



Cecil S.
Webb

A
HARE
ABOUT
THE
HOUSE



This remarkable little book is the story of Horrie—short for Horace—a wild Irish hare whom the author adopted as a tiny day-old leveret. Reared as a pet, given the run of the house, and sharing his food and the fun of life with his white rabbit friend, Squirt, Horrie knew none of the fear of man which a hare shows in its natural state, but became as domesticated as any cat or dog. A novel pet, he proved also a most endearing one, intelligent, warmly affectionate and playful in his ways, but with a mind of his own. No story could be more engrossing—nor, indeed, more touching—than this account of the first two years of

Please turn to back flap

A HARE ABOUT THE HOUSE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A Wanderer in The Wind



Horrie steals an afternoon nap

A HARE ABOUT THE HOUSE

by

Cecil S. Webb

With a Foreword by MAXWELL KNIGHT



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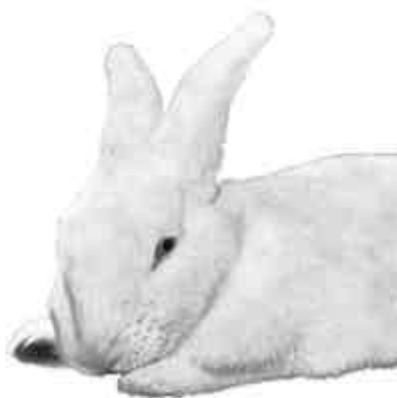
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To
Horrie and Squirt
and all their
charming kind



*All the photographs in this book
with the natural exception of his own
portrait, were taken by the Author*

FOREWORD

By MAXWELL KNIGHT, O.B.E., F.L.S.

I WAS greatly pleased and honoured when C. S. Webb ('Webbie' to all his many naturalist friends) asked me to write a foreword to his little book.

I, myself, have had many strange animals 'about the house'—ranging from bear cubs to mongooses down to a plover and a cuckoo; so from that angle I felt I could write with sympathy. Having read Webbie's absolutely fascinating account of Horrie and his companions, my feelings of sympathy are mixed with admiration and envy.

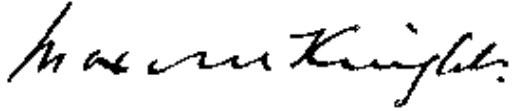
I once had a baby hare which I reared successfully; but though this gave me much pleasure and taught me a lot about hares and their ways, my own experience were but pallid imitations beside those related by Webbie.

There are today, I am glad to say, an ever increasing number of books about the lives and habits of wild animals, but there can be few which are as attractive and instructive as this one. The adventures of Horrie and his pals are not merely entertaining for the lay reader, they throw a great deal of light on the behaviour, habits and character—yes, *character*—of the what is, perhaps, the most sensitive and nervous of all our wild creatures.

To have succeeded in rearing and taming one leveret is quite an achievement; but the Webbs (for one must not omit to pay tribute to the part played by Mrs. Webb) were not content with that. They took on more foundling hares and finally—triumph of triumphs—made them so content that

they actually bred. This has seldom been done in captivity, and I am certain that it has not before been achieved in conditions that amount to real domestication.

To my mind this is the most interesting and charming account of any pet animal that I have ever read. Well done Webbie—more strength to your feeding-bottles!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maxwell Knight". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and date.

Camberley, 1955.

INTRODUCTION

ANIMAL behaviour is an absorbing study and with patience one can learn much of the general habits and mannerisms of a particular species. But there remains the quality which we call personality.

Occasionally the opportunity arises for one to live on intimate terms with a great character of the animal kingdom who, bereft of fear, reveals his extraordinary individuality to his owner.

Such a one is Horrie, the Irish Hare, about whom this story is written.

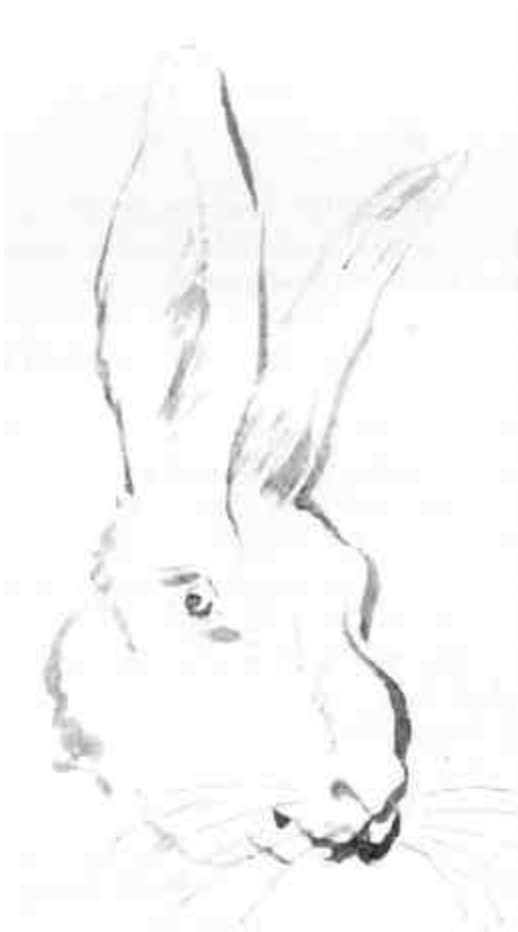
Although my close association with wild animals extends for over thirty years, it surprises me that such a timid creature as the Irish Hare should make so delightful a pet.

As dog lovers and cat lovers are well aware, no two animals are exactly alike in behaviour and similarly I doubt if another hare could be found quite the same as Horrie. And with this you may agree when you have read this story of his life in the Webb household.

Unfortunately, I never realized when he was a babe that he might one day become the subject of a book, so, alas, I have no photographs of him in his youth. You will, however, be able to capture some of his babyhood charm by studying the photographs of another little leveret—recently brought to us—who is the image of Horrie at the same age.

Apart from the great joy I have derived from keeping

Horrie as a companion, he has been instrumental in extending my knowledge in unsuspected directions. Hares are vegetarian and require a considerable variety of food all the year round to keep them fit. Consequently I have been forced to take an interest in the natural history of hedgerows—a science I had sorely neglected prior to his arrival.



A HARE

ABOUT THE HOUSE

DURING my term of office as superintendent of the Dublin Zoo my life had been fairly normal up to February 1953, that is, judged by ordinary Zoo standards. It is true that my wife occasionally had lion and tiger cubs—abandoned by their mothers—warming up on the kitchen stove, and such lesser fry as ducklings, parrots, snakes, and baby rabbits. But these were emergency cases and did not, with the exception of Tara, the tiger cub, occupy the kitchen for more than a day or two, or at most, a few days. In other words our house is not a Zoo annex though at times a visitor could be forgiven for thinking so.

Our kitchen is large, light and airy, and of even temperature, having a slow-combustion stove for heating water as well as the Aga for cooking. Thus it is ideal for emergency cases that require constant heat and attention. However I never visualized it being a home for permanent guests, but there is no limit to the surprise in store for one who becomes involved in Zoo life.

On 27th February, 1953, it happened; life in the Webb family began to take on a different aspect, and all through a trifling accident.

A friend of ours, Mrs. Daisy Gilmore, who lives at Rath-farnham, a suburb of Dublin, was strolling round her garden on this particular day when she saw a ploughman approaching in the adjoining field. Stopping his horses he gave the usual greeting. Then followed the inevitable chat on weather, horses,

and the soil. This over, he was about to get on with his work, but suddenly, he remembered something. A knowing smile came over his face as he thrust a large hand into his jacket pocket. Nestling inside was a timid little leveret—only a day or so old—and as he lifted out the tiny ball of fluff our friend was filled with wonder. Was anything in nature so lovely and cuddlesome—the big eyes, the soft fur and the cute little face? What was he going to do with it? He did not know and before he had time to think, she had definite ideas on the subject—she was going up to the Dublin Zoo that afternoon and knew someone there (my wife), who would love to look after it.

The ploughman had no further say in the matter and the baby changed hands there and then. A cardboard box with a soft duster as bedding served as a nest for the little fellow, and shortly after he was whisked off on a six-mile journey by car to the Zoo.

Leverets are notoriously difficult to rear, and my wife could therefore be excused her feeling of apprehension when landed for the first time with the responsibility of keeping one alive. When I arrived home I was proudly shown the new baby which, by then, was sucking milk eagerly from a fountain-pen filler. Its keenness showed that it was determined to live under any circumstances, and thus half the battle was already won. Cow's milk, too rich for baby hares and similar creatures, was diluted with one-third water and to this was added a small quantity of glucose D. The mixture was heated to blood temperature and fed to the leveret every two hours.

So perky and full of energy was this comical little wide-eyed creature that we took it to be a male though it was pure guesswork at this stage. In anticipation we named him Horace, and our guess as to sex ultimately proved to be correct. Familiarity has long since corrupted his name to Horrie or Horrie Boy.



My name is Horace, I was born in a field near Dublin

Perhaps I should mention here that the Irish hare is a subspecies, or race, of the Scottish or Mountain Hare, with the scientific name of *Lepus timidus hibernicus*. It differs in colour from the European hare *Lepus europæus* and is slightly smaller and more elegant.

Leverets, being born in the open, are a target for numerous



I wish this were a real drum

predators, not excluding magpies, and therefore in order to survive their infancy they must possess highly developed survival instincts almost from birth. When so small that they would fall an easy prey to almost anything, reactions that are not instinctive must be acquired rapidly or it may be too late.

Horrie was not slow to bring this fact home to me and by

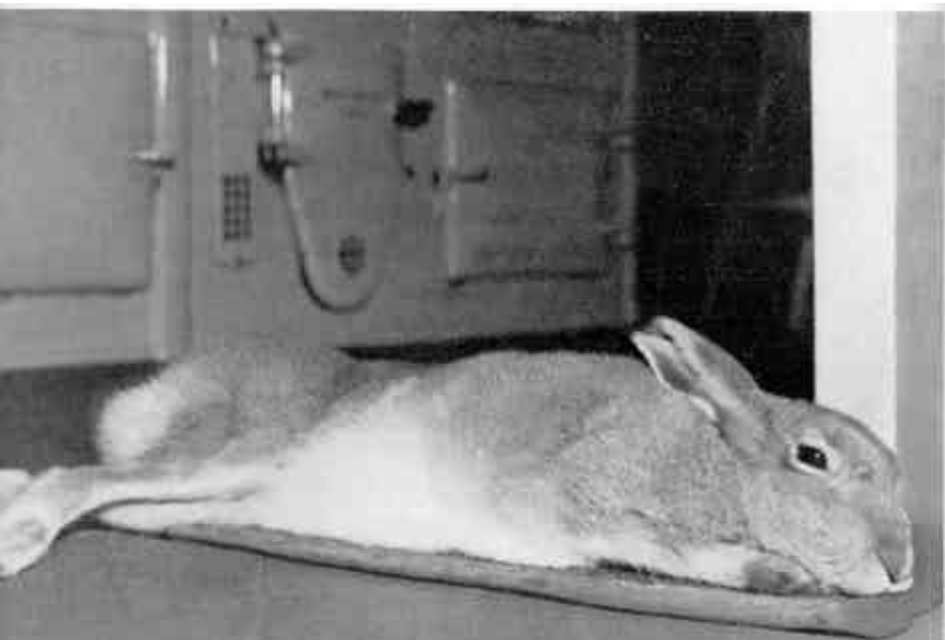
watching him I learnt many things. For the first few days it was his instinct to remain quiet in the daytime and to wander abroad in the evening. Then, he showed unbounding energy and spent all his time learning the geography of his surroundings. Without fear he would go from room to room sniffing everything until he was familiar with each object. With a leveret every smell and sound is registered and is associated with safety or danger. At an early age, Horrie knew if any strange object had been introduced into a room. On entering he would spot it at once, hesitate, then cautiously make straight for it with body elongated and ears thrust forward in the most comical manner. Much sniffing would take place before he was satisfied and then ever after the said object would be accepted as normal. After a while Horrie became more venturesome and carried out sniffing excursions by day and also followed us around so closely that we developed the habit of walking with a shuffle to avoid treading on him.

