

In edition 87 of this newsletter we asked people who live in the South-West and have never seen a hare to let us know, but can you tell a hare from a rabbit? Adult hares are at least double the size of a rabbit and females are on average 10% larger than males. Hares are a sandy brown colour whereas rabbits are predominantly grey although some have a brownish hue. Hares have black tips to their very long ears which are fringed in white and a black top to the tail with a white underside. The tail is held down when the hare is running, showing the black top fringed with white whereas in rabbits the tail is held up, displaying the white underside. The pattern of black and white to the ears and tail is quite characteristic of hares as they run away from you. Hares have very long legs in proportion to their bodies which give them a well developed stride, whereas rabbits scamper along. Rabbits rarely venture far from cover, so if you see an animal with long ears towards the centre of a field it will almost certainly be a hare.

Could hen harrier re-introduction pave the way for mountain hares?

There is enough habitat for 300 breeding pairs of hen harriers in England, but in 2014, only four pairs bred. In 2015, three nesting males “disappeared”, and only a handful of pairs remain. Like the mountain hare the hen harrier is being brought to the verge of extinction by illegal persecution on grouse moors. Both species are protected under EU law. A reintroduction to Southern England feasibility study funded by Natural England identifies four potential release areas for hen harriers: Exmoor, Dartmoor, Dorset Heaths and Wiltshire. The full report which gives an indication of the work required for a reintroduction of the mountain hare to Dartmoor makes very interesting reading and can be downloaded here:

<https://raptorpersecutionscotland.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/draft-hh-reintro-to-southern-england-feasibility-study.pdf>

Children as young as eight encouraged to kill for fun

As reported in the Telegraph of 2 January thousands of shooting enthusiasts are facing lengthy waits to receive their gun licences as more GPs are boycotting issuing certificates due to a change in the law. The renewal of firearms certificates, which once took up to three weeks, can now take up to nine months, and the process is having a knock-on effect on sporting events, including pheasant shoots. Since the law changed in April, GPs have been required to inform the police if they have any concerns about a patient receiving a firearms licence if they have any relevant medical conditions such as depression or dementia. GPs are responsible for putting a firearm reminder code on the patient's record.

But Alan Kirby of POWA says: “I'd say wanting a gun so you can blast birds and mammals to death for fun is in itself evidence of mental illness.” The link between childhood harm to animals and adult harm to humans is well documented. So too is the brainwashing of children, some aged only eight, to take up killing animals for fun. In one case a child of five has been granted a shotgun licence although the gun can only be used under supervision. Since the 1970s, research has consistently reported cruelty to animals as the first warning sign of later delinquency, violence, and criminal behaviour. In fact, nearly all violent crime perpetrators have a history of animal cruelty in their profiles. Yet we live in a society which actually encourages children to kill animals from an early age.

GCSE in Natural History

Re-engagement with Britain's natural history has never been more urgent. Young people need the skills to name, observe, monitor and record wildlife. It is vital to understand the contribution nature makes to our lives physically, culturally, emotionally and scientifically both in the past and today. SWAFH welcomes this proposed development in the national curriculum with the strict proviso that it does not create a platform for pro-bloodsports propaganda.

Further details and a petition to sign are here:-

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/176749>
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