

## JANUARY 15 – 31, 2018 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

### **RED-TAILED HAWK**



**Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis***  
© Dick Harlow, 2017

Notice the brown flecked belly band, a distinct characteristic of eastern Red-tailed Hawks. These belly bands can be dark like this one or quite diffused; but a belly band can always be counted on as a characteristic of this hawk. Both pictures of this Red-tail show the belly band. The bird does have a red tail, but I wanted to show how obvious the belly band is in a sitting and flying position. Even though the **red tail** can be seen in adults, immatures will not show this for at least two years. Look for the dark head, white breast with the belly band to be sure you are looking at a Red-tailed Hawk.

There are always exceptions to every rule, and if you go to the southwest or out to the far west there will be variances to the plumages of this species. Some species are dark and have no discernable belly band and others with less white and more flecking all over the chest. Consequently, the belly band characteristic is primarily for an eastern Red-tailed Hawk.

Our EastView Red-tail tends to perch in the trees boarding the meadow to check out the trees, meadow, and the back yards of the cottages. We usually see a Red-tail in the Fall, appearing anytime from October to December and staying until March or April. Their home range covers a large area so our meadow is only one of several that this bird frequents looking for food. Our area seems to be a winter hunting ground rather than a nesting area.



**Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis***  
© Dick Harlow, 2017

Red-tails are primarily mammal predators. They will go after Gray Squirrels, Red Squirrels, Eastern Cottontail Rabbits or any other small mammal that they can catch, e.g. Meadow Vole, Brown Rat, Field Mice, etc.

## JANUARY 15 – 31, 2018 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

The following image was taken this winter of an adult Red-tailed Hawk in the tree line facing the Deer Meadow cottages. Hawks have a winter territory that they will protect from encroachment by other hawks of the same species. This fellow might very well be last year's bird (in the first two images) or for that matter the same bird we have been seeing for several years. If it is a different Red-tail there should be tell-tale plumage marks that are significantly different from last year's bird. Let me know what you think, same or different.



**Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis***  
© Dick Harlow, 2018

.....

## NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL VS EASTERN COTTONTAIL

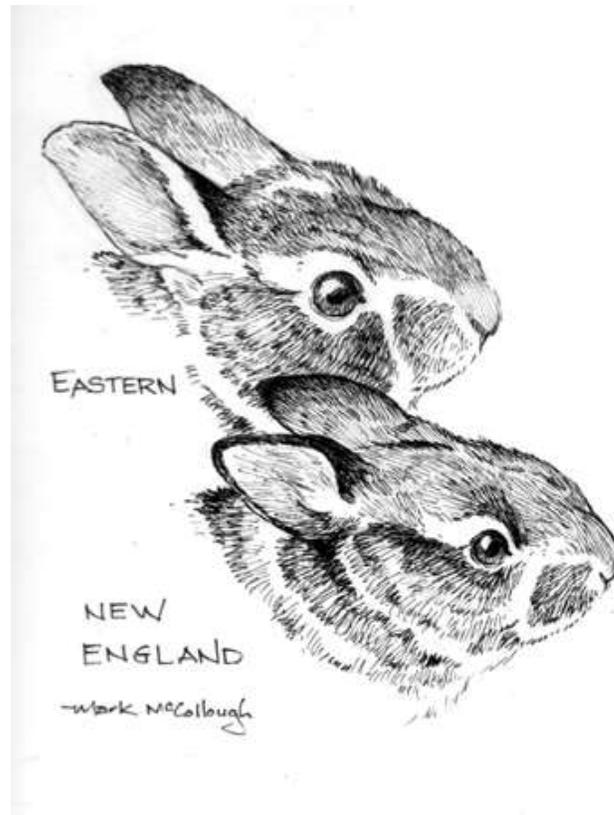
One is native to New England and the other was brought into the region by the hundreds in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, there are more of the Eastern Cottontail than the New England Cottontail.



NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL (Courtesy: Linda Cullivan)

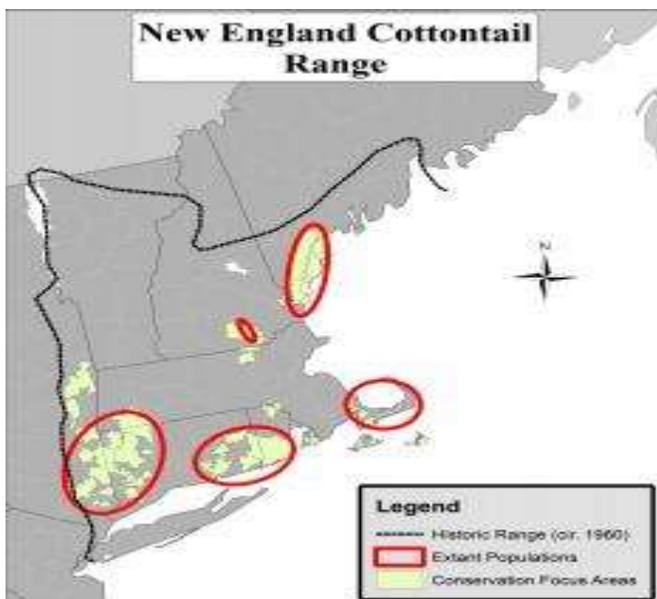
EASTERN COTTONTAIL (Courtesy: Stan Freeman)

**JANUARY 15 – 31, 2018 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW**  
**By Dick Harlow**



New England Cottontail left and Eastern Cottontail right. New England Cottontail is slightly smaller with shorter ears and is very habitat specific. Whereas the Eastern Cottontail is slightly larger, has slightly longer ears and is much more tolerant to adapting to changes in habitat. Consequently, either through competition or habitat changes the Eastern Cottontail is more apt to succeed.

The New England Cottontail, *Sylvilagus transitionalis*, as noted, is smaller than the Eastern Cottontail. Its habitat includes shrubs, low brush and young trees. I can remember, as a kid, seeing New England Cottontails on a regular basis when I walked through a field with shrubs from my house to a pond about ¼ mile from my house. As forests mature along with human construction these changes to the environment have removed cottontail habitat, thus this shrubland species has dwindled in numbers and their numbers are presently located in very specific locations as seen on the map below. New England Cottontails once ranged from southern Maine to southern New York including Vermont. There is now a big effort to bring this local species back from near extinction.



Historic 1960s range (black line), current populations (red), and conservation focus areas (yellow) for New England cottontail restoration. USFWS

The western relative, called Eastern Cottontail, *Sylvilagus floridanus* was introduced into New England in the 1900's. You can find this species now throughout the Northeast and because of

## JANUARY 15 – 31, 2018 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

its introduction in the 1900's, their population has expanded and is now more numerous than its New England cousin.



**Eastern Cottontail, *Sylvilagus floridanus*,**  
backyard EastView © Dick Harlow

It is felt that even though these two species compete for habitat, they do not interbreed. I am sure there are other factors that enter into the success or failure of their individual populations, such as genetics, behavior and dispersal patterns to name a few.

Whatever the case, it is hoped that there will be some success in reintroducing the New England Cottontail to more areas of New England, especially Vermont!

## OBSERVATIONS

### MAMMALS

Coyote – heard, tracks  
Eastern Cottontail - tracks

### Weather Tidbits

Month of JANUARY 2018

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

### PRECIPITATION

**Total Precipitation: 30.8 mm or 1.2 inches**

**Overcast Days: 8**