

Giant-sized hare less pesky than the hunters

ART BRIGGS-JUDE
Correspondent

Under the fluffy surface, the snow was hard from previous winds. The dog ran over this unseen crust with ease, sniffing and snorting at every mark in the new snow.

Only on occasion did she flounder, where a hedgerow or fence line had lessened the wind's firming effect. It was in such places I was glad to have snowshoes for, judging from the protruding outposts, the blanket was more than a foot deep.

My webbed trail crossed an open field, followed by a row of naked trees, then cut into an old corn patch. Although only the odd sign of corn was visible, other

signs nearby proved to be of greater interest.

At a place where some dried stalks showed above the white surface, my dog discovered a large hole in the snowbank. It was the workings of a jackrabbit, digging down to feed on some of the hidden cobs.

I looked carefully where the dog had not disturbed the animal's track, and whistled softly. This track was a dandy, an exceptionally large set of prints, even when I allowed for some fluffy surface distortion.

I glanced up just in time to see a huge long-eared hare explode from the snow in front of the dog. The chase was on...

It's hard to believe that the European hare or, jackrabbit,

was not always part of our native fauna. Even harder to accept is the fact that all the multitudes of these jacks seen in Ontario over the past 75 years are the result of nine imports.

But this is indeed true. The story, though, really begins in Brantford.

In 1912, at the Bow Park Farm, an island in the Grand River, the manager, a German immigrant, brought in several young European hares from Danzig. Like many old country people at the time, he probably longed for some of the familiar ties with his homeland.

Whether this was behind his thinking or if he had ideas on marketing the animals, no one really knows.

At any rate, hares being hares, and long-noted for their incredible wildness, his new stock grew and became so hard to handle he finally gave them the run of the property.

That winter, they crossed over the ice and went wild. The jackrabbits' appearance in Brant and the neighboring counties was at first welcomed by sportsmen and farmers alike.

Its presence filled a void in the open countryside providing meat and sport during the long winter season.

By 1921, the European hare had reached Niagara Falls, by 1925, the outskirts of Toronto, and in 1948, the Kingston area.

But as these big bunnies increased and spread, the boon for

the hunter became a bust for the farmer.

Young orchards, seedlings and berry patches were girdled and destroyed, tender plants were nipped off with disastrous results. A mad hare was on the march and the farmers were called for help.

Invitations were sent out to hunters and sportsmen's groups to come and shoot the ravaging rabbits. Soon, caravans of cars and busloads of nimrods were leaving St. Catharines, Hamilton and Toronto.

Their destination was the outlying areas, especially those near Wainfleet, Cayuga, Hagersville, Paris and Orangeville. The old method of hunting the thickets and woodlots for cottontails or snowshoe hares was changed.

Now, lines of men, spaced gunshot distance apart, pushed across the open fields and crop lands, while others waited in advance at the next concession road.

The Ontario "jack drive" was born.

Then, just as the bonanza was at its peak, the rural landowners called for help again. This time, though, it was to the then Department of Game and Fisheries. The hordes of hunters drawn to reap the hare harvest were now themselves becoming a problem.

The heavy concentrations of men were too much for the fences and, at times, the fresh crops.

To help the farmers, the department limited the jack drives to 12 hunters. To help themselves, many landowners erected "No Trespassing" signs.

Actually, after these events, the jackrabbit population stabilized in some areas while in others it diminished noticeably.

To many people, the days of the great hunts were over and, I guess, if measured by hares that were hung up, they were.

Gormley news

Ressler celebrate 40 years

EVELYN MILSTED
Gormley Correspondent

Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Marlin Ressler on the occasion of their 40th wedding anniversary. The Heise Hill congregation presented them with a gift following the Sunday morning service. The adult Sunday school class also made a presentation.

Miss Donna Pridham spoke on Sunday night at the Missionary Church. She leaves on Jan. 18 to return to her work at Kent Academy in Nigeria, Africa. She visited with Mr. and Mrs. Mel Baker and Mr. and Mrs. George Yake.

Mr. and Mrs. Russell Sproxtton welcomed their daughter Betty on Thursday evening from Lima, Peru. Betty has spent 23 years in Peru as a missionary with the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church.

Mr. and Mrs. George MacBride of Lucknow visited recently with her cousins Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hill.

Rev. and Mrs. David Theissen and family of London visited her parents Mr. and Mrs. Mel Baker and his parents Mr. and Mrs. Abe Theissen on Thursday.

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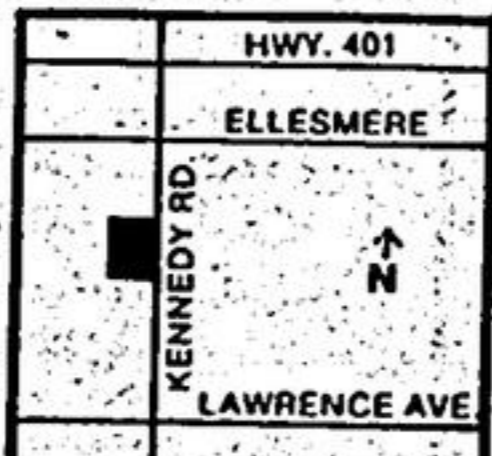
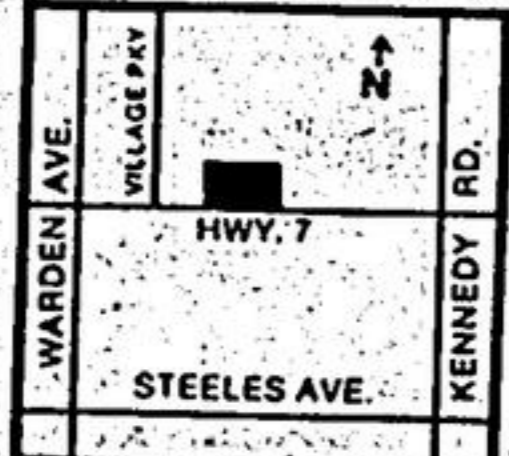
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