

# The medicine woman of the long-eared

One would be hard pressed to find anyone who knows more about rabbits than Esther van Praag. Her website [MediRabbit.com](http://MediRabbit.com) has about 30,000 visitors monthly. It is because of her work and commitment to rabbits that she becomes the "Tierwelt" encouragement prize winner for 2012.

**K**aspi, Yara and Zippy who are house rabbits, are likely the happiest rabbits in Switzerland. Not only do they live free-range in an apartment, have a weekly outdoor garden journey, get healthy food, have excellent health care, but their caretaker is none other than Esther van Praag a Ph.D. biologist, who is a sought after expert in rabbit diseases and rabbit care.

Many years of self-study and rabbit care have helped Esther, a Swiss woman with Dutch roots, become a renowned rabbit expert. In 2003, she created [Medirabbit.com](http://Medirabbit.com), a non-commercial website where veterinarians as well as rabbit owners can research critical information about rabbit health and handling. "The website is an informational instrument, but also that of exchange and support" declares the French-Swiss woman in perfect German. She is fluent in 5 languages - Dutch, French, English and Hebrew as well as German. Esther wrote her doctoral thesis at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and has since used her research and organizational abilities to gather much needed information on rabbits and begin assembling this information in one place.

[Medirabbit.com](http://Medirabbit.com) has developed into a global source of information for veterinarians, breeders and pet rabbit owners since it was created. Esther van Praag and her website have since remained an important place for questions –from both experts and lay persons. Requests for help come not only from all over Europe and the USA, but also from Saudi-Arabia, Iraq and Iran. One example - a pet rabbit owner from the Philippines whose rabbit had a tilted head asked for help with the diagnosis. To Esther, because of her own knowledge and experience, it was obvious that this rabbit's problem related to an inner ear infection or a parasite.

**It is Esther van Praag's dream to share her knowledge professionally.**

Her work is not limited to her website only, in 2010, she wrote and published a 400 page book titled "Skin Diseases of Rabbits." Her next book on diseases of the heads of rabbits is being researched and assembled now. Esther dedicates herself to rabbit research; however she does not earn any income from it. "I dream to be able to earn a living as well as to share my knowledge, whether it is with veterinary student's studies or perhaps in specialized seminars about rabbits, their health as well as their care and handling."

Until now, rabbit medicine has been marginalized in Switzerland. "From a medical point of view, rabbit are still considered "exotic" animals in Switzerland, about which very little is



*Esther van Praag hat ein Herz für Kaninchen, vor allem für Kaspi, Yara und Zippy.*

known. During the 5 year long study to become a veterinarian only few hours are dedicated to rabbits. What remains is a great knowledge gap in relation to rabbit health", explains Dr. Van Praag. One searches in vain for a professorship on rabbit medicine in Switzerland, however at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland there is a professorship for rabbit medicine and surgery. Dr. Van Praag hopes that soon the rest of the veterinary studies world will catch up to that of Scotland.

Every Sunday, Kaspi, Yara and Zippy enjoy a trip to Esther's parent's house and garden. She calls it her "Rabbit party", smiling. The three rabbits seem to enjoy it; all three appear to be in amazingly good health. Especially surprising, since one of her rabbits named Zippy,

an 18 months old castrated male suffers from the genetic intestinal disease known as "megacolon." This disease is the very reason why Zippy was adopted by Esther and her family. "Through Zippy I can closely observe the disease and its evolution, and identify treatment possibilities", explains the rabbit expert.

Esther van Praag is profoundly honored to get the «Tierwelt»-Förderpreis 2012 for her involvement and work with rabbits. "For me this was a tremendous surprise. It is recognition of my work, and it motivates and encourages me to continue. The prizewinner has never felt 'rabbit tired' to this day. To stop the work for the 'long-eared' has never crossed her mind, since there are still many rabbit diseases that have not been researched. *Text and Picture: Christa Wüthrich.*

*English editing: Bonnie Salt*