

# Outdoor Life

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In This Issue  
**WILD WEST  
GUNMEN  
WERE NOT  
SO HOT!**





RAYMOND J. BROWN, Editor

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# Little White-Tails

By  
ROB F. SANDERSON



Useful as it is picturesque, a horn serves to call in the dogs when the bunny is shot

**M**ORE cottontail rabbits are killed each year in the United States than any other species of game, big or small.

From Maine to Mexico and from Washington to Florida, hundreds of thousands of hunters hike their shotguns into the brush every season in search of the bobbing little white flags. No other American game has a wider or more plentiful distribution than the cottontail and its progeny. With many other animals and birds on the decline, the rabbit crop alone remains as sure as the corn crop.

There are mornings when the ducks don't fly and days the game birds just don't seem to be around. Sometimes the waterfowl flight isn't even coincidental with the open season. But any day, rain or shine, snow or slush, the rabbit hunter who has a general knowledge of rabbit personality can go into the woods, and return with his game coat sagging in the rear.

All you need to be a successful rabbit hunter is red blood, a desire to get out in the autumn sun or on the fresh winter snow, and some sort of a shotgun. There are no calls, boats, trailers,

or other paraphernalia to buy. Of course there are many short cuts and tips which make the difference between the successful and the indifferent hunter. A hunt will always seem more pleasurable with soft-furred bulk in your game coat.

**A**N IDEAL outfit consists of two or three men and a pair of trained dogs. This size group is just right for company, for safety, and for giving the highest percentage of sport to each hunter. Too many men in the party will prove unwieldy and hard to handle in thick cover. As much rabbit shooting is done in dense brush where visibility is very short, and the hunters dash here and there to cut in on the rabbit's route, it is sometimes more of a trick to be sure that your shooting partner is not there than to know that the rabbit is. A large party of shotgun soldiers flitting through the brush with the dogs chasing different rabbits is likely to cause prolific cussing if not something more serious.

Small patches of woods or brush, scrub pasture lands, abandoned fields, marshes, bramble patches, grown-over fence rows, and cornfields near cover are a few of the places where cottontails bed down in the daytime after a night of crisscross meandering. Walk where you have good visibility to shoot any game that jumps ahead of you or the hounds. A well-trained hound will take care of the thicker cover on either side of you. If no hounds are used, four or five hunters can work together, lining up and driving through the woods.

Beagles, bassets, and dachshunds are the three most popular rabbit hounds. If correctly brought up from puppyhood, any of them will make nice pets and house dogs as well as hunters. Of the three, beagles are in widest use. They are small enough to work through thick brush, yet not so short-legged that they cannot get around in snow or rough country; moreover they can be had in various sizes from less than a foot to sixteen or more inches at the shoulder. My own two dogs are beagles, and are all that can be asked in the field and at home.

A medium-slow trailer with a steady tongue is best. He will bring a rabbit around in less time and with greater reliability than the faster, more erratic hound. Knowing where his pursuer is every minute, and confident he can easily outrun the dog, a rabbit ahead of a slow dog will be only mildly perturbed and will come loping around like a boomerang to where he was routed. For this reason foxhounds and other large breeds, as well as crossbred "hound-etc." mixtures, are entirely too speedy. Either the rabbit is going too

fast for the shot charge to catch up with him, or else the chase ends in a den or rock pile.

During the daytime a cottontail sleeps or suns himself in a little round nest in a protected place. Sometimes he will remain motionless until you are within a few feet of him and many times he is passed by unobserved. When he does decide to move, he leaves explode and he is away like a cannonball. Then the hunter has to be fast!

Immediately after jumping, the frightened rabbit will run for some distance in one direction. Then he will slow down, hop around nervously, and reconnoiter. If not pressed by a pursuer, he slips off at right angles to nest down and watch his back track. When the hounds jump him the second time, you can tell what's happened by their renewed vocal zest. Try to ascertain the direction they are headed. Then mount a stump or log where you will probably intercept his route.

The woods are full of funnel-shape formations. Try to locate your stand at the mouth of a funnel or bottle neck where the visibility is pretty good, and you will outshoot your companions every time. I recall a short, brushy fence row connecting two patches of woods that has yielded dozens of rabbits to my double-barrel scattergun. Always keep silent and motionless, as a rabbit is all eyes and ears except when he is running very fast. Then he will almost run you down. But ordinarily the slightest noise is enough to make him change his route. If the dogs come yodeling toward you and make a sudden swerve just before they come into sight, you can figure that old Pete Rabbit heard a twig snap.