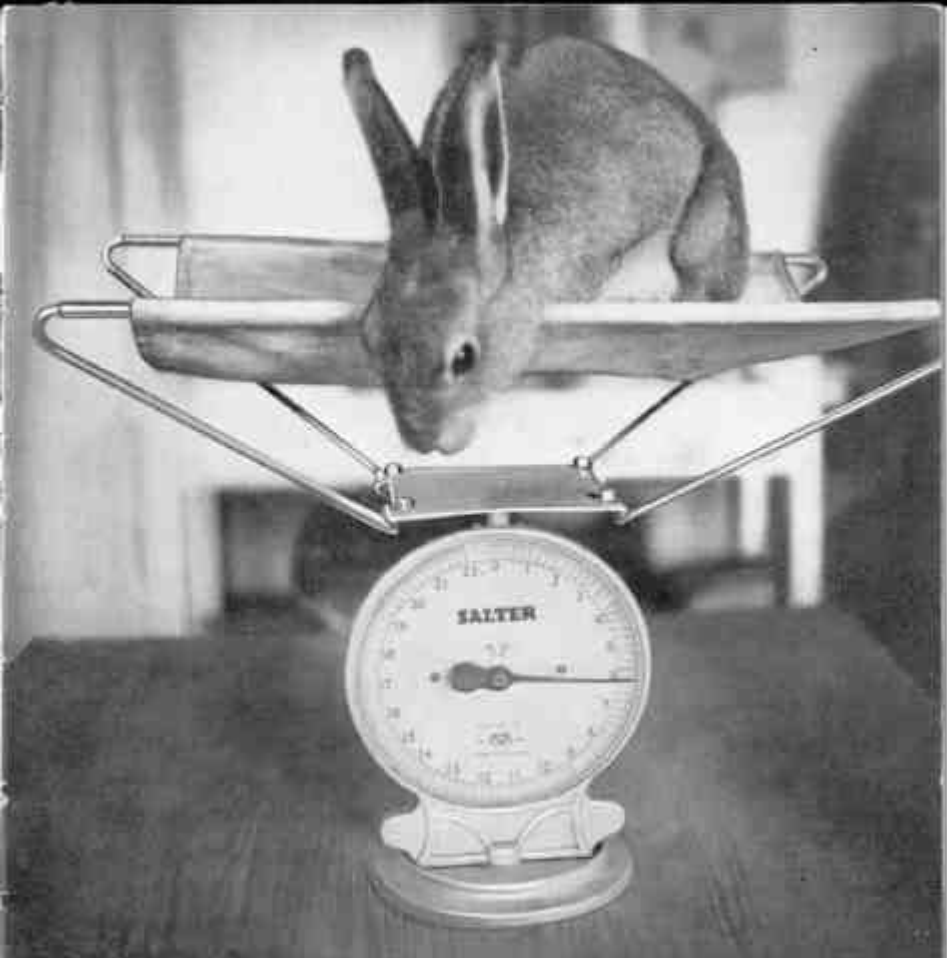
After Horrie had been with us for six days we gave him his last feed late at night and put him to bed as usual on a woollen scarf in his small cardboard box with the lid safely secured. He was the perfect baby—no trouble whatsoever. We retired to bed, and peace, perfect peace, reigned in the Webb household—but not for long. I was just dozing off when I imagined I was in the wilds of Africa. I heard the distant drumming of toms-toms, a sound I had heard so often, while natives danced in the moonlight in some nearby village. In my sleepy state I was enjoying this, and was doubtless being lulled into deep sleep when I was conscious of a sharp tug on my arm. Regaining full consciousness, I heard my wife saying, "What's that, what's that ?" but before I could reply the whole house reverberated with what might have been a burst from a kettle-drum. It appeared to come from the kitchen directly under us. Could it be some freak air-lock in

the hot-water system or what? I admit I was baffled. It came again with startling intensity. My wife was distinctly agitated; she always knew the place was haunted—all large old houses were the same ! This was a challenge which had to be faced. I jumped out of bed prepared to do or die, and as I made my way downstairs there was yet another burst. Here was I, a traveller of some thirty year's experience in outlandish places, about to meet my first ghost. The noise stopped before I reached the kitchen but I switched on the light and peeped in cautiously. All was normal—all was quiet. Horrie was sitting peacefully in his box like a little angel. I waited but the mysterious sound never came—the ghost had defeated me, so I returned to bed.

Unsolved mysteries of this nature are not conducive to sleep and we were both wide awake when the next burst shattered the still night air. Down I went again—this time

Contentment





Oh dear ! I'll have to diet !

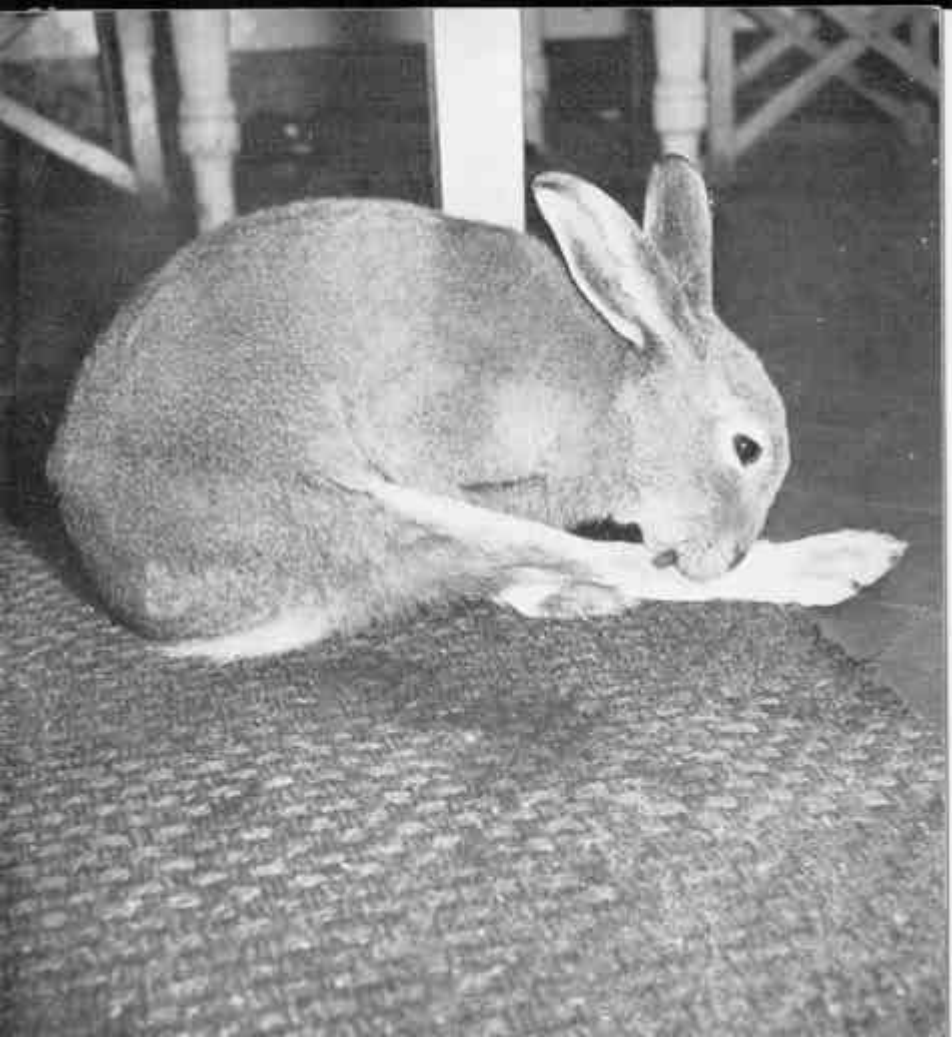
determined not to be fooled by anything or anybody. All mysteries have simple explanations if one delves deep enough, I thought, so why not try the simple process of elimination? I did, and by this means I picked on the brat. But he looked so innocent and quiet when I arrived that I feared my mathematical formula might be letting me down. It was impossible for a thing of that size to produce a noise like a crazy wood-

pecker drumming on a tree. Maybe, but I took him out of his box and put him in a bottom cupboard giving him his woollen scarf to sleep on. All was quiet and remained so for the rest of the night. The mystery was apparently solved—at least, in part.

The following day, bursting with curiosity, I put a large cardboard box upside down on the kitchen floor and put the little fellow on it to note his reactions. After some preliminary sniffing he became galvanized into action, sitting on his haunches and drumming away with his front paws so fast that they looked like two blurred objects. The sight of this energetic little drummer hammering away on a cardboard box was too ludicrous for words, but it is something I shall never forget. During the night he had evidently used the inside of the box as his drum. At once I tried to link this with some instinctive behaviour; was this the leveret's way of letting its mother know of its whereabouts at night so that she could come and feed it ?

Leverets at an early age disperse from the form, either through being disturbed, or, more likely, through a survival instinct—a fact that may have given rise to the belief that hares deposit their young in different places. In any case the mother has the difficult job of finding her offspring in the darkness. The drumming could be quite effective if carried out on hard or hollow ground, a fallen dead branch, or a hollow tree.

Whatever the impelling force we turned it into our own advantage, for Horrie was induced to treat us to a drumming performance every evening. He got the best results from a cardboard box, the lid of which consisted of two flaps; he would sit on one and hammer away at the other, which, being loose, gave a remarkably loud hollow sound. After a while if he came across anything hollow, or which would produce a hollow sound, his reaction was the same, be it shoes, rubber-foam cushions, hot-water bottles, empty trunks, or sheets of



This is a long job

brown paper. These and many other things were all used as drums by Horrie when he was in the mood. Like all the best drummers, the sound he produced seemed to spur him on to greater enthusiasm until in his frenzy he resembled a mechanical toy more than a leveret a few days old.

At this early age he had the remarkable habit of suddenly

springing upwards from a standing position without warning—a sort of involuntary bounce as if a spring had been released. Up he would go with legs stiffened and immediately resume whatever he was doing beforehand. At intervals single or double bounces would take place for no apparent reason. They had the appearance of being the beginning of a gambol that suddenly misfired, but were no linked in any way with his playful running and skipping. Could this again be some instinctive reaction to let the parents know of his whereabouts? Whatever the reason, it disappeared with babyhood.



A YOUNG hare is a bundle of nerves and regards every strange noise as potential danger, and Horrie soon knew our voices from any other and if a stranger entered the kitchen he bolted into the cupboard until he had gone.

To house-train him we provided him with a metal roasting-pan sprinkled with sand and this was kept in one corner of the cupboard floor. He took to this like a cat and never fouled the kitchen at all. In any case a hare's droppings, like those of rabbits, are comparatively clean, and they are in no way offensive animals.

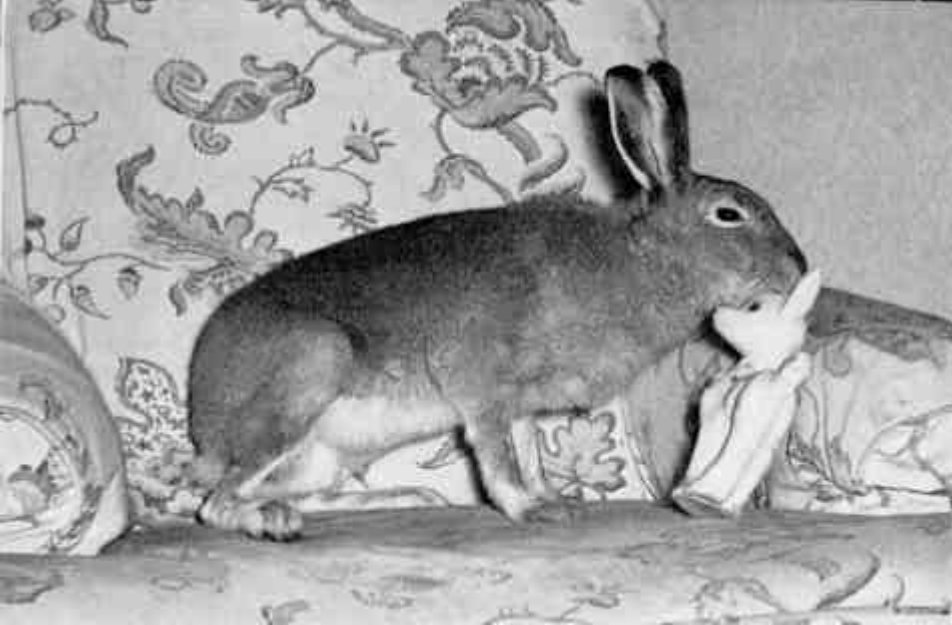
From the start Horrie spent much time cleaning himself, and it was delightful to see a baby only a few days old so concerned about his toilet. Sitting up in squirrel-like fashion he would wash his face with both hands, first licking them, then drawing them over his head, face and ears, and combing his body with his incisors.

