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Jackrabbits

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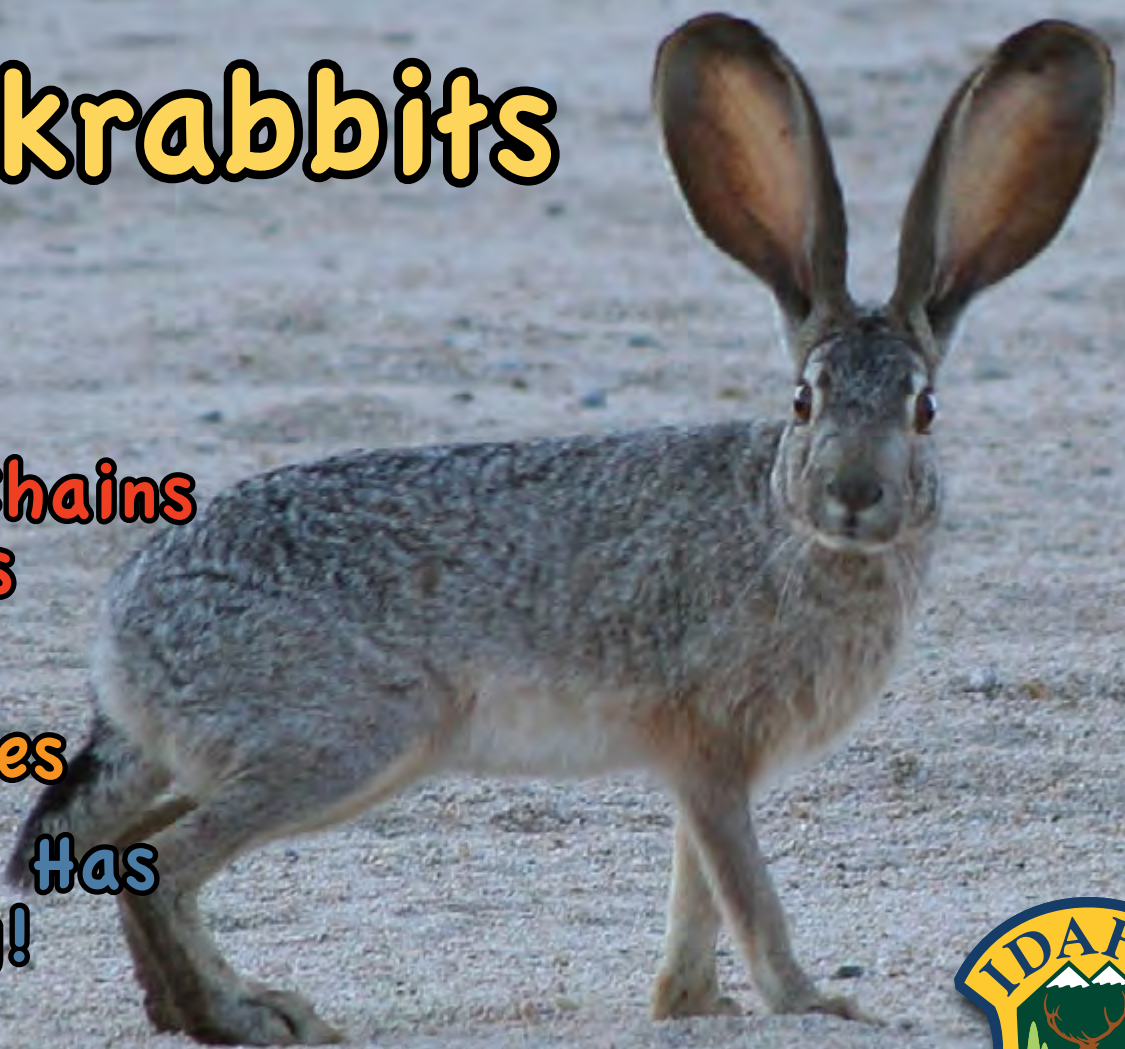
Jackrabbits

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Let's Talk About JACKRABBITS

If you have ever seen a jackrabbit or a picture of a jackrabbit, you may have noticed something. Jackrabbits have huge ears! Their big ears help them listen for danger. They also act like air conditioners. Have you ever noticed that when you are too hot, your cheeks and face sometimes get bright pink? Your body is trying to cool down by bringing your blood close to the surface of your skin. If a jackrabbit gets too hot, blood flows into the ears. The skin on the inside of jackrabbits' ears is thin, so heat can pass through it easily. A jackrabbit with bright pink ears is a hot jackrabbit!

