



Welsh's HoneyBuns Rabbitry

lionhead, netherland and holland lop rabbits
in the pikes peak and front range region of colorado

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Birth and Babies

The information provided is the opinion of Welsh's Honeybuns based on our experiences and care. Different breeders will have different opinions. For any health issues always check with your rabbit vet on questions regarding the proper care!

Issues Discussed:

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Breeding - Please be responsible with your breeding! If you are not ready for babies **do not put bucks and does together** even if you think they won't do anything, or if you've heard things such as 'heat makes the buck temporarily sterile so they cannot breed in the summer' (only true in extreme heat) etc. Rabbits are extremely prolific and you **will** end up with babies if you put a buck and doe together. What age are they ready? That depends on the breed and the size of your rabbit. Although they sexually mature around 4 months, average wait time is 6 months. They can have babies every 30 days, will get pregnant again on the same day they had babies (if with a buck), and can be pregnant with 2 litters at the same time. Bucks mature slower than the does on average and may 'shoot blanks' for a while.. NOTE: We make sure the buck is similar in size or smaller than the doe - especially with first time mothers. If we have a proven doe who has had several litters we will consider breeding to a larger buck if we need to. Rabbits breed best at mornings and evenings. Take the doe to the bucks cage. This way the buck is not distracted by new surroundings. Sometimes the doe will attack the buck if he is brought to her cage. Sometimes the does will run around the cage first. This is OK. If she's ready, she will quickly stretch out and put her tail up. Sometimes the buck (especially if he is young) will jump on the wrong end of the doe. He may sit on her face or on her side. Eventually he'll get it right. If you have a new buck and a proven doe she will usually rearrange herself to be in the correct position. Once they are 'lined up' correctly it only takes a few seconds. The buck will usually squeak loudly and will fall off to the side. Leave them in for a few minutes more to see if they will breed again. This can increase your litter size and your chances in general. Once she is finished with him (after 2 or 3 times) she will likely become hostile. She will put her butt squarely on the bottom of the cage and may even attack the buck if he bothers her. At that point separate them.

Line Breeding

Line breeding is breeding within a family such as mother to son or father to daughter. This is used when you want to enhance a good trait within the 2 rabbits. You do not want to breed brother to sister because the lines are too close. Line breeding should only be done with 2 carefully chosen rabbits for good traits. If they both have a bad trait, the line breeding will not help. [Here is a good chart on line breeding](#). It shows what the results of your crosses will be.

Quick and Simple Colors and Genetics

What color babies will I get from my parents? Although genetics sound complicated, there are simple ways to start figuring your colors. Based on each parent's pedigree you can figure the likely color of your litters.

 Use your rabbit's color to find the 'genotype' on this list.

<http://www.sociablerabbitry.com/us.htm>

 Once you know the basic genotype either from a pedigree from your breeder, or from a genotype list [Click here](#) to simply enter your parent genotypes in a calculator to see the baby colors you will get.

There will inevitably be some 'unknowns' in your genotype so you may get surprise colors. This is all part of the fun when breeding rabbits AND these new colors help you fill in the unknowns in your parent's genetics.

Care of Doe - after a doe is bred she will become extremely moody. The timing varies. Sometimes it is immediate and sometimes she doesn't become moody until a week or so before.

 Until you know your doe and how she will behave it is best to keep all other rabbits away from her.

 About 2 weeks before she is due we put her on higher protein food for pregnant and lactating does. You can also add calfmana to her feed in order to get her the protein she needs. You only need about a teaspoon in her food. These can usually be found at any feed stores. About 3 days before birth we give her [Tums](#) (1 per day in 1/2 pieces) in order to supply extra calcium for labor and contractions. We use the berry flavored tums and they love them. You can also use spinach and other calcium rich foods instead.

