

THE ARBORETUM AT PENN STATE

EXPLORE NATIVE ANIMALS!

PENNSYLVANIA'S WILD RABBITS



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RABBIT SPECIES

There are two species of wild rabbits in Pennsylvania.



Look for the white blaze on this eastern cottontail rabbit's forehead.

The **eastern cottontail** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) is the most common rabbit species in Pennsylvania. There are many eastern cottontail rabbits at the Arboretum. Look for them early in the morning and in the evening, when they are most active.

The **Appalachian cottontail** (*Sylvilagus obscurus*), also known as the woods rabbit or timber hare, is found at higher elevations in the state. Appalachian cottontails are slightly smaller than eastern cottontails and have a black blaze on their foreheads. (Some eastern cottontails also have a black blaze, which makes the two species hard to tell apart.)



This Appalachian cottontail rabbit has a black blaze on its forehead.

RABBIT BABIES

Cottontail rabbits are born in shallow nests dug by the mother rabbit, who lines the nest with grass and her own soft fur. Baby cottontails are born blind, naked, and helpless. They spend most of their time alone. The male does not help to raise the babies, and the mother only makes brief visits at dawn and dusk to nurse.

By about two weeks of age, baby rabbits are ready to leave the nest. By four weeks, they are living on their own.

Gardeners and curious pets often uncover rabbit nests. If you find a rabbit nest, the best thing to do is to cover it back up and leave it alone.



Baby rabbits in a shallow nest. How many babies do you see?

RABBIT HABITAT

Cottontail rabbits like to live where there is a mix of low, dense brush and more open areas. Swamps, thickets, overgrown fields, fencerows and gullies are good places for rabbits to hide and feed in. Cottontail rabbits are less common in deep forests, where tall trees shade out the understory plants.

Except for nests dug by mother rabbits, cottontails rarely dig burrows, though they may take shelter in abandoned groundhog holes.

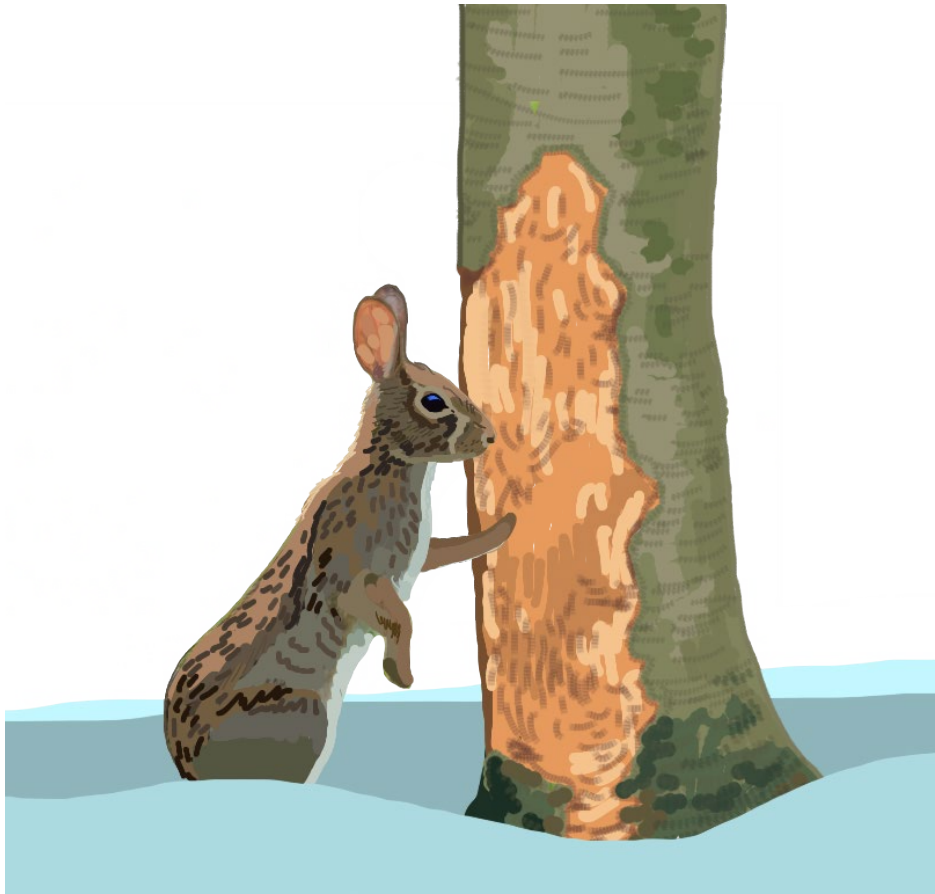


Can you find the cottontail rabbit in this picture?

RABBITS & GARDENS

In the summer, cottontail rabbit diets include herbs, grass, weeds, clover, fresh fruit, and sometimes garden plants.

