

Hare Today



The official newsletter of the British Brown Hare Preservation Society

Issue No. 17

Police prosecutions for hare coursing

Police in Cambridgeshire say there has been a 45% drop in hare coursing in the county since their crackdown following the Hunting Act in February which made all hare coursing illegal. 191 people have had proceedings started against them and the most powerful tool to beat the coursing fraternity has been a 24 hour confidential hotline for people to report events taking place. Penalties levied against the perpetrators include seizure (and in some cases crushing!) of vehicles, dogs and cash. In total so far, 35 driving disqualifications have been imposed on passengers as well as drivers and fines totalling more than £16,000 have been handed out.

NFU magazine profiles the BBHPS

The National Farmer's Union magazine, 'British Farmer and Grower', recently profiled the society and letters of encouragement and interest were received by the Chairman.

Hare Coursing

Complaints about hare coursing in Yorkshire and Staffordshire encouraged Rodney to contact the Chief Constables in both areas. Replies were received from the Wildlife Crime Co-ordinators in both Yorkshire and Staffordshire, from which it is obvious that this matter is taken seriously. Whilst not becoming complacent, it would seem that a good start has been made - the mere fact that there is a responsible officer speaks volumes about the police attitude to this kind of crime. See separate item about successful prosecutions.

Hare Surveys

Several farmers enquired about hare surveys on their farms and asked about ways of encouraging hares to establish themselves. The Society is in touch with the Essex Wildlife Trust, who are planning to employ a student to devise a survey method aimed specifically at farms. The Cheshire Wildlife Trust has a county based survey method but this could possibly be adapted to smaller farm sized areas.

Translocation

An estate manager in Lincolnshire has said that hares there will be culled at the end of the pheasant shooting season. This is one situation in which translocation, whilst presenting many welfare problems, might be justifiable. The hares would need to be moved during November /December to reduce the possibility that females might have dependent young. A trapping method, which involves the least amount of stress, would have to be decided upon. One possibility is a wooden trap devised in the late

1700's, which is left in the field but not set, to allow the hares to get used to it and being wood acquires their scent. Hares would need to be sedated as soon as possible after trapping, which means that a vet (preferably with experience of leporids) would need to be on hand. As we go to press this issue is still outstanding, see the next newsletter for what happened next.

Donation from Friends of Wildlife

We received another wonderful surprise from the Friends of Wildlife in the summer; a cheque for £100 in recognition of 'the invaluable work you do in aid of the British brown hare' and which they 'hope will come in useful'. I think we can find it a good home!

RSPCA open day

This event took place at the beginning of September and Rodney Hale manned the stand on behalf of the Society. He attracted a lot of interest by including a self made 8ft. tall wooden hare on the stand as well as Irene Brierton's 'relaxed hare' cards and Stephen Tapper's book 'The Brown Hare'. Unfortunately a thunderstorm brought proceedings to a premature close at 1.30p.m. but funds were raised - as was the profile of the society locally.

Newsletter has new editor

From this edition onwards the BBHPS newsletter has a new editor. As a result, the former editor and founder/chairman of the society Rodney Hale, will have more time to concentrate on his vital field work with farmers. Jane Russ, a print and graphics manager from Banbury, will both edit and set the piece in the new format you see here. All proposed items for publication should be e-mailed to her at jane@janeruss.co.uk or contact her by 'phone on 01295 276019.

AGM at The Hare but no hare on the menu!

The Society's AGM took place at the appropriately named Hare Inn near Wantage on Saturday 25th. June 2005.



The pub had a self-contained restaurant conservatory, which made a great meeting room, after members had sampled the lunch menu. It was exciting to put faces to names as most members didn't know each other. The prize for longest distance travelled to the meeting must go to Grahame Ayers who made the trip from Grimsby. June Vince, who is an air hostess, had travelled straight from Heathrow accompanied by husband John after landing from the USA. Lots of ground was covered during the meeting and Rodney Hale (Founder/Chairman) was offered much help and support from those present in his campaign to raise the profile of British brown hare.



Society drives for a close season for hares.

Following a discussion at the AGM, a letter was sent to Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Animal Health and Welfare, explaining our concern about the lack of a close season for the shooting of hares.

We requested the following, in line with the Government's commitment to improving the welfare of wild mammals:

A shooting close season from 1st. February to 30th. September inclusive. This covers the main breeding season (although hare births have been recorded in every month).

Mandatory training on the safe, competent use of shot-guns before a licence is issued.

Extended research into non-lethal methods of population control, including translocation, in line with the Biodiversity Action Plan to which the Government subscribes.

