

Ghost Ranch
Abiquiu, New Mexico
February 10, 1940

Mr. Sam Raddon, Jr.
Oregon Journal
Portland, Oregon

Dear Sam:

A day or two ago I sent an article to Averill about the winter birds in this region. I have taken some photographs, but they were not so very good so I have taken more and will have them developed in two or three days. If Averill can't get the right illustrations for the article I'll send him what I can get. Since the article relates to the winter feeding of birds and is a comparison with those at home, I hope you can use it within the next two or three weeks.

Enclosed is an article from Irene in regard to Easter bunnies. The only photograph we have with us is a little cottontail at the foot of an apple tree in our yard. It may be a little too dark for reproduction, but if so, you could get Corley to make a good drawing something like it. This is an article that I hope you can use on Easter Sunday.

I have always been interested in the photos for your Roto section. There are lots of attractive features down here in the southwest. I don't remember whether you have used any scenes showing the Indian pueblos, their seasonal dances, and close-ups of the Indians themselves. I am trying to get some good pictures for you and hope you can use them. You won't have to pay anything for them.

I wish you would drop me a note and let me know if there is anything in particular that you would like from this part of the country. Irene and I will be here until about March 10, then we are going to Washington, D. C., to attend the Fifth North American Wildlife Conference March 18-20, also the annual conference of the Izaak Walton League of America in Chicago March 28-30. We can't get back home until about April 8.

We are writing two more articles, one on the peccary or wild pig, and one on the grebes. We are both in good health and hope you are the same.

Irene joins me in best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

Written Feb. 10, 1940
(at Shoot Ranch)

BUNNIES FOR EASTER

by

Irene Finley

The Union Pacific train was speeding along 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 a tangle of discouraged brush huddled 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.

It began to snow harder, the soft flakes thinly veiling the picture outside. 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 Jack rabbits 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. Their exhilaration and abandon increased. One big fellow leaped straight up in the air, four or five times as high as he could stretch, twisted sidewise 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 to the spirit of the white winter moon-witches in the elf light.

One big buck stopped short. "Thump! Thump!" sounded in the midst of the reveling. Every gray form froze and melted away- somewhere. The moon shone down on an empty open space, lighting only dim mounds in the snow.

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.

What better symbol of the re-creation of spring could there be than Bunny's bright face and acstatic capers under an infant moon in April? And April is the month of Easter, that remembrance day of the Resurrection, which the early Magians and Persians solemnized by presenting Pasch eggs to their friends. These were colored red in allusion to the blood of their redemption. But in modern times our Easter eggs are the colors of the rainbow, and with them on Easter morning comes a snowy bunny with pink eyes. But only tame bunnies or stuffed ones are pink and white. The great number of both rabbits and hares that live in different regions of this country would never think of being white in April, except perhaps a few in the very far north. It might be sure death.

The Leporidae or rabbit family is perhaps better known than any other of our wild animals. They are found universally 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 "snow-shoe Rabbits," while our little hares are really "rabbits" or "cottontails", 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 over night or with the coming of a snow storm. Nothing is farther 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 ~~gradually~~ 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 ^{cactuses} cactuses. The big hares or Jack rabbits 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 Jack rabbit 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 sportsman-like method of hunting Jack rabbits is coursing with greyhounds in the same manner as 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 taken in one day runs from a few hundred up to ten or even twenty thousand.

Far and foreign is this picture to 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.