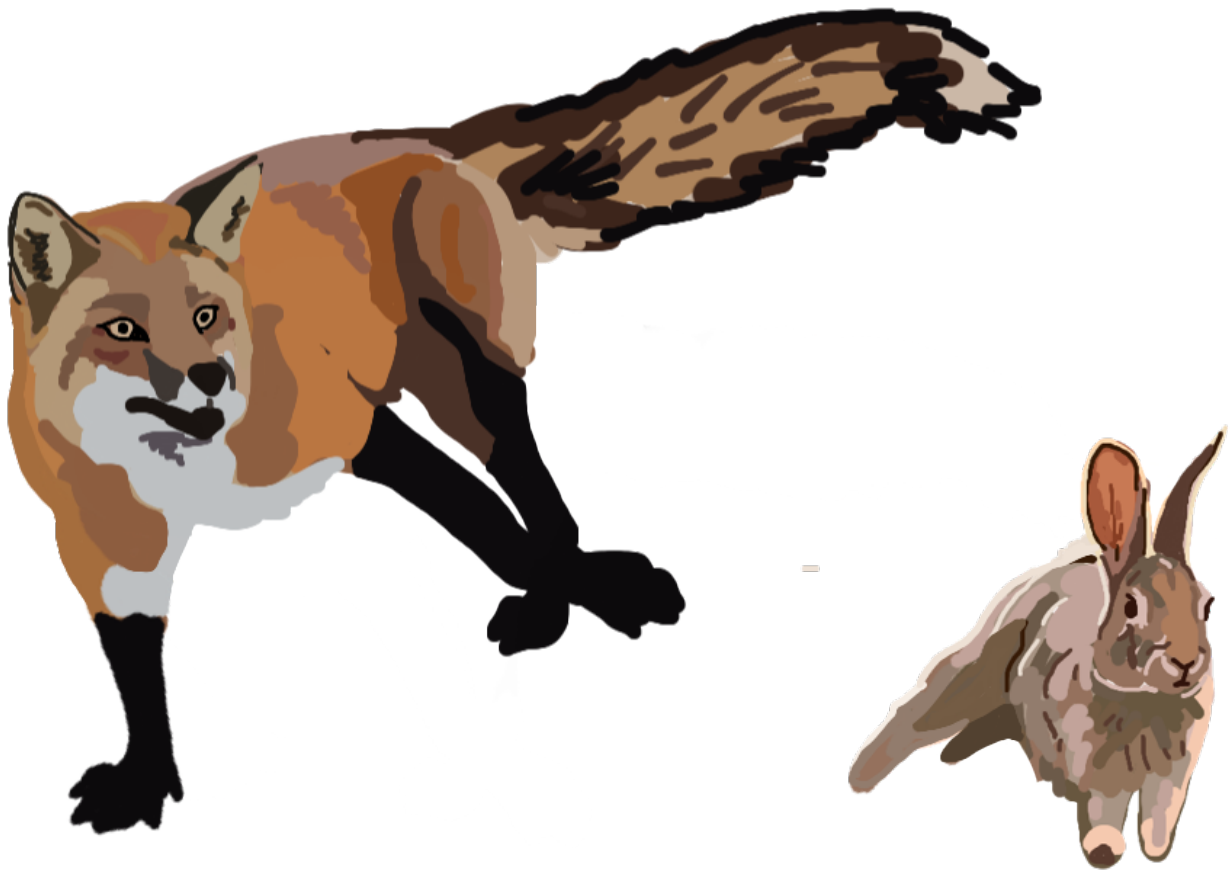
In the winter, rabbits eat leaf buds, tender twigs, and bark. Hungry rabbits can kill young trees by gnawing off a ring of bark. This is known as “girdling” the tree. You might notice that some of the Arboretum’s young trees are surrounded by wire cages. The cages keep rabbits and other hungry animals from damaging the tree bark.



Rabbits often eat tree bark in the winter, when other food is scarce.

RABBITS IN THE FOOD WEB

Rabbits are food for many different predators, including owls, hawks, foxes, coyotes, martens, weasels, and snakes. Even though cottontail rabbits feature prominently in predator diets, rabbits have so many babies that there are always plenty of them around.



Run, rabbit! This fox is hungry!

RABBIT-THEMED ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Count the Bunnies

Rabbits are mostly active at dawn and dusk. Try counting the number of rabbits you see during daylight hours and compare it to the number you count in the evening. There will probably be a lot more rabbits around early in the morning and towards bedtime. Rabbit spotting is a good activity for driving.

Fox-and-Rabbit Tag

Choose two players to be "it." These players are the foxes. All other players are the rabbits. Have the rabbits line up on one side of a designated space. The foxes then say "Run, rabbit, run!" and the rabbits run to the other side of the space, trying to avoid being tagged by the foxes. If a rabbit is tagged by a fox, they must sit down where they were tagged. The foxes repeat the call of "Run, rabbit, run!" until all but two rabbits have been tagged. The last two rabbits are the winners and become the foxes in the next game of tag.

Carrot Scavenger Hunt

Make a set of rocks with "carrot" written on them. Hide them around the house or yard. Children play as rabbits on a carrot hunt. Whoever finds the most carrots wins!

RABBITS IN LITERATURE

If you like rabbits, you might enjoy these books!

Youngest Readers

Guess How Much I Love You? – Sam McBratney

Knuffle Bunny – Mo Willems

National Geographic Readers: Hop, Bunny! Explore the Forest – Susan B. Neuman

The Runaway Bunny – Margaret Wise Brown

The Tale of Peter Rabbit and *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* – Beatrix Potter

The Velveteen Rabbit – Margery Williams

Older Readers

Bunnacula – Deborah and James Howe

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane – Kate DiCamillo

Welcome to the World of Rabbits and Hares (Welcome to the World Series)
– Diane Swanson

Teens and Adults

Watership Down – Richard Adams

The Private Life of the Rabbit – R.M. Lockley

Stories Rabbits Tell: A Natural and Cultural History of a Misunderstood Creature – Susan Davis and Margo DeMello