After eight days he learnt to drink his milk from a shallow dish, this saving us a lot of trouble as we had previously fed him every two hours till late in the night. Three days later he started to eat dandelion and cauliflower leaves, but his milk drinking has persisted to this day.



Who's there ?

When Horrie was only sixteen days old there was another incident which led to a further addition to the family. One morning the lad looking after the Zoo's stock of domestic rabbits arrived at the house carrying one of a litter that he had rescued. The mother, a large white rabbit, had eaten the rest of her offspring and was about to devour this one. In spite of



I feel hungry, but this tastes funny to me.

its appearance my wife took pity on it and took it in. It was naked, blind ugly—looking more like the tiny embryo of a bull terrier than a young rabbit. To make it more comical it walked like a dog instead of hopping. By comparison with the beautiful wide-eyed, alert fluffy little leveret, this was one of nature's monstrosities. However it was interesting to see the difference between the young of two rodents of somewhat similar size, the one born above the ground—perfectly developed—and the one normally born in a burrow—blind and helpless—and in our kitchen bumping into everything as it walked along.

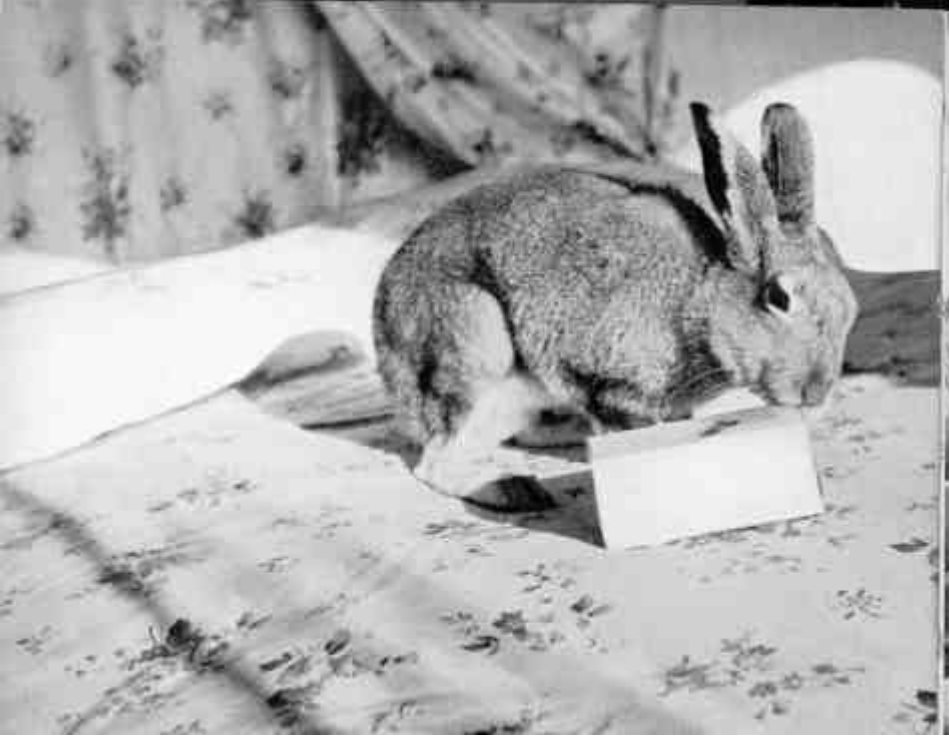
When Horrie's donor arrived to tea one day, she was quite aghast when she saw my wife hand-feeding the new arrival. She could only exclaim, "Oh no, how could you?" But my wife had different ideas; ugly or not ugly its life had to be saved, and after all the 'ugly duckling' might develop into a 'beautiful swan'. For a while he was called Harvey, but as I



At last my toast and butter!

greeted him so often with the remark, "poor little squirt", his name henceforth became Squirt.

After first Horrie regarded this strange object with complete indifference, and even when it staggered blindly quite close to him on the kitchen floor, he entirely ignored it.



Is this all I get for my birthday?

It is in Squirt's favour that even while still blind he never once wet his bed but always waited to be lifted out of his box into the sand-tray, and also made gallant attempts to wash himself. He quickly grew fur and after twelve days his eyes opened and from then on, Horrie, although very much a babe himself, took on the role of guardian to his comparatively backward companion, washing him from head to foot and apparently worried if Squirt was not looking as immaculate as himself. The attachment grew and grew and they became inseparable companions to a degree rarely seen in animals of any kind. My wife had one slight disappointment—when Squirt's eyes opened she found they were pink.



The birdwatcher

As expected, he never drummed like Horrie, this apparently being the speciality of the leveret, but at quite an early age he thumped the ground with his back feet when frightened—a well-known habit of rabbits to warn their kind of impending danger.

Although our kitchen is an admirable place for rearing baby animals, it is hardly suitable as a permanent home for them. We had to think of fresh air, exercise, sunshine and rain, so that they would grow into sturdy healthy creatures. With this in view, I constructed a spacious run linking up with a large wood-shed for shelter. In the run a gate connected with the backyard which is fenced in and contains the wood-shed. Here the boys could skip and play, sunbathe, and sit in the rain,



I must tell Squirt

which Horrie in particular loves to do. Much as the two were attached to their cupboard home, it was our painful duty to remove them to their more spacious quarters.

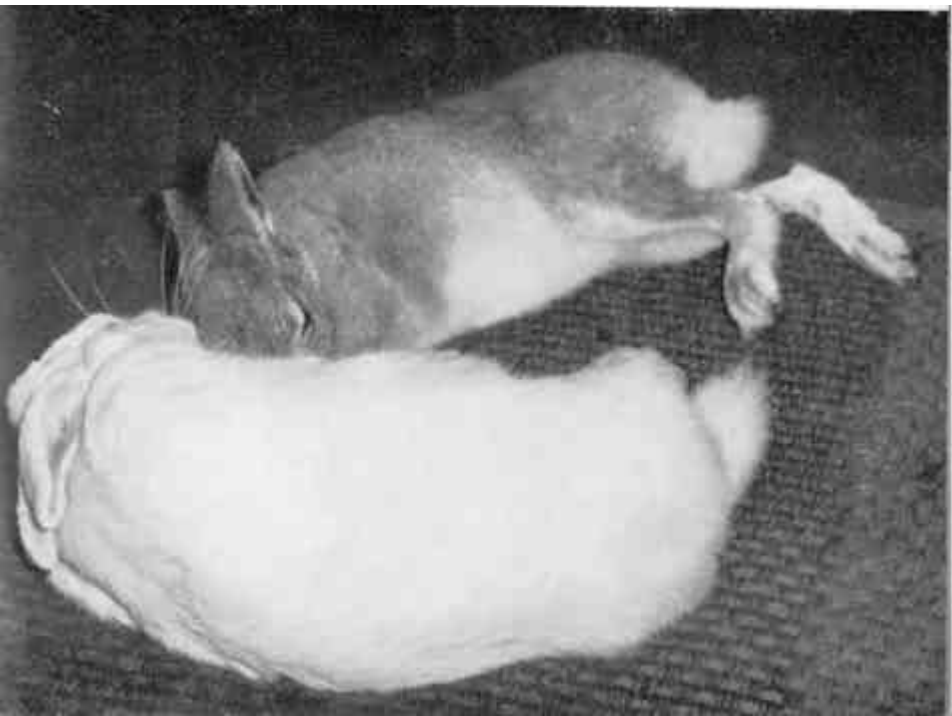
In Ireland hares are often found on islands in wide rivers and loughs and have even been seen swimming in the sea, which indicates that not only do they swim well but have no fear or dislike whatever of water. Perhaps

that is why Horrie seems to like getting soaked to the skin.

The 'boys' were perfectly happy in their new abode especially as we allowed them in the house every morning at breakfast time and again in the evening. Often we heard Horrie in his play-pen drumming away merrily on a cardboard box provided for the purpose. The sound carried right through to the rooms on the far side of the house even when all doors and windows were shut.

His boundless energy and inquisitiveness—the insatiable desire to know what was on the other side of every door, window, fence or barrier of any sort—led him to escape several times. Once he made his exit through the kitchen window by first jumping on to a chair, then a table, and finally on to the window-sill. A drop of four feet on the other side meant nothing to this adventuresome elf. Unfortunately his spirit of exploration was such that when he got through our garden

. . . Pals



hedge into the Zoo grounds, he ran aimlessly in any direction. Sometimes visitors of the Gardens would join in the chase and help us drive him through the front gate and back through the front door of the house to safety.

In contrast to this Squirt was quite placid—content to sit on any rug in front of a fire with no desire to know what was at the back of beyond or even in the next room.

Living mainly in the yard gave Horrie an opportunity to learn the meaning of certain noises. Occasionally a rat would take up residence in the wood-pile and creep out at night making rustling noises which put Horrie very much on his guard—in fact he seemed terrified on one occasion when a very large male appeared. I quickly caught this rat but he would no longer go near the wood-shed. This meant changing the sleeping quarters and attaching the pen to another shed in the yard where there was no wood-pile to attract the occasional rat. One could hardly blame him for his fears; he was tiny and how was he to know the difference, at that age, between a rat and a stoat? Certain noises in the house used to worry both of them at first, particularly the rustling of a newspaper or the 'singing' of a kettle. But louder noises such as the clatter of a saucepan lid dropping on a tiled floor a few inches from their heads was never associated with danger. In this respect it is amazing how hares, all over Europe (including Ireland), have learnt that airfields are safe places to live on in spite of planes roaring past only a few yards away. The barking of a dog or a strange human voice puts Horrie on the alert at once, yet these same noises from our wireless set leave him quite unperturbed.

When Horrie was still a babe my wife took him out one bright afternoon and put him in a garden frame, partly to give him some sunshine and partly to see if he would nibble at some young lettuces growing there; but his choice fell



I wonder if that would break!

on mother earth which he swallowed in quantity. As he grew he developed some extraordinary tastes, and had I been asked at that period what a young captive Irish hare required in the way of food I should have been compelled to say grapefruit; hot buttered toast with marmalade; potato mashed with butter, pepper and salt, and served hot; sponge cake; corn-flakes; cream crackers; fibre mats; net curtains; wall-plaster; coke

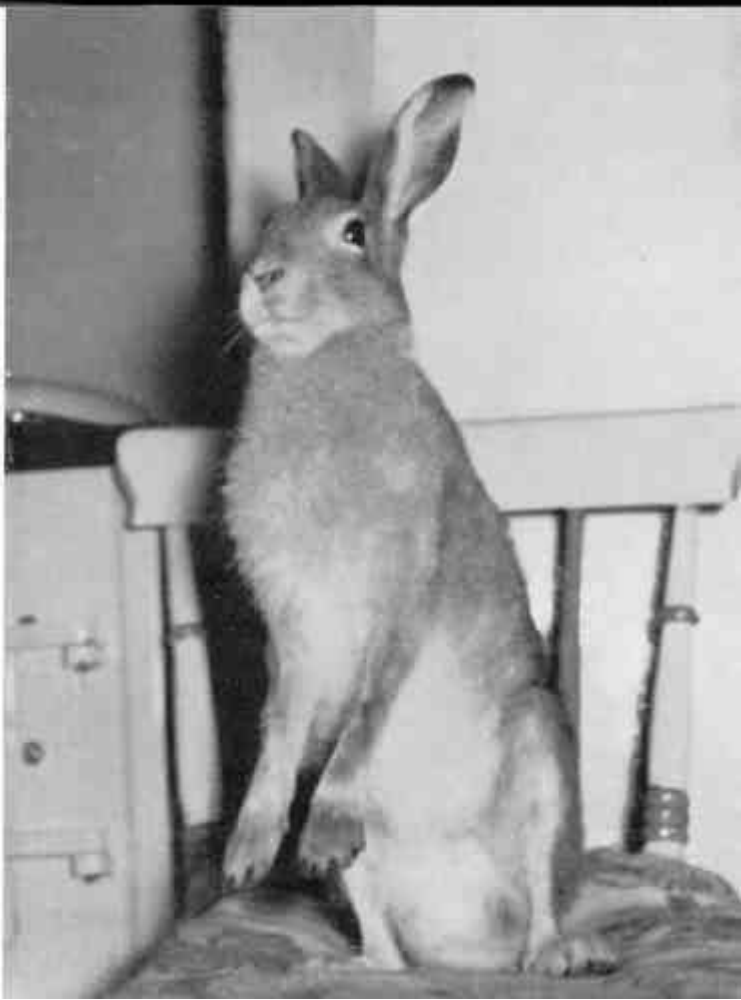
and ashes—all of this being supplemented with dandelion leaves and diluted milk.

