

Hare Today



The official newsletter of the Hare Preservation Trust

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Members thrilled by breathtaking mountain hare walk by Mike Crompton

On a rather damp, misty and windy Sunday morning early in October, 13 people assembled close to Ladybower reservoir in the Peak District. We had come from as far North as Yorkshire and Lancashire and as far South as Hertfordshire and were heading for the Upper Derwent Valley in the hopes of seeing some mountain hares. Although we were mostly strangers to each other, the group proved very friendly and welcoming.

We were led by Val and Bob Clinging, members of the Sorby Natural History Society based at nearby Sheffield University and they have been studying hares, as well as much else about the local flora and fauna, for over 30 years. Adult mountain hares are large animals, although smaller and more compact than brown hares, and this area is one of their strongholds. Val & Bob's regular surveys have shown that hare numbers are currently healthy (they recorded the highest number ever – 262 - last year) and therefore our hopes of seeing some were high.

They were a very nice group of people and I have had several appreciative emails saying how much members enjoyed the day. VAL CLINGING

We walked in quiet excitement up the hillside and then higher still, to and then along Derwent Edge. The higher we got the more the weather improved and on reaching the Edge itself the sun was out and the sky a perfect cloudless blue; affording wonderful views of the colourful autumn landscape across the Valley to Edale and Kinder Scout. Geologically, we were on Millstone Grit; providing good grip underfoot and a heather moor – perfect hare habitat!

The weather forecast was dreadful but in fact the day turned out to be really nice. We spotted 15 mountain hares. They were beautiful and it felt such a privilege. Val and Bob Clinging were very good leaders. I hope to join them for their annual

hare spotting walk for the Sorby Society next spring. SALLY FURNESS

After about an hour, during which we all had our eyes peeled in eager anticipation, we saw our first hare – on an outcrop of rock about 50 yards away. What a moment; we had a very good view of her before she started to cross the slope and into the heather. (The sexes are quite hard to tell apart, but by convention hares are always referred to as “she”). Hares live above ground and partly rely on just keeping still as a protective strategy, this makes them hard to spot despite their size. It is when they lose their nerve and move or break cover that you get the chance to see them. Typically they will then run uphill, rather than down, using their powerful back legs to escape the threat. A further strategy is that their fur turns white in winter to camouflage them in snow.

It was thrilling to see at least 15 of them in their Derwent Edge environment and the organization and knowledge imparted was first class. DAVID BRATT

After lunch we all spread out across a broad section of steep ground parallel to the Edge in the hope of (gently) disturbing some hares. The group were rewarded with some 15 sightings altogether.

...one of them ran out from heather very close to me - unfortunately our camera is on the blink so I didn't have it to get a photo, although at the speed she was moving she would probably only have been a blur in any case!! So all in all a great day... thanks for setting it up! ALISON ANKERS

Bob said that on another occasion a member of a group he was leading virtually trod on one before they realised it was there! When we had finished walking just below the Edge, and the terrain grew less steep, we all sat and had a rest in the warm afternoon sunshine. Then, fortified by some delicious shortbread kindly provided by Val, we walked back enjoying the wonderful views and chatting about what we had seen.

What a memorable day – for the friendly



company, for the wonderful views and most of all, of course, for the hares. We are indebted to Val and Bob for their leadership, enthusiasm and generously shared knowledge of the hares and local wildlife; and to Rodney for arranging the walk with them.

We were very relieved too that we had such a good day - both weather and hare-wise! We would be happy to lead one another year, probably to the same area which is the nearest accessible good site. VAL CLINGING

Full details of the next proposed walk will appear in Hare Today as soon as they are available.

Snowshoe links to lynx!

This spring, Red Lake High School biology students in Minnesota USA, helped the Ministry of Natural Resources in a snow-shoe hare population survey. The research involved counting the number of hare pellets in four sample plots set up last year. The data gathered by the students will help the ministry monitor snowshoe hare population trends across the province, said MNR District biologist Nadine Thebeau, adding that the survey is conducted annually and contributes to a hare density database.

