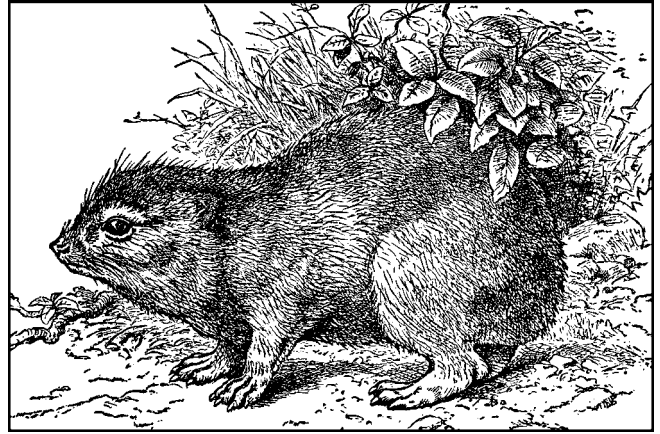


# The Hyrax

I don't suppose you've ever heard of me: I'm called the hyrax. Sometimes I'm called the cony, only that's a mistake, because a cony is really only another name for a rabbit, and I'm not a rabbit, at all. I live among rocks, far away in a country called Syria. I am a very nice little person, really, and I eat grass and flowers and things like that. I have four toes on my front feet, and only three on my hind feet. That seems odd, doesn't it?



Do you know what some people say about me? They actually say that I am a relation of the great big elephant. Well, if I am, I don't look very much like it, do I? My feet are very useful feet, because the soles have little ridges in them, so that I can walk straight up a tree, and I'm quite sure that you can't do that, although you have got five toes on each foot and five fingers on each hand. But what use do you make of your five toes? If you don't use them, I don't see what's the good of having them, at all.

*Before I read this charming story, I wondered, "What is a hyrax? It sounds like a creature in a Dr. Seuss story." With research I found that the hyrax is a mammal of the Hyracoidea order (which it has all to itself) and the Proacviidae family.*

*The hyrax comes in a few varieties. The rock hyrax, also known as the rock dassie due to its stony habitat, is the most commonly known. This hardy hyrax is literally made to scale rocks, with small suction cup-like toes. Other hyraxes include the bush, yellow-spotted, and the tree hyrax. Interestingly, the shriek of the tree hyrax can easily be mistaken for a child's scream.*

*The size of a groundhog, the hyrax weighs only 7 or 8 pounds and stands only about one foot high. However, it has a surprisingly long gestational period of eight months and often reproduces only one to three young. These facts seem to support the theory that the small hyrax and enormous elephant share an eons-ago ancestor. The hyrax itself has been around thousands of years. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, rock hyrax middens (garbage piles) in Yemen show plant fossils that date back 2,000 to 5,000 years.*

*The hyrax, which dines mainly on roots, bulbs, and locusts, has an expansive habitat. Hyraxes dwell in the arid regions of the Middle East as well as in Africa's rain forests, savannas, and frigid alpine areas. Even those found in harsher climates are not alone. Friendly creatures, they live in groups of up to sixty, and they are active during daylight hours. Rock hyraxes can often be found sunning themselves on their front "porches." Now they know how to live!*

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This story contains the unabridged and unaltered text of and illustration from "The Hyrax" from *Animal Stories for Little People*, published in 1902 by Henry Altemus Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; with additional new text (italicized) by Anne Verville. New material Copyright 2004 by Canville Communications.