

# LOVU ZDAR

## “Successful Hunter”

Jim Lane – Laneline Beagles

Hunting is one of the Czech’s most popular hobbies. There was a company in Czechoslovakia where in 1964 the owner {an avid rabbit hunter} of the company worked



with the Worker’s Hunting Society {a hunting union} and they gave a paid day off work to their workers to have a unified hunting day once a year. These pictures of the “setting-aside” ceremony were made after a half-day hunt organized by the Worker’s Hunting Society of the factory CKD Slany. Usually about 3,000 hares were shot during this hunt and the setting-aside itself must be done according to tradition with the hares laying on their right sides, and every tenth hare out of line for easier counting. Then, accompanied by the sound of hunting horns, out of respect the last honors are given to the game according to this tradition. Now this is being serious about rabbit hunting! It is also a displaying a great amount of respect for the game they were hunting.

**“We respect the animals our dogs are chasing!”** was a comment made by Dave Fisher of LinDavid Productions in one of his rabbit hunting videos. Others have made similar comments in their hunting videos or magazine articles concerning the same, trying to send the message to hunters that if you don’t respect what you have, you might not have it very long and as we all know, many times **“you don’t know what you’ve got, until it’s gone”**. I have been fortunate enough to have had the privilege to been on a hunt where we have bagged up to twenty-three rabbits in eight hours. Another hunt, sixteen rabbits and a red fox. I have also been in those places where we would shout and jump up and down like a seven year old child, if it was Christmas morning three days after his Momma had won the Lottery, if we saw three rabbits and only shot one in ten hours. There is nothing



worse than having aggressive hard hunting dogs with few rabbits and lots of other game, temptation, temptation, temptation. I have been to the point where I would cage wild rabbits and try to breed them and set their young free. I even tried to loose domestic, San Juan, Netherland Dwarf, or any other kind rabbit that people would advertise that would run like wild rabbits. Hey, when you love to run dogs and hunt rabbits you will try anything. Desperate times calls for desperate measures right? I than came across a man by the name of Ken Sadler who is a Biologist. He completed a study on the population and habitat of wild rabbits. We can all learn from this



study.

He spoke of three basic habitat requirements for rabbits -- cover, food, and nesting sites. We must learn to respect the “rights of the rabbits” in these three areas. I know to those of you who have no problem with rabbit population this may sound foolish, and don’t worry I am not going to make any tee-shirts or bumper stickers with this slogan. But I know there are a lot of hunters out there that know exactly what I am referring to. Mr. Sadler claims that as of right now; “RABBITS are by far Missouri's most popular game animal”. For instance, during 1962 Missouri hunters spent over one and three-quarters million hours afield after rabbits. They had a good deal to show for their efforts: collectively, they brought home over 2,000 tons of rabbits! That was an average year. During 1959, when the rabbit population was up, 3 million hours of hunting by 166,000 rabbit hunters produced a string of rabbits that would stretch from Kansas City to St. Louis and down to New Orleans. Over 3,300,000 rabbits were harvested that year. Despite the glamour that surrounds some game species, more people in Missouri spend more time and take more game hunting rabbits than anything you can name.



The reason for this interest in rabbit hunting and for the high hunting success is that the rabbit is not only a fine sporting animal, but he is available. There's hardly a farm, forested area, subdivision or even a vacant city lot in the state with a small piece of habitat that doesn't have a few rabbits. Where conditions are really favorable, densities of 200 rabbits on 40 acres can readily develop. I know you’re probably thinking the same thing I was when I was given this information. “Where I run or hunt sure ain’t Missouri!” Because of my employment, I have had the privilege to live in several states including Ohio, Iowa, Colorado, West Virginia, Indiana and Tennessee. Some of the places I have lived, they were an abundance amount of rabbits, almost too many. Running my dogs in some places was like turning them loose in a



starting pen. Other places I have lived well, I was not that lucky. Sometimes if we hunted six hours and jumped two rabbits we considered it a good day. Why is it so different in so many different places? Some say the predators that their rabbits have, the rabbits get wiped out. Some say the weather, diseases or even land developments. Biologist, Ken Sadler gives us some pointers that if we follow there is no reason that any of us can't have "Missouri" in our own back yards.