🐰 After a doe is bred typically she will have her litter 30 days later. This can vary by a few days so it is best to have the nest box in with her at 28 days (at the latest). You don't want to put it in too early or she may use the box as a litterbox. If you put some straw in her cage and you notice that she gathers the straw (or even her feed hay) in her mouth (see picture at left) and starts going to each corner of the cage, she is ready for a nest box no matter how early it is. Fill the nest box with plenty of straw and put it in a corner of the cage. She will arrange the straw how she wants and right before birth will usually pull her belly fur out to line the nest. She may pull so much that she is bald on the lower half of her body. That is ok. If you don't want to use straw you can also use 'litter saver'



filler from [KWCages](#). We use this with first time mothers because sometimes they don't pull enough fur for the litter. It is a very light, all natural fluffy warm filler. Its perfect for next boxes, doesn't entangle the babies and is pretty cheap. The nest box should be just a little bigger than her whole body. This will allow her to maneuver around her babies. It doesn't need to be much bigger than that. You can have a lid on the box but it is not required (see picture on left). Our does typically like to sit on the top of the box in order to be up higher. If the doe makes her nest outside of the box on the wire floor keep a close eye in order to catch the babies soon after they are born. At that time move the whole nest that she has made, into the nest box. Even if ours have the babies outside of the box, they usually do not have a problem with you moving them into the box after the birth. **Note: Make sure the box does not have a slick floor. The babies need something that will not cause them to slide around. This can cause leg 'splay' and ruin whole litters.** We do not use metal floored nest boxes for this reason. She will almost stop eating and drinking immediately before she has her litter. But she should pick up again right after she has the babies. During birth, the doe's levels of calcium can drop to a dangerous low. Providing spinach and/or a crushed up fruit flavored tums can help get her back to safe levels.

Birthing - Kindling

There will probably be some blood. You may see some around the cage or in the nest box. It won't be tons of blood but will probably be smeared here and there. When the mom is having the babies she will usually be sitting in the nest box. Some new moms run around an have babies on the wire. It just depends on the mom. Just watch and make sure babies end up in the box so they stay warm. There will also be afterbirth which the doe typically eats. If it's left in the nest box just remove it. The number of kits depends greatly on the breed and size of your doe. Netherlands typically have 2-4 kits (less in their first litter) and Lionheads typically have 6-8 (less in their first litter). A first time doe will likely have still-born babies and sometimes will lose the whole litter. This is not unusual. sometimes there will be '[peanuts](#)' in the smaller breeds. She also may have babies on the wire'. Meaning, she may have babies outside of the nest box on the floor or in the litterbox etc. If these are not caught quickly they will freeze. If you are caught by surprise and don't have a nestbox, get a shoebox and put in some straw (hay is typically not warm enough by itself). Gently place the babies on the straw. Do not put cloth in the nest. The babies can become entangled in it or beneath it. Then just leave them with the mother. First time does may not pull fur until after the litter is born. That's ok and they will learn with future litters to pull it ahead of time. The first time they may not pull enough - or even pull so much that they leave bald patches. We usually gather extra fur from other litters and save the fur for the new mothers. We will put some in the nest box before the babies are born. We also take fur from the netherlands boxes and use it for the Lionheads so the Lionheads won't pull so much of their mane. If you do want to keep hair, keep it in a paper bag. This will keep the hair smelling clean and will allow the hair to stay dry and to 'breathe'. Or you can use [KWCages](#) 'litter saver'. It's a natural, no smell, fluffy warm filler for nest boxes. Its wonderful stuff, keeps the babies very warm, the mother doesn't pull a ton of her hair out and it doesn't entangle the babies. It's also pretty cheap. Once the doe is pulling fur she is very close to having the babies (if she hasn't had them already). Make sure she is in a quiet, protected place and is not disturbed. It will take about 20 minutes for her to have the litter once she has started. Usually the doe will stop eating, drinking and pooping right before she has the babies. She will start doing these things after she is finished. The doe will probably wait a few hours before she feeds them the first time so don't worry if you don't see her near them. You can touch the babies soon after birth. We always check to make sure there are no dead babies in the box, that everyone is warm and doesn't need help. Once you've checked on them - leave them alone for a while so the mom doesn't get agitated. Some new moms can get agitated and confused so try not to bother her a lot in the first day or so. New babies need to stay warm - but you should **keep newborns inside during the summer** so they do not overheat. 80 degrees is dangerous. Unless you are a breeder - and have worked with litters a while to know what is safe and not safe -keep them inside so the temperature can be moderated. Note: many first time does will lose their entire first litter. This is normal and does not mean the doe is a bad doe. First time moms are not always that great. Also, if you have litters in the winter and spring, the mortality rate (abandoned litters, crushed litters etc) can be quite high. Most breeders will breed a doe at least 3 times before they decide whether or not she is a successful breeder. First time moms will usually have smaller litters than experienced moms. This could even be just one large baby. That's normal.