**I**N EARLY fall, when the daytime sun is bright and warm, cottontails are scattered all over the countryside. Later on when winter's bite makes bunny shiver under his thick fur, he will hunt cover from the raw wind and cold.

From the cold snap that usually comes about Thanksgiving time until the shocks of corn are hauled from the field, shaking shocks in a field next to a woods will produce good shooting. My uncle had an unusual hound that would trot up and down between the rows of corn, sniffing carefully with his head high to the windward. At every shock that sheltered a rabbit, he would bugle and fume until the furry occupant was shaken out.

In the woods, bunny trails twine and intertwine in the denser patches of briars and thickets. Brush piles will generally produce a rabbit when tramped on—sometimes two or three. Dry marshes with long grass or some brush, especially along their edges, usu-



## Start hunting rabbits as a substitute for fancier targets and you may wake up to find they're your favorite game

ally contain a family or two. In tamarack country, the cottontails can find no better cover from the winter snow and cold than the thick tangle of trees, bogs, long grass, and overturned roots of the big tamarack swamps. This is why weasel and fox tracks run all through the swamps. But the shooting here is apt to be so tough that unless you can find a fire line or fence line or a clearing wide enough to glimpse the rabbit as he comes skipping by, you had better hunt somewhere else. Your dog must be deerproof, too, if you hunt in these swamps.

**A**FTER the fall season is over and the snows come, men have less enthusiasm to go out and try for a coatful of cottontails. The hunting is harder, and many figure that much of the fall crop of bunnies has been harvested. Yet at this time of year, the hunter who goes out is pretty sure to have the whole woods to himself, and although a lot of bunnies have been carried out feet up, the colder weather has brought a sizable influx of rabbits from the open country seeking shelter. What's more, you can tell by the tracks in the snow just how good the hunting in a given locale will be, and what part the rabbits are using. Snow hunting has the great advantage that the dark-gray fur of a cottontail stands out on the snow like a gravy spot on your white Sunday shirt. And finally, you can always track a wounded rabbit down on snow.

Many of my most successful hunts have been on midwinter days after a spell of pretty cold weather has ended in a sudden thaw. You go outdoors in the morning to find the snow soft—this is the day to go rabbit hunting. Cottontails by the score will come poking out of holes and woodpiles to romp in the premature spring air. By stealing along quietly in the soft snow you can get an unusually large number of jump shots. The snow and air are damp enough to hold the scent well, and once the hounds start a trail the pursuit is easy for them. On a day like this, slip on your fall hunting coat and rubber pacs to keep your feet and back dry.

If you become a confirmed rabbitier, as you likely will if you are not already, you will be abroad even in the coldest snaps. Be sure to dress warmly in woollens. Roomy boots with two pair of fluffy socks are an essential.

A slow dog is essential, too, in cold-weather hunting, as the rabbits are accustomed to using holes and will slip down one very quickly if at all hard-pressed. The experienced hunter can soon tell if his dog has holed. Not all dogs hole-bark; many will simply dig and whine. But if a dog makes a sudden loss and does not seem to be around working for a fresh lead, you will likely find him busy at a den or hollow log

near where you last heard him sounding off.

Don't give up now by any means. A regular rabbit hole is much shallower than most persons think. Right near the entrance it has a crook or reverse twist, then it extends a short distance at an angle. Often a long-armed hunter can work his hand down to clutch bunny by the ears or hind legs. If this  
(Continued on page 62)

Poking at a rabbit in his burrow, the hunter keeps his gun handy while a dog guards the other entrance

Winter hunting is effective—with a slow dog. A rabbit holes up quickly if chased too hard in snow



Caught in the act! A quivering bunny is nabbed as he tries to escape from his burrow



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## Little White-Tails

(Continued from page 31)

doesn't work, cut a supple switch of good length with a small, solid fork or prong on the end. Work this around the den crook, twisting it, as far as it will go. If the fork comes out with rabbit hair on it, back in it goes. A good rabbit twister can work the fork to twist bunny's fur up so tight he can't wriggle, and pull him out like an apple on a stick.

You are up against a different proposition if the den has more than one entrance. One hunter must be constantly on the alert for a jump shot, or a scuttle and a draught will be all that is heard and felt. Unless the dog is well trained, tie him up out of the way or the rabbit will zip between his legs as it escapes and often get away because the hound follows along too close for you to risk a shot. Run the switch down each entrance in order to find the straightest one and frequently you will find a direct approach followed by a direct exit of the occupant. Sometimes the noise of the switch working down a shallow den will frighten him into desertion, especially if you tie a small piece of weasel fur on the end so cousin rabbit can get a good whiff.

