

# Snowshoe hare

## Lepus americanus

A close cousin of the rabbit, the snowshoe hare is unique for its twice-a-year change in pelt coloration. Hares in Pennsylvania are found in the northern half of the state, with some populations found in the south-central.

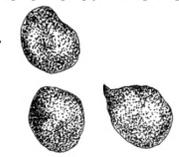
### Habitat

Deciduous forests with conifers and escape cover, such as rhododendron and mountain laurel.



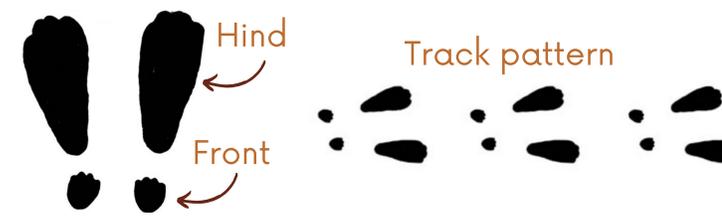
### Scat

Pellets, slightly oval shape and a pointed end. Generally around 5 mm in diameter, but those of large adult males can be up to 10 mm wide. Tend to be dark brown to black in color.



### Tracks

Flat-footed, large, 5-6 in. long. 4 toes front and back, widely spaced. Soles of feet covered with stiff fur.



### Diet

In summer, snowshoes eat green vegetation including leaves, clover, jewelweed, dandelions and tender buds and the growing twigs of low woody plants. Winter food is woody material such as twigs and bark from aspens, willows, birch, alders, maples, blackberry canes, firs, cedars, pines, spruces and hemlocks. Deep snow helps hares get food by making a platform that lets them reach higher food sources.



### Phototropism: what is it?

Cold temperatures and ground color have nothing to do with the snowshoe hare's pelt's color change. The change is from **phototropism** - the amount of available light. As days get shorter in fall, a hare's eyes receive light for shorter and shorter periods; this stimulates the pituitary gland, located at the base of the brain. During molt, the pituitary shuts off pigment production in the new fur, which therefore grows in white. In spring, lengthening days trigger the reverse of this process. The snowshoe hare is directly affected by climate warming. If their camouflage becomes mismatched with their surroundings, the hares stand out like lightbulbs against a dark background and are predicted to be at a higher risk of predation.

### Reproduction

Courtship begins in early March, when males (also called **bucks**) fight furiously for females (**does**), kicking each other with their powerful hind feet. 1-6 young (usually 2-3) are born after a 36-day gestation period. Young hares are called leverets. They weigh 2½ ounces at birth, their eyes are open and they're capable of walking and hopping soon after they are dry. Their fine brown fur blends with the surroundings. Young start eating green vegetation at 7-10 days old and usually are weaned and on their own at 6 or 7 weeks of age.

