

## News

# Will Year of Rabbit mean more abandoned bunnies?

*Pet shops report no big hop in rabbit sales – yet*

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**B**ELOVED pet bunny today, abandoned and unwanted tomorrow. Animal activists had feared the Year of the Rabbit (starting Feb 3) would see a craze for pet rabbits.

This could lead to more abandoned rabbits, both the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the House Rabbit Society of Singapore (HRSS), warned last month.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta) also warned against buying rabbits this Chinese New Year, reported the AFP.

That fear is not unwarranted.

In the last rabbit year in 1999, SPCA took in 625 abandoned rabbits. That's an increase of 116 per cent from the previous year.

But a check with seven pet stores by The New Paper On Sunday found that demand for bunnies has remained largely unchanged.

Only two saw an increase in rabbit sales.

Mr Benjamin Wee, 35, managing director of Petmart, said he sold 15 rabbits this month, which is up from his monthly average of 10.

Currently, all his rabbits have been sold out.

He has ordered more, but the bunnies will come in only after Chinese New Year.

While customers typically don't tell him that they are motivated to buy a pet just to improve their luck, Mr Wee said he was not surprised by the leap in sales.

## Not unexpected

"The jump isn't unexpected; it's just like how in the Year of the Rat, sales of mice and hamsters also go up in the same way at our store," he said.

He also recalled a similar demand for pet bunnies during the last Rabbit year in 1999.

Pets Republic, which has three outlets, has also seen an increase of 10 to 20 per cent.

But owner Lifan Ang, 27, said that she can't be sure if the spike is due to the Chinese Zodiac.

She said: "So far the increase isn't that dramatic. This could be because this is a good month, not just because it is a rabbit year."

Ms Ang also pointed out that even if customers do buy rabbits during a Rabbit year, it doesn't mean that these owners will be irresponsible.

She said: "I would think that the more someone believes a rabbit will bring them wealth and luck, all the more they will take care of it."

"The most important thing is that the owner takes proper care of the rabbit."

Both stores said no particular breed has been especially popular during this pre-Chinese New Year period.

The different breeds of rabbits that Mr Wee's store retails, such as Lionheads, Netherland Dwarfs and local rabbits, are equally popular, he said.

They retail from \$18 to \$350, depending on the breed.

But these pet shop owners stressed that they do not sell rabbits indiscriminately.

Mr Wee said: "We have to make sure the customer really loves the pet and knows how to take care of them because a pet is for life."

Not all stores are seeing a boom for bunnies.

Five other pet stores – All Breeds Pets, Pet Lovers Centre, Pets Village, Aquapet Thomson and Marine and Pet Image – have not seen any increase in demand for them.

Mr Issac Koh, a consultant with Pets Village, reckons there is a shift in mindset among Singaporeans today.

He said: "Singaporeans today are not so traditional. They wouldn't buy rabbits for luck."

Animal activists here welcomed the news that demand for bunnies hasn't been high.

Ms Jacelyn Heng, president of the HRSS said: "It's encouraging. We certainly hope the public can pick up on the message that they should not buy rabbits on impulse."

But as she pointed out irresponsible pet owners still abound.

Already, HRSS has received five abandoned rabbits this year, Ms Heng said.

Ms Deirdre Moss, executive director of the SPCA, believes it's still too early to tell if there will be a rush for bunnies this year.

"We will be cautious in our forecasting since it's not yet into the Year of the Rabbit," she said.

"We don't want to be too optimistic; people could still be buying rabbits throughout the year."