

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WYOMING SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 120

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Subject: WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT*

General

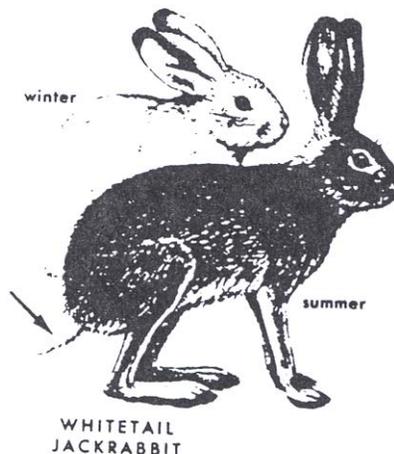
The white-tailed jackrabbit (Lepus townsendii) commonly occurs in open areas in the Colorado mountains at elevations up to 13,500 feet (4,115 m).

Food Requirements

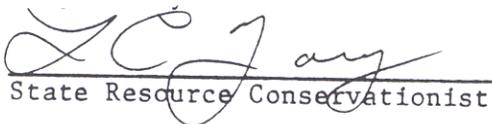
In southern Colorado, the diet was primarily forbs and grasses during summer and fall and shrubs during winter and spring. The jackrabbit eats the woody stems of shrubs, preferring them over the leaves and recent growth. White-tailed jackrabbits are nocturnal and crepuscular feeders. One study estimated that 25 percent herbaceous canopy cover is a minimum for optimal jackrabbit habitat.

Water Requirements

The water needs of the white-tailed jackrabbit are fulfilled by the succulence of its food.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Cover Requirements

The white-tailed jackrabbit requires shrub cover for hiding and resting during the day, although their protective coloration and lack of movement help make them "invisible" when threatened and no cover is available. One study estimated that shrubs 2.5 to 3 ft (0.76 to 0.91 m) tall should cover 30 to 40 percent of the ground from optimal habitat. In Wisconsin, another study found many jackrabbits in agricultural lands where woodlots and fenceline hedges covered 20 to 30 percent of the area. The jackrabbits avoided large blocks of wooded cover.

Jackrabbits prefer vegetation 4 to 6 in. (10.2 to 15.2 cm) tall for ease of movement. They most often use hay meadows after the vegetation has been harvested.

In southern Colorado, a study reported that burrows may be used as escape cover, especially during winter. One burrow extended downward approximately 3 ft (0.91 m) and then widened into a small cavity.

Reproductive Requirements

No nest or shelter was used for reproduction in Wisconsin. The young may be dropped on bare ground or in a form (a soil-surface depression that indicates a jackrabbit hiding or resting place).

Special Habitat Requirements

Ridges that are blown free of snow during the winter are used extensively as travel routes.

Interspersion Requirements

In Wisconsin, jackrabbits occupied large open fields of at least 160 acres (64.8 ha). The home range was probably less than 1 mile (1.6 km) in diameter, and the rabbits often confined their activities to one large field. To receive maximum use by jackrabbits, one study stated that a meadow or grassland should be no more than 0.25 to 0.5 mile (0.4 to 0.8 km) in diameter.

Special Considerations

One study stated that the white-tailed jackrabbit populations tend to decrease in intensively cultivated areas.