

Small Animal Record Equals Big Work

Oldest rabbit owner shares story of claiming world record in Guinness Book.

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Even small pets can accomplish big feats, as one Netherland dwarf rabbit, George, found out.

On March 13, 2008, the rabbit of Tewksbury, Mass., was inducted into the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest rabbit in the world. For George, the task was simple – keep on hopping. It was his owners, Joe and Amy Breton, who did the grunt work of claiming their bunny's world record.

"Initially, when we tried to put George in he was about 13 years of age. They told us we didn't have the record, that there was in fact a rabbit who was older," Amy said. "But when he turned 14, they said we had the record."

For five months, starting in November 2007, Amy and Joe dug up the records to "prove without a doubt" to Guinness Book that George was really the age they claimed he was.

"With dogs and cats it's a little bit easier because they've been to the veterinary clinic," Amy said. "But with a rabbit, even though he had been to a vet clinic, it's just very hard to prove a rabbit's age because they don't have the same dentistry as a dog or a cat."

So the Breton's had to get creative with their proof.

They collected about 20 affidavits from friends and family, including George's original owner, stating how long each person has known the rabbit. Four veterinarian signatures they acquired showed that George's physical aspects, such as his cataracts, arthritis and dentistry, proved he was an older rabbit. They even wrote a three-page paper explaining their life with George and dug up 35 to 40 photographs from the past – a past without digital time stamps – to prove how long George had been around.

One such picture showed George with a textbook from a class that Amy took in the fall of 1999.

"It was a picture of him sitting next to my anatomy and physiology book with my transcript that said when I took my anatomy and physiology class that is proving he was alive back then," Amy said. "You had to get completely creative with how you had to show that without a doubt that this was the rabbit, and this was the same rabbit all these years."

Once the Bretons gathered all the paperwork, which Amy said took at least 40 hours over the course of two months, they had to write their address, telephone number and claim number on every piece they submitted.

Guinness Book responded to their claim via e-mail 10 weeks after they sent in their submission.

"We were so happy. It was obviously up to their discretion to decide whether he was who we say he was," Amy said. "But we had pretty concrete evidence."

George isn't the only small animal whose claim to fame is a world record. These other small animals have made appearances on Guinness's world record list over the years: Longest Eared Rabbit: Nipper's Geronimo, an English lop owned by Waymon and Margaret Nipper. It was measured by the American Rabbit Breeder's Association to have the longest ears on a rabbit at about 31 inches. Oldest Chinchilla: Bouncer, owned by Jenny Ann Bowen of the United Kingdom. Born July 1, 1977 and died October 3, 2005, it lived to be 28 years and 94 days old. Smallest Breed of Domestic Hamster: Roborovski hamster, originating from Mongolia and northern China. It grows to about 1.5 inches in length. Largest Hamster Litter: 26 hamsters, owned by the Miller family of Louisiana. The hamsters were born February 28, 1974. Fastest Eater (Mammal): Star-nosed mole. Dr. Kenneth Catania of Vanderbilt University found in his study that it has an eating time of 120 milliseconds. Largest Rodent: Capybara of South America. It can grow anywhere from 3 feet 3 inches to 4 feet 3 inches and up to 174 pounds. Most Dangerous Love Life: Male brown antechinus of Australia. This marsupial mouse has an intense two-week mating period in which it mates with as many females as possible. Then the entire male population dies from ulcers, infections, exhaustion or starvation caused by stress. Smelliest Mammal: Striped skunk of North



America. When threatened, this animal releases a foul odor from its anal scent glands. Sleepiest Mammals: Uinta ground squirrel and barrow ground squirrel of North America. Each species sleeps for about nine months a year.