



# ORIGIN OF THE RABBIT

- ▶ The European wild rabbit evolved around 4,000 years ago on the Iberian Peninsula, the name 'Hispania' (Spain) is translated from the name given to that area by Phoenician merchants, meaning 'land of the rabbits'.
- ▶ When the Romans arrived in Spain around 200BC, they began to farm the native rabbits for their meat and fur. The spread of the Roman empire, along with increasing trade between countries, helped to introduce the European rabbit into many more parts of Europe and Asia.
- ▶ With their rapid reproduction rate, and the increasing cultivation of land providing ideal habitat, rabbits soon established large populations in the wild.
- ▶ The European rabbit continued to be introduced to new countries as they were explored or colonised by European adventurers and pioneers.
- ▶ Wild rabbits thrived in many new locations, and populations grew rapidly in countries with suitable habitat and few natural predators.
- ▶ The European rabbit became widespread in North America and Australia.





# INTRODUCTION OF THE RABBIT IN TO AUSTRALIA

- ▶ The First Fleet listed five rabbits on the initial transport. They were probably silver greys, a popular breed for hutch rearing in England at the time. But they were never released into the wild.
- ▶ In 1859 European wild rabbits were introduced into Australia so they could be hunted for sport. On Christmas day Thomas Austin, a self-made wealthy settler, released 13 European wild rabbits on his estate, Winchelsea, Barwon Park, Victoria.
- ▶ By 1866 hunters bagged 14,000 rabbits on the Bawron Park estate. The spread of rabbits was the fastest of an introduced mammal anywhere in the world.
- ▶ Within 50 years rabbits had spread across almost the entire continent, with devastating consequence on Australia's indigenous flora and fauna.
- ▶ Australia is home to at least 150 million feral rabbits, which continue to have a huge impact on our environment.
- ▶ With abundant food sources, good ground cover and a lack of predators, the rabbits raced across the landscape. By 1880 rabbits had crossed the Murray River to New South Wales and had reached Queensland by 1886.
- ▶ In 1894 they had travelled across the Nullarbor and populated Western Australia.







# RABBIT INVASION

- ▶ To put it into context, the spread of rabbits over Britain took 700 years. It took just 50 years for the rabbit to cover two-thirds of Australia, an area 25 times the size of Britain.
- ▶ The effect of rabbits on the environment has been devastating. Rabbits can survive on almost any plant matter: shoots, herbs, grasses, grains, leaf buds.
- ▶ Fast reproducing rabbits overgrazing in large populations, have had long term effects on indigenous plants and the native animal species that eat them.
- ▶ Excessive grazing also leads to soil erosion, which affects pasture yields and water quality.
- ▶ It is estimated that rabbits cost the Australian economy more than \$200 million per year.
- ▶ Rabbits are one of Australia's most visible introduced species.
- ▶ Australia's native plants and animals adapted to life on an isolated continent over millions of years but since European settlement they have had to compete with a range of new animals for habitat, food and shelter.



# RABBIT TERMINOLOGY

- ▶ A male rabbit is called a Buck
- ▶ A female rabbit is called a Doe
- ▶ Baby rabbits are called kittens
- ▶ When the doe is giving birth to young it's called kindling.
- ▶ A group of baby rabbits born in one birth is known as a litter.
- ▶ The average pregnancy period is usually 28 to 31 days.
- ▶ A bunch of bunnies is called a Kit





# KEEPING PET RABBITS



- ▶ Rabbits are social and curious animals, who can make fantastic pets. But don't be fooled in to thinking they are an 'easy' first pet for children.
- ▶ Rabbits, like all animals, have specific needs when it comes to their housing, handling, food, and providing enough stimulating activities for them to do.
- ▶ Here are some important tips on taking care of your rabbits - (and a quick reminder that rabbits cannot be kept as pets in Queensland)
- ▶ Because rabbits are a social species they shouldn't be kept alone. Generally, rabbits should live as part of a bonded pair of rabbits; this is a process that takes some time and patience but, if successful, will hugely improve your rabbits' quality of life. It is important that the rabbits are de-sexed, to prevent them producing lots of baby rabbits.



