

Brown Hare

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Species English Name (Scientific name)

BROWN HARE (LEPUS EUROPAEUS)

Associated Habitat Action Plans:

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN



Ecology

Appearance

Brown hares are generally larger than rabbits reaching up to 60cm in height and weighing 4-6kg. Their fur, as the name suggests, is mostly brown with orange-yellow markings on the face, distinctive black ear tips and white under belly. The brown hare is more robust than the rabbit with long powerful hind legs.

Food

Brown hares feed mainly on grasses and herbs but will also eat young cereal crops, oilseed rape and turnips in winter. They can be destructive in tree plantations eating buds, twigs and stripping tree bark. Similarly to rabbits, hares produce soft faeces which they re-eat to digest for a second time in order to extract more nutrition.

Habitat

Brown hares are found in mainly arable farmland as well as grasslands with sheltered areas in long grass, hedgerows and ditches.

Predators



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Brown hares are at risk of predation by foxes, stoats, buzzards and owls. Young leverets are most vulnerable as adult hares are extremely fast runners reaching up to 50kmph. Brown hares are also shot as pests and are often found as road casualties.

Lifestyle

Brown hares generally live up to 4 years in the wild.

Brown hares do not dig burrows but live exclusively above ground in shallow scrapes called "forms" usually against a hedge or in a ploughed furrow. The hare lies flat in its form to remain camouflaged from predators venturing out at dawn and dusk to forage.

Brown hares are mainly solitary animals that gather together only to mate and perform courtship rituals. Spring is the main breeding season when chasing and boxing rituals are seen. Hares can breed at any time of the year and females tend to have up to four litters per year averaging four leverets per litter. Young leverets are born with their eyes open and fully furred becoming independent in just three weeks.

Current status

Despite a well-documented decline in numbers since the turn of the twentieth century, Brown hares remain widespread and locally abundant in lowland Britain. The fall in numbers has been most pronounced in the western pastoral regions. The pattern of decline shows a modest post-war increase, followed by a significant fall in numbers from the 1960s to 1980s (Tapper 1992).

The first stratified national survey, carried out by Bristol University gave a population figure of 817520-just 20% of that of 1880. The most recent population estimate placed the national population level at around 752,608 +/- 37,697 (Temple et al 2000). Figures released by JNCC in August 2002 indicate that numbers have declined in the southwest of Britain over the last five years

Results of a questionnaire survey undertaken in the Cheshire region suggest that the hare population in 2000 was around 6133 individuals with a mean population density of 2.41 hares per square kilometre. A decline in numbers appears to have been ongoing from the 1950s to 1980s when stabilisation and even some localised increase seems to have occurred. Factors affecting population levels include habitat richness and poaching (Potter J, Rogers R. unpublished)

As a game species hares enjoy limited protection through the Ground Game Act (1880) and the Hares Protection Act (1911). The sale of hares between March 1st and July 31st is prohibited in order to act as a deterrent to culling during the peak of the breeding season. Hares remain otherwise unprotected. The UK Biodiversity Steering Group report, Volume 2 (1995), contains a costed



Species Action Plan for the Brown hare. Changes in legislation on hunting with dogs remain uncertain.

The map shows brown hare distribution across the Cheshire region in 2000 (Map produced by BASC on behalf of the Cheshire Brown Hare group, taken from Hares in the Cheshire region. Results of the Cheshire Brown Hare Survey (Potter J., Rogers .R 2003)

Threats

- * Poaching
- * Simplification of the agricultural landscape
- * Urbanisation of habitat
- * Intensive farming practices e.g. silage cutting, pesticide usage, grazing

How are we helping to conserve brown hares in the Cheshire region?

- * Ongoing mapping of data
- * Hold landowners workshop
- * Seek to guide habitat improvements with landowners, utilising Environmental Stewardship options and Woodland Grant Schemes
- * Continue to highlight issue of poaching

Objectives, targets and actions

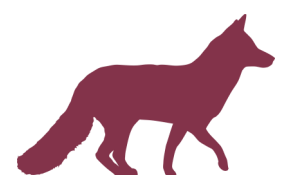
The objectives, targets and actions to help conserve Brown Hares in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about brown hares

Vale Royal Borough Council Brown Hare Species Recording card
Brown Hare Survey Guidance
Brown Hare Recording form
UK BAP for Brown Hare - www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=410

How can you get involved?

The Brown Hare LBAP Action group are running a Brown Hare Watch where the general public are



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asked to look out for hares. Please report any sightings in any areas of Cheshire, Halton, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington or the Wirral to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust on 01948 820728.

The information we require is:

- * Location of the sighting to the nearest street or lane
- * The number of hares you have seen
- * The date of your sighting
- * O.S. grid reference (if possible).

Extra information (e.g. what the hare(s) were doing, sex of hare(s) involved, sightings of dead hares, etc.) is always helpful but the above provides a minimum of information to make a record useful. Many thanks for your involvement.

Download a copy of the new Brown Hare Survey Record sheet and Guidance notes on doing a transect survey.

These have been produced by the Brown Hare Group and are designed for formal surveying purposes. If you would like more information you can contact the Group via the Cheshire Wildlife Trust on 01948 820728.

Contact details

LBAP Chair Tony Parker, Cheshire Mammal Group
National Lead Partners Game Conservancy Trust
Mammal Society
National Lead Contact Dr Stephen Tapper, Game Conservancy Trust
Dr Derek Yalden, Mammal Society

References and Glossary

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