



# WILDLIFE NOTES

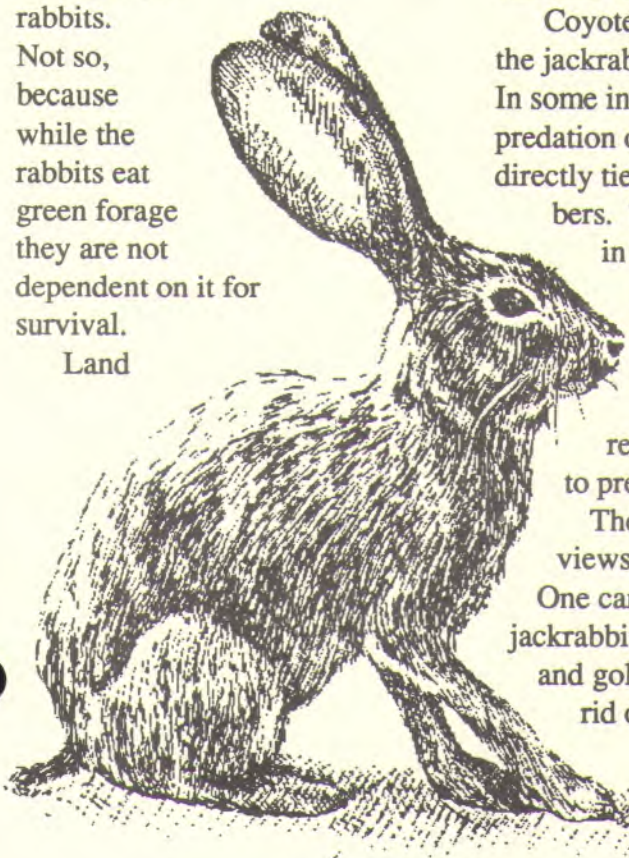
## Black-tailed jackrabbit

The black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*) is probably the most widely known New Mexican animal. Even those of us who miss seeing the deer that "everyone else saw" manage to see a jackrabbit sooner or later.

During a rainy period, these rabbits eat sprouting green plants. The rest of the year, they eat the twigs and barks of mesquite, catclaw, rabbitbrush, and other shrubs. Because cattle compete with the jackrabbits for the green forage, one might think that a heavy cattle stocking rate would drive out the rabbits.

Not so, because while the rabbits eat green forage they are not dependent on it for survival.

Land



that is overgrazed by cattle usually loses its perennial grasses. The grasses are replaced by mesquite and cactus, which jackrabbits eat handily. If anything, overgrazing by livestock stimulates black-tailed jackrabbit population growth.

What keeps us from being knee-deep in jackrabbits? Disease and predators certainly help hold the line. Jackrabbits are susceptible to tularemia, also known as "rabbit fever." This bacterial disease occasionally decimates the jackrabbit population, which can take several years to rebuild.

Coyotes and golden eagles are the jackrabbit's primary predators. In some instances, increased predation on livestock can be directly tied to low rabbit numbers.

This puts the stockman in a strange position: The rabbits consume green forage and compete with livestock, but the rabbits' presence reduces livestock losses to predators, to some degree.

There are two extreme views about this situation.

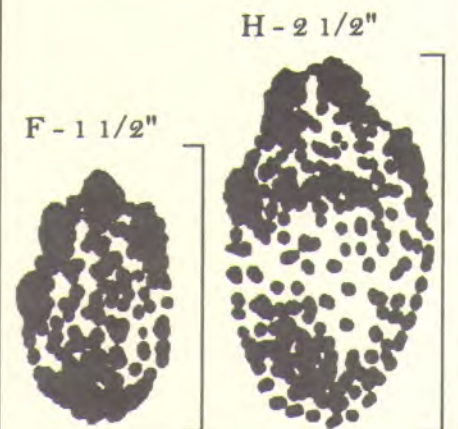
One can say, "Get rid of all the jackrabbits and all of the coyotes and golden eagles," or, "Get rid of all the livestock and let nature regulate itself." In

reality, neither option is likely to happen. The coyotes and jackrabbits are too hardy and adaptable (the eagle less so), and man's needs for beef, leather, mutton, and wool are likely not going to lessen.

It is left to the wildlife biologist and the stockman to learn how the lives of the jackrabbit, its predators, and livestock are intertwined. Then, within the realms of biological constraints, the public must decide the priorities for these species.

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### Actual track size



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