

Aggressive Doe?

Question: I've just been going through your website and its fantastic for information! I have a question about our dwarf lop Bozzy. She is 10 months old and has been desexed. She lives in a two story hutch in the laundry (it's cool in there) and comes out into the lounge room with us of a night time every day when we get home from work - usually for about 3-4 hours.

She is a lovely little thing and we love her dearly. She appears to have bonded well with me. She will lick me after I give her a pat and is not adverse to a cuddle now and then either so it appears she likes me! She will also climb all over me and flop at my feet, so it seems she is more than comfortable with our presence and it's not a personal thing.



The problem we have with her is that she can still be aggressive. She is usually fine however each night we must pick her up to take her back to her hutch to bed. It is then she starts running around and will simply refuse to be picked up. She will box with her paws, and growl and nip.

We have tried giving her a treat every night when she goes to bed in the hope she will associate the two, but it doesn't seem to be working. It is very difficult at times to put her to bed and I hate chasing her around all the time, as I'm sure it's not enjoyable for her either. Even when she needs to go to the toilet, (I am very adept at spotting this now!) she still refuses to be picked up.

Unfortunately, the hutch is off the ground and therefore we must pick her up to put her in there. She is also like

this when we try to clip her toenails. It has gotten to the stage where we have to wrap her in a towel and hold her like a baby, tranced out. I don't like doing this either.

I just can't seem to get her to enjoy being held. I fully grasp the fact that this is their reaction to being "hunted" as it were, but I also think she really needs to learn there are times when she has to be picked up. We never hold her for no reason, it is just to take her from hutch to lounge and back, or to clip nails once a month. We always make sure we hold her securely, although my partner has now formed a habit of transporting her tranced out like a baby in his arms because she is a lot less likely to struggle that way. (is this a bad thing?) How on earth can we work with this!?

Thank you so much for your time and any advice you can give us. Carly and Ray

Answer: Sounds like your doe has a mind of her own . . . a rabbit with attitude for sure! It appears that she associates that time of day to when she knows what is install and is very unwilling to be confined - and food treats are obviously not as important as her freedom. Some pointers to help you understand and ideas you could try are:



- Change your/her habits, no doubt they've been fixed for a while, but it's never too late to foil her with entirely different scenarios!
- Only put her dinner in her hutch at bedtime. Get her addicted to a particular treat such as small bits of bread, raisins or anything you know she'll get excited about. Use a trail of treats to the laundry and just close the door, so she won't have to be picked up and can enter her hutch at her leisure.

- Place a sturdy ramp up to the doorway of her hutch, perhaps add carpet for sure footing. See photo example, instead of carpet, I used a doormat on top of a heavy metal ramp, which was actually a section of a fireguard.



- Instead of having free-range exercise, purchase a playpen and then there'd be no need to chase her around. Some puppy playpens have doorways, so that's another option for them to be able to come and go. Or alternatively when you get the chance you could sneak up and close the door. 😊
- Drape a towel over her anytime she is aggressive or whenever you have to catch her . . . the darkness usually quiets bunnies. Or at least helps to prevent scratching or biting when scooping them up. Lying in your arms (like a baby) works wonders with the majority of flighty rabbits and I recommend it! Sometimes I think it calms them down because they used to suckle mother's milk in this position. Rabbits are indeed sensitive animals . . . especially in the way they sense nervousness, lack of confidence in human handlers. So the more you are relaxed (yet firm), the more they'll gain confidence and trust that you know what you are doing and won't drop them from scary heights.
- Don't worry about her making a fuss when you need to clip her nails, after all you are doing her a favour! Just like kids who tantrum about nail clipping or hair brushing, these things are necessary!

There's only so much I can relay in an e-mail, so it might be a good idea to try to borrow my book from the library. If they don't have it just tell them they really ought to get it in, as every pet owner (and their bunnies) needs such a handy resource!