

Coyotes make quick work of rabbit

Her. Mt. News 15 Jan 1981

from the CCLIA

Conservation Committee

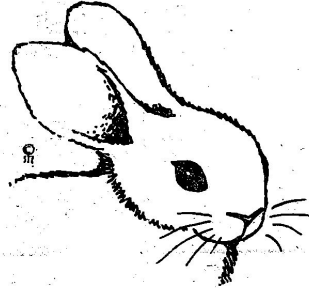
It was the middle of a clear, but crisp, early fall afternoon. The tomato vines were obviously past their prime. My job in progress was to clear out a small garden plot near a front corner of the house. All of a sudden my concentration was interrupted by a crash and a scurry of commotion in the jojoba shrubs about 10 feet away.

I turned toward the noise, and to my amazement observed a predator in the process of capturing his meal. The coyote's appearance was so unexpected, I exclaimed, "What are you doing here?!" The coyote, evidently was as surprised as I, to realize his hunt had lured him into a human's yard and presence. Hearing my voice he froze in his tracks and relaxed the grip of his jaw just enough. The lucky, happy rabbit took full advantage of his golden opportunity to leap free and bound into the sanctuary of a nearby rock wall. This left a slightly frustrated, probably hungry coyote, to recover his equilibrium and beat a fast retreat into the open desert.

The jack rabbit sniffs the air. Danger! Freeze or flee. He must flee quickly. Body stretched long and low, ears flat against his back, he races across the desert floor. The chase is on! Sometimes he zigzags, sometimes he circles, hoping to shake off the two large coyotes that are close behind. His muscles are taxed to their limit as he tears across Cave Creek Road 100 feet in front of an unexpected motorist. The

motorist, as he looks in his rear view mirror, sees the coyotes lope across the road, hot on the jack rabbit's trail.

How did the chase end? Did the jack rabbit reach the safety of a bush or hole in time? We will never know.



The "chase" as described in the above narratives, is a daily occurrence. However, it is not often that man is fortunate enough to become involved and witness (if just for an instant) this glimpse of nature's true life drama.

The coyote or *Canis latrans*, means barking dog in Latin. He is one of the most misunderstood, maligned and persecuted of the wild animals. He is the prime scapegoat of the misdeeds of anything and everything. Actually, the coyote functions in his natural environment as a predator to control the rodent population and as scavenger to clean the desert of carrion.