



## Eastern Cottontail

*Sylvilagus floridanus*

Eastern cottontails are gray-brown to reddish-brown in color with large hind feet and long, erect ears. They have a fluffy white tail with a red patch on top and a white underbelly. They are 14-19 inches in length, with a tail that averages 2.1 inches. Females are larger than males. The average weight of Eastern cottontails is 2.6 pounds. Kits, or baby rabbits, are born with a white mark on the forehead that disappears as they mature.



Eastern cottontails can be found in the eastern United States from Canada to Mexico and into the northern Midwest. They need areas surrounded by dense shrubs for protection, but with plenty of open areas in the middle with green grasses and herbs for foraging. They are very seldom found in deep woods. Their habitat is a rough circle and they will stay there their whole lives, only shifting as vegetation gets sparse.



Eastern cottontails use burrows from other ground dwelling animals, such as groundhogs. They do not dig their own, except for nest holes which can be found in grassy areas, and are very well camouflaged. They are very territorial and will run in a zig zag pattern at speeds up to 18 mph when threatened. They spend the days in shallow depressions under bushes and feed on vegetation in the open at dusk and night, but they can be seen at any time of day. Cottontails can sit still for up to 15 minutes at a time.

Predators include domestic dogs, foxes, coyotes, owls, hawks and more.

### **Ask A Naturalist**

#### Fun Facts:

- Their urine can turn blue in the sunlight.
- Rabbits defecate twice. The first time is soft and green and the rabbits will eat it to get nutrients from it and the second time are hard pellets that are then all waste.
- They use speed and caution to avoid predators.
- Baby rabbits are called kits, not bunnies.
- Eastern cottontails are the most common species of rabbit in North America.

