

2008

Rabbit Watcher

Robin Chapman

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Recommended Citation

Chapman, Robin. "Rabbit Watcher." *The Iowa Review* 38.3 (2008): 119-119. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6524>

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ROBIN CHAPMAN

Rabbit Watcher

In a Welsh malt-house converted to cabin I'm reading the 1964 classic by R.M. Lockley, true British eccentric who spent his years up a tree, spying on rabbits' social networks, their wars over warrens, their digging and tunneling, grazing and cropping, courting and sleeping, breeding and greeting, sunbathing, fighting, marking their corner of island territory. He even describes, *Deus ex machina*, how he ruined a life to satisfy curiosity, moving the Head Rabbit out of his green kingdom for three long weeks—time enough for Shakespearean plot to evolve, for the Queen to take up with an upstart Pretender who moved in, sent the old King, returned to the field, into life on the margins of the down, grazing thistles and scuttling out of the path of former sycophants, his fur matted and ungroomed, his eyes dark and wild. And Lockley—living on a small island overrun by 10,000 rabbits—tries infecting them with Australian rabbit fever, follows up with Cyanogas in all the warrens and burrows. Takes up bird-watching, making life lists, identifying gulls.