When all else fails there is the old-timer's stand-by—the grapevine. A supple length of one-inch grapevine is flexible enough to negotiate a double-reverse twist, and stiff enough to feed in well. After you are through do not leave the switch or vine in the den for the convenience of every hunter that follows. Toss it off into the bushes a few yards away and when you need it the next time it will be waiting for you.

ALL rabbit hunters have their favorite guns, tastes varying from a 10 gauge to a .410, single shot to automatic. The ideal rabbit gun has barrels not too long and a short stock with considerable drop, enabling it to be sighted very rapidly for jump-shooting. My favorite firearm has a twenty-six-inch barrel, much drop in the stock, and a modified choke. For extremely fast short-range shooting the improved-cylinder bore is just the thing.

The main thing is to have a gun with a pattern which will knock the game over in the shooting you intend to do. As I do considerable hunting where the shooting runs to extremes in either thick cover or long range, a 12 gauge suits my requirements best. A 20 gauge is a lighter arm and will send bunnies somersaulting when properly handled, and even the three-inch .410 shell in careful hands will bring down plenty of game, but I lean toward heavier shot charges and larger gauges because rarely a day passes that I am in the woods and do not find a couple of dead rabbits that had been lightly wounded, and crawled off to die. Many of the partially eaten remains for which predators are blamed have been killed in this manner. Then, also, I hunt in country where my next shot may be at a fox or other larger game, and it's nice to have enough shot to go around when a chance like this shows up.

As soon as I shoot a rabbit I pick it up by the hind legs and slit it with my pocketknife down the belly from the crotch to the throat. The entrails will hang out, and a vigorous twirl like an Indian whirling a tomahawk will send them soaring away like a clay pigeon.

Then I twist the head off and slip the carcass in my game pocket. Unless I have some clean sheeting or paper to wrap the meat in I do not skin it, or hair will stick to the damp flesh and dry there. Then unless the cook is exceptionally conscientious, it will eventually find its way to the gravy bowl, whence it will work between the teeth.

This method eliminates about half the weight you would ordinarily carry around all day in your game pocket, rids the kitchen of the offal problem, soothes your wife's nerves, and gives you much better-tasting meat. A few shot causing blood clots or puncturing the body cavity will detract from the normal fine flavor of the flesh. In cleaning the game be sure the offal goes where the dogs will not eat it, if they have a tendency that way, as most rabbits contain tapeworms which will complete their cycles in the dog's intestines and become a severe drain on canine vitality.

Some hunters pass rabbits by because of overdrawn tales about tularemia or "rabbit fever." Proper precaution will prevent all danger of infection to the hunter. Usually a rabbit that can run around in an approved healthy fashion is all right, and for this reason if no other, sitting rabbits should not be shot. This is not always an absolutely sure test, though, and the only positive check is made by examining the liver. If the liver is enlarged and has many small light spots on it, the rabbit is afflicted.

However, infection can come only (excluding insect bites) from handling the fresh carcasses, or from cleaning rabbits when you have a cut or opening in your skin. It is claimed that no infection can be contracted when the human skin surface is perfectly intact. But as hunters are apt to have numerous minor scratches from brambles, it is best to take the precaution of using rubber gloves. During seasons when there is tularemia present in my locality I carry a pair of rubber gloves with me in the field and use them when skinning my haul. After the meat is properly cooked, it is absolutely non-infectious.

A couple of days rest in the refrigerator will make your cottontails more tender eating. All but young rabbits should be soaked in salt water for a couple of hours. Then parboil 'em, young or old, until partially done, fry 'em brown all over, and make about a gallon of milk gravy. That, if nothing else, will make you a confirmed rabbit hunter.

### Deer on the Highways

SUPPOSE you were driving along a highway on a dark night and ran into a deer, thus damaging your car. Would you be able to collect from the state? Not if a recent opinion by the attorney general of the state of Washington establishes a precedent.

An employee of a Wisconsin corporation, driving through Washington, collided with a deer on the road, and the impact resulted in damage to the car. His employer thereupon inquired of the attorney general of Washington whether the state assumed any liability in such accidents. The official ruled, in a lengthy opinion, that the state could not be held responsible for the wanderings of deer, and declined to entertain a claim for damages by the corporation.