

Man discovers rabbits 'live up to their reputation'

80 bunnies are found in San Franciscan's home.

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SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO

— A few years back the focus was on Marilyn Barletta, Petaluma's so-called "cat woman" who was found to have been keeping 196 cats in her home. In the past week, also in Petaluma, nearly 1,000 rats were discovered in filthy conditions in the home of Roger Dier.

And Friday, in South San Francisco, a man with a soft spot for bunnies was reported to the local humane society. When animal welfare workers arrived at his home, they discovered 80 rabbits chewing on day-old bagels and cauliflower.

It seems, for various reasons, sometimes the cutest of creatures can pile up — fast.

"This case hit us at the worse possible time," said Scott Delucchi, a spokesman for the Peninsula Humane Society, which is working to house the confiscated rabbits and find them new, less-crowded homes.

The three months after Easter are a busy time with extra rabbits that have been turned in after the new owners get bored, Delucchi said.

This, however, was a case of a man who bought a couple of rabbits for his son's class project — rabbits that ended up doing what rabbits do best.

"He didn't know you can fix a rabbit like you can dogs and cats," Delucchi said. "They lived up to their reputation as prolific multipliers."

The South San Francisco

man, whose name was not released, was cooperative with animal workers and handed over all 80 of the animals. He was promised three keepers in return after they were checked out, Delucchi said.

No animal cruelty charges were expected.

The abundance of bunnies is just the latest in a string of Bay Area animal hoardings to come to light.

Dier, of Petaluma, was found in the past week living with nearly 1,000 squealing rats in his one-bedroom home. He was cited for animal cruelty and admitted that his overflowing collection of rats had gotten a bit out of control.

Still, he insisted, the furry rodents loved him and he loved them, according to Nancee Tavares, the city's Animal Services manager.

Barletta, the cat keeper, didn't even live with her felines. She merely kept the Petaluma home and drove there from her San Francisco residence to care for them on occasion.

Barletta was arrested in May 2001 after the discovery of the sickly cats, and underwent at least three psychiatric evaluations.

Sonoma County Superior Court Judge Robert Dale accepted the recommendation of one psychiatrist and determined Barletta was mentally incompetent to stand trial.

Delucchi said that often the animal lovers are simply lonely.