Dear TWA,

Summer has come to an end and so the last time I talked to Mom, she told me that I ought to look into being an “X-change” student so that I don’t miss too much school this year. I checked out some places online and I am now an official student at Leaps and Bounds Academy in Pecos, Texas.

I’m staying with a really nice family of Desert Cottontail Rabbits and they have a son my age named Chase. They also have a son named Chester, one named Frank, two named Darryl, one named Mikey, a daughter named Cara, another daughter named Carla and a lot of others whose names I can’t recall right now…. Let’s just say they have a BIG family and Mrs. Cotton (the mom) is expecting 4 more babies any day now! Wow! I noticed that she had some bald spots on her tummy and so I asked Chase about it. He said that whenever his mom is getting ready to have babies, she pulls fur off of her tummy and covers the bottom of the nursery nest with it so that the little ones will have a soft place to sleep. She must be a really good mom to go through all that for her children!

The Cottons have a really cool house. It is a system of tunnels and holes that was built by prairie dogs years ago. I guess a lot of rabbits use old prairie dog towns as homes because they don’t like to dig their own burrows.

On the first day of school, I got up bright and early and tried to find Chase and the other school-age Cottons so that we could walk to school together but nobody was up. I finally woke Chase up and he got all mad and said that school didn’t start until 9:00 PM! I tried to go back to sleep since all the rabbits were snoozing but I was too excited. I had never been to night school before!

As it turns out, school is even better than I thought! Each evening, we start out practicing what they call the zig-zag maneuver. It is basically like a race where you run in a zig-zag motion instead of a straight line. Boy, are those rabbits fast… I haven’t even won a single race, yet! The teacher says the zig-zag maneuver is the best way for rabbits to escape predators and so that is why we practice it every day.

After racing, we do signal drills. Desert Cottontails, like all cottontail rabbits, have fluffy tails that are a light brown or gray color on the top and bright white on the bottom. When we practice signaling, everyone spreads out and keeps an eye out for predators. Some one from class will pretend to be a coyote, a bobcat, or even an eagle and when another student catches a glimpse of the “predator” they either have to drum their hind foot against the ground or flash their tail upwards so that the white part shows. The thump, thump, thump of the foot and the bright, white flash tells other rabbits to watch out for danger. It is a fun game but most of the time I have to be the predator because I don’t have a bright white tail and my little dillo feet aren’t big enough to make a good thumping noise!

I am learning a lot at this school and can’t wait to dazzle my family with all of my rabbit knowledge when I go home for winter break!

I’ll write again soon….

Your friend,

Nancy

Nine-band

Postcards from Nancy...  By Sarah Stannard

Critter Connections

September 2008

Kid’s Quarterly Mini-Mag!

Vol. 2  No. 3
Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) have joined forces to offer youth hunts that are safe, educational and very affordable. We sponsor introductory, instructive youth hunts for deer, turkey, hogs, javelina, exotics, dove, small game, waterfowl, varmints and other species. Normally, we provide mentors, lodging and meals.

Our Goals
☆ To preserve the hunting heritage in Texas for present and future generations.
☆ To instill in youth a basic understanding of practical conservation measures.
☆ To encourage wildlife habitat access, enhancement and management.
☆ To teach the basic skills, values, techniques and responsibilities of hunting.
☆ To promote the highest ethical standards in hunting.
☆ To give our youth an initial, positive, safe, educational, mentored hunting experience

Our Mission
The Texas Youth Hunting Program was established to increase the numbers of youths participating in wildlife and hunting activities and to promote the hunting heritage in Texas.

To participate in the Texas Youth Hunting Program, you must ...
☆ Be 9 to 17 years old.
☆ Complete and submit the Texas Youth Hunting Program Application at www.tyhp.org.

To hunt with TYHP, youth must ...
☆ Complete the Texas Hunter Education Program and be able to provide a copy of your certificate, card or student registration form that shows your test score, etc. You must have Hunter Education to hunt with TYHP, regardless of age. If you are less than 12 years old, you cannot be certified by the Hunter Education program and must retake the course after your twelfth birthday. Call Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 for more information and a schedule of upcoming Hunter Education courses in your area.
☆ Have a valid Texas hunting license and appropriate tags or stamps when required.
☆ Be accompanied by a parent or guardian.
☆ Complete a TYHP Hunting Application that lists your choice of hunts by priority. TYHP hunting schedules will be sent to you periodically.
☆ Complete the TYHP release forms sent to you when you are selected for a youth hunt.
☆ Submit a refundable deposit to secure your position when you are selected for a youth hunt to insure all youth hunt opportunities are utilized.
puzzles.....mazes....oh my! go ahead....
give it a try!

Rabbit Word Find

ALTRICIAL
BUCKS
COTTONTAIL
DOES
HARE
JACKRABBIT
KITS
PREOCIAL
PREDATOR
RABBIT
SWAMP
ZIG-ZAG

Take the Rabbit Quiz

1. Are rabbits herbivores (plant-eaters), carnivores (meat-eaters), or omnivores (eating both plants and meat)? ______________________
2. Are a rabbit’s whiskers are used to sense sounds, touch or smells? ______________________
3. Are rabbits fast-moving or slow-moving? ______________________
4. Do rabbits have a short tail or a long tail? ______________________
5. What part of their body do rabbits use for hopping and for digging burrows? ______________________
6. Do rabbits have a good sense of hearing? ______________________
7. Rabbits are found on every continent on Earth except this cold one. ______________________
8. Are rabbits preyed upon by foxes, raccoons, and dogs? ______________________

Texas Rabbits and Hares

Article by Justin Dreibelbis

There are three species of rabbits and one species of hare that call Texas home. You may think that these critters are the same but they are actually different. Rabbits and hares are split into two different groups because rabbits usually live in underground burrows in a colony with other rabbits. Also, when the rabbit’s babies are born, they usually don’t have hair and their eyes are closed. When a baby is born completely helpless like these baby rabbits, they are called "precocial" young. On the other hand, the hare usually lives alone, above ground, and gives birth to very active babies with their eyes open and covered with fur. These babies who can take care of themselves soon after they are born are called “altricial” young.

