

1. CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Legislation and priority status

International	None known
UK and Wales	Ground Game Act (1880) Hare Preservation Act (1892) ^a The Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996 UK BAP Priority Welsh S74 list ^b
Gwynedd	Snowdonia BAP

1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

The brown hare^c is a common and conspicuous farmland species in Britain, probably introduced by the Romans in ancient times. It is widespread, but is absent from the northwest and western Highlands, where it is replaced by the mountain hare (*Lepus timidus*).

Formerly considered abundant, the brown hare appears to have undergone a substantial decline in numbers since the early 1960s. A recent survey suggested that winter numbers in Britain may be around 800,000¹. Information from shooting estates suggests that hare numbers have remained stable for the past ten years, although other evidence of this is unclear. Similar patterns of population change appear to have occurred throughout much of Europe and appear to be linked to changes in agricultural practice.

The brown hare is present in almost all counties in Wales but its population seems to have seriously declined since 1960. Population size is currently estimated to be around 58,000. Since 1996 hare records for North Wales have been collated by the North Wales Wildlife Trust and the data suggests a widespread distribution but at a relatively low density. Hares seem to be less common in the more mountainous regions.



1.3 Status in Gwynedd^d

The distribution of brown hare in Gwynedd is not accurately known, however a 1997 / 1998 survey of North Wales by North Wales Wildlife Trust indicated that brown hares were widespread but not common. Records came mainly from farmland with lower grazing intensity.

^a The Hare Preservation Act (1892) forbids the sale of brown hares during their normal breeding season, March to July inclusive.

^b Welsh Assembly Government, *Going Wild in Wales - List of Species and Habitats of Principal Importance for the Conservation of Biological Diversity*. Crown Copyright 2003.

^c *Lepus europaeus*

^d Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise

2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS SPECIES IN GWYNEDD^e

- Changes in farming practices: changing from spring to autumn sown cereals, and in particular the use of silage rather than hay
- Intensification in cropping and harvesting and in use of herbicides which reduces available food and habitat
- A possible increase in numbers of foxes, the major predator of young hares
- Hare coursing (possible factor locally)
- Climate change. A long term trend for wetter spring and summer weather may have long term implications for brown hare populations, as wet weather can reduce the survival rates of young hares

3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Arable field margins, Upland heathland, Lowland meadows and pasture, Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, Wetlands

Lapwing, Farmland birds

4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

4.1. Site and habitat protection

- Brown hares may occur in terrestrial or coastal areas of Gwynedd identified as potential Wildlife Sites, or designated as LNR, SSSI, NNR, candidate SAC or SPA, however no details are available.

4.2 Management and programmes of action

- Grant Schemes for agri-environmental management (e.g. Tir Gofal) may contribute towards maintaining and enhancing habitat suitable for the brown hare.
- The brown hare is one of the species eligible for funding from Countryside Council for Wales Species Challenge Fund.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- The North Wales Wildlife Trust has been collating hare records from members of the public since 1996.

5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

1. To establish the current status and distribution of brown hare in Gwynedd.
2. To maintain and expand existing populations of brown hare in Gwynedd.
3. To use the brown hare as a flagship species to raise awareness of the impact on biodiversity of changes in farming practices.

^e See also associated HAPs for more general factors affecting this species habitats

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) ^f
Policy and legislation		
1	Use planning conditions to ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of brown hare TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , relevant partners
Species / habitat management and protection		
2	Promote and support grant schemes and / or use management agreements where appropriate to secure favourable management of brown hare habitat, taking into account the needs of associated LBAP species and habitats TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set / Ongoing	CCW , CLA , FUW , FWAG Cymru , GC , NFU Cymru
3	Seek funding for land management by developing a biodiversity grant scheme, which would include grants for appropriate management of brown hare habitat TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	GC , Relevant partners
Advisory		
4	Translate and distribute the information leaflet <i>Conserving the brown hare</i> , produced by the Game Conservancy Trust, among members of farming unions, shooting clubs, BASC , GCT and other landowners and managers as appropriate TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set	GCT , GC
Survey, research and monitoring		
5	Collate all existing records of the brown hare in Gwynedd (including NWWT data), to establish the local status of the species (information to be stored electronically). Consider reviewing this SAP in the context of this information TARGET/TIMESCALE: Complete review by 2005	NWWT , CCW , GC
Communications and publicity		
6	Encourage the recording of brown hare sightings by land owners and managers, to be passed to NWWT for collation, and to be integrated within future National Hare Surveys, through publishing regular articles in relevant publications (e.g. those of farming unions, BASC , GCT , NWWT) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , BASC , FWAG Cymru , GCT , NWWT
7	Encourage the recording of brown hare sightings by the general public, to be passed to NWWT for collation, and to be integrated within future National Hare Surveys, through submission of occasional press releases to local newspapers. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , NWWT

^f Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

7. PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 Overall Lead partner for SAP

North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

7.2 Key partners

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Farmers Union of Wales (FUW)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Game Conservancy Trust (GCT)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

National Farmers Union Cymru (NFU Cymru)

7.3 Opportunities

Volunteers, students, farming unions, landowners and managers

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, LNR: Local Nature Reserve, NNR: National Nature Reserve, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SAP: Species Action Plan, SPA: Special Protection Area, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest

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¹ Hutchings, MRW and Harris, S. 1996. "Current status of the brown hare in Britain". Report of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.