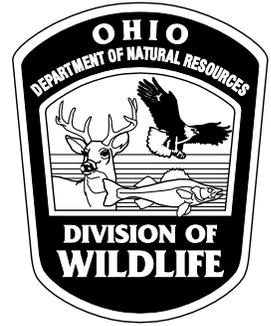


Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

Scientific Name: *Sylvilagus floridanus*



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Introduction

The Eastern cottontail rabbit is one of the most common wildlife species in the state of Ohio. Although native to the state it was not as nearly widespread prior to European settlement. As with several other species of wildlife, the Eastern cottontail was a beneficiary of settlement; the clearing of woodlands and the establishment of more open areas along wood- ed borders provided an ideal environment.

Cottontail rabbits are found in all 88 counties of Ohio. They are also distributed throughout much of the continental United States, found as far west as the Plains states and into parts of New Mexico and Arizona. They can also be found in southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Canada.

Cottontail rabbits are also prolific. It has been estimated that if no young rabbits were lost from a litter, one pair of rabbits could produce 350,000 offspring in five years. This is unlikely to ever occur as rabbits also have a high mortality rate--few live more than a year.

Description

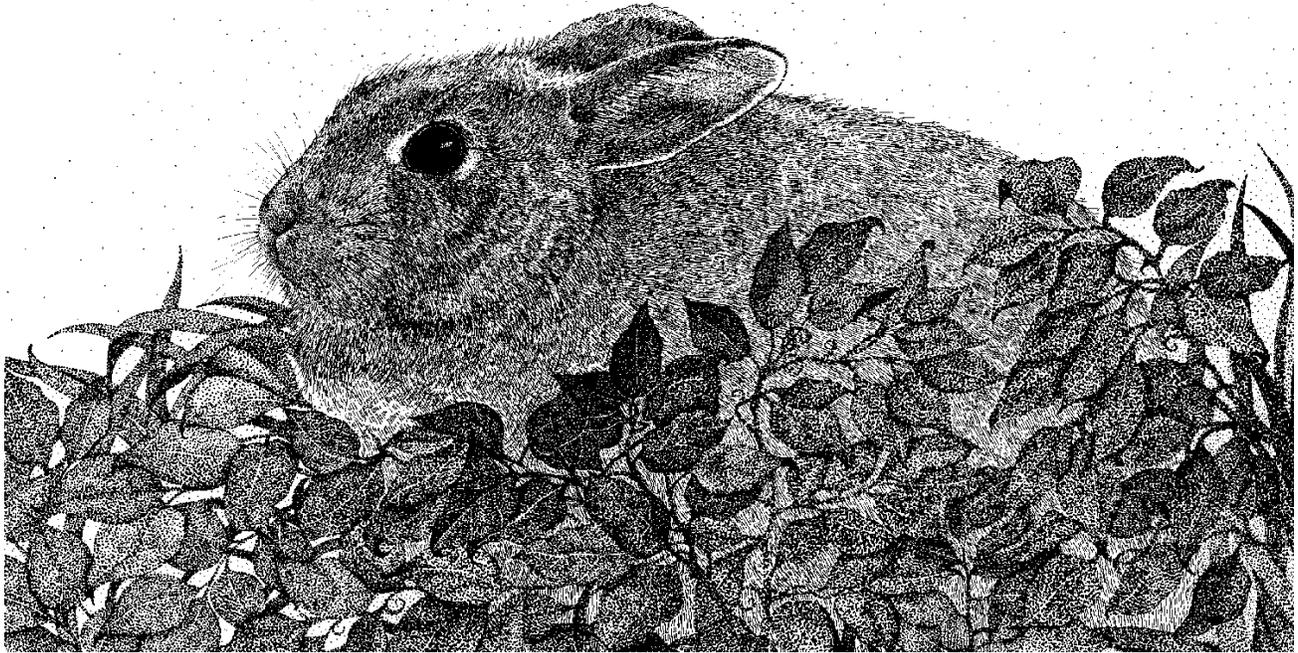
The Eastern cottontail rabbit is a small mam- mal with a brownish-gray body, long ears, and a small white tuft of a tail that resembles a cotton ball--the feature it derives a part of its name from. There is also a rusty colored patch of fur on the nape of the neck. The feet can be whit- ish.

Habitat and Habits

Eastern cottontail rabbits prefer open areas bordered by thickets or brush areas. Prefer- ably the open area is an old field with tall grass. Nearby burrows are used as protection from predators and harsh weather. Open woods with nearby brush piles or near fields are also utilized. Still rabbits are found inhabiting suburbs and cities using lawns and nearby borders of shrubbery and other boundary plantings for food and cover.

