

## **Pollinators – more shocking news**

A study reported by a top team of 70 U.N. scientists finds that bees, butterflies and other pollinators are in greater danger than previously thought and in some cases may be at risk of extinction. The report is the first ever global study on the status of pollinators and the results are far worse than expected. Meanwhile, Bayer, one of the world's biggest producers of bee killing pesticides, is suing the European Commission to lift its ban on pesticides which are driving bees to extinction. Almost 90% of all flowering plants rely on pollinators, including 75% of the world's food crops. Seed heads of insect pollinated plants are an important food source for hares in the summer months. Hares nipping off seed heads on the Somerset Levels was one of many aspects of hare behaviour observed by the late Tony Holley using a specially adapted astronomical telescope installed in his attic and he was awarded a PhD degree from Durham University for his studies.

## **New evidence of mountain hare massacres**

In 2015, owing to concern about the scale of mountain hare culling in Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage appealed to grouse moor owners for “voluntary restraint.” The concern was, in fact, raised in a paper published by retired police officer Neil Macdonald in 2008 saying that the mountain hare is now scarce or extinct in many parts of Scotland where it was previously abundant. This is despite the fact that the mountain hare is protected under EU law which requires the species to be maintained at a favourable conservation status. Mountain hares in Scotland have been relentlessly persecuted for many years since they are believed to carry a tick borne virus causing louping ill in grouse chicks.

We have long recognised that the bloodsports fraternity have a pedigree for considering they are a law unto themselves and would not co-operate with an appeal for voluntary restraint. This is now proving to be the case and in February a bird watcher in the Cairngorms happened upon a group of men with Land Rovers and track laying vehicles one of which upon closer inspection was seen to be carrying a large number of mountain hare carcasses. Hundreds of mountain hares are known to have been shot prior to the close season coming into effect on 1 March. Again, if there is a means of circumventing protective legislation the wildlife killers can be guaranteed to find it. So we are making a new appeal to the Scottish Government for the mountain hare to be afforded full protection since it is abundantly clear that nothing less will do.

## **Another dog caught in a snare**

Julie Roberts, who was out walking her springer spaniel Mollie, had become concerned when Mollie failed to return when called. Upon investigation Ms Roberts was horrified to find Mollie trapped in a snare with the wire tightly wound round her neck. The incident happened as Mollie was walked above Boarsgrove Farm, near Buxton, in the Peak District National Park in February. Ms Roberts and her partner managed to free Mollie and returned to the scene the following day where they met the local gamekeeper. They said he dismissed concerns about dogs becoming trapped, saying that nobody walked dogs in the area. It is currently legal in England to set free-running snares for foxes, provided they are inspected daily. A voluntary Code of Practice published by Defra and promoted by shooting organisations states that snares must not be set close to roads and footpaths. In theory, free-running snares relax their grip if the animal stops pulling, but they can very quickly become kinked or rusty and then have an ever tightening, ratchet type of action like the illegal self-locking snare. The animal welfare organisation, OneKind says: "There is no way that these primitive wire nooses can ever be humane or selective which is why OneKind is campaigning for them to be banned throughout the UK as soon as possible." For further details go to [www.snarewatch.org](http://www.snarewatch.org)

## **Reintroduction of mountain hares to Dartmoor**

An increasing number of animal and plant species, including the mountain hare, are becoming rare, or even extinct, in the wild, but in some cases can be re-introduced into viable habitat. The Reintroduction Specialist Group (RSG) manages a Secretariat and network of global voluntary members which aims to provide reintroduction guidelines, networking resources and publications to reintroduction projects. RSG's mission is to combat on-going and massive loss of biodiversity by promoting the establishment of viable wild populations in their natural habitats.