



# Rabbit Hunting 101





# Why Hunt Rabbit in Georgia?

- During the time of North American settlement, rabbit was an abundant and valuable food source. The hunting of rabbit in Georgia has been in a steady decline as the years progress but rabbit ranks third of the most hunted small game animals in the state behind dove and squirrel.
- Hunting is used primarily as a means of keeping the rabbit population within acceptable limits that keeps the herd healthy and strong, but also does not allow the herd to destroy habitat and overconsume food sources for other species; this is called carrying capacity.
- The revenues generated from licenses and equipment sales are a major source of funding for wildlife and habitat restoration projects. Projects include habitat improvements on state owned lands and population studies, as well as hunter education.
- Rabbits exhibit numerous nuisance-type habits affecting the property of homeowners and farmers alike. Rabbits are responsible for extensive property damage in the form of burrow digging, vegetation damage, and sometimes even structural damage.

# Hunting Regulations

- GA DNR is responsible for setting and enforcing regulations for hunting rabbits.
  - Hunted statewide from November 17<sup>th</sup> through February 28<sup>th</sup>.
  - They can be hunted with predatory birds from October 1st through March 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - There is no requirement for recording or reporting rabbits that have been harvested.

# Identifying Species



# The Four Species of Georgia Rabbit

- Eastern Cottontail
- Appalachian Cottontail
- Swamp Cottontail
- March rabbit



# Eastern Cottontail



Most common of the four, the Eastern Cottontail has dense brown to gray fur with a white underside and tail. Sometimes, this rabbit will have a white spot on its forehead.

# Appalachian Cottontail

- Similar to size and appearance to its Eastern counterpart; however, rather than a white spot on its forehead this species of rabbit may have a black spot between its ears.
- The Appalachian Cottontail is included on Georgia's Protected Wildlife list and is thus the most uncommon of the four rabbit species.





# Swamp Rabbit



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- Also referred to as a “cane cutter” a Swamp Rabbit is the largest of the four rabbit species. This rabbit has rusty-brown fur with a white underside.



# Marsh Rabbit

- The smallest of the four rabbit species.
- This rabbit has a blackish to reddish-brown backside with a brownish-gray underside, unlike the other three species with their characteristic white undersides.
- The Marsh rabbit's ears, and tail are noticeably smaller than those of the other three species.



# Habitat and Patterns of Movement

- Georgia rabbits occupy a broad range.
  - Habitats differ based on species.
- Mostly active from Dusk until Dawn.
  - Largely Evasive.



# Eastern Cottontail Habitat

- Found throughout the state. They tend to favor upland areas associated with agricultural fields, pine forests, and brushy areas. Cottontails favor early succession, newer vegetation growth, habitats with a mix of grasses, briars, forbs and shrubs.
- The Eastern Cottontail will burrow in hard-to-reach areas, surrounded by vegetation; a habitat provides both a food source and protection from their natural ground and aviary predators. The Eastern Cottontail will cover 4-13 acres of favorable land annually.

# Appalachian Cottontail

- The Appalachian Cottontail is considered to be a rare find. They are confined to high mountain elevations, hence their common name. They favor rough mountain terrain with bushy areas mixed with open forests.
- The Appalachian Cottontail is primarily nocturnal and is never too far from dense ground cover. They cover a very small .5-2 acres of favorable land annually.



# Swamp Rabbit

- Found in riparian, or water-side, areas such as bottomland hardwood areas as well as beaver pond habitats found in the Piedmont. They generally nest under logs, rotten stumps, and ground depressions.
- The Swamp rabbit can cover 5-19 acres of favorable land annually. Unlike other species of rabbit, Swamp rabbits can be territorial. If pursued, the Swamp rabbit may take to water when fleeing.

# Marsh Rabbit

- Found mostly in the southern half of the state. They are often found in open marsh areas associated with the Coastal Plains and coastal river systems. These areas include bottomlands, swamps, and hammocks.
- Marsh Rabbits are mostly nocturnal. Being the smallest of Georgia's rabbit species, the Marsh Rabbit has many documented predators. For this reason, a Marsh rabbit will not hesitate to take to water when fleeing.



# Hunting Sequence of Events

- Scouting.
- Selecting your hunting location.
- Choosing your method of hunting.

# Scouting

Scouting can be crucial when it comes to hunting rabbit, typically taking place prior to the hunt itself. When scouting, the hunter should pay close attention to the factors that indicate favorable rabbit habitat. Looking for signs to mark the locations of rabbit activity on a map or GPS unit may position the hunter near the rabbit's burrow.



# Method of Hunting

- Rabbits can be hunted using multiple methods. Two distinct methods are static and dynamic hunting.
  - Static hunting, or ambush hunting, involves waiting for the rabbit to come to the hunter while they remain in a fixed location.
- Dynamic hunting, or flushing, involves the hunter moving around in the rabbit's habitat and attempting to find the rabbit. Using trained dogs are often a large part of dynamic rabbit hunting.

# What Can I Hunt Rabbits With?

- Rifles
- Handguns
- Air Rifles
- Muzzleloaders
- Shotguns

# Rifles and Handguns

- Single projectile firearms such as rifles, handguns, air rifles or muzzle loading firearms may be used. When using rimfire firearms such as rifles and handguns, the projectile must be .22 caliber or smaller.
- When using a single projectile to hunt rabbit, place the shot behind the animal's ear or within the animal's chest area. A shot delivered in either area will likely result in an immediate kill or will cause the least amount of suffering.





# Shotguns

- Permissible shot shells must be 3.5 inches or smaller in length with No. 2 or smaller shot.
- Shotguns are typically a rabbit hunter's first choice due to the broader projectile pattern to combat the rabbit's small size and speed. Using a single projectile to hunt rabbit often requires great marksmanship skill.
- When using a shotgun to hunt rabbits, shot placement is not precise. For the best chance at an effective kill, aim for the front end of the animal.



