

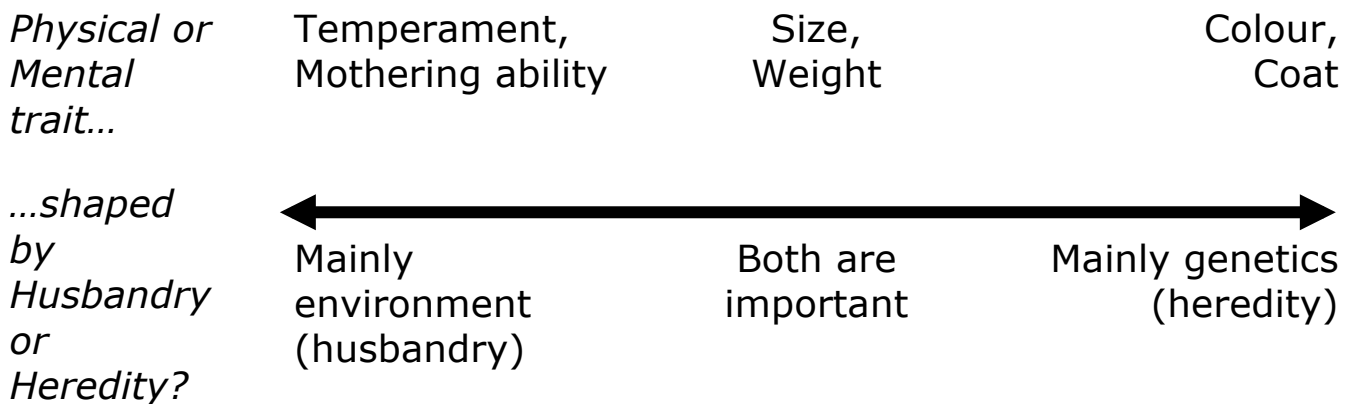
HUSBANDRY OR HEREDITY

Do we know the answers yet?

By Andrew Cottam

Joe Phillips's article reprinted in the last NOFRRRA Newsletter started with a question and finished with the hope that some answers would be revealed shortly through research.

Thirty years on researchers on both sides of the heredity or husbandry argument (sometimes called the "nature -v- nurture debate") continue to argue for one or the other – but do we have any more answers? Well; yes and no!: Yes, heredity and genetic makeup heavily influence the physical and mental make-up of any animal. Their environment and husbandry, however, often determines which inherited traits blossom and which never show to their full potential. So what does that mean for your rabbits?:



Interestingly, research has shown that the mother's behaviour in the early days of their youngsters lives influences their 'personality'. That includes how they deal with stressful situations and how good the female young themselves are as mothers when they mature.

Research has also shown that environmental conditions experienced early in life (between birth and weaning) may effect animals throughout their life. Food availability, stocking levels and temperature have all been found to be important. Get conditions right and they create a 'silver spoon effect' (as in born with a silver spoon in their mouths – ie favoured from the start of their lives) which can last for all an animals life.

Joe's article also talked about the reproductive system. Researchers have established that reproduction can be switched off temporarily by environmental factors such as poor nutrition. There are also some chemicals that can directly influence the reproductive cells, changing them permanently.

How does this further knowledge help the rabbit breeder? Well it shows much of what the old stockmen (and women!) did has a scientific basis. It particularly shows how important husbandry as well as heredity is for your breeding does – know their history, including what their mothers were like. The balance swings more towards heredity being most important when selecting your stud bucks.

Andrew Cottam (also known as Amber's – your Press Secretary's - Dad!)