

Ideal Rabbit Home

Case study

Harry is a male rabbit who lives with a young family. He always had a good relationship with his owners, particularly the child minder but problems started when he hit puberty and began exhibiting increasingly aggressive behaviour for no apparent reason. Consequently, the family decided to get him neutered. This seemed to work and as a reward for his good behaviour he got a new roommate, Camilla, a female rabbit. Shortly after Camilla arrived, Harry started acting aggressively again, particularly towards the child minder. He began to bite her ankles when she walked through the garden. Her attempts to shoo him away merely exacerbated the situation and as a result, she felt uncomfortable going anywhere near the rabbit.

Harry's garden was not fully enclosed so neither he nor Camilla spent time unsupervised in the garden. He spent most of the day inside the hutch which significantly limited his mental stimulation and activity. When he was in the garden with the child minder, her reactions to his biting led him to believe that he was dominating the relationship and was higher up in the family hierarchy.

The pet behaviourist warned against the use of spray bottles and air canisters as they only address the symptoms and not the cause of the aggression. The child minder was advised to change her behaviour toward Harry in order to see a change in his behaviour toward her. The child minder began wearing wellington boots when she let Harry out of his hutch to protect her ankles from Harry's biting. This allowed her to continue her duties as normal, whilst ignoring Harry's aggressive behaviour.

They also suggested that Harry spend more time outside the hutch and so the family took the necessary precautions to make the garden safe and secure.

The owners were advised to temporarily stop feeding Harry his favourite food; small pieces of carrot. After a few weeks, it was recommended that the child minder became the sole person to give Harry and Camilla the treat. It was not long before Harry's aggressive behaviour subsided and the child minder and the rabbit began to rebuild their relationship.

After only a month Harry was a changed rabbit. When he was able to spend more time in the garden foraging and grazing his aggressive tendencies began to subside. When the child minder became the one who delivered the treats, Harry also became eager to be on her good side. By understanding Harry and his needs, and addressing the root problem of the aggression, the family were able to mend their relationship with their pet and ensure Harry was happy once more.

The PFMA urges pet owners to log-on to www.pfma.org.uk and see what difference they can make to their pet's life.

For more information on the study, pet case studies, images or the pet designed house images, please contact Julia Lloyd on 0208 870 6777 or julia@saltlondon.com