

# ABOUT THE HARE PRESERVATION TRUST

The Hare Preservation Trust is dedicated to promoting awareness about hares and the pressures faced by this iconic British mammal. The Trust is run by a small team of volunteers and the funds we raise go directly into projects which support hare welfare.

We campaign to alleviate their persecution for 'sport' and encourage changes in agricultural practice and population management. In our work to help combat illegal hare coursing, we have also funded specialist equipment to support Rural Crime Teams. The Trust works closely with other agencies, including Humane Society International, Care For the Wild and Bristol University, to study the decline in hare numbers. We hope this research will help establish a close season for all hares.

We believe that education is key to securing a brighter future for our hares. Our publication, *The Hare Book* aims to enlighten and inspire people as well as provide an informative guide to British hares. As part of our outreach work, Trust members are available to give talks to interested groups and societies – please email [rosie@hare-preservation-trust.co.uk](mailto:rosie@hare-preservation-trust.co.uk) for details. Our membership is UK-wide and we even have international members! So, wherever you live you can join us to help support our beautiful and enigmatic hares.



Contact:  
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## NOT ONLY BROWN HARES

★The mountain hare (*Lepus timidus*) has been here much longer than the brown hare; bones around 130,000 years old have been found in southern England. Indigenous populations are found throughout Scotland, and they have been re-introduced to the Isle of Man, Derbyshire's Peak District and Snowdonia. They inhabit moorland and high ground, turning white in



winter. Their 'pelage' changes colour from the ground upwards in winter and top down in the spring. This may help them retain body heat. They are sometimes called 'blue' hares during this colour change.

★The Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*) is only found in its native Ireland, but an introduced colony exists on the Isle of Mull. Arguably Ireland's oldest surviving mammal, it is often mistakenly referred to as the mountain or blue hare [see above].

Generally regarded as a sub-species of mountain hare, recent findings suggest it is genetically unique and should be classified as a separate species of hare.



Photography by Russ Miles, Tony Bates, Andrew Fusek Peters, Andy Howard and Andrew Kelly

## SOURCES OF HARE INFORMATION

### Books:

- *The Hare Book* HPT – Graffeg 2015
- *The Hare* Mason, J. – Merlin Unwin Books 2005
- *The Brown Hare* Tapper, T. – Shire Natural History 1987
- *The Leaping Hare* Evans & Thomson – Faber & Faber 1972

### Websites:

- [www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)
- [www.irishhare.org](http://www.irishhare.org) (*Irish hare conservation*)

# HELP



# SAVE THE

# BROWN HARE



## The Brown Hare is becoming increasingly rare.

Outdated legal protection and changes in farming practices mean the Brown Hare needs your help... NOW!

 @HPT\_Official

 The Hare Preservation Trust - HPT Official

[www.hare-preservation-trust.co.uk](http://www.hare-preservation-trust.co.uk)





## ABOUT THE BROWN HARE

- ★ Unlike rabbits, hares are born above ground, fully furred and with their eyes open.
- ★ Up to 60cm in length, the hare is capable of reaching 35-45 mph, making it the UK's fastest land mammal.
- ★ Female hares have three or four litters of 'leverets' a year, which wean at three weeks.
- ★ Largely nocturnal, hares spend much of the day alone in a hollow or depression in the ground, a 'form'.
- ★ Hares' habitat is predominately arable/ grassland, they are also found in heathland, woodland and dunes.
- ★ Boxing is most often seen in spring, it is not 'madness' but in fact part of their courtship.

## WHY THE HARE IS DECLINING

Hares thrive when they have a wide variety of wild grasses and herbs, but **changes in agricultural practices** and the **loss of hedgerows and set-aside land** have seriously reduced suitable hare habitats.

95% of traditional hay meadows have been lost since the 1940s and largely replaced by silage production. Frequent silage cutting increases hare mortality whereas hay production enables hares to breed more successfully. Early ploughing of stubble also removes important foodstuffs, and autumn sown cereal crops are too mature and indigestible for leverets born the following spring.

Farm machinery and increased use of pesticides also pose significant threats to hares. Their main predator is the fox, but leverets are also taken by stoats, badgers, crows and birds of prey. Hares are also susceptible to a number of diseases. Despite serious concerns about the decline in hare numbers, many are still killed at **organised shoots** or through **illegal hunting and coursing** with dogs.

## WHAT FARMING COULD DO TO HELP HARES

- ★ **Break up** blocks of cereal as much as possible.
- ★ **Provide grass** on arable farms for summer grazing by hares.
- ★ **Leave wide strips** of uncut grass across or at the side of pasture. Hares need quiet, undisturbed cover to raise leverets.
- ★ **Leave unploughed stubble areas** until needed for spring crops.
- ★ **Use government funding** to reinstate field margins and hedgerows (Environmental Stewardship schemes pay farmers for this).

## HARES & HUNTING

**The brown hare is the only game species in England and Wales that is not protected by a close season.** Organised shoots start in February when the breeding season is well underway and leverets orphaned as a result of shooting will die of starvation without maternal support. The shooting of pregnant and lactating females and the avoidable loss of their offspring raises serious animal welfare issues.

Illegal poaching using lurchers may cause losses in some areas, but is unlikely to have a serious impact on hare populations. However, since hare coursing has become illegal, some landowners and farmers have chosen to reduce the number of hares on their property in order to prevent unwanted illegal hare coursers trespassing on their land.

It is estimated that between 28% and 69% of local hare populations may be removed **annually** by shooting. Such hare culls are regarded as 'pest management', however, the brown hare is a minor pest to crops and given that the **UK population declined by 80% in the 20th century alone**, the continued lack of legal protection seems to contradict the government's plan to increase hare numbers in line with its Biodiversity Action Plan for the species.

**In parts of the country the hare is virtually extinct;** if we are to stop the decline of the brown hare in England and Wales, **the need for a close season is self-evident.**

