Innocent eyes, soft furs and billowy tails characterize the many species of rabbits and hares found in the West. But the warm-and-fuzzy images fade when the flop-eared lagomorphs browse and shred homeowners’ prized shrubs, gardens and flowerbeds. In California and the Northwest, cottontail rabbits cause extensive damage to homestead landscapes, crops and fruit orchards.

Cottontails and jackrabbits are the common names for members of the family Leporidae found in the west, including a number of subspecies. Both species bear four to eight litters a year, with three to eight young in each litter. On average, 15 percent of the young survive their first year. That’s a lot of hungry bunnies!

Cottontails, Sylvilagus audubonii, prefer to live and forage among the edges of open fields and meadows, areas of dense high grass, in wood thickets, along fencerows, forest edges and along the borders of marshy areas. In summer, cottontails' natural foods include tender grasses and herbs; crops such as peas, beans and lettuce are also eaten, along with several flower species. In winter, bark, twigs and the buds of shrubs and young trees, as well as manicured lawns, attract foraging cottontails.

Jackrabbits, Lepus californicus, are hares that are commonly found in California and other western parts of the United States. Jackrabbits live in the desert, high plains and chaparral and are also found on brushlands, prairies, pasturceland and meadows.

During the spring and summer, jackrabbits feed on clover, alfalfa and other abundant greens. During the lean fall and winter months, they subsist on woody

RABBIT MANAGEMENT

Despite their nocturnal nature, rabbits leave signs of their presence, including prints and scat (droppings). Usually, its droppings are dark pellets the size of peas and are sometimes found in piles.

Rabbit browsing can be distinguished from deer browsing by the appearance of clean-cut clipping of young stems. A rabbit will leave a clean, angled cut while a deer will leave a rough, jagged rip or break. Browsing and debarking by rabbits usually does not extend more than 2 1/2 feet above the ground.

Methods of control—both proven and experimental—include fencing, trapping, hunting, removal of yard debris and, where permitted, application of chemical and natural repellents.

The best way to repel rabbits is to attack their sense of safety while not injuring them—scare them with a threat, the threat of death. Granular and spray repellents can be an effective control for rabbits where aesthetics, cost and effort discourage fencing. There is more than one way to control that “wascally wabbit!”

David Cuddeback is a Cornell graduate with a background in biology, ecology and business. He is president of Enviro Protection Industries Co., Inc. (EPIC), a leading manufacturer of natural repellents which employ organic and ecologically sound solutions to pest problems. Visit www.rabbitscram.com to learn more about rabbit protection and this natural granular rabbit repellent.