

NATURAL RESOURCES-WILDLIFE
FACT SHEET No. 1-1979
JAMES R. KITTS

Rabbits and Hares

RABBITS

One of the most familiar animals to residents of Minnesota is the Eastern cottontail rabbit. Cottontails are commonly associated with farmland areas but, where habitat is suitable, they also may be found in cities.

The cottontail is a true rabbit, i.e., the young are born hairless, sightless, and nearly helpless, as opposed to hares in which the young are born with eyes open, hop shortly after birth, and are furry.

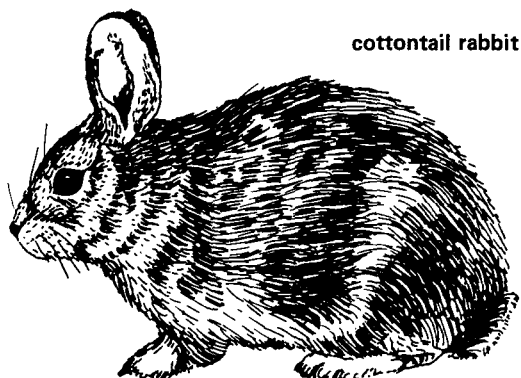
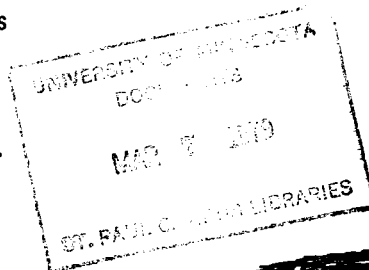
Because of a high reproductive rate the cottontail will occasionally overpopulate its habitat. A female may give birth to a litter of four to six young. Within hours she may mate again. Three and one-half to four weeks later she will deliver another litter. It is not uncommon for adult females to have four litters in a summer.

Although relatively small at maturity, 2 to 4 pounds, cottontails are highly prized as game animals. They are the number one game animal in the United States, having proven to be both a challenging quarry and a delicious meal. Compared to beef, weight for weight, wild rabbit meat is higher in protein, lower in fat, and lower in calories. Always check wild rabbit for signs of internal parasites or disease immediately after capture. If the liver is of normal size, texture, and color, the animal will be safe to eat.

HARES

Two species of hares occur in Minnesota—the whitetail jackrabbit and the snowshoe hare. Both animals are larger than the cottontail. The whitetail is the largest member of the family Leporidae (rabbits and hares) in North America and will weigh from 6 to 10 pounds. The snowshoe is intermediate between the whitetail and cottontail.

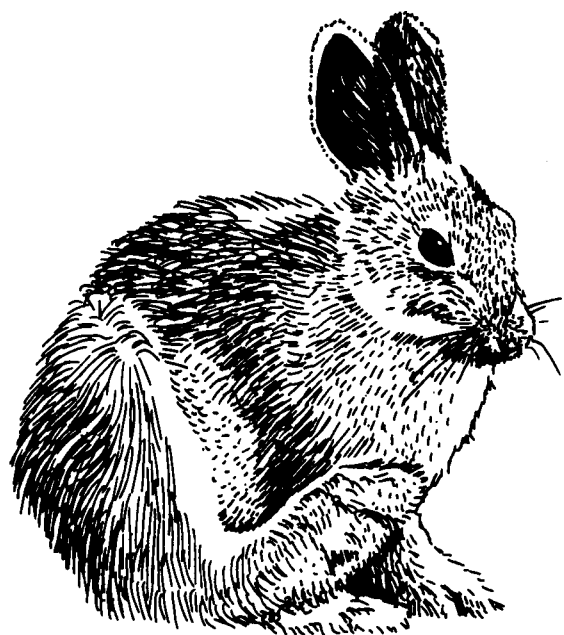
Both whitetail and snowshoe change pelage color in winter—from brownish-gray to white.



cottontail rabbit



whitetail jackrabbit



snowshoe hare

Season	Repellent	Formulation	Use
Growing	Talc (taste)	Standard health aid	Sprinkle lightly on leaves, stems and fruits. Reapply after each rain and at signs of rabbit damage.
Growing	Z.I.P. (taste)	1 qt. to 7 qts. water	Spray leaves and stems. Do not apply to edible portions of plant.
Dormant	Thiram (taste)	20%—Dilute 1 to 1 with water	Spray before damage starts. Do not apply to edible portions. Spray fruit trees only during dormant season. One application on dry day late in fall should last until spring.

Removal

All species of rabbits and hares in Minnesota are considered protected species and harassment and capture (alive and dead) are controlled by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Enforcement. However, the statutes do provide for the removal from private property of any rabbit or hare which is causing damage. Always consult the local conservation officer before removing pests.

Cottontail rabbits are easily caught in live traps or box traps except during late spring and summer. To prevent spring damage, begin trapping the previous fall and continue through early spring. Unless the trapping is very intensive, spring and summer damage probably will not be noticeably reduced.

Shelled corn, apples, and parsnips make good bait items for use in live trapping rabbits. If traps are of wire mesh construction, a small blanket or burlap bag should be draped over the trap at the end opposite the entrance. This serves two purposes—it makes the trap more acceptable to the rabbit and reduces the number of animals which die of exposure in the trap. Live traps suitable for capturing cottontails will have an entrance 6 to 8 inches square and be 15 to 18 inches long. Whitetail and snowshoe hare require larger traps and are more difficult to capture.

Population reduction through shooting is effective for all species. The hunting effort required may be as intensive as trapping. Most Minnesota counties have firearms codes which prohibit shooting in urban and suburban areas. Always consult the local police or county sheriff before discharging firearms.

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CONTROL

Exclusion

Rabbits and hares may be excluded from small garden plots by fences. A barrier 24 inches high of $\frac{3}{4}$ - to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch mesh poultry wire will suffice. Be certain the lower edge is either staked to the ground or buried to prevent animals from entering under the fence. Where exclusion is necessary for areas with winter snows, a higher fence may be required.

Where damage to trees is occurring it may be necessary to wrap the tree trunk with heavy tree wrap, burlap or a light-gauge metal or hardware cloth. Be certain to check the tree periodically to ease pressure on the trunk created as the tree grows.

Repulsion

Repellents can help prevent rabbit/hare damage to plants. There are two classes of repellents commonly used: odor repellents and taste repellents.

To be effective, odor repellents must be used in areas where the animals are likely to hold their heads close to the ground. This situation occurs most regularly in spring as garden plants are just emerging. Naphthalene, blood meal, or bone oil may be effective until plant growth exceeds 3 to 4 inches. Beyond this height, odor repellents have little effect.

Taste repellents will remain effective for any stage of plant growth. These repellents are generally of two types: dormant season and growing season repellents. Consult the following table for proper selection and application.