

HARE PRESERVATION TRUST

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Hare on sale at Waitrose

Reported in the 14 December edition of London Evening Standard, including a recipe, this has been met with anger and disgust from hare enthusiasts nationwide. 300g packs of diced hare costing £3.99 are on sale in the food hall of John Lewis in Oxford Street and at the Bluewater shopping centre in Kent. The hares are sourced from estates in the east of England where they are relatively abundant, but Waitrose's determination to: "bring back hare to our dinner tables" conveys a lamentable example to areas where hares are particularly scarce. And aside from the conservation aspect the inhumanity of hare shooting is well known. Section 6.66 of the *Burns Report on Hunting with Dogs* states: "As far as shooting is concerned we have received anecdotal evidence of high wounding rates on organised shoots which would undoubtedly lead to poor welfare." Wounding rates estimated by Dr Douglas Wise of the University of Cambridge generate a figure of 30,000 wounded hares escaping to an uncertain fate annually in the UK. And since hares now breed throughout the year we estimate that at least 37,000 orphaned leverets die of starvation annually. We have challenged Waitrose to explain how their association with this barbarity is consistent with their claim to be: "Committed to providing the best conditions for animals at all stages of the supply chain, and to combatting cruel practices."

Coat colour in the mountain hare

It is generally assumed that the mountain hare's coat colour changes to white for the winter months to provide camouflage in a snowy terrain. They would certainly be conspicuous if they retained their brown summer coat. But during the winter predators are relatively scarce at the high altitudes inhabited by the mountain hare, so it may well be that a white coat primarily gives protection against the cold rather than predators. White bodies radiate heat less rapidly than dark ones, so a white winter coat may be an adaptation to conserve body heat. Temperature seems to trigger the change to a white coat. This is also seen in the stoat which is at the top of its food chain and would gain little advantage from camouflage but, like the mountain hare, needs to conserve heat when exposed to low ambient temperatures.

Protected Species status

Unfortunately, we were unable to find an MP willing to adopt our Private Member's Bill among those who drew the top six places in the PMB ballot at Westminster on 26 November. So we are now researching the credentials of all 129 MSPs at Holyrood and hope to identify suitable candidates to invite to adopt our Bill. There is no ballot system in Scotland and we can ask any MSP who is not a Minister to propose a Member's Bill in the Holyrood Parliament.

Hares at Hyde Hall enjoy the seasonal weather.

The RHS gardens at Hyde Hall in Essex are renowned for their thriving hare colony and we have received a report of groups of up to nine playing in the snow.

Magic on the Moors

This interesting article about mountain hares appears in the January edition of Country Living.

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