

FAVORITE ANIMAL

By Fred Hobbs

Picking a favorite animal is a very difficult task indeed. Among potential pets no finer choice exists than “man’s best friend”, the dog, especially a friendly mutt. While some men prefer cats, more often they might be called “woman’s best friend.”

A favorite animal need not be domestic. The mighty elephant, the ferocious tiger, King of the Jungle--the lion, the sly fox, the bear, immortalized in its stuffed “Teddy” form to be cuddled by countless tiny tots. Each is a suitable candidate for favorability.

Support is growing rapidly, however, for one of the most fascinating and unusual animals--the jackalope. The name is derived from its powerful combination of jackrabbit speed and antelope grace not to mention its display of prominent ears and stately antlers. Jackalope enthusiasts tell us those distinctive characteristics evolved from an ancient union of a pygmy deer and a species of “killer” rabbit, most likely in the Mesoamerica period of the Aztecs.

Sightings of similar creatures have been reported for centuries in Alpine regions of Europe, especially in remote areas. Jackalopes are very shy and very quick to move when spotted. Skiers and hikers who have recently attempted to photograph the elusive animal were unsuccessful, momentarily stunned by the sight of the jackalope’s unique features and stymied by its swift departure.

Jackalopian experts believe the creatures can be caught at night by putting out a flask of whiskey near their habitat, but so far those efforts have proved futile.

At some point, probably early in the 19th century, evidence of Jackalope activity was first reported in the United States near Douglas, Wyoming. Years later, patrons in a Douglas bar recounted the sighting and, persuaded by his drinking companions, Herbert Blankenship later wrote of the experience: “It was in 1829 and my Uncle Dan’l, he wuz out huntin’ for deer with John Colter.” (Colter was one of the first white men to settle in what became Wyoming.) “First, my uncle heard them kinda weird sounds, some almost like a human voice. Then he seen this huge rabbit with antlers the size of a mighty big antelope. The beast stood there just for a split second and then he was gone. Uncle Dan’l swears it’s true and I believe him.”

No jackalope has ever been captured alive, but a few stuffed jackalope heads can be found. Former President Ronald Reagan was in possession of one, given to him by a South Dakota Senator. Reagan liked to tease reporters claiming he caught it himself. f

Jackalope conspiracy theorists are concerned. What if jackalopes are real? Is there a conspiracy, a cover up led by environmental zealots who insist on scientific evidence to support the notion that they exist? And what’s the government’s position on

this? Pro-jackalopers say: "Government wants you to believe they ain't real, but we ain't gonna take their word."

So, is the jackalope a real creature and can it be said legitimately to be a favorite animal?

You decide.