

Outdoors

Found: A use for jackrabbits

Ever eat a jackrabbit? Many years ago, I was a guest for some predator calling on a ranch on the Frio River. On arrival day we were served lunch by the ranch cook. Lunch was a delicious stew filled with tender meat that was obviously from a small mammal. I inquired of the cook what species of animal, and he very reluctantly informed me that it was a young jackrabbit he'd collected that morning. His reluctance was because he figured (correctly) that most Texans are prejudiced against eating jackrabbit.

I admit to being a fairly adventurous eater. With a few exceptions, I'll generally try at least one bite of anything anybody whose judgment I respect tells me is edible. I've tried all of the big game in North America and a lot of it in Africa, plus such non-standard entrees as coyote, bobcat, armadillo, 'possum, rattlesnake, iguana, alligator, mountain lion, black bear, meadowlark, curlew, chachalaca, tinamu, turtles, sundry other reptiles, amphibians, and insects, and lots more. (I long ago scratched insects off my menu, however; I may be adventurous but I'm just not that hungry.)

Back to the jackrabbit. That jackrabbit stew was superb, the meat was tender and sweet, and I loved a subtle south-of-the-border tang to the dish that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

Unfortunately, I cannot pass on a recipe because the rustic ranch chef preferred not to reveal his secrets.

What made me think of his jackrabbit stew was a report I

Currently Outdoors



John Wootters

read recently that, suddenly, jackrabbits are in demand in the kitchens of some high-octane gourmet chefs. Most of these gentlemen (and ladies) were trained in Europe, where hare is considered a delicacy. It comes as a surprise to many Americans to learn that jackrabbits are actually hares, not rabbits, and they and cottontail rabbits are not even very closely related. They do not even belong to the same genus and cannot crossbreed. The cottontail's scientific name is *Sylvilagus*

and that of the jackrabbit is, appropriately, *Lepus*. The jackrabbit is the only member of the hare clan found in Texas. The only other true hares in North America are the varying hare ("snowshoe rabbit") and the Arctic hare, found only along the northernmost rim of the continent.

That means that a highfalutin' chef in Dallas or Austin who wants to serve a dish like authentic German hasenpfeffer has to import European hare, or use jackrabbit. Whence the sudden demand for ready-to-cook jackrabbits.

In researching my collection of game cookbooks, I could find only one recipe for jackrabbit, and it's in the only genuine west-Kerr-County source, Mike Hughes' Broken Arrow Ranch Cookbook, on page 152. I must tell you that I haven't tried it yet, but every

other recipe I've lifted from this invaluable volume has been outstanding.

The recipe includes a 24-hour bath for the rabbit (excuse me: hare) in a brine marinade made with vinegar, salt, and water. Then comes a mushroom gravy that sounds so good it ought to make a stick of stove wood taste delicious. The ingredients include butter, pan drippings from cooking the meat, mushrooms, sherry wine, chopped parsley, Worcestershire sauce, and heavy cream.

This isn't the recipe for that wonderful jackrabbit stew I remember from Frio County all those years ago, but it reads good and comes from a reliable source. There's one word used by that old ranch cook that doesn't appear in Mike Hughes' book, but I'm confident that Mike would approve of my



Photo by John Wootters

Since jacks outnumber cottontail rabbits in Kerr County by about 20 to one, the author felt we needed directions for cooking these Texas-style hares in order to utilize an abundant resource. Here's what his research revealed.

adding it to his recipe. It's "young", as in "one young jackrabbit, cut into serving pieces".

Anyway, jump-shooting running jacks with a rifle is wonderful sport and even better practice for moving game even if you do occasionally run into an old jackass rabbit on which no marinade will quite get the job done.

John Wootters is a semi-retired outdoors writer with more than 30 years experience. He was editor of Peterson's "Hunting" magazine and author of the monthly column "Buck Sense" and has written the all-time best selling book on deer hunting, "Hunting Trophy Deer." He has written for "Shooting Times," "Rifle," "Handloader," "Guns & Ammo" and Peterson's "Hunting."