

Easter Bunnies

On Easter Sunday small children will be wandering through the gardens in many areas... armed with baskets and in search of coloured eggs and other things the Easter Bunny may have hidden in the bushes. Imagine their great joy at finding a full Easter nest. The Easter Bunny tradition is still relatively young as the experts from the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo know. But this particular bunny has nothing at all to do with the rabbits that we keep as house pets.

Why should it be a bunny that brings the eggs? There have been a lot of attempts at explaining this. The hare is seen as a symbol of fertility as is the egg. Yet a thousand years ago it was the egg that stood for fertility and a new life. It fits well into the idea of resurrection which we celebrate with Easter - the oldest Christian festival. In the middle ages in Germany Catholics took colourfully painted eggs with them to the church service to have them blessed. Although Protestants disapproved of this egg consecration, they adopted the Easter egg custom in the towns around 300 years ago and introduced the Easter egg search to make the festival as much a family thing as possible. They invented the hare as the bearer to distance themselves as much as possible from the Catholic practice. After all, the hare droppings of the



Easter bunny are also egg-shaped and are often seen lying next to each other like little eggs in a nest...

FROM EASTER BUNNY TO PET RABBIT

What we so commonly describe as "bunny" today and keep as pets are not hares at all, but rabbits. The difference between hares and rabbits is so serious that these two animals couldn't even mate. The field hare, which is a protected species, is much bigger and heavier than the wild rabbit. It has red-

brown fur, long ears and is encountered alone on wide meadows - apart from during the mating season. Rabbits, on the other hand, are pack animals and their rounded bodies are clad in grey-brown fur. Wild rabbits live in burrows where they also hide when danger threatens. Their young come naked and blind into the world - completely helpless. In contrast, baby hares can see from birth and are able to take on survival alone relatively quickly.

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RABBITS AS PETS

Dwarf rabbits are among the most popular of pets. They have a distinctive social behaviour and need the company of their own kind around them. Therefore one should keep them as a pair at least otherwise the creature will become lonely and unhappy. Even the widely accepted notion that guinea pigs and rabbits compliment each other ideally is wrong: each of these animals needs a true fellow which it can also get along with. Rabbits moreover

need a lot of movement and daily exercise in an outside run. An enclosure, in summer perhaps an enclosed outside run or a large cage suits them best. Bear in mind that your rabbits always needs hay and wood for gnawing on. If you let them hop around your house, watch out that cables, carpets and plants don't fall victim to their appetite. You can find more information on keeping the hopper happy at: www.maxizoo.ie



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