

Rabbit Population in Shelters 1995-2000

Information concerning the number of rabbits abandoned in shelters during 1995-2000, rabbit “overpopulation”, and rabbit shelter intake numbers.

According to a survey done by an individual involved in rescue **an estimated 43,519 rabbits were abandoned in 1996 in shelters nationwide.** This is the only accurate estimate of the rabbit shelter population available.

Information from my own research into the rabbit shelter population:

There is no central reporting office for shelters, humane societies, or SPCAs so no one is tracking the number of rabbits entering shelters. The best way to gather accurate information is to get it from the shelters. So part of the Rabbit Education Society's mission is to compile and store shelter information on rabbits.

The following table represents **rabbit intake numbers from shelters** I have contacted and gotten data from, articles, and web sites. The numerical range represents the rabbit intake number reported by a shelter for a particular year. The percentages represent the percent of shelters that their intake numbers fell in that numerical range. %'s were rounded up.

Rabbit Intake per year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1-29	45%	44	18	55	72	77
30-50	28%	23	29	10	0	5
51-75	10%	16	0	3	5	3
76-100	5%	0	6	10	10	2
100-200	5%	9	18	9	5	6
101-300	3%	2	6	6	8	0
301-450	0%	2	6	0	0	7
451-500	3%	0	6	6	0	0
501-591	0%	5	12	0	0	0

**Nothing over 591 was reported Data prior to 1995 is sparse and therefore not represented in the table.

An expanded table for the above information:

Shelter Intake number for Rabbits	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1-10	25%	21%	6%	39%	62%	58%
12-29	20	23	12	16	10	19

30-50	28	23	29	10	0	5
51-75	10	16	0	3	5	3
76-100	5	0	6	10	10	2
100-150	5	9	18	6	5	6
151-200	0	0	0	3	0	0
201-250	3	0	6	3	8	0
251-300	0	2	0	3	0	0
301-350	0	2	6	0	0	5
351-450	0	0	0	0	0	2
451-500	3	0	6	6	0	0
501-591	0	5	12	0	0	0

Adoption rates for Rabbits:

Rate %	% of Shelters falling into that range
Up to 25% adoption rate	19%
26-50%	43%
51-75%	14%
76-100%	24%

Only 26% of these shelters work with a rabbit rescue group. It is also interesting to note that despite repeated requests for information only one rescue group, newly formed in Southern CA, has provided me information.

Most Frequent Reasons Given for Owner Surrender of Rabbit

Based on Shelter data totals 1995-2000

- 1) No time for & Moving 20%
- 2) Kids don't want 17%
- 3) Pain to care for/tired of having 17%
- 4) Allergies 9%
- 5) Too many 8%
- 6) Misc (won at fair, gift, stray)4%
- 7) too expensive 2%
- 8) Disposition & behavior problems .8%

Most Frequent Reasons Given for Owner Surrender of Rabbit

Based on Shelter data for 2000

- 1) No time for 24%
- 2) Kids don't want 20%
- 3) Moving 17%
- 4) Other 12%

- 5) Too many 10%
- 6) Allergies 7%
- 7) Pain to care for/tired of having 5%
- 8) Disposition & too expensive 2% ea.

Owner surrendered vs Stray: Most shelters do not tabulate how many rabbits come in as strays. Of those that did the average number of strays per year were 1995 (22%) 1996 (23%) 1997 (13%) 1998 (17%). Santa Clara HS reported 33% strays in 1995 and 45% in 1996. So although we can't calculate the number of rabbits released into parks or wooded areas some portion of that population is included in shelter data.

Whose To Blame?

Shelter workers report that the majority of abandoned rabbits are due to pet store impulse buys and accidental litters. One worker in particular noted that 1985-1986 saw a peak in rabbit abandonment. Since then the number has stabilized and may be declining. The late 80's was also the peak of the pet rabbit fad. According to an article in Rabbits 1998-99 "The most common rescues are the 'discarded Easter bunnies' according to Marinell Harriman HRS. "People have purchased them without all the facts, and then they grow up."

Irresponsible pet owners unwilling to make a commitment to responsible pet ownership are solely to blame for rabbits being abandoned. The rabbit rights groups want us to believe breeders are somehow to blame, but who is taking these rabbits to the shelter, it's not the breeder. From a private rescuer on a pet group: "I must say though that 99% of the rabbits that come to me came from either a pet store or a person they found in the newspaper. NOT from a responsible breeder." Most shelter workers agree that most breeders are not to blame and that few if any rabbits from reputable breeders end up abandoned.

Just The Facts:

American Pet Products Manufacturers Assoc. From ASPCA Shelter magazine:

From 1992-2000 percentage of small animal households owning rabbits went from 24% to 40%

5.3 million rabbits owned by 2.2 million households in the US

Number of adults only households ownership of rabbits went from 26% in 1996 to 39% in 2000

Pet Products Manufacturing Assoc. in 1996 estimates over 4 million pet rabbits residing within 1.44 million households. In the 1994 issue of Shelter Sense from HSUS the number of pet rabbits in the US was 3.3 million from the American Pet Products Manufacturers Assoc. If one uses the 1996 estimate of 43,519 rabbits abandoned in US shelters that is only 1.09% of the total pet rabbit population.

"In 1996, about 5.1 million animals-1.5 million dogs, 3.5 million cats and some raccoons, skunks, ferrets, gerbils, were euthanized in shelters, says Merritt Clifton, editor of Animal

People, a 15,000-circulation newspaper based in C Wash. That's down tremendously from the 17.8 million put down in 1987, the peak of recorded shelter euthanasia, he says." *Animal Supporters At Odds* by Martha Waggoner 5/11/97. So we do know that there were less than 100,000 "other" animals euthanized at shelters in 1996.

According to the AVMA there are 59 million cats and 52.9 million dogs kept as pets. So according to this information and that of *Animal People*, 6% of the total pet cat population was euthanized and 3% of the total pet dog population.

UK Rabbit numbers

UK 2000: 33,000 pet rabbits were taken to rescue centres last year - an increase of almost 30% on 1999 (survey by The Rabbit Charity)

"17,500 unwanted rabbits in 1996 passed through rescue centres" Linda Dykes **BHRA** 1997

"The resolution of rabbit behaviour problems is still, however, a minority interest-rescue societies are inundated with unwanted pet rabbits. Records of the number of rabbits put to sleep because of behaviour problems are scarce, but a survey conducted in 1995 indicated that 16,000 rabbits were given up to UK rescue centres. In 1997 a survey of 200 UK rescue centres, conducted by Morwen Abbott of one known as 'Cottontails', showed that this number had increased to 24,000." Pg. 21-22 "Why Does My Rabbit? By Anne McBride @1998

According to the same book in 1995 the rabbit was the third most popular mammalian pet in the UK (Cat #1 and Dog #2) with over 1.4 million kept as pets in the UK. What is encouraging is that the number of rabbits abandoned per year (24,000 in 1997) is only 1.7% of the total pet rabbit population.

Other Population Data

Pet Industry Online

Other pet statistics

In 1998 six in ten U.S. households tend to shell out for pets, but the rates vary from place to place. Americans care for about 13 million birds, 4 million horses, 6 million rabbits and ferrets, 5 million rodents, 3.5 million reptiles and 56 million fish.