Birthing (Kindling) Complications

There are many types of birthing complications especially with the smaller breeds. Some issues that

we have had are 'stuck babies' and abandoned babies.

 **Treatment for stuck babies** - Hollands and Netherlands can easily have stuck babies due to their small bodies. This is more common for first time mothers. Rabbits usually have the babies very quickly once they start to kindle- typically within 20 minutes or so. You can tell that babies are stuck if the mother is continuing to strain or have contractions over a long period of time. We try to wait an hour or so, in order to make sure she is still in labor. Although you don't want to disturb a birthing mother you need to take action if you think her babies are stuck. At that point your babies are probably no longer alive and will start to quickly break down. This puts the mother in great risk of toxic shock. You can gently palpitate the mother's stomach area to see if you feel any babies (will feel like a marble). If you haven't done this before though it may be difficult to tell. Check the vent and see if you see a baby. If you do, you can put a small amount of vaseline on the vent and then try to gently grab the baby. Pull very very gently at a 90 degree angle from the doe (if she is sitting normally then you would pull straight down). Try to pull with the doe's contractions. Do not pull all at once and be extremely careful not to tear the babies skin - this can cause an infection in the doe. If you do not see a baby and the doe is continuing to strain you should see a vet. The vet can tell you how many babies are left as well as if they are stuck in the birth canal. The vet will also be able to offer you some shots which will boost the doe's natural contractions. Sometimes the doe is so weak by the time you find her or take her to the vet that she cannot push much on her own. Calcium is the natural trigger for contractions. If you can get the doe to somehow eat some spinach or something else high in calcium (like cherry Tums) that will help her to replenish somewhat. Make sure some is available in her cage at all times in case she does eat. We have found that if the doe's contractions have stopped, we gently palpate her and she will almost immediately start 1 set of contractions. We let her rest and continue this every 20 minutes or so. Eventually - each of our does has had the babies (although none of the babies have been alive). You know she has had the last baby when 1. you palpate and don't feel any more 2. you see the afterbirth and 3. you will notice a large change in her behavior. She will start to eat and drink almost immediately and she will poop (ours stop doing all of that when they kindle). She will no longer have contractions when you palpitate. If any of the babies are born torn or missing parts you need to contact your vet and put her on antibiotics immediately. This will help combat infections and toxic shock. The medication tastes like peppermint (which they love), is not expensive and will greatly help your doe.

Births a couple days apart

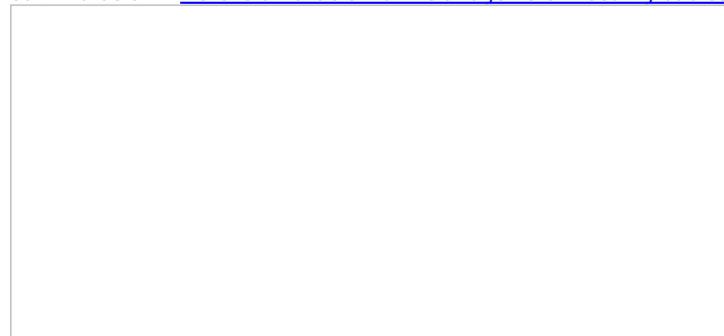
Occasionally babies may be born 1 day and a few more babies may be born a few days later. This is not a usually a bad thing, although it is rare. Rabbits can be pregnant with 2 separate litters at the same time. Usually they are born 2-3 days apart. Just handle the birth as you would with any other litter. We always leave the nest box in a couple days afterwards 'just in case'. We have found that if a doe has a litter a few days apart - that she may do that often with future breedings as well. So if a doe does have babies a few days apart, always make sure you have a nest box in with the doe for about a week or so "after" for all future breedings.