Some people maintain that it is not easy to distinguish between good margarine and butter, but Horrie is never deceived. His nose tells which is which and he will have nothing to do with toast or mashed potato if margarine is substituted for butter.

Cleanliness is very important in maintaining hares and rabbits in good health, particularly the former, and food should never be allowed to go stale or be thrown on a soiled patch of ground. Hares need a certain amount of roughage or they may get bowel trouble. If the droppings are small and too dry, wild rose hips are an excellent cure and Horrie adores them; also good medicinally are dried onion tops. For roughage I give leafy branches of hawthorn, willow, elm and bamboo, etc., and not only are the leaves devoured but most of the twigs. In winter evergreen, oak and bamboo serve the purpose.

As Horrie grew he became a great connoisseur of apples preferring the most expensive dessert varieties. In fact his sense of smell is such that he could easily become an expert apple grader. One sniff at any choice Pippin is sufficient for him to know it from an inferior apple and his immediate reaction is to take a bite at it, but an apple of A₂ quality is sniffed for several seconds before he decides to eat it. If hungry he will condescend to eat a Bramley but only after sniffing it for a while and rolling it over a few times. An ordinary sour cooker he sniffs once and then turns away. When he is lucky enough to be given a first-class dessert apple, he shows his appreciation by devouring the lot—fruit, skin, core, pips and stalk.

In the house he prefers to eat in comfort on the mat in front of the kitchen stove, so if an apple is put on the tiled floor, he sinks his incisors into it and carries it to his favourite



Portrait of a gentleman

spot. Once I offered him an apple so large that he had difficulty in carrying it, and it dropped and rolled. This gave him an idea for a game; he picked it up and intentionally dropped it again without attempting to take it to the mat. After a few times he learnt that by flicking his head as he dropped the apple it would roll further, as so the game went on with Horrie chasing it all round the kitchen floor.



If I lick him he may lick me

SINCE the advent of Horrie and Squirt our own habits have changed considerably. Although we have a very pleasant living-room with every comfort, and a nice library, we spend most of our free evenings in the kitchen with the 'boys'. They can always be relied upon to do something amusing and interesting and whatever we have done to brighten their young lives, has been more than offset by the entertainment they have given us.

At breakfast time Horrie demands his piece of toast with butter and marmalade by begging, not like a dog, but like a performing bear; he stands bolt upright on his toes prancing to keep his balance, with his nostrils uppermost sniffing the air for the tit-bit.

Hares, like dogs, live in a world of smells and Horrie's sensitive nostrils have got him into trouble on more than one



Oat-time

occasion. I had been stripping the leaves from a bundle of dried mint plants for storage, and later picked up Horrie for a few minutes petting. But almost immediately he was seized with a violent fit of sneezing which continued for some minutes after I had put him down. He was in such distress that he sat up like a squirrel rubbing his hands over his poor nostrils as if to bring relief. The cause must have been an irritant powder from the mint leaves or the pollen from the dried flowers, which had adhered to my clothing. Later when I stood near him, without picking him up, he had a renewed attack. The only remedy I thought, was to change my clothes which I did, but about a week later I donned the same old garments without thinking of any possible consequences to Horrie, and he immediately had another sneezing fit as soon as I touched him. All further trouble

was avoided by sending the clothes to the cleaners.

Some months later he developed the same condition again for no apparent reason and it became chronic. This was very worrying, for the poor little chap suffered repeated distressing attacks. I removed a large bed of hay from the shed and substituted peat as I thought that dust and pollen might be the cause, but there was no improvement. Horrie had taken a great liking to whole oats and was in excellent condition a few weeks after these had been added to his diet. I examined the sack that had been recently opened and found that this fresh sample smelt slightly musty and contained a considerable amount of dust. From then on I washed the oats and dried them on the kitchen stove, and Horrie's condition slowly improved and after about a fortnight he completely recovered. Naturally great care has since been taken over his oats.

Nose trouble of a different kind afflicted him temporarily when he was young and inexperienced. A dopey wasp was crawling along the kitchen and with his usual curiosity Horrie had to sniff it and was badly stung on the nose. The poor fellow was in trouble again and, as before, he sat up rubbing his face with both hands. Squirt sensed immediately that something was amiss and ran to Horrie's aid licking his nose vigorously. It was extraordinary the way he sat quite still although in obvious pain while this was going on, evidently realizing that Squirt was doing him some good. I looked for the sting afterwards but could not find it, so it is possible that Squirt had removed it. Poor little Horrie looked so pathetic with his swollen nose, but we had already found that the offer of a piece of sponge cake was a wonderful palliative for all ills. This, and milk, were his sole sustenance for the next twenty-four hours as he refused to touch anything else.

On another occasion Squirt took on the role of nurse when Horrie cut his nose on a wire-netting fence through being too

persistent in getting to the other side. A small piece of skin and fur was removed from about half-way up his muzzle, and Squirt spent much time licking it to keep it clean and it soon healed perfectly.

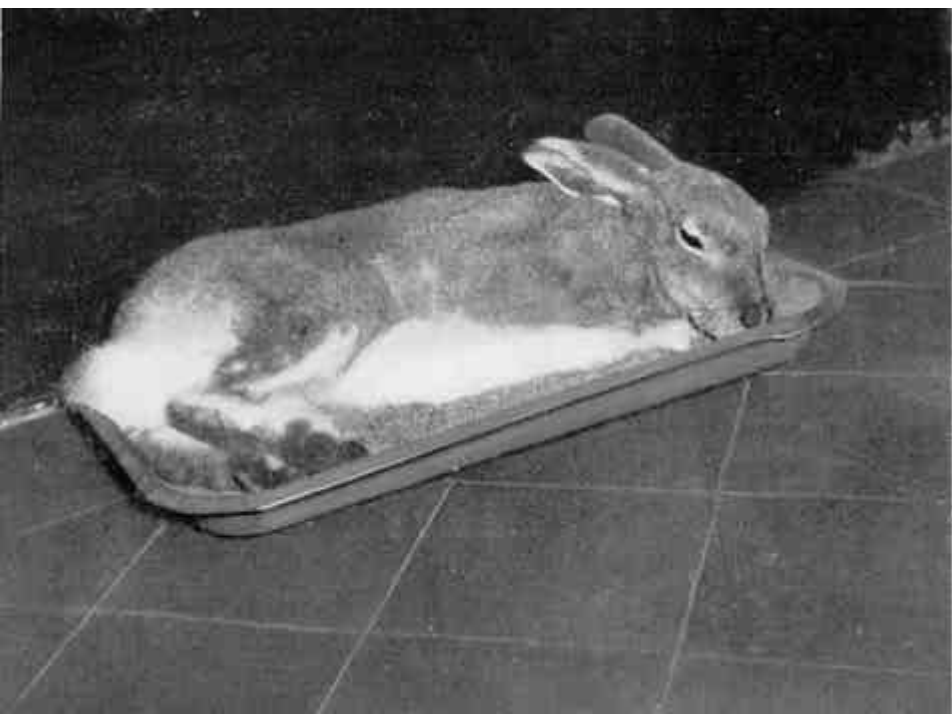
Squirt has always loved his stomach and in growing up he has become fatter and fatter. In his own way he is a great character always reminding on of a fat clown in a circus. His present weight is seven pounds as against Horrie's six.

Coming from a long line of domestic stock Squirt is not a highly stung creature, and is not worried by tradesman or other strangers. It is remarkable that from a babe he has always been completely house-trained no matter for how long a stretch he has been indoors at the time. When the urge is too great he simply runs to the back door and waits, letting us know he wants to get out. He is full of fun but has none of Horrie's devilment and love getting into mischief. Undoubtedly Squirt's most extraordinary trait is his undying devotion to Horrie. This is something so deep that it almost amounts to worship. Whenever Horrie decides to rest he will go up to him, often rolling over on his side or even on his back, and rest his head against Horrie's and stay there in perfect bliss till Horrie moves. However, much of his attachment centres round the important business of toilet. Most people have seen monkeys in a Zoo going through one another's hair, and picking out small pieces of dried skin. The one being worked on invariably appears to be in raptures, and Squirt wears the same benign expression when his hero condescends to clean him. I say condescends, but Squirt has evolved quite a cunning technique in feigning helplessness. His usual method is to creep along the floor and push his head between Horrie's front legs—an act that usually evokes sympathy and sets the latter off combing Squirt's long fluffy coat. At other times he waits till Horrie is cleaning himself, then crawls right under him



Bliss!

Ready for roasting?



getting so much in the way that Horrie stops licking himself and bestows a few licks on Squirt. Again when Horrie is resting Squirt will lick his (Horrie's) face and ears with great vigour, but this is merely a sprat to catch a mackerel.

At times Squirt's over persistence in being cleaned gets beyond the of limit Horrie's endurance and he retaliates by pulling a bunch of fur from the top of Squirt's head. This has affected the growth of the hair in this region, and poor Squirt now has a 'crew' cut—enabling us to boast that we have the only crested rabbit in captivity.

He is a sensitive fellow and if talked about by name invariably licks his paws in acute embarrassment.

The business of sharing food is most comical. There is much friendly rivalry with no malice, the competition apparently stimulating their appetites. One of the funniest sights is when they are sharing the same piece of bread. First one gets it and holds his nose close to it while emptying his mouth, but by this time the other fellow is ready for a bite so he pushes his rivals head away and takes charge of the bread. This goes on alternately and smoothly until the piece becomes so small that they have to steal it from one another's mouths. The final act is of the one not in possession turning his head sideways and sticking his teeth almost in the other's mouth—an action if photographed might reasonably be captioned: "Hare kisses rabbit good night!"

