# eastern cottontail

*Sylvilagus floridanus*

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

**ILLINOIS STATUS**
common, native

track replicas (smaller front foot)

## ILLINOIS RANGE

**FEATURES**
The eastern cottontail grows to a length of 14 to 16 inches. It has rust-brown fur with a cinnamon-colored patch at the nape of the neck. The fur of the belly and throat is 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, dandelions 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 that have no nutrients; and green ones that are composed of partially digested food and remain full of nutrients. The green ones are ingested 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.

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## Aquatic Habitats
none

## Woodland Habitats
none

## Prairie and Edge Habitats
edge

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