

## Special Protection Order

We have made the point to Scottish Natural Heritage that the mountain hare should be subject to a SPO while long overdue research into a reliable method of counting them is being carried out by SNH and partner organisations. A reliance upon shooting estates to show “voluntary restraint” on mountain hare culling is unacceptable in view of compelling evidence of massive declines and even local extinctions which has built up over a period of nine years. Estate owners have already had ample opportunity to put their own house in order, but have failed to do so.

We now understand from Dr Aileen McLeod, Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform that there has been just one prosecution under the EC Habitats Directive since its inception in 1992 for an offence relating to the mountain hare. This does not augur well for an SPO from Holyrood but before we petition the European Parliament we need to satisfy them that all other avenues have been explored. A SPO was conferred on the Irish hare on 2006, so a precedent has been set.

## Corporate wealth tries to buy the General Election

SWAFH remains politically non-aligned – we support MPs of any colour if they share our wildlife welfare and conservation objectives. This time we say a few words on behalf of Adrian Sanders, Lib Dem MP for Torbay. Adrian, who is vice-president of the League Against Cruel Sports, has proposed or supported 279 Early Day Motions on animal welfare since 2007, including EDMs he proposed in 2011, 2013 and 2014 for a hare shooting close season. In July 2010 he received the LACS Parliamentarian of the Year Award. So, not surprisingly, Adrian faces an onslaught from the Tories to oust him. He says: “We already know that big business massively funds the Conservative Party. Our estimate is they are spending in excess of £150,000 to win this constituency alone. At a recent invite-only Tory Summer Ball no fewer than six billionaires and 15 people with a personal wealth above £100m were in attendance. My ability to raise the issues that matter to people and help them to get things done is down to the efforts of volunteers and donors. If you would be interested in helping me locally in Torbay, please contact me on 01803 411816 or email [adrian@adriansanders.org](mailto:adrian@adriansanders.org) There are lots of different things you can do.”

## Dwindling hare numbers on Exmoor

This was highlighted on Radio Devon recently and visitors are being asked to help National Park rangers build an accurate picture of hare numbers. This is essential before conservation measures can be devised. Ali Hawkins, Exmoor National Park wildlife conservation officer, said rangers were keen to know more about the animal as part of a 2015 Wild Watch scheme. “Exmoor Wild Watch gives a really important insight into Exmoor’s Wildlife and last year members of the public kindly sent in over 50 sightings of hares on Exmoor which was really positive” she said. “If anyone sees one on Exmoor this year we would love to hear from you so that we can build on what we know about this fascinating mammal.” Hares are commonly found in grassland, moorland and woodland edges. Sites such as North Hill, Croydon Hill, Molland Moor, Barle Valley and Withypool Common are good places for hare spotting. They are most visible in early spring, but the National Park Authority would like to know about sightings all year round. The hare is just one of 12 key species the National Park would like to hear about with others including the hedgehog, kingfisher, kestrel, green hairstreak butterfly and cuckoo. Wild Watch 2015 aims to get members of the public involved in conservation on Exmoor and help them learn about its diverse wildlife. Anyone who wants to take part can pick up a leaflet at visitor centres. [info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](mailto:info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)

## Extraordinary hare sighting near Truro.

Jane Lewarne contacted us recently with a sighting of twelve hares. This would be remarkable in any part of the country, but in Cornwall where hares are extremely scarce it is unprecedented in our records. The area clearly favours hares for some reason and if this could be found then it might enable conservation measures in other parts of the county.

