



# The Rabbit

## Fact File

**English Name:** European Rabbit

**Scientific Name:** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**Irish Name:** Coinín

**Body Colour:** Mainly greyish-brown fur, with paler grey underparts.

**Length:** 40-55 cm.

**Weight:** Approximately 1.3-2.2 kg.

**Habitat:** Grassland, scrub and roadside verges.

**Food:** Rabbits are vegetarian, mainly eating grass. They will nibble on other plants and can be a pest for farmers by eating their crops. They also eat their food twice to extract all the nutrients!

Rabbits are mammals. They are not native to Ireland but were introduced here by the Normans for food. They are native to south west Europe (Spain and Portugal) and north west Africa. Rabbits are found throughout Ireland (though not on Sherkin!) and live in different types of habitats. They especially like areas where the grass is short but which also have patches of longer grass so that they can hide. They are mostly nocturnal but may be seen during the day if few predators are about (e.g. foxes, badgers, domestic pets, birds of prey and human hunters).

Rabbits like to live in large groups and many extended families often live together in a large warren. A warren is a large system of burrows that the rabbits dig underground.

In many countries they are considered an invasive species, having caused many problems to the environments that they have colonised. However, in their native homes their populations are under threat, mainly due to a disease which affects rabbits, known as myxomatosis.

Rabbits have lots of babies, and they have them often! They can breed at any time but mostly in spring and summer. A doe can have up to seven litters a year, with 3-7 young per litter. Babies are born blind and hairless and are weaned by 24 days. Many rabbits live less than a year but a few live for about five years.

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## Rabbit Names

- A male rabbit is called a *buck*.
- A female rabbit is called a *doe*.
- A baby rabbit called a *kitten* (also a *kit*, or *bunny*).
- A group of rabbits is known as a *colony* or *nest*.



## A RABBIT & A HARE: What's the difference?

- Hares are generally larger and faster.
- Hares have longer ears and legs.
- Rabbits are born blind and hairless, hares have hair and can see.
- Hares live in simple



Hare

- nests above the ground and mostly alone.
- Rabbits are not protected in Ireland but hares are.