

Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Pet Rabbits - Explained

The following has been obtained from the gov.gg website and is the official Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Pet Rabbits as issued by the States Veterinary Officer and forms part of the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012. At the end of this Code is an explanation of exactly what it means and how you can adhere to it.

CODE OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WELFARE OF PET RABBITS

DUTY OF CARE TO A PET RABBIT UNDER THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012

Section 8 of the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 provides that the owner or keeper of an animal owes a duty to take such care as, in all circumstances, is reasonable to see that the animal is free –

- from thirst, hunger and malnutrition,
- from discomfort,
- from pain, injury and disease,
- from fear and distress, and
- to express normal behaviour patterns.

In determining what care is reasonable in all the circumstances described above, the owner or keeper of an animal shall have particular regard to –

- A. good practice for the care of the animal in question,
- (b) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept,
- (c) any lawful activity carried on in relation to the animal,
- (d) the physical activity undertaken by the animal,
- (e) seasonal climatic conditions,
- (f) the life-stage of the animal, and
- (g) any special or additional dietary and nutritional requirements that may arise –
- A. where the animal is pregnant, brooding or rearing young, and
- (ii) from the general state of health of the animal.

"normal behaviour patterns" means normal behaviour patterns for a domestic animal or a captive animal, as the case may be, of the kind concerned.

The duty of care includes providing the animal with -

(a) a supply of fresh drinking water and food of sufficient quantity and quality to keep the animal in good health,

(b) where appropriate, suitable shelter which is sufficient to maintain the animal in good health and such shelter must include -

A. access from the shelter to water and food,

(ii) comfort, and sufficient space for the animal to lie down or otherwise rest in

(iii) where appropriate, adequate light, heat and ventilation,

(c) protection from injury, disease or unnecessary suffering including, where appropriate, providing timely and appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment where necessary by a recognised veterinary surgeon, and

(d) the opportunity to express normal behaviour patterns and living conditions that are conducive to maintaining those normal behaviour patterns.

The Welfare Recommendations below provide practical guidance on meeting this duty of care when caring for a pet rabbit.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE UNDER SECTION 13(1) OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012 FOR THE WELFARE OF PET RABBITS

A FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE WELFARE RECOMMENDATIONS MAY BE RELIED UPON IN COURT AS TENDING TO ESTABLISH LIABILITY FOR FAILING TO MEET THE DUTY OF CARE

RECOMMENDATIONS – FOOD AND WATER

1. A rabbit should be provided with food that contains the correct balance of essential nutrients, in sufficient quantity to keep it, in all circumstances, in good health and vigour.

2. A rabbit should be provided with fresh, clean water in sufficient quantity to keep it, in all circumstances, hydrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS - LIVING ENVIRONMENT

3. As a minimum a rabbit should be provided with living accommodation that -

A. is large enough to allow it to lie down and rest or sleep in a natural posture,

b. is large enough to provide it with space, other than the place in which it rests and sleeps, to stand up on four legs, stand up on its back legs, stretch, hop three paces unhindered and turn around in a normal posture,

c. provides it with shelter that is predator and vermin proof, dry, ventilated, but protected from draughts and which provides protection from direct sunlight

and extremes of heat and cold,

d. provides daylight or light equivalent to daylight during normal daylight hours,

e. allows continuous access to water and appropriate access to food (to ensure it receives a sufficient quantity of food as required to meet the duty of care), and

f. is constructed from materials that are not hazardous to rabbits.

RECOMMENDATIONS - HEALTH

4. A rabbit that is injured or ill should be provided with timely and appropriate treatment for the injury or illness or in the case of a serious injury or illness, medical diagnosis and treatment by a veterinary surgeon. In the case of doubt, advice should be obtained from a veterinary surgeon.

5. Veterinary medicines or treatments should only be administered in accordance with the directions of a veterinary surgeon or a person authorised to supply such products, or in the case of products that can be purchased by the general public, in accordance with the directions of the manufacturer of the product.

6. Hazardous substances should be kept out of the areas to which a rabbit normally has access.

7. A rabbit should be protected from hazardous appliances (household and garden) by keeping such appliances out of the areas to which it normally has access or by using measures to ensure it does not suffer harm from the appliances.

8. A rabbit should be given the opportunity to exercise to keep it in good health and vigour.

9. A rabbit's coat should be checked regularly for mats and external parasites and, if necessary, mats should be removed and parasites treated.

