

HUNTING RABBITS WITHOUT A GUN

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The Everglades that comprise all southern Florida are an almost perfectly flat area only a few feet above sea level, from which the summer rains drain very slowly. Most of the land consists of pine savannas with a low growth of grasses and hundreds of kinds of small plants, many with beautiful flowers. Interspersed through the pine woods are bald-cypress "hammocks," slight depressions, usually with a pond in the center, containing many water plants and surrounded by dense thickets of myrtle and other shrubs.

Among the shrubs arise tall cypress trees with slender pale trunks whose bark is almost like soft velvet. The hammocks occupy places usually filled elsewhere by rivers—there are no real rivers here, at best small streams—and along the chains of hammocks the water drains slowly to sea.

Great areas of savanna and hammock land remain even in those parts of the Everglades where vegetables and citrus fruits are cultivated, and these wild areas are one of the most densely populated refuges of wild life to be found anywhere in the United States. Birds live here in countless numbers despite the disappearance of such former residents as the Carolina parakeet and the great rarity of others, such as the flamingo and ivory-billed woodpecker.

VENOMOUS SNAKES

There are uncomfortable numbers of moccasins and rattlesnakes. Alligators persist even in well-settled areas and may be seen along or even on the paved roads. Wild turkeys and deer are bagged in large numbers during the open season, and in the most remote swamps black bear and panthers survive.

One of the most interesting mammals is the swamp rabbit, in size and appearance much like the northern cottontail. Because of the peculiar environment, its habits are somewhat different. During the summer the savannas are covered with shallow water seldom more than two or three inches deep, too shallow to drown the smaller animals but enough to keep their feet always wet. The rabbits feed on the higher ground, but if molested they race for the swamps. When frightened, they make no attempt to avoid water, but dive into the ponds and swim across them or lie quietly among the plants in the margins.

Upon my first visit to the Everglades a good many years ago, I was invited one morning to go rabbit hunting with my sister. Noting that she was accompanied by a dog but carried only a hatchet, I asked whether she were not going to take a rifle, but was told there was no need for one. The route followed led toward a cypress hammock. The cypress trunks have enlarged bulblelike

bases, and between the trees are many conelike "knees" that project above the water and are supposed to serve as breathing organs. The lower part of the trunk often is hollow, as the sequel proved.

RABBIT CAUGHT BY HAND

We had not proceeded far when the dog raised a rabbit and began barking madly on its trail. At the edge of the swamp the dog was soon barking at the foot of a rather small and slender cypress in whose base there was an inconspicuous opening. The trunk was tapped tentatively with the hatchet; then a hole was cut some four feet above the base (often it is cut still higher) with the hatchet through the thin wood. A hand thrust upward into the hollow grasped the hind legs of the panting animal and hauled him from his retreat.

This is the conventional method of rabbit hunting in the Everglades, economical of ammunition and with few failures. The rabbit is so tightly wedged into the narrow channel within the tree trunk, pushing upward just as far as his head permits him to climb, that one wonders that he can free himself when he feels safe again.

In New Mexico, almost 40 years ago, I saw another quite different kind of rabbit hunting by the Spanish-speaking residents of the Rio Grande Valley near Las Cruces. These people, who have inhabited the valley for many centuries, are descendants of agricultural Indians like the Pueblos of more northern New Mexico, and cling tenaciously to many ancient customs.

ANNUAL DRIVE

Here it was formerly—and may still be—customary to hold a rabbit drive once a year or oftener, usually in late autumn. The affair was directed by a responsible "chief" of the rabbit hunt, who marshaled as many men and boys as possible, armed at least with clubs, and many of them with short curved throwing sticks of hard wood. These sticks can be thrown by a skilled man with considerable accuracy and will return to the thrower like an Australian boomerang.

Stationing the men in a great circle around a selected area, usually upon the high level mesa above the Rio Grande Valley, the circle was gradually narrowed as the men advanced on foot, urging the cottontails and jackrabbits, both very abundant in this region, toward a chosen center. If the circle was sufficiently large at first and care was used to keep the rabbits within it, a large number of them often were herded into a close mass and slaughtered by clubbing or by use of the throwing sticks. At the end of the hunt the dead animals were soberly apportioned by the chief and carried away for a feast.

These New Mexican rabbits, in contrast to the Florida ones, have little acquaintance with water. They live on plains where for most of the year not a drop of water is

HARES AND EXOTIC RODENTS ADDED TO EXHIBITS

Recent acquisitions have made possible the exhibition of formerly unrepresented rodents from South America, Asia, and Africa. These have been added to the screen of exotic rodents and hares in Hall 15. The Peruvian viscacha, a larger relative of the chinchilla, which lives at altitudes from 3,000 to 16,000 feet in the Andes, is now shown. Also, the large burrowing bamboo rat of China, so called because it feeds



HUTIA CONGA

Specimen presented by the Chicago Zoological Society

largely on bamboo, and the Patagonian cavy, a large almost tailless rodent of the Argentine pampas, are now exhibited.

Of especial interest is the arboreal hutia conga from Cuba, one of ten forms of hutias found in the West Indies. As the heavy forests are cleared for agriculture or grazing, these mammals are gradually becoming rarer. Some have been successfully raised in captivity and were found to make gentle and interesting pets. Only one or two young are born at a time, after a gestation period of, in the conga, 123 days. The conga does not have a prehensile tail as do some of its relatives. It feeds on fruit and leaves.

An antelope jackrabbit and a snowshoe rabbit have been added to the exhibit of these mammals. Other additions are the pygmy rabbit, a small relative of the cottontails of the western United States, and two pikas or conies, one from Oregon and one from the mountains of western China. These mammals, related to the rabbits, are best known for their habit of making hay and storing it for winter use in the broken rock slides where they make their homes.

The new exhibits were prepared by Staff Taxidermist W. E. Eigsti.

—C. C. S.

obtainable, and in their whole lives they probably never see even the smallest pool or trickle of water, even when the scant summer showers fall.



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