

OSTERSITTEN UND BRÄUCHE / CUSTOMS and TRADITIONS

Osterhäschen / Easter Bunny

Ursprung und Legende / origin and legends

The rest of the commercial depicts the Bunny's complex, internal struggle with its own identity as a bi-species being, often taunted by its more pedigreed peers. But we won't spoil the ending for you.

The video has already collected nearly 4 million views as of Friday after being posted last Saturday.

The original idea of the Easter Bunny, or *Osterhase* in German (literally Easter Hare), was in fact a very German creation dating back to the Middle Ages, according to [Berlin City Museum biologist Beate Witzel](#).

By the 17th century, the Easter Bunny would bring eggs for children to discover on Easter. And the creature bringing treats wasn't always a hare: there was also an Easter Fox, Stork and Crane in various regions before the hare became mainstream.

But why a bunny? A big reason for this is that given their reputation for frequent reproduction, bunnies represent fertility and new life, just like eggs do, which are big themes of springtime and the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection.

EASTER BUNNY'S ROOTS

The Easter bunny was introduced to America by German settlers in the 18th century. The custom of the Easter bunny hiding the eggs is quite common all over Germany and could perhaps be explained by the fact that rabbits have their litters around this time in spring and are seen more often in gardens nibbling on the fresh greens.

In some areas of Germany, however, Easter eggs are brought by other animals such as the fox (Fuchs), the hen (Henne), the crane (Kranich) or colorful hares (der rote Hase, der grüne Hase).

There is an old folk tale according to which a poor woman painted eggs during a famine and hid them in a nest as an Easter gift for her children. Just as the children discovered the nest, a rabbit leaped out of a grassy thicket.

The Easter bunny, first mentioned in German writing in the 1500s, is a symbol of the fertile spring. In the early 1800s, the first edible Easter bunnies, made of pastry and sugar, came to the market in Germany. The tradition was brought to American shores by German settlers arriving in Pennsylvania in the 18th century. Today, German children still believe that if they are good, the Osterhase, will lay a nest of colored eggs and hide them throughout the home.

The first known American picture of an Easter rabbit bringing Easter eggs is part of a *fraktur*, a religious record that was drawn in Pennsylvania about 1795-1800.

The watercolor-and-ink picture on paper is attributed to John Conrad Gilbert from what we now call Schuylkill County.

The Pennsylvania Germans told their children that the Easter rabbit laid the eggs. The picture shows colored eggs in a basket held on the rabbit's back, and the eggs were dyed with natural materials.

They used onion skins for brown, madder for red and alder catkins for yellow. Collectors are now searching for all types of Easter items.