

# Rabbiting

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**Rabbiting** (also **rabbit hunting** and **cottontail hunting**) is the sport of hunting rabbits, often using ferrets or dogs to track the prey and various trapping and shooting methods to catch them.<sup>[1][2]</sup>

Hunting of rabbits involving dogs (usually beagle or basset hounds) is called beagling.



HUCKLEBERRY FINN.

*Huckleberry Finn*, illustration by E. W. Kemble from the original 1884 edition of the book by Mark Twain

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## Hunting

Hunters without hounds have the following options. A hunter, alone or with a partner, walks through the possible locations of rabbit hiding places, kicking or stomping possible covers to chase the rabbit out. In winter an advantage is visible rabbit tracks after fresh snow. Unravelling tracks allows the hunter to locate the hiding place: if no tracks leave out of a suspected location, then the quarry is located. After this, hunters with short range arms (archers or the ones with small calibre) may scrutinize the location to find the rabbit and shoot it immobile. Alternatively, one may just as well scare the animal out and shoot it on the run.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Trapping methods

Typically, long nets are placed around burrows so that a bolting rabbit (that is, one leaving its burrow while being chased by a ferret or other animal) will become ensnared, allowing the hunter to dispatch it. Another method is to use a purse net, which is a net with a draw string at the opening. This net is placed over the burrow, so that when the rabbit bolts, it will run into the net and cause the draw string to pull the net shut.

Rabbits are occasionally killed by a priest, but may also be killed with a sharp blow of the hand to the base of the neck, or by holding the neck between the thumb and first finger and using a whipping motion.

## Ferreting

Ferrets tend to be the primary animal used in rabbiting, due to their ease in moving about burrows. A jill (female ferret) is more typically used in a hunt than a hob (male ferret), as the hob is more likely to "lay up" (killing and eating a rabbit in the burrow, resulting in the hob falling asleep) due to it being stronger than the jill. In modern rabbiting, ferrets may wear a locator collar, and the hunter will use a device that emits a faster clicking noise the closer it is to the ferret's collar. When the ferret lays up, the hunter uses the device to locate the ferret, digging down to remove it and the trapped rabbit.

Some hunters now rely on firearms to take the prey, rather than laying down nets. Three or four hunters with shotguns will attempt to shoot the rabbit as it bolts from the burrow while being chased by the ferret. A method used to determine when the rabbit is preparing to bolt is to listen for thudding sounds coming from the burrow.

## Spotlighting

Spotlighting can refer to any form of rabbit hunting performed at night with the aid of powerful hand-held, rifle mounted or vehicle mounted search lights. The light is often used in conjunction with a dog such as a sighthound, (or lurcher) alongside an air rifle, or some other firearm such as a .22LR.17 HMR The rabbit is illuminated by the light and then shot, or in the case of the dog chased and captured. (See coursing.)

Spotlighting is also known as lamping <sup>[4]</sup>

Using a vehicle is a very popular method of spotlighting (also referred to as Lamping in the United Kingdom) Pick ups and 4x4 are preferred modes of transport. ATVS are also popular vehicles for rabbiting. They provide rapid acceleration making it easy to chase down rabbits.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Long netting

A long net is used (similar to the purse nets used when ferreting) to catch rabbits that have been scared across a field.<sup>[6]</sup> long netting was the primary method of catching farmed rabbits in England before they become a major pest. This method is still used today when ferret or shooting isn't an effective method due to hedgerows or large warrens.

## Historic rabbiting

In medieval times, a hawk or falcon would have been used to catch the rabbit as it exited the warren burrow. For this type of hunt, an albino ferret would typically be used, allowing the bird-of-prey to more easily recognize it. While this hunting style is still occasionally used, especially in the UK where it remains popular, (see Falconry) the above methods have almost entirely replaced it.

## United Kingdom

In the UK the hunting of rabbits rarely involves dogs. The rabbit population is endemic in the UK.



An old rabbit trap



A silverback ferret being used to hunt



A rabbit taken from a longnet

The use of ferrets (domesticated polecats) in rabbit hunting is common.



*Women hunting rabbits with a ferret in the Queen Mary Psalter*

First the hunter finds the rabbit warren. Once located the hunter lays down catch-nets over all the rabbit holes. The next step is to place one or two ferrets down the rabbit holes without disturbing the catch-net. Now the hunter waits for a rabbit to run out of the warren into a

catch-net.

Other methods include shooting with air-rifles, .22 rimfire rifles, or shotguns, the latter two requiring a licence.

## United States

In the U.S., many states have hunting seasons for rabbits. In Virginia, the season lasts throughout November, December, and January.<sup>[3]</sup>

## See also

- Hare coursing

## References

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Categories: Hunting by game



Polecat at the British Wildlife Centre, Newchapel, Surrey

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