Mr. Sadler Starts by stating that we must **understand and respect the concept of rabbit reproduction**. Until recently we thought of rabbit reproduction in terms of two to five litters per year, with three to four young per litter. Recent studies have shown that six or seven litters per year are more typical, and though the number of young in the first litter is often three or four, as previously thought, subsequent litters normally contain five or six young. Each female in the population at the beginning of spring, that survives until late August or September when reproduction normally stops, can be expected to produce about 35 young! This high annual production is due to the fact that adult female rabbits are constantly pregnant throughout the breeding season. In addition, in some instances, up to 35% of the juvenile females (produces in early litters) also raise young of their own in the same season they were born.



This sort of production provides lots of rabbits, but it creates problems too. Unless enough of the excess rabbits are removed, this unbridled growth of the population sets the stage for heavy losses. The point here is that cottontails have a terrific reproductive potential and we're missing a bet if we don't use it to full advantage in hunting. We can keep this production high by keeping the population below the carrying capacity of the land.

This can be done by: (1) adequate harvest, or (2) by increasing the carrying capacity of the land.

**Adequate Harvest** - Maintenance of high, vigorously producing populations of rabbits requires the removal of all animals in excess of the carrying capacity of the land. If these animals aren't removed by hunting, nature itself will bring the population into balance with the environment.



Since the carrying capacity of any rabbit range changes with the seasons, it's not too surprising to find the capacity greatest near the close of the reproductive season, when the population and the cover are both at their highest. As winter weather and crop harvest reduce the habitat, the rabbit population shrinks with the carrying capacity. Any attempt to maintain densities of rabbits above the carrying capacity by stocking is certain to fail. Aside

from the justification of hunting rabbits for recreation hunting also serves, at least in part, to bring about the necessary reduction in the population to somewhat parallel the natural loss in carrying capacity. Reduction of the rabbit harvest, through restricted seasons, as a means of bolstering the breeding stock, and hence the following year's supply of rabbits, fails to take into account that (1) Rabbit survival is largely a matter of habitat quality, not hunting pressure, and (2) Rapid population growth can easily reestablish peak numbers in good habitat, and no amount of restrictions can maintain good populations in poor habitat.

**Increasing Carrying Capacity** - There are three basic requirements that must be met to provide favorable rabbit habitat. They are (1) Escape and concealment cover; (2) year-around food supply; and (3) nesting sites.

To increase the rabbit carrying capacity of your favorite running grounds or hunting area you will have to decide which of these factors is in need of help. It's not likely that it will be your favorite spot if these factors are missing in any degree, but it is possible that any or all may be missing from the spot you'd like to make your favorite. Because rabbits are born, live, and die within a very small area (often a radius of less than 100 yards), it is necessary that these habitat requirements be close to one another. When the habitat types are in small units, well distributed over the area, they are said to be favorably "interspersed." That is to say, rabbits can easily move from one type to another, from a brush pile (escape cover) to a clover patch (food supply) and back to the brush pile, without being excessively exposed. To separate the brush pile from the food supply with plowed ground or a bare pasture is like putting a thirsty cow on a 15-foot tether, 16 feet from water.

**Respect a Rabbit's Cover** - Good quality, well distributed escape cover is fundamental



to good rabbit populations. For this reason, no form of rabbit management is as successful as providing additional cover. The easiest way to achieve this is to use what is on hand. Often, just rearranging what you already have can achieve fine results. Following are a few techniques that you might find useful to improve your cover conditions:

1. Cut and pile brush in fence rows and corners, gullies or pasture lands.
2. Bulldozed brush or trees should be pushed into piles and left

unburned. These are especially effective near field borders.