10. A rabbit's nails should be checked regularly and excessive growth should be clipped.

11. A rabbit should be provided with a high fibre diet and untreated wood or twigs to gnaw on to prevent its teeth from becoming overgrown.

12. A rabbit should be handled so as to avoid distress or injury.

13. Food and water containers that are provided for a rabbit should be kept clean of waste food, droppings and other contamination.

RECOMMENDATION - BEHAVIOUR

14. A rabbit should be provided with the opportunity to regularly socialise with its owner or keeper or other rabbits.

RECOMMENDATIONS - BREEDING

15. Only a rabbit that is adult, well developed, in good health and condition and with a favourable temperament should be used for breeding.

16. Bucks should be removed from a doe after mating and should not be kept with young when they are born.

17. A female that is due to give birth should be provided with an area that is safe, warm, dry and quiet and also provided with clean bedding material. It should be inspected frequently to ensure that it is not experiencing difficulties, but otherwise disturbed as little as possible. If a female exhibits any signs of significant difficulties, during pregnancy or birth, veterinary assistance should be sought promptly.

18. A young rabbit should be able to feed independently and be in good health and condition before it is re-homed.

RECOMMENDATION - EXHIBITING RABBITS

19. A rabbit that is exhibited should be at least 5 months of age, in good health and free from injuries or skin parasites. A pregnant rabbit should not be exhibited.

RECOMMENDATIONS - TRANSPORTATION

20. A rabbit that is transported in a vehicle should be restrained in a secure container.

21. A travelling container should be large enough to allow a rabbit to stand up, turn around and lie down with ease. It should be provided with bedding and food, including moisture-rich food. A container should be secured within the vehicle and positioned so that a rabbit is not exposed to extremes of temperature, drafts or high humidity.

22. A rabbit should not be left unattended in a vehicle unless the environment within the vehicle is maintained below 20C air temperature in the shade.

23. A rabbit should not spend more than 8 consecutive hours confined in a vehicle or travelling container per day.

Guidance - What this code actually means.

GUIDANCE - FOOD AND WATER FOR RABBITS

Food

Rabbits are true herbivores, relying on a diet rich in fibre to maintain their health. This high-fibre intake is crucial for several reasons: it helps wear down their continuously growing teeth, supports optimal intestinal function, and prevents boredom.

The digestive system of rabbits is quite unique; they do not absorb all necessary nutrients in the first passage through their digestive tract. Instead, rabbits produce soft pellets from partially digested food, which they re-ingest to extract more nutrients during a second digestive cycle. Following this process, they also produce firm, brown droppings that are typically not consumed.

To ensure proper nutrition, a rabbit's diet must consist of a substantial supply of hay or dried or fresh grass at all times—this should comprise approximately 95% of their diet. The remaining 5% can be made up of fresh green plants and a small amount of high-quality specialist rabbit food, such as extruded pellets.

Freshly picked grass can be a delightful treat for rabbits, but it must be harvested from clean areas—never from roadsides or locations where it may be contaminated with pesticides or animal waste. Caution is particularly necessary with lawn clippings and clover, as these can disrupt a rabbit's delicate digestive balance.

Suitable green plant options for rabbits include:

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Parsley
- Watercress
- Celery leaves
- Kale

Occasional treats of root vegetables or fruit can be offered, but moderation is key, especially with high-sugar options like carrots. If carrots are provided, prioritise the greens and limit the root itself to prevent excess sugar intake.

Safe wild plants that rabbits may enjoy include:

- Chickweed
- Bramble
- Raspberry leaves

- Blackberry leaves
- Strawberry leaves
- Dandelion

All green foods should be thoroughly washed and dried before serving. Providing untreated twigs from fruit trees, like apple or pear, can assist in wearing down a rabbit's teeth naturally.

Rabbits may develop selective eating habits, particularly if offered a course mix feed that resembles muesli. This can lead to an unbalanced diet, so it is advisable to avoid such mixes. Instead, offering plain extruded pellets prevents selective feeding and ensures each pellet is nutritionally balanced.

While specialist rabbit treats are enjoyable, they should be given sparingly. Avoid sticky or sugary treats, as these can damage a rabbit's teeth.

Rabbits are extremely sensitive to dietary changes; therefore, any adjustments should be introduced gradually. This is especially crucial when weaning young rabbits and introducing them to fresh green plants.

Water

Clean, fresh drinking water must be accessible to all rabbits at all times, with containers replenished daily. Water should ideally be provided in bottles equipped with a sipper tube and ball bearing to prevent spillage. Bowls, while an option, can be easily tipped over or contaminated with bedding and droppings.