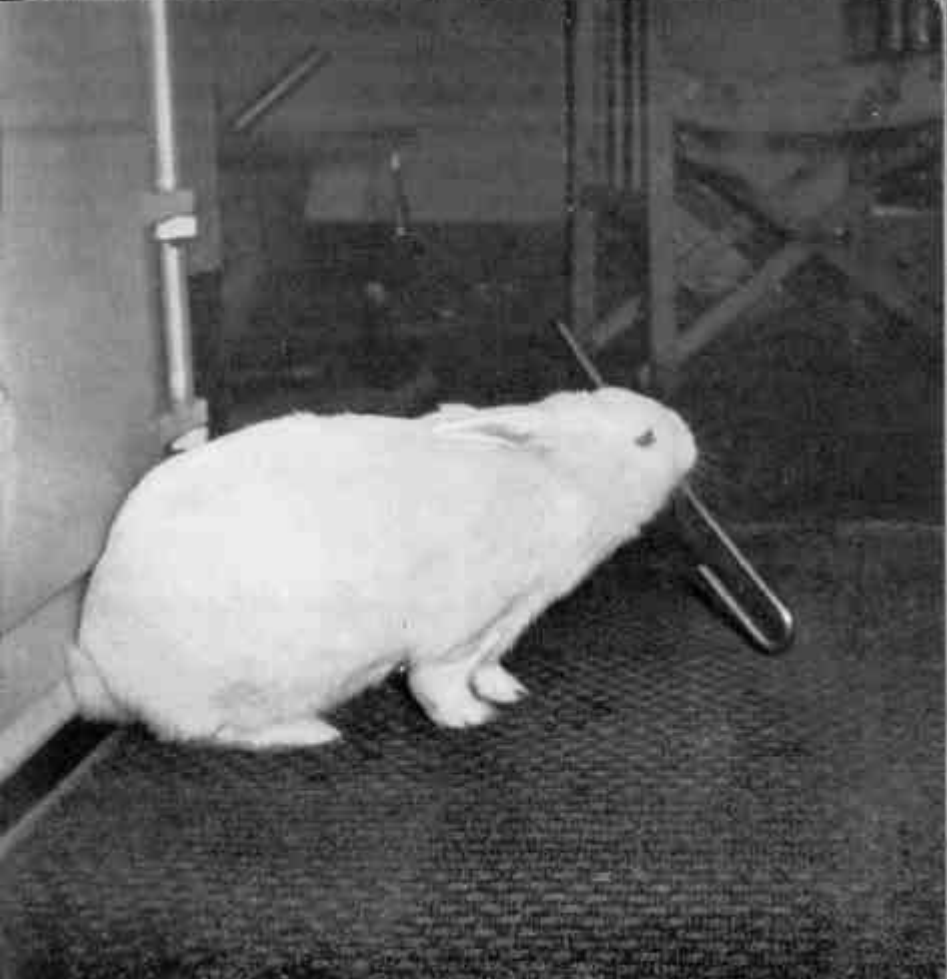
Horrie's fame was beginning to spread far and wide, with some amusing repercussions. On being introduced to people at parties, the opening remark of: "Oh, are you from the Zoo?" often became: "Oh, are you the people who keep a tame hare?" It is surprising the number of young visitors to the Zoo who, lions and tigers forgotten, pester their parents to ask permission to see Horace the Hare.

His fame may be gauged by the happenings on his first

birthday. On 27th February, 1954, six birthday cards and a telegram from England, arrived for Horrie. This, incidentally, is a total I have never reached myself! The occasion was a great one and something fitting had to be done about it. The first essential was a sponge cake suitably iced and bearing a single candle. The great day started off quietly enough, but when I came home for the birthday tea I found the house full of admirers—mostly female—bent on giving the wee fellow a rousing reception. The tea got under way, the candle was duly lit and it fell to me to bring in Horrie in my arms. At this juncture the whole assembly—normally quite sane people—rose and sang: „Happy birthday to you“. He showed obvious signs of embarrassment and by the look on his face might even have been thinking that the legend that all hares are mad should have included humans.

At this stage Horrie seemed not quite full grown but had lost much of his earlier restlessness. He was also learning to tolerate visitors, but not complete strangers. His bugbear was small boys in big boots. One such—a yard-boy—had thoroughly scared him by catching him when he was a tiny tot and he had never forgotten it. To this day any similar boy frightens the life out of him. On the other hand his affection for me has grown and grown.

Soon after Horrie's first birthday the yard-boy left the back gate ajar with the result that, as he was out of his pen, he escaped, and instead of looking for me or my wife the boy foolishly gave chase. Of course, Horrie went off like a streak through the Zoo grounds and, to make matters worse, there were quite a number of visitors in the Gardens, some of whom had already joined in the chase. Fortunately, by pure chance, I came on the scene and when it became evident what was happening I shouted to everyone to remain still. This done, I called Horrie repeatedly in the manner familiar to him and he



Who puts this poker on my mat?

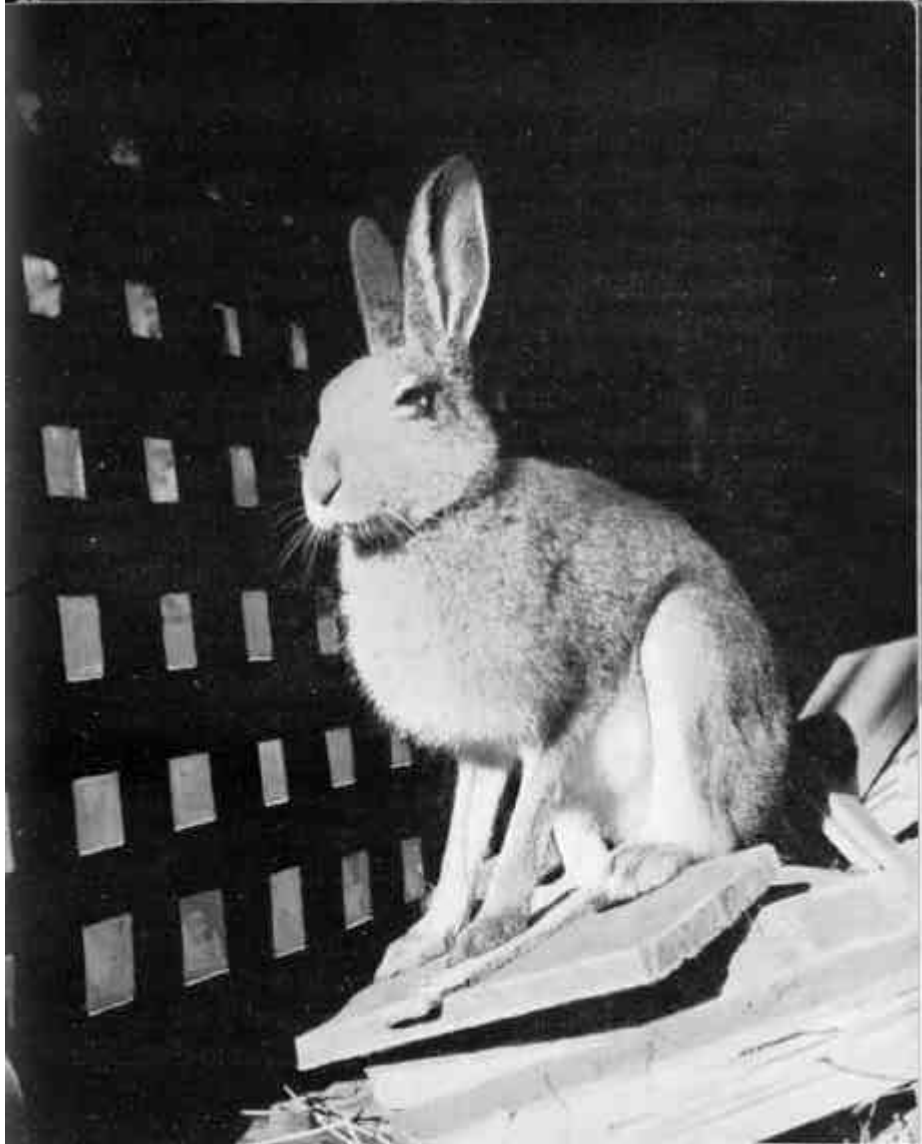
stopped instantly and listened. He was obviously torn between two conflicting emotions—the instinct to flee from danger, and the response to the acquired knowledge that my voice meant safety. Being in unfamiliar surroundings and having just been chased by one of the aforementioned folk who wear an oversize in boots, he was, no doubt, in a highly nervous state and it says much for his devotion to me that he chose to

stop in his tracks and come loping back. This was all the more remarkable in that his late pursuers were standing not far behind me. I continued to call and as he approached me he described a couple of diminishing circles round me, ever getting closer, till, perfectly sure of my smell, he sat at my feet, when I picked him up.

The interesting point was that although I had always called him by name, he had never learnt to come to me on command, but obviously when frightened he associated my call strongly with safety.

About five months later on a calm summer evening, I was walking through the Zoo with my wife, after closing hours, when I spied a hare running along on the opposite side of the lake. As we had previously seen a wild hare that had taken up residence in the Gardens we took no notice of this. It should be explained that the Dublin Zoo is in one corner of Phoenix Park which has a circumference of seven miles and any small mammal can easily pass from there through the Zoo boundary railings.

As we neared home, with the hare still in sight across the lake, we began to wonder if it might not be Horrie after all. If so, he would soon be through the railings into Phoenix Park and there, in all probability, he would be lost as it is a favourite place for people to exercise their dogs. To our consternation, on reaching the house, we found that not only was the back door open which allowed Horrie in, but the front door had not been properly fastened and had blown open and this had given him access to the front garden, thence to the Zoo. I tore round the opposite end of the lake to head him off and found him near the boundary fence. When about eighty yards away I shouted: "Horrie Boy, Horrie Boy," and once again he came loping towards me. Fortunately this time he had not been chased and there were no strangers to disturb



Show me the way to go home !

his peace of mind. He came unhurriedly, straight towards me, and as on the previous occasion made a couple of circles round me before squatting right at my feet.

THE toilet of animals is an important business and many have special adaptations for this. For instance the lemurs have their lower incisors and canines grouped together like a comb and they project horizontally. Their sole function is for toilet purposes. A further toilet arrangement is the development of a claw on the second toe of each foot, in place of the flat nails on all the other toes and fingers.

Judging by the time Horrie spends in doing his own toilet, hares must be about the most fastidious of all animals. He works systematically, using his feet, tongue and teeth. As a rule he commences with his ears, first pulling down one with a front paw. This remains so while he gently combs downwards with this thumb or toilet claw which is placed high up on the foot. The whole action reminds one irresistibly of a woman combing her long tresses. With his head held low he then holds the ear down to touch the ground and then licks the inner surface near the tip. When face-washing he sits up like a squirrel licking each front paw in turn and rubbing it over his head. His coat is groomed by the combined action of licking with his tongue and combing with his teeth, special attention being paid to any part where the hairs are bunched together or knotted, and then a great deal of tugging takes place. To get to the back of his neck he uses one of his long hind legs after first licking the paw. The disproportionate length of the hind leg of the hare makes this action look decidedly comical, but even more so is his effort to clean right inside his ears with a back paw.

Some of Horrie's toilet attitudes are unbelievably graceful reminding one at times of a ballet girl and at others of a fawn. Some again are quite like those contortionist, and not the smallest portion of his coat is missed. Even the hairy soles of his feet come in for much tugging to get rid of any foreign matter. To clean his hind feet, one leg at the time is thrust

forward till it sticks well in front of his head; he then bends forward while spreading the foot like a great hand, and cleans between the toes. The knees are attended to by holding a hind leg vertically with the whole of his foot well above his head in most ludicrous fashion.

Squirt washes as little as possible and leaves his toilet mainly to Horrie.

Quite early in life Horrie developed a fairly rigid daily routine. My first duty, on rising, is to make the early morning cup of tea, and while doing so let the 'boys' out of their pen into the yard where I give them their customary ration of bread. This event is waited for eagerly, for although they have a large pen and hut to play and sleep in, they love the run of the whole yard as well; in addition, this gives them access to the back door of the house with the possibility of a sleep on a comfortable mat and all kind of tit-bits. Horrie has learnt all about the time lag between my first and second appearance in the morning; I have first to drink my tea (upstairs) and wash, shave and dress. On my second descent to the kitchen he knows that I am down for good and that I will be able to pay some attention to him. After this he detects the slightest sound in the kitchen, be it the rattle of a kettle lid, or the tipping of coal on the fire, and then he drums on the door to be let in. I think he learnt this trick by accident when he was quite young. His first performance may have been in fun or to see if he could push the door open, but anyway when I heard it I let him in, and this single experience was sufficient for him to know that if he wanted to come into the house, all he had to do was to knock, and he has been knocking ever since.

There are sixteen doors in our house and, at one time or another, he had drummed on all of them so that he can be let in to explore the different rooms, but the curious thing is,



How long does it take for this thing to heat up ?

that he knows which way each door swings—he never knocks at the hinged end but always where it opens. Whether he is guided by the handle, or whether it is his memory I am not certain but I would say the latter.

