



A poster, designed by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the House Rabbit Society of Singapore, discouraging people from buying pet rabbits for luck. Through the AVA, 1,400 posters were distributed to pet shops, veterinary clinics and town councils. ST PHOTO: NURIA LING

No hop in sales of bunnies

Activist groups' efforts to discourage impulse buying have paid off

By POON CHIAN HUI

A PUBLIC-EDUCATION blitz by animal activist groups to discourage people from buying rabbits for luck in the coming Chinese New Year appears to be working in some quarters.

Half a dozen pet shops contacted, including a chain with 35 outlets, reported rabbit sales holding steady ahead of Thursday's start of a year which the Chinese zodiac has named after the animal.

One shop has sold only 10 per cent more bunnies than usual; another, Pets Kampong at Great World City, sold only one rabbit in two weeks this month, way below its usual rate of 10 to 15 a month, said an employee there.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruel-

ty to Animals (SPCA) and the House Rabbit Society of Singapore (HRSS), anticipating a craze for rabbits – and a mass dumping of them after their novelty expired – had jointly mounted a drive with the message: “Don’t buy a rabbit on impulse just because it’s the Year of the Rabbit”.

They posted entries on The Straits Times’ interactive website Stomp, wrote online blogs and collaborated with The Straits Times’ RazorTV for a series of videos on the issue.

They also designed a poster with the message, and distributed 1,400 copies of it through the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) to pet shops, schools, veterinary clinics and town councils.

This is the first time such a concerted effort has been timed with Chinese New Year to protect an animal, said SPCA executive director Deirdre Moss.

Some pet shops have joined in the cause by putting measures in place to prevent impulse buying. At Pet Lovers Centre, for example, those expressing inter-

est in rabbits are asked whether they have the time and the means to care for them.

Its spokesman Loh Mun Loong said: “We give them the scoop on what it entails – the care, the accessories, the time they need to devote and so on.”

Mr Benjamin Wee, who owns Petmart, also “screens” buyers this way, and tells them their commitment has to last 10 years, the animal’s lifespan. As a result, one in 10 eventually decides against buying the animal, he said.

Meanwhile, SPCA and HRSS, with members of the public, have written to newspapers criticising promotional events held by some pet shops and malls.

Pets Village, for example, came under fire for its exhibition at the Suntec City Atrium two weeks ago, which included rabbit races and putting the animals in fancy dress; HarbourFront Centre was also panned for its rabbit exhibition.

Ms Moss said one of the events put rabbits in cages too small for them and in the hands of inexperienced staff. Another concern was that the rabbits may have been stressed from excessive handling by the public.

Not all pet shops, however, are singing the tune of SPCA and HRSS. The Straits Times found 10 shops where rabbits could be bought without hassle, even though the reporter announced that the purchase was for new year “good luck”.

These shops neither discouraged the purchase nor offered care tips.

At one shop, an employee declared rabbits “very easy” to care for. “You only need to feed them and change the bedding,” he said, making no mention of toilet training, trimming of nails, sterilisation costs and post-surgery care.

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