

RABBITS AND HARES NATURAL HISTORY



POPULATION AND RANGE

Rabbits and hares play an important role in the **predator-prey dynamic** in the Pacific Northwest. They are important food sources for various raptors, corvids, wild canids, bobcats and lynx.

Rabbit Distribution



Due to top down predation, population density fluctuates with predator density.

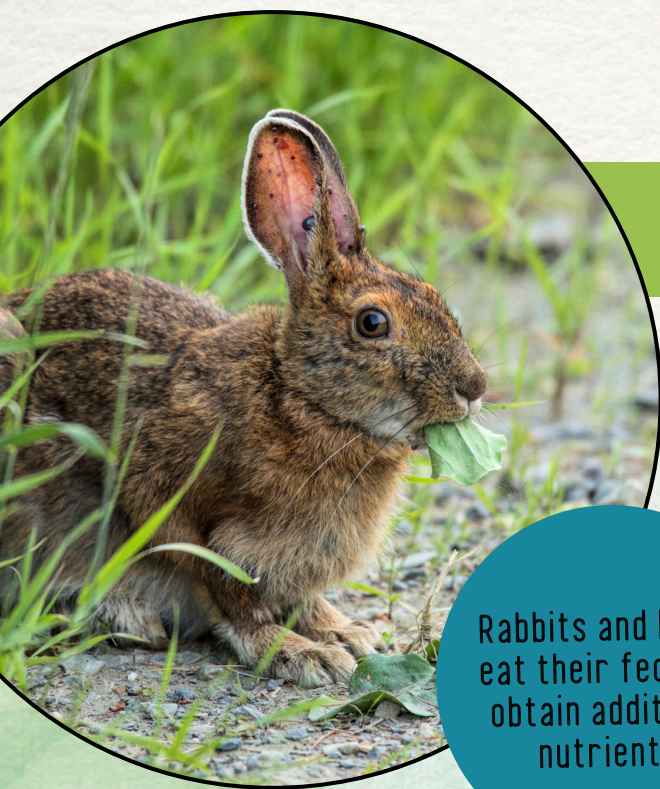
Hare Distribution



HABITAT

Rabbit and hares occupy a wide range of urban, suburban, and rural areas at a variety of elevations. If there is appropriate food and shelter present, a rabbit or hare species probably lives there.

- Meadow
- Orchard
- Farmland
- Swamp
- Chaparral
- Grassland
- Mountain
- Tundra
- Riparian
- Bog
- Taiga
- Forest



Rabbits and hares eat their feces to obtain additional nutrients.

DIET AND FORAGING

Rabbits and hares are **obligate herbivores** and use **hindgut fermentation** to help digest their food. Diets vary with habitat, season, and species.

- Summer diets are dominated by herbaceous plants, including weeds, flowers and crops.
- Winter diets include woody and evergreen items such as twigs, bark, and buds.



REPRODUCTION

Breeding occurs from February to September. Rabbits have many litters throughout this time period while hares have only two litters each season.

Rabbits are helpless, naked, immobile, and have eyes closed at birth. In contrast, hares are far more developed, being able to hop around hours after birth.



RABBITS AND HARES IDENTIFICATION



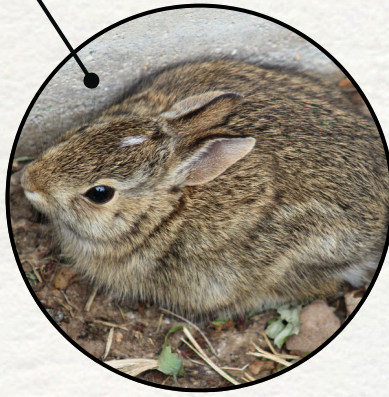
EASTERN COTTONTAIL *Sylvilagus floridanus*

Eastern Cottontails are an **introduced species** and are the **most common** rabbit in western Washington. They inhabit forests, grasslands, and urban areas.

