# PSEUDO PREGNANCY

An unusual feature of great interest to breeders is that of pseudo-pregnancy. This phenomenon is of common occurrence and is related to the management and genetic make up of the stock concerned. The ovaries normally shed some of their eggs immediately after mating has taken place, after which yellow bodies (copora lutea) form in their place. These give rise to a hormone (progesterone), which in turn results in internal changes taking place typical of early pregnancy. If a false pregnancy occurs it lasts about 18 to 20 days, and therefore if a doe starts fur pulling and making a nest within three weeks of conception, the false nature of the pregnancy can be assumed. It should be confirmed by palpatating the abdomen of the doe which should not reveal any foetus's in the womb. If such does are placed with a buck many will mate immediately, and a proper pregnancy should then follow. Does which repeatedly have false pregnancies should be culled or housed separately for three weeks prior to mating.

## Doe's Milk

Chemical examination of doe's milk has shown that it contains about fourteen per cent of protein which means that it is three times as rich as ordinary cows milk. It is therefore necessary to feed good quality food in unlimited quantity during late pregnancy and throughout lactation. At the height of lactation the doe a does will produce 5 ounces or more of milk daily. Does usually feed their young once every twenty four hours, a somewhat unusual phenomenon and they often feed their litter in the standing position!. Should it become obvious that a newly kindled doe is not producing milk, a veterinary surgeon should be consulted since he may be able to inject the doe with a hormone to stimulate mammary function.

## Coprophagy

The rabbit (like that rat) is characterised by the habit of coprophagy which literal means the *eating of faecal matter.* In the rabbit two kinds of faecal pellet are produced, one ,the normal type seen on the hutch floor and the other a special

smaller, softer pellet which is wallowed directly from the anus. These pellets which are formed in the colon, remain in the rabbits stomach for several hours before passing into the intestine where the absorption of a variety of water-soluble vitamins. etc (synthesized by bacterial action) takes place.

It should be emphasised that coprophagy in the rabbit is a natural habit and not evidence of depraved appetite. Its origin is uncertain. It may be a method of occupying the animal at a time when (under natural conditions) feeding is impossible, representing Natures way of increasing her supply of certain essential vitamins. It is probably related to the length of time rabbits normally spend in their burrow,

## SOME THOUGHTS ON FUR

A well written standard is one that gives a complete description, is easily understood and is not ambiguous. Most smooth coated rex are judged by a general points standard and vary only in colour/and or markings in this group are both the Orange and the Fawn Rex Rabbits.

Forty points are allocated for FUR and the standard states that it should be approximately half an inch in length. Not a SHORT coat, not a LONG coat. APPROXIMATELY means nearly right, fairly exact etc.

FUR is generally accepted as that part of the pelt which is used by furrier. This is known as the 'sleeve' and would be the whole body from just behind the ears to the base of the tail, head, legs and tail would not be included. Our perfect length would be exactly half an inch all over this area and if this were so there would be no penalty for length.

The feel of a good rex coat often baffles the newcomer to the Fancy, but by direct comparison with other rabbits the feel of the coat is soon apparent. A true Rex coat is when the hairs stand at ninety degrees to the skin, it is comprised of a very dense coat of soft downy fur supported by a profusion of guard hairs which must be slightly shorter in length. The guard hairs give life and a plush like feel to the coat, but they should not

be seen or felt above the softer hairs. The fur should be intensely dense, jam packed, impenetrable and when blown into no skin should be seen.

The top level of fur should be of a fine silky texture free from harshness and wooliness. Run the palm of the hand lightly over the coat from the tail to the head, it should glide over the fur with little trace of resistance. Guard hairs will give a rough touch and wooliness will cause the hand to drag. Many ermines have a woolly coat and this is because the soft downy hair has outpaced the guard hairs and little groups of them tend to cross and matt. To test for firmness press the palm of the hand flat on top of the coat, there should be a definite springiness with plenty of resistance to pressure.

There are no disqualifications for fur, but there are faults. These are not serious faults or minor faults, they are just faults. They are:
Thin or curly triangle on the back of the neck behind the ears, lack of density, harsh, wavy or curly coats. Faults of course must carry a penalty and this is left to the judges discretion. It is fairly obvious that a rabbit with a complete curly coat would loose more points than with a curly chest. Do not hesitate to exhibit rabbits with faults, they all have them but some will not be penalised as much as others. A great deal can be learnt when exhibiting and comparing your stock with that owned by other fanciers.

Why not check your forty fur points?

1. **Observation.** Is the fur smooth and level over the whole body, has it a lustrous sheen. Is it devoid of projecting guard hairs. Moulty rabbits are normally patchy.

2. **Length and Density**. Blow into the fur all over the body, is it the correct length, is it intensely dense. Are the hair shafts straight, kinks or curl is a fault.

3. **Texture**. Has the fur a silky texture free from harshness and drag, is it firm to touch with plenty of spring and resistance.

I have been asked by Nicholas Hayter to give some information on moult in rabbits, so here goes:

## MOULT IN RABBITS

Moult is the death and replacement of the fur, a natural process which does however make the animal feel below par. Temperature has an effect: it can make the moult begin a month early in cold weather, or a month late in hot weather.

Moult normally starts on the head and proceeds backwards and downwards. The areas of the flanks (in the region of the tail) and belly are thus the last places to be cleared of moult, and it is here that signs of moulting should be sought when the animal is being examined to see if it is in tight coat.

The moulting of the adult rabbit is a continuous process, although the severity of loss of hair and growth of new hairs varies considerably. The first moult is usually started in early spring, when the heavier winter coat is shed and the summer coat grown. The summer coat is less dense than the winter coat. It may not be until the autumn that the animal sheds an appreciable number of hairs and the moult is apparent. In some cases a very severe loss of hair and rapid growth of new hair may occur, when the appreciable moult period may be very short. In other cases the moulting period may be much longer.

Apart from the normal moult, several other types of moult may occur. In the pregnant doe there is the loosening of hair on the belly, thighs and chest and she is thus able to pluck out fur easily to line her nest. The same loosening which is due to the effect of hormones produced during pregnancy occurs when the doe is pseudo-pregnant. There may be a double moult: that is to say the rabbit may start and complete a moult immediately after a first moulting

Although the fineness of the hairs and the rapidity of their growth, and the length of the moult period are determined

basically by inheritance of the rabbit these characteristics are much affected by environment of which feeding and temperature are the two most important factors. A high level of nutrition will tend to produce a thicker fibre.