Horrie's resting attitudes have always been most interesting to us. In one, which we call the 'broody hen' attitude, he seems to be transformed into a different creature; his front legs are tucked under the body (done with a curious flick) and his face appears to be puffed, giving him an owlish



I hope every hair is now in place

expression. As a babe he had a pale fawn-coloured horizontal streak across the face which had the effect of breaking it up and creating the perfect camouflage. Looking at him at close quarters sitting in a shadow on the rug it was difficult to make out any definite shape at all. If anything he resembled some queer bird and it can be well imagined that if he were sitting in his natural form instead of on a bare surface, he would have been well-nigh invisible.

The early morning is playtime for Horrie and he loves a romp before going to sleep, which he does for a good part of the day. His playground, for reasons which I cannot explain, is any part of the house other than the kitchen; in the latter he loves to eat, drink and wash, but never play. I think it is because Squirt is kitchen-bound and never voluntarily goes further afield, and so Horrie has come to regard the rest of the

house as a private territory. On a few occasions when we have carried Squirt into the dining room, Horrie has refused to play.

His playtime act is a sight for the gods, especially when he is in a skittish mood. The dining room is large (twenty-eight by nineteen feet), and has a thick red carpet which means that Horrie can get up speed and corner abruptly without skidding. To get him really excited it is best to chase him clapping one's hands, and then he tears off leaping and twisting in the air and zig-zagging at great speed. Sometimes I have seen him go flat out round and round the long table like a greyhound on a track, until I became quite dizzy watching him. Much as he likes the dining-room to skip and race in, he is, perhaps, happiest when he is free to roam the house. This gives him real scope for his playfulness and obviously gives him immense satisfaction, for when it is over he is no longer restless—he asks for nothing more than sleep. He leaves tearing up and down stairs, going up two at a time with a most beautiful action. Once on the upper landing the urge to dance is irresistible. In fact one might be excused for saying that he becomes a trifle mad. A stranger would definitely think so if he suddenly saw a hare streak out of a bedroom, leap into the air, disappear into another room, spring on and off all the beds, shoot out again and corner so fast that he rolled over his back, then tear down the stairs and skid along the polished floor in the hall, kicking rugs in all directions.

In January 1955 I was lying in bed with a serious illness, and felt about as low as possible. To take my mind off pain I tried to put Horrie's playtime act to verse. I cannot aspire to the heights of William Cowper in his lyrical writings about his hare, and a cynic, on reading these lines, might say with justification, that I must have been *very* ill when they were composed. My defence is that I certainly *was*—hence no apologies.

Horrie Boy, Horrie Boy, loping through the hall,
Rather cautiously mat first in case he has a fall,
The lino's were slippery and not the place for hares,
But now he's on a nice thick rug abutting on the stairs,
Up he goes just like a fawn—two stairs at a time,
Never could one see such grace or such speedy climb.
Twisting sharply at the bend he takes the second flight
Arriving on the landing-place as perky as a sprite.
He comes to think this place is his, reserved for him to
prance
And like a flash the game is on, watch a mad hare
dance.
Rugs and carpets, beds and chairs, and obstacles galore
Oh what fun for a skipping hare bounding across the
floor.
Leap twist, leap twist, now dancing on a bed,
Off he flies from room to room, tossing his pretty head.
A mighty leap with ears aflying, twisting in mid-air
A corkscrew run at dazzling speed, then up and over a
chair.
Then down the stairs he goes so fast he skids along the
hall
Falling over his back, rugs kicked against the wall.
Up he goes to dance again till all his zest has gone
Then down he joins his pal, and rest—another day is
done.

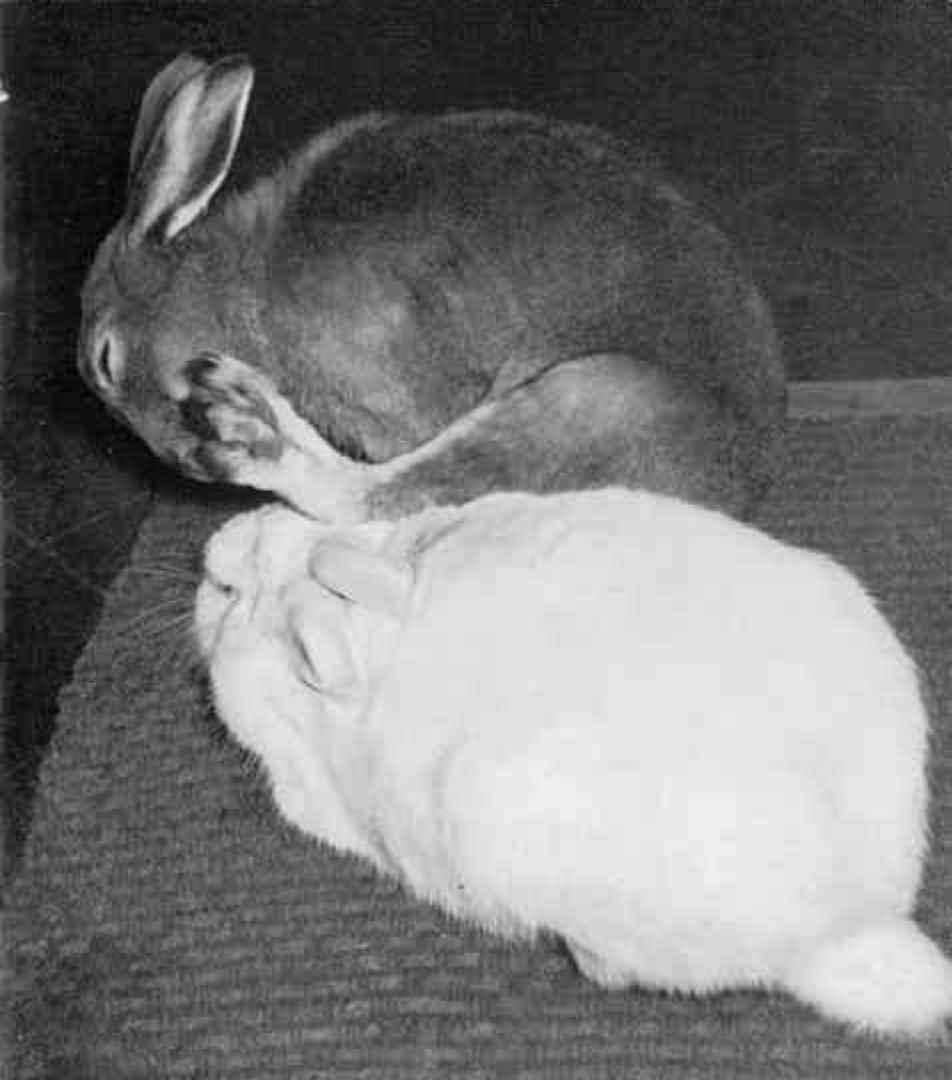
Often, when we are having breakfast, we hear him dancing overhead; after this has gone on for some time there comes the inevitable thumpety-thump down the stairs and a final skid along the passage before joining us. Here his sensitive nose tells him that the smell of toast and marmalade is in the air, and he lets us know, in unmistakable fashion by prancing

bolt upright, that he must have his tit-bit before retiring to rest.

As a babe Horrie was a lovely dark grey, but later became light ginger above with white underpants. In the adult animal the normal summer pelage is reddish-brown above and white below; in winter the white extends to the legs and the upper-parts become light ginger, and the flanks and rump bluish. His ears viewed from behind, remind one of some exquisite tropical butterfly being blue with black tips, and white rimmed. This is particularly so when he is listening and moving his ears this way and that.

Allowing the 'boys' to spend their evenings in the house has enabled us to observe many interesting things that would otherwise have been lost. I wonder how many people have seen a hare, or even a rabbit, in a deep sleep, that is, completely relaxed. This is quite distinct from dozing which is usually in the sitting position and enables the animal, if disturbed, to bound off to a flying start. When Horrie is dozing, which he does by the hour, his eyes remain open but they have a distinct glassy look. He is then sleepy but still responds to sight, sound or smell.

The real sleep of both the hare and the rabbit is of great interest, and as far as our observations go, it has only taken place on the mat in the kitchen where both animals know they are safe and not liable to disturbance. One wonders if the hare can ever afford to relax, even for a brief spell, in the wild state, living as it does above the ground with such enemies as the fox around. In captivity deep sleep never lasts for more than five minutes, and even during this short spell there are usually several sudden awakenings followed immediately by further relaxation. With Horrie it starts when he is sprawled out, dog-fashion, with legs stretched out sideways. At first the head is held upright with the chin resting on the mat or his front paws. In this position he first dozes then a swaying motion



What a foot!

shows that he is passing into sleep. In a few moments the head goes over so that one side is flat on the rug, and then commences a most extraordinary twitching of the mouth and grinding of teeth, while the head is jerked backwards until it is touching,



All aboard for a ride

or nearly touching, the back. Often the leg muscles twitch also and in this state the animal has the appearance of passing through a paroxysm. After a few of these noisy jerky spasms, he will jump up completely alert and refreshed. Having watched this performance dozens of times, I am convinced that a few moments of complete relaxation means more to him than hours of dozing.

Squirt passes out in the same manner with the same violent twitchings and grinding of teeth, and on rare occasions I have seen them both out at the same time. A still-life photograph of them in this attitude would certainly be taken for two dead animals. The position of the heads held right back reveal underslung jaws and give a most unlikelike appearance.

IN captivity young mammals are trusting creatures and are usually willing to make friends with the young of almost any other warm-blooded creature, even if bearing no relationship.

An amusing instance of this was when we introduced a baby mallard to the kitchen when both Horrie and Squirt were very young. Being brought up under artificial conditions it had lost the natural oiliness in its feathers, and had become water-logged and cold. It soon recovered and during convalescence was allowed the freedom of the kitchen for exercise. This strange object was accepted into the fold by Horrie and Squirt but only after they sniffed it all over like a couple of bloodhounds.

All the very young animals introduced to our kitchen quickly find the warm end of the Aga stove, and sit on the mat pressing against it. The duckling was no exception, and before very long we found it sandwiched between Horrie and Squirt, the two latter with their hindquarters pressing on the stove for warmth.

Horrie has long since given up this unmanly habit, whereas Squirt persists winter and summer in spite of his angora-like coat. If he comes forward for some tit-bit such as a biscuit, he picks it up and then backs until his rump makes contact with the heat again, to eat his meal in comfort. He hates any object to be put on the mat within the radius that he regards as his territory, and sometimes we amuse ourselves by putting all kind of things near him to watch him push them away with his nose. A heavy object such as a poker he picks up with his teeth, carries it, and heaves it clear of the mat and then backs to his spot looking very indignant.

Although playful, Squirt has a definite temper and one cannot go too far in playing practical jokes with him. He also dislikes being taken from his sleeping-quarters and being picked up when not in the mood. When angry he resents any atten-

tion and will do anything to evade capture. Horrie on the other hand, is always sweet-natured and although determined to have his own way, such as when beating me for milk or food, or drumming on a door to be let out, he never gets annoyed if frustrated; moreover since his restless boyhood days, he has always allowed me to pick him up under any circumstances. Latterly he nearly always comes to me when called.

Squirt's pushing and carrying are very comical when he is excavating in the pen. There he has tunnelled under two six-foot logs making a fine deep burrow which he rarely occupies. On the other hand Horrie, who never excavates himself, frequently retires below to rest taking advantage of Squirt's labours.

Squirt brings up most of the earth from below by the orthodox method of kicking it backwards. A great pile accumulates thus at the entrance hole; this he attacks by turning round and facing from within, and then splaying his front legs he pushes the mound forward, while his belly is flat on the ground, like a miniature bulldozer. Large stones are pushed out of the way with his nose. A great lump of iron was dragged up with his teeth while walking backwards, and finally his nose was brought into play to push it clear.

By the antics of Horrie and Squirt one might reasonably conclude that hares and rabbits have a definite sense of humour or, at least playfulness.