In colder weather, it's essential to check the water bottles regularly to ensure they have not frozen.

GUIDANCE - LIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR RABBITS

Housing

The housing for rabbits should adhere to specific standards to ensure their safety and comfort:

a) The enclosure must be escape-proof and designed to protect against vermin and predators.

b) Include a sheltered area that occupies at least one-third of the total space, providing enough room for all rabbits to take cover simultaneously.

c) The housing must offer sufficient space for a rabbit to:

- Execute a sequence of at least three consecutive hops without obstruction (minimum dimensions of 180 cm long by 60 cm wide for an average rabbit).
- Stand on its hind legs with ears fully erect without them touching the ceiling (approximately 75 cm high for an average rabbit).
- Lie fully stretched in any direction without touching the walls and turn around freely.

d) Ensure the enclosure is damp-proof, draught-proof, and well-ventilated.

e) Remove any hazards such as sharp objects, and use materials that are safe for rabbits and have not been treated with toxic substances.

f) Ideally, the living space should allow for natural light while also providing shaded areas for protection against direct sunlight.

g) Ensure continuous access to water and a constant supply of hay or dried or fresh grass.

When constructing the enclosure, utilise strong galvanised mesh wire that prevents rabbits' feet and legs from becoming trapped while excluding vermin. A mesh size of $\frac{1}{2}$ " x $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm x 13mm) and wire gauge between 19 SWG (1.016 mm) to 14 SWG (1.626 mm) is generally suitable. In areas with mice, a finer mesh of $\frac{1}{4}$ " x $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm x 6mm) and 23 SWG (0.610 mm) is recommended.

Outdoor hutches should be built from robust, weatherproof materials and elevated off the ground to avoid dampness, while also providing protection from harsh weather conditions, draughts, and fumes such as car exhausts.

An overhanging roof design will help reduce dampness on the sides and rear and minimise rain ingress at the front.

Exercise Runs

Daily access to a separate exercise run is ideal for rabbits. Regular exercise is essential for their physical and mental well-being, as inactivity can lead to serious health issues such as foot and leg ulcers, osteoporosis, and spinal fractures.

Rabbits are active, athletic creatures, requiring ample space to crawl, hop, run, and dig. Providing areas for jumping onto and off sturdy platforms or hay bales is also beneficial for maintaining muscle and bone strength. Therefore, an exercise run must be spacious enough to allow free movement.

The run should be constructed from solid materials, covered with strong galvanised mesh to ensure safety while providing some protection from wind, rain, and sun. A box or tubing can be included to serve as a tunnel for added enrichment. The ground beneath the run should remain unwired to encourage digging, which is a natural behaviour; however, if escape is a concern, appropriate measures should be taken.

If you prefer your rabbit not to dig into your lawn, consider providing a designated digging pit using a large litter tray filled with soil.

To protect against potential predators, secure the run to the ground.

Access to grassy areas should be ensured while preventing access to flower beds or areas that may contain poisonous plants.

Bedding Materials

Providing appropriate bedding is essential for insulation and a safe hiding spot. Suitable bedding materials include hay and straw.

Dust-free wood shavings or shredded paper can be used in designated toilet areas, or you can opt for a litter tray filled with non-clumping, non-toxic litter material.

All bedding must be clean, dry, and dust-free to prevent respiratory issues and should never contain harmful chemicals.

Cold Conditions

Rabbits can tolerate cool weather as long as they have shelter and plenty of bedding. However, thin rabbits lacking body fat are more vulnerable to cold temperatures.

In colder months, ensure that rabbits have an abundance of clean, dry bedding and additional protective measures, such as insulation in sleeping areas and hutch covers.

Take care to shield rabbits from draughts during cold spells. Outdoor hutches can be relocated to indoor areas like sheds or outbuildings, but ensure these spaces remain ventilated to avoid humidity and condensation.

Hot Conditions

Rabbits struggle to cope with high temperatures, which can be life-threatening. They cannot sweat or pant effectively, making them particularly sensitive to extreme heat and direct sunlight.

The optimal temperature range for rabbits is between 15°C and 20°C. If temperatures are likely to exceed 20°C, take additional measures to cool their accommodations, such as:

- a) Relocating the hutch to a shaded area.
- b) Using air conditioning or fans in sheds or outbuildings.
- c) Covering the hutch with a wet cloth or sacking (with the edge secured in a bucket of water or ensuring regular wetting).
- d) Placing sealed, frozen plastic water bottles within bedding for added cooling.