3. Plant single or double rows of American Plum and blackberry in rows 5 feet apart with plants 1.5 to 2 feet apart. Clump plantings of blackberry are very effective.

4. Fence odd corners of pastures, woodlots, briar patches, etc. from livestock to encourage annual and perennial growth. Lop off growth too tall to provide cover and leave it in loose piles.

Two points should be remembered when you're building rabbit cover:

(1) It's better to make many small improvements than a few big ones; and (2) the object of rabbit management is to provide rabbits for your use; don't build or plant your cover so large or so tight that rabbit hunting becomes impossible or too difficult.

**Respect The Rabbit's Food Source** - It has been said that if you undertake to make a list of rabbit foods, list what they DON'T eat, not what they do. The "don't" list will be much smaller. In short, rabbits eat a wide variety of plant materials. Green vegetation of grasses, legumes and tender shoots of all kinds are important foods during all seasons, but form the bulk of the diet during the time when young rabbits are growing. During the rest of the year, corn, soybeans (and other waste grains), blackberry, dewberry, apples, horse nettle, etc. are favored. Also, during the winter months, especially when snow covers other foods, bark and twigs of young trees and shrubs, roses, vines (notably poison ivy) are eagerly consumed.



Those undertaking the planting of small food plots for rabbits (and it's an excellent plan) should consider the following:

1. Small, 1/10 acre plots, approximately 20' x 200', placed next to permanent cover will provide a substantial food supply.

2. Plots should be of two types: (a) During late August or September, plow, disc and fertilize (40 lbs. 12-12-12) each 1/10 acre plot. Seed and lightly cover a mixture of one pound of locally adapted grass (bluegrass, brome, timothy or orchard grass are preferred) and one pound of inoculated ladino clover; (b) During late April or May, plow, disc and fertilize (40 lbs. 8-24-8) each 1/10 acre plot. Seed and cover 1/2 to one inch, a mixture of one pound each of soybeans, dwarf milo and mixed cowpeas. As with the development of cover, small, well distributed 1/10 acre food plots are better than a few large ones

**Respect the Rabbit's Nesting Sites** - Of the three basic habitat requirements for rabbits - cover, food, and nesting sites -- the latter is perhaps the least understood. The reason for this is that mortality in cottontails in general, and losses of nestlings and very young rabbits, in particular, are very difficult to evaluate. Unfortunately heavy losses of young do sometimes occur. These losses could be lowered by providing safe nesting and rearing

cover. Management of nesting cover should feature the development or improvement of undisturbed grassy plots on well-drained sites (such as diversion terraces, pond dams, hay lands, etc.) near well established protective cover.



Studies have shown that nests are usually less than 50 feet from good cover. Well developed grass-clover plots, if protected from fire and grazing, will provide excellent nesting sites, as well as appropriate foods for rapid development of the young. Most of all, allow some time for the rabbits to raise their young and allow the young to mature before you put a pack of hounds to raid their nests. I like my dogs to get as much running

time as the next guy but there are things you must do and sacrifice to be a LOVU ZDAR “successful hunter”. In the first picture you will see a sign being held up that says; “LOVU ZDAR”. The translation of that is “Successful hunter”, it is also the name of a dog kennel which was responsible for introducing a new breed of hunting dog specifically for hunting rabbits. But that’s another story. Good Luck and happy hunting, Jim Lane – Laneline Beagles

Pictures:

- 1} 1964 Czechoslovakia “setting-aside ceremony”
- 2} Jim Lane & Tex with 23 Rabbits!
- 3} “Fruits of a Hunt” 16 Rabbits & a Red Fox
- 4} Josiah Lane with cousins Nolan & Austin Lane with dogs; Speedy & Dolly
- 5} Nolan Lane with his first Rabbit!
- 6} Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
- 7} Winter Snowshoe Hare
- 8} Hawk and his Prey
- 9} Swamp Rabbit
- 10} Baby Cottontail Rabbit