

Turtle doves under threat of extinction

The turtle dove is the UK's fastest declining bird, having suffered a 91% population decline since 1995 and a 78% decline across Europe since 1980. Some of the conservation measures which can be taken to help them are also beneficial to hares. Turtle doves are obligate granivores, that is their diet consists entirely of seeds. Bird seed mixtures can be grown on farms and payment received by farmers up to £640 per hectare under Countryside Stewardship. These mixtures also provide forage for hares who can often be seen nipping off the seed heads. However, the seeds contain virtually no fluid, so in the case of the turtle dove a nearby source of fresh water such as a pond or ditch is essential, whilst it is also beneficial to hares and other wildlife. Again, funding is available from Countryside Stewardship. Further details about bird seed mixtures are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/wild-bird-seed-mixture-op2>

Irish hares extinct on North Bull Island

Bull Island, or more properly North Bull Island, is an island located in Dublin Bay about 5 km long and 800 m wide, lying roughly parallel to the shore off Clontarf, Raheny, Kilbarrack, and facing Sutton. The wildlife and habitats on the island and inter-tidal areas are designated as a national nature reserve and protected by Irish and EU legislation. But whilst coursing with greyhounds has brought the Irish hare to the verge of extinction in other parts of Ireland, this time the ordinary family dog wandering at large or released for exercise is the main culprit. A good example, therefore, of the need for dogs to be kept under close supervision in nature reserves and other environmentally sensitive areas. (The name of the Irish hare in this source was quoted as *Lepus timidus hibernicus*, that is a sub-species of the mountain hare *Lepus timidus*, but recent DNA studies suggest the Irish hare is a species in its own right. Originally a large, long lake the Irish sea resulted when warmer conditions followed the last glaciation of the current ice age around 10,000 years ago, cutting off a population of mountain hares from mainland Britain and these evolved separately.)

Sir Ranulph Fiennes OBE opposes Hunting Act repeal

You might think that the Brexit negotiations will provide the Government with more than enough to occupy their time in the foreseeable future, but newly appointed Environment Secretary, Andrea Leadsom, had already made a free vote on repealing the Hunting Act a key policy commitment when she was challenging for the Tory party leadership. But Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who once famously marched with the pro-hunting Countryside Alliance, wants the newly-shaped Government to keep the Hunting Act. In an excellent open letter to Theresa May he says: "What rural people want from a Conservative Government is not an obsession with repealing a popular piece of legislation. There is a unique opportunity today for conservatives everywhere to proudly assert their compassionate credentials, and to communicate a powerful vision of preserving Britain's natural heritage for future generations. I hope you will publicly join me in championing this compassionate, conservative vision for animal welfare and against persecution for sport." More details of Sir Ranulph's letter are here: www.express.co.uk/news/nature/689641/Sir-Ranulph-Fiennes-Theresa-May-fox-hunting

Chris Packham upsets the shooting lobby – again.

This time by raising awareness of grouse on sale at Marks & Spencer despite containing lead levels up to 100 times greater than that allowed for other meats, having been shot with lead ammunition. Iceland foods, however, are not planning to sell red grouse this year. Grouse shooting for 'sport' depends on intensive habitat management which increases flood risk and greenhouse gas emissions. Hundreds of mountain hares are shot and snared annually despite EU protection because they allegedly carry a virus which kills grouse chicks. Grouse shooting also often leads to the deliberate illegal killing of protected birds of prey including Hen Harriers. Dr Mark Avery has a petition running to ban driven grouse shooting which at the time of writing has reached 60,625 signatures and can be visited here: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125003>
And SWAFH member Eileen Russell comments:
"It's all to do with money! Game-keepers get a bonus from the "master" if the well-off idiots with their guns get a good haul. Mankind is the most pernicious pest on the planet."