

Shooting close season

Blue Hare have a new short campaign film for a close season for hares. It was produced for them by a professional BBC wildlife documentary film maker with a beautiful unreleased film soundtrack.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vd3tA_GSETQ&feature=youtu.be

The film will help raise public awareness of the plight of vulnerable hares and the need for a close season for hares to be introduced by the Westminster government as soon as possible. Blue Hare hope a commitment for a close season for hares will be included in the new Conservative manifesto and their proposal on this was put forward to the No10 Policy Board committee in a private meeting they had on animal welfare proposals for the manifesto in October 2014.

Re-introduction of mountain hares to Dartmoor

Research in Banffshire has shown that heather contributes 90% of the mountain hare's diet during winter and half the summer diet. Dartmoor includes 11,500 hectares of heather moorland, the largest area being found at East Dartmoor SSSI. Also found here are gorse, juniper and the rush *Juncus effusus* which are chief foods in stormy weather and snow cover.

A member of the public has raised the issue of camouflage during recent warmer winters with reduced snow cover as the hares take on their white winter coats. This could be a problem in the short term, depending upon the number of predators on the moor, but some climate experts believe global warming could upset the Gulf Stream which brings warm air to Britain, resulting in a colder climate and increased snow cover.

With regard to protection for the hares we consulted wildlife legal expert John Bryant who said: "I'm sure that the MOD and Defra could between them arrange some sort of protection by use of game laws (poaching), trespass with dogs and/or firearms. The Wildlife & Countryside Act Section 24 also allows Natural England at any time to advise the Secretary of State to add any animal to Schedule 5, either generally or in any area of Great Britain or for any particular time of the year. I doubt whether the present disgusting government would lift a finger, but it might be worth a campaign if we get a better government in May!" (John Bryant was largely responsible for successfully steering the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill through Parliament so that it became an Act in 1996 as described in newsletter 41.)

Campaign in Europe for improved mountain hare protection.

The mountain hare is listed in Annex 5 of the EC Habitats Directive (1992) as a species: "of community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures." The Habitats Directive requires member states to ensure exploitation of Annex 5 species is: "compatible with their being maintained at a favourable conservation status." But the latest information published by the British Trust for Ornithology indicates a 43% population decline between 1995 and 2012, Veteran ecologist Dr Adam Watson has also found massive declines in numbers on grouse moors around Deeside. This and a large amount of other evidence suggests that the Scottish Government has failed dismally in its duty under EC law to protect the mountain hare.

Green MEP for the South-West Molly Scott-Cato has offered her support to a petition to the European Parliament towards the full implementation of the EU Habitats Directive and the protections it provides for the mountain hare. Molly will communicate with Green colleagues in the Petitions and Environment committees on the issue. Another option which will deliver a fast response would be for Molly to submit a Parliamentary question to the Commission, to request information on how it assesses the current treatment of mountain hares and whether their management conforms to the EU

Habitats Directive.

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