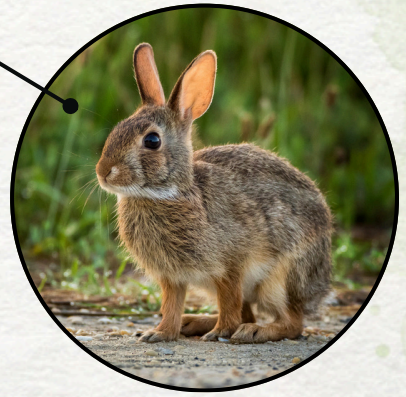
- Tan-brown ear margin
- White tail
- Large hind foot
- Consistent mottled brown coat



Infant



Juvenile



Adult

SNOWSHOE HARE *Lepus americanus*

Snowshoe Hares are a **native species** and are the **most common** hare in western Washington. They inhabit forested land away from urban environments.

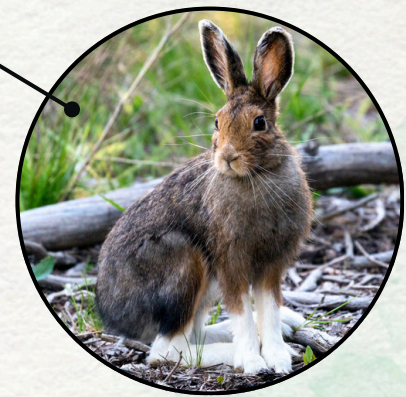
- Black ear margin
- White tail
- Enormous hind foot
- Coat color varies by season/elevation



Infant



Juvenile



Adult

OTHER RABBITS AND HARES



European Rabbit

Oryctolagus cuniculus
Domestic



Pygmy Rabbit

Brachylagus idahoensis
Endangered



Mountain Cottontail

Sylvilagus nuttallii



Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Lepus californicus



White-tailed Jackrabbit

Lepus townsendii



RABBITS AND HARES WHEN & HOW TO HELP



INJURED ANIMALS

If a rabbit or hare is visibly injured (bleeding, falling over, laying on side, not responding, dragging legs, limping), they need help!



Natural Predator Attacks

While hard to watch, intervening in natural predator attacks is not recommended. Often the victim is mortally wounded and the predator will need to find another meal.

If the attack was interrupted accidentally or otherwise, seek medical attention for the victim.



Domestic Dog or Cat Attacks

Even if the animal appears uninjured, cat and dog attack victims need medical attention.

Cat attacks may result in small punctures and lacerations which may be hard to see. Cats also carry a deadly bacteria that may kill small animals without treatment.

Dog attacks may result in crushing, shaking, and internal injuries that may not be visible to the untrained eye.

ORPHANED ANIMALS

Mother rabbits and hares leave their young alone for extended periods of time and only nurse them twice a day. Assume mom is caring for her babies until proven otherwise!

Found Alone

Check the lone rabbit for obvious injuries or signs of orphanage (excessive ectoparasites, fly packs or maggots, weak or thin). If unwell, they need help.

If you find a healthy infant (eyes-closed), they must be returned to their nest. If you cannot find a nest, then call a wildlife rehabilitator.

If you find a healthy juvenile (eyes-open, larger than a closed fist), they are likely weaned or weaning. Monitor from a distance but otherwise leave alone and let mom finish raising her baby.



NEVER
treat or raise a wild
rabbit or hare at
home!

Nest Disturbance

If a nest is accidentally disturbed by a pet or during yardwork, reconstruct the nest and place the babies back inside.

Keep people and pets out of the area and monitor to make sure mother returns. Call a wildlife rehabilitator for detailed instructions and tips.



ALWAYS
call a wildlife
rehabilitator for
advice ASAP!

SAFE INTERVENTION

Hares and cottontails are not aggressive, but may kick or thrash when restrained possibly resulting in scratches to the handler or injuries to the animal. Follow these steps:

- Prepare a box with air holes, lid, and absorbent material.
- Place the animal in the box. For adults, put one hand over their shoulders and the other over their hips.
- Keep warm, dark, secure and quiet until you talk with a wildlife rehabilitator. Do not provide any food or water!

