



# WILDLIFE NOTES

## White-sided jackrabbit

The white-sided jackrabbit (*Lepus callotis*), found in extreme southwestern New Mexico, has suffered sharp declines since the 1970s. It was state listed as an Endangered Species in 1975.

### DESCRIPTION

The white-sided jackrabbit shares its range with the similar appearing black-tail jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*). White-sided jackrabbits are stockier in build, and generally more grizzled and buff-colored than the black-tail species. Both have black tails and expose varying amounts of white fur on their sides and flanks. The chief difference between the two is the

extensive, conspicuous white area along the body of white-sided jackrabbits, highly visible when they run. The ear-tips of white-sided jackrabbits are white on the outside and black on the inside, while the reverse is true in black-tail jackrabbits. The white-sided jackrabbit has large ears and long limbs disproportionate to its body size. Together, these structural adaptations create an increased body

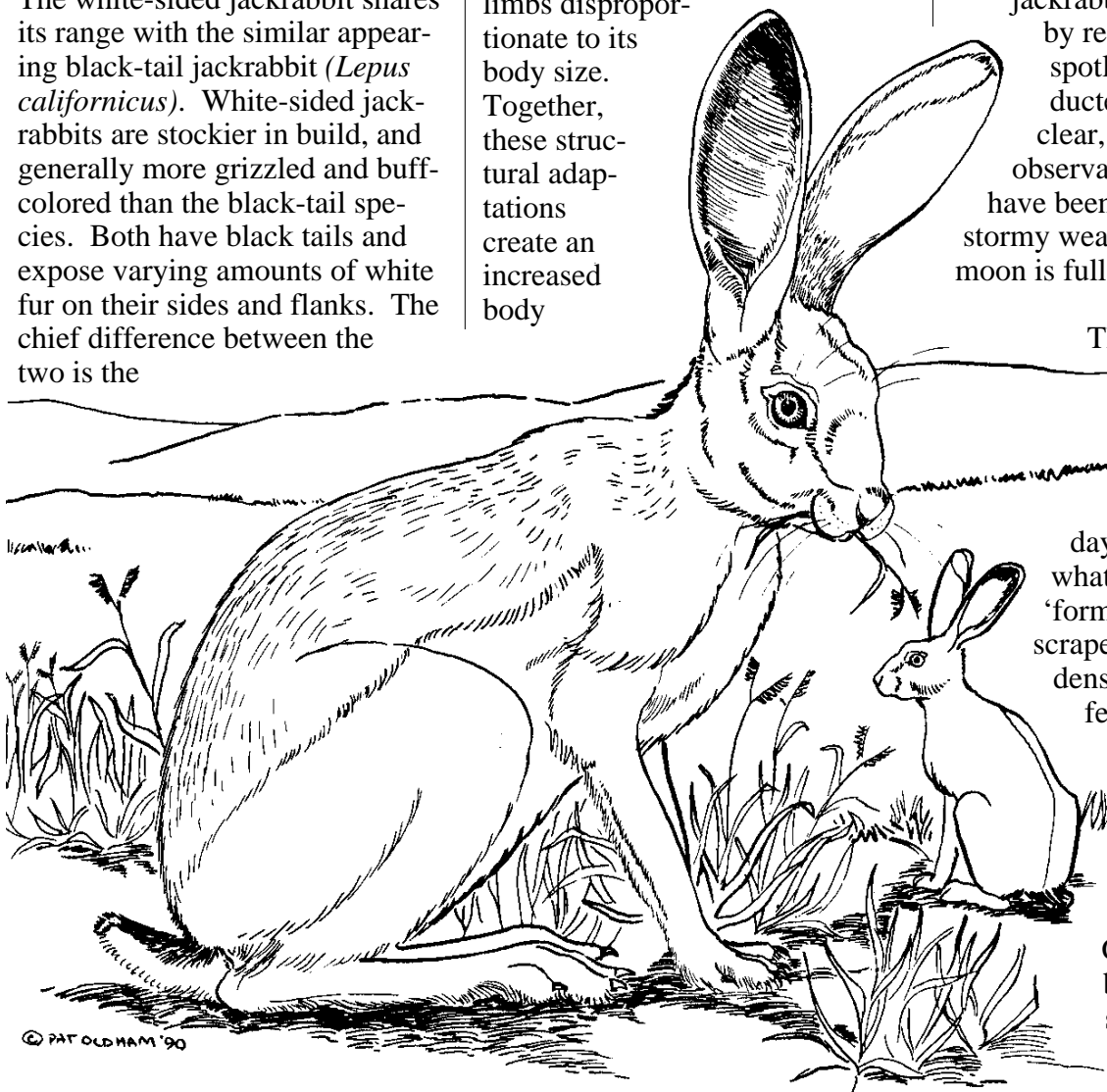
surface area to help the animal dissipate heat.