Once my wife put a very large enamel saucepan on the floor near the scullery door. Squirt was the first to pass and, of course, had to investigate. After the usual sniffing he lifted the lid with his nose and let it down with a bang. This was evidently intriguing for he tried it once more and then passed on. But the lure was too great; stopping suddenly he turned in his tracks and started lid-banging again, this time with great



Like meets Like. Author and mad Irish hare

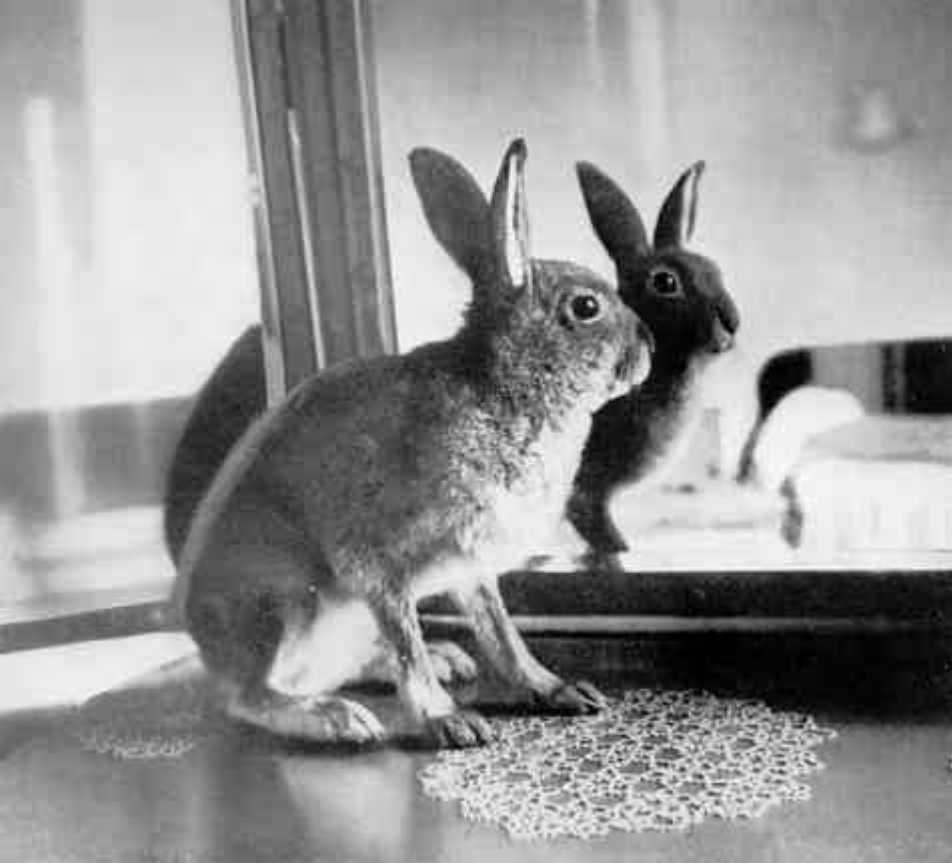
enthusiasm. Horrie was attracted by the clatter, perhaps disappointed that he had not thought of the game first, and joined in until there was quite a din. This game of playing the cymbals was carried on from time to time in another ingenious fashion. One of them discovered that by jumping on the foot-pedal of the sani-bin there was a similar clatter, and this became a sort of routine joke every time they passed it.

Horrie's sensitive nose has already been referred to. He brings this organ into play in a big way when we return from a visit to any friends who keep dogs or cats. He seems to know when we have been out, and perhaps this is because he is conscious of strange and exciting smells as we approach him. There is no escape—we have to submit to third-degree methods and allow ourselves to be sniffed from top to toe. He gets quite worked up over this business; pressing his nose on a shoe he will run it all over with the enthusiasm of a bloodhound on a trail, and even try to stick it under the instep to get at the soles. Then starts the same process on my trousers until he is standing bolt upright sniffing every article of clothing he can reach. Yet this never happens when I come daily from the Zoo—he knows all those smells, but is intrigued beyond measure by smells of dogs and cats.

Horrie has given up quite a few of the naughty pranks of his childhood and is behaving more like a well brought up little gentleman (with occasional lapses). He has always loved jumping on chairs, settees, tables and window-sills, etc., and several times I have found him on the kitchen table—a leap of two foot six inches. Once we found evidence that he had been on the Aga stove but his curiosity must have been satisfied very quickly when he contacted the covers of the hot-plates. He has learnt not to do these things in the kitchen since I screamed at him for kicking the kitchen clock flying from the window-sill. He has also given up leaping on pantry shelves and helping himself to apples, but he occasionally leaps out of the pantry window—a vertical leap of three feet—into the yard.

When he was about fifteen months old, we had some lovely Lilac Rex rabbits in the Zoo and we wondered how he would get on with a female. Hares and rabbits have never been crossed and it is probably impossible to do so. However, out

of curiosity, we decided to carry out the experiment and a handsome female was selected for him. Horrie received the damsel with his usual air of detachment, and reminded me of a camel looking across the desert. In the meantime Squirt was eyeing the intruder like a buffalo, weighing up the situation before charging. He had never before seen a rabbit so who could tell what was in his mind? We had not long to wait; he shot at her in a blind fury charging all round the pen in hot pursuit. Horrie sat serenely, like a sphinx, with his nose twitching while the chase went on—he would never be guilty of such undignified behaviour himself. To save the poor female, I had to remove Squirt, leaving her with Horrie, and Squirt in the yard where he could see the other two through the railings. As soon as he found that he was frustrated, his manner changed to one undiluted charm. He ran and skipped along the fence, backwards and forwards, inducing the female to join in the game on the opposite side. After a while they were having such a gay time together that I thought it safe to let Squirt back into the pen. The lady had now become familiar with her surroundings and was no longer the timid creature as when introduced. Without any preliminaries Squirt took a headlong rush at her, but this time she changed her technique. Skipping lightly over his head she gave a downward kick with her legs and, as she did so, caused a lump of fur to fly off his back. Squirt now had his blood up and was determined to finish the vixen off there and then, but each time he cornered her she sprang over him and gave him a pounding. There was so much white fur flying in the pen at one time that it was like watching the fight through a miniature snowstorm. This time it was Squirt who had to be rescued and to save him from further punishment we sent her back to her Zoo quarters whence she came. Squirt was very much battle-scarred but at least the potential rival had gone and he returned



Surely that's not me!

to Horrie with head bloody but unbowed, and flung himself down at his feet as if to show that he had fought for his affection.

About a month later some boys brought in a female leveret. It had evidently relied upon its protective colouration and sat perfectly still in a clump of grass, but the boys had seen it go there and had pounced on it. I reckoned it to be about six weeks old.

We thought this a wonderful opportunity to provide Horrie with an eventual bride. She was lithe and beautiful and much too tiny, so we thought, to cause Squirt any jealousy.

We called her 'Jasmine' but this was later changed to 'Mo'.

Squirt accepted her at once and turned on all his charm; he played, skipped and even rolled over on his back at her feet. No doubt the idea in the back of his head was to get this silly little hare to wash him as well as Horrie, and then the main worry of his life would be solved. She might have been young but was not quite so simple. Unlike Horrie, she had seen enough of wild life to know the difference between a rabbit and a hare so the ruse failed and Squirt's outward affection quickly changed to complete indifference. Later he tried to bully her, but she was so nimble that she was able to keep clear of him with the greatest of ease, and so he gave it up. Occasionally, when he is in a skittish mood, he chases her round, more I think, in fun than anything else.

Unless taken almost at birth leverets are exceedingly difficult to tame, and Mo has remained a shy nervous animal in spite of being with two tame companions. Although she sees Horrie and Squirt come into the house she rarely ventures in herself, and then even the slightest unfamiliar noise sends her out again. She is now nearly full grown and has become less nervous. It is evident that she is devoted to Horrie and often sits by his side defying Squirt, who has come to permit a certain amount of familiarity between the two, but only when he wills it. On rare occasions recently, much to our surprise, we have seen Mo sandwiched between them on their bed of hay. Who knows but that one day there may be some baby Horrie's ?

To the uninitiated all sheep look alike and I suppose the same could be said of hares, but a glance is sufficient for us to distinguish Mo from Horrie as she has a different shaped head and her face is more angular and less pretty.

★ ★ ★

ONCE when Horrie was sitting on a rug, I took hold of it and towed him round the dining-room floor. He seemed to love

this, so I got up speed and dragged him round the corners and through the doors. Several times when I took a corner too fast he lost his balance, but there was never a difficulty about coaxing him on again. To my surprise he soon learnt, when he had a spill, to chase after me and take a flying leap on to the rug while I was still running. This has become one of his favourite games and he is now quite expert at ‘sitting’ the rug no matter how much I jerk it from side to side while running or when rounding a sharp end. I hate to think what the reaction of visitors to the Gardens would be if they see the Superintendent (all six foot five of him!) charging through the house towing a hare on a rug. No wonder our newly acquired Amazon Parrot shouts: “What are you doing, what are you doing” when we pass through the kitchen.

It is surprising how quickly birds learn to differentiate between dangerous and harmless animals. The sparrows take no notice whatsoever of our trio when eating bread in the yard, in fact these birds steal a good deal of their food, but the sight of a cat would get them very agitated. A cock robin spent much of his time last winter in the shed with the animals apparently liking their company.

Recently we have noticed a half-grown rat coming into the yard at dusk to get some scraps of food. Mo took no notice of it at all, she apparently having learnt in the wild state in some way that it could do her no harm. Strangely enough, Horrie and Squirt who were formerly scared of rats are now quite indifferent—no doubt, I feel, to Mo’s influence. Greatly to my surprise I saw the rat and Mo one evening, eating the same piece of bread. In the end there was a tug-of-war which the rat won, and then scampered off into the wood-shed to devour his booty.

Mo is always on the alert when in the backyard as this is the right-of-way for tradespeople, and she is ever prepared to



Breakfast time for Bimbo—only two weeks old

dash into the shed—now called the harem—for safety. She has the extraordinary habit of carrying all her food from the yard like a rat. Whenever we throw a slice of bread or an apple from the back door, she picks it up and runs through the pen and into the shed, which is quite a distance.

Rabbits and hares are silent creatures and, once domesticated, will not complain even if injured. I have never heard Horrie make any noise other than several short low grunts, inaudible a few yards away, when I pick him up. Mo has remained silent except for two occasions when I was forced to catch her and then she let out a loud scream. Squirt has never been heard to make a sound except when in a deep sleep, and then on occasions he emits a thin high-pitched squeal.



So this is a bedroom?

Individual animals have different requirements and preferences in the way of food and drink. Horrie requires plenty of liquid, consuming nearly half a pint of milk diluted with water daily (he never drinks plain water). In the summer he requires less liquid as he then has plenty of his favourite dandelion leaves which provide much of the necessary moisture. Mo on the other hand never drinks although she took milk when she first came, and Squirt has refused to drink anything since he took to green food. However, I have seen all three eating snow, which they seem to enjoy. There is no doubt that snow excites these creatures as it does children, for they delight in digging

in it and skipping about madly. The novelty would probably wear off if the snow remained too long. Sand is also a thing that excites Horrie, and whenever his sand tray is newly filled he rolls in it kicking his legs in the air.

A little trick that he has developed lately is feigning sleep in my arms. While lying on his back with his feet in the air, he turns his head sideways and goes to sleep, relaxing completely. His head droops and his eyes close—at least so I thought at first for no matter which his side his head was held the eye uppermost was always closed. After I had proudly shown off the ‘sleeping beauty’ a few times to my wife, she suddenly exclaimed: “He is cheating!” She had spotted that the other eye, not visible to me, was wide open. Since then she has checked up many times during his sleeping act, and has found him always playing the same little joke.

Squirt has his peculiar habits and one in particular may seem funny to his distorted sense of humour, but is probably not appreciated by the hares.

Oat-time is around four o’clock and there is always a rush for the bowl with Squirt winning every time and Mo a bad third, as she waits for us to depart. When Squirt has had his fill he seizes the edge of the heavy earthenware bowl and tips it upside down, leaving the hares to grope for the scattered oats that are left uncovered.

