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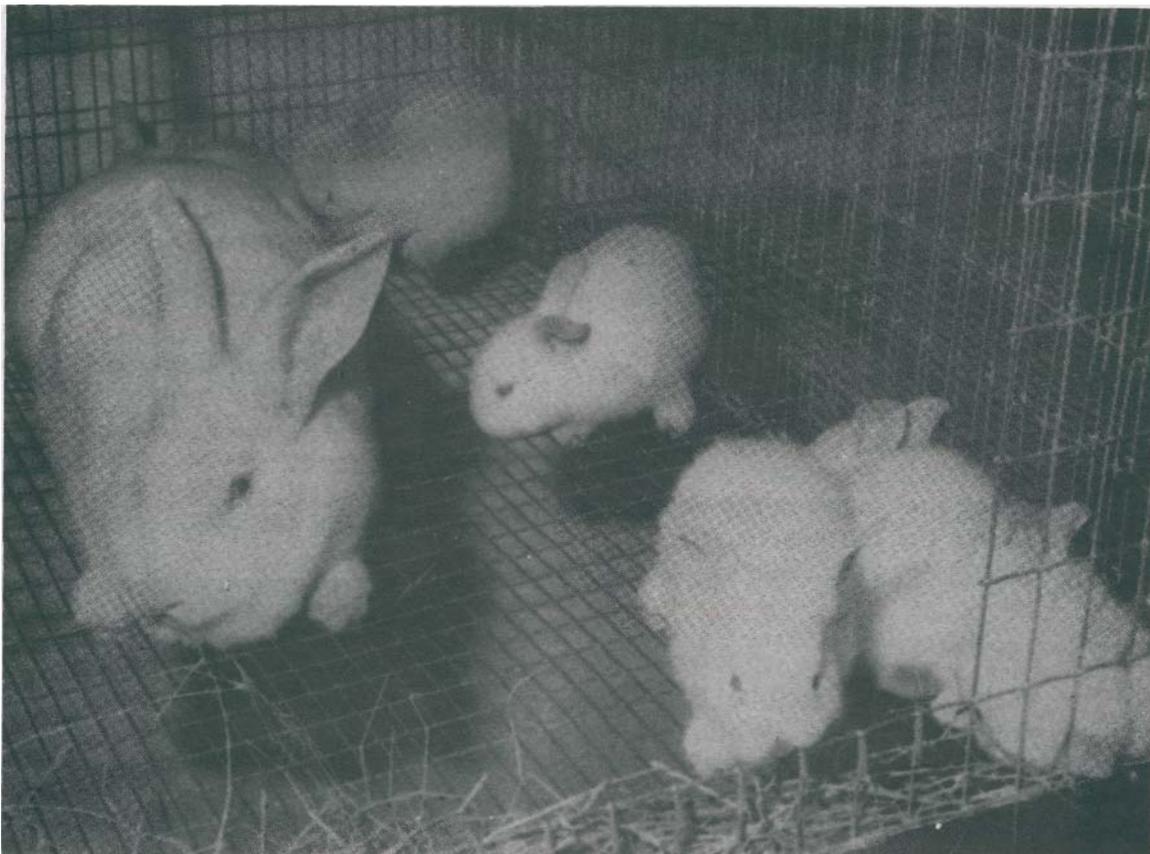
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# Factsheet

## A GUIDE TO BREEDING

# Rabbits



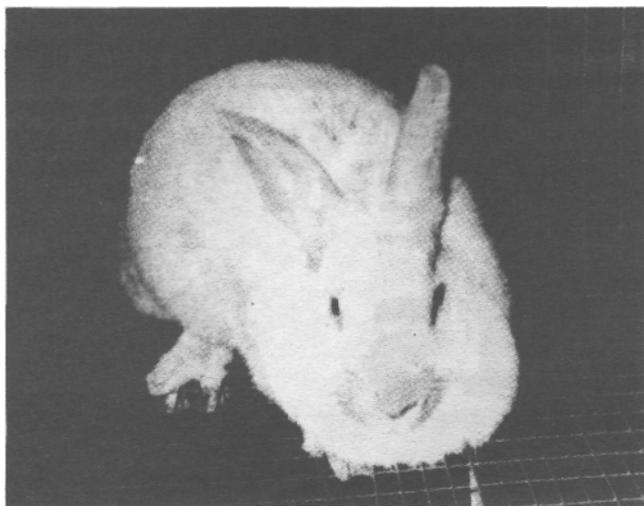
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**BARCLAYS**

The success of your breeding programme depends very much on the breeding practices used. The recommendations suggested in this factsheet are made as a result of extensive experimental work conducted at many Universities and Research Centres throughout the world.



### HANDLING THE STUD BUCK

It is important that the stud buck be given the best care and treatment available. Breeding bucks are the most important animals in your rabbitry. A strong, vigorous mature buck can be used two or three times a week for up to four weeks. Do not use him for breeding that regularly for more than four weeks, since over use can often ruin any buck as a reliable breeder. A buck's physical condition will influence the health and vitality (strength) of his offspring. Bucks in poor condition, or too fat or over used for breeding may either go sterile or sire small litters.

Remember keep your stud bucks in top condition and you will realize the full benefit of their breeding value.

### AGE TO BREED

Generally the smaller breeds, such as Polish, mature at about 4 months of age. While the medium-weight breeds such as New Zealand, Chincillas and Californians mature at 6 to 7 months; and the heavy Flemish at 9 to 12 months.

