

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*



The brown hare *Lepus europaeus* is the larger of the two species of hare in the UK, with a widespread distribution across the lowlands of Great Britain. They are larger than rabbits, with longer black-tipped ears, black tail top and longer hind feet. They are generalist herbivores, eating mostly young shoots of grasses and flowering plants, depending upon seasonal availability. Occurring in both arable and pastoral landscapes, they have a preference for mixed farmland. Female hares usually give birth to three or four leverets with an average of three litters per year. Their exact status in the UK is unknown but numbers are estimated to be between 800,000 and 1,300,000. Data from the NGC and that collected under the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), between 1995-2009, suggests the population has stabilized over the last two decades. They have limited legal protection but were listed as a Priority Species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (2007) and are a Species of Principle Importance under the NERC Act (2006).

The status for this species in Herefordshire is uncertain due to lack of records and survey effort, although existing records suggest the species is sparsely scattered across the county.

Threats

- Loss of mixed farmland resulting in reduction of available food resources
- Use of herbicides with associated loss of arable weeds
- Loss of field margins, winter stubbles, set-aside and ley, leading to reduction in cover
- Potential increase in predation of leverets by rising fox *Vulpes vulpes* population
- Habitat fragmentation and severance, including increasing road mortality of adults
- Disease from coccidiosis and yersiniosis
- Localised pressure from illegal hare coursing
- Climate change; trend for wetter spring/summer with potential reduction in leveret survival.
- Earlier cutting dates for crops and leys used to shelter leverets, leading to increased mortality in leverets

Current Action

- Legislation regarding hunting with dogs

	Objective	Action
A	Locate and map existing populations to determine county status	1,3,3
B	Identify important areas in the county for the species	1,2,3
C	Maintain current status of populations across key areas	3,4,5,6
D	Aim to enhance and restore historical populations by increasing suitable range of habitats within the county	3,4,5
E	Increase awareness of brown hare habitat requirements and habitat management practices that can benefit the species	4,5,6

	Actions	Target
1	Resurvey known populations and identify new populations	2020
2	Run training sessions in brown hare ecology and survey techniques	Annual
3	Map distribution, determine status and publish in BAP atlas	2020
4	Produce and promote information on species for land owners	2020
5	Work with land owners/ ,managers to encourage beneficial land management practices	2020
6	Engage with the BASC and GWCT to encourage hare conservation within the shooting fraternity	2020

Lead Partner	HWT
Key Partners	HMG, BASC, GWCT