Dead Kits

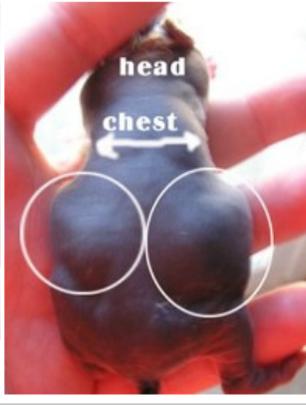
Often first time births will have dead kits. This can be caused by problems during birthing or by the mom not taking care of them and many many other reasons. Even in future litters there may often be 1 or 2 dead kits. It does not mean you have a bad mom or a difficult brood doe. Contrary to popular belief, rabbits are not usually great mothers. Rule of thumb for breeders - If the doe did not seem to have birthing difficulties (such as stuck kits) breed at least 3 times before deciding if you want to continue with this brood doe. Very very often, the doe will have full healthy litters by the 3rd time. She will have learned how to take care of them better and the mortality rate will be much better. Remember that litters in the winter, or during extreme heat will have a much higher death rate as well. Moms will abandon them more often, will stop feeding, will sit on them, not cover them etc. There can be many reasons why a birth is not successful which is why many breeders will try at least 3 times before deciding what to do. Narrow hips can cause future problems for future litters though. Sometimes the second litter will be fine, and sometimes it can continue to be a very risky situation for her. The health of the doe should always be your first concern. If narrow hips are a problem, then you may want to consider using a different doe.

Feeding Babies (kits)

How to tell if your babies are being fed and treatment for abandoned babies -In addition to our info below...[Here is an article from islandgems on feeding babies.](#)



Don't be alarmed if many of the babies are dead at birth if this is the doe's first litter. First time mothers can be easily confused especially if they had the babies on the wire rather than in a nest box. But most of the time, if you catch them soon enough and put them in a nest box (even a shoebox will work) the mother will pull her fur and make a



nest. This is a good sign that she's starting to understand what she needs to be doing. Usually if they do this they will be ok. On rare occasions they do abandoned the babies.
NOTE: don't be alarmed if you don't see her feeding the babies. Rabbits only need to be fed a few times for a few minutes a day. Also, most feedings are done early morning or evening when you may not be around. A way to tell if they are being fed is if they have 'frog' bellies. See the pictures below of some

well fed babies. Rather than just having a straight body or having stomachs that are shrunk in after their rib cage, the babies will have a round belly - protruding out to the sides like a toad - when they have been fed. You can also check their nose to see if you see tiny bits of dried milk from when they drink. If the babies have are warm to the touch then they are likely being fed. If they feel cool then they probably aren't. Unless the mother is killing the babies, don't remove them from the mother's cage.

If you are **sure** your babies have been abandoned there are a few things you can do.

 **Fostering** First - you must make sure they keep warm. If they are cool to the touch they

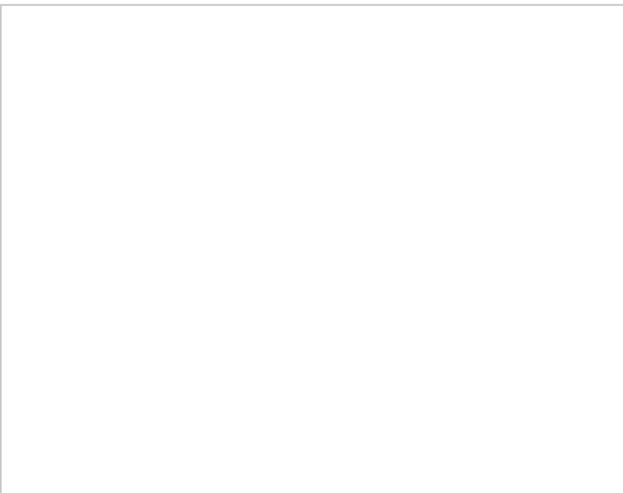


are losing tons of energy trying to keep warm. They will die much faster if they are cold. The best way we have found to keep warm constantly is by putting a heating pad underneath the outside of the nest box. **CAREFUL: you do not want to overheat them.**

