



Wildlife Control  
Best Practices



European rabbit

# Rabbits

- There are three rabbit species in BC: **snowshoe hares** (*Lepus americanus*), **Eastern cottontails** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) and domestic **European rabbits** (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)
- **BC rabbits are not known to carry rabies**
- Snowshoe hares are Schedule B; cottontails and European rabbits are Schedule C in the *BC Wildlife Act*; can only use trapping devices listed in the BC Hunting & Trapping Regulations

## Understanding Rabbits

Snowshoe hares and Eastern cottontails are both wild species. Although very similar in appearance in summer, snowshoe hares can be identified by their larger hind feet and cottontails by their short, fluffy white tails. In winter, snowshoe hares are all white. In urban areas, populations of domestic European rabbits exist from abandoned pets or their offspring. Commonly called “feral rabbits”, they can be black, tan, white or spotted.

extreme winters. They need safe spaces to rest, and prefer areas with dense shrubs or undergrowth – making sheltered landscaped yards an ideal habitat.

## Humane Choices

*The BC SPCA does not support killing rabbits for nuisance reasons, and supports the re-homing of adoptable feral rabbits.*

Relocation of adult cottontails should only be done outside the breeding season within the animal’s home range, and as per the *BC Wildlife Act* (within 1km on Vancouver & Gulf Islands, 10km in rest of province). Killing is rarely necessary and control methods should be selected to cause the least harm to the animal’s welfare. If attractants have not been removed, more rabbits may arrive, so follow-up monitoring is needed.

The BC SPCA strongly encourages non-lethal, non-contact methods. Prevention and exclusion comes first, followed by deterrence, and if necessary, capture and re-homing. It is illegal to release feral rabbits.



## Did you know?

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

Eastern cottontail

## Rabbits...

- wild rabbits have three or four litters of 3-5 babies through spring and summer
- babies leave the nest and are independent at approximately 3-4 weeks old

## Common Conflicts

Rabbits are attracted to ornamental gardens and plants, and smaller trees (like fruit trees) damaged by their bark stripping or girdling in

## Conflict Resolution

Intentional feeding in parks and greenspaces is highly discouraged and may be illegal in some municipalities. Rabbits feel safe in thick brush with leafy plants nearby. In some years when rabbit populations are low, the tactics in this sheet may not be needed at all.



## Recommended Actions & Methods

### Prevention & Exclusion Before any conflict, and to prevent future issues

#### Remove potential food sources

- ✓ Trim back or remove attractive habitats like blackberry patches and other dense undergrowth
- ✓ Install fencing around gardens and trees that need to be protected
- ✓ Chicken wire secured with stakes, or moveable fence panels at least 0.5m high will prevent access if the bottom edge is secured to prevent rabbits pushing or digging underneath

#### Modify habitats

- ✓ Remove thick brush and other sources of plant cover, and plant edible wildflowers away from the landscaped areas

### Deterrence If babies are mobile (3-4 weeks old) or there are no babies

#### Use mild humane harassment techniques

- ✓ Use reflective tape, pinwheels or balloons placed at rabbit eye-level

### Eviction

#### Evict the animal

- ➔ Feral rabbits cannot be relocated, and should be re-homed if adoptable
- ✓ If at risk, use cage traps for relocation within home range
- ✓ Rabbits can be taken to a wildlife rehabilitator for treatment if injured or orphaned
- ✓ If rabbit is in critical distress, a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator can euthanize
- ✓ Follow all prevention and exclusion steps above

These are legal, regulated methods - but they are **not recommended\*** as they can cause animal suffering, may be high risk to non-targets, and/or are difficult to administer; legality must also be confirmed according to local bylaws and/or regulations

- Carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide - using pure gas cylinder into sealed chamber with regulator
- Shot to brain of trapped or free-ranging animal
- Crossbow
- Penetrating captive bolt
- Killing neck snare
- Spring trap (e.g. Conibear-style)
- Manually applied blunt trauma that induces immediate unconsciousness
- Cervical dislocation
- Falconry (with permit)

\*email [wildlifecontrol@spca.bc.ca](mailto:wildlifecontrol@spca.bc.ca) for information on these methods

It is **illegal** to use...

- Bait poisons or chloroform
- Fumigant poisons
- Drowning or suffocation
- Leghold or foot snare
- Carbon monoxide by vehicle exhaust
- Carbon dioxide, rabbits are breath-holding, burrowing animals
- Electrocution of conscious animal

