



eastern cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Lagomorpha
Family: Leporidae

FEATURES

The eastern cottontail grows to a length of 14 to 16 inches. It has a rusty-brown body with a cinnamon-colored patch at the nape of the neck. The belly and throat are white. The eastern cottontail has a short, stubby tail with a white underside. The soles of the back feet have hair on them. It has very large ears.

BEHAVIORS

The eastern cottontail may be found statewide in Illinois. This mammal lives in weeds, briar patches, brush, lawns, shrubs and around wooded areas. The eastern cottontail eats alfalfa, clovers, dandelion and grasses in the summer. It feeds on buds, fruits, seeds and bark of shrubs in winter. The eastern cottontail is a coprophage (eats some of its own waste). It has two forms of droppings: brown ones, which have no nutrients; and green ones, which are composed of partially digested food and remain full of nutrients. The green ones are eaten to allow the cottontail to eat more food in a short time. This mammal moves by hopping. Mating occurs from February to September. Eastern cottontails are polygamous and undergo a complex mating ritual. The gestation period takes about one month, and females breed again almost immediately after giving birth.

Four to six young comprise a litter, and a female may produce about 25 young per year. Young are placed in a nest of hair, grass and leaves on the ground or in the ground. The mother comes to the nest only to nurse the young -- maybe only two times per day. Young leave the nest in about two weeks. The eastern cottontail may start breeding at the age of six months.

HABITATS

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident: statewide

Summer resident:

Migrant:

Winter resident:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.
Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.