



# COTTONTAIL RABBIT

ANIMAL ID

SEASON INFORMATION

HUNTING TIPS

Little is known about the pre-settlement distribution of cottontail rabbits in Iowa. Cultivation by man no doubt favored rabbits much the same way it favored quail at the turn of the century. Cottontails are the best known and most widely hunted game mammals in Iowa and all of North America.

### IDENTIFICATION

Cottontails are 14-20 inches long, weigh 2-2 3/4 pounds with reddish to grayish brown fur. Their fur does not change color during the year.

Ears measuring up to three inches long can be cocked in any direction to detect the slightest sound. Their large eyes are located on the sides of their heads enabling them to see in all directions without moving. Hind feet from 3-4 1/2 inches long and large back and leg muscles make the cottontail extremely quick and agile.



Rabbits can produce 5-6 litters per year from February to September. Most cottontails spend their entire life within a five acre area. Cottontails have a short life span with 90 percent annual mortality.

Their diet consists almost entirely of plant material and varies by season. Summer is leaves, stems and flowers of many grasses, sedges, herbs, legumes, and garden crops. Winter diet shifts to waste grains, woody plants, orchard trees and nursery stock.

## IOWA RABBIT SEASON INFORMATION

Rabbit hunting regulations appear in the *Iowa Hunting & Trapping* regulations online and from license retailers.



SHOOTING HOURS:	Sunrise to Sunset
BAG LIMITS:	Daily limit of 10, possession limit of 20
LOCATIONS:	Entire state is open to hunting
LICENSE AND FEES:	Small game license & habitat fee

### PLACES TO HUNT:

- **HUNTING ATLAS** shows all areas in the state open to public hunting, type of wildlife likely found in the area, open seasons and any restrictions. [www.iowadnr.gov/hunting](http://www.iowadnr.gov/hunting)
- Iowa Habitat Access Program (**IHAP**) allows hunter access to private land in exchange for habitat improvement on the site. [www.iowadnr.gov/ihap](http://www.iowadnr.gov/ihap)

## HUNTING TIPS

Equipment needed for successful rabbit hunting is minimal compared to other shooting sports. Warm clothing, brush pants, good walking boots and a shotgun are about all you really need.

### GUN CHOICE:

Rabbit hunters often use .22 caliber rimfire rifle or 20 gauge or smaller shotgun. Because most shooting typically takes place at 30 yards or less, shooting a shotgun with an open choke will increase the chance for success. Cottontails can be challenging targets as they dodge, weave and change direction quickly when flushed.

### AMMO:

Depending upon gun gauge and shot type 1/2 to 1-1/8 ounces of shot are typical for cottontail hunting. The most common shot size is 6 and 7-1/2 in lead and 6 in steel. With the .22 rimfire both .22 short or long rifle ammunition can be used.

### WHEN TO HUNT:

Cottontails are most active in the morning and evening, but can be hunted all day. Early fall provides the most shooting opportunity with abundant rabbit numbers, but foliage can make them difficult to see. Winter snowfall makes cottontails much more visible and concentrates rabbits in shrubby cover. With the opening of the upland gamebirds seasons, the take of rabbits increases, as many are killed incidental to bird hunting. However the serious rabbit hunter doesn't get down to business until the ground is snow-covered in December, January and February.



### WHERE TO HUNT COTTONTAIL RABBITS IN IOWA:

The DNR produces a map of areas with the best rabbit densities at [www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey](http://www.iowadnr.gov/pheasantsurvey). The most desirable rabbit cover includes a good mix of cropland, idle grassland, brushy draws or brushy woodland borders, briar patches, osage orange or hedgerows, and other idle areas. The best hunting locations are where food and cover are next to each other.



Several effective techniques are employed in hunting rabbits:

- Stomping brush piles, or walking abandoned farmsteads, brushy fencerows, wooded draws, or roadsides.
- The same areas may be covered more quickly if a hunting companion is stationed at the other end, but one must know where the other hunter is at all times.
- The purest form of rabbit hunting is done with the companionship of one or more beagles. Turn them loose in a tangle of brush and briars on a sunny winter afternoon, pick a stand with a good view, and sit back and enjoy the day. Listening to a ringing chorus of beagles on a hot track and trying to connect with a bouncing brown blur flashing through a brushy tangle can indeed be very sporting.

### SAFETY AND ETIQUETTE:

- Be courteous and careful when hunting near other hunters especially on public areas.
- Do not load firearm until at your hunting site.
- Always be aware of what is beyond your target before you shoot.
- Clean rabbits in the field away from parking lots.
- Carry out any trash including empty shells.
- Always ask permission to hunt on private lands.

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
on where to hunt in your local area,  
contact your regional DNR wildlife biologist.