

swamp rabbit *Sylvilagus aquaticus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Lagomorpha

Family: Leporidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The swamp rabbit is about 16 to 22 inches in length and weighs about four and three-fourths to five pounds. It has brown-black fur with tan fur on the feet. The fur on the underside of the body is white except for the cinnamon area between the forelegs. The hair is coarse. The ears are short and round. An orange eye ring is present.

BEHAVIORS

The swamp rabbit may be found in the southern one-third of Illinois. It lives in cane thickets, swamps and bottomland forests. This mammal eats grasses, sedges, herbs and aquatic plants. The swamp rabbit 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 rabbit to eat more food in a short time. Droppings are often deposited on stumps or logs. When chased, this mammal will plunge into water, if there is some available. It may swim at any time. Mating occurs from February through summer. The gestation period is about 40 days. Shortly before the young are born, a nest is dug in the ground and lined with fur, leaves and grasses. The nest is usually located in grass or piles of dead branches. The average litter size is three.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; swamps

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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