

Artifact of the Month

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

April 2018



Hop! Hop! This time of year most people, when they think of rabbits, are envisioning an all-white rabbit, with a rather large fluffy white tail, sometimes carrying eggs in a basket. Well, what about your average everyday rabbit? Florida is home to two different species of rabbit, the Eastern Cottontail and the Marsh Rabbit, neither of which are white in color. With the ability to blend into the vegetation of Florida, both in heavy brush and briar patches (Cottontail), and amongst the wet prairies and agricultural fields (Marsh rabbit), these rabbit species are easily hidden. While the depiction of April's Easter rabbit is usually hopping around with their bushy white tails; the Marsh rabbit, April's artifact of the month, has a small-gray brown tail and legs made for swimming rather than hopping!

Most rabbits have distinctive pelvic bones and legs that allow them to spring into the air and run at high speed away from predators. However, the Marsh Rabbit uses those leg muscles and pelvic bones to hightail it into the nearest water source in order to hide. With their short hind legs, Marsh Rabbits unfortunately are easy to capture when hunted across land unless they find water. In fact, in most cases the rabbit will stay immersed in the muddy waters with only their eyes visible. The pelvic bone of the Marsh rabbit (shown above), found on the Brighton Reservation, is thinner than what is seen in the body of the Cottontail, aiding in its ability to walk through dense vegetation near swampy areas. Known as pests in southern Florida because of their inundation of sugar cane fields, they face harrowing predators such as alligators, snakes, and owls. So the next time you're walking through the dense swampy areas of Florida just remember that the animal splashing into the water could in fact be the Marsh Rabbit running away from you.

