

Rabbits and Hares

By IRENE FINLEY

THE train was speeding through Eastern Oregon. I was looking out of the wide-glass window at the pale sunset that flooded the flat stubble between me and the horizon. Here and there huddled a tangle of discouraged brush like a lonely remnant of the summer. Thin patches of the first snowfall flecked the surface. The scene was quiet, the smooth sliding of the train along the rails almost monotonous. I was in that pleasant state of half-consciousness to things about me.

A pale half-light settled over the world. Out of a brush pile flitted a small dim form, scurried into the snowy openness, sat back on his haunches for a minute with his long ears laid back, then hobby-horsed with big hops under cover again. Another shadow scampered into the light, and behind him another. In a few minutes there were a dozen jackrabbits scampering about in the white light. They got more lively and soon a hop-skip-and-jumping revel was on. How they kicked up their heels and leaped over each other, light, feathery, like the snowflakes falling over them. One big fellow leaped straight up in the air, four or five times as high as he could stretch, twisted sideways and came down facing in the opposite direction. Around and around they went, bouncing and rebounding like rubber balls, padding and playing over the powdery paths.

One big buck stopped short. "Thump! Thump!" sounded in the midst of the reveling. Every gray form froze and melted away—somewhere.

A twig had snapped. Something was near. The stamp of an old rabbit's hind feet had sounded the danger signal. The life of little Jack is always on the firing line. It is a life of fear. Inoffensive and defenseless, he is hunted and hounded through his days and nights. His salvation depends upon his long ears, his limber legs and his capacity to fade into nothingness before strange eyes.

The Leporidae or rabbit family is perhaps better known than any other of our wild animals. They are found throughout this country from the polar regions to the tropics. Few people know the difference between a rabbit and a hare. The European rabbit, which is the parent of all our domestic breeds, is the only one that can rightfully bear the name. It differs slightly in size and lives in burrows. The rest of the race as a rule make their nests, called "squats" or "forms," on top of the ground. These are properly called hares. The young of true rabbits are born naked and blind and have to be kept in a warm nest, fed and nursed carefully for some time before they can move around and hunt their own living. The young of the hare have fur coats when born, have keen senses, and are able to move around and take care of themselves in a few hours. The big hares of our northern states are either varying hares or so-called "snowshoe rabbits," while our little hares are really "rabbits" or "cottontails,"

There's a Difference All Right But It Really Doesn't Matter

and the large hares of the plains are "jackass rabbits."

All mammals, in northern climates, at least, shed their coats twice a year, which gives them a thicker coat in winter and a thinner one in summer.

The winter coat of the varying hare is white like the snow which gives him a chance to crouch in safety as he is practically invisible as long as he doesn't move when a hawk or other enemy is about. One sometimes hears that this change takes place overnight or with the coming of a snowstorm. Nothing is further from the truth. Brown hair cannot be dropped off and white hair slipped on in the twinkling of an eye. The change takes a number of weeks, and during that time brownish patches intermingle with the white until the full change is completed. The individual hairs never alter their color from the time they appear until they fall out. The change from brown to white occurs in autumn. As the weather gets warmer in March the snow gradually disappears from the woods, and the fur of the northern hare slowly begins to be mottled with brown again and soon the spring change is finished. Only the Arctic hare is snow white all the year around.

There are four varieties of cottontail in this country, all more or less related, three varieties of varying hare, four of the polar hare, two marsh hares, a water hare, and the large hare of the plains, called big jack. The jack of the western desert regions has a black tail, instead of a white one like the eastern form. In the southern regions of Arizona and New Mexico is found the big antelope jack with a white rump patch which has a mystifying way of flaring from one side to the other as the animal bounds away under mesquite or cactus. The big hares or jackrabbits of both the east and west plains and deserts have been in the front line of attention from early days. The western Indians have always held jackrabbit skins in high esteem for clothing. They twist the skin in narrow strips which are fastened together to make robes, the skins being twisted in such a way as to leave the fur on both sides, making a warm, durable covering of exceeding lightness. "Driving jacks" was known to the Indians long before it was to the whites, although on a much smaller scale.

By far the most exhilarating and sportsmanlike method of hunting jackrabbits is coursing with greyhounds in the same manner as is followed in the Old World. Our big hares are, if anything, swifter and more resourceful in dodging the hounds than the European hares.

However, the big jack is hunted on the western plains and deserts for a different and more serious purpose. He is the most destructive one of the gnawing tribe in the regions of hay and root crops. In some districts a real "rabbit drive" is almost an annual affair in which

whole communities join in to rid their fields of these pests. An area several miles in extent is beaten over by men on horseback who close in as they advance, driving the game before them, usually into some kind of an enclosure or corral from which there is no escape. The number of rabbits take in one day runs from a few hundred up into the thousands.

