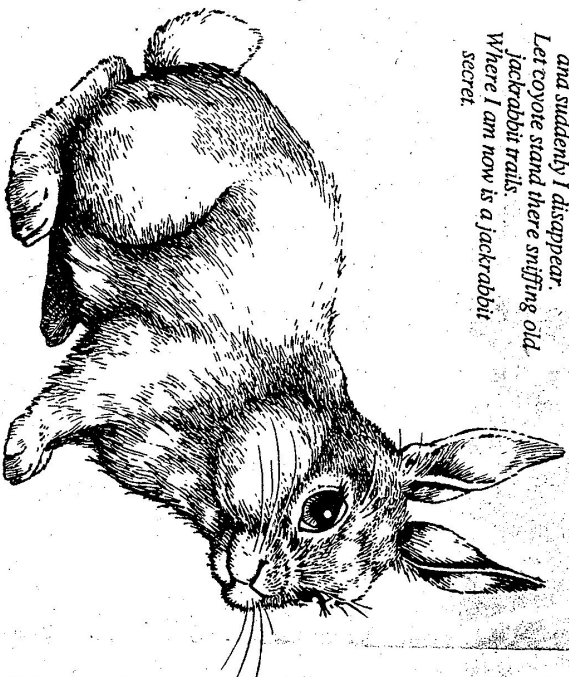


# Less exotic animals still provide pleasure for nature lovers

*Antelope — 29 October 1986*

Now...  
 Now I go  
 like a zig zag lightning flash.  
 With my ears laid back, I sail.  
 Jumping gullies and bushes and  
 rocks, doubling back, circling,  
 jumping high to see where my  
 enemy is.  
 I hardly touch the ground  
 and suddenly I disappear.  
 Let coyote stand there sniffing old  
 jackrabbit trails.  
 Where I am now is a jackrabbit  
 secret.

From "Desert Voices"  
 by Arizonan  
 Byrd Baylor



by Jane Ekrom

*Rabbits - Hares*

Watching rabbits happens to be a favorite pastime of mine; it is a matter of necessity to my well-being to find time for it each day.

A great horned owl ate my cat; my dogs got old and died; so the many creatures I share this land with have become my pets.

I don't feed them, of course. Nature has provided well for them. All I have to do is sit back, enjoy and smile a lot.

Rabbits and hares have long ears, long hind legs, bulging eyes on the sides of their heads which enable them to watch for danger over a wide arc. Females are larger than males, the reverse of most mammals.

Primarily nocturnal, they can scent enemies, thump the ground when alarmed and sense the

vibrations caused by thumps of other rabbits or hares nearby. They freeze when threatened and instantly switch directions when running, quite the challenge to the chasing coyote.

They rest in shallow depressions in the ground and "bathe" in the dust by rolling back and forth on their backs, much as a bison wallows.

They give a piercing distress call, the hare's being louder and deeper than the rabbit's.

Hares make no maternity nests; their young are born well-developed, fully furred with eyes open. They are able to fend for themselves fairly soon and require less protections than baby rabbits. Cottontail rabbits do make nests

because their young are born naked and with eyes closed. The pregnant cottontail makes a small depression in the ground in a protected place about a week before giving birth. She bites off downy fur from her breast and belly, mixes it with soft dead grasses and leaves to line the nest and makes a second layer to cover the young while she's out foraging.

The desert cottontail is buff brown above and white below with moderately long ears (2.5 inches) and measures about 12 to 16 inches in length. It feeds chiefly on grasses, mesquite and cactus.

Strict vegetarians, they are meat for nearly every other species, including man. Cottontails mate year-round, having at least two litters per year of one to six young.

Our local hares are the blacktailed jack and the antelope jack. The most noticeable differences between the two are the black tips on the blacktails' ears.

The antelope jack's ears are very long, 6-8 inches, and all help

regulate body temperature. In hot weather, jacks' ears stand erect and the dilated blood vessels give off heat, thus cooling the jack.

In cold weather, the ears lay back close to the body, and the blood vessels constrict to maintain body warmth. They avoid direct sun and are most active early morning, late afternoon and nighttime.

Jacks rarely walk, but hop 5-10 feet at a time, leap up to 20 feet when panicked, and can reach speeds of 30-35 mph over short distances.

Now, about the Easter Bunny matter. The Audubon Field Guide to North American Mammals, where I found help on writing this article, said the cape or European hare, which ranges from the Great Lakes to New England, came from Europe in 1893 and was the original Easter Bunny.

According to a Germanic legend, Eostre, the goddess of spring, created the first hare from a bird and, to show its gratitude, the hare has ever since laid eggs during the Easter festival in her honor.