HUNTER SAFETY
TRAINING PROGRAM

In the November 1970 issue of the Bulletin we covered the rabbits of Oregon. Their close relatives, the hares, are commonly called rabbits also, but certain features have made taxonomists put them in two groups. The hares have longer ears and legs, some internal differences, and are born haired and with their eyes open. The rabbits are born hairless with closed eyes. Both groups belong to the order of rodents, but the hares are in the genus *Lepus* while the rabbits belong to the genus *Sylvilagus*.

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You are walking down a familiar path, headed for some relaxing fishing at a favorite spot. Suddenly, zing! A load of tiny arrows shoot past your ear, thrown by the stout monster that has appeared on the trail in front of you. You wheel and scramble for cover to escape the next deadly poisoned load. Fact or fancy? Do such episodes really occur in Oregon? Probably too many people believe so and are needlessly frightened or miss some fine opportunities to observe wildlife in its natural setting.

The "monster" of the above tale is, of course, the common porcupine, as incapable of "shooting" or throwing his quills as you are of making the hair jump from your head at will. The forest of quills that cover the upper parts and tail of the porcupine are really modified hairs and are attached as firmly to the animal as the real thing. True, they can inflict painful injury to both man and beast but only when direct contact is made with the porky's body.

The poison is a myth, too. Tiny barbs on the tip of each quill collect dirt and other matter during the animal's travels. This foreign material is carried into the flesh with the quill and may cause rapid infection, giving the false impression that the victim has been "poisoned."

Many other wild creatures in the woods, fields, and waters around us have been falsely accused of having various mystical powers or affording certain "dangers" to man. Such yarns abound in folklore and Indian legends. The belief that birds could foretell the future was common among North American Indians. Most of these superstitions were connected with the call or place and manner of the bird's appearance. Medicinal powers were believed to be present in other animals or animal parts. Certain tribes dangled dried cougar paws over a sick person to drive the evilness out. Others pricked their skin with a sharpened bone from the puma to ward off death. Snake skins, bear claws, eagle feathers, or the teeth of animals were also used to cure illness or promote health and bravery.

These remedies have generally died off with their ancient medicine man practitioners. Other wildlife-related beliefs brought over from Europe or developed by early settlers have lingered on to modern times. Some have a basis of truth but most are pure fiction. Unfortunately, such myths as toads causing warts and hoop snakes that roll downhill after their victims are still accepted as fact by a surprising number of people.

Among those unfamiliar with the ways of wildlife probably the fear of attack by a wild animal such as a bear or cougar tops the list of imagined dangers. This fear is not supported by facts. Records of unprovoked attacks are rare indeed. It can generally be said that only under unusual or extenuating circumstances are humans ever attacked. In most cases the animal proves to be either near starvation, rabid, wounded, defending its young, or cornered with no other means of escape. The latter three could hardly be called "unprovoked."

The cougar or mountain lion is very (Continued on Page 4)
What's Dangerous . . .

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timid around man. This characteristic along with his remote habitat make contact with humans infrequent at best. The odds of seeing a cougar in the wild are small, chances of being injured by one infinitely less. Stories of hunters or hikers being followed at a distance by the curious cat are not uncommon, however.

The last reported attack by a cougar in Oregon occurred in Curry County in 1916. The victim, an eight-year-old girl, escaped with little or no injury. No fatalities have been recorded in Oregon this century and only one in Washington. This was in 1924 near Malott. Two unexplained attacks and one death, however, were reported recently from a remote area of British Columbia. Last November in Montana a cougar attempted an attack but was diverted by a family dog. The cat was later killed and proved to be an old, nearly toothless female, apparently near starvation.

Few people are hurt by bears in Oregon each year. The state has but one national park and few other areas where the bruins have become semi-domesticated. The grizzly bear, long noted for its temper and destructive nature, has been responsible for several deaths and serious injuries in other parts of the nation over the past several years. This animal is extinct in Oregon.

Notions that bears have a raging hunger and are thus more dangerous upon emerging from winter sleep are unfounded. Their stomach has shrunk from nonuse and they have little appetite for a week or more. Since bruins are actually sleeping in the true sense and not really hibernating as chipmunks and frogs do, they can be awakened by a spell of warm weather or a disturbance. Crawling into a sleeping bear’s winter den is a bad way to gather information but a good way to get hurt.

Next on the list of potential physical damage are the horns, antlers, and hooves of big game animals. These timid creatures rarely attack man, with the possible exception of during the rut or mating season. With the fall rut, males lose much of their fear and reason to a more aggressive interest. An unwary intruder in such an animal’s chosen territory might find himself seeking the protection of a convenient tree. A far more likely source of injury, however, is the downed game approached too hastily or without caution. Many a “dead” trophy has suddenly come to life and nailed the careless sport who left his rifle against a nearby tree and advanced, knife in hand, to administer the coup de grace. This possibility is not confined only to the buck deer or bull elk, for the hooves of female animals can also be potent weapons. Even when the quarry is dead, a final muscle spasm can send an antler or hoof slashing in the wrong direction.

