



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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**Letter to the Editor**

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## **Show kindness during Rabbit Year by not keeping one**

Every lunar new year is associated with one of the 12 zodiac animals, each bringing with them their own good fortune and strengths. With just weeks to go before the year of the rabbit is ushered, the Consumer Association of Penang (CAP) urges the public not to be tempted into buying a pet rabbit on impulse. In a consumer-oriented society people are tempted to get the animal associated with the zodiac animal for the year, the inevitable outcome of which is neglect, abuse, mistreatment, and abandonment.

As with any other past zodiac 'animal trends', there is bound to be extensive exploitation by pet retailers, petting zoos, and animal farms, due to the brisk demand for the furry creature. A high sales pitch is very worrisome to CAP because of the misconception that rabbits are low maintenance pets. They are often brought for a demanding child as though the poor creature is some animated toy. Pet shops are also not well informed, often providing wrong or false information to first-time owners. Web retailers have also jumped on the bandwagon posting rabbits to online customers with many dead on arrival, suffocated in their cardboard confines.

It is not known how many rabbits are being purchased because of this coming New Year, only to end up in the backyard and gardens of homes, stuffed into a small cage for life whilst being fed an inappropriate diet.

Animal welfare groups have also voiced concern that the wire flooring of metal cages is also very hard on delicate rabbit feet which can develop pressure sores commonly called 'sore hocks'. Most rabbit owners do not know the correct diet for their pets, feeding them on pellets the whole year round when, according to veterinarians, rabbits should be fed with hay, grass, and fresh greens and a lack of that can lead to dental problems. Rabbits live in groups and a bored rabbit can become aggressive and depressed resulting in self-harm.

In most homes, these gentle animals are subjected to filthy living conditions, in small and cramped cages for life. Observation by CAP revealed that rabbits are often bought from pet stores and then confined into cages. Rabbit owners have no idea that their pets need space to exercise as they are social creatures needing social stimulation. Often seen are rabbits in tiny hutch without proper food, or sometimes having no food, and some dirty water. As a matter of fact, many pet rabbits are badly cared for and their needs are commonly misunderstood by families looking after them.

People are unaware that rabbits are gregarious animals living in the wild in groups with a need to run and dig. Depriving them of exercise is inhumane and this will subject them to poor health. Despite their popularity, rabbits are among the most neglected animals that humans have domesticated, insensitive to the suffering such domestication often entails.

It is time for people to change their thoughts about keeping pets and tackle the ignorance that is so prevalent. Acquiring a pet requires forethought and a clear understanding of the animal's basic needs. High demand for rabbits may be inevitable in the run-up to the rabbit year with the belief that it will bring good luck. However, as with other past zodiacal hype, many rabbits will be left to their fate once the novelty dies off.

CAP, therefore, implores consumers not to follow the hype of acquiring rabbits as pets. If there is a need for a rabbit to symbolise good fortune, elegance, and beauty, people can acquire a toy rabbit or figurine instead.

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