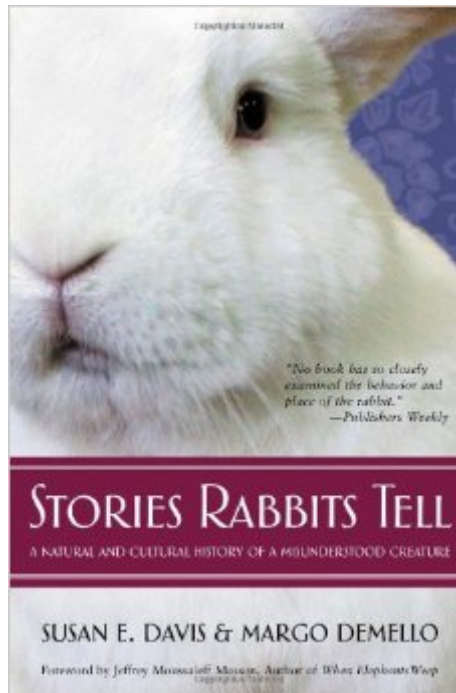


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# Stories Rabbits Tell: A Natural And Cultural History Of A Misunderstood Creature



## Synopsis

Revered as a symbol of fertility, sexuality, purity and childhood, beloved as a children's pet and widely represented in the myths, art and collectibles of almost every culture, the rabbit is one of the most popular animals known to humans. Ironically, it has also been one of the most misunderstood and abused. Indeed, the rabbit is the only animal that our culture adores as a pet, idolizes as a storybook hero and slaughters for commercial purposes. *Stories Rabbits Tell* takes a comprehensive look at the rabbit as a wild animal, ancient symbol, pop culture icon, commercial product and domesticated pet. In so doing, the book explores how one species can be simultaneously adored as a symbol of childhood (think Peter Rabbit), revered as a symbol of female sexuality (e.g., Playboy Bunnies), dismissed as a dumb bunny in domesticity and loathed as a pest in the wild. The authors counter these stereotypes with engaging analyses of real rabbit behavior, drawn both from the authors' own experience and from academic studies, and place those behaviors in the context of current debates about animal consciousness. In a detailed investigative section, the authors also describe conditions in the rabbit meat, fur, pet and vivisection industries, and raise important questions about the ethics of treating rabbits as we do. The first book of its kind, *Stories Rabbits Tell* provides invaluable information and insight into the life and history of an animal whom many love, but whom most of us barely know. As such, it is a key addition to the current thinking on animal emotions, intelligences and welfare, and the way that human perceptions influence the treatment of individual species.

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## Customer Reviews

I've lived with rabbits all my life, but it was not until I first picked up a copy of *The House Rabbit Handbook* in 1993 that it dawned on me that I could really let a rabbit not only into my home, but into my life, my family, and essentially, into my heart. That book was a turning point for me. *Stories Rabbits Tell* is another such singular, profoundly meaningful book, though it is quite different from the Handbook; it is more academic, and requires a great deal of fortitude and intelligent thinking from the reader (though of course what the Handbook asks of us in terms of necessary bunny-proofing does, too!). It seems to me that the dissenting reviews on this site have a fundamental desire to dismiss anyone who questions possible mistreatment of rabbits -- most of these negative reviews really don't seem to have much of anything to do with this book at all, and I would be surprised if many of the reviewers had actually read it. If they had, they would see that Susan Davis and Margo Demello are quite open about their methodologies, and that they go to great pains to present a balanced view of any topic they present -- even vivisection. The fact is that almost no Americans know the suffering that animals experience so that we can benefit from them in myriad ways--ways that most people never even consider; Davis and Demello discuss this. In turn, people get upset. It's an upsetting reality -- to paraphrase Pete Seeger, quoted in the book, if it upsets us just to read or hear about it, imagine how much it pains the animals who experience this suffering. But that is a relatively small part of the book, and I would be very sorry to see readers discouraged from reading this marvelous, rich, and brilliantly researched, argued, and written life/history/cultural review of rabbits. I feel as if I am getting to know rabbits all over again, and for the first time, in some ways--rabbits in the wild, in other people's homes or yards (oh no!), in meat and fur farms (not the 'friendly' or clean facilities you may have imagined), and in isolating research labs. Gazing into the faces of my three house rabbits when I look up from this book's pages, I marvel at the depth and beauty of these creatures -- and I hope that this brilliant book will not only open up the possibility of such a rich and rewarding connection to others, but that it will also allow even those people who have never thought of rabbits at all to know that they are indeed a truly wonderful creature. I congratulate the authors on their tremendously well-done book, and I urge readers interested in everything from animals to folklore to politics to the medical industry to hunting to history to --well, everything -- to read it. And I thank them for taking the time to write a book I have been waiting to read for many many years without even specifically knowing that this was what I wanted and needed. Regarding the chapters on abuse and vivisection: I am grateful that they were included even though I cried reading them, because sometimes we do have to read things that are painful and difficult, not because we want to, but because they are true, and because it is important

