

What is Hare Coursing?

Hare coursing is a cruel and illegal blood sport in which mainly lurchers and salukis are released to chase and catch hares, often live-streamed for gambling purposes. It is most common from late summer when the crops are cut through to spring when crops are grown enough to provide hares with sufficient cover.

Why is Hare Coursing Cruel?

- Hares are wild animals and are naturally fearful of dogs. When chased by dogs, hares experience immense stress and fear.
- The dogs used in hare coursing are often trained to attack and kill the hares. Even if the hare is not killed, it will likely suffer serious injuries, including broken bones, internal injuries, and shock. Most hares, though, will eventually be killed by the dogs and their bodies thrown into ditches or by the roadside. Coursing enthusiasts have claimed that hares die instantaneously from the bite of one dog. However, hares are often unsuccessfully grabbed several times by the dogs - causing terrible injuries and stress. Witnesses have described hearing the hares screaming in pain, as they become part of a brutal tug of war between dogs.
- Hare coursing often takes place at night, when hares are most active. This means that the hares are more vulnerable to being attacked and have less chance of escape.

Hare Coursing also Involves Other Crimes

Hare coursing often involves the committing of other crimes:

- The vehicles used are often untaxed or uninsured, or are unfit for road use. Dangerous driving is also an issue.
- Trespass: the hare coursers are trespassing on farmland
- Criminal damage and theft: plus other farm equipment damage/theft and damage to farm gates
- Violence towards farmers or others who approach the coursers
- Gambling: there is much money to be made from hare coursing. Coursing is even livestreamed to gamblers in countries as far afield as China. Bets are placed, for example, on how often a dog turns the hare, or whether the hare will escape.

- Hare coursers are often serious criminals involved in other criminal activity and are often armed
- Hare coursers often commit their crimes in other counties from where they live.
- The dogs are also often cruelly treated or abandoned

Hare Coursing and the Law

Hare coursing is covered under the following Acts:

Section 30 Game Act 1831

This creates offences in relation to trespassing during the day in search of game (hare is classified as game), depending on the number of people involved (an offence involving five or more people carries a higher fine).

Any offence that is committed at night must be prosecuted under Section 1 Night Poaching Act 1828 (see below).

It is most important to note that there is no requirement under this Act for anything to be actually chased or caught for the offence to be committed. Trespassing on land to look for something to chase is sufficient.

Section 1 Night Poaching Act 1828

Only deals with offences committed at night. Two separate offences:

- The first provides that it is an offence if, by night, a person "unlawfully" enters onto land (i.e. trespasses) and takes or destroys game
- The second one provides that it is an offence if, by night, a person is "unlawfully" on land with a "gun, net engine or other instrument" for the purposes of "taking or destroying any game".

Section 5 Hunting Act 2004

This outlaws hare coursing and contains wider provisions than those relating to hunting wild mammals. The offence is precisely drawn but some confusion may arise where 'illegal hare coursers' are prosecuted. Such persons are trespassers and commit an offence under the Game Act 1831. Where trespass to land is an ingredient of the activity said to constitute an offence under section 1 or section 5 HA 2004, it will generally be easier to continue to prosecute under the Game Acts. However, this section does not encompass what might be described as hare

coursing that is recreational, it requires proof of a competition. Section 5 HA 2004 will clearly capture large, well organised hare coursing events, such as the old Waterloo Cup. It is much less easy to prove in other circumstances unless there is strong supporting evidence of competitive elements such as betting on the outcome.

Section 5 also provides that a person commits an offence if they:

- participate in a hare coursing event;
- attend a hare coursing event;
- knowingly facilitate a hare coursing event; or
- permit land which belongs to them to be used for the purposes of a hare coursing event.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, Section 63 and Section 64

This Act created two new offences of trespass with intent to pursue hares and being equipped to search for or pursue hares.

The offence of trespassing with intent to pursue hares (s.63) is committed where the trespasser intends to use a dog to pursue or search for hares, or to facilitate another doing so or to enable another person to observe that activity.

The offence of being equipped to search or pursue hares (s.64) when a person has with them (other than when in a dwelling) an article with the intention that they or another will use it to commit any offence under s.63.

What Can You Do to Help?

- Report any sightings of hare coursing to the police – call 101 or 999 if coursing is taking place live. DO NOT approach these men, they are extremely dangerous and violent. Your local police rural crime team may also have a way you can report anonymously if you prefer. When reporting, to save time, make sure you have the exact location handy. What 3 Words is great for this or a map grid reference.
- Support organizations that are working to end hare coursing.
- Educate others about the cruelty of hare coursing. Talk to your friends, family, and neighbours about the issue and encourage them to report any sightings of hare coursing. Share hare coursing incidents/prosecutions on your social media pages to further inform people that this crime is still taking place