

Brown Hare Action Plan

Introduction and Vision Statement

The brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) is a widespread but declining species in Britain, which occurs mainly in the agricultural lowlands, although it can be seen up to altitudes of 500 m. It inhabits both arable and pasture land, although it appears to be most abundant in mixed arable systems.



Hares are generally nocturnal, often feeding in groups on grasses, cereals and root crops. During the day they tend to remain hidden in small scrapes (forms) at ground level. Male hares do not defend territories but will guard individual females during the breeding season, often leading to aggressive encounters.

Hares rely on their ability to run fast and long to escape predators. The fox is considered to be its main natural predator, although owls and other birds of prey will take a leveret.

The brown hare is thought to have been introduced to Britain by the Romans.

The brown hare has undergone a marked decline and reduction in its distribution in Carmarthenshire since 1950. Records since 1990 indicate that the majority of populations now occur in hilly, less intensively farmed areas in the north and east of the county; most recent sightings appear to have come from the Cwman–Rhandirmwyn–Talley area.

The Pembrey peninsula is now perhaps the single most important locality in the county. Congregations of hares are regularly sighted in the open dunes, in rides and glades within the forest itself, and also in the surrounding farmland. It is quite possible that the little-surveyed dune system east of Pendine also supports good numbers of hares.

A perhaps unusual location where this species occurs was at Ffos-las, Trimsaran where it is yet to be seen whether the good numbers that used open land remaining at this restored opencast site after development to a race course.

Loss of habitat diversity in the agricultural landscape, changes in cropping and planting regimes, such as a move from hay to silage, and autumn sowing of cereals are causes for the decline in the hare in Carmarthenshire.

Within Carmarthenshire our vision for brown hares is have a good understanding of their population size and distribution and to expand the range and increase the numbers of brown hares. This would be by providing the range of interconnected habitats that they need to survive and to work with landowners/organisations to encourage appropriate management.

Action Plan Objectives

HARE1SP To maintain and increase the population of brown hares in Carmarthenshire

HARE2DCM To gather data on the distribution and status of brown hares in Carmarthenshire

HARE3RA To raise awareness about the brown hare in Carmarthenshire

Actions

CODE	TEXT	START/ END DATE	CONTACTS (lead in bold)	Action goal	Key partners	Funding	Priority L,M,H	Report Jan-Dec 2010		
HARE1SP1	Based on existing survey data identify suitable areas for expansion of core populations	2010– 2014	WTSWW	Map, recommend ations	CCC, CCW		M	Not started		
HARE2DCM1	Continue to promote submission of records	2010– ongoing	CCC	Website Press release Item in newsletter	WTSWW		H	Not started – action for 2011		
HARE2DCM2	Identify core populations of brown hares in Carmarthenshire	2010– 2014	WTSWW	GIS layer	CCC,WW BIC, CCW		H	Ongoing- continuing to gather data		
HARE2DCM3	Assess impacts of agri-environment schemes on brown hare populations	2010– 2012	WTSWW,	1 Report	WAG		M	WAG have issued contract to consortium of NGOs to undertake this assessment. Desk study completed and report published (now in public domain). Ongoing.		
HARE3RA1	Produce advice to landowners and other interested parties on the habitat requirements of the brown hare and appropriate management for the species	2010– ongoing	WTSWW	Advice sheet produced	WAG, CCC		M	Ongoing		