



For More Information Contact

wildlifecontrol@spca.bc.ca
BC SPCA Animal Helpline
1.855.622.7722

BCSPCA
SPEAKING FOR ANIMALS

RABBITS

WILDLIFE CONTROL BEST PRACTICES

Species

Eastern cottontail, *Sylvilagus floridanus*
European rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Legal Designation

Schedule C, *BC Wildlife Act*

Disease Risks

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease in domestic, feral and wild rabbits

Seasonal Considerations

Multiple litters in spring and summer



Did you know?

When it feels safe to let their guard down, their playful nature makes them a joyful neighbour. Rabbits are also a valuable prey species.

Eastern cottontail, Photo Credit: Arsalan Butt

Common Conflicts

In urban areas, free-living populations of domestic European rabbits exist from being abandoned pets or their offspring. These rabbits are commonly called “feral rabbits” and can be a variety of colours like black, tan, grey, white or spotted. Eastern cottontails are a wild species, they have brown bodies and short, fluffy white tails.

Rabbits are attracted to sheltered, landscaped yards with dense shrubs or undergrowth. Rabbits can damage smaller trees, like fruit trees, by bark stripping or girdling in extreme winters. Eastern cottontails do not dig burrows, but European rabbit burrows can damage lawns. Babies found alone do not always need help - it's normal for a mother rabbit to leave babies hidden in the nest for long periods of time.

Conflict Prevention

Discourage people from abandoning pet rabbits. This is illegal, and domestic rabbits suffer when outside human care because they are not a wild species. Feral rabbits should not be relocated, but rabbits that are considered adoptable should be re-homed.

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD) is an extremely contagious, lethal disease that causes organ damage and internal bleeding in rabbits. An outbreak of RHD in European (feral and pet) rabbits occurred for the first time in BC in February 2018. Most affected rabbits die suddenly, and there is often visible bleeding from the nose. In 2020, a strain of RHD that can also infect wild rabbits spread across the USA and Mexico. A similar strain was identified in Alberta (2021) and Ontario (2022), but has not yet been detected in BC. Report suspected cases of RHD to the BC Ministry of Agriculture.



European (domestic) rabbit

spca.bc.ca/urban-wildlife





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European (domestic) rabbit, Photo Credit: Christine Hubbard



RECOMMENDED

Actions & methods for control

Remove thick brush, blackberry patches, and other plant cover with dense undergrowth. Plant edible wildflowers away from landscaped areas. Protect landscaping by fencing gardens and/or individual trees. Use chicken wire secured with stakes, or moveable fence panels at least 0.5 m high with a secure bottom edge to prevent rabbits from pushing or digging underneath – for European rabbits, the bottom edge of the barrier should be buried underground to discourage burrowing. Injured or orphaned rabbits should be taken to a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator for treatment.

Wild vs. Feral

In BC, it is illegal to release European “feral” rabbits into the wild as this is considered abandonment. Further, trapping and moving either European rabbits or wild Eastern cottontail rabbits is not allowed under wildlife regulations to prevent their spread into new areas.

Know who's who: domestic rabbits that are considered adoptable should be rehomed. Eastern cottontail rabbits are a wild species that are not suitable as pets.



NOT RECOMMENDED

Actions & methods for control

The BC SPCA does not recommend killing rabbits. However, legal regulated methods may be used for euthanasia to relieve suffering when animals are injured. They may also be used legally to control rabbits, but are not recommended as they can cause suffering, may be high risk to non-target animals, and/or are difficult to administer. Check local bylaws and/or regulations to confirm whether the method is legal in a municipality.

- Blunt force trauma (baby rabbits only, pre-weaned < 150 g)
- Carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide
- Crossbow
- Cervical dislocation, only with a purpose-designed device for adults
- Falconry (with permit)
- Killing neck snare
- Captive bolt
- Shot to brain
- Spring trap (e.g. Conibear-style)



ILLEGAL

Actions & methods for control

- Trapping and relocating
- Bait poisons
- Blunt force trauma (adult or juvenile rabbits > 150 g)
- Drowning
- Suffocation
- Chloroform
- Electrocution
- Fumigant poisons
- Leghold or foot snare
- Vehicle exhaust