

Hares Preservation Act 1892

Under this Act it is illegal to sell, or offer for sale, hares or leverets from 1 March until 31 July. This means that hare cannot be on the menu in restaurants. Hares killed outside the prohibited period are not exempt from the legislation. As a game species hares cannot be shot on Sundays or Christmas Day, but otherwise in England and Wales the Hares Preservation Act is the only brake on hare shooting, so enforcement is important. It is worth noting that the Act came about at a time when hares were considerably more abundant than they are today. In England and Wales the Act does not prevent shooting for amusement or the “pot” but in Scotland the brown hare now has a close season from February until September inclusive and the mountain hare from March until July. So as March approaches now is the time to start monitoring restaurants, game dealers and farmers markets for possible infringements of the legislation. These can be reported in confidence at the e-mail address below.

Re-introduction of mountain hares to Dartmoor

Comments on our article in Devon Life:

I read with interest of your proposals to re-introduce hares to Dartmoor and am writing to give my support. I have lived on Dartmoor for 5 years and have thought this would be wonderful to see throughout our time here. Originally from Scotland, I was struck by the similarity in landscape, vegetation, agricultural practices between Dartmoor and Scotland. Good Luck with the project, I look forward to seeing it progress. Susie Beardwell

Morning, I was so impressed with your article in Devon Life I too thoroughly support the re-introduction to Dartmoor of the mountain hare. Elizabeth Hothersall

And this from wildlife legal expert, John Bryant, regarding protection for introduced mountain hares: The Secretary of State for the Environment Liz Truss (good luck with that!) can, as part of an international obligation, add any animal to the protected list, either nationally, or in a specific area, or for any period, such as a 'close season.' If the EU were to call on the UK to protect the mountain hare, the UK would be obliged to do so, or give a good reason for a derogation.

Hunting Act – call for a “reckless behaviour” clause.

If a motorist drives recklessly and causes an accident he is punished – saying he didn't mean to cause any harm is no defence. Under the Hunting Act 2004 it is legal for hunts to follow a scent trail, but there is no penalty if this trail is laid recklessly and liable to cause “accidental” chasing and killing of wild mammals, including hares. If a case comes to court the intention of hunting a wild mammal has to be proved. So the hunters can lay trails in places where foxes or hares are likely to be found. They can also use natural scents for the trail, such as fox urine, so the hounds cannot distinguish between the trail and the scent of a live fox. All this means that “accidents” are inevitable – in fact they are orchestrated by many hunts, enabling live quarry to be hunted exactly as they were before the ban. This situation can be resolved by amending the Hunting Act to deal with this reckless behaviour by making it an offence to “cause or permit a dog to hunt, attack, injure or kill a wild mammal.” That would remove the possibility of an “accident” being used as a defence and removes the need for intent to be proved in court.

Wildlife crime – hare coursing a lucrative pastime

Organised hare coursers can make thousands of pounds in just a few weeks and it's been reported that an individual can make up to £30,000 in three months of bets. Dogs which lose money for their owners are often brutally killed. Anyone suspecting that hare coursing is going on should ring the police immediately. On no account should coursers be approached since some of them are extremely nasty individuals.