Jackrabbits are actually hares, not rabbits. Hares are larger than rabbits and have longer legs and ears. Hares usually do not dig burrows, and rabbits do dig burrows. The easiest way to remember the difference between rabbits and hares is hares are born with hair! Hares have young that are born with hair and their eyes open. They are not born in the safety of a burrow like rabbit babies. Hares need to be able to get away from danger soon after being born. Rabbits are born in the safety of a burrow. At birth, rabbits are naked, and their eyes are closed.

In Idaho, we have two different types of jackrabbits—the white-tailed and the black-tailed. Both types of jackrabbits share some things in common. Jackrabbits are known for being speedy. They can run 40 miles-per-hour and can leap more than 10 feet in the air! They use their speed, leaping and zigzag running to avoid being caught by predators. Coyotes, bobcats, foxes, hawks, owls and golden eagles all like to eat jackrabbits.

Jackrabbits like to eat all kinds of plants. They can eat over a pound of food a day! Grasses, bushes and even cacti are eaten. They also eat something else—their poop! Jackrabbits and other rabbits produce two different types of droppings. The first is a black runny poop. This is the poop they eat. By eating their droppings, jackrabbits get more nutrients and water out of their food. The second dropping is a dry oval-shaped pellet. When jackrabbits are not eating, they rest under bushes or in shallow depressions called forms.



Cerahl and Buff Corsi © California Academy of Sciences

If you see a jackrabbit, how do you know if it is a white-tailed or a black-tailed? As you probably figured out, white-tailed jackrabbits have a tail that is white on the underside. White-tailed jackrabbits are the largest hare or rabbit in Idaho. They are 22 to 26 inches long and weigh seven to thirteen pounds. Their ears are about four to four and one-half inches long. One thing that makes them different from the black-tailed jackrabbit is they change colors with the seasons. In summer, white-tailed jackrabbits are grayish-brown. In winter, their fur turns white to help them camouflage in the snow. Usually, white-tailed jackrabbits are found alone or in small groups in the mountains.



Image by Patrick Congdon

Black-tailed jackrabbits are mostly found in the southern part of Idaho. They may gather in large groups to feed. This can sometimes cause problems for farmers when they eat their crops. Black-tailed jackrabbits are gray to black on their backs and gray to white on their bellies. The underside of their tails is a black to brownish color. Black-tailed jackrabbits are smaller than the white-tails, but their ears are bigger! Their ears are four to seven inches long. They weigh four to eight pounds. Since they sometimes live in warmer areas, they need bigger air conditioners. Keep an eye out for Idaho's jackrabbits when exploring outside this spring. You are most likely to see them during dawn and dusk.

Food Chains and Webs

Have you ever heard the saying, “one thing leads to another?” This sure is true with food chains. Food chains are formed when one animal eats a plant and then another animal eats it. Each plant or animal is one link in the chain.

Living things need energy in order to survive. Plants get energy from the sun. Animals get energy by eating plants or other animals. Energy is passed along as animals eat. A food chain is the order of who eats who to get the energy and nutrition needed to survive.

Some links are easy to see. Almost all food chains start with the sun. Plants, like rabbitbrush, use energy from the sun to make the sugar and food needed to grow. A jackrabbit eats the rabbitbrush and uses the energy stored in the leaf. A coyote then eats the jackrabbit, and the energy in the jackrabbit is passed to the coyote. Sun links to rabbitbrush, which links to jackrabbit, which links to coyote.

