

BIODIVERSITY on your Farm

The National Biodiversity Data Centre has set a challenge for farmers to record some of the amazing biodiversity found on your farm during the year. We have 40 species for you to record.

Are you up for the challenge?

Species: Irish hare

Scientific Name: *Lepus timidus hibernicus*

Irish name: Giorria sléibhe Éireannach

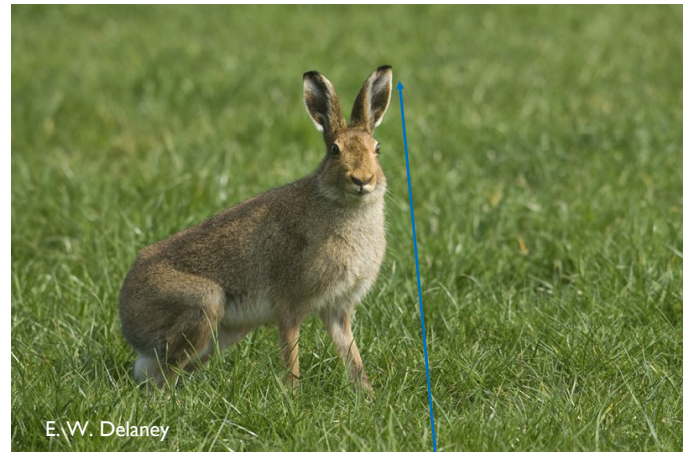
Group

1 of only 3 Lagomorphs found on the island of Ireland and the only native Lagomorph.

Found only in Ireland and a subspecies of the Mountain hare.

How common on farms

Biodiversity surveys were carried out across 40 farms within the National Biodiversity Data Centre's 'Protecting Farmland Pollinators' EIP project (<https://biodiversityireland.ie/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators/>). The 40 farms were chosen to reflect farms of differing types and intensity levels. The Irish Hare was recorded on some of the 40 farms.



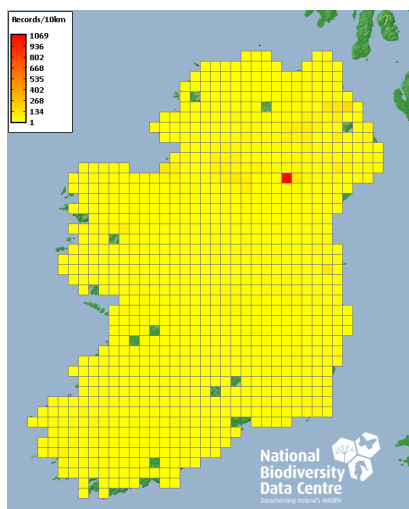
Irish hare. Note: Long ears with black tips and long back legs with big feet.

Identification Tips

- 52 to 62 cm in length.
- Much larger than a rabbit, with long back legs, big feet and long ears with black tips.
- Fur can appear a reddish-brown in the summer.
- Mainly nocturnal, but can be active in daylight hours especially at dawn and dusk.
- Can be spotted boxing in the breeding season.

Distribution

Common and widespread.



Source: The Irish Hare records as viewed on Biodiversity Maps, 2023