

Rare Breeds - Rare Opportunities

By Ellyn Eddy

What is a rare breed? By the definition that this article is based on, a rare rabbit breed is a breed in which there are few or no breeders of that breed in your area. Stock in this breed is not readily available. There are few, if any, shown at local shows. Generally, area breeders (or other breeds) or judges are not familiar with this breed. Most importantly, a rare breed is a breed that needs a boost--one that you can provide.

This "rare breed" may be something really rare throughout the country or world, like the American or Satin Angora. On the other hand, it could be a breed such as the Dwarf Hotot or Silver Marten: a breed that is in no danger of extinction, but is unseen or uncommon, and un-promoted in your area or state. Remember, a rare breed is a breed in which you can make a difference.

Anything that needs promotion needs committed, positive, and energetic people. It needs someone who can take the lead and encourage others. A rare breed offers ***so many*** opportunities to the hard-working promoter aiming high, that a common breed just does not offer! Is there a lack of Holland Lop breeders in the country? Capable Holland breeders, who can run a club, sanction shows, help new breeders, create websites and promotional tools, and design educational material? I do not mean to single out Holland Lops; I am not a Holland breeder and have little idea what the Holland world is like, and what it needs. However, I can assure you that

you will have more to offer, and what you do will be better appreciated in a rare breed than in a common one.

Let me share my personal examples that compel me to write this article.

In November of 2004, I acquired a pair of silvers, to add a rare breed to my Polish barn. I wanted a rare breed, honestly, because I wanted to win with less competition. Though my original intentions were selfish, raising silvers turned out to be so much more! Walking away with BOB and BOS at every show was fun, but it isn't worth very much when you are competing against only yourself! I saw a place where my abilities could be used to help the National Silver Rabbit Club (NSRC) and the silver breed, and pounced on my opportunity. In the summer of 2005, the NSRC was creating a promotional committee, of which I was one of the first to volunteer to be on. A few months later I found myself the webmaster of a brand-new NSRC website, a brochure I had created being printed for distribution, my silver articles published in *Domestic Rabbits* and the NSRC "Silver Bullet", and myself a well-known member of the NSRC. More projects are underway! I know that I am using my talents to help something I love, and that I am appreciated.

Silvers at the local level are even more exciting! When I got my silvers, there were only two breeders in the state. Neither of them was very active in breeding or showing them. I know of eight breeders now in my state, and the interest in silvers is increasing at every show! It has been so much fun to see how many people really love the silvers once they are introduced to them, and how much I can do for my breed!

I don't mean to highlight my own "good works", but to point out that there are many places you can fill with a rare breed. Many positions and openings are out there in your rare breed club. Just one person's energy and willingness to help will be a real shot-in-the-arm to a slow, struggling club or breed. Even youth are good for something.... I'm fifteen years old! (*Note: article written and originally published in Domestic Rabbits in 2006.*)

I have found that promotion of your rare breed at a local level to have tangible, quick-to-come, positive effects. You never know when someone happened to be looking for that rare breed when you donate a pair to a raffle or auction. Many people out there are interested in a rare breed, but not quite convinced enough to hunt a trio down. When the person sees a pair come up in a raffle or auction, the person will take advantage of it and you've hooked another breeder! Really, I have seen great results from this.

Writing promotional articles or just plain advertising silvers is another way I have been paid off in choosing to promote a rare breed. Not only does one get great feedback from friends, but also it is quite profitable. Those reading this article may remember an article I wrote in the November/December issue of *Domestic Rabbits*, in which silvers vs. other silvered breeds was discussed. A few weeks after that article was published, a man came up to me at a show, inquiring about the silvers in my carriers. My articles had interested him in the breed. It was so cool to see how through my article silvers gained another breeder. I hope the same thing has been happening all over the country!

Who is going to write an article explaining to the world what a Mini Rex is? Who is going to, after writing that article, have a stranger inquire if those are mini rex in your carriers, and if you have any for sale? People are familiar with Mini Rex, and the setting for an awesome experience like that just is not there. How much of a thrill does a Netherland Dwarf breeder get every time they sell a rabbit to a new dwarf owner? I can assure you, it is not as much as when a person scores another point for a rare breed.

Acquiring your starting stock in a rare breed can be difficult, but I have found that it can certainly be done with a little trouble or travel--less than it may seem to require at first. Once you get your foundation animals you may be surprised at how many people will tell you that they were looking for that breed, but couldn't find any. In my experience, the best way to find stock in a rare breed is at or through the ARBA convention. There will almost certainly be someone within a few hours from you going to convention each year. Contact breeders of the rare breed you want to get before the date when entries close.

There are definite pros and cons to raising a rare breed. Most of the unique features of a rare breed work both ways. You may have no competition at shows, for instance. This may be fun, "I win every time!", or boring, or both. It may be a "con", but it provides you with a chance and incentive to promote your breed in your state.

Rare breeds are often inbred, with the same faults fixed in nearly every rabbit in the country of that breed. This can make those undesirable characteristics harder to breed out when there are no rabbits strong in those areas to cross to. Even the best in the nation of that rare breed may not meet the standard as closely as the Mini Lop that won your state convention. However, the more people working on a breed, the faster it grows close to the standard and the closer your rare breed is to winning BIS!

Rare Breeds offer Rare Opportunities. Consider helping to save a rare breed. Just pick up a few if you want: you don't have to let them overrun your barn. Join the breed's national specialty club and see where you can help. Sanction shows; contact the secretary, newsletter editor, or sweepstakes keeper and ask if they could use a little help. Write an article or contribute something to the club's newsletter. There is a need for you and there are so many ways you can do so much for **your rare breed.**