It is a good management practice to restrict young New Zealand White bucks 6 to 9 months of age to mating 2 does per month. After they are over 9 months of age they should be used, the same as adult bucks, for breeding one doe a week the usual number of does kept for each buck is ten.

### HANDLING THE BREEDING DOE

It is advisable to mate does when they are coming into maturity; some difficulty may be experienced if mating is delayed too long. Proper handling of the breeding doe and providing her with a comfortable hutch and nest box are also necessary for a sound breeding programme.

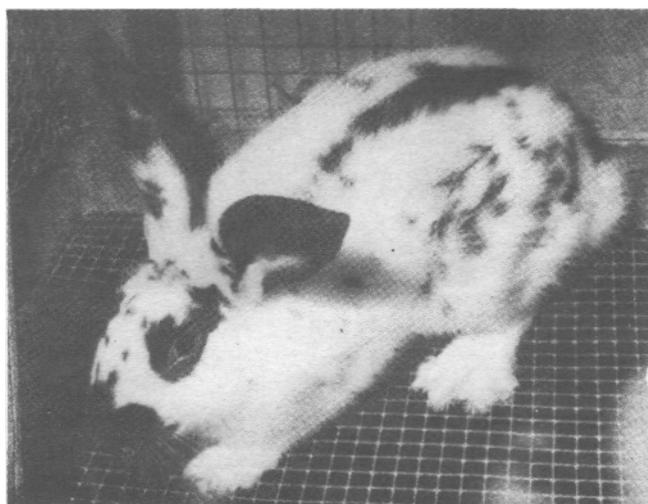
Breed young does of the small and medium breeds at 6 months of age and giant breeds when they are 8 to 9 months old. As with all animals, the growth and physical development of the individual doe should be the final deciding factor when to breed.

Many breeding failures result from the does being overfat. Overweight does are usually lazy breeders and are reluctant to accept the service of the buck. Feed your does to maintain them in good condition of flesh and be always on the look out for overfatness.

Keep all young and adult does in separate hutches (pens) for at least 21 days before trying to get them to mate. Sexual stimulation may result from one doe riding another causing the doe to develop a case of false pregnancy. False pregnancy lasts for 17 days and the doe will certainly not conceive during this period. However, if the doe starts pulling fur or building a nest around 18 to 20 days after mating, it indicates the end of false pregnancy. Rebreed her immediately.

### GESTATION PERIOD

This is the period of time between mating and kindling (birth of the young rabbits). The gestation period is 31 to 32 days. Some litters may be kindled as early as the 29th day or as late as the 35th day. Most of the litters will be born between the 30th and 33rd day.



## BREEDING SCHEDULES

Unlike most other animals, rabbits do not have a regular heat cycle (oestrus). Consequently they can be bred at any time. Conceptions will be highest during the cool months of the year and lowest during the hot and humid months. Does can be bred for 4 to 5 litters per year, once they are kept in good condition.

To produce four litters a year breed the doe immediately after her young are weaned at 8 weeks. If five litters are required a year then breed the doe 6 weeks (42 days) after kindling. With proper care and sound feeding the productive life of a doe is about 3 years.

It is important to remember that breeding schedules really are determined by the individual doe. For example:

- (i) Although it is possible for a doe to produce 5 litters a year, this practice is not recommended for everyone to try.
- (ii) Overweight does in many cases should be bred when the litter is 4 to 5 weeks old.
- (iii) Heavy milking does (poorer condition) should not be bred until the litter is weaned or even a week after the litter has been weaned.
- (iv) If a litter is lost at birth and the doe is otherwise healthy, she can be re-bred in three or four days.

## BREEDING TECHNIQUE

Take the doe to the buck's hutch for breeding since most bucks are slow in mating in a strange surrounding. Also the doe will not take too kindly to any buck placed in her hutch. Does have been known to attack and injure bucks placed in their hutch. If the doe refuses to accept service from the buck within a few minutes remove her and return her to the buck later.

It is a good practice to mate the pair, remove the **doe** and after five hours remate the pair. Because of the possibility of false pregnancy, all **does** are re-bred again on the 18th day.

Should the **doe** run about the cage, simply hold your hand in front of her face to prevent her from running. Sometimes this is all that is necessary.

## RECOGNISING THE MATING ACT

When a **buck** serves a doe properly, he usually falls over onto his side or back. Since the doe will not release the eggs to be fertilized until she has been stimulated properly at mating it is recommended that

she be mated twice to ensure adequate stimulation. This is why it is suggested to **rebreed her 5 hours after the first mating.**

## TESTING FOR PREGNANCY

There are two common methods used for pregnancy testing:

- (i) Test breeding — as the term suggests this means taking the doe again to the buck's hutch 18 days after her first mating. If she refuses service and refuses the buck by fighting and "growling" you can assume that she is pregnant.
- (ii) Palpation — This method is reliable only in the hands of experts. The stomach area of the doe is carefully felt and manipulated in an effort to feel the presence of young in the doe's womb.

N.B. Unless you have been trained to palpate the doe **DO NOT** try it because this unnecessary handling can upset her.

## BREEDING DIFFICULTIES:

**Many factors are responsible for breeding difficulties.**

Sterility and false pregnancy are the two most common causes of a doe's failure to conceive. Extreme age, poor physical condition, molting, sore hocks, injuries and disease are factors that cause the doe to produce small litters and/ or reduced number of litters a year.

Good breeding cannot be obtained unless you have good animals, good feed, good housing and good management.



