

# HARE HUNTING

## What is Hare Hunting?

Since the Hunting Act 2004, hare hunting is illegal – yet this doesn't stop hare hunting going on, with many packs hunting 3 times a week. Basically, it is a glorified form of hare coursing – just like hare coursing, dogs are set to find hares and chase them; just like hare hunting there are spectators. The only difference is that there is no gambling involved.

Hare hunting season runs from late August to mid-March.

Hares are hunted with beagle packs (on foot), harrier packs (on horseback) or basset hound packs (on foot). These packs will also prepare their hounds for hare hunting by hunting leverets (baby hares) early in the season. As of 2023, there are currently around 45 beagle packs, 5 basset packs and 15 harrier packs.

Hares don't like to leave their territory so a hare hunt may only cover a couple of miles or so. But there is always the possibility of finding other hares in the area to chase. During the chase, the hare will be faster than the hounds but it will not have the stamina to keep going over a long period and will eventually be caught and killed.

Hare hunts are "regulated" by the Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles (AMHB), who claim they enforce strict hunting rules and conduct kennel inspections – they obviously are not doing their job properly as East and West Kent Hunt Sabs exposed the filthy living conditions of the Bolebroke Beagles in Kent in 2023.

Hare hunts are also very secretive. They have very little social media or internet presence, which makes gathering intel on them or finding them difficult. They usually meet in remote locations, such as farm buildings or pubs, far away from the public. The hunt usually starts around midday.

There is a Master, Huntsman and Whipper-in, whose roles are the same as that for fox hunts, plus the followers and supporters.

Hares don't go to ground as such but may be flushed out if they shelter in drains or other places of cover, and re-hunted. The hare's brown coat enables it to blend in with the ground and it may lay in a form (a shallow scrape in the ground) until a hound is almost upon it, and then shoot off. They don't like to go on to fresh ground or ground they don't know and so may run in a wide circle. Hare scent originates from between the toes, and pregnant hares carry little scent.

The Huntsman will encourage the hounds with voice and horn. The hare will use manure etc to spoil its scent and will jink, making a sharp leap to the side. If a hare is lost, the hounds will be re-cast. Supporters will usually raise their hat or arm to indicate if they've seen a hare.

Beagles have a lot of stamina and are fast. They often run off, losing the hunt members, until they cannot be seen in the distance. During that time, of course, they are under no human control and may well kill out of sight.

## A Few Hare Facts

- Hare scent comes from between the toes and this can be confused by roads, other animals and humans. Pregnant hares carry little scent.

- Hares are also good swimmers and will swim across rivers or ditches in the hope of getting away from the hunt.
- They are game animals but some farmers regard them as pests because they can damage cereal crops.
- Hares feed mainly at night and rest during the day.
- Unlike rabbits, hares do not build warrens
- They are mainly solitary animals although a few may live near to each other and form small collectives when foraging
- Hares scream when distressed or caught
- Adult hares normally live 3 – 4 years
- Hares breed February to September, producing 3 or 4 litters of 3 or 4 leverets

## **Hare Shooting Season**

Brown hares are a quarry species which may be legally controlled during the open season, but is protected in the closed season under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The closed season for brown hare is 1 February - 30 September. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a brown hare in its closed season without a licence. It is also an offence to possess or control, sell or offer for sale, or transport for the purpose of sale any living or dead brown hare (or rabbit), or any derivative of such an animal, which has been killed without a legal right to do so.

Adult hares normally live to 3 or 4 years but very rarely can live much longer.

Breed Feb to Sept. Can produce 3 or 4 litters of 3 or 4 leverets

Brown hare numbers have declined since the 1960s.

## **Differences between hares and rabbits:**

Rabbits – brown eyes; hares – amber

Rabbits – shorter ears; hares are taller with black tips

Rabbits usually hop, hares tend to walk

Rabbits are smaller with shorter limbs

## **Legal Protection for Hares**

### **The Hunting Act 2004**

The Act creates five offences:

- Hunting a wild mammal with a dog **section 1**;
- Permitting land to be used for hunting a wild mammal with a dog **section 3(1)**;

- Permitting a dog to be used for hunting a wild mammal with a dog **section 3(2)**;
- Participating in, attending, facilitating or permitting land to be used for the purposes of a hare-coursing event **section 5(1)**; and
- Entering/permitting/handling a dog in a hare-coursing event **section 5(2)**.

The law allows them to be killed both as a game species and to prevent serious damage to farm crops. This specifies that any killing or control must be undertaken by competent people who are aware of their responsibilities as game shooters or as pest controllers. Any killing or control must always be carried out in strict accordance with the law.

## **Ground Game Act 1880**

Brown hares are defined as 'ground game' by the Ground Game Act 1880. This Act gives a statutory right to every occupier of land to take or kill ground game; this right may be shared with other persons, such as the holder of the sporting rights.

Subject to certain conditions, the occupier may also authorise others to control hares, but only they and one other authorised person may use a firearm.

This means that every occupier (farming tenant) retains the right to kill hares whether or not they hold shooting rights

## **Game Act 1831.**

Brown hares are defined as 'game' by the Game Act 1831. This Act prohibits the shooting of game species on Sundays and Christmas Day.

## **Hare Preservation Act 1892**

This Act makes it an offence to sell, or expose for sale, any hare or leveret between the months of March and July inclusive. This prohibition removes any commercial incentive to kill hares during the main breeding season but does not apply to imported hares.

## **What to do if you see a hare hunt in progress**

Call 999 and say you are reporting hare coursing under Operation Galileo. Operation Galileo is a national police operation tackling hare coursing and poaching.