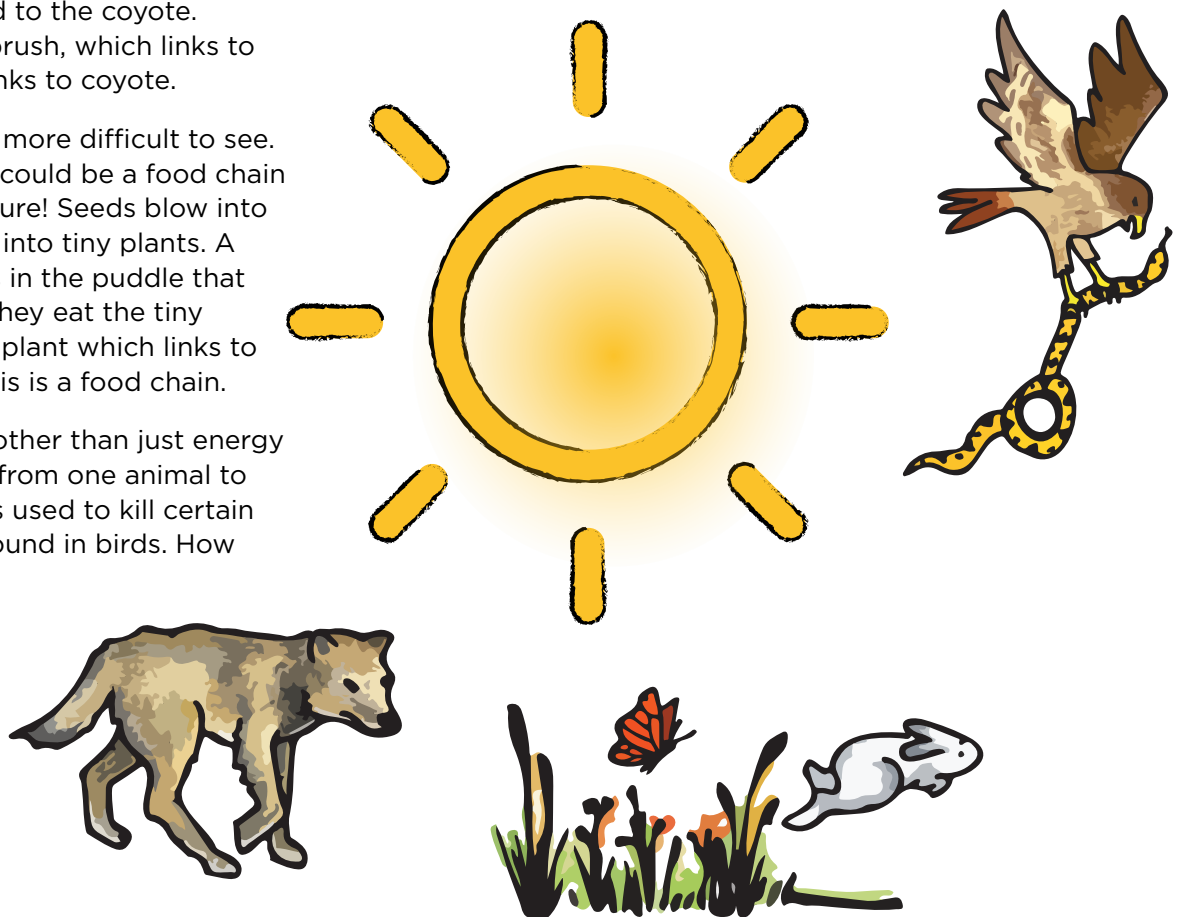
Other links may be more difficult to see. Do you think there could be a food chain in a mud puddle? Sure! Seeds blow into a puddle and grow into tiny plants. A mosquito lays eggs in the puddle that hatch into larvae. They eat the tiny plants. Sun links to plant which links to mosquito larvae; this is a food chain.

Sometimes things other than just energy and nutrients pass from one animal to the next. Chemicals used to kill certain plants have been found in birds. How

did the poison get into their bodies when they didn't eat the plants the poison was sprayed on? The answer can be found by following the food chain. Mice swallowed the poison when eating the plants. The poison does not leave the bodies of the mice. When the birds ate the mice, they also ate the poison that was in the mice.

Have you ever heard of a food web? Food webs are made up of food chains that are linked together. Food webs help show us how plants and animals are connected in nature. No matter how different and separate plants and animals may seem, their food chains connect them in some way. Would you think that a salamander would be connected to a wolf? It may be hard to see this connection, but it is there. Wolves eat moose, and moose eat cattails. Salamanders eat aquatic insects that eat cattails. Salamanders and wolves are connected in the food web by cattails. If the cattails around a pond are removed, both the wolves and salamanders might be affected.

Everything in nature is connected in some way. Food chains and webs help us see those connections. Do you think you might be connected to salamanders? Think of different food chains and webs to see if you can find a connection.



Clever Defenses

Can you think of an animal that has a clever way of protecting itself? Animals may use color, armor, or even poison to protect themselves.

Jackrabbits use camouflage and speed. The color of their fur helps them to disappear in their habitat. If a predator does see them, jackrabbits quickly run and dart about to get away from danger.

