

## Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

### Background

The Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus* is not native to Britain. Documentary evidence and archaeological specimens from Iron Age sites suggest that they were introduced by the Iron Age, but possibly not long before, with only scattered earlier records.

The Brown Hare is one of the larger British mammals with a body length of 50-60 cm and a body weight of 3-3.5 kg (females are larger than males). They tend to be found in diverse open habitats, preferring areas of short vegetation for feeding at night, but using areas of denser cover for resting and occasionally for feeding during daylight hours. Across Europe they are most common in arable areas, but are found throughout Wales, often on the edges of the uplands. They feed on grasses and herbs, both wild and cultivated, and will also use young trees and woody growth.



The last national population estimated hare numbers at 817,520. Numbers are thought to have peaked during the Victorian era of extensive gamekeeping. They appear to have declined particularly since the 1960s but little information is available on current trends, especially within Wales.

### Status in Wales

Range Widespread, occurring in all counties  
 Population Populations in England and Wales have declined over the last century. Population density in Wales varies widely with very few records from Pembrokeshire.

### Threats

(as identified in the 2008 BAP reporting)

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| • Changes in native species dynamics:       | Predation             |
| • Habitat loss / degradation - agriculture: | Loss of mixed farming |
| • Habitat loss / degradation - agriculture: | Loss of set aside     |

Also:

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| • Habitat loss / degradation - agriculture: | Use of agrichemicals   |
| • Habitat loss / degradation - agriculture: | Agricultural machinery |

### Status

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, S42 species of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity in Wales

UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species

The Brown Hare has limited legal protection under the Ground Game Act (1880) and the Hares Protection Act (1911). Sale of hares is prohibited between 1 March and 31 July. Hares are the only game species in Britain not to have a proper close season.

Wales BAP Lead Partner – Wildlife Trusts Wales (Lizzie Wilberforce  
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UK BAP Lead Partner – The Mammal Society and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

#### Wales BAP targets

*Set in 2005 at UK level and adopted as Welsh target in 2009.*

*Targets to be reviewed in 2014*

Code	Target type	Target	Units	2005 (baseline)	2010	2015	2020	2025
LeT1	Range	Maintain current range of Brown Hare in Wales	Occupied 10km squares	170	205	205	205	205
LeT2	Population size	Increase the population size of Brown Hare to double the 1995 level by 2020	Population index	150	200	200	200	200

#### Actions

Code	Action Type	Action	Action lead	Ecosystem Groups	Delivery Agents
LeA1	Habitat and Site Management	Ensure agri-environment prescriptions are available that support and encourage the maintenance and development of habitat features helpful to hares.	WG (Frances Gillett)	Enclosed farmland, Lowland Grassland and Heathland, Upland	WG
LeA2	Survey and Monitoring	Ensure a national long-term monitoring system is in place with sufficient power to detect population changes at an agreed level.	Wildlife Trusts Wales (Lizzie Wilberforce)	Enclosed farmland, Lowland Grassland and Heathland, Upland	NRW; WTW; LBAPs
LeA3	Research	Support research on habitat utilisation by Brown Hares	Wildlife Trusts Wales (Lizzie Wilberforce)	Enclosed farmland, Lowland Grassland and Heathland, Upland	NRW; WTW

Issues affecting implementation:

LeA1- this action may also include advocacy work by LBAPs and partners during the development and/or review of AES. Increasing diversity of habitat appears to be a key feature of landscape suitability for hares, so opportunities to encourage AES entry and application of a variety of prescriptions would be advantageous.

LeA2- some areas of Wales appear to be under-recorded and LBAPs have a role in encouraging reporting of brown hares by the public. Recent experiences of limited geographical monitoring of hares in Wales needs to be built on to establish national monitoring based on a standard methodology, with site selection being key (assistance from LBAPS).

LeA3- more Wales-specific information is required on habitat use by Brown Hares outside arable areas

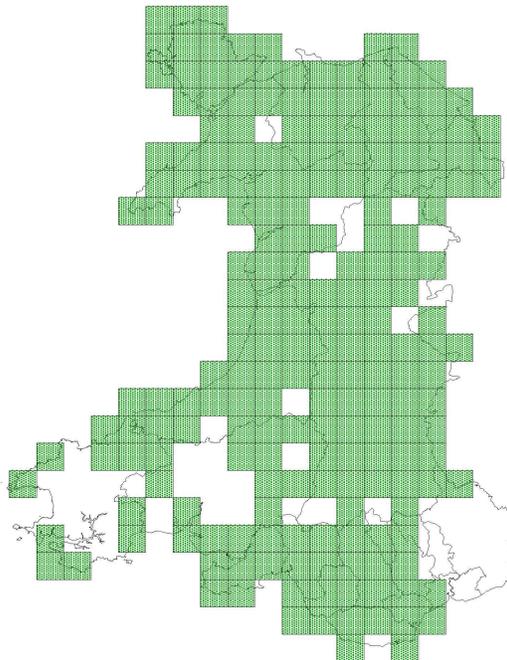
Ecosystems approach and enhancing species resilience

The key issues are

- Restoring diversity to our countryside. Brown hares traditionally thrived in areas mixed farming. Particularly, restoring arable to Wales's largely pastoral landscape and providing a range of habitats at all times of year will help provide all of hares' needs.
- Safeguarding our agriculturally marginal land. Many of the areas of Wales with the highest number of records of brown hare at present are the edges of our uplands. Maintaining these areas of low-intensity agriculture and mixed habitats will mean our brown hare populations are more resilient for the future.

**Current distribution and LBAP areas where action is needed**

**Figure 1:** 10km square occupancy by brown hares 2005-2011



**Figure 2:** LBAP areas where action is needed



References and further information

Harris, S & Yalden, DW (2008). Mammals of the British Isles: Handbook, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. The Mammal Society.

Hutchings, MR & Harris, S (1996). The current status of the Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*) in Britain. JNCC.

The Mammal Society: <http://www.mammal.org.uk/>

UK BAP Brown Hare Species Action Plan (Tranches 1 & 2, 1995-1999)  
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110303145213/http://ukbap.org.uk/ukplans.aspx?ID=410>

BARS  
<http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/>

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