

# Black-tailed Jackrabbit

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Lepus californicus* comes from the Latin *lepus*, meaning “hare,” and the Latinized *californicus*, meaning “from California,” where the first specimen was described. The “black-tailed” portion of this animal’s common name refers to the color on the topside of its tail. The common name “jackrabbit” is a misnomer assigned to several hare species of western North America. It stems from the book “*Roughing It*,” in which Mark Twain describes a hare species that “has the most preposterous ears that ever were mounted on any creature but the jackass.” The term “jackass-rabbit” was later shortened in common usage to “jackrabbit.”

**DESCRIPTION:** There are two jackrabbit species in Arizona, the black-tailed and the larger antelope jackrabbit. Black-tailed jackrabbits range in length from 18 to 25 inches and weigh 3 to 7.5 pounds. Their most prominent feature, their ears, can reach more than 6 inches in length. Soft fur covers their body. The fur is comprised of an insulating underfur and

longer guard hairs that they molt twice annually with the changing seasons. The body is a brown to grizzled color with darker sides, a pale buff underside and a darker chest. The tail is black on top, but buff to grayish on the sides. One distinguishing feature is the presence of black patches of fur only on the outside tip of the ears.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Their range is broad. It extends from central Missouri and Arkansas west to the Pacific Coast and from Washington, Idaho and Montana in the north to Hidalgo and Querétaro, Mexico, in the south.

**HABITAT:** In Arizona, black-tailed jackrabbits are most abundant in open areas. However, they are not generally tied to any one vegetation type and can be found in open desert, agricultural fields, prairie, chaparral, desertscrub, pinyon-juniper and some forested areas. They tend to avoid areas of tall grass and dense vegetation where they cannot see predators. Elevation is not a determining factor.

They have been found as high as 9,000 feet on the Kaibab Plateau and as low as 200 feet along the Gila River near Yuma.

**BIOLOGY:** Black-tailed jackrabbits are herbivorous and feed on a variety of grasses, forbs, cacti and woody plants. Large groups are found near food sources during droughts. Otherwise, these normally are solitary animals.

They are also “coprophagic,” meaning they eat their own feces. As vegetation passes through their system the first time, they produce soft and moist “cecal” pellets, which they consume to extract more nutrients. This then produces a drier and harder fecal pellet, which is not re-eaten.

They are largely nocturnal and rest in the shade of plant cover during the day. Adults are capable of jumping 20 feet horizontally and attaining running speeds up to 35 mph.

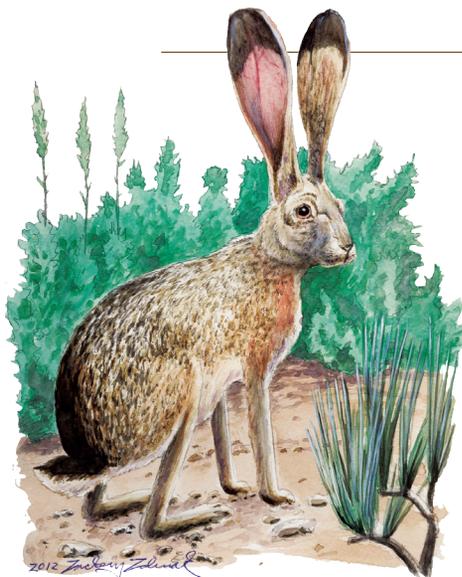
Breeding occurs from December through July. The courtship ritual involves a complex series of chases and males fighting for dominance. After a gestation period of 40–47 days, the dam bears an average of two young, called “leverets,” in a litter. Leverets are born with hair and under vegetative cover in shallow, bowl-like depressions called “forms.” The young can run and jump almost from birth. The black-tail reaches sexual maturity at 8 months.

**STATUS:** The black-tailed jackrabbit is a hunted species in Arizona, as it is through most of its range.

**MANAGEMENT NEEDS:** There are no special management needs for black-tailed jackrabbits at this time. They are abundant habitat generalists and highly adaptable. 🐾

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ILLUSTRATION BY ZACKERY ZDINAK



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