

Custodial sentence for hare coursing

Almost daily we hear of a hare coursing incident and in a number of cases vehicles involved have been confiscated and crushed. This is the first time, however, that we have heard of a custodial sentence being handed down. Mark Reid, 45, from Dundee was jailed for four months and also banned from owning a dog for six years when sentenced at Perth Sheriff Court recently. Reid was tried alongside his son John Stewart, 21. The pair had set their lurcher dogs onto hares at West Culmalundie Farm, near Perth.

(The police have a good record for prosecuting hare coursers, but I suspect this is only because hare coursers do so much damage to property such as crops and fences. If hare coursing was just an animal welfare issue I have no doubt the police wouldn't lift a finger to stop it, as we have seen so many times with hare hunting and fox hunting. Ed.)

Help *Lepus timidus* return to Dartmoor and benefit your health!

In the Daily Telegraph of 24 March Environment Secretary, Liz Truss was reported as stating that she wants: “to see more people enjoying the outdoors and benefiting from our fantastic national parks. Research from Natural England shows that taking part in nature based activities can reduce stress, depression and anxiety.” *(A refreshing change to have some words of wisdom from Liz Truss! Ed.)*

Pikas – are they lagomorphs?

We were asked this question recently. Yes, they are. Pikas are charming little creatures native to cold climates in Asia, North America and parts of Eastern Europe. They look like small rabbits, but have small, rounded ears and no tail. They live on rocky mountain sides with numerous crevices where they store piles of hay to tide them over the winter months since, like rabbits and hares, they don't hibernate. Pikas are members of the Family Ochotonidae within the Order Lagomorpha, whereas rabbits and hares are members of the Family Leporidae. Ochotona is the sole living genus of the family and has thirty species. During the latter part of the Devensian stage which spanned 71,000 to 12,000 years ago pikas were native to Britain and remains of *Ochotona pusilla* have been found in a small cave known as Bridged Pot in the Mendip Hills of Somerset.

Culling of mountain hares in Scotland

We have written to Dr Aileen McLeod, Minister of Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, asking for a Special Protection Order to be conferred on *Lepus timidus* at the very least until a reliable method of counting hares has been developed. This is a crucial aspect of Scotland's obligation under EU law to maintain the species at a “favourable conservation status.” Almost exactly a year ago we were informed that owners of grouse moors would be asked to exercise “voluntary restraint” on mass culling of mountain hares which we prophesied would be ignored and recent events have proved us right. If there is a way to circumvent protective legislation the bloodsports rabble can be guaranteed to find it and in this case they embarked upon an orgy of killing ahead of the shooting close season which came into force on 1 March. We are similarly sceptical of obtaining a satisfactory response from the Scottish Government and since protection for *timidus* is a matter of urgency we have written to MEP for the South-West, Molly Scott-Cato, asking her to brief us on the procedure for a complaint to the EU.

Snaring prosecution scandal

OneKind has called for a change in the law and condemned the Crown Office for dropping a case against a gamekeeper charged with snaring offences on a country estate. William Curr, a gamekeeper on the 23,000-acre Glenogil Estate in Angus, was accused of offences dating back to 2014 but it has emerged the case will not proceed. The charges against Curr were brought under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. He had appeared at Forfar Sheriff Court and denied neglecting snares that harmed wild animals on the estate. His trial was due to start on May 9. OneKind said it obtained footage of two trapped foxes during a visit to the estate in September 2014. One fox was already dead but the other was still alive and had to be euthanised at the scene due to the extent of its injuries. OneKind said it was appalled at the decision to drop the case, given the eye-witness evidence, the horrific video footage and the detailed follow-up investigation carried out by the Scottish SPCA.