

## Elko rabbits and dumb dogs



The white-tail jackrabbit from [www.wildlifenorthamerica.com](http://www.wildlifenorthamerica.com)

My Parson Russell Terrier's excitement ramps up as we leave the paved road for a two-track road bordered with sagebrush and covered with snow. Some of my dog's excitement comes from knowing he will soon get a chance to run and burn off terrier energy, but most of it comes from knowing "they" are out there, waiting for him.

They are jackrabbits which only he knows are wily, dangerous prey to be chased (all this although he has never gotten close to one.) There, ahead of us sits one of these dastardly creatures, calmly watching us with long ears stretched upward.

Every ounce of my dog's attention is focused like a laser beam on the jackrabbit. I have to say my attention wanders at this point since I have seen this scene too many times and already know the outcome. Terrier excitement is no match for jackrabbit speed.

But what exactly is so calmly sitting in the road ahead? I know it is a hare, characterized by its large size, long ears, bulging eyes and long legs superbly adapted for running away from dumb, city dogs. Two species of hare make Elko County home. My guess is this one is the black-tailed jack rabbit, having a black tail and black-edged ears. The white-tailed jackrabbit is larger, less common and turns white during winter. Its dark tail is white underneath.

It is definitely not the smaller Nuttall cottontail, best known for its white-bottomed, or 'cotton' tail and shorter ears. We also have the smallest and rarest rabbit, the pygmy rabbit, barely a foot in length and sporting an all brown tail.

Jackrabbits do not dig tunnels. They will tunnel down through snow for winter protection, but during summer, their only protection is scrapes, slight dirt scrapings beneath sagebrush. Jackrabbit babies are born in these scrapes fully furred and with eyes open. They are ready to run soon after birth.

Rabbits such as cottontails and pygmies, do dig tunnels, usually near the base of sagebrush. Rabbit babies are born naked with eyes closed. Their burrows give the young a chance to develop before having to face the harsh world. Cottontails dig solitary burrows while pygmy rabbits dig group mazes called warrens.

My dog sits as I remove the leash but is immediately running down a road now bare of jackrabbits. Traveling at top speed, it runs 30 yards beyond where the jackrabbit once sat before beginning a frantic search among road side sagebrush. All I can do is sigh at one more fruitless chase.

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