

## SHORT NOTE AANTEKENING

### A note on the burrows used by the hare *Lepus capensis*

by

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Hares are generally considered to be non-burrowing animals (Brown, 1968; Schmidt-Nielsen, 1964). Apart from an old record of *Lepus saxatilis* using springhare (*Pedetes*) burrows to lie up in during the day (Shortridge, 1934) most references state that these animals shelter in tufts of grass and under bushes or rock overhangs. Also when chased or under pressure from predators *L. capensis* will apparently seek refuge underground by entering the burrows of other animals (Shortridge, 1934).

We can accept that in some cases, when subject to predation pressures, hares will resort to underground escape. However, where predators are not any cause for alarm other environmental factors such as high ambient temperatures might influence hares to seek shelter underground to avoid a severe heat load. There appears, however, to be no record of holes or burrows having been excavated and used by the hares themselves, in the literature.

The lagomorph *L. capensis* occurs in fairly large numbers in the Namib Desert Park. During 1971 one of these animals was observed to emerge from an old half collapsed burrow. Little attention was paid to this until in late December 1974 when the author observed a hare occupying a hole on a sparsely vegetated gravel plain. Three visits were made to this site over the period 21st to 24th of December. On the first and second visit the hare bolted from the hole at 11 h 00 and 09 h 30 respectively. On the third occasion the animal was seen to bolt from the general vicinity of the entrance when the observer was still 0,5 km away. Fresh footprints in the loose soil at the entrance indicated that the hare had however been underground. A careful examination of the soil at the burrow entrance on the 21st showed definite signs of fresh digging.

The excavation forming the burrow is illustrated in Fig. 1. The favourable thermal gradient underground would be of thermoregulatory advantage to hares. While the so-called jack rabbits *L. alleni* and *L. californicus* of western North America appear not to have developed the capability to burrow it may be more common in the desert race of *L. capensis* than present records indicate.

The subject warrants further investigation. I would

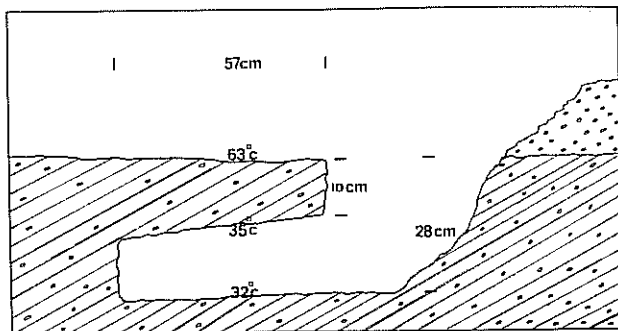


Figure 1. Showing thermal gradient and form in a burrow occupied by *Lepus capensis* in the Namib Desert Park.

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