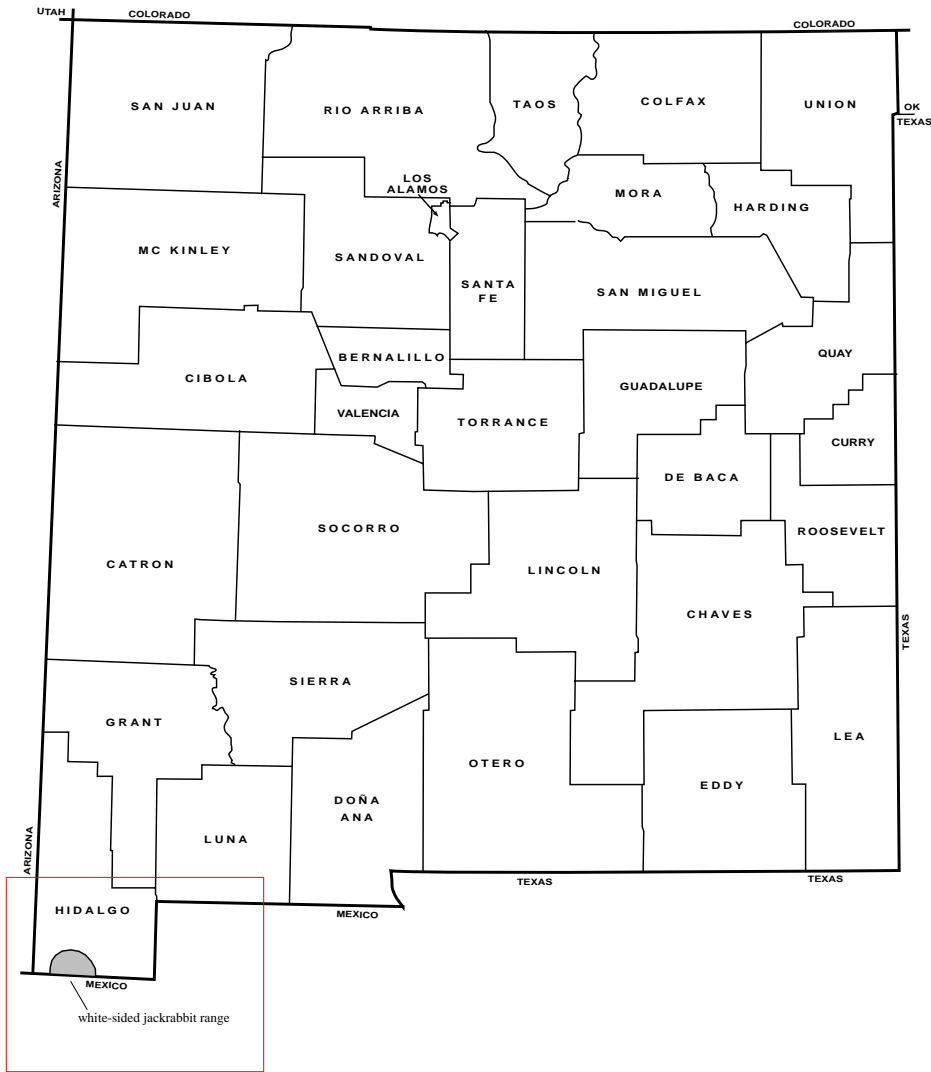
### BEHAVIOR and BREEDING

White-sided jackrabbits are most active during darkness and only rarely are they seen during daylight. Most reports of white-sided jackrabbits have been made by researchers during spotlight surveys conducted at night during clear, calm weather. Few observations of this species have been recorded during stormy weather or when the moon is full.

The white-sided jackrabbit is a desert species preferring stands of pure grasslands. It spends the daylight hours hiding in what researchers call 'forms,' 12-to-14 inch scraped depressions in dense stands of grass. It feeds primarily on sedges and various grass species, including tabosa, buffalo grass, and blue grama.

Grasslands that have been invaded by shrubs, such as





this species occurs is in certain grasslands of the Playas and Animas Valleys of Hidalgo County in southwest New Mexico. For centuries, these verdant valleys have nurtured a classic desert grassland community. However, changes in land ownership and grazing practices have resulted in alterations of this rare species' habitat.

## THREATS AND CONCERNS

Sound management of existing habitat and restoring degraded grasslands in the white-sided jackrabbit's range are critical strategies to conserve this species in New Mexico. Loss of habitat (desert grasslands converting to shrublands because of poor range management) poses a serious threat to this species. The status of white-sided jackrabbits should be closely monitored by long-term field surveys.

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Jane Susan MacCarter*

mesquite and cholla, are no longer suitable habitat for white-sided jackrabbits; in these degraded areas, black-tail jackrabbits outnumber the white-sided species.

Like wolves and tundra swans, white-sided jackrabbits are believed to mate for life and are typically seen in pairs. Their long breeding season runs from December through September. One to three young are born per litter, fully furred with eyes open, like other hares. In good years, pairs may produce more than one litter.

## HISTORIC RANGE

Biologists first learned of the white-sided jackrabbit in 1892. Although never abundant, white-

sided jackrabbits were fairly common at that time in extreme southwestern New Mexico, southward into Mexico. However, the species remained seldom-seen and little-known until 1974, when a female white-sided jackrabbit was collected near Cloverdale, New Mexico. Subsequent surveys in the mid-1970s indicated the white-sided jackrabbit was maintaining a viable population. Surveys for white-sided jackrabbits conducted in the mid- to late 1970s revealed an estimated population of about 200.

## CURRENT RANGE

White-sided jackrabbits occur primarily in Mexico. The only place in the United States where

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