Wanted: A Better Life for Rabbits

Saturday 13 March, 2021

CAMPAIGN FOR A BETTER LIFE FOR RABBITS & RODENTS

One Voice for Animals UK (OVFA UK), launched in April 2020 to support the UK's small rescue centres which are struggling due to the Covid crisis, is campaigning during the first half of 2021 to improve the welfare of domestic rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters and other rodents.

As these pets aren't foremost in the minds of the public, there is far less awareness of the welfare issues they face.

The two key welfare issues for this type of pet are :

- Lack of awareness around proper care; diet, health, accommodation, companionship and enrichment needs; and
- Unlicensed breeders selling through the internet. They are not subject to any regulations, legislation or welfare checks, and they provide no care advice to their customers.

Val Green, founder of OVFA UK, said:

"We have over 70 Animal welfare organisations that rescue rabbits and rodents on our public directory, two of them are in the Greater London area. Many are deeply concerned about these small mammals' welfare. Animals bred in awful conditions, left cold and lonely in tiny cages with no space to roam, and even abandoned. They have the same needs as our cats and dogs, but because they don't make as much noise, they literally suffer in silence. Please visit our campaign page to see how you can help www.helpanimals.co.uk/campaigns "

Rabbits are the third most popular pet in the UK but are the most neglected. As well as being left in too-small hutches without room to stretch or mental and physical stimulation, thousands of rabbits end up in rescue centres every month.

OVFA UK member, Little Furries Rabbit Rescue in Stanmore, has recently come to the aid of many such rabbits . One of these was a stray who was found in a local park and sadly remains unclaimed. Named Dumbo because of his very large ears, he will remain a permanent resident at Little Furries due to ongoing health issues.

Cinzia Delegate from Little Furries commented that they have seen an increase in abandoned pet rabbits since lockdown has eased.

Another, Ralph, was bought by a student and was living in halls of residence in a tiny dog crate. When eventually he came to Little Furries, he was underweight (as a result of being fed the wrong diet), had a weepy eye and his nails were very long.

Cinzia believes that pet stores selling animals are a major contributor to the problem by firstly providing unsuitable living conditions for those animals, and secondly not checking that purchasers have sufficient knowledge of the animal's needs before buying them.

Little Furries is a small, privately run rabbit rescue who being totally self funded, rely on donations from kind hearted members of the public. Their aim is to rescue, rehabilitate and re-home abused, abandoned and neglected domestic rabbits. They try to find them good homes where possible or provide sanctuary until end of life.

Between February 2020 and January 2021, they took in an additional 52 rabbits. They are left with many permanent residents due to age or health issues and often call upon other rescues to help with care for the many more they just can't accommodate.

A spokesperson for the charity Animal Rescue and Care (ARC) in Twickenham said they were recently involved in the rescue of many rabbits being used for breeding who had been kept in small dark "prisons" . The rabbits were overweight and frightened. Although the rescue was full, their "amazing

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fosterers found spaces for these girls and their new lives start now".

If anyone is considering a rabbit or rodent for a pet, OVFA UK urges the public to :

1. Find a reputable source to understand your potential pet's needs, such as an animal charity.

For rabbits we recommend the free download of an easy-to-read guide by the Rabbit

WelfareAssociation & Fund (RWAF) (at

https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-welfare-association-fund/our-work/rabbit-care-booklet/)

2. Adopt, don't shop.

You can use the OVFA UK directory at www.helpanimals.co.uk to find a rescue near you (they all vaccinate and neuter rabbits before re-homing)

Attachments: Dumbo & Ralph

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