Turtles use armor. Turtle shells are made of bone, and the outside is covered with scales called scutes. Scutes are made of the same thing as your fingernails, something called keratin. Keratin is hard and tough and helps to protect the shell from weather. The patterns and colors on the scutes also help camouflage the turtle. If camouflage doesn't protect the turtle, it can seek protection inside its shell. Turtles' necks are very flexible, and the skin around the neck is loose. This allows the turtle to pull its whole neck inside the shell when danger is near. Most turtles fold their necks in an "S" shape inside the shell. It is very difficult for a predator to get a turtle out of its shell.

Some lizards also have armor. Horned lizards come to mind. They are covered by sharp, pointy scales. Horned lizards have another way to protect themselves. They can squirt blood out of the corner of their eyes! The blood may go as far as three feet. This definitely will startle a predator!

Poison is a good defense, too. Sometimes an animal might not look dangerous. Many frogs, toads and salamanders have glands on them that make poison. If they aren't poisonous, they may taste awful. Poisonous animals are sometimes bright and colorful. Their bright colors are a warning to stay away.

Think of a skunk. The stripes on a skunk are a warning to stay away, and boy, do they smell bad! Once an animal has had a run-in with a skunk, it most likely won't get too close to a skunk again. Can you think of other clever ways animals protect themselves? There are just about as many clever defenses as there are animals.

Black-tailed Jackrabbit



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Scutes



By Paul venter (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Horned Lizard



By Steve Hillebrand/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

You may know that deer hang out in herds. A group of jackrabbits is called a husk. But have you ever heard of a knot of toads or a murder of crows? How about a kettle of hawks? The English language has hundreds of names for groups or collections of critters.

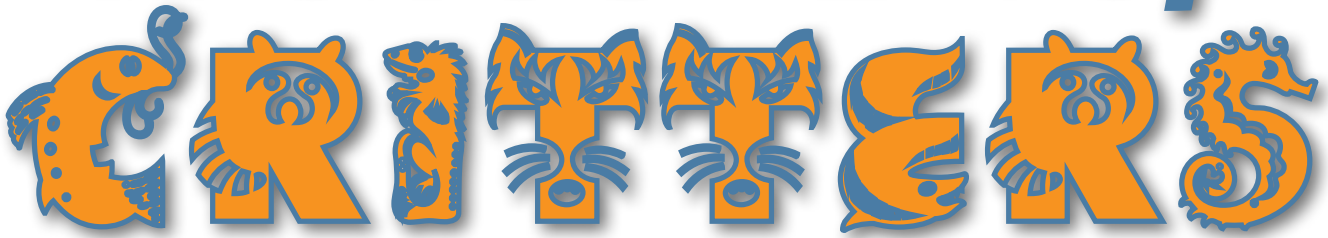
Many animal group names date back to the Middle Ages. Some names were hunting terms. Hunters would pursue a dray of squirrels or a spring of teal.

Cloud of gnats

Gang of elk

Hive of bees

A CLUSTER of



There are many reasons why someone may have first chosen a particular name. The sounds the animals make—a murmuration of starlings. The animals' homes—a nest of pheasants. What the gathering looks like—a knot of toads. A repetition of sounds the animal makes—a gaggle of geese.

Some names are mistakes. A school of fish was first called a shoal of fish. Fish gather in a shoal, a shallow place in a river or lake. A long time ago someone translated shoal of fish as school of fish, and the name stuck.

Here are some other animal group names. Can you think of more?

Army of frogs

Cete of badgers

Covey of quail

Leash of fox

Tribe of goats

Romp of otters

Pack of wolves

Charm of finches

Descent of woodpeckers

Hover of trout

Raft of ducks

The days are getting longer. The weather is getting warmer, and there is excitement in the air. That can only mean one thing—it's spring! If you watch and listen carefully, you may see that animals are aware that it's spring, too.

What kinds of things are happening with wildlife in the spring? It is a busy time for them. Animals all around are looking for mates and places to have their young. Skunks and foxes are searching for dens. Birds are establishing territories and building new nests. Great horned owls, which start to lay eggs in February, may already have chicks learning to fly.

The hardships of winter are over for many animals. Deer and elk are heading for higher ground where new, nutritious food is now available. Another sign telling us that warm weather is ahead is the molting of animals' coats. Elk and deer shed their winter coats and grow new lighter coats. Big clumps of hair can also be found hanging off a mountain goat's coat. Animals, such as white-tailed jackrabbits that

grew a special white coat to blend in with the snow, must replace it with their brown summertime coat.

Hungry bear cubs, weighing only three to four pounds, are coming out of their dens with their mothers. Romping and playing are only part of what they do. At other times, their mothers are teaching them how to find food and to survive on their own.