# Bows

- Longbows, recurve bows, crossbows, and compound bows may be used to hunt rabbit.



Recurve Bow

# Special Considerations for Rabbit Hunting

- Camouflage and protective clothing.
- Increasing your visibility to other hunters.
  - Using hunting dogs.
- Understand chokes and when to use them.



# Camouflage and Protective Clothing

Rabbits often tend to forage near protective cover.

A rabbit hunter may want to wear clothing that can withstand navigating through dense vegetation, especially thorns and briar patches.

# Increasing Your Visibility to Other Hunters

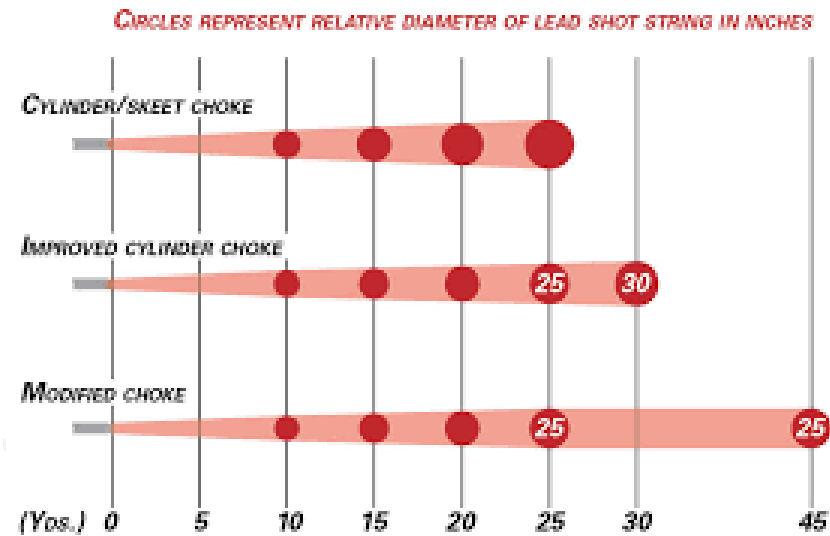
Other than protection from thorns and briars, a rabbit hunter must make themselves visible to fellow hunters. Wearing blaze orange is important in all hunting activities but becomes more important the further the hunter travels into thick vegetation. A combination of blaze orange body gear and a cap is highly recommended.

# Using Hunting Dogs

Many rabbit hunters choose to use trained dogs to aid in their rabbit hunting experience. A working dog can find and flush rabbits out of hard-to-reach areas in a desired direction depending on the degree of instilled training. If hunting with dogs, it is the hunter's responsibility to be up to date on the specific regulations.

# Understand Chokes and When to Use Them

If hunting rabbit with a shotgun, choosing your choke tube can be very important. Using a wider choke, such as improved cylinder, that produces a broader shot pattern for small and fast-moving targets is ideal. If hunting with dogs, a hunter may need to consider using a tight choke, such as modified or full, to reduce the likelihood of stray shot striking the working dog.





# Where Can I Hunt Rabbit?

## Private Land

- Requires Permission in order to Hunt.
- Includes regular landowners and hunting clubs.
  - Permission must be gained in writing.
- Private lands offer exclusive opportunities to hunters that are sometimes not offered on Public Land.
- Gardeners and Farmers are a rabbit hunters' friend.

# Where Can I Hunt Rabbit?

## Public Land

- There are many opportunities to hunt public lands in Georgia. A full list of the WMAs and other government owned properties where rabbit hunting is allowed can be found in the Georgia hunting regulations.
- It is important to note that some WMAs and public lands have specific rules that pertain to them, and it is the hunter's responsibility to know the rules ahead of time and abide by them while hunting.

# Pittman Robertson Act & U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Pittman Robertson Act is an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment.
- This money goes toward Wildlife Restoration only.

# Pittman Robertson Act

- The excise tax is set by law at 11% of the wholesale price for long guns and ammunition and 10% for handguns. It is paid by manufacturers, producers, and importers and applies to all commercial sales and imports, whether their purpose is hunting, sport shooting, or personal defense. This tax is handled by the Department of the Treasury, which turns the funds over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for apportionments to states.



# How are Pittman-Robertson Funds Distributed?

1. \$8 million is dedicated to Enhanced Hunter Education programs, including the construction or maintenance of public target ranges.
2. \$3 million is set aside for projects that require cooperation among the states.
3. One-half of the excise tax collected on handguns is set aside for Basic Hunter Education programs.

The remainder of the trust fund is then divided in half with 50 percent apportioned to states based on the land area of the state in proportion to the total land area of the country. The remaining 50 percent is apportioned based on the number of individual paid hunting license holders in the state in proportion to the national total.

# Wildlife and Sport Restoration Program

- The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) works with states, insular areas and the District of Columbia to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, their habitats, and the hunting, sport fishing and recreational boating opportunities they provide. Insuring they will be available for generations to come.

# How Can You Learn More?

- There are many books, websites and pod cast dedicated to the subject.
- Find a friend or family member who is an experienced hunter and talk to them or see if they will be a hunting mentor for you.
  - Videos and shows on television and online.
- Visit <https://georgiawildlife.com/LearntoHuntFish>

# Learn More About Rabbits

You can find more information about Rabbit management, biology, and more at:

[https://georgiawildlife.com/sites/default/files/wrd/pdf/fact-sheets/2005\\_rabbit.pdf](https://georgiawildlife.com/sites/default/files/wrd/pdf/fact-sheets/2005_rabbit.pdf)