



Photo credit: Guido Bonetti

Native to the Iberian Peninsula, the European Rabbit is thought to have been introduced to the Maltese Islands by the early Romans; or possibly even earlier. While being relatively common in the countryside and rocky areas, the European Rabbit is rarely seen as it is a very timid animal and it forages for food at dusk.

Growing up to 45cm, this species has large and prominent eyes. Its hind legs are very long, while its tail is short and curved upwards. The European Rabbit usually has pale, sandy brown or greyish fur with white under parts. Nonetheless, it is possible to find individuals with different colour varieties in the same area. It feeds mostly on grass; however, it may also graze on roots. Males are slightly larger than females, and during the mating season, each male rabbit mates with more than one female. The nest is built in deep burrows, and the female, known as the Doe, gives birth to more than three litters per year, with 3-12 young at once. The young, known in Maltese as 'iż-żrameġ', emerge from the burrow 3 weeks from birth.

In the Maltese Islands, rabbits have long been sought after for their exquisite meat. Indeed, the European Rabbit is most likely a progenitor of the domesticated rabbit, and while it is still frequent in the wild, the conversion of countryside into urban land may be a potential threat to the survival of this species. It used to be a very important source of food until it was replaced by various, newly introduced breeds and hybrids. The European Rabbit is protected in the Maltese Islands, and in order to be hunted, one must obtain a specific license from the competent authorities and follow all regulations that are set in place in order to prevent this species from becoming endangered.

Scientific Name:
Oryctolagus cuniculus

English:
European Rabbit

Maltese:
tax-xiber (wild)
il-fenek selvaġġ (wild)
il-fenek (domestic)
iż-żarmuġ (young)

