

Animals of the Chihuahuan Desert



Desert Cottontail

Physical Characteristics

This rabbit's tail looks exactly like a cottonball which is why it is called a cottontail. They are lightly colored in tan or gray and the fur on the bellies is usually white. The bottom of their tail is white too. They have big ears and big hind feet and their tracks are shaped like a 7. Cottontails are smaller than other rabbits such as jackrabbits.

Diet

Desert cottontails' main source of food is grass but they also eat different desert plants such as grass, shrubs, mesquite leaves, and beans. Their main source of water they get from the plants they eat or the dew that gathers on the plants.

Habitat

Desert cottontails can live in a lot of different habitats such as grasslands as well as in shrubs, in areas near water, and in forests. They can be seen resting in shaded areas underneath shaded bushes. They have even adapted to humans living in close proximity to them that they are sometimes seen sunbathing in the grassy areas of neighborhoods.

Senses

They make sure to stay out of the heat the best they can and usually only come out of hiding in the early mornings or at night. Their large ears help with the temperatures of the desert. Their ears have blood vessels that can radiate body heat into the air.

Predators

The desert cottontail has many predators, more than most animals. Humans along with coyotes, rattlesnakes, badgers, and owls are still predators to the desert cottontail.

Interesting Facts

- These furry friends run in a zig zag pattern and that is to better escape the predator they are running away from. They can run up to 20 miles per hour to get away from predators! If the predator corners them, they can use their back legs and kick the predator away.
- Cottontails are coprophagic, meaning they eat their own feces. This sounds unpleasant, but this helps their body receive all the nutrients they need. Since grass is difficult to digest, eating their own pellets allows for body to better digest any nutrients from the plants that they consume.
- Females can have multiple litters in a year and their young only stay in the nest for about two weeks.
- Their cottontails aren't just for looks. When a cottontail raises its tail, the large white patch underneath is exposed. This is a signal to other rabbits that danger is nearby.