

Bunny tale could have a happy ending

Pet owner, rescue group to trap rabbits together

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When her children asked with imploring eyes, "what's going to happen to the bunnies?" Yolanda Hall had to come up with an answer.

It appeared her neighbours had skipped town and left a brood of bunnies behind on their Ferndale Road property.

Developers were bulldozing the land, and the bunnies' days were numbered.

"I called the SPCA but they said they couldn't do anything because they weren't trapped."

SPCA gave Hall the number of the Small Animal Rescue Society (SARS) a non-profit group of volunteers based in Burnaby.

They came out to assess the situation earlier in the week, but as there are still a number of brambles and blackberry bushes on the land, the bunnies were impossible to catch.

SARS plans to return Sunday with an army of volunteers to try the trap the domesticated rabbits.

"We'll be out there at seven in the morning with about 10 or 12 volunteers. It will probably take us the day to trap them," said SARS'

Lisa Hutcheon.

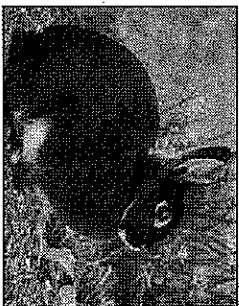
Hall also called the developer, the current owner and the city:

But the responsibility really lies with the previous owners who left the bunnies behind when they moved in September, according to Hutcheon and Hall.

Frances Alblas admits she had bunnies when she lived on the property, but says she had no idea they were still there.

"This is the first I've heard of it," she told the News. "I thought the coyotes had gotten them all. If I knew there were any left I would have brought them here (to the acreage she now lives on with her husband and eight kids in Langley.)"

"We're very animal-type people. We wouldn't do that on purpose."



Alblas says the bunnies were kept outside in an open-topped pen, and she agrees they were vulnerable to various wild animals such as coyotes and raccoons.

"I saw a crow take off with one of the babies once," she adds.

Keeping the bunnies outside was the family's first mistake, says Hutcheon. "They should be kept inside and made a part of the family like any other pet. We



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Yolanda Hall and her daughters Stephanie, Rebecca and Jessica (above) examine the remains of a rabbit habitat across from their Ferndale Road home; one of the rabbits left to fend for itself (at left).

wouldn't accept that if it was a puppy dog." Regardless, the Alblas want the bunnies back — now that they know not all their furry friends were coyote lunch.

Hall was contacted by city staff saying the current and previous owners are hoping to work together to catch the rabbits.

"Enough people are involved so maybe the owners will step up and take care of the situation," says Hall.

While this bunny tale seems to be leading to a happy ending, the problem with abandoned bunnies is still a sad story in Richmond, says Hutcheon.

She blames pet stores that sell bunnies when there are plenty at the SPCA, and irresponsible owners for the problem.

"A lot of people think they are doing them

(the bunnies) a favour by setting them free, but a domesticated bunny doesn't have a chance."

And then there is the issue of proliferation. A female bunny can have a litter every month and may have up to 12 babies in each litter.

"It's really exponential," says Hutcheon. The problem is becoming more acute as more of Richmond's farmland is developed.

Hall says that while the owners are taking responsibility for the rabbits in this case, too often it is left up to volunteer organizations to spend their own money and time catching, neutering/spaying and looking for shelter for these abandoned creatures.

"The city should have some kind of fund that developers are required to pay into that can support these groups."