

## Brown Hare

*Lepus europaeus* (Pallas, 1778)

Order: Lagomorpha

At a distance hares look like large rabbits and are best distinguished by their behaviour – hares are usually solitary, when they are disturbed they have a distinctive lolloping gait and much longer legs than a rabbit. When running, the ears are usually held flat along the back and the tail rarely flashes white, they do not go to ground and may run in a wide arc. Closer to, the hare has long ears with marked black tips. The fur is more ginger than that of the rabbit. Females can grow larger than the males, up to 5 kg and 700 mm long.



Photograph: Di Northey

Hares breed from February to September and may raise up to 4 litters of 2-5 leverets each year after a gestation of 42 days. The leverets are born fully furred and with eyes open and are active within one hour. The young remain immobile and inconspicuous under cover whilst the mother is feeding and they are weaned at 3-4 weeks. During courtship the females may fend off males by standing on their back legs and 'boxing'. Although most hares die during their first year they can live up to 12 years.

Brown hares are solitary animals of open country, living above ground and feeding mainly at night. During the day they form shallow scrapes, lined with grass, known as forms. Hares seem to have spread from the open grasslands of central Asia following the development of arable agriculture.

Brown hares eat young cereal crops, oilseed rape, wild grasses and herbs and root crops and tree bark in the winter.

Adult brown hares are preyed upon by foxes, they rely on speed to escape predators and have been recorded at 50 km/hr. In some areas they are controlled as a pest species and are also shot as game. Illegal hare coursing still takes place in some areas. Road traffic casualties can be significant.

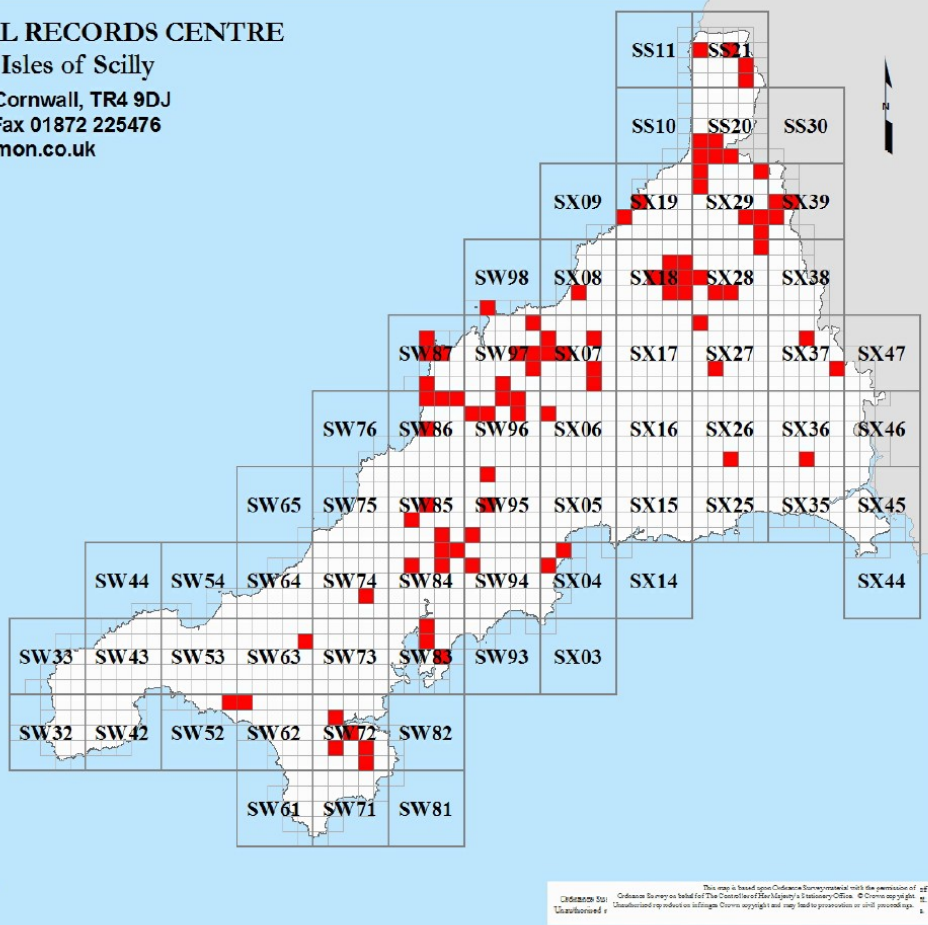


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**Cornwall Mammal Group**  
**Brown hare**  
*Lepus europaeus*  
As of September 2009

**Legend**

-  Grid 10 Km
-  Grid 2 Km (Tetrad)
-  Brown hare records, 2000-2009



Local distribution and key sites

The map shows that the brown hare has a patchy, fragmented distribution and is under recorded across Cornwall. Recent records suggest that the brown hare has declined in Cornwall.

**Number of records per date class**

2002 to 2006 inclusive 73  
1997 to 2001 inclusive 40  
All records previous to 1997 161  
**Total 274**

Brown hare were probably introduced to Britain by the Romans from the grasslands of central Asia. It also found across Europe and the Iberian Peninsular and has been introduced to North and South America as well as Australia and New Zealand.

The brown hare is not specifically protected although it is a Cornish BAP species. Numbers have declined nationally by about 80% in the last century and the estimated population is now about 1 million individuals. This may be a result of changing farming practices, in the South West this includes the use of fast silage cutting equipment, and increased stocking densities which may displace resting hares and their leverets.

Survey Methods

- Hunt returns
- Road casualty records
- Field surveys

Did you know?

Boxing hares in the spring are usually females repelling the advances of males during courtship. Brown hare populations may increase when myxomatosis has reduced the rabbit populations. Hares are considered ill omens in some cultures and witches were supposed to take the form of hares. The hare was the original 'easter bunny' being the sacred animal of Eastre, the Saxon goddess of spring.

Key references

McBride, A (1989) Rabbits and hares. Whittet Books, London