

RABBIT TRACKS: *Handling*

Introduction

It's important for you to learn to handle your 4-H rabbits properly. If you use proper handling techniques, you're less likely to hurt your rabbits and it's less likely they'll hurt you.

Proper rabbit handling and carrying methods vary according to the breed and size of the rabbit. Whatever method you use, be firm and let the rabbit know it is in your control. When you handle or carry a rabbit, keep it comfortable and prevent it from struggling or trying to escape. The procedures described in this bulletin will help you safely handle and carry rabbits of many breeds and sizes. The procedures are written for right-handed people. If you are left-handed, simply reverse the directions.



Ear-Nape-Hindquarters

This method is recommended for handling medium- or heavyweight rabbits. It keeps the rabbit under control. Most rabbits handled this way won't even struggle.

Hold the rabbit's ears in the palm of your hand, using only enough pressure to keep its head steady. With the rabbit facing your left elbow, firmly grasp a fold of fur and skin at the nape of its neck between the fingers and palm of your right hand. As you lift the rabbit's forequarters with your right hand, bring your left hand around to support its hindquarters (excluding the hocks).

To examine the rabbit, turn it over on a table by supporting its hindquarters in your left hand and gently rolling it onto its back. Let the rabbit's hindquarters rest on the table as

you hold it. This keeps your left hand free to examine the rabbit. When you've completed the examination, return the rabbit to its natural (posing) position by reversing the procedure.

When you need to move your medium- or heavyweight rabbit, pick it up gently (see fig. 1) and tuck it under your left arm. Many rabbits can be carried comfortably and safely in this position (see fig. 2). However, you shouldn't carry fryers you plan to "dress out" this way, because it may bruise their carcasses. You probably shouldn't carry "marked" rabbits this way, either, because it could distort their markings. Some rabbit breeders say that holding the rabbit by the neck can damage the fur of breeds such as Rex and Satin.

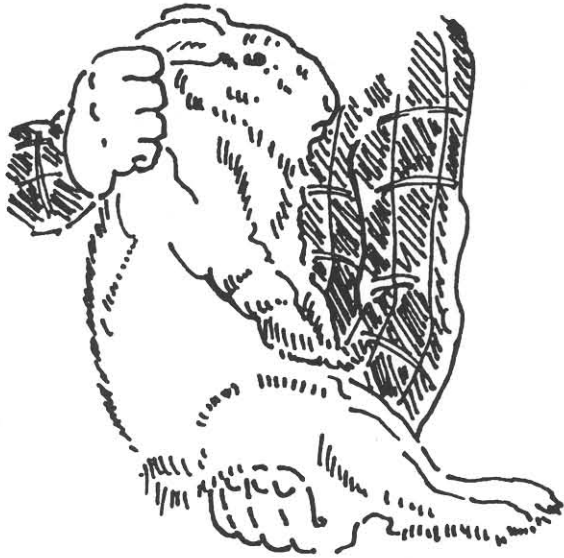


Figure 1. Suggested method for lifting medium- or heavyweight rabbits.



Figure 2. Suggested method for carrying medium- or heavyweight rabbits.

Ear-Hindquarters

This method is commonly used with small rabbit breeds, and is the one recommended for carrying and handling Dutch and other “marked” breeds because it doesn’t disturb their color patterns. Hold the rabbit’s ears firmly between the thumb and first finger of your right hand, and support its hindquarters with your left hand. You can usually control a small rabbit without holding the fur and skin of its neck.

To turn a rabbit over, rest its hindquarters on your left hand, and as you hold its ears with your right hand, use that hand to gently roll the animal onto its back. Simply reverse the procedure to return the rabbit to its natural (posing) position.

Lifting from the Underside

This is another handling and carrying method that is recommended for small- or medium-sized rabbit breeds. Pick up the rabbit by placing the palm of your hand under its abdomen and lifting. You won’t disturb the animal’s color pattern or markings with this method because you don’t really hold the rabbit very firmly.



There is one drawback to this method, however. Because you don't have a firm grip on a rabbit you're handling or carrying this way, it can easily escape. For that reason, you should probably only use this method to move rabbits short distances, such as from one spot to another on a judging table.

A variation of the "lifting from the underside" method is often used with large rabbit breeds. Move such a rabbit a short distance by picking it up with one hand under its chest and your other hand under its hindquarters. This procedure is faster than the "ear-nape-hindquarters" method described above and makes it easier for the rabbit to assume a normal pose quickly when you set it down. You can also use this method when handling fryers, since there is little chance of bruising their carcasses.

Lifting by the Loin


This method is recommended for handling fryer-size rabbits. With the fryer facing to your left, hold the animal's loin between its ribs and hip with your thumb and first two fingers. Most rabbits stay quiet and won't struggle when they're lifted or carried this way (see fig. 3). Commercial rabbitries use this method to move large numbers of fryers quickly. When done properly, this carrying method won't bruise the rabbit's carcass. 



Figure 3. Suggested method for lifting and carrying fryers.



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