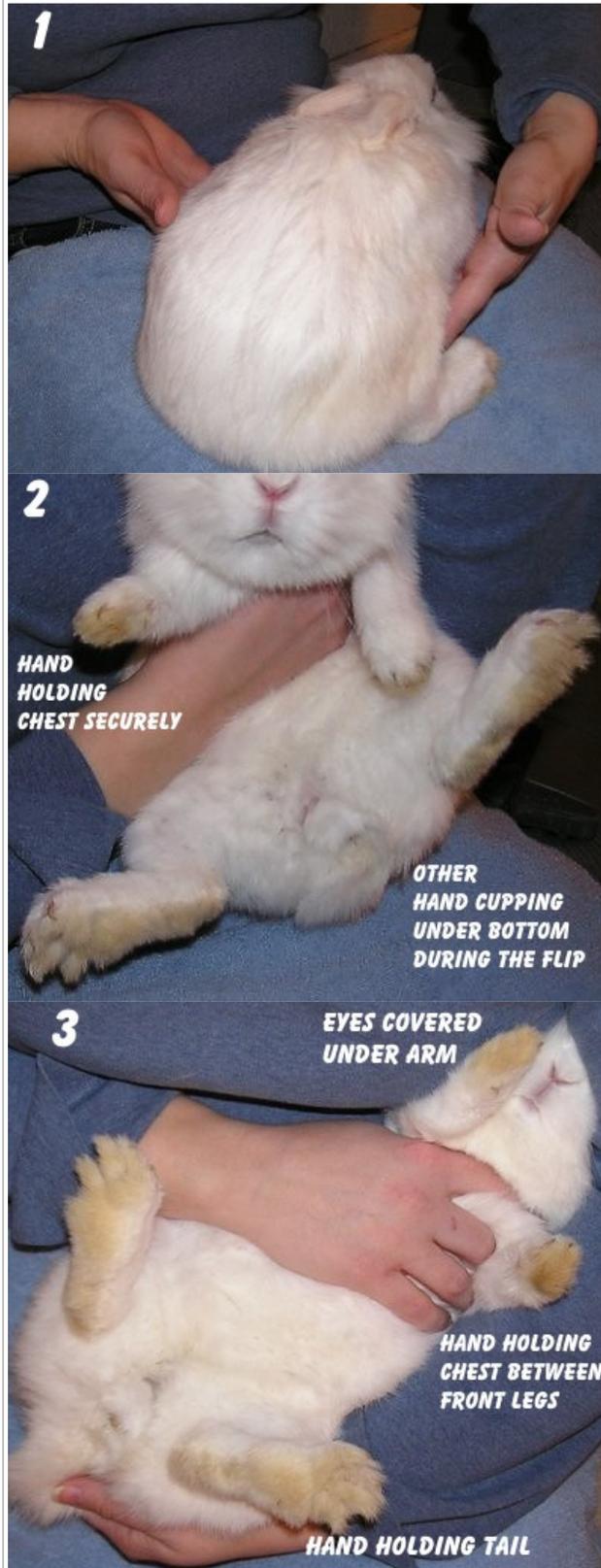
Put the heating pad on LOW and put it about 2-3 inches away from the bottom of the nest box. (see picture below). This can be done by stacking books and laying the box in between etc. **DO NOT** lay the whole nest box directly on the

heating pad (except on the edges of the box if you need to). They only need a tiny bit of constant warmth in order to stay warm. Make sure the nest box has some fur from the mother or something to keep the babies covered. Blankets and cloth are not the best because the babies usually end up separated from each other around the blanket.

 **Best fostering method** - You can try to find a mother who has babies the same age and move the babies into that nest box. If you put a tiny dab vanilla extract on the head and tail she should accept them. Watch closely to make sure there are no problems. If they are cool to the touch after about 12 hours then they are probably not being fed. They should be nice and warm if they are well fed. Note: not all does will accept other babies so check them often. If they continue to get colder after about 4-6 hours, or if they are injured you will need to try another method.



 **Second best fostering method** - you can hold the mother on her back (gently and making sure she is comfortable) and 'hook' the babies up - twice a day until they have had their fill. The key to this is making sure the mother is relaxed. If she is not relaxed, her body will not let the milk down and the babies will not receive nourishment. This whole process is much easier if you have 2 people. One person holding the doe and one person managing the babies. First we usually let the mom sit normally on our lap and we gently massage underneath her body around the nipples to stimulate the milk 'drop' (see picture 1). Next we make sure the person holding the doe is in a very