Squirt gets very excited whenever I dump a fresh armful of hay in the shed, for not only does he like to eat it, but while it is loose and untrampled, he spends hours constructing a bower. This is like a tunnel or covered way, open only at one end, and is not made by nosing through the hay but by sitting in it and carefully arranging each piece with his mouth, like a bird building a nest. He jealously guards this and if we go near it when he is elsewhere, he gallops up and plants himself near the entrance hole, breathing defiance.

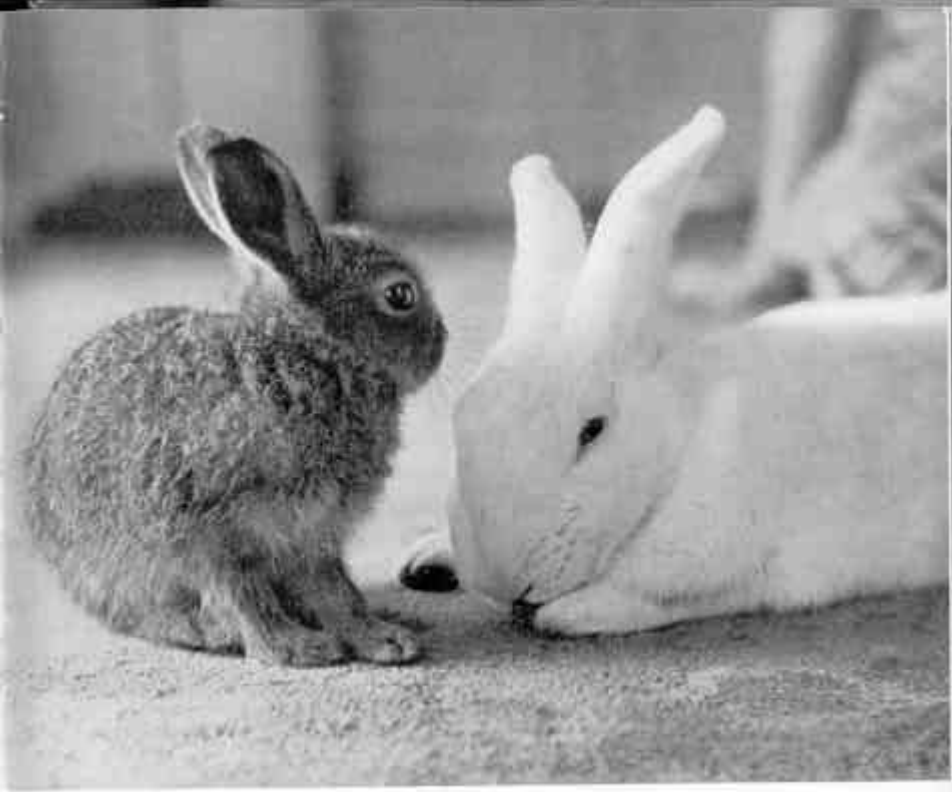


This is better than that old fountain-pen filter

Occasionally he is in occupation, but on the whole it seems that he gets most pleasure when actually constructing his work of art, though he is obviously proud of it when completed.

Horrie's latest game is one I term: "beating me up". It consists of chasing me round tables and from room to room, bounding up at me like a dog and hammering at me with his front feet. He gets really excited over this, so much so that I have to remove my shoes for fear of treading on him, so determined is he to pound me while I am running. If I pause he drums away on my legs until I dash off again with him in hot pursuit.

At bedtime I usually pick Horrie up and carry him out to



The baby sitter

his pen. Squirt well knows the significance of this, and that his turn is next, and when he hears me coming in again he hides under anything that is available, wasting as much of our time as possible while we try to dislodge him. This is just one of his tricks to make us chase him, for once ousted from his hiding place, he trots off merrily out of the house, through the yard and into the pen to join his pal.

It is not generally realized that animals are as individual as humans, and if brought up under the right conditions will develop personality and become great characters. Close acquaintance will soon teach one that although members of a certain species may have the same general behaviour, they all

develop peculiar habits of their own. It follows then that another hare and rabbit brought up under similar conditions as those pertained to Horrie and Squirt, would not behave in the same way.

I have heard of many people keeping rabbits as household pets and of them being perfectly house-trained. In some cases they pal up with dogs and cats, and I heard of one that used to sleep in bed with children. Recently a lady living near Dublin told me of a delightful pet rabbit that chases all stray cats out of the garden!

Horrie's second birthday, in February 1955, was more or less a repetition of the first except that there were a few more admirers to sing "Happy birthday", and of course the precious sponge cake bore two candles; also the number of birthday cards increased considerably. This time he showed much less apprehension when thrust among strangers though I did notice an acceleration of his heart beats as I carried him into the room. However, he delighted his admirers by eating a slice of birthday cake, and by drumming on my shoulder.

Poor Squirt's birthday (14th March) passes by unnoticed—no fuss, no party—but the little fellow seems quite content to join in the festivities in Horrie's honour and to help him demolish his cake.

My wife has always been devoted to Squirt—perhaps because my own affections have veered towards Horrie. When I am in a flippant mood I pick up a recipe book and turn to the section on cooking rabbits. "What about doing Squirt this way?" I say as my eyes falls on a French recipe—*lapin au vin blanc*—which I read out in detail. By now my wife's face has a sickly look, and she retorts that if she were starving she would never eat rabbit again—"the poor little chaps."

Then I look at Horrie Boy, once a timid little fellow responding to all his wild instincts, but now full grown and as

devoted to me as a dog. Many a time I wonder what would have happened to him if the ploughman had not picked him up. Had he survived he would have been just another hare—perhaps hanging before now in a poulterer's shop or, maybe, netted for coursing. When my thoughts run on these lines it is *my* turn to look sick.

Recently I broadcast on intelligence in animals from Radio Eirann in Dublin. The script ended thus: "In the wild state most animals and birds appear to be shy unfriendly creature—they have to be in order to survive—but in captivity when they have lost their fear of man, they endear themselves to him by their intelligent and friendly behaviour."

Having finished recording my observations on the *Hare About the House* there was a lapse of time—and time plays strange tricks, so much so that I am compelled to add a postscript to my story.

The first complication was the arrival of a baby leveret, the image of Horrie in his childhood. This was found by a boy near the cricket field in Phoenix Park, and brought to us.

'Bimbo' as the new arrival is called, is an independent little fellow, full of intelligence, timid, and inquisitive. He has the same urge to drum that Horrie possessed so strongly in babyhood, which incidentally, diminished considerably once he had passed the leveret stage.

After being fed for a few days with the aid of a fountain-pen filler, Bimbo learnt to lap from a basin and to eat bread and milk, and to nibble at green food. His rate of growth is quite amazing.

For the first week he was confined to the kitchen, using the cupboard as his funk-hole and sleeping quarters as his predecessors had done. Fortunately Squirt, who was brought in every evening to baby-sit, adores the new arrival and spreads

himself out like a broody hen whenever he is around, enticing him to lick or be licked. Bimbo's favourite pastime is leaping over Squirt's back, but he has developed the less pleasing habit of chewing off, and eating, poor Squirt's whiskers—a sure indication of his desire for roughage. In this respect our kitchen mat is by no means what it was, its fibres having provided numerous meals for various animals brought up to it!

After a week of kitchen life, Bimbo was transferred to a special pen in a shed in the yard, with Squirt as his companion.

Just prior to this a great change came over Mo; she became tamer and bolder and even attacked Squirt when the latter tried his bullying tactics, beating him furiously with her front paws.

From this behaviour we deduced that she was about to have young, for just over a month before she and Horrie were having an obvious courtship. I have stated previously that Horrie and Mo were almost totally silent but during the courtship period both were heard to let out an occasional short bleating note much like the noise of a rubber balloon deflating.

The prospect of Horrie becoming a father was exciting, for there must be few records (if any) of breeding Irish Hares in captivity. This may be because they are more highly strung than the European Hare. As a precaution against accidents this was another reason we decided to put Squirt and Bimbo in another pen leaving the grown-up hares to themselves. However, both Squirt and Horrie are allowed in the house in the early morning and evening, partly to allow Horrie to romp but also to give Squirt an opportunity to worship his hero.

As night was falling on 18th June (two days after the separation), we saw a tiny object following Mo and which to our great delight proved to be a newly born leveret. We



...and please make me a good boy

gathered that it must have been born down the hole (excavated by Squirt), under the large logs. The following morning there was nothing to be seen but that night a second leveret appeared—so dear Horrie was the father of twins.

They are a delightful pair but at present are very nocturnal, spending the entire day under the logs with Mo; though she

often comes out and sits near Horrie. It is noticeable that since she has become a mother she has developed a ravenous appetite. The babes are reasonably tame, having been accustomed to human sounds from birth, and are delightful to watch in the evening as they play or sit together and often lick one another. Strangely enough, Mo seems to show no interest at all in them except when they are actually feeding. The babes commenced nibbling green food only a few days after birth. One has a small white star on it forehead like Horrie, and the other is without, like Mo. My wife insist on calling them Castor and Pollux, the Heavenly Twins.

Hares are independent creatures so it was only natural that Horrie should show an air of indifference to his offspring. However, I suspect that he is proud in his own peculiar way, for since he has become a father he has shown little desire to be let out of his pen.

Thus our innocent beginning with one hare has so far progressed to five. This seems to be developing into an impossible situation, but somehow it appeals to my warped sense of humour. Perhaps I am becoming hare-brained !

According to my dictionary the group term for hares is 'down'. A down of hares went up the stairs; what a wonderful thought, or is it crazy ?

If anyone is now foolish enough to be tempted to own a pet hare, my advice is—"don't", unless you are prepared to say farewell to freedom !

L A T E N E W S

WHILE reading the galley proofs of this book the publishers kindly permitted me to add one more item of news, which is the last straw, so to speak. (And we have also squeezed in one more photograph.)

On the 5th of August, 1955, seven weeks after her twins were



Dear reader, this is the end !

born, Mo escaped and may have been frightened by a stray cat for she could not be traced. An hour later, to our consternation, we found three newly born leverets in her pen and these my wife was compelled to hand-rear in the house.

Their progress in growth and behaviour has been remarkable. At four days they were following my wife round the kitchen and could distinguish her from me, and also knew the way back to their cupboard after being fed. At one week they were dancing and skipping round the kitchen and commenced nibbling at grass and leaves. At this age the three collectively weighed one pound.

My wife has just recalled the nursery rhyme, “There was once an old woman who lived in a shoe. . . .” And no wonder !



his life: of his games with Squirt, of the ways in which he communicated his needs to his master and mistress, of how he learned to trust some people and fear others, of his escape and recapture, of his amazing eccentricities.

The author, who is Superintendent of the Dublin Zoo, and author of *A Wanderer in the wind*, that best-selling book about the thirty years' experience collecting wild animals throughout the world, has an exceptional understanding of animals. The information he gives about the instincts, habits and behaviour of hares in their natural surroundings, entrancing in itself, makes all the more fascinating the story of Horrie, adapting his hare-like ways to a human household, yet never losing his true character as a hare. For the author loves but also respects his subject, and Horrie is never 'almost human', nor is he a specimen.

This is a book to delight every animal lover—and this must surely include most of us. Its many appealing pictures, charming and amusing photographs of Horrie and the very individual rabbit Squirt making free in their master's house, are an important feature and help to make this perfect gift book.



*Almost the whole of Cecil Webb's life has been concerned with the handling and the care of wild animals, for which he possess a rare gift. For thirty years he travelled all over the world collecting wild animals for zoos—including some rare species never hitherto seen in captivity—a pursuit which took him into each of the five continents and provided him with a wealth of fascinating experiences which he set down in his *Odyssey of an Animal Collector, A WANDERER IN THE WIND*. As Curator-Collector to the Zoological Society of London he was mainly responsible for re-stocking Regent's Park and Whipsnade Zoos after the last war. Following a spell as Curator of Birds and Mammals at the London Zoo, Mr Webb was, in 1952, appointed Superintendent of the Dublin Zoo.*

