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There's nothing more magical than seeing the delighted face of a child searching for Easter eggs in a large grassy field, or the sound of their laughter when being tickled by the soft fur or feathers of baby bunnies and chicks. If bunnies and chicks are purchased as Easter pets, however, the excitement of the new addition can wear off fast, says Lamorinda 4H Rabbit Leader Aimee Protzen.

"Children lose interest very quickly," she said. "A lot of rabbits like a quiet household, so buying a rabbit for a 3-year-old is not a good match."

And chicks have another complication. "People don't realize that when they go to a feed store and get chicks that many of them are roosters," said Lamorinda 4H Club Poultry Leader Michelle Chan. "You are never guaranteed the sex of chicks until they are six months old and start crowing."

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Keeping Easter Fun for Everyone – Even Easter Pets

By Jennifer Wake



The House Rabbit Society's "Make Mine Chocolate" campaign promotes buying chocolate bunnies for children on Easter Photo Jennifer Wake

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Protzen experienced this first-hand. “I raised chicks when I was in first grade and kept them until they started to crow,” she said. “We had to give them up because we were in the city.”

Yet each year people continue to purchase rabbits and chicks as Easter pets, and sadly many end up abused or neglected. Just a few weeks before Easter, there were already more than 6,000 rabbits listed for adoption on PetFinder.org. “Unless a parent is willing to take care of rabbits they end up at ARF, the House Rabbit Society, or at a shelter,” Protzen said.

Moraga resident Sophie Lucacher realized how difficult it can be to raise rabbits after she agreed to bring two bunnies home. “Andrea, my youngest child, age 10, had been begging for a rabbit for years (literally),” she said. “My husband didn’t want it in the house. A friend of ours, Kim Winter, (who has many animals) had a nice outside cage. I thought it would be a good solution.”

Her friend’s rabbit just had a litter, so Lucacher decided to buy the outside rabbit pen and took home two bunnies. “They were adorable. Andrea and her older sister swore they would care for them,” Lucacher said.

Although they built a light-weight mesh enclosure around the pen so they could wander outdoors, the rabbits escaped numerous times. “We ran after them with the whole neighborhood helping us,” Lucacher said. “Sometimes it was fun, but when it got late and cold and everybody else had left, my kids and I ended up running after these animals that are incredibly fast and agile.”

Additionally, Lucacher said getting the children to clean the cage daily was nearly impossible, and when she let the rabbits into the kitchen, “they ate the phone wire and would grind their teeth on anything.”

“People don’t like the smell of rabbits in their home,” Protzen said, “and they think they can just put a cage outside, but if it’s not built to withstand predators, the rabbits

will be gone. Raccoons and coyotes prey on them.”

Chicken wire needs to be more than a ¼ inch thick and sunk into the ground to keep chicks and bunnies safe. “If you use regular chicken wire, the raccoons will grab them right through the wire,” Chan said. “They will actually eat the chickens through the wire.” Owls, hawks, and dogs also prey on the animals.

Twice, a neighborhood dog charged Chan’s chicken cage and killed all her chickens.

And there are other costs as well. According to the House Rabbit Society, veterinary bills for rabbits can be more expensive than for dogs. And Rabbits can live up to 10 years.

“Some people think you can just give them food and water and go away for Spring Break,” said Protzen, “but they need to be boarded if you leave on a trip. There are costs like nail clipping, and they can have behavioral issues if they are not spayed. Male rabbits tend to spray in the same place to mark their territory, and they dig and chew.”

The House Rabbit Society, which rescues abandoned rabbits and finds permanent adoptive homes for them, puts a moratorium on all rabbit adoptions during the Easter holiday, and started a campaign called “Make Mine Chocolate,” to promote purchasing chocolate bunnies for children versus the actual animal.

“Rabbits are not passive and cuddly,” the Society stated on their Web site. “They are ground-loving creatures who feel frightened and insecure when held and restrained.”

Protzen does not want to give rabbits a bad reputation, however. “Rabbits are great pets, if you’re ready for a rabbit,” she said.