

The Saga of the Black Rabbit

by Don Turner

I must admit that I don't know most of this bunny's story. My first encounter with the black bunny occurred back in December. I parked my car at one of the many trail heads for Lake Conestee Nature Park in Mauldin, SC. I grabbed my camera gear and went down the trail toward one of the lake remnants to take some photos of the trees along the lake as the morning sun first struck them. I took photos for an hour or so and headed back to my car to go home. As I approached the parking lot I saw it.

A dark little animal was playing around my car. I got closer and saw it was a black bunny, cute as it could be. Someone had bought a pet bunny, decided it was too much trouble, brought it to the park and set it free. It didn't seem afraid of me. I took a few photos of it as it played in the morning sun. Eventually it hopped off into the woods so I went home.

The next day I came back to the same trail head and there it was again. I actually was able to touch it briefly before it hopped back into the trees.

Then I got an idea: the next time I'll bring food.

Over the next few days I visited the park every morning. Each time the bunny was within a few feet of the same place, sitting on the edge of the tree-line in some tall grass sunning itself and chewing tender leaves. I fed it carrots and banana; apparently they were quite a bit tastier than the leaves. The bunny got more and more relaxed around me. Soon I was petting it as it took food right from my hand. On an especially cold morning I took off my gloves and lay them on the frosty grass. I sat on the gloves and the bunny hopped over to me.

I Picked it up and placed it on my lap. I cuddled the bunny with my arms and hands for about ten minutes to warm it up a bit. It made no move to escape my lap.

From the first day I saw the bunny I had been trying to find a home for it. I asked family and people I saw in the park. The local no-kill animal shelter would not take strays and I was afraid what might happen if I took it to some other shelter. Then someone I met in the park suggested a local rabbit rescue named Rabbit Sanctuary, Inc.

I called and they could take the bunny. I borrowed a cat carrier from my sister and on Saturday morning I headed for Lake Conestee Nature Park on a rescue mission. I was armed with both carrot and banana to coax the bunny toward the carrier.

My big fear was that instead of finding the cute bunny I might find nothing... or worse, a black bunny carcass. The bunny had shown no concept of fear, not of people, or even of curious dogs that saw it on the edge of the parking lot. I knew that the first predator it encountered would have this cute little rabbit for a meal.

I parked my car, pulled the carrier out of the back seat, sat on the grass in front of my car, and took off the carrier door. With a piece of banana in my left hand I walked along the frosty mowed grass, looking in the tall weeds and calling softly to the bunny. I was a bit nervous about capturing it. I figured I had one chance. If I frightened the bunny and it got away I might never see it again.

Imagine my surprise!

The black bunny appeared from the tall weeds and hopped right over to me as though it was answering my call. I bent down and gave it the banana. We were about fifteen feet from the carrier, a long way to coax a bunny.

I changed my plan.

I just reached down and picked it up. It did not struggle at all. I walked over to the carrier and placed the bunny inside. Now the only issue was getting the wire door back on the carrier before the bunny spooked and escaped.

I should have practiced putting the door back on ahead of time. I fumbled with the door several minutes. My first attempt failed; I tried to put it on upside down...and it would not close. While the bunny was poking its nose out and climbing the door, I had to take it off and flip it around to put it back on correctly. I just knew the bunny would slip past me and get away.

But it didn't.

In fact, after I got the door safely closed I realized the bunny was just trying to get closer to my banana-flavored fingers. It wasn't trying to escape at all. It was calm and comfortable in the carrier especially after I squeezed another piece of banana through the wire door.

A few minutes later I was at the Rabbit Sanctuary. I met Caroline Gilbert, a sweet lady who had been rescuing bunnies for over forty years. And I met some of her bunnies and petted a few bunny noses. They were healthy and friendly and well-treated. This was much better than the certain death the black bunny faced in the park. She told me the bunny was declining in health quickly and would not have lasted much longer the wild. A week in the wild is a long time for a pet bunny.

She said the bunny would be taken to the vet to check for parasites and then it would become a member of her little group. It would be given a good diet and should do well.

I have learned a few things from this adventure. Too many people buy bunnies for pets and, when they get tired of them, they put them out in the wild to fend for themselves. Even wild bunnies don't live very long in the wild. To release a pet bunny into the wild is a quick death sentence. If you're considering a pet bunny, do your research. It may not be for you.

And if you have one and can't keep it, find a good home for it; it can not survive except as a pet.

I have spoken to Caroline on the phone to get an update on the bunny's health and to give her permission to use parts of this article in the Adopt-A-Rabbit newsletter. The black bunny has a name now; because all my encounters with it were in the morning, it will be called Morning Glory. I have just learned that it is an un-spayed female (not pregnant). She has taken a course of medication for hookworm and has begun to gain weight; she had lost a lot of weight in those few days in the wild. She will be spayed once her health improves. Caroline has found her to be just as cute and friendly as I did.

My part of the black bunny saga has come to an end. I have enjoyed being a brief part of a bunny's life. Hopefully, Morning Glory will regain her health completely and live out her natural life span around her own kind and in the loving care she will receive at Rabbit Sanctuary, Inc.

Don Turner is a Vietnam veteran. He is a photographer/writer whose enjoyment of hiking led him to Morning Glory. His blog is www.taomanna.com