Other entries to the log of possible dangers are the puncture wounds of catfish or bullhead spines, bites from small animals such as chipmunks, and similar types of minor injuries. These usually produce more knowledge than pain but should nevertheless be treated promptly to avoid any complications.

Besides the threat of physical injury,

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fear of poison or disease causes many to keep their distance when it comes to certain animals. Past accounts of a horrible screaming death probably make rabies one of the most dreaded of animal-transmitted diseases. It is primarily a mammalian virus, found most often in certain species of carnivores such as skunks, bats, and foxes. It is transmitted to animals and humans by a bite or other inoculation of infected saliva in an open wound. Actual development of the disease after such exposure is under 50 percent and notions that untreated rabid animal bites are always fatal are false.

Dogs are responsible for 90 percent of the rabies cases with other domestic animals contributing another 8 percent. Only 2 percent of the bites come from wild animals and a good number of those involve critters brought in as pets. Any hint of rabies in an area usually brings on swift action by health and other governmental agencies. Animals, however, have their own method of control. Rabies in the wild is frequently associated with population highs of foxes, coyotes, skunks, bobcats, and others. The disease quickly decimates them. The survivors are often immune types that keep the area free of rabies for years.

There are few other diseases transmitted directly by wild animals although fleas, mites, and other external parasites may carry tularemia, spotted fever, or similar maladies. More dangerous than diseases, however, are the stings and bites of certain "bugs," especially to individuals that are particularly sensitive to the poison. A few small scorpions and some poisonous spiders such as the black widow are present in Oregon and may cause some concern but no deaths have been reported in this state in recent years. No doubt the most dangerous of all wildlife in Oregon are the bees. Since 1958, eight Oregonians have succumbed to bee stings—more than all other wildlife-related deaths combined.

Of all animals, snakes are probably the most universally dreaded. Children are taught to fear them at an early age. Adults rarely get over their phobia of these interesting reptiles. Of the 15 species found in Oregon, only the rattlesnake offers any real danger to man. Although found statewide, rattlesnakes are probably more abundant east of the Cascades. Like all wildlife, they too would much rather quietly escape human contact than be forced to defend themselves. With reasonably fast treatment, bites are seldom fatal. There have been no deaths in the state for over 20 years, and very few bites.

All of the previously mentioned "danger" require physical contact with the animal involved. Only one creature can "do his thing" from a distance: our chemical warefare expert, the skunk. More obnoxious than dangerous, the skunk's spray of yellowish musk is accurate up to ten feet. This defensive weapon has a temporary burning, blinding effect on the eyes and skin, a feature which probably provides the most immediate benefit to the animal. The evil odor may linger in the air for several days and never fails to clear everyone out of the area. The squirt guns seem to be functional from almost any angle and stories that skunks are helpless when the back feet are held off the ground are probably untrue, although few people risk getting close enough to verify it either way.

What's dangerous in Oregon's outdoors? The answer is—not much! Porcupines and skunks are the most likely encountered of the "dangerous" mammals, rattlesnakes are seen regularly but rarely bother anyone, and bees are the most deadly of all, but only for those sensitive to the poison. If some fate awaits the venturer in Oregon's wonderful out-of-doors, the individual himself will most likely be the cause. Records consistently prove that the

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Game Commission
Sets 1971 Season
Opening Dates

At a public hearing in Portland Friday, January 15, the Oregon Game Commission set the opening dates for the 1971 hunting seasons for deer, elk, and upland game birds.

The buck deer season opening will be Saturday, October 2. The Rocky Mountain elk season was set to open October 30 while that for Roosevelt elk was set for November 13. Hunters will have an October 16th opening for ringneck pheasants and quail. The chukar and Hungarian partridge season will coincide with the deer season opening October 2.

The Commission’s objective in setting the opening dates early in the year is to provide ample time for Oregon hunters to plan their vacation periods to coincide with the game seasons of their choice.

Length of seasons, bag limits, and other regulations for 1971 will be established at a public hearing scheduled in early June for big game animals and in early August for upland birds and waterfowl.

What’s Dangerous...

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recreationist is his own worst enemy. Falls, exhaustion, hunting and boating accidents, cuts, drownings, and sprains are just a few of the self-inflicted “dangers” that outnumber the wildlife-related ones many times over. Even these outdoor accidents do not begin to keep pace with those occurring in the home or on the highways. Oregonians are truly safer in the woods with the animals than in most other places.

