

As Magical as the Easter Bunny...Almost

By Sherry E Engler

As Rim Country celebrates Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017, there are many festive activities to attend in Payson and the surrounding communities. There are sunrise services, Easter egg hunts, family gatherings and, as usual, the one most intriguing to our little ones of Rim Country, the visit from the Easter Bunny. As the Easter Bunny delivers goodies and hides eggs, one must acknowledge his magical attributes. However, as cute as the Easter Bunny is, it is my belief that magical bunnies surround us each and every day in Rim Country. These magical, (well, almost magical) bunnies are known as the Black-Tailed Jackrabbit, aka a *Lepus californicus*. I hear some of you muttering, "Those blame jackrabbits ARE NOT MAGICAL!" Therefore, I hope to change your mind with interesting facts so that, in conclusion, you too will be stating, "Jackrabbits ARE MAGICAL! Well almost."

Magic surrounds the Black-Tailed jackrabbit at birth. I pause here because you need to know the truth up front; jackrabbits are not rabbits at all. Jackrabbits are classified as "hares" because of the magic surrounding their birth. After approximately forty-five days of gestation, these "almost magical" creatures, weighing approximately one-half of a pound, are born with eyes wide open, fully clad in fur, and are precocial, meaning they have the ability to jump and wander around the minute they hit the ground, giving the expression "hit the ground running" a whole new meaning. Thank goodness for the mother jackrabbit, she gives birth to only one or two at a time. Could you imagine giving birth to six or eight and all of them jumping in different directions at once? And the panic you would feel as their mother? Thankfully for the Black-Tailed jackrabbit mother, she has only one or two baby leverets at a time. (Leveret is the name for a baby jackrabbit.) The mother nurses the baby, or babies, for twelve weeks at which time the leveret(s) jumps into independence. Usually, jackrabbits are very social, living in a group of twenty or more, otherwise known as a warren, nest or colony. The Black-Tailed jackrabbit may have a life span of approximately twelve years.

Another magical fact about Black-Tailed jackrabbits is they do not burrow or build nests for protection. This fact too separates them from the rabbit, or bunny, and is a distinct trait of a hare. Magically, the jackrabbit finds dense grasses or bushes to rely on for resting and protection, never burrowing inside the protection of a hole in the earth to save it. So, how does it escape demise due to its predators?

Predators, such as coyotes, bobcats, eagles, hawks, and owls (to name a few) are constantly on the hunt for the delicious meal of a good, juicy jackrabbit. Here, I will list yet another magical power jackrabbits possess: it is the ability to jump and move super, super fast to avoid predators. Jackrabbits can leap as far as nineteen feet in a single leap. Wow! Nineteen feet in one leap for a single rabbit (I mean "hare") is magical to me! Not only can this gray-haired wonder with long black ears protect itself with a huge leap but the Black-Tailed jackrabbit has also been known to reach speeds of up to 45 mph, with the norm being between 35 and 40, to escape from the dangers of predators for up to a half mile. Now, that's magical when you think of the enormity of it.

These magical beings of Rim Country, the Black-Tailed jackrabbits, are usually gray in color, with significantly long black upstanding ears. They are usually 20-24 inches in length and weigh in the neighborhood of six to eight pounds. Larger jackrabbits have been known to weigh nine pounds. You may be thinking, "What is magical about this?" The magic lies with the long, peculiar-looking black ears standing firm on their heads. Interestingly, the ears stand at attention to allow a very keen sense of hearing to alert any minute sound of danger to the jackrabbit. Magically, these peculiarly long ears enable the ability to rid the mammal of intense heat from the high temperatures of the summer months, and to

regulate body heat. “Amazing!” you say. See, I told you these rabbits (I mean “hares”) are magical. Well, almost magical.

And the citizenry of Rim Country should feel very lucky to be surrounded by these magical hares because the Black-Tailed jackrabbits primarily only inhabit the Western United States, being nocturnal Southwest desert dwellers. They eat a variety of plants in Rim Country terrain such as grasses, dandelions, mesquite leaves, mesquite beans, cacti and even root twigs. The jackrabbit does not require a significant amount of water and may resort to cacti for water needs in times of drought. By now, you may understand why these creatures possess a rather magical presence in a sometimes very harsh environment.

So, the next time you hear the expression “Easter Bunny” and your mind slips into the happy, magical world of pastel colored Easter eggs, filled baskets protruding with goodies and sweet delicious candy looking like speckled eggs and tasting delicious, do not forget about all the magical bunnies, I mean “hares,” that surround us each and every day. May you and yours have a very Blessed and Happy Easter! Be safe and Godspeed.