Light

During daylight hours, ensure that light is available in both exercise and sleeping areas to facilitate visibility. A mix of natural light and artificial light is ideal.

Adequate illumination is vital for the inspection of rabbits; a light intensity of at least 200 lux is recommended. For indoor housing, provide a minimum of 10-12 hours of light daily.

Noise

Rabbits are easily startled, so their hutches should be situated away from areas exposed to sudden loud noises.

Enrichment of the Environment

Rabbits are inherently social animals and thrive best in the company of other rabbits. Ideally, each rabbit should be paired with at least one compatible companion, with a castrated male and a spayed female forming the ideal pair.

It is possible to keep same-sex pairs together if they are siblings raised together and neutered early to prevent fighting. Never separate same-sex pairs, even for short periods.

Providing environmental enrichment is essential for allowing rabbits to engage in natural behaviours. Some enrichment options include:

- a) High-quality bedding and hay for nesting and hiding opportunities.
- b) Socialising with other rabbits or people.
- c) Offering toys such as hay blocks, chew sticks, parrot toys, or cat balls.

If rabbits are kept in a pen, enhance their environment by creating compartments within the pen and incorporating boxes and tubes for hiding.

Monitoring Health

Rabbits should be carefully observed at least once a day to assess their overall well-being. This includes checking if they are eating and drinking normally, urinating and defecating adequately, displaying their usual behaviours, moving freely without discomfort, and maintaining a healthy coat.

Specific health checks should encompass:

- **Nails:** Ensure they are at an appropriate length, free from damage, and not overly long, which can lead to discomfort.
- **Feet:** Inspect for bald patches or sores that might indicate underlying health issues.
- **Fur and Skin:** Examine the coat for signs of parasites, dandruff, patches of baldness, itchy sores, scaly or damp patches, and any open wounds.
- **Teeth:** Check that they are the right length and shape. Overgrown teeth can lead to pain and eating difficulties.
- **Eyes:** Look for clarity and absence of weeping, as runny eyes can be indicators of respiratory infections, which may escalate into pneumonia if untreated.
- **Nose:** Ensure it is dry and not runny, as a runny nose can also signal respiratory distress.
- **Mouth:** Look for drooling or a wet chin, which may not be readily visible; any staining of the fur on the chest should be noted.

- **Ears:** Check that they are clean and free from crusty wax.
- **Bottom:** Examine for signs of diarrhoea, and monitor the living area for similar indicators.

During warm weather, it's vital to check rabbits at least twice a day for droppings stuck to their coats, as a dirty bottom can significantly increase the risk of fly strike. This dangerous condition occurs when flies lay their eggs in soiled fur, leading to maggots that can eat into the rabbit's flesh, potentially causing severe harm or death. Immediate veterinary assistance is crucial if maggots are discovered.

Prevention of Disease

Consult with a veterinarian to establish an appropriate vaccination program for each rabbit, as requirements can vary. Vaccinations are available for Myxomatosis and Viral Hemorrhagic Disease (VHD).

To minimise disease risk, avoid contact with wild rabbits or areas frequented by them. Maintaining good hygiene and a clean living environment is essential for preventing *Encephalitozoon cuniculi*, a common protozoal parasite affecting rabbits' brains and kidneys.

Injuries and Illness

Be vigilant for **signs of injury**, such as cuts, swollen limbs, or abnormal walking patterns. In the event of severe injuries, seek veterinary care immediately.

Indications of **illness** may include behavioural changes like sitting still and hunched, alterations in eating or drinking habits, weight loss, discharge from the eyes, ears, or nose, difficulty with toilet habits, or signs of pain like flinching or teeth grinding. If a rabbit displays any symptoms of illness or pain and the cause isn't clear, it's essential to consult a veterinarian without delay.

Grooming

Rabbits naturally moult at the end of winter and summer, but they may shed fur more frequently if exposed to temperature fluctuations. Regular grooming is necessary to keep them comfortable and to prevent excessive fur ingestion, which can lead to furballs in the stomach and blockage of the bowel.

- **Short-Haired Rabbits:** Should be groomed weekly.

- **Long-Haired Rabbits:** Require daily grooming to avoid matting and tangles. Professional clipping by a veterinarian or pet care specialist is also an option.

Care of Nails

Rabbits naturally wear down their nails through exercise on hard surfaces or digging. However, if kept primarily in enclosures, their nails may not wear down sufficiently, necessitating regular clipping to maintain an appropriate length—typically about 5 mm longer than the quick.

