



The Rabbit's Bill of Rights

A **Bright Eyes Sanctuary** adaptation (with permission) of
"The Parrot's Bill of Rights" as drafted by my dear friend, Stewart Metz, MD
<http://brighteyessanctuary.org/rights.html>

*Preamble... Until he extends the circle of compassion to all living things,
man himself will not find peace. - Dr. Albert Schweitzer*



Article the first... **GET TO KNOW ABOUT RABBITS BEFORE YOU**

BRING ME HOME. I am a domesticated pet like a dog or cat but I still have wild instincts because I am a prey animal. I still have the spirit of the woodlands in me but my body has been shaped by your preferences for my appearance & I can no longer survive in the wild on my own. I have special needs which you may find hard to fill. Please don't learn these too late for my well-being. And please don't acquire one of my cousins from the pet store--it will contribute to the number of us in government animal shelters where we are the third most abandoned animal after cats and dogs. Only a small number of us leave those places alive. So adopt, & please don't buy while shelter pets die.



Article the second... **GIVE ME THE LARGEST HOME POSSIBLE INSIDE YOUR HOUSE.**

My ancestors were built to run & leap for joy in the fields & grassy woodlands & to burrow into the Earth & build a cozy home, even an underground city, called a warren, where there is a fairly stable temperature no matter the season. I have given up this great gift for your pleasure. At the very least, give me enough room to dart back & forth a good length or so in my very own condo/apartment with a solid floor - no wire that will break my toes and cause other injuries! I also need a hidey box where I can get away from it all when I choose & different levels to perch on & survey my indoor home. And, I need toys for my amusement & wood to chew. Otherwise, I might confuse your home with the forest and its trees.



Article the third... **GIVE ME A NUTRITIOUS DIET.**

I need my diet to be 90% indigestible fiber better known as grass hay. I need racehorse quality hay too because my wild cousins can run just as fast as a racehorse & like horses, our tummies are kept humming by always having this fiber passing through it. I should only have about 5% grass hay-based pellets (i.e., timothy-based pellets, not alfalfa!) & the remaining 5% should be a wide variety of fresh & nutritious vegetables, but not too high in calcium or sugar as my tummy can get upset & I can die from an upset tummy. I should never eat high fat foods like bird seed or peanuts or starchy carbohydrates unless I am trying to gain weight after an illness. As a prey animal with a heightened flight response, my cardiovascular system can only handle a heart-healthy diet. Take time to learn what my needs and preferences are.



Article the fourth... **LET ME HAVE A SOCIAL LIFE.**

I am a gregarious colonizing animal, but I am not one of you. I need lots of socialization to learn how to interact with you as well as my siblings. My wild brethren mate for life, & I am happiest with a little mate but only if we are both altered & liberated from our hormonal urges. I also need to have adequate quality time with you every day - no matter what your schedule or other needs are. I am a living, feeling creature. I am sentient. Above all, I need to be able to have complete trust in you & count on your predictability in looking after me - every day.



Article the fifth... **LET ME BE CLEAN.**

I may like to drop one of my "pellets" in a corner sometimes but I need meticulous cleanliness to be healthy. I can easily be litter-box trained, better than a cat, & that is also where my hay should be kept. My litter box is like a couch to me, it should be comfy & full of safe bedding (no softwood shavings!). I will use one little corner of it to deposit my pellets & pee in. I am very clean & bathe

and groom myself every day. It is not gross that I like to lie in my litter box. I should have one just for lounging & one for eating & “output” which I do simultaneously as part of my flight response readiness. If you do not keep my box with proper litter & change it at least once a week or make it big enough for me to feel safe there, I may become ill if my box, or food & water is not always sanitary.



Article the sixth... **I NEED MY OWN DOCTOR.** You may not understand my physiology & therefore you may not recognize it early on when I get sick. And, it may be too late when you do, because I hide my illnesses. (Remember what I said about my being a prey animal of the woodlands, where I have a thousand enemies.)

And I need an exotic vet - a specialist. (No HMOs for me please.) My health care costs can be just as high or higher than dog's or cat's. If you can't afford this, perhaps you shouldn't have taken me home.



Article the seventh... **PLEASE DON'T PUNISH ME.** Just as I don't always understand your peculiarities, you may not understand mine. I don't TRY to get into trouble - remember, a house is not the woods. If I do screw up, don't yell at me and never hit me. I have sensitive ears & I will never trust you again if you strike me. Hands are sometimes scary things to us. (Why in the world would you not be digitigrade like us?) Even more importantly, we don't learn by punishment. We are gentle creatures who only strike back to protect ourselves; we learn through patience and love.



Article the eighth... **SPEAK MY “LANGUAGE”** I know you get upset with me when I knock over my food bowl, throw food, chew on furniture, or nip you to warn you you're being too rough with me, are invading my privacy, am in a bad mood, or have to go to my litter box. I don't do these things to annoy you. I am probably trying to tell you something (perhaps that I am hurting, lonely, or sad). Learn to speak MY

(body) language & NEVER PICK ME UP BY THE SCRUFF. Visit The Language of Lagomorphs website at <http://language.rabbitspeak.com/> and learn my fascinating, subtle, and unique language.



Article the ninth... **SEE ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL.** I am a unique & feeling being. No two of us are alike. Please don't be disappointed in me if my behavior is not exactly what you expected or I am not snuggly wuggly like your friend's rabbit. But if you pay close attention to me (and I always empathize with

you, whether you know), I will show you a unique being who will give you so much more than snuggling & playing. Give me a chance to show you who I am; I think you'll find the effort worth it. And remember, I am not an ornament. I do not enhance ANY living room decor. And I am not a holiday symbol - if you use me as such, I might nip at your up-turned nose!



Article the tenth... **SHARE YOUR LOVE WITH ME.** Above all, please remember that you are my Special Person. I put all my trust and faith in you. We rabbits are used to being monogamous. (No bar-hopping for us!) So please don't go away for long periods or give me away - that would be a sadness from which I may never recover. Changes are very difficult for us, we like things to stay where we put them & we are creatures of habit. If that seems to be asking a lot, remember, you

could have learned about my needs before bringing me home. Even having a baby or taking a new job isn't a fair reason - you made a commitment to me FIRST. I may live to a ripe old age, maybe even 15 years! but I can't provide for myself. Remember I'm in a cage amongst people who are not of my blood.

Article the eleventh... **YOUR RIGHTS.** You have lots of rights, but I can only assure one. And that is, if you treat me the way I described above, I will reward you with unwavering love, humor, knowledge, beauty, dedication, & a sense of wonder & awe you haven't felt since you were a child. When you took me home, you became my Chief Rabbit, indeed, my entire Universe—for life. I would hang the moon & stars for you if I could. We are one in Heart and Soul.