comfortable position. You don't have to have to move in the middle of a feeding. Sit on the floor and put your back straight up against a wall. Put a towel across your legs to give the doe uniform support and to catch babies if they fall off her. Gently flip her on her back. (see picture 2) One hand is between her front legs and the other is holding her bottom and her tail securely (but not hurting her) in order to keep her from kicking the babies if she gets upset. We tuck her eyes and ears under my arm/armpit in order to keep her more calm (see picture 3). If the mother is extremely unhappy she will likely kick with her back feet. If that is the case you can hold her 2 back feet together with one hand, instead of holding her butt and tail. Then we gently rub her stomach a little to get her to relax. Next we put as many babies (usually about 3 or 4) on her at once. More babies seem to stimulate the milk more and it makes the process quicker. The quicker the better because this is very stressful to the mom and usually they hate it. The longer it takes the more stressed she will get. The babies will be somewhat frantic at the beginning. Gently move them to the nipples and keep them on her body. If they fall asleep on her, gently rub them with a finger to get them to eat more. If they continue to fall asleep remove them and add a different baby. At that point they are usually full, or too weak to continue. If the mother starts to kick out or try to flip over remove the babies immediately and release the mother. Let her calm down. Then you can decide if the babies have gotten some nourishment or if you want to try again. If the babies have gotten some it is best to put the mom away so she doesn't get overly annoyed. Feed with this method 3 times a day if the babies are very skinny or cold. Feed only 2 times a day if the babies are looking OK. This will reduce stress to the mom and they are already getting plenty of nourishment.

In the first few days it may take 1/2 an hour or more for babies to get any nourishment. This method can be EXTREMELY time consuming and the milk may not 'come down' right away. That's ok. Let them eat as long as the doe is laying still and the babies are trying. After about 4 days the doe should increase milk production by quite a bit and this should be much easier and faster. Make sure you rotate the order in which you feed the babies.

If the babies are first up in the morning, rotate them to the last on in the evening. This will make sure everyone gets equal nourishment. Once the milk starts to flow (it can take a while and unfortunately the babies can get weak while they wait) you will see an almost instant filling of the



babie's stomachs. All of a sudden within about 30 seconds to a minute the babies will be very round and bright pink. After they have eaten their fill the babies will almost immediately fall asleep. At that time remove them and put a new baby rabbit in its place. If the milk starts to flow you usually have a very short time to get all the babies fed before the milk 'shuts off' again. So if possible, **always have 2-4 babies on the mother at a time** so once the milk is flowing you can feed as many babies as possible at a time. Having multiple babies on the doe also helps get the milk flowing. 1 baby rabbit will not usually get the milk going.

How often do you feed rabbit babies? Try to feed 3 times a day. Morning, noon and late night. If you

can't make the noon feeding then try to feed them right after you get home from work and then again late night. Remember to rotate the babies. Those who are smallest or who look thinnest should eat first. BUT if they are weak - put the stronger babies on until you know that the milk is flowing. As soon as you see the strong babies are getting milk (bellies are getting round and pink) then add the weak babies on to feed. If possible have 1 person holding and one working with the babies to make sure they are on the nipples. You should have 3 to 4 babies on the mom at a time because once the milk starts flowing you need as many babies to get access as quickly as possible.

Can the baby rabbits be handled? It is a common misconception that if you handle rabbit babies the mom will no longer feed them. This is generally false. The mother rabbit doesn't care if the babies smell like you. But we try to keep handling to a minimum the first week or so because certain does can become stressed if your hands are constantly in their cage. They can get really aggitated. If they get aggitated they tend to do strange things. In very rare circumstances they may injure a baby etc. But basically it's ok to handle them. Our babies are each handled and checked out right after they are born and then every few days after that.

Nose Clearing: After a few days you may notice some of them eating less and becoming cool to the touch. The baby rabbit also may seem indifferent to nursing even though they obviously need food. AND they will be holding their faces up in the air rather than looking for a nipple. These are not getting enough milk. Check their noses to see if they are visibly clogged with a yellowish crust. They cannot nurse if their nose holes are not clear. Get a warm we paper town and gently hold the tip of the wet paper towel to the crust. You don't want to get their body wet or get water in their nose - but you need to use the warm water to loosen the hard crust. Be patient because it may take a little while. Once the crust is a little softer you can take a needle or pin and GENTLY remove the crust from the nose. It should come right off in one little glob. Now you can put them back on the mom to nurse. You should see an immediate difference in their interest to nurse. They will be pretty frantic but they will be weak so it may not last long. The key with these babies is to catch the problem right away.

