

Rodents and Lagomorphs.

Many people think in error that hares and rabbits are rodents. They are in good company because even Darwin got it wrong! Rats, mice and beavers, for example, are members of the zoological Order Rodentia, but hares and rabbits are members of the Order Lagomorpha. So how do we tell the difference? Rodents and lagomorphs have many differences in, for example, their skull structure but the diagnostic feature which never fails rests in the incisor teeth. Rodents have a single pair of incisors in the upper and lower jaw, but lagomorphs have an additional smaller incisor on either side of the main ones in the upper jaw. This feature is unique to lagomorphs and has enabled palaeontologists to identify them in fossils dating from the Eocene period between 36 and 55 million years ago. The Lagomorpha is, in fact, probably much older, since the first known mammals date from the Triassic period between 205 and 250 million years ago - before the dinosaurs evolved. They were small, shrew-like creatures and have been found in rocks of the Mendip hills in Somerset and in Glamorgan.

Mountain hares

Molly Scott-Cato who is the first Green MEP for the South-West of England has included a short article in her newsletter on the possibility of re-introducing mountain hares to Dartmoor. The article is accompanied by a wonderful close-up photo of a mountain hare taken in the Peak District of Derbyshire by John Fielding.

Gene editing in grasses could help hares

High nitrogen levels in intensively managed grasses could inhibit digestion or cause other physiological problems for hares and may have contributed to their population decline of 75% since the 1960s. But the John Innes Centre has developed a technique known as gene editing which enables plants to manufacture their own ammonium fertiliser from nitrogen in the soil. This involves a subtle alteration of the plant's DNA and means that the fertiliser is, in effect, targeted on the crop plant. So weed plants are not affected and since these are foraged by hares in preference to crop plants they are less likely to suffer from the effects of intensive management involving high application rates of nitrogenous fertiliser. Gene editing differs from genetic modification (GM) where a new gene from another plant is inserted into a plant's chromosomes whereas gene editing is just a tweaking of the plant's existing DNA. However, the EU food standards agency has already suggested that they are going to class anything that is not natural as GM. If they go ahead with such a decision, they will cut off many approaches based upon gene editing for creating new foods and crops.

RSPCA urged to drop the R

If you agree please sign this petition urging the RSPCA to drop its Royal patronage: -

<https://www.change.org/p/the-rspca-we-urge-the-rspca-to-drop-the-r>

(Since the Royal Family kill and maim birds for fun I think the RSPB should also drop the R. In both cases I think it should be replaced by P – People's Ed.)

In another bizarre twist – Prince Philip is President Emeritus of the World Wildlife Fund and it has been suggested that WWF adopted the panda for its logo because it is the only animal that Philip hasn't shot!

Trail of Lies

The recent IFAW report "Trail of Lies" is the most revealing and damning document you will ever read, exposing the devious and cheating activities of virtually every hunt in the country. Study the report if you have time, but make sure you read the summary. This should be a watershed moment - indisputable evidence that 99% of hunts hunt foxes hare and probably deer every day. Make sure your Chief Constable gets a copy. Then ask them what they are going to do about it!

<http://www.ifaw.org/sites/default/files/2015-IFAW-Trail-of-Lies-full-report.pdf>

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