OREGON’S HARES...

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VARYING HARE (Snowshoe Rabbit)

A native of the timbered areas throughout Oregon, this big brown hare with a white tail can hardly be distinguished from the shadows into which it seems to melt. If you return to the same spot in the dead of winter, the same animal might be there. It is still almost invisible, but instead of being brown it is as white as the snow that covers the landscape. Only black eyes and black-tipped ears betray its presence. Because of its varying color with the season, it is called the varying hare.

Its “snowshoes” have also given it the name of snowshoe rabbit. Its long toes spread wide and the soles of the feet are covered with coarse hair that is longer in winter than in summer. These “snowshoes” prevent slipping on icy crusts and hold the animal up in soft snow.

Like all of its close relatives the varying hare is well concealed as long as it remains perfectly still, a defensive measure which is often more useful than speed. Where snow covers the ground, the varying hare changes its brown summer raiment for a winter white one. The shift is irregular and often occurs in patchwork fashion. The change generally requires about two months and is completed about the time the ground is covered with lasting snow. In the Coast Range the winter color may change only to a patchwork of brown and white or it may not change at all.

The snowshoe hare is a strict vegetarian. Succulent herbs and tender buds form the major portion of its summer diet. During winter it is dependent mostly on shrubs and trees and is fond of aspen, willow, alder and maple. It eats the bark, twigs and often the needles of conifers, including fir, cedar, hemlock, spruce and tamarack.

Mating generally begins in late March or early April and may extend throughout the summer. The young are born in about forty days. The size of the litter ranges from one to six. Three or four is most common.

The mother hare does not build a nest but merely stops where she happens to be. All of the young are usually born within a half hour. The youngsters are fully covered with fur and can walk and even hop within an hour after birth. At one week of age they are making short exploratory trips from their hiding place.

Contrary to popular belief that young hares can get along from birth without maternal care, they would die in a few days without milk. As a rule they nurse for about four weeks and would continue longer if permitted. At about two weeks they begin to nibble at tender grass and other herbs and could probably survive from that time if the mother were killed.

The snowshoe is a fairly large hare with summer fur more reddish than that of the jacks or cottontails. Its hind feet are always much larger, with longer toes. Average weight is around three pounds with a maximum of four.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT

Long ears that stand out like twin antennae characterize the black-tailed jackrabbit as he bobs off across the plains. The ears twist and turn with each jump as if to catch every sound of pursuit.

The long hind legs and feet propel the animal ahead at speeds up to 35 miles an hour. In times of stress the ears are flattened back along the neck as the animal leaps forward in a burst of speed. Only the greyhound can run down a fleet jackrabbit in fair chase. The coyote, fox and bobcat must use cunning to catch the fleet-running jack.

The black-tailed jack, like his cousin the white-tailed jackrabbit, inhabits the open treeless regions of Oregon. It is found in greatest numbers in the sagebrush country east of the Cascade Mountains. Jacks have invaded western Oregon, especially the Willamette Valley.

The jackrabbit feels safer at night and prefers to feed at that time. Although it may go out at any time during cloudy days, usually it waits until the shadows are long in late afternoon.

The black-tailed jack is fond of succulent green vegetation. He has a hearty appetite and nibbles almost constantly from the time he begins to forage in the afternoon until he returns to his hiding place the following morning. It is no wonder that in the west jackrabbits are disliked by farmers and ranchers. In years of peak abundance a landowner may be forced to take harsh measures to protect his crops.

The jackrabbit is not always destructive and in reasonable numbers is an asset.

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Steelhead Angling At Torrid Pace

Oregon steelhead anglers have reported some of the best steelhead fishing they've ever enjoyed in the coastal streams as well as several Columbia tributaries.

The success of the Game Commission's steelhead hatchery program is much in evidence by the impact it is having on angler success. If the high success continues through the remainder of the winter, marked steelhead from Game Commission releases will contribute well over 50 percent of the total catch, which is expected to run from 180 to 200 thousand ironheads.

So far this winter, marked steelhead have contributed 76 percent of the catch from the Kilchis, 68 percent from the Wilson, about 50 percent from the Siletz, 60 percent from the Alsea, 50 percent from the Salmon River, 61 percent from the Siuslaw, and 50 percent from the Sandy. Marked fish records have not been tallied as yet from other streams on the Commission's stocking schedule.
WHO CARES FOR THE CRITTERS?

Oregon law gives the Game Commission jurisdiction over game animals, most of the wild birds, and the few small mammals classified as furbearers.

There is no law giving any agency the authority to manage or protect most wild mammals, amphibians or reptiles. It is hoped that the Legislature will enact HB 1123 to broaden the Commission's management responsibilities to include presently unprotected wildlife.