

Pygmy rabbit or Cottontail?

How to tell the difference between Washington's endangered pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) and the common **Mountain** cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*)

- **The first distinction to consider is location.** Although cottontails may be found in pygmy rabbit habitat (shrub-steppe, sagebrush terrain where deep soils allow them to dig burrows), cottontails are much more likely than pygmy rabbits to live in abundance in backyards, orchards, wood piles, drain pipes and other human-dominated areas. In other words, it is highly unlikely for a rare pygmy rabbit to be outside of its specialized habitat.
- **Tail size and color is very different.** The Pygmy rabbit (left) has a very small, inconspicuous tail that is the same color as its body. The cottontail, as its common name suggests, has a white and very conspicuous tail, especially obvious when fleeing.



Pygmy rabbit, Photo by S. DeMay



Cottontail rabbit, Photo by E. Sequin

- **Adult body sizes differ.** The adult Pygmy rabbit measures 9-11 inches and weighs about one pound. The adult cottontail measures 12-14 inches and weighs 1-1/2 to three pounds. Juvenile rabbits of both species are similar in size, but juvenile cottontails are distinguished by their white tail.
- **Ear shape and size is somewhat different.** Pygmy rabbit ears are slightly shorter and definitely more rounded. Cottontail ears can be barely longer, but they appear much longer because they are more elongated in shape.
- **Color is slightly different.** Pygmy rabbits have a rufus (reddish-brown) color on the nape (neck), back of ears, and feet (left, in summer pelage) and a white belly that is most noticeable in their winter pelage (right). Cottontails tend to be more uniformly brown. Color is not a distinction easily made at a distance.



Pygmy rabbit, Photo by J. Witham



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