The sun's warmth and longer days also brings about the beginning of another year in the lifecycle of amphibians and reptiles. Having spent the winter in an underground hideaway, these animals need to find places in the sun to bask. The sun's warmth helps them to raise their body temperatures.

In the springtime, songbirds brighten our lives with flashes of color and beautiful song; they announce the coming of spring after winter. Look and listen. What signs of spring are near you?

Spring Has Sprung!



Here Comes Peter Cottontail ... Hare ... Bilby?

April fifth is Easter. If your family celebrates Easter, you may be hunting eggs, looking for Easter baskets and eating a big meal on Easter Sunday. Easter has some interesting traditions. Some of these traditions have been around for a long time. Others are fairly new.

Decorating and eating Easter eggs can be traced back at least to the 13th century. During this time, many people put more restrictions on what they ate during Lent. Most people ate no meat, dairy products or eggs for 40 days. To mark the end of Lent and fasting, people started painting and decorating eggs to celebrate Easter. Many people see eggs as a symbol of resurrection. The hard shell is like a tomb. Crack the shell and a new life is revealed.

When you think Easter, do you think of the Easter Bunny? The Easter bunny is a cherished part of the holiday. Rabbits have long been symbols of springtime. They represent new life. German immigrants brought the idea of the Easter bunny to our country in the 1700s. In Germany, they had an egg-laying hare called "Osterhase." Around Easter children made nests



By ItsLassieTime (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

out of their caps and bonnets. If the children were good, the rabbit would lay colored eggs in their nests. This tradition grew into the egg hunts and Easter baskets that we have today.

We think of Peter Cottontail hopping down the bunny trail as the Easter Bunny. In other parts of the world, the Easter Bunny may be different. Germany's is a hare and looks similar to our jackrabbit. Rabbits were not traditionally found in Australia. They were brought to Australia and soon caused many problems. The endangered bilby, however, looks similar to a bunny, and has become a new symbol of the season. You can find Easter Bilby candy, cards, and decorations if you visit Australia during Easter. Many families have special Easter traditions. What are yours, and how did they come to be?





BE OUTSIDE
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

BE OUTSIDE & Let Them Be

Spring is a time for renewal. It's a time to get out of the house and explore all the wonders of nature. Walks, bike rides and fishing trips may take us closer to wildlife. You may see baby animals. It's a true sign that spring has arrived.

When you hear people talking about enjoying animals, remember it is especially important that we leave animals alone. Let them do the things they need to do to survive. Getting too close to wild animals might stress them and cause them to die.



As humans, we have an urge to take care of things we think are helpless, especially “cute” animals, like young rabbits. If you see a baby animal, don't assume it has been abandoned by its mother. Most of the time, this isn't the case. Mothers often leave their young hidden while they go away to eat. If the mother stayed close to her baby, she could actually draw the attention of a predator. You may have scared the mother away. She will return once “danger” has passed.

If you know that an animal is orphaned because the mother has died, call your local Fish and Game office. They will take the animal to a wildlife rehabilitator. Chances are if you take an animal home, it will die. Caring for a wild animal is not the same as caring for a pet. They need special foods, cages and treatments. Wildlife rehabilitators are specially trained and licensed to care for them.

Wildlife should not be handled, fed, chased or disturbed. If an animal will let you close enough to pick it up, it may be sick. Do not pick up a wild animal—dead or alive.

Get outside this spring and look for wildlife as you are enjoying the fresh air. Just remember, wild animals survive on their own just fine without any help from people. View them from a distance and leave wildlife in the wild.

Jackrabbit Word Search

D L L K A R J R K N R S F E W
T E L O N G L E G S P L P A N
I D L N N C D H N E U T A S O
C E I I X G M I E T Q H E T T
K L A H A H E D J U M G L E N
S I W A W T Y A Y M A M S R W
U A W H K L K F R L F R T E X
E T S A M K N C F S M V M G P
X E I V V J S U A I L K B F H
S T Y F L Z O H P L G N N G B
C I D M E M J S V E B M I J W
T H S C A H Z T R O N G E L A
R W J C S W O A D G N I R P S
N V O N N Q Z Z H E Y N N Z F
Z R I G Z Q Y E G X Y V J T F

WORDS

BLACK-TAILED

CAMOUFLAGE

EASTER

HUSK

LEAP

LONG EARS

LONG LEGS

SPEEDY

SPRING

WHITE-TAILED

WILDLIFE EXPRESS

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If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to:
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