

## Biology

- NEC are far less likely to stray more than 15 feet from cover
- Adults live solitary lives except to mate and, in the doe's case, rear young
- On average, 15% survive their first year
- Average life expectancy is 15 months
- Average litter size of 3-8, 2-4 litters per year, 28 day pregnancy
- Doe makes shallow nest by scratching 4 inch divot in ground and lining with fur and dried grass and twigs
- Eat their own fecal pellets to more completely digest food (this is called coprophagy)
- Nearly indistinguishable from the introduced Eastern Cottontail



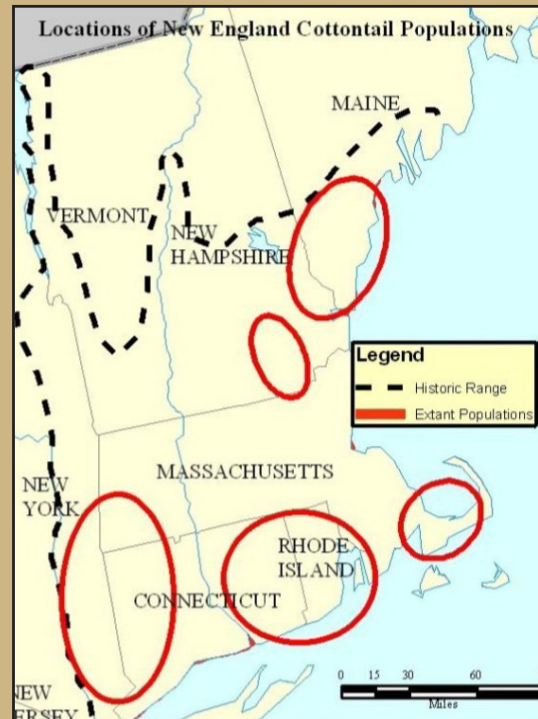
Photo credit: "Working Together for the New England Cottontail"

A litter of New England Cottontail kits in a nest constructed by the mother. They will be raised by the mother for 4-5 weeks.

## History

The New England cottontail (NEC) is Cape Cod's only native cottontail—the far more common Eastern cottontail was introduced in the late 19th and early 20th century to enhance game populations. Once occupying the majority of New England, today NEC populations are found in just five locations (including Cape Cod), representing only 14% of their historic range.

**The NEC needs your help.**



For more information on the New England Cottontail, visit:  
[newenglandcottontail.org](http://newenglandcottontail.org)  
[friendsofmashpeenationalwildliferefuge.org](http://friendsofmashpeenationalwildliferefuge.org)

## Rabbit Habitat (*rabbitat*)

**Creating and Maintaining  
Habitat for the New  
England Cottontail**



New England cottontail photo by Meagan Racey



Friends of  
Mashpee National  
Wildlife Refuge



# Preferred Habitat

The New England Cottontail prefers habitat with thick shrub cover

- *Forests with thick understory*
- *Shrublands*
- *Forested wetlands*

This thick cover provides protection from predators like

- *Owls and hawks*
- *Foxes and coyotes*
- *Domestic cats*

On Cape Cod, the NEC can be found in forests of mixed pitch pine and oak with a dense understory of

- *Huckleberry*
- *Blueberry*
- *Green briar*

The NEC's diet consists of bark, twigs, leaves, nuts, berries, flowers, and grasses. Preferred sources of this food include raspberry, blackberry, highbush blueberry, willows, birch, and red maple.



The dense understory of a pitch pine forest like the Mashpee Pine Barrens offers excellent cover for the NEC.

# How You Can Help

Make brush piles!

Aside from managing land to provide native plants for food, the best thing you can do for the NEC is give them somewhere to hide.

Here's how you can make a rabbitat:

1. Lay down large logs in a crisscross pattern—this provides the entrances and exits for the rabbit, keep them small enough that predators won't fit



2. Pile on smaller limbs and branches



3. Pile on any loose leaves, twigs, and other plant detritus



4. Keep adding to the pile throughout the year—bigger is better



**\*\*Important note\*\***

This is how to build the perfect brush pile or rabbitat. One or more brush piles offer important hiding spots, which is extremely beneficial to this woodland rabbit.

**The NEC requires a travel corridor of habitat (or at least hiding places) to utilize for food and shelter. Homeowners can help by creating several brush piles like this one on their property.**