A reply was received from Jim Knight the Minister for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity. In it he stated that it was felt that a clear case for a close season had not been made as the biggest shoots in February were used mainly for culling purposes in areas where pest control was the issue. (N.B. We understand from our researches that pest control is **not** an issue over most of the UK, quite the reverse - there is a hare Biodiversity Action Plan which hopes to double hare numbers by 2010!) Gun control should be under the jurisdiction of the Home Office and that he had no comment to make on this issue. Finally, he did feel that Defra was continuing its programme of research into cost-effective and humane methods of wildlife management. Translocation had in-

herent problems because of the potential for transmitting disease but he felt it might have a part to play in the protection of hares but favoured a hare-friendly attitude to agriculture, to nurture correct hare habitats under the Hare Species Action Plan.

The Society in a reply to Mr. Knight continues to press for a close season from February to September. Furthermore, we have had support from Paul Flynne MP, also Dr Graeme McLaren and Professor Stephen Harris, co-authors of 'The Brown Hare in Britain' (1998). They spoke in favour of a close season at the Mammal Society Symposium in Nov. 2004. Graeme McLaren is writing a paper on the close season issue and we eagerly await its publication.

Member gives talk at Symposium

Mike Rendle a member of both the Irish Hare Initiative and the BBHPS, gave a talk on rearing orphaned leverets at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Symposium in Inverness on 26 November 2005. Mike and partner Myrna Brown, run the Glenlark Nature Reserve in Northern Ireland and have a wealth of experience on this aspect of hare care and the release of hares back into the wild.

The Mountain Hare by Marion O`Neil

In the British Isles there are three kinds of hare. In addition to the brown hare, there are the mountain hare (*Lepus timidus Scoticus*) and in Ireland the related Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*).

Most of the mountain hare population is found in Scotland, with a smaller number in the Peak District. The mountain hare, indigenous to Britain, is also known as the blue hare, the white hare, the maukin or, in Gaelic, the maigheach-gheal. Smaller than the brown hare it has shorter ears and lacks the black top to the tail. The most obvious difference is that it turns white in winter. Its greyish-brown summer coat moults in autumn (during the second half of October), and then again at the beginning of winter. By December it has turned white, though the tips of the ears remain black. This moult appears to be initiated by shortening day lengths - although Pliny thought that the hare turned white from eating snow! Those at higher altitudes turn white earlier and more completely than those at lower altitudes. The white coat provides camouflage against the snow from predators like foxes and eagles. It has also been suggested that the white coat offers some thermal insulation. It occupies higher ground than the brown hare, some 350 metres up in the Lammermuirs in the Borders, and 750 to over 1,000 metres in the Cairngorms. Its home range comprises a night feeding area and a variety of places to feed and shelter. Resting by day in forms,

the hares gather to feed in large groups and in bad weather they will shelter or feed on leeward hill slopes, where the snow can be scraped away from the underlying heather. When under threat they can reach speeds of up to 60km. per hour, and they usually move directly up slopes whereas sheep and deer run traverse. Population densities fluctuate and can vary tenfold.

Mountain hares are listed in Annex V of the EC habitats directive (1992) as a species of "community interest." This prohibits and restricts certain methods of capture. However, much shooting still takes place in the Scottish Highlands as part of commercial "adventure" packages. Also the Scottish Executive has since 2001 issued 8 licences permitting culling - with the result that over 250 mountain hares have been snared and killed. Snaring continues and at the Cawdor estate for example "piles of dead mountain hares" were recently found laid out as bait to lure in further animals. Mountain hares can often be seen in considerable numbers. There are few things in the countryside more exciting than catching sight of their white heads peering over the snow. In the depths of winter, they are the harbingers of the spring life to come.

Firms sponsor us

Cre8media, who are webmasters for the BBHPS website have confirmed that they will do all our work in lieu of a company 'charity' donation. This is a really serious helping hand to the Society as they will amend the website, adding pages, editing out old information etc. and generally giving us all the new media support they can for free.

där lighting of Banbury, the UK's largest lighting manufacturers, have agreed to print the hard copies of the newsletter for free, (N.B. they employ our editor). A big thanks to both companies for their support. Funds that would have gone to these important areas of communication can now go to support our work more directly.

Speedy Hare

The Editor had a recent visit from friends with a 1932 two-seater Alvis, the bonnet of which was enhanced by this very fine mascot. The owners were impressed that your editor was the only person so far to correctly identify it as a hare and not a rabbit!!



BRITISH BROWN HARE PRESERVATION SOCIETY - Working for the preservation and welfare of the brown hare

PO Box 70 CREDITON EX17 4ZQ Tel: 07800 584 885 (evenings)

E-mail: brownharepreservation@btopenworld.com Website: www.brown-hare-preservation.co.uk

...gone tomorrow?