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LAKE STATES FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION*
University Farm, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Woody Food Preferences of the Snowshoe Rabbit in the Lake States

The kinds of woody plants eaten by the snowshoe rabbit in any one locality are quite largely determined by the species present and their relative abundance. There are, however, a few plants distributed throughout practically the complete range of these animals which make up a large part of their diet. Among the deciduous species young aspen, willows, and the birches are probably the preferred foods. Others are readily eaten but to a much lesser degree. These include hazel, alder, dogwood, red oak, silver maple, wild rose, cherry, raspberry, and sumac.

In the coniferous group, the rabbits show a decided preference for jack pine, white pine, and tamarack. Other evergreens less frequently eaten, but commonly damaged when other food is scarce, include Norway pine, white spruce, Scotch pine, and white cedar. Black spruce and balsam fir are much less often utilized.

Seldom do the animals cut off stems or twigs which are more than a half inch in diameter. Usually, however, they nip off the buds or the tender portions of the twigs such as the branch tips or gnaw the bark. The amount eaten of the portion cut off varies anywhere from zero to one hundred percent. Woody plants are used as food mainly during winter but considerable amounts are also consumed during the spring and fall months. In summer this diet is largely replaced by a more succulent menu of the tender grasses and herbs.

It is thus evident that as far as damage from rabbits is concerned the critical period for coniferous plantations is the fall and winter months. Any scheme for control of depredations by these animals should, therefore, take this fact into consideration.

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