

Rabbit Body Language



Nonverbal communication fascinates most of us animal lovers, and who can blame us for wanting to understand our furry friends? However, reading the body language of another species can be quite challenging.

Here's an overview that can help you learn to read your rabbit's signals. Look for the clues provided and take into account your rabbit's entire body and the situation she is in—context is everything.

Happy and Content Rabbit

Your rabbit will show you that she is happy and content by using the following nonverbal cues:

- “Binkying” (jumping): a rabbit will dance and hop around when she is feeling happy and excited
- Laying on side or back (“flopping”): very relaxed
- Forward facing ears
- Teeth chattering: indicates contentment, rabbit version of purring
- Swaying and staring into space: sleeping with her eyes open

Fearful or Defensive Rabbit

Your rabbit will show you that she is fearful or defensive by using the following nonverbal cues:

- Thumping: lifting up rear feet and smacking them down in succession. Thumping can indicate either fear or anger. Thumping is often seen when an owner rearranges his rabbit's domain; rabbits are creatures of habit and routine (and they like it that way!).
- Shrill scream: signal of either extreme pain or fear

Upset or Angry Rabbit

Rabbits express anger using their ears, stance, and tail. Your rabbit will let you know that she is upset by providing you with the following clues:

- Raised tail
- Grunts
- Backward facing ears

Other Body Language Cues

A few other important rabbit body language signals are:

- Nose bonking (nudging): often used as an investigative tool to examine the area. She may also be trying to get your attention or move you.
- Chinny: a rabbit's chin contains scent glands so she may rub her chin on items to indicate that they “belong” to her
- Nipping: an attention-seeking behavior. Your rabbit is not trying to hurt you—she just wants your undivided attention.
- Teeth grinding: a sign of pain
- Bobbing or swaying head: a way to see perspective better; often occurs when lifted