Rabbits prefer to eat near cover, and rely on "travel lanes" not only for safe haven, but as a relatively safe way to get from place to place. A travel lane may be a brushy fencerow, mul- tiflora rose hedges, immature pines, corn rows, stream banks or dry drainage ditches--cotton- tails are reluctant to get into water although they are capable of fording water, but only if necessary.

The cottontail rabbit has an unusual court- ship display. The male and female will sit and face each other. The male then moves towards the female and leaps straight up into the air, making a 180 degree turn. In the meantime, the female has run under the male and will sit facing him when he lands. This behavior will continue for a period of time with both sexes making the leap and spin into the air. Mating immediately follows this "dance." Rabbits are polygamous meaning that the male will mate with more than one female. Male rabbits will play no role in rearing the young.



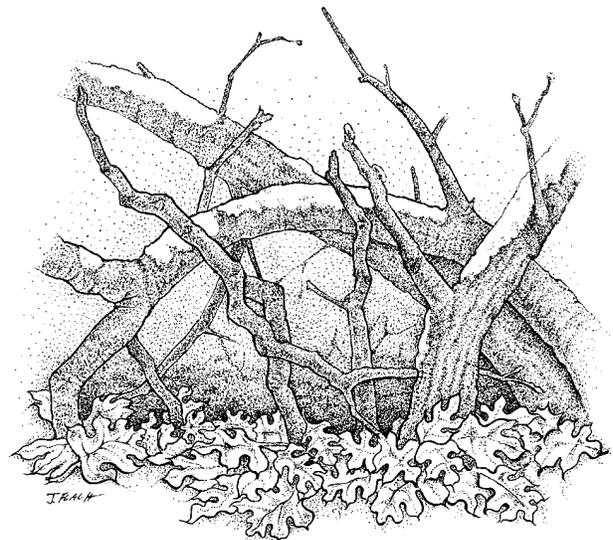
The nest is a shallow depression made in the ground that is four to six inches deep and four to five inches wide. A variety of field types ranging from pastures to pine plantations to mowed lawns are used as nesting sites. As long as there is suitable cover and food nearby, a site is acceptable for nesting. The nest is lined with dry grass and fur from the female's body. Female rabbits carry their young for about a month. Litters average five members, although there can be as many as seven and as few as two young rabbits born. The young are born with their eyes closed, deaf, and without hair. The female doesn't stay on the nest however; most of the time she is away from it returning only to feed the young. At just over three weeks (26 days) the young will leave the nest and begin life on their own. Most female rabbits will produce three litters in a year; if conditions are favorable five litters may occur.

Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage habitat specifically for cottontail rabbits. However, rabbits can be found throughout the state and on most of our state wildlife areas where suitable habitat exists. The habitat management activities that occur on these areas and elsewhere around the state are designed to benefit a host of wildlife species, including the Eastern cottontail. Each year wildlife biologists evaluate data and establish hunting season dates and bag limits for the Eastern cottontail rabbit.

Viewing Opportunities

Rabbits can be found and seen throughout the state, possibly as close as your own backyard. The best location to see cottontails is at an open field adjacent to brush piles or other dense cover. Should you venture out to see cottontail rabbits, several of the state's designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas are good choices: Delaware Wildlife Area, Woodbury Wildlife Area, Pickerington Ponds Wetland Wildlife Refuge, Big Island Wildlife Area, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, and Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area.





Cur. Bishop

Do Something Wild!

The Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitat that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. Many species like the Eastern cottontail rabbit are hunted in the state, but many more are not. The Division has a special program to manage and study non-game species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax checkoff, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.

At a Glance

Mating: Polygamous

Peak Breeding Activity: April-May

Gestation: 29 or 30 days

Young are Born: Early March-late September;
May-June is peak

Litter Size: 2-7, average 5

Young Leave Parents: 3+ weeks

Number of Litters per Year: 2-5, 3 is average

Adult Weight: 2-4 pounds, 2.5 pounds is average

Adult Length: 14.5-16.4 inches

Life Expectancy: Usually less than a year, some live to 4 or 5 years

Migration Pattern: Year-round resident

Typical Foods: Clover, dandelion, plantain, lamb's-quarter, and ragweed. Winter foods may include ear corn, dry hay, and bark of tree saplings, raspberry, blackberry, and multiflora rose.

Native to Ohio: Yes