

We're all going on a Summer Holiday ...

the David Byng column
Photographs by Wendy Byng

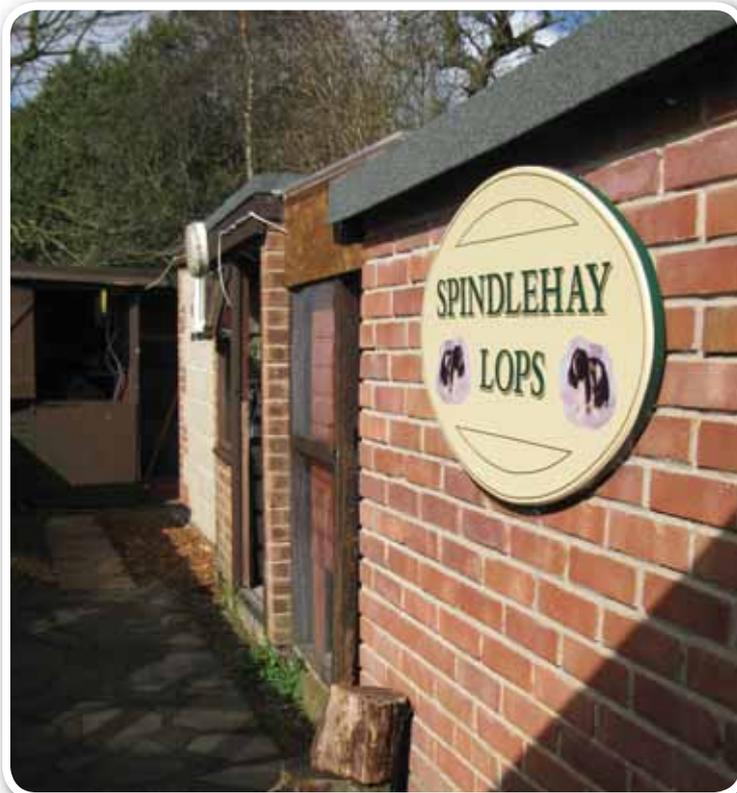


Having resisted the glossy holiday brochures through January, the sudden emergence of spring weather rekindles the yearning of many for a couple of weeks in the sun - but what to do with the rabbits?

At a local show it was very interesting that a respected member of the BRC noted that he was astonished to visit a show with so many new faces around.

When told that this was due to local breeders and boarders extolling the virtues of the pet show he was most impressed but then worried about whether this interest could be maintained.

Well! only time will tell but entries have been rising for the last three years and many have moved on to showing as could be seen by the new names on the prize cards.



Returning to the subject of holidays, it was interesting to talk to the many newcomers around the show and to find out why they had attended.

Some were the customers of our own boarding hobby and were showing some of our own babies. Others were the owners of other breeders bunnies and some had been introduced by our pet show host, Jude Dawkins and our secretary Maggie Smith, but the bulk were very keen to give praise to Sandy Croombs with whom they were boarding their bunnies while on family holidays.

Sandy together with her daughter, Emma, have run Spindlehay Lops for fourteen years and had concentrated on breeding dwarf lops.

They are members of Fareham and Southampton rabbit club and show on regular occasions and have sold off some excess stock to approved owners as pets. Changing family circumstances had decided Sandy to

reduce her breeding and showing activity and to use her love of rabbits and her extensive facilities on a new venture of boarding.

She had already embraced many of the requirements of the modern ideas of welfare and these had impressed her visitors, so it was a small step to get a business started.

At first she used her spare hutches to house some of the holiday makers but owners wishes made her realise that the pet owner demanded even more than the spacious hutches she had, so she decided she would have to invest in runs and some purpose built facilities.

At this stage she needed the additional support of her husband, Ken, and it was opportune that with the downturn in the motor industry he had more time to help in the refurbishing of her run and shed designs.

The first requirement that Ken had to fulfil was to put gates at both ends of the holiday complex; whether this was to keep Ken or her dogs out is a matter of conjecture, but it was an assurance to the owners that their rabbits would be safe and well looked after.



The next requirement was to invest in some luxury pads, with exercise area, warmth and weather protection. Two insulated and covered accommodation pens with good all round vision were built by Ken and a friend, but the investment was a risk as Sandy could not be sure if owners would be prepared to pay a small extra premium.

The answer was provided by the very next visitor as the owner was blown away and decided to let her rabbit give the facility a trial.

At first the holidaymaker was confused by his new surroundings but soon began to explore under his own steam and within a couple of hours, left to his own devices, he was perfectly at home.

It will be a labour of love before Sandy can fully justify her adventure but, as the rabbit show at Fareham revealed, the dialogue she has started between her customers, the local veterinary practice, other boarding and breeder facilities will do nothing but good for the welfare of the rabbits.

Each is given a full examination before entering the holiday home, the owners are given good advice on care and they are encouraged to share their experience with others.

Wendy and I fully embrace the willingness to communicate with other rabbit owners and do so through our own limited boarding facilities and through other establishments in the area.

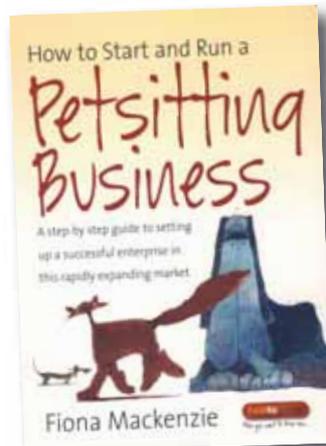
It was very refreshing to talk to the array of visitors that we had at our last show and to see the huge improvement in the care and attention paid to the pet section. The comments of previous judges such as Marion Chamberlain and our judge for the day, Ann Hipkriss, have been taken aboard and the cleanliness and condition of the pets was excellent.

Amongst the visitors were veterinary nurses, people from the cats protection league, newcomers embarking on their first experience of rabbit owning and just casual bystanders.

There were many questions about the conduct of the show, the awards and the housing and feeding of the rabbits on show but the presence of so many pets, all at ease, did wonders in allaying any criticism of our activity.

With summer approaching so many rabbits will need care and attention. Owners, especially caring and sensitive pet owners, will have the need for their own holidays and many will put their trust in a relative or neighbour to look after bunny but as with all aspects of life there will be the horror stories.

It's a small price to pay for an owner to have a caring rabbit breeder to help out and the dialogue started in this way could be one way of helping your club and the future of our hobby.



Recommended Reading:

How to Start and Run a Pet Sitting Business by Fiona Mackenzie (How To Books). Softback, 136 pages. A step by step guide to setting up a successful enterprise in this rapidly expanding market. Includes sections on researching the market, the law relating to animals, pet care, insurance, licensing, etc. £14.25 from the Fur & Feather Bookshop.



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