

One should try and avoid moult in the rabbit. This is normally done by brushing the loose hairs out of the coat for a period prior to the show. Whilst the rabbit is sitting on the table, rub your hands through the fur. This brings out the loose fur. If you wet your hands or use a damp cloth or chamois to brush the rabbit you normally find the process is quicker. Some fanciers try feeding vitamins or other feeds to prevent or accelerate moult. A sudden change in weather conditions could bring on moult.

The rabbit should be transported to the show in a travelling box. The box should be such that the rabbit will not wet itself if it urinates in the box. It is advisable not to place a white rabbit on newsprint as the ink could stain the fur. One should also ensure that the rabbit has fresh air and if possible avoid overheating as a rabbit perspires easily.

A number of fanciers believe in rubbing potato starch or corn flour into the rabbit's coat the evening prior to the show, to remove any dust or slight stains. One must, however, either ensure that you do not put in too much or otherwise remove any excess powder the morning before judging, as the coat could look dull and lifeless.

Regular brushing of the coat with a chamois or clean sheep's wool can also improve the sheen on the coat. Some breeders believe in feeding the odd sunflower seed or peanuts to their show animals.

Preparation does not take that much time, but gives your animal a far better chance on the show bench to do its best for you.

9. SHOWING

You have bred / obtained your rabbit and you now wish to show it, what do you do now? You could either contact your local rabbit club (which is the best way), or a Show Society that holds a rabbit show and arrange to obtain a show schedule. You then fill in and send off the entry form, ensuring that your rabbit is entered in the correct class. Further you prepare your rabbit waiting for the show date.

Normally, benching (that is putting the rabbits into their show cages) is the evening prior to judging of the rabbits. When one arrives at benching you will be met by one of the stewards. Your rabbit will be inspected for ill health, its pen (hutch) number will be marked in its ear, and it will be weighed. Your rabbit will then be placed in its hutch and you will be afforded the opportunity to do any final preparation. You can also enquire what time the hall will open and if you can handle your rabbit prior to the judge's arrival the next morning. Once the judge has arrived, no rabbits should be removed from their cages except for judging.

The book steward will ensure that the stewards bring all the rabbits in a class onto the show bench. The judge will then judge the class, giving comment on the animals. Normally with smaller shows more comment is given than on a large show. The book steward notes down all comments made for later reference. The judge will then proceed to allocate prizes as he / she sees fit. After all classes in a breed have been judged the first prize winners will be judged for the Best of Breed (BOB). All BOBs will then be judged for higher accolades until finally a Best in Show or Grand Champion is selected. After judging the judge will normally answer any questions which the showmen might raise.

As different clubs and shows have different rules, classes, etcetera, it is advisable to check before entering as to the conditions under which the show is being held.

GUIDELINES FOR SHOWING RABBITS

REQUIREMENTS FOR WASHING AND PREPARATION:

Unpack the following:

- Mat
 - Water
 - Chammy
 - Cotton wool
 - Baby oil
 - Maizena (light coloured rabbits)
 - Sheep wool (dark coloured rabbits)
 - Nail clipper
 - Food
 - Lemon
 - Container for food and water
1. Container with food – place on table.
 2. Container with water – place on table.
 3. Nail clipper – clip toe nails two weeks before the show. (Nail clipper must be placed on the table).
 4. Cloth or towel to place the rabbit on. A rubber mat works best as the cloth or towel tends to slip.
 5. Little bit of baby oil – for ear cancer.
 6. Baby powder or Maizena for white rabbits. Sheep wool for darker rabbits.
 7. Lemon juice and a cloth or cotton wool to clean the feet.
 8. Brush for long hair rabbits. Chamois to remove loose hair.

Remember to always look neat and presentable and to wear the correct clothes with your cap on.

Preparation of rabbit:

1. Greet the judge and introduce yourself.
2. Unpack the necessary requirements neatly out on the table in front of the judge. Explain what each item is used for.
3. Remove the rabbit from its cage and place it on the cloth or mat.
4. Examine for ear cancer and snuffles.
5. Wash the top side of the rabbit. Use a little bit of water on your fingertips to remove any loose hair. Rub from back to front repeatedly until the bunny is dry.
6. Rub the top of the rabbit with Maizena/sheep wool.
7. Examine for Snuffles.
8. Examine toe nails.
9. Clean feet.
10. Clean underneath tail.
11. Examine for gestation.
12. Turn the rabbit on its back and repeat the process on its tummy.
13. Rub the tummy with Maizena/sheep wool.
14. If there are any stains on white rabbits rub some baby powder on.

15. Turn the rabbit around and look for stains on the top side.
16. Answer any questions that the judge may ask.
17. Return the rabbit to its cage.
18. Pack all required items away in a case.

SHOWMAN:

1. Greet the judge again.
2. Remove the bunny from its cage.

2.1 Remarks of rabbit

- Type of breed
- Characteristics of breed

2.2 Remarks of pelt

- Colour
- Density
- Texture
- Hair length
- Evenness
- Condition
- Marks

2.3 Remarks of

- Head
- Ears
- Eyes
- Neck

2.4 Remarks of

- Toe nails
- Feet

2.5 Remarks of

- Legs

3. Determine gender.
4. Examine rabbit for diseases and faults.

4.1 Contagious diseases

- Pasteurella

4.2 Non-contagious diseases

- Buck teeth
- Abscess
- Diarrhoea

5. Remarks of tail.
6. Answer questions that the judge may ask.
7. Return the bunny to its cage and greet the judge.

Finally, here are a few addresses that you can contact if you are interested or require more information.

Remember there are also a number of books available, and also an Internet, that contains a wealth of information.

Transvaal Rabbit Breeders Association
PO Box 1281
Walkerville 1876

The Rabbit Breeders Association of Matabeleland
PO Box 252
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

British Rabbit Council
Purefoy House
7 Kirkgate, Newark
Nottingham, NG 24I AD
United Kingdom

Natal Rabbit Club
24 Pioneer Crescent
Northdene 4093

Mashonaland Rabbit Breeders Association
PO Box H98.
Hatfield, Harare, Zimbabwe

American Rabbit Breeders Assoc. Inc.
PO Box 426
Bloomington, IL 61702-0426
United States of America