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## Who's killing the bunnies at San Jose's Easterbrook school?

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Posted: 07/29/2009 05:08:59 PM PDT

Updated: 07/30/2009 09:50:10 AM PDT

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Call it the Great Bunny Multiplication and Murder Mystery of 2009.

Nobody knows precisely why so many pet rabbits have been abandoned next to San Jose's Easterbrook Discovery School — maybe it's the name. But after years of doing what rabbits do — and more Easter bunnies being dumped at the same 1.5-acre site — the population has soared into the hundreds. Now suddenly, so has the death rate.

Somebody is killing the bunnies in Moreland Woods.

"The place is strewn with bodies of bunnies," said Lily Lee, a San Jose physician who has spearheaded efforts to try to help or rescue the bunnies. "They're on the sidewalk in the woods, in places where children play."

Easterbrook and Moreland Elementary School District officials have known about the bunnies in their midst for years, but it took the recent cruelty to push the problem into the open — that and complaints from residents in the area who say hungry rabbits have migrated from the woods and nibbled away at their gardens.

"There are three camps," said Dana Taylor, assistant superintendent for business and support services for the Moreland district. "People who love the rabbits, people who hate the rabbits and people in between."

The rabbits have taken the brunt of all that emotion.

### Insurance requirement

Lee said she saw "at least 20 bunny bodies" last Thursday. Some of them were recent deaths, some were decayed and some were in pieces. Lee, a volunteer with PAWS (Pet Awareness Welfare Society), a nonprofit group formed to help San Jose Animal Care and Services, started meeting with school district officials in February to try to work out a solution. Both sides agreed that something needed to be done, but there was a catch, a big one: Lee and her fellow rabbit rescuers would have to buy an expensive liability insurance policy to cover anyone who went inside the wooded area to humanely trap the bunnies.

"It didn't make sense," she said. "They weren't enforcing people bringing their dogs onto the property; they wanted us to use all of the money we raised to care for the bunnies for insurance."

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Luckily, just recently, after networking and negotiating, the group thinks it's found a policy it can afford.

Still, the mystery remains: Who — or what — is killing the bunnies?

One resident said a bunch of decapitated baby bunnies were dumped in his yard. After a surveillance camera was installed, that culprit turned out to be a cat, said Capt. Leslie Tisdale, field operations supervisor for San Jose Animal Control.

She said animal control will investigate incidents as they happen but placed responsibility for the rabbits on the school district. "I think it's Moreland School District's responsibility," she said.

School district officials said they have been trying to find a solution. Rabbit rescuers said they haven't tried hard or fast enough.

This past spring, they posted a sign on the fence around Moreland Woods that says: "Do Not Dump Rabbits Here, It Is a Crime."

"We have repaired the fence multiple times," said Robert Varich, president of the school board. "We've gone to California Fish & Game, San Jose Animal Control, and Critter Control (a private pest control company) contacted us. We've tried to find a solution."

The issue went back and forth until recently when two or more dog owners reportedly had ugly confrontations with people who often walk the perimeter of the property to check on the bunnies.

"I went over there one evening after dark," said Heather Draeger, who lives a block from the school. She said she saw a dog running loose in the field and asked the dog's owner if he would "please leash your dog."

"He was all over me," said Draeger, who later e-mailed a "call to action" to neighbors about the bunnies and claims the man said "he was glad his dog killed one of the rabbits."

Other rabbit watchers said they found a dying bunny, a pregnant female, shortly after some teenagers were seen in the woods with a pellet gun just over a week ago.

## Reward fund

PAWS named the dead rabbit Wish, and Lee donated \$1,000 to kick off a reward fund in Wish's name for information leading to the arrest and conviction of people involved in killing the rabbits. There has been some progress.

Several rabbit rescue groups have started collecting

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some of the bunnies. Since they aren't allowed into Moreland Woods, they have managed to trap about 30 of the bunnies as they came out of the fenced area to the park next door in search of food.

"These are not [wild rabbits](#) ; you can hold them," said Marcy Schaaf of Marin County-based SaveABunny. SaveABunny and other groups, such as PAWS and The Rabbit Haven in Santa Cruz, said they are committed to rescuing, rehabilitating and finding homes for all of the rabbits in the woods. And they're hoping the public will help with donations.

"Imagine if someone were dumping golden retriever puppies, there would be a huge outcry," Schaaf said. "That's the most upsetting thing for us — getting people to care."

Contact Linda Goldston at 408-920-5862.

## HOW TO HELP

Many of the rabbits rescued from Moreland Woods will be available for adoption. For more information or to make donations to care for the rabbits, contact the following rescuers:

PAWS: [www.paws4sjacs.org](http://www.paws4sjacs.org)

SaveABunny: [www.saveabunny.com](http://www.saveabunny.com)

The Rabbit Haven: [www.therabbithaven.org](http://www.therabbithaven.org)

Checks may be mailed to: PAWS for SJACS, 2633 South Bascom Ave., Campbell, CA 95008.

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