Far and foreign is this picture to

Varying Hare or Snowshoe Rabbit



Antelope Jack Rabbit

California Jack Rabbit

Cottontail

Marsh Rabbit

Arctic Hare

that of the gentle-eyed round little cottontail that may be the Easter bunny of your own dooryard. He is common in the Willamette valley, and unknown to you may have a snug nest lined with soft fur in which are snuggled a half dozen blind and helpless babies not far from your kitchen door. At evening mother cottontail may come out on the edge of your green lawn to nibble grass, and if you approach she will sit quietly like a little round gray ball, and then slip softly away into your thick shrubbery or the bushes. On Easter morning she may sit openly at the foot of an old apple tree, basking in the sunshine.

Youthful Diana of Stuart Island Writes of Thrills of 'Still Hunting'

By GRACE CHAPMAN, 14,
Of Stuart Island, B. C.

STILL HUNTING on Stuart Island, a rugged, timbered spot in British Columbia, is one of the most thrilling of all sports. "Still hunting" means pitting your wits against those of an alert, fleet-footed deer. It is one of the hardest and most exciting forms of hunting.

Many times I have been back in the woods with my father, Reg Chapman, who has been at this game for 24 years. During this time he has learned the essentials necessary to be a good hunter. Much of this lore he in turn has passed on to me.

The sport is what I would call a stirring game of "hide and seek," though I must admit that seven times out of ten the deer becomes victor. The wild animal is accustomed to looking through a screen of bushes. He has sensitive ears and a good sense of smell. Lastly, he has an uncanny ability to freeze and is camouflaged to match the terrain.

On one occasion when I went out hunting with Dad, we came out on a mossy knoll on the mountain behind our home. Here we sat down for a few minutes, looking around in all directions to see if we could spot a deer that was looking at us, as they often do. We had not been there long when Dad pointed out to me a big buck deer that was peering through a screen of bushes. He was not more than 20 or 30 feet away, and it was very difficult to distinguish him from his surroundings. However, he was gone before Dad could shoot, and was probably

laughing at us through another growth.

The usual course of a seasoned hunter is to go slowly through the woods until fresh spore is encountered. This can be recognized by the freshness of the hoof marks in the ground, or the clear imprint of his foot. Old spoor can be recognized by the falling in of the walls, of pine needles and small leaves falling into the spore. Also the obliteration of the spore by wind and weather is noticeable.

After you strike fresh spore the general practice is to walk two or three steps ahead, looking in all directions as carefully as possible, not forgetting to look behind you occasionally as deer are clever enough to back-track. Often they amuse themselves by watching you hunt them. In some instances I really believe that a deer gets as much pleasure out of being hunted as the hunter does hunting them. When things really become too hot for the deer he loses no time in putting distance between himself and the hunter.

I have known deer to go down hillsides in 20-foot jumps. Many times we have seen the imprint of a deer's four feet about 20 feet apart where they have gone down in the ground nearly three inches, with the force he lands.

By studying the spore the hunter can tell just how serious the deer is taking things. For instance, when a deer is worried he takes short mincing steps, as his tracks will indicate. If a little excited he will break into a trot. When baiting the hunter he

will take short gallops remaining within hearing but just out of sight. When really alarmed he will take off in earnest. Then all a hunter can do is to try and figure out the general direction the deer is taking, endeavoring to take a short cut to a certain open point which the deer will pass.

One Good Way To Surprise Deer

If a deer breaks into a run around the side of a hill, invariably you can surprise him by cutting up over the ridge and waiting for him to come by. This seldom fails. If on the other hand a deer runs straight up a hill, you can do the same thing by going around, and carefully watching the open spots above you. After you become accustomed to this you will sometimes see the deer's ears and horns, other times the head and shoulders, and perhaps the whole body, standing within easy range, watching. I have never known a hunter on this island to shoot a deer that was not looking straight at him.

Not long ago Dad and I were out hunting, and slowly climbing the side of a hill we came upon a large growth of underbrush. In the middle lay a deer which had been sleeping. He was suddenly startled by our approach. Out he jumped and ran around the side of the hill before Dad could shoot him. The deer was going westward so we started eastward to meet him on the other side. When we had walked about half way around we saw him standing on a bluff above us. Bang! Then a thump! The big buck lay

A Sportsman's Creed

1—The enjoyment of healthful recreation in the out-of-doors and the thrill of the chase shall count more than the kill.

2—I shall hunt only where I am welcome and shall carefully guard the property of the land owner.

3—Human life means more to me than all the game. I shall handle guns carefully and see clearly before pulling trigger.

4—Alcohol and gunpowder make a bad combination. I will not imbibe when starting to hunt.

5—My success shall be measured by my sportsmanship.

6—I shall give others a chance, stop within the legal limit and insist that others do the same.

7—My matches burning tobacco and campfires never shall be responsible for forest fires.

8—Game officers shall always have my hearty co-operation.

9—I shall not defile forests, fields or waters.

10—I shall affiliate with and actively support some organization working to restore and conserve America's wildlife resources.



Reg Chapman and his daughter, Grace, aged 14, who find real thrills and adventure in 'still hunting' for deer on Stuart Island, British Columbia.