Domestic Rabbit

**Fast Facts**

**Common Name:** Domestic Rabbit

**Scientific Name:** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**Family:** Leporidae

**Order:** Lagomorpha

**Class:** Mammalia

**Range:** Originally Spain and France; introduced to other European countries and Australia; domestically kept worldwide

**Habitat:** Grasslands, forests, deserts, wetlands

**Lifespan:** 8-10 years in captivity; less in the wild

**Conservation Status:** Stable

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**What do they look like?**

Most domestic rabbits have been bred and domesticated from wild European rabbits. These wild rabbits are around 13-18 inches long and are usually brownish-gray in color. Domesticated since the Middle Ages, rabbits have been bred for their skins, fur, meat, and as pets. The American Rabbit Breeders Association recognizes over 40 distinct breeds, many of which have multiple coat colors. They range in size from Netherland Dwarfs, which weigh around 2 lbs, to Flemish Giants, which weigh upwards of 15 lbs.

**How do they behave?**

Wild rabbits live in a warren, a series of tunnels and burrows. They are very social, living in medium- to large-sized groups with complex hierarchies and ranking systems. Rabbits are crepuscular, most active at dawn and dusk, during which time they will travel short distances from their warren to graze. Rabbits communicate not through vocalizations, but by thumping their large hind legs to alert other rabbits that danger is near.

**What’s on the menu?**

Rabbits are herbivorous and graze primarily on grasses. In the winter when grass is scarce, they may eat twigs, strip bark from trees, and forage for other plant matter. Rabbits’ digestive systems are evolved to process large amounts of grass with high fiber content. The fiber is fermented by bacteria in the bowel, producing a kind of droppings called caecotrophs which are expelled. Caecotrophs are then eaten and digested a second time to further extract essential nutrients. At the Zoo, rabbits eat hay, rabbit pellets, and leafy vegetables.

**How are they born?**

Rabbit kits are born blind, deaf and hairless, in a chamber of the warren lined with their mother’s fur, which she plucks from her chest and belly. Their litters are usually 5-6 kits, but may be up to 10. Many wild does breed twice every year, allowing rabbit populations to grow very quickly. Rabbits also mature early, reaching sexual maturity at 4-6 months of age. Rabbits ovulate after mating occurs, so can breed at any time of year, although in the wild, most litters are born in spring and summer.

**What should you know about them?**

Rabbits can make good family pets, but, like any animal, make sure you research them thoroughly, and acquire them from a reputable source. Animal shelters and rabbit rescue organizations often re-home pet rabbits.