



RABBITS AND DOGS

Rabbit Runaway Orphanage (RRO) has had rabbits come into its care after the dog “playing” with the rabbit... sadly the rabbits have all died from their injuries.

As this info sheet was being compiled, this post came onto our facebook page it read:

“I feel horrible but my bunny had an accident early this morning, I've been to the vet and unfortunately he's got a broken jaw”

Subsequently the rabbit died. The rabbit had escaped its hutch/ door not latched properly/children left the door open, and the bunny was attacked by the family dog. *“The dog would never hurt it, it was only playing with it”* These are the types of stories we hear regularly.

Following several enquiries relating to rabbits and dogs , RRO has put together this document based on personal experiences from many of our supporters, ranging from an animal behaviourist, dog trainers, and dog/rabbit owners.

At first thought, one would assume that the two could not co-exist, as in their natural state, one is a predator and one is a prey animal. The majority of dog/rabbit owners who contributed to this article have stated that their dogs and rabbits get along very well, **when their interaction is supervised**. Additionally, they have separated their animals when they cannot be monitored.

RRO is of the opinion that they must never be left together unsupervised. Rabbits stress fairly easily as they are prey animals, and the stress of being around a predator may cause a “flight” response, to which a dog, with its natural predator instinct, may give chase and a tragedy could result.

Warning from an animal behaviour expert

“It depends on the bunny, the dog(s) and the owner as well as the owners skills in reading and managing their animals.

“Regardless of how skilfully we have introduced and worked with them, **the animal will always have its biological and behavioural evolutionary patterns related to emotional states or responses which may be drawn out and may be strong enough to over-ride other normal behaviours or 'taught' behaviours.** 'Taught' used for lack of a better term - simply meaning any behaviour which was shaped or influenced in some way by us, not necessarily one which was formally 'trained' or in the process of being trained.

Likewise in a household which mixes animals whose base nature is predatory or prey-based **we must always be aware of predatory drift, that there are species specific action patterns residing in them** - which has been modified and morphed for human use over the years but which still exists in all, even in animals who have lived together for many years. It may be low-frequency but of course it carries with it the highest of stakes.

In interspecies households you simply cannot afford to have a Disney view of any of the species involved or treat them as funny looking humans in fur-suits without courting disaster. Likewise the owner must be both aware of and dedicated to reading and managing each animal’s behaviour and emotional state as well as the overall environment in such a way as to ensure safety and harmony of all.”

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INTRODUCTIONS

Introducing a rabbit to a dog is best done slowly, over a period of time, in a controlled environment (for example, while the dog is on a leash and the rabbit in a crate), OR THE DOG IS IN A CRATE WITH THE RABBIT ABLE TO COME UP TO THE DOG TO INVESTIGATE IT. Although a few people have had successful and positive experiences having the two co-existing freely, **RRO is of the opinion that they must never be left together unsupervised.**

TRAGEDY

Rabbits stress fairly easily as they are prey animals, and the stress of being around a predator may cause a “flight” response, to which a dog, with its natural predator instinct, may give chase and a tragedy could result.

Or, the rabbit may decide to do a binky and speed around the yard- this could startle the dog, kicking in its instincts and causing it to give chase. Before the dog even realises, it may have already been too late for the rabbit.

A playful golden retriever for instance, might get excited and paw the rabbit. While it hasn't intended the rabbit any harm, the size of its paw and the strength with which it “played” with the rabbit may be enough to inflict a fatal injury.

DOG BREEDS

The breed of a dog however, is not indicative of its suitability to co-habit with a rabbit. While herding and hunting dogs may pose a greater risk, it is ultimately the personality/temperament of the individual dog and how it has been raised and trained, that needs to be taken into account.

Although the website below has categorised each breed for its reliability with other domestic pets, please note that it is not gospel, as there is always variation in character within each breed.

<http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/petreliability.htm>

As an example, a supporter reported her Samoyed and mini lop as being “inseparable”. When this Samoyed passed on, she got another, and her current Samoyed has a tendency to chase. As such, the owner has “kept him separated from my buns because I absolutely would not trust him despite introducing him to the buns in the same manner as I did (previous Samoyed)”.

Some breeds which have been reported to get along well with rabbits include: Jack Russel, Labrador, Greyhound, Papillion, Chinese Crested, Miniature Schnauzer, Border Collie, Whippet, Plott Hound, Maltese.

It is important to remember that many of these are exceptions to the rules (several are bred to hunt or herd) and their circumstances also vary.

It takes a lot of dedication to make this a success, though please bear in mind that accidents can still happen no matter how much precaution you take. Separation between dog and rabbit is crucial when adult supervision is not possible.