



Chapter 006, The Domestic Rabbit, *Oryctolagus Cuniculus*: Origins and History (American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine)

Mark Suckow

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NOTE: This is a single chapter excerpted from the book *The Laboratory Rabbit, Guinea Pig, Hamster, and Other Rodents*, made available for individual purchase. Additional chapters, as well as the entire book, may be purchased separately.

This chapter discusses the origin and the history of the domestic rabbit. All varieties of domestic rabbits used in modern biomedical research were developed from the European rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*. The European rabbit possesses a mixture of features that make it an appealing model for in vivo research: an intermediate body size, tractable disposition, ability to breed readily in captivity, and a short generation time. Given its obvious utility as a research subject, the European rabbit is richly represented in the scientific literature from the Age of Enlightenment onward. When breed standards improved and production facilities moved from the backyard to commercial rabbitries, rabbits were increasingly accepted as research models. The obvious physical and behavioral differences between European rabbits and other leporids ultimately led to the recognition of *Oryctolagus* as a separate genus, with *O. cuniculus* as the only member species. The role of the European rabbit as a game species, agricultural commodity, research model, invasive pest, endangered species, and companion animal has increased.

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