

Close Encounters

A few weeks ago Rodney was amazed to have a hare almost brush past his leg as he leaned on a gate admiring the view to Dartmoor. Hares infected with European Brown Hare Syndrome often lose their fear of humans, so this was a possible explanation, but SWAFH member Gill Turner says:

“As you know, I spend lots of time in the company of hares. They come very close but alot depends on how many humans they see and also how old they are. This one (Gill enclosed a photo) actually put its foot on mine but was not spooked by me. I found this hare at the same time and in the same place two days on the run - this is not unusual. Don't think about why or how, just relish being in the company of such a glorious creature.”

Snares

We recently received a letter from Defra saying: “The Animal Welfare Act 2006 contains protection for animals under the control of man to help prevent unnecessary suffering and would cover any animal held in a snare. If animals are left to suffer unnecessarily in a snare, this would most likely be unlawful under the 2006 Act. It would be for the courts to decide whether the method of entrapment caused any suffering, and if so if this was unnecessary or not, in any particular case that was brought before them.”

The legal maximum period for which an animal can be left unattended in a snare is 24 hours but we understand that dog owners have been prosecuted for leaving the animal tied up without food, water or shelter for six hours and we await further details from the RSPCA. A problem could arise regarding proof of the time for which an animal has remained in a snare, but the concentration of endorphins in a blood sample could provide an answer. Endorphins are produced by the central nervous system and pituitary gland. Their primary function is to inhibit the transmission of pain signals and can also be produced in response to any form of stress. This was shown to be the case by Prof. Patrick Bateson in 1997 in his study of the effect of hunting on deer and contributed to the National Trust banning deer hunting on their land.

Moors for the Future

We contacted this organisation recently regarding their mountain hare surveys in the Peak District and South Pennines and received this reply from Tom Aspinall their Commiunity Science Project Officer: “ The surveys fall within our Community Science project which is aimed at understanding how the Peak District and South Pennine moors and the species they support are changing over time as the climate changes, as well as raising awareness of our moorlands within the general public. Our hare surveys are one of several survey types in this long-term monitoring project which also includes vegetation monitoring, bumblebee surveys and the monitoring of environmental variables such as rainfall and water table depth. Whichever way the climate does change in Britain we are interested to see its effects on all of our survey subjects, whether that be mountain hares, bumblebees or butterflies. We are interested to hear of your feasibility study into re-introducing mountain hares into Dartmoor and would be grateful to hear of the outcome.”

Drone mounted thermal imager project

Many thanks to Bryan Griffiths of Protect Our Wild Animals for sorting out the following: “In my humble opinion, best value for money drone is probably the new Phantom 3. Bear in mind it doesn't have GPS mapping ie. you can't pre program a flight route like some others for another £200 - £300, but any pilot should be quite capable of flying a straight line. Best price I've found to date is £922 inc delivery. Extra battery about £120 (a must as max flying time is 20-25 mins) You will need a cheap Android/Apple phone for the on board IR camera (cheapest I've seen is about £50). Make sure the Seek will fit it beforehand or a short adapter cable may be required. The phone/IR will have to be fitted to the drone in addition to the pilots camera and may require some fabrication. Value for money on the camera has to be the Seek thermal imaging suitable for use with Apple or Android phones. Best bit about this is that it uses the phone battery - less additional weight for the aircraft. The manufacturers have told me that others have used this camera on UAV`s. You will also need a tablet or similar device to view the IR video while standing next to your pilot, and you will need to download and set up a mirror image program to WiFi or Bluetooth the real time image. `Cheapcast` seems pretty good.”