The three species of rabbits found in Texas are all cottontails and belong to the genus Sylvilagus. They are all brown with white underparts and most have a white tail that looks like a cotton ball. Cottontails use this white tail to warn others of danger by lifting it up in the air. In rabbits, males are called bucks, females are called does, and babies are called kits or kittens. Rabbits are herbivores and most feed on grasses and forbs when conditions are right, but they can switch to other sources of food like twigs and shrubs if they have to. This is especially important for the animals who live in areas where food is scarce. Many predators like to feed on rabbits, so they have to find ways to keep themselves safe. One way they do this is to run back and forth in a zig zag motion when running away so that it makes it more difficult for the predator to track them down.

The hare that can be found in Texas is the Black-tailed Jackrabbit. Although, they are easier to find in the western half of our state, it is possible to see one of these guys anywhere but deep east Texas and on the gulf coast. They are a bigger animal than the rabbits with big, strong back legs and giant ears much bigger than any of the cottontails. These big legs and ears come in handy when predators give them a hard time because they depend on their speed and hearing to survive. Sometimes when you catch a jackrabbit out in the open, they will tuck their huge ears back and stand still. Jackrabbits prefer a hot, dry climate and are active mostly in the late afternoon and evening. During the day, much like the other rabbits, they find a shady spot to hang out and protect themselves from the sun. When they come out at night, they are heavy eaters. The jackrabbits eat a number of different things including forage crops, mesquite, cactus, and many different grasses. It is believed that 128 black-tailed jackrabbits can consume as much forage as one cow or seven sheep. When there are too many jackrabbits in one place they can begin to compete with the other wildlife and livestock in the area. For this reason, many ranchers consider them a major nuisance and try to get rid of them whenever possible.

Next time you are outside and see a rabbit running around, use your new rabbit knowledge to figure out what kind of rabbit it is and what they might be up to. Share what you have learned from Critter Connections with your friends at school. Who knows, sharing your rabbit knowledge might get them interested in wildlife and the outdoors.

The first of the three rabbit species found in Texas is the Eastern Cottontail which is the most common, not only in Texas, but across the United States. These rabbits can be found all across our huge state usually hiding in the brush until the sun starts to go down. Females give birth to their young in nests lined with grass and fur. These nests are either in heavy brush or they are covered with vegetation. These nests have large families and females will have two to four litters of up to nine kits per year. Unfortunately, to go along with their incredible birth rates, Eastern Cottontails have a high death rate and have a life expectancy not much more than one year. The second rabbit in the group is the Desert Cottontail which can be found in the western half of Texas. These rabbits are the smallest of the Texas cottontails and usually weigh from two to three pounds. They are often associated with prairie dog towns because they like to use these old burrows for their nests when it comes time to give birth to their young ones. The Desert cottontail can be found in a number of different types of habitats in western Texas from grasslands to thick cactus flats.

The last kind of rabbit found in Texas is the Swamp Rabbit. This rabbit is the largest of the cottontails and can weigh up to six pounds. Swamp Rabbits are found in the eastern one third of our state in low areas near marshes, creeks, and drainages. They are great swimmers and actually have been known to hide from predators under water with nothing showing above the water but their nose. Another way that the Swamp Rabbit avoids predators is its speed. They are the fastest of the cottontails in Texas and can reach speeds of around 45 mph. They are very secretive and spend most of the day hiding out in thick brush or tall grass near water.

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...the jackrabbit is a hare, which is different than a rabbit?

...rabbits and hares can see and smell very well?

...young rabbits grow so fast that within 4-5 months, you cannot tell the difference between a youth and an adult rabbit?

...swamp rabbits are born with all of their fur but their eyes are closed?

...swamp rabbits are also called "cane cutters" because they like to live in cane thickets?

...rabbits and hares may be hunted year-round?

Color Me...

Big Ears

Big eyes

Whiskers

Short Tail

Soft fur, white, brown and/or black
Questionnaire

1. What is your full name? Jacob Lewis Nowlin
2. What city/town do you live in? Junction, TX
3. How old are you? 9
4. What grade are you in? Entering 4th grade
5. What is your favorite school subject? Reading, because I like to read adventure books.
6. What is your least favorite school subject? Math, because you have to do a paper in a certain amount of time.
7. What are some of your hobbies? Cub Scouts, piano, and church activities.
8. What is your favorite outdoor activity? Kayaking and swimming.
9. What do you want to be when you grow up? Not sure yet.
10. Who is your “hero”? Albert Einstein.
11. If you were granted one wish, what would you wish for? To be the smartest kid in the world.
12. Describe yourself in three words. Smart, honest, and funny.
13. What is the best way for kids to get involved with the outdoors? To go hiking...nature’s all around you!

We’re looking for some young outdoorsman to spotlight in Critter Connections. Why not you?

It is simple. Just answer the questions above and send your answers, along with 3-4 really good pictures of you pursuing your favorite outdoor activities! We will select one person each quarter to spin the spotlight on! The deadline for consideration is the 1st of the month, so send your spotlight in today!!

Mail your information to:
TWA
Attn: Critter Connections
2800 NE Loop 410, Ste. 105
San Antonio, TX  78218

Or email it to:
h_holdsworth@texas-wildlife.org
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