Care of Teeth

Rabbit teeth grow continuously throughout their lives. A diet rich in hay and grass is essential for dental health, helping to naturally wear down teeth. Providing untreated wooden gnawing blocks or twigs can further promote good dental condition.

Teeth misalignment or overgrowth can occur, especially sharp spurs on the back teeth, which may cause pain when eating. Since back teeth are not easily visible, they should be routinely checked by a veterinarian, who is the only qualified individual to correct any dental issues. Signs of dental problems may include drooling, sudden refusal of food, or backing away from it in discomfort.

Hygiene

Maintaining a high standard of hygiene is vital for the health and welfare of rabbits and can help prevent infections and reduce the risk of fly strike.

Essential hygiene practices include:

- Removing and replacing wet or dirty bedding and shavings daily.
- Disposing of uneaten fresh foods every day.
- Cleaning droppings from the living area at least every two days, while ensuring that soft faecal pellets are not consumed as rabbits often eat them immediately after excretion.
- Cleaning food bowls and water bottles weekly, using non-hazardous disinfectants or detergents.
- Thoroughly cleaning the entire living area at least once a week.

Exercise runs should also be moved to fresh areas or cleaned weekly. Store feed in vermin-proof containers to prevent contamination.

Handling

Rabbits can be easily startled and require gentle, careful handling to avoid distress. When lifting a rabbit, use both hands—support the chest with one hand and the bottom with the other, keeping the rabbit's head slightly higher than its bottom. This positioning helps prevent the rabbit from kicking out or attempting to flip forward.

Never pick up a rabbit by its ears, as this is painful and highly distressing for the animal.

Behavior

Rabbits have unique behavioural needs, rooted in their nature as prey animals.

Companionship is crucial, as they are inherently social creatures. Ideally, they should be housed with a compatible companion, typically a neutered rabbit of a similar size and opposite sex. Successful introductions depend on careful consideration of factors such as timing, gender, neuter status, age, and size to ensure compatibility.

While rabbits can accept guinea pigs as companions, they should never be housed together due to the risk of serious injury from a rabbit's powerful hind legs and their differing dietary needs.

Even if a rabbit is kept alone, it's essential to provide daily opportunities for interaction with humans. However, since rabbits instinctively fear other animals and people, careful training and gentle handling are necessary for them to become accustomed to human company.

When multiple rabbits are housed together, monitor their interactions closely to prevent bullying or aggression, and separate individuals if necessary.

Socialisation

Every rabbit has its own personality; some may be naturally more confident than others. However, early social experiences greatly influence a rabbit's behaviour. Proper socialisation with both humans and other rabbits is vital during their early weeks of life.

Adult rabbits that haven't had sufficient or appropriate early socialisation may struggle to interact with humans or other animals, leading to nervousness and potential aggression when handled.

To aid in socialisation, handle young rabbits gently from around two weeks of age. When introducing a rabbit to new experiences or other rabbits, always provide a safe space where they can retreat if they feel threatened. Never leave a rabbit alone with a cat or dog, even if they appear familiar with each other.

Boredom and Frustration

Rabbits depend on their owners for entertainment and mental stimulation. Left alone for extended periods, they can become bored and stressed, which may result in behavioural changes.

To alleviate boredom, provide various enrichment activities, such as:

- Opportunities for foraging for food.
- Interactive toys or objects for play.
- Companionship with another rabbit.

Signs of Stress

A content rabbit will exhibit calm, relaxed behaviours, nibbling food, lounging outstretched, and engaging with people, other rabbits, and their environment. It is natural for rabbits to seek refuge when faced with real or perceived threats, such as sudden loud noises or unfamiliar animals. Thus, a secure hiding space—like a wide tube, cardboard box, or a secluded area within their living environment—should always be accessible.

Common causes of stress include:

- Novel experiences, such as a car ride or interaction with strangers.
- Fear-inducing stimuli, like loud noises or unexpected movements.
- Social stress due to overcrowding, loss of a companion, or solitary living.

- Inability to engage in natural behaviours, stemming from inadequate companionship, mental stimulation, or exercise.
- Physical pain or discomfort from illness.
- Environmental factors, including poor lighting or temperature regulation.
- Lack of space or ventilation in their living area.

