



Cottony Creatures

In the animal kingdom, you don't have to be cute and cuddly to have a cotton-inspired name, but it helps.

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Cottontail Rabbit

Sylvilagus floridanus
(eastern cottontail)
and *Sylvilagus obscurus*
(Appalachian cottontail)

Two of North Carolina's three native rabbit species have the cottontail's requisite fluffy, squeezable, cottony rear end (sorry, marsh rabbits). The eastern cottontail, found across the state, has longer ears and lacks the rarer, mountain-dwelling Appalachian cottontail's black ear tips. Both species run in zigzags, flashing their furry fannies when frightened, creating the visual effect of pandemonium and befuddling would-be predators. In addition to their emergency escape plan, cottontails, and other rabbits, have a hidden talent: They're excellent swimmers.

Cottonmouth Snake

Agkistrodon piscivorus

Also known as the water moccasin, this eastern North Carolina resident spends its days sunning peaceably in swamps and streams, reserving nights for its deadly prow. But don't worry; the cottonmouth isn't hunting for you. People-shy, cottonmouths only bite humans when threatened. Though its common name points to the white color of its gaping, poisonous maw, its less fearsome scientific name means "hook-toothed fish-eater," referring to the preferred diet of North Carolina's only venomous water snake. Young cottonmouths even have a light yellow, worm-looking tail tip, which they wiggle around to "fish" for lizards, birds, frogs, and other small-but-delicious snake snacks.

Hispid Cotton Rat

Sigmodon hispidus

Yes, many cringe at the thought of any rat, but the hispid cotton rat is a serious candidate for cuteness. From its stocky, plump body and big, black eyes to its little snub face and tiny, rounded ears, this North Carolina native more closely resembles a charming companion than *eek!*-inducing vermin. Besides, they never break into our houses like other rat species. Instead, hispid cotton rats pass their time in fields across North Carolina, sniffing around for tender crops, seeds from plants like cotton or corn, and sweet potatoes, and building grassy nests under rocks and logs.



BOLL WEEVIL *Anthonomus grandis*

Fear no weevil — except maybe the boll weevil. Having arrived from Mexico in the early 1900s, this fuzzy beetle, smaller than a popcorn kernel, brought North Carolina cotton production to its knees by the 1950s. Using their long, elephant-trunk-like mouths, weevils chew tiny holes into cotton bolls and squares, irreparably damaging the plant. When weevils get together, they can wipe out cotton acres by the thousands. Today, you won't find any boll weevils in North Carolina. With the help of constant monitoring and a national eradication program, North Carolinians wiped the pernicious pest off our map.