

## **Shooting restrictions proposed by Labour**

A new series of animal welfare proposals, commissioned and welcomed by the Labour Party, has called for the licensing of shooting estates, a four-fold rise in the price of shotgun certificates and an end to snare use. The proposals, presented during the Labour Party conference, seek to end cruel practices on shooting estates by outlawing battery cages for breeding pheasants, further restricting shooting seasons and no longer allowing drainage of land to facilitate grouse shooting. Landowners will also have obligations to restore land to its natural environment. The badger cull will be halted. Airguns will be prohibited to anyone under the age of 21, the price of a shotgun certificate will rise to £200 and possession of firearms will be limited to farms and clubs with proper security measures.

Meanwhile, lead poisoning has caused the death of birds at four Wildfowl & Wetland Trust centres (Welney, Arundel, Martin Mere and Caerlaverock) Whooper swans and Canada geese had between 1 and 7 eroded lead shot pellets in their gizzards. Previous research has shown the former to be particularly prone to ingestion of shot. There is no evidence of hares acquiring lead other than by being shot. The problem with birds is that they mistake lead shot for food.

## **News from our under-cover investigator in Scotland**

Heard an interesting anecdote recently - I've heard similar stories time and time again from my "learned sources" - anyway, a commercial deer poacher told a friend that he had been out at night recently using thermal imaging binoculars, he spotted 4 roe deer lying up in rushy grass, and was able to get all of them. In the recent past, using more basic equipment such as lamping or "ordinary" night vision (not the same as thermal imaging which can detect life through foliage etc), these deer (or hares, badgers etc) would not have been seen and would have got away. Additionally, wildlife becomes "educated" to a lamp beam and will run away at the sight of one. What is going on is silent and deadly denuding of our countryside of its wildlife and no one seems to be taking any notice. The RSPB also report thermal imaging being used by gamekeepers to detect hen harrier nests. I think it is high time for a ban on night vision and thermal imaging equipment being sold to non military/police.

## **The mountain hare in Wales – is it extinct?**

The general consensus of opinion seems to be that it is, but a sighting sent in to the Hare Preservation Trust for 28 June 2015 by two experienced wildlife observers casts some doubt on the matter. What appeared to be a mountain hare was seen on the mountain road between Nant Y Moch and Talybont in the Cambrian mountains of Wales. The sighting, recorded in clear weather, stated: "Absolutely a hare due to legs but shorter ears than I have seen when watching brown hares. I know that there are not supposed to be any mountain hares in this area. Both myself and my wife are keen naturalists and are fairly sure that it was a mountain hare, although I know this seems unlikely - this is exactly why I am reporting it." Jo Sharplin of HPT says: "Some years ago a Welsh farmer wrote and asked why we didn't mention the Blue Welsh hare". So hares answering the description of mountain hares have been seen more than once in Wales in the not so distant past. All most intriguing and worthy of an expedition to search for them.

## **New variant of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHDV-2) can infect hares**

In 2010, an uncharacteristic outbreak of RHD occurred in a rabbitry in France in which 25% of rabbits which were vaccinated against normal RHDV died. An emergency vaccination was administered to the remaining rabbits which stopped the mortalities, but it was slower than the usual 7 to 9 days and took much longer to control, taking up to 15 days in most cases. The wild rabbit population was also affected the same way. Samples were genetically analysed and found the virus causing the fatalities was related to, but highly distinct from, the strains of RHD isolated from previous outbreaks. This new strain of infection has the potential to devastate a wild rabbit population and can also infect previously vaccinated pet rabbits and unlike RHDV, it also appears to affect hares. This variant was renamed RHD-2, and the virus itself as RHDV-2. Laboratory testing has confirmed that Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV-2) was present in three recently deceased European brown hares in Australia one in Victoria and two in South Australia. RHDV-2 is specific to Lagomorph species, which include rabbits and hares. A vaccine is available in the UK.