Indicators of stress can manifest in various ways, such as:

- Nervous behaviours like freezing, hunching, or flattening ears.
- Excessive vigilance or jumpiness, characterised by bulging eyes.
- Uncharacteristic aggression towards humans or other rabbits.
- Reluctance to be handled, showing signs of distress.
- Lethargy or disinterest in surroundings.
- Restlessness or excessive inactivity.
- Hiding or attempting to flee.
- Heavy, panting breaths.
- Changes in eating or toilet habits.
- Over-grooming or neglecting grooming altogether.
- Engaging in repetitive, purposeless behaviours, like biting a water bottle or circling.

If any concerning behaviours arise, owners should consult a veterinary surgeon for guidance.

Guidance on Breeding Rabbits

Breeding rabbits is a significant commitment that requires careful planning and consideration. Prospective owners should thoroughly educate themselves about the responsibilities involved and ensure there is a suitable home or market for any offspring.

Neutering

If an owner does not intend to breed their rabbit, it is highly advisable to have the animal neutered. Female rabbits can typically be spayed once they reach sexual maturity, around four months of age, while males can be neutered at about three months.

Failing to neuter a female rabbit poses serious health risks, including the potential development of womb infections or even life-threatening cancers. In unneutered males, undesirable behaviours such as spraying urine or mounting other rabbits and animals may occur.

A female rabbit has the capacity to produce between four to twelve babies in a single litter and can become pregnant again shortly after giving birth. If housed with an unneutered male, a female could have up to six litters each year, resulting in a staggering potential of up to 72 offspring.

Selection of Breeding Stock

For breeding, females can be first mated around four months of age, but they should not be bred if they are over three years old. Males can start breeding at approximately six months of age.

Only rabbits that are mature, well-developed, in excellent health, and with favourable temperaments should be selected for breeding. Mating should always be supervised to minimise the risk of aggression; it is best practice to bring the female (doe) to the male (buck) to avoid potential fighting that can occur if the buck is introduced to the doe's territory.

Care of Pregnant Does

A secure and private environment is essential for a pregnant doe to raise her young. This can include a nest box or a secluded area within a pen or hutch, furnished with quality nesting material like hay.

The nesting area should provide adequate space for the doe and her young, allowing for nursing and movement. The nest box must be designed so that the doe can enter and exit without injuring the babies. As a general guideline, the minimum dimensions for the nest box should be 30 cm in length with a floor area of at least 0.08 m²; larger breeds will require more space. The side walls should be 25 cm high, with the front wall at 15 cm.

Rabbits are pregnant for approximately 28 to 30 days, and it is crucial to provide a nest box about a week before the expected delivery date to allow the doe to engage in natural nesting behaviours. The nest box should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each use or disposed of if it shows signs of wear.

Care of Young Rabbits

During the first week of life, it is essential to minimise disturbance to the litter. Young rabbits typically begin to venture out of the nest between 2 to 3 weeks of age and are generally weaned around six weeks. It is important not to wean young rabbits before they reach four weeks of age.

A lactating doe with a large litter may consume up to 4.5 litres of water daily. If she does not have access to sufficient water, her milk production could decrease, resulting in undernourished young.

Guidance on Exhibiting Rabbits

Rabbits intended for exhibition must be at least five months old, mature, in good health, and free from any injuries or skin parasites. Pregnant rabbits should not be exhibited.

To ensure the well-being of the rabbit during the exhibition, provide a suitable diet that includes hay and a source of fresh water, which can be offered through a water bottle or moisture-rich vegetables. To reduce stress, it is critical that rabbits are handled regularly prior to being shown.

Guidance on Transporting Rabbits

When transporting rabbits, they must be in good health. Sick or injured animals should only be transported to a veterinarian for treatment or diagnosis.

Rabbits should be placed in secure pet carriers designed for their comfort. These carriers must be spacious enough to allow the rabbit to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably, and they should be well-ventilated. Bedding and hay should be included for comfort.

When loading carriers into a vehicle, ensure that they are arranged to maintain ventilation, avoiding direct sunlight and proximity to heat sources. Carriers should not

be placed in the trunk of a car. Adult rabbits must be transported in individual containers to prevent fighting.

During longer journeys, it is advisable to provide vegetables with high moisture content instead of water bottles, as they can be difficult to manage in transit. Rabbits should be checked regularly, particularly in hot weather.

Heavy or unsecured items, such as food bowls, should not be placed in the carriers, as these can pose injury risks during travel.

A rabbit should never be left unattended in a vehicle unless the air temperature within the vehicle is maintained below 20°C in the shade.