

I'd better hop to it!



WARNING: READERS SENSITIVE TO BAD BUNNY PUNS SHOULD PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

 The fast and the furiest.

Wild rabbits have a lifespan of one to nine years.

Remarkable Rabbits

by Pat Betteley

Rabbits are small, fluffy mammals that rate 10/10 on the cuteness scale. Here are some ear-resistible facts about the third most popular pet in the United States (behind cats and dogs, of course!).

Description

There are many species of rabbits around the world that share many characteristics such as: long ears, powerful hind legs, soft fur, and short, puffy tails. Also, their teeth never stop growing. Rabbits' chompers grow up to five inches a year, but are gradually worn down as they chew on plants.

Size-wise, rabbits vary widely. The smallest is the pygmy rabbit at 7.9 inches long and 0.9 pounds. The Guinness World Record holder for the longest rabbit is Darius, a 4.4-foot continental giant from England who weighed in at about 50 pounds.

Because rabbits are the main prey animal for a whole lot of predators, such as wolves, foxes, bobcats, weasels, hawks, eagles, and owls, they need sharp senses to survive. Eyes on the sides of their heads allow them to see almost all the way around them to keep close watch for



Hare-raising.

What's the big deal about rabbits and hares? Some breeds can reach 50 pounds.

Diet, Habitat, and Geography

What did the rabbit say to the carrot?
"It's been nice gnawing you."

Judging from this joke, you might think that rabbits consume a lot of carrots. Actually, that's not true. Wild rabbits don't eat root vegetables. They prefer greens like weeds, grasses, and clovers. They also eat their own poop. By eating pre-digested meals, rabbits can absorb nutrients their bodies missed the first time around. (Subtract one from that cuteness score mentioned earlier.)

Rabbits live on all continents except Antarctica in underground burrows found in habitats ranging from deserts to tropical forests to wetlands. Bunny soil engineers dig a series of tunnels and rooms underground that are called warrens. Large groups live in these complex systems with many connected rooms and entrances that allow them to escape in a pinch. Speaking of homes, did you hear about the bunny who built herself a new house? She was fed up with the hole thing.

Breeding and Life Span

Rabbits are **prolific** baby-makers. Mother rabbits begin



Baby bunnies are born hairless.

breeding at a young age and give birth to up to seven kittens (baby bunnies) four or five times a year. (Do the math!) Baby rabbits are naked, blind, and helpless at birth. They grow quickly and are weaned in about a month.

How can you tell when rabbits are getting old? Look for the gray hares. Mom puns aside, not all rabbits live to grow old. Wild rabbits have a shorter life span (one to nine years) than pet rabbits (eight to 12 years) because they are not exposed to disease, food scarcity, or predators.

Threats and Importance

Humans threaten rabbit survival when we hunt them for sport, food, and fur. Although we value them as pets, they are also used as laboratory animals for medical and scientific purposes. Unfortunately, almost half of the world's rabbit species are in danger of extinction. Will there be a *huppy* ending for rabbits? *Lettuce pray.*

WORD HELP

Prolific means producing many offspring.

predators. Ears up to four inches long have a serious purpose—they rotate 270° like satellite dishes to listen for threats up to two miles away. Rabbits are also amazing athletes, able to jump up to three feet vertically and 10 feet across the ground. Cartoon character Elmer Fudd has good reason to call them “wascally wabbits,” (rascally rabbits), because escape-artist-cottontails can sprint up to 18 mph and run in zig-zag patterns, making them hard to target.

When life is good, the binky (rabbit “happy dance”) is performed. Bunnies leap, twist, and kick in mid-air. They also purr like cats when they're relaxed.

Rabbits and hares are not the same species. Here's the difference. Hares are larger, have longer ears and hind legs, live alone or in pairs in above-ground nests, and are born fur-covered with open eyes.