

## How to Speak Rabbit

### Understanding Your Rabbit : Behavioral and Vocal Communication

Rabbits have a complex language all their own. They talk to each other and to humans using a wide variety of body positions and a few vocalizations. Your own rabbit's personality and dialect can best be learned through patient observation. Learning to "read" your rabbit and understanding how they communicate is one of the joys of sharing your home with a rabbit. Watch closely to learn the fascinating intricacies of "rabbit-talk."

- **Ears**  
Ears are like a rabbit's radar. They are used for tuning in to what's going on around them. Their ears are both expressive and inquisitive. Watch to see if you can figure out just what both ears forward, both ears back, or one ear forward and one ear back means. Hint: "Something has caught my attention." "I'm giving my radar a rest." "Something is going on which doesn't yet warrant my full attention."
- **Grunting**  
Grunts are often angry reactions to a human behavior or towards another rabbit and may be followed by scratching or biting. Rabbits grunt when they feel threatened, or to show their disapproval if they do not want to be handled – means "leave me alone" -or- "back off!" Some rabbits show their disapproval by grunting to protect what is theirs (cage, food, etc.) from a human hand or another rabbit and often, that is the extent of their anger.
- **Tooth-clicking**  
Indicates great pleasure and contentment – means "I'm a happy rabbit." Tooth-clicking, often described as like a cat's purring, occurs while a rabbit is being petted/stroked or when they are completely relaxed and comfortable with their environment.
- **Tooth-grinding**  
Indicates severe pain, discomfort, or stress. Often, body language accompanying tooth-grinding is that of a rabbit sitting hunched up in corner of a room or cage. Your rabbit is sick and you need to seek veterinary care immediately.
- **Honking**  
Soft, almost inaudible sounds is a courting behavior. Honking is usually accompanied by circling.

- **Circling**  
Circling Also a courting behavior. Can be used to get attention from human companions.
- **Mounting**  
Indicates a hormonal rabbit and time for spaying or neutering. (See honking and circling.) For altered rabbits, this behavior says "I'm the dominant rabbit and don't you forget it."
- **Spraying**  
Another sign its time for spaying or neutering. Males that are not neutered will mark their territory, including you, other pets, everything in range! One little hop really gets it flying! Females will also spray.
- **Territory droppings**  
Droppings that are not in a pile, but are scattered, are signs that this territory belongs to the rabbit. This will often occur upon entering a new environment. If another rabbit lives in the same house this may always be a nuisance.
- **Chinning**  
Scent glands are located under a rabbit's chin. Rubbing with the underside of the chin is your rabbit's way of marking his/her territory – "this belongs to me" -or- "I've been here."
- **Thumping**  
Rabbits thump to get attention, to express displeasure, fear, or as a warning to others at something seen or heard.
- **Nose-nudging**  
Means several things in rabbit language: "Pet me now" -or- "Move out of the way" -or- "Pay attention to me."
- **Flopping**  
Indicates a totally relaxed, comfortable rabbit. Your rabbit appears to have an attack, suddenly falling or flipping over on his/her side exposing their belly. Means "life is wonderful."
- **Tail-wagging**  
Believe it or not, your rabbit can, and will wag his/her tail. Indicates defiance – "No, I don't want to go to my cage!" -or- "You can't make me!" -or- "You're not the boss of me!" Watch closely and you'll see that your rabbit will occasionally "back-talk" – they just think you won't notice!
- **Begging**  
Rabbits are particularly bad about begging, especially for sweets. Who

can resist those eyes and that cute mouth? Beware of giving treats as overweight rabbits are not as healthy as trim rabbits.

- **REM sleep**

Watch to see – your rabbits eyelids twitch, his ears twitch, and his whiskers vibrate. His teeth click. He starts to fall to one side, then rights himself, then relaxes again. You have a comfortable, happy rabbit who is slipping off to bunny dreamland!

- **Dancing**

Your rabbit is dashing about the room, kicking up her heels and making 180-degree turns in mid-air. The House Rabbit Handbook describes dancing as a “frolicking series of sideways kicks and midair leaps accompanied by a few head shakes and body gyrations.” This is a happy rabbit, content and in a great frame of mind.

- **Playing**

Rabbits like to push or toss objects around – even bowls and/or litterboxes. Give your rabbit some toys and watch the fun!

- **Happy feet**

Hind feet are stretched out fully behind your rabbit. Means “I’m relaxed and comfortable but ready to move at a moments notice.”

- **Nipping**

Like a little pinch, nipping can also mean several different in rabbit language. “I want your attention – NOW!” -or- “This is a warning.” Nipping can also be used in a grooming sense as in “I like that you pet me so, I will groom you.”

- **Licking**

Rabbits lick for affection, not for salt. Licking means “I love you, I trust you.”

- **Lunging**

Lunging may occur when you reach into your rabbit's cage to clean, give food, or to take your rabbit out – a sign of disapproval. Can usually be remedied by getting the rabbit accustomed to whatever is occurring. In the meantime, place your hand on your rabbit's head to calm him/her while performing the task.

- **Don't touch my stuff**

Some rabbits rebel (and are none too concerned about showing you) when you rearrange or move items in their cage. As creatures of habit and when they get things just right, they like them to remain that way.

- **Tense body, upright tail, laid back ears**  
Means “watch out” – your rabbit is on the offensive and is prepared to lunge and possibly bite.
- **Third inner eyelid shows in corner of eye**  
Indicates fright or uneasiness, a sign of stress.
- **Screaming**  
Indicates mortal terror or excruciating pain.