

Mass mountain hare culling

We are exploring the possibility of seeking a Judicial Review of the Scottish Government's decision not to adopt the precautionary principle and confer a Special Protection Order on the mountain hare while research into a reliable method of counting them is carried out. The plight of the mountain hare has been known for at least nine years and landowners have had ample opportunity to take remedial action, but have not done so. EU legislation calls for "robust" measures for mountain hare conservation, so appeals by the Scottish Government at this stage for "voluntary restraint" on culling are unacceptable. Judicial Review is the procedure by which anyone can seek to challenge the decision, action or failure to act of a public body such as a government department or a local authority or other body exercising a public law function. Over the past few months the Tories have been attacking Judicial Review with an objective that ordinary people cannot apply for such a review. That is because this Government hates being told that it is acting unlawfully, which it often does.

Background information can be viewed here, but please be aware this includes a very distressing image:

<https://raptorpersecutionscotland.wordpress.com/2016/05/28/mountain-hare-slaughter-set-to-continue-in-breach-of-eu-regulations/>

Irish Parliament - TD Clare Daly calls for outright ban on hare coursing

TD Clare Daly has repeatedly called for a ban on coursing, claiming the reality of coursing is very different from the rules in place to protect the welfare of hares. She said the State's regulation of the issue is another sort of Irish solution to an Irish problem. There is an incredible contradiction where on the one hand hares are protected under the Wildlife Act but on the other under the Animal Health and Welfare Act all animals are protected with the exception of hares to be coursed, Ms Daly said. Last year 7,000 hares were taken from the wild to be used in coursing events, but she said the Irish mountain hare was becoming extinct. The Dublin Fingal TD said reports from the National Parks and Wildlife Service showed only 17 of the 75 events held here last year had officials from the service in attendance to monitor coursing regulation. Minister for Agriculture Michael Creed has refused to ban hare coursing outright. He warned that hare coursing organisers had to operate within the law and within the terms of their coursing licences. He said it is an Irish solution to an Irish problem, adding that he was not sure if Ms Daly was saying we should have an imported solution to an Irish problem. During Dail questions recently he pointed out that a very high proportion of hares netted for coursing were returned successfully to the wild. He said that at the end of the 2014-2015 season, 99.3 per cent of hares captured were released in a healthy condition after coursing. However, Ms Daly said many of the hares released back into the wild are in a very distressed state and die afterwards and this was reported by the wildlife service.

Mountain hare research and Dartmoor reintroduction.

We are extremely fortunate to have made contact with Carl Bedson, a PhD student at Manchester University who will be working on a project entitled: "Evaluating the Reintroduction of Mountain Hares to the Peak District: Implications for Rewilding Landscapes with Native Mammals"

In the 1880s 300 mountain hares were introduced from Perthshire to the Derbyshire Peak District. Half may have died out during the first year, but they certainly took hold. At that time the entire UK was some 34 million people, Sheffield and Manchester were much smaller and of course there was no car traffic. These factors made a reintroduction much easier. Currently, mountain hare roadkill on the short stretch known as Snake Pass may be one per day. Since this is less than one quarter of the road network that now divides the Peak District road kill is likely to be much higher. The present Peak District population is unclear with a wide range 3,500 to 10,000. Carl thinks this estimate is too high. In addition there is a known population cycle in mountain hares: Scotland nine years and Sweden four years. Populations can reduce by 90%. Also, adverse winters can dramatically reduce populations. The natal dispersal range of mountain hares is short – estimated at 0.8km with high juvenile mortality and reintroductions must consider this carefully. On this PhD study we would seek to understand these and other matters in greater detail and generate empirical field data. This would help to drive a population viability model which would forecast the likely extinction risk or longevity of the Peak District hares. Carl said we could certainly use such a model also for forecasting the possible success of a mountain hare reintroduction to Dartmoor. This is entirely the point of the study.