

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

NUTTALL'S COTTONTAIL

Sylvilagus nuttallii

Family: LEPORIDAE
M046

Order: LAGOMORPHA

Class: MAMMALIA

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Nuttall's cottontail is found on the east slopes of the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades from Siskiyou and Modoc cos. south through the Great Basin to southern Inyo Co. (Orr 1940), and probably to San Bernardino Co. Primarily an animal of rocky, sage-covered hills and canyons, it is common in sagebrush, fairly common in sparse, montane riparian habitats, and uncommon in subalpine conifer, pinyon juniper, juniper, and alpine dwarf-shrub habitats. Altitudinal range in California is from 1372 to 3200 m (4500 to 10,500 ft) (Orr 1940, Ingles 1965, Chapman 1975).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Prefers grasses, but lives most of the year on sagebrush, and will eat juniper berries. Mountain cottontail usually feeds in the shelter of brush, or in clearings a few meters from cover.

Cover: Rabbits living in dense sagebrush or riparian growth probably spend most of their time above ground. Those inhabiting sparse, or open, habitats rely on crevices in rocks, or burrows, for cover (Orr 1937).

Reproduction: Nests are found in dense vegetation, crevices, rockpiles, or burrows. The nest is a cup-like cavity lined with fur and dried grass. The top of the nest is covered with fur, grass, and small sticks (Orr 1940, Chapman 1975).

Water: No data found.

Pattern: Optimal habitats are rocky, sage-covered hills, or canyons, with dense cover adjoining grassy clearings.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Active yearlong, primarily crepuscular.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Moves locally, in a very limited sense, following seasonal food supplies.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found.

Reproduction: Breeding season is from April to July in northeastern California (Orr 1940). Gestation lasts 28-30 days; an average of 6.1 (range 4-8) young per litter. Probably 2 litters

per yr in California, but 4-5 per yr in Oregon (Powers and Verts 1971). Young are weaned at about 1 mo. There are reports of females about 90 days old breeding (Powers and Verts 1971), but this probably is rare.

Niche: Bobcats, coyotes, owls, red-tailed and Swainson's hawks, northern harriers golden eagles, and rattlesnakes all prey upon *S. nuttallii* (Borell and Ellis 1934).

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