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Cottontails generally spend their entire lives in an area no larger than 5 acres, so don't exceed that range when building a habitat.

for rabbits, though rabbits will certainly eat them if they are available. However, these crops are important if you hope to provide a benefit to upland birds, such as quail or pheasants, along with the rabbits.

Protective Cover: Birds of prey are a rabbit's worst enemy, which is why rabbits spend considerable time in the types of cover where avian predators can't easily target them and make a clear swoop. A small orchard of wild plum, apple or crabapple, or a brushy fencerow grown up with dogwoods, honeysuckle, sumac or raspberry vines, will prevent owls and hawks from sneaking under the radar to snatch cottontails feeding in winter.

Brush piles also make superb rabbit fortresses. To benefit rabbits, a brush pile must be at least 10 to 15 feet in diameter, and at least 5 feet high. In addition to protecting rabbits from predators during the day, a good brush pile protects rabbits from exposure to the elements. This can be especially important if heavy snow buries the grassy areas where rabbits spend much of their time. Brush piles do rot away over time, and should be replaced every three to five years.

Constructing brush piles has an added benefit. By removing mature trees and making brush piles out of them, you reduce the attractiveness of your rabbit-hunting area to deer. This



means fewer temptations for your rabbit hounds to "run trash." Still, it is probably impossible to entirely eliminate deer from the area.

SETTING THE TABLE

Homebodies: Rabbits have a very small home range. Typically, a cottontail rabbit will spend its entire life within an area of less than 5 acres. This means you don't need a large property to have a good rabbit population. It also means cover types should be distributed in small patches on larger properties. All the major habitat requirements—nesting cover, food, protective cover—should be accessible within a 4- to 5-acre area.

To plan your habitat layout, envision a circle 150 yards in diameter, and use

CROCK BARBECUED COTTONTAIL

SERVES 4 TO 6

2 or 3 cottontail rabbits, cleaned,
washed and cut into pieces

1 cup water

1 1/2 cups barbecue sauce

SPICE MIXTURE:

3 tablespoons dry instant
minced onions

1 tablespoon crushed red
pepper flakes

1 teaspoon instant coffee
grounds, crushed

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Rub spice mixture into rabbit pieces and put in slow-cooker. Pour water over the rabbit pieces, cover and cook on low heat until meat is fall-apart tender, 6 to 8 hours.
2. Remove meat from bones and discard bones. Be careful to remove all the fine leg bones. Drain off the water. Pour in your favorite barbecue sauce and mix with a wooden spoon.
3. Serve on grilled wheat buns, with dill pickles and potato chips.