that we know the truth, so that then we can make of it what we will and choose our own actions from there. Finally, this book makes me want to be kind to those around me; it makes me feel even more conscious of and grateful to the rabbits with whom I share my life. It's one of the most special qualities of *Stories Rabbits Tell*, I think: the intimate attention given to the details of rabbits' quirks, narratives, frustrations, losses, sufferings, triumphs. The authors have taken great care in the way they have presented the lives of rabbits; throughout, they respect and cherish the individuality of each rabbit life, at the same time that they discuss trends in the understanding of and response to/use of rabbits at large. Thinking of each animal as an individual, with real feelings, needs, rights--anyone who has a beloved pet knows what this means in the particular, but how about looking beyond that? Davis and Demello opened my eyes to sights and realities I did not want to see; because I love my own dear rabbits, I cannot ignore the individuality of all other rabbits, of all animals. It is a philosophy that may boggle the mind of those in commercial rabbit industries, or those who wear fur but one that I find to be perfectly respectable and plausible, and even practical--and certainly well-argued. So now, I'm off to hug my bunnies, and count my blessings that we've found each other. Buy and read this book -- you will benefit from it immeasurably.

"*Stories Rabbits Tell*" has many lessons:- Rabbits are quite a diverse lot. Some are devious, some are gregarious, some are industrious, some are shy, some are flirtatious, some are regular "snuggle bunnies." Some rabbits are like General Patton, born to be leaders. Others are content to be part of the rank and file. Still others are like branch managers, overseeing a small department (which may include non-rabbits).- Life as a rabbit raised for meat is desolate. In large breeding operations, virtually every aspect of the rabbits' personalities are suppressed. Every fundamental activity other than eating, drinking, and sleeping is denied. No exercise, bonding with others, playing, or exploring. The rabbits are treated as, and perhaps eventually become, soulless commodities.- Many of the product tests performed on laboratory rabbits are alarmingly inaccurate, have never been validated, and are not required by law.- There are a multitude of portrayals of rabbits in popular culture, almost all of them wrong.- Being in a room with twenty-two rabbits and a plate of banana muffins will brighten your day, and is probably as good an introduction to rabbits as any. As the authors point out, rabbits occupy several seemingly contradictory niches in human society: an object of affection for children, a favorite target of hunters, a laboratory subject, a sex symbol, and a family pet. For the most part, our treatment of rabbits is nothing to be proud of. Humans have inflicted every imaginable type of cruelty on these creatures, sometimes with gratuitous malice and viciousness. But that is slowly changing. Consumers have made it clear that they prefer

animal-friendly products. A growing number of enlightened scientists are working strenuously to replace crude animal experiments with non-animal alternatives (which tend to be more reliable and cheaper). Animal shelters are increasingly taking in abandoned rabbits and providing them with enriched, spacious habitats. The House Rabbit Society and rabbit rescue leagues across the country are introducing people to the joys of having a rabbit as a live-in companion. "Stories Rabbits Tell" is two-thirds disturbing and one-third encouraging if not enrapturing. That's probably about the right balance if one is going to thoroughly chronicle our relationship with rabbits, as the authors have masterfully done. They convey the beauty and mystery of rabbits, but don't shy away from exposing the various horrors experienced by rabbits at the hands of humans. Rabbits may be the most underrated non-obscure animal in the world. Viewed optimistically, this means that rabbits have the potential to become much more highly regarded and better treated. "Stories Rabbits Tell" will help change the public's perception of rabbits: from expendable pests or "dumb" livestock to complex, often very engaging individuals worthy of our respect and kindness. Then we will have new stories to tell.

As a rabbit lover, and a person who hopes to be a vet someday, I loved this book. Every part of it was interesting, though some was disturbing. The authors take an intimate look at rabbits. They offer much information that is difficult to find elsewhere. I found the biological information on rabbits to be very interesting, especially regarding their evolution. The authors make mention of a few very rare and endangered species of rabbits. They offer many stories of house rabbits. Stories that may shock those people who don't know the joys and complexities of living with a house rabbit. I also enjoyed reading about the rabbit as a symbol in our culture, both loved and hated, often misunderstood. I have often said to my rabbits, "Silly Rabbit", without thinking about where this phrase came from and what it indicates about our culture's idea of rabbits. The chapters on the rabbit meat, fur, and pet industry, as well as the use of rabbits in laboratories, were informative and inspiring, though disheartening. It is shocking to realize how we view these creatures in so many different ways, but important to realize that reform and regulation are needed. The authors present the information realistically without trying to sugar coat the truth or shock their readers. An educational, informative, and important read for all those who love rabbits or wish to learn more about them. After reading this book, you will never utter the phrase "just a rabbit" again, if it hasn't left your vocabulary already.

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