

Bunnies not recommended as Easter gifts

By Codell Rodriguez, The Southern

An organization based in Columbus, Ohio, is advising Easter shoppers that if they are going to buy their children a bunny, make it chocolate.

Meghan Nigra of Carbondale is involved in Make Mine Chocolate, a campaign started by the Columbus House Rabbit Society. The goal is to discourage people from impulsively buying live rabbits to give children as gifts for Easter and to buy chocolate bunnies as an alternative.

Nigra said people often purchase rabbits around that time, cannot care for them and then drop them off at an animal shelter.

"Statistically, it's such a high dumping time," Nigra said.

Karen Mullins, manager of the Humane Society of Southern Illinois in Murphysboro, said informing the public of the seriousness of adopting a rabbit is extremely important because they are the third most discarded animal at humane shelters, behind dogs and cats.

"The novelty wears off or the child loses interest," Mullins said. "Some of these animals are just dumped outside, where they run the risk of being dinner for coyotes, hawks, owls and dogs."

She said the number of rabbits received at the shelter increases after Easter; two of the shelter's bunnies, Laverne and Shirley, were most likely Easter gifts.

Nigra said another problem is that when rabbits are dropped off at shelters, they are rarely adopted.

"If someone goes to the Humane Society, they're not usually going to adopt a rabbit," Nigra said.

And if someone is adopting a rabbit, Nigra said they should go to humane societies instead of pet stores because the ones at the shelter most likely came from the store originally and those who cannot find homes run the risk of being euthanized.

Mullins said when adopting rabbits, people should be ready for a difficult, full-time job. Rabbits can live as long as 10 years and should be spayed or neutered.

They also have a finicky diet that includes pellets, fresh fruits and vegetables and timothy hay, which should be available to the rabbit 24 hours a day. And because their teeth constantly grow, they have to have toys to gnaw on.

Mullins said with all the responsibility that comes with raising a rabbit, buying one as an Easter gift for a child is not necessarily the best idea.

"If a child is asking for a rabbit for Easter, make it chocolate," Mullins said. "If you don't like all the sugar candy contains, make it a stuffed toy."

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Make Mine Chocolate

For more information on Make Mine Chocolate and caring for rabbits in general, visit www.makeminechocolate.org or the House Rabbit Society's Web site at www.rabbit.org.