# HOUSING YOUR RABBIT



- ▶ People often make the mistake of thinking rabbits can be housed in a hutch all the time. A hutch should only serve as a temporary enclosure for your rabbits, a safe place to rest and sleep.
- ▶ If your rabbits are kept in a hutch, it must be attached to a rabbit run with plenty of space for them to run, jump, sit/stand upright, exercise and express normal rabbit behaviours.
- ▶ Your rabbits will also need at least a few hours a day of exercise outside.
- ▶ Your rabbits' enclosure should be as large as possible but the minimum size for an enclosure for two rabbits should be 3m long x 1.5m wide x 1m high (as recommended by the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund)
- ▶ The hutch should be predator-proof, located somewhere that is rain-proof, and has netting that can keep out flies and mosquitos.
- ▶ You can also keep rabbits inside your house, this is becoming increasingly popular! This means that you spend a lot more time interacting with your rabbits and get to know them really well.
- ▶ Your rabbits would still need a safe escape proof area to themselves inside but can be kept 'cage-free'
- ▶ You can even toilet train them!
- ▶ Ideally your indoor rabbits should have some access to a safe place outdoors some of the time, or they can be trained to use a cat flap to a secure safe outdoor area.
- ▶ Remember to also keep any poisonous cleaning products out of reach and protect your rabbits from potentially chewing power cords.







Leafy Greens  
4-6 cups



[exoticanimalsupplies.com](http://exoticanimalsupplies.com)

Fruit  
2-4 teaspoons



# FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

- ▶ Rabbits are herbivores and grazers and need to have a constant supply of grass or grass hay to chew.
- ▶ Grass/hay should make up 80% of your rabbits' diet and is vital for gut health.
- ▶ Chewing continuously throughout the day also helps keep your rabbit's teeth worn down and can prevent dental disease.
- ▶ Rabbits should also have plenty of fresh leafy greens and vegetables, such as broccoli, spinach, Brussel sprouts, celery and others; these should make up about 15% of your rabbits' diet.
- ▶ You can offer a small quantity of high-quality rabbit pellets (though this should be no more than 5% of your rabbits' diet)
- ▶ Carrots and other root vegetables can also be offered in small quantities as treats.





# HEALTH CARE, PESTS & DISEASES

- ▶ Animal health, welfare and biosecurity are all important stages of the livestock production chain. If managed poorly each can have adverse impacts on productivity.
- ▶ Biosecurity programs for farming industries are designed to prevent the spread of infectious disease and contain disease outbreaks when they occur.
- ▶ Parasites and disease impact on all animals, including rabbits. Animals affected by disease may not always show obvious clinical signs.
- ▶ Biosecurity is important at the national, regional and property level.
- ▶ Producers are governed by Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. State and territory governments are responsible for animal welfare laws and their enforcement. These are enforced through animal welfare or prevention of cruelty to animals' legislation.



# RISKS & CHALLENGES

- ▶ Like any primary production enterprise there are risks associated with commercial production of Rabbits. Some will be outside of a producer's control however experienced producers are usually able to manage these risks.
- ▶ Risks include the loss of vital export markets. The COVID-19 outbreak had a massive impact on a lot of our export markets.
- ▶ Disease and pests, it is extremely important that we maintain Australia's freedom from major diseases through strict quarantine laws and procedures.
- ▶ Here in Australian weather events such as drought, fires and flooding take a huge toll on our farming communities. They really need our support.







# POP QUIZ

- ▶ The male is called a \_\_\_\_\_ and the female is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ A baby rabbit is called a \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ Rabbit pregnancy last for about \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ A rabbits average natural lifespan is \_\_\_\_\_ years.
- ▶ In Australia you can keep pet rabbits in all States and Territories TRUE/FALSE
- ▶ The wild European rabbit evolved around \_\_\_\_\_ years ago.
- ▶ It took \_\_\_\_\_ years for the rabbit to spread through England. How long it take in Australia \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ Rabbits like to be kept in a hutch at all times TRUE/FALSE
- ▶ Wild rabbits are considered a \_\_\_\_\_ in Australia.
- ▶ What are three challenges farmers face in Australia \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_



# NOTES

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# RABBITS





## RESOURCES

<https://www.nma.gov.au>

<https://www.rspca.org.au>

<https://riseandshinerabbitry.com>

Wikipedia