

**FEBRUARY 01- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES**  
**By Dick Harlow**

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL RABBIT**



**Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus*, © Dick Harlow**

The Eastern Cottontail Rabbit is the most common rabbit species found in North America. These images were taken here at EastView and represent at least one family of Cottontails living here.

This species is found in grassy, shrubby areas giving it a wide variety of plants on which to forage. It is known to live in one area its entire life. This is known as an animal's home range. The criteria that will cause a rabbit to move are food and weather.

The home range of New England Eastern Cottontail Rabbits range from 1.2 to 1.4 acres but can vary from 0.5 acre to 40 acres.

Because rabbits eat plants, they are considered First Order-Consumers. Those animals that eat animals that feed on First Order-Consumers are called, you guessed it, Second Order-Consumers. Beyond that the numbers go up, but generally don't go beyond Third and Fourth Order-Consumer, primarily

because there is less and less sustainable energy in the food that is eaten above Third Order-Consumer.



**Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus*, © Dick Harlow**

Although we may see rabbits foraging on our lawns, they need to find shelter and escape predators using an abundance of shrubs, stone walls or anything that can protect them. Without protection the lives of these rabbits would be in serious jeopardy.

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### MEADOW VOLE



**Meadow Vole** adult, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*  
© Farmersalmanac.com

The Meadow Vole, also called Field Mouse is not a mouse, and has a wide range encompassing most of North America.

Their preferred habitat is where there is plentiful food and nesting material. Grass, wherever there is an abundance of various grasses, in fields, meadows, marshes will provide the food and cover.

Will they survive in other habitats such as a forest, a bog or agricultural land? Yes, as long as there is enough food, nesting material and cover, they will survive in these habitats.

We think of animals as being male centered. In other words **males** establish territories and defend their territory. Not with Meadow Voles. In this species the **female** is dominant and establishes her territory. She will mate with various males, having primarily one litter from the various encounters with males.

There is a real diversity in the life span of a Meadow Vole. The statistics are interesting.

A litter of Meadow Voles is between four and six young. The average young that survive from a litter is 2.6. Research says that the average life span of a nestling Meadow Vole is less than one month. The average for an adult is two months. Thus, mortality after birth for the first month is about 88% while an older adult's mortality is about 53%.

Therefore, it can be seen, that a single female could produce a number of litters in a single year. A captive Meadow Vole female produced 17 litters in a single year. In the wild it will be less, but one can see that these rodents are very important to the food chain of various predators.

Per acre a Meadow Vole population might range from 10, 50, 160 per acre and have been known to be as high as 600 per acre. However, it is dependent on habitat as to what the density of the population can be. The population in a specific area can vary significantly.

The salient point here is that the variation of vole density is directly related to the food supply for various predators. Add to that the fact that foxes, coywolves, hawks, harriers depending in part on this food supply shows that there is significant pressure on this food source. Therefore a decrease or an increase in the vole population can significantly affect a predator population.

Vole populations tend to fluctuate in 3-5 years' cycles. This means they become very abundant every 3-5 years, dependent upon habitat, geographic region and local specifics.

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**OBSERVATIONS**

**MAMMALS**

- **Coywolves w/pups, heard only**
- **Red Fox, observed and tracks**
- **Meadow Voles – 2 observed**

**Month of FEBRUARY 1-14, 2020**

*All Measurements taken at solar noon  
(1230 EST).*

**PRECIPITATION**

**Average FEBRUARY Precipitation for  
Vermont = 1.8 inches**

**Total precipitation for first 14 days  
in February was 11.8 mm or 0.5  
inches. This is a 1.3 deficit for the  
month.**

**Overcast Days: We had 9 days, two  
days over a week of overcast skies.  
Of those overcast skies 2 days  
produced snow or snow flurries.  
This month definitely added to the  
draught we are in even though it  
may not feel like it.**

**Deb found the feathers and remains,  
an eviscerated Pigeon, from most  
probably dinner for a Cooper's Hawk.**