

Please report to me all appearances of the gray squirrel in your vicinity.

#### Rabbits and Hares.

The hare, often improperly called the "rabbit," is a familiar animal. Examine a specimen. To which order does it belong?

The chief distinctions between the true rabbits and hares may be stated as follows: rabbits live in burrows, hares in "forms" or nests, in hollow stumps or logs, or under brush heaps; rabbits feed by day, hares mostly after sunset and during the night.

As far as I am aware the only hare found in the Maritime Provinces is the Northern or Varying Hare, (*Lepus americanus*.) The fur of this species becomes white during the winter, and the hind feet are longer than the head, points in marked contrast to the cotton-tail of Ontario and the Eastern States. Mrs. Comstock in her "Handbook of Nature Study," bases her studies of the "rabbit" upon the cotton-tail, and tells several interesting stories about their habits and intelligence.

What is the winter food of the hare? Visit recently formed hard-wood brush heaps. Note the tracks in the snow, and how hard it is packed. What has happened to the twigs? How did the hare get the bark off the limbs? Does this help you to place it in its proper order?

Find one in the woods, or, better, along a road. As soon as you see it, begin whistling and walking slowly towards it. Note its listening position. How near can you get to it before it leaps away? Notice the length of its leaps, and its tracks. Its long strong hind legs enable it to take jumps of from ten to twelve feet. How is this of value to the animal? The fore legs are shorter and the feet smaller. What is the covering of the bottom of the feet? Learn to distinguish the tracks in the snow. At each leap you will find two small round prints close together, and associated with them two longer and larger marks of the hind feet, but a little forward of, and farther apart than those of the fore feet. From the tracks learn to distinguish the direction in which it is going. Does the length of the jump tell whether it is frightened or not?

Find the tracks of the squirrel and compare with those of the hare.

#### The Muskrat.

Another animal that deserves mention at this time is the muskrat. Why is it so named?

During thaws in the winter it frequently leaves ordinary haunts and is found around barns and other farm buildings. If a specimen is available, study its color, above and below, the texture of its fur, the size of its body, and the length of its legs and feet. From what you can learn of its habits of life determine the use of the front claws. Note that the hind feet are webbed. What is their use? Observe the tail. What is its covering? How flattened? Some naturalists say it is used as a scull and as a rudder to aid the animal in swimming, and also to slap the water as a warning to its fellows of approaching danger. Watch for verifications of these statements.

The food of the muskrat consists chiefly of weeds and roots. He is especially fond of the roots of the sweetflag, and the yellow pond lily. Have you ever noticed in the fall the empty clam shells scattered in the ice around small "air holes?" These tell of the muskrat's taste for clams, the only animal food of which he is fond.

During spring and summer watch streams and ponds to find the time of day when he is most active. Is he a good swimmer? Note how he carries branches of trees, grass, etc., in his mouth.

The muskrat is a builder. Late in the fall he constructs in the bed of the stream, or in a shallow part of the pond, a cone-like mound from two to three feet above the water. This is his winter lodge; its entrance is under water. It is built of grass and reeds, with a filling of mud, and made to look like a natural hummock. In the snug interior lined with dry lily leaves, grasses and weeds, he passes the winter. In some cases, according to the nature of the banks of the pond, he may pass the winter in his summer burrow.

Find such winter lodges, and sketch them. Look for tracks in the soft snow. During summer, tracks are plentiful in the soft mud near the edge of streams and ponds. The paired foot-prints are characteristic only as they are accompanied by a tail-mark, which is a continuous line where he walks, and a broken one where he jumps. You will be quite safe in