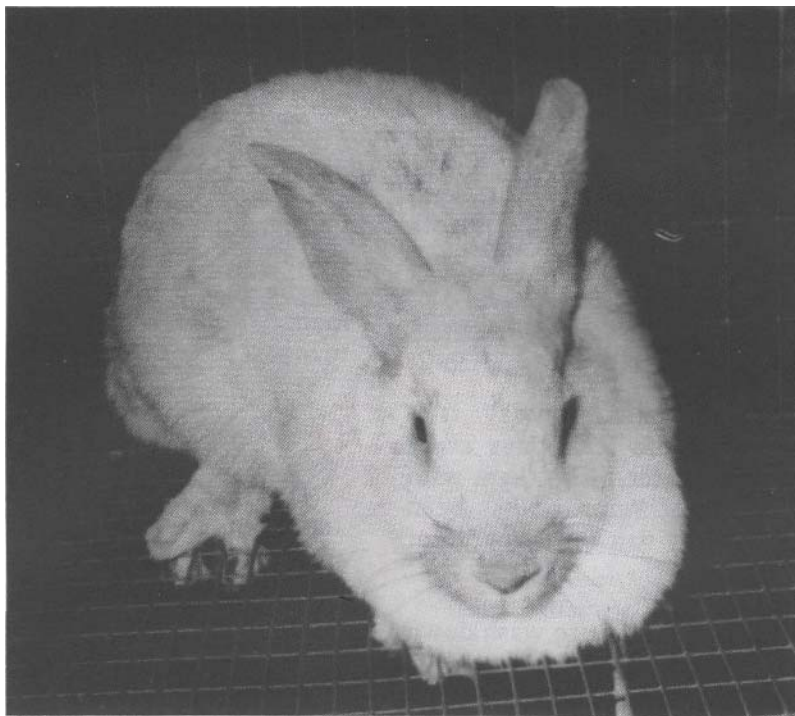


# Rabbits

## DISEASES AND THEIR CONTROL

*Gerald Proverbs and the late Leonard Hutson*



*This publication was produced with assistance from  
The Barclays Development Fund in the Caribbean.*



**BARCLAYS**

## INTRODUCTION

Treating sick rabbits is usually a waste of time and money at the present time. It is easier and safer to destroy all sick animals than it is to treat them and risk spreading the disease to healthy stock. This is especially true of animals with respiratory problems.

However, in the case of purebred stock, it is worthwhile attempting to save these valuable animals. Consequently, it is advisable to consult a veterinarian (vet) for his professional services.

There is very little recorded information available on the overall incidence and distribution of rabbit diseases in the Caribbean. Consequently, only those common diseases observed will be mentioned in this "factsheet". Furthermore, the recommended treatments are based on proven field experiences. Should there be any doubt as to the effectiveness of a treatment it is recommended that you consult your local veterinarian.

## DISEASES AND THEIR CONTROL

It is better to prevent an outbreak of a disease than to try and get rid of it, once it has started. The best protection against diseases in general is to follow a careful sanitation programme.

Maintaining sanitary conditions in your hutches (pens) is a major preventative measure for controlling disease in the rabbitry.

- Remove manure, soiled bedding and contaminated feed from the hutch daily.
- Inspect water and feed pans everyday. It is good practice to wash the feed pans every week with hot soapy water, rinse them with water to which a bit of "clorox" has been added, then place in the sun for a couple of hours.
- It is good management practice to wash down and disinfect each hutch after the litter has been weaned with one of "the following commercial disinfectants:-

Jeyes Long Life  
Germex  
Iosan

- Allow the hutch and equipment to dry before returning the doe to the hutch.
- Clean and disinfect nest boxes before using them a second time.

- Flies spread disease from one rabbit to another and from one farm to another. To control flies, it is best to dispose of manure regularly.
- Be constantly alert for the appearance of any signs that may indicate disease.
- Isolate animals suspected of having disease at least two (2) weeks to determine definitely whether they are sick or not.
- Place newly acquired rabbits and those returned from shows in a separate hutch away from the rest of the herd for at least 2 weeks.
- Burn or bury very deeply all dead rabbits. Do not leave them around your property to be a source of disease.

## PARASITIC DISEASES

### Ear Mange (Ear Canker)

Infestation of the inner surface of the ear by ear mites (*Psarptes spp.* or *Chirioptes spp.*)

### Signs of Disease

Infected rabbits shake their heads often and can be seen to frequently scratch the base of their ears, as a result, brown scaly crusts occur at the bottom of the inside of their ear. In severe cases of ear mange the ear becomes hot and reddened. Ear mange is uncommon in young rabbits.

### Treatment and Control

The first step is to isolate the rabbit and clean and disinfect its hutch to prevent the disease spreading. When new animals are purchased they should be isolated for two (2) weeks and observed for evidence of infestation.

Animals exhibiting ear mange should have the brown, scaly crusts removed and a drop of mineral oil or cooking oil put in the ear every day until the mites are saturated. This is the most effective method to cure this disease.

