

# DWARF RABBITS AND ECZEMA

In its simplest form eczema is also called “dry skin”. There are many causes of eczema and there are many types. Here is some of our own information on eczema in dwarf rabbits. Some common causes include parasites like fur mites (mange) or poor quality food (too much of something or too little of something).

What the dwarf rabbit owner will see first is some of the following;

- Bald patches; and
- Dry skin or flakiness (can be felt when you are holding your dwarf rabbit);

Since 2003 it is safe to say we have had about 900 dwarf rabbits go through our hands and about 150 of other people’s dwarf rabbits (kennelling; assessing etc.). Of this 1 000 dwarf rabbits we have only encountered 4 cases of eczema and in all cases it presented in the same way.

## **Four cases that we were involved in**

- These were two females and two males;
- They were one Dutch, one BEW, one Augotti and one New Zealand Red;
- Three of the four we could identify had been housed at least one night in a place (e.g. A Vet’s office or a makeshift cage) where other pets were kept. This was within 6 weeks of them getting eczema;
- From the first scab to full blown (>10% of the body) was quick in all cases (~2-3 weeks).

- All owners reported that these dwarf rabbits had friends or mates who suddenly started biting them;
- No fatal cases ever emerged to date with the worst case being 40% of the body coverage;
- Heads, tummies and paws stay clean the longest but with no treatment can also become infected;
- Rabbits from 6 weeks to 4 years old can develop eczema;
- In only one case (0.1%) did the clean dwarf rabbit sharing a cage with an infected dwarf rabbit also develop eczema after 10-12 days of being together as they were not separated(-see reason below);
- Most of the owners recognised it as eczema but did admit handling their rabbits less because they felt “dirty” or “icky”.

## **Why dwarf rabbit eczema is serious**

Fly mites can very easily infest the scabs and before you know it little wriggly worms are inside the scabs.

## **Behaviour of dwarf rabbits with eczema:**

- The dwarf rabbit that develops eczema continues to play and eat as often as it did before so here there are no behaviour changes here;
- Dwarf rabbits will try to spend more time in the sun to help

drying (assuming the owners let them outside);

- If they are in cages they will sit and rub themselves against the cages;
- Dwarf rabbits groom obsessively so where eczema is accessible to its mouth it will lick, and bite this;
- If your dwarfie rooms with another dwarf rabbit you would notice that the clean dwarfie starts co-grooming the infected dwarfie. In two cases owners brought the dwarf rabbits to us because 'this one suddenly started biting that one'. We think this is due to:
  - The clean dwarfie is helping the other by grooming the scabs off your infected dwarfie and clearing hair away from infected areas (and sadly infecting itself).

## Treatment

Here is some internet tips for treatment but typically involves a Vet which can be costly. We use the non-Vet alternative.

1. Some Vets immediately start with injections (typically a course of three shots over 6-weeks). Some Vets may want to first take a skin scraping to confirm that the dryness is caused by a parasite. The Vet may also prescribe medication to kill the parasite.
2. If your dwarf rabbit's dry skin is not caused by a parasite, your vet might recommend a bath. Your Vet will recommend a shampoo from the pet store. A rabbit shampoo or a waterless bath shampoo will keep the dwarf rabbit dry while

treating her skin **(DANGER: Bathing a rabbit in water can be fatal if done wrong!)**.

3. You can also brush your dwarf rabbit with a rabbit brush. This will not only increase circulation, but will make its coat feel better.
4. Massaging your infected dwarfie's skin will provide lots of relief and help the healing;
5. Follow up with your vet to ensure the skin problem has been eliminated completely.

We have had 3 of 4 successful treatments (remember, one dwarf rabbit arrived so late that it sadly died). We do not recommend to lay people how to treat them because it is a regimen that works but is time consuming. Call us if you want to treat your dwarf rabbit but first off try to isolate it and then treatment can commence. All treatment that we have started has been successful within 30 days.



***Let us know if you find any other tips that you think may be of use to all dwarf rabbit owners.***