

## 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.



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.

