



## **RABBIT (CONEY)**

Rabbits were first introduced to this country by the Normans as a food source and as escapes soon occurred they quickly colonised the surrounding countryside. The fur of these animals was also a valuable by-product and was used extensively for clothing. Colour can vary slightly from light brown to grey through to black but generally they are brown with long dark hairs giving a well camouflaged appearance.

An adult will weigh in the region of 1.7kg but larger specimens often occur. The bucks (males) have a broader head and heavier body than the does (females) and often show signs of fighting for dominance of a warren, with ragged and torn ears being common.

### **LIFE CYCLE**

Breeding mainly takes place between January and July but can occur during any month with young females capable

of breeding at 3 - 4 months of age. Gestation is 28 - 30 days with an average litter size of 5 born and females are capable of breeding 4 - 5 times a year in ideal conditions.

Mating and conception within 24 hours of parturition usually occurs with ovulation being induced by mating.

The young are born hairless with their eyes closed in a nest chamber called a stop which is prepared by the doe. This can be within the main warren but more commonly it is a short distance away with the entrance being blocked when the doe has completed feeding (which takes place at 24 hour intervals). The stop contains dry grass and bracken and is lined with fur from the does under parts. Eyes open at about 10 days and weaning takes place at 3 - 4 weeks of age.

Rabbits are very clean animals and spend a great deal of their time grooming and cleaning their fur in much the same manner as cats.

Defecation or urination never takes place within the burrow system, all faeces being deposited outside the warren with the average being 360 hard round pellets in a 24 hour period. The softer encapsulated

faeces are reingested to obtain the maximum nutrition.

### **FEEDING HABITS**

Rabbits feed in grazing fashion taking any young shoots close to cover and nibbling them down squarely to 10mm above the ground. In cereal crops extensive grazing can occur and crop loss can be serious although grazing on vegetables or flowers in domestic gardens can also be infuriating.

### **SIGNS OF INFESTATION**

Apart from the visual damage caused by grazing a number of small scrapes may be noticed where attempts to obtain roots have taken place. These signs and large amounts of hard round droppings can easily be seen. Often on well established routes to feeding areas runs are easily visible and they can be followed from the warren to a chosen feeding ground. Damage to trees or shrubs can also be seen in the winter months when food is short and this can be extensive to smooth barked species. Trees can be killed by this stripping of the bark unless a guard or fencing is erected for protection.

### **CONTROL**

In agricultural environments the most effective means of control are gassing, shooting, ferreting or trapping although only the latter two methods can

possibly be undertaken in domestic situations. In some situations repellents may be used but often wire or electric fencing may be the most effective protective measure.

Solutions Pest Control can provide a service for the control of rabbits, but in domestic situations our Technicians will be pleased to offer advice on proofing or control measures which can be carried out by the householder.