Peeing: If the mother is not taking care of them, the babies will sometimes need to be cleaned and assisted to pee. The cleaning part is usually as they get a week or 2 old. You can gently wipe their body with a warm paper towel and then dry. Make sure they don't get cold and don't soak them. Newborns usually don't need to be cleaned. But the newborns sometimes need assistance to pee. The mother rabbit usually takes care of this by grooming the babies as they nurse. It doesn't have to be done by you constantly, and doesn't have to be done to everyone. If you see a baby that always seems fat BEFORE each feeding but you know it hasn't eaten, then it may need to pee. You can take a wet paper towel and gently use the tiny tip of the towel to touch around the rabbit genital area. This will stimulate them to pee. It will usually only be 1 or 2 tiny drops. You don't need to rub them and don't use a cloth towel. Just the teeny end of a wet paper towel. Once they have their eyes open you will no longer need to do this.

Cannibalism: This can happen for many reasons. If the doe is a first time mother, if she is confused, if she is upset, more often during the winter and colder months, if she has a baby on the wire, if she does not have a nest box available, etc. Don't be discouraged. Although it is shocking and sad, it is not completely unusual. This can even happen with experienced does in the colder months or if the doe is bred in quick succession. Basically she is upset or is unready for the litter. If she is a first time mom, usually the second litter will be much better. If she is an experienced mom she will usually do better the next time if the nest box is correct and if the weather is in the summer or early fall.

 **Foster Method #3** - Finally as a last resort, you can try to feed the babies yourself. This is **very** difficult and we have had very limited success with this method. You can give them warmed kitten milk (found at pet stores), goats milk, and un-flavored pedialyte. Mix that with a drop of symethicone (baby gas-x) and a tiny bit of acidopholus powder (found at any drug store usually in pill form). Kitten nipples are way to big. You will need very tiny zoological nipples on a syringe or small 2oz bottle. You can find them at Petco/Petsmart or at

http://www.thesquirrelstore.com/moreinfo.cfm?Product_ID=54 . Hold the babies so they are comfortable - **DO NOT FEED THEM WHILE THEY ARE ON THEIR BACK** or they will aspirate and die.

Gently hold them upright in your hand with their head between your circled thumb and fingers. Put a drop of liquid on the side of their 'cheek' next to the mouth. That way it will run into their mouth and they can lick it up. - make sure it does not go in their nose and make sure you do not feed them too quickly so that they inhale the liquid, this will kill them. They really only need a few drops (few cc's) for newborns before they will be full. Make sure you don't continue to feed the baby rabbit more than they need or they will start to inhale it. They should fall asleep either while you are feeding them or very quickly after. This will let you know that they have eaten.



Peanuts - The picture to the right is of a Holland Lop peanut. Peanuts are caused by 2 dwarf genes (1 from each parent) being passed to the baby. They are somewhat common in the dwarf breeds (dwarfs / hollands). The baby cannot live and is usually visibly deformed at birth. The baby usually dies within a few hours but can sometimes live even a couple weeks. The ears are a good indicator of a peanut - they will be much much smaller than usual. Also the head is usually disproportionately large to the body, and the limbs are small and deformed.



Babies growing up - the kits are born bald, blind and deaf. They can get cold extremely easy and therefore must be fully covered by their mother's nest hair and straw. Their mother will bathe them and feed them a few times a day. They will get tiny baby 'fuzz' all over their bodies within a day or so (see left picture). Usually with first time mothers I leave the babies alone for 2 days and then I will start to handle them. With an experience mother we gently pick up the babies almost from day one. Their ears will come up at about 1 1/2 weeks which is also when they will open their eyes. We continued to handle them as they grow in order to keep them friendly. They will hop out of the nest box around 2 1/2 weeks. At that point remove the nest box, sterilize it and let it completely dry in the sun. The babies will start to



sample food at about 3 weeks. They will also quickly learn to use the water bottle from watching their mother. Netherlands and the smaller breed mature more quickly than the larger rabbits. Typically ours are weaned at around 5 weeks although they may try to sneak a drink from mom if they can manage it. By then they are eating and drinking and eating hay. You can leave the babies together for quite a while if you need to. Rabbits sexually mature around 4 months so you will need to separate them by then. The bucks may have started fighting already by that time. If you see the baby bucks starting to fight then you need to separate them. Eventually they may kill each other if left alone. Does raised together from a young age usually continue to get along. Older bucks or older does that are introduced to each other will typically fight. So if you are getting 2 rabbits (and don't want babies) then make sure you get 2 does that were raised together or that are together when they are young.

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