

## Rabbits Count—So Count Rabbits

A sales policy shift at PetSmart moves rabbit advocates to seek better statistics

BY ADAM GOLDFARB



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

Surprise and outrage—those were the collective feelings of the members of the House Rabbit Society (HRS) last July when the pet supply giant, PetSmart, announced it would begin “test sales” of rabbits in some of its stores. In the past, PetSmart avoided selling rabbits for the same reason it doesn’t sell dogs and cats: Too many end up in shelters.

Since HRS chapters across the country already handle some 35,000 pet rabbits each year—most of whom likely originated in pet stores—HRS representatives were extremely concerned about the increase in rabbit surrenders that would inevitably follow this unfortunate policy change.

HRS hopped into action, firing off a letter to PetSmart’s top executives. A dialogue between the company and

HRS representatives led the organization to start examining rabbit statistics in animal shelters and rescue groups. Now, HRS has posted a survey on its website to track the number of rabbits entering shelters nationwide.

This survey isn’t just about numbers; “[statistics] have larger implications for these animals,” says Margo DeMello, administrative director of HRS. Many shelters keep individual statistics for dogs and cats, but group all other animals together in other records. “Shelters need to start keeping statistics for separate animals because it helps with larger issues,” says DeMello. “Shelters were going to be impacted [by PetSmart’s rabbit sales] even if they didn’t know it.”

Rabbits are often touted as the third most popular pet in America, but are

also the third most commonly surrendered. This creates challenges for shelters that handle rabbits, since bunnies have special dietary needs and a prey animal’s mindset—a nature difficult to cater to in a shelter setting. It’s equally hard to find knowledgeable adopters; few people have ever heard of rabbit rescue groups or know that shelters have bunnies to adopt.

PetSmart discontinued its test later in 2007, citing failed business objectives. But DeMello is still encouraging all shelters and rescues to keep track of their rabbit statistics and fill out the survey on the HRS website ([rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org)). Statistics will help the sheltering field gain a greater understanding of the big picture. And, DeMello warns, “Without [statistics], this could happen again with another store.” AS