“Knowledge of changes in hare density over time will allow us to better manage furbearers that depend on the hare as food,” she said, “because lynx prey upon hares, the population of hares is also a good indicator of lynx numbers”. Lynx populations closely track those of snowshoe hares in a nine-to-11-year cycle, lagging about one to two years behind their prey population levels.



Hyde hares still going strong!

After our successful hare spotting event last year at Hyde Hall in Essex, the splendid hare on the right was spotted by member Mr P. Goddard earlier in the year. Good to know all is well and they continue to thrive.

To recap for new members who missed our piece on hares at Hyde Hall; it is a

Royal Horticultural Society Garden with a special love of the hare, the grounds and some surrounding fields and a lake are mown or not to help preserve the large number of hares. There is also a helpful explanation of the life cycle and what to look for when hare spotting. If in the area, it's well worth a visit.



HPT merchandise

A fleece and a bag, what more could you want? The fleece is dark green with a full



zip and has the HPT logo and the strap line "working for the preservation and welfare of hares" embroidered on the left chest. Sizes are XS, S, M, L up to 4XL and cost £19.95 inc. p&p.



The fabric shopper has the logo printed at 220mm diam in the middle and should get us noticed, it costs £4.95 inc. p&p. Please order both items on the website or send a cheque to the. HPT address below.

West Country Eco-fayre visits Totnes

Totnes Civic Hall in the heart of Devon's South Hams was the second venue in a series of Eco-fayres being held in the West Country - giving environmentally friendly organisations opportunities to spread their message and raise funds.

The first event was held in Topsham, near Exeter in September and was a great success for HPT, so we had no hesitation in accepting an invitation to attend in Totnes. Our selection of greetings cards featuring the work of six artists and photographers soon attracted a steady flow of customers, many of whom stopped to chat about hares. Peoples' concern about the few hares in the south-west, grew to astonishment when they realised that hares have no protection whatsoever from shooting.

Several landowners asked what they could do to encourage hares. We advised leaving uncultivated margins around fields to provide hares with cover and forage. Cereal stubbles left over winter provide forage from sprouting spilt grain and fresh weed growth. Organic farming also seems to be very beneficial to hares. We look forward to raising hare awareness by attending further Eco-fayres during the coming months.



Our indomitable Chairman manning the stand.

In death Paul Sivell creates life.

Paul Sivell is a self taught wood carver/sculptor who specialising in turning dead, dying, damaged or fallen trees into sculptural features. Although based on the Isle of Wight, he will travel to any location to undertake commissions. Paul said in an e-mail to the editor, 'I have always have a fascination with hares and have carved quite a few and I have included a couple of pics of previous sculptures - the one with the dog is called Leap to Freedom! It is inspired by once seeing a loose lurcher chasing



a hare. The hare lead it a merry dance before eventually escaping by leaping over a stone wall leaving the dog looking bewildered and bemused. The other photograph shows his 1m long carving, The Good Omen, which stands at a cross



roads on the Isle of White, carved from a fallen Leyland Cypress it was commissioned by Arreton Parish Council. Paul's website: www.thecarvedtree.com.

...and a hare related postscript from Paul's e-mail:

I have another hare story that inspired me and might interest you. Almost 30 years ago I was working in North Yorkshire looking after some ornamental woodlands. One day I was sitting in the woods having my lunch, when I noticed a hare about a dozen yards away that seemed to have appeared from nowhere. I decided to try the old country trick of sucking on my hand to make a squeaking noise to bring it closer and to my surprise it slowly came closer and closer. I was thinking that I had some kind of magic charm as it eventually came right up to me. I gently picked her up and she looked at me with the most beautiful hazel eyes ... and died in my arms. It was such a magical experience that I almost expected the hare to transform into a beautiful maiden! She was very light and as skinny as a rake and obviously had been at death's door, but I felt humbled by the experience.

HARE PRESERVATION TRUST - Working for the preservation and welfare of hares

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