

## Would you believe it's a cabbit?

United Press International  
ALBUQUERQUE — Tourists driving across the plains of Wyoming hear tales of the Cowboy State's famous "jackalope, a mythical creature that is a cross between a jack rabbit and antelope.

Postcards with photographs of jackalopes abound, and stuffed jackalopes — jack rabbits with an antelope's horns — are evident in many Wyoming cities.

But the tourists soon learn that the jackalope is a biological impossibility.

Now, a New Mexico cowboy says he has a genetic oddity to equal the jackalope. But Val Chapman's creature, which he says is a cross between a rabbit and a cat, is alive.

Chapman, who owns a ranch in the desolate expanse of northwestern New Mexico, says he is convinced his "cabbit" is what he says it is. Several biologists, however, say it is impossible.

Chapman's tale begins last Jan. 3, when he owned a general store on State Highway 44 northwest of Cuba.

"It just hopped up in the yard," Chapman recalls. "When I first saw it I thought it was half-cat, half-rabbit. I put it in the house and started taking care of it."

The more Chapman studied the creature, the more he said he became convinced it was a cabbit. The animal looks like a smallish cat except that it has a stubby tail and its hindquarters look like a rabbit.

The cabbit hops like a rabbit. And Chapman says it eats rabbit food-like lettuce, cabbage and potatoes. He says it also excretes rabbit-like pellets.

The cabbit was mated with an ordinary cat shortly after Chapman found it. Last May it gave birth, through cesarean section, to three offspring.

Dr. Deborah K. Cosgrove, a Farmington veterinarian, performed the operation.

"She (the cabbit) had three babies, but only one survived," Dr. Cosgrove said. "The offspring looked like a kitten except it was long-legged."

Dr. Cosgrove said she could not form an opinion about the cabbit or its offspring, which Chapman has named "Ricky Raccit." But she said she was skeptical of it being a cat-rabbit cross.

She suggested the creature might be a breed of cat called a Manx, although she said the Manx is generally more stocky than Chapman's cabbit.

"I have seen some Manx cats and a lot of people take a look at a Manx and think it is half rabbit because it is born tailless or with a short tail and its hind legs are longer," she said.

Another veterinarian, Dr. Ron Little of Mesa, Ariz., has seen Chapman's cabbit and remains skeptical.

"We asked about taking some radiographs to get some clues on the skull structure, but Chapman refuses anything like that," Dr. Little said. "Geneticists say it is impossible, but I really can't say. If it is a Manx, it isn't a normal one."

Little said he thinks the cabbit might be the result of a genetic defect.

Chapman, who readily admits he wants to make money with his cabbit, took his creature to the Los Angeles Treasure Show this summer after producer Don Bullock heard of it. It was there the cabbit began getting newspaper and television attention.

Harvey Fischer, a curator at the Los Angeles Zoo, said at the time that a cabbit would be a genetic impossibility.

"Let's put it this way: Can you mate a butterfly and a fish? It's impossible," Fischer said.

Two University of New Mexico biologists agree. Dr. James Findley, curator at the Museum of Southwestern Biology in Albuquerque, said flatly a cabbit is impossible and suggested the creature was a genetic abnormality.

"I know of no possible way it could happen," he said, referring to a cross between a cat and rabbit. He said the characteristics of a Manx, with a short tail and long hind legs, could "pop up" in any cat family.

"It is just so impossible I have to laugh," said Findley's assistant, Dr. Patricia Freeman.

Chapman is steadfast. He says he thinks the biologists are afraid to admit it might be possible.

"One thing with most scientists is that basically they don't want to go against the rest of their colleagues to say it is genetically possible," Chapman said.

He also said he is afraid the biologists want to kill his cabbit so they can dissect it. "There is no way I am going to let that happen," he said. "If it dies, and I am sure no one killed it, then maybe I'll let them study it."

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