## COCCIDIOSIS

### Intestinal Coccidiosis

This is a parasitic infection of the intestinal tract caused by the protozoa *Eimeria*. Intestinal coccidiosis is caused by four species of *Eimeria*. This form of the disease often will occur in rabbits

receiving the best of care, as well as in rabbits raised under unsanitary conditions.

### Signs of Disease

In mild infection, there are no visible symptoms. However, diarrhoea and no weight gain are the symptoms of moderate infection. In severe cases, "pot-belly" and diarrhoea with mucus are prominent signs. Pneumonia is often a secondary condition. Diagnosis may be confirmed by faecal examination.

### Treatment and control

Keep the floor of the hutch (pen) clean and dry. Remove droppings from the hutch frequently to prevent faecal Contamination of feed and water. Isolate all suspected cases.

There are two methods to treat intestinal coccidiosis:

(i) Via the drinking water: Water soluble sulfaquinoxaline can be added to the drinking water at a rate of 1 1/2 oz. (40 ml) per gallon (5 litres). Treat for 14 days. If necessary the treatment can be repeated after 7 days on plain water.

(ii) Via the feed: Although this is a normal method of treating coccidiosis in rabbits in North America and Western Europe, it is not practised here. The main reason being that feed manufacturers do not produce a medicated rabbit ration.

### LIVER COCCIDIOSIS

This infection is caused by *Eimeria stiedae*, and is found in the liver and bile ducts.

### Signs of Disease

Young rabbits are the most susceptible. However, pure infections are usually not detectable in live animals.

Liver infestations are often seen in combination with intestinal coccidiosis, an aggravated condition which may prove fatal.

### Treatment and Control

Use the control measures as discussed for intestinal coccidiosis.

Sulfaquinoxaline is the drug of choice for treatment as with intestinal coccidiosis.

### LICE

This is not a very common complaint but they are documented cases of severe lice infestation in some

countries.

### Signs of Disease

Heavily infested animals are seen to rub and scratch very frequently. This causes the fur to become ragged and the skin bared and inflamed. On close observation lice can be seen moving about in the fur.

### Treatment and Control

Dust the animals with the insecticides, Sevin dust (5%) or Malathion (5%). Be sure that the insecticide does not get into the rabbit feed or water bowls. Rub the insecticide well into the fur. The treatment has to be repeated every 3 to 5 days over a 21 day period.

### PINWORMS

This is a parasite of the intestinal tract and should be no major problem for rabbits raised and kept in clean hutches with wire floors.

### INFECTIOUS DISEASES Respiratory Disorders

These are commonly first observed as "colds". If the rabbit gets immediate attention it will invariably recover with no ill effects. However, if unattended, as suggested by many scientists, the common cold progresses to 'snuffles', and ultimately pneumonia sets in. Death usually results in three (3) of four (4) days.

### Signs of Disease

Rabbits are heard to sneeze often and there is usually a slight nasal discharge.

Most rabbits try to wipe the discharge from their noses causing the fur on the inner sides of the front legs to become matted, soiled, and discoloured. Some rabbits do not attempt to remove the exudate from their noses. Consequently it is very easy to see the discharge.

### Treatment and Control

Rabbits do not recover completely from this infection and there is no specific treatment. It is best to prevent rabbits getting a cold. However, rabbits suffering from snuffles or pneumonia should be destroyed and disposed of in order to control the spread of disease.

### RINGWORM

This is a fungus infection of the skin. Signs of Disease

Ringworm usually starts in areas that are moist. Look for the lesions (scabby skin) on the face and around the mouth, nose, eyes and feet. The skin gets red and

scaly and finally the fur drops out. The rabbit scratches the infected area vigorously often leading to a worsening of the condition.

#### Treatment

The first step is to isolate the infected rabbits. Be sure to wear gloves when handling animals because the disease spreads readily to humans.

The fur should be clipped from around the infected areas and half inch (1.75 cm) beyond. Apply an anti-fungal ointment (e.g. Griseofulvin). Hutches and utensils should be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly. Seriously affected animals should be killed and buried deeply or burned.

#### MISCELLANEOUS DISEASES Sore Hocks

These are sores that appear on the rear feet of rabbits and in severe cases on the forefeet as well.

#### Signs of Disease

The soreness appears on the rear feet first. Affected rabbits raise and lower the affected feet in rapid succession and try to lie in such a way that their feet do not come into contact with hard surfaces. Rapid loss of weight is the result.

#### Treatment

Severely affected rabbits should be destroyed. Give those with a milder case a board to sit on and treat with tincture of iodine, or gentian violet.

#### HUTCH BURN OR VENT DISEASE

This is an infection of the anus and genitals. The condition is usually associated with filthy hutch floors.

#### Signs of Disease

Small blisters first show up. These rupture forming yellow to brown scabs. Pus may be present in the affected areas.

#### Treatment

Before breeding, all rabbits should be checked for this disease. If the rabbit is found to have the disease it should not be bred. Clean and disinfect the sore areas as well as the hutch immediately. Most mild infections will clear up without further treatment. Most severe cases have to be tended to daily. Wash the infected areas with warm soapy (dettol) water or dettol and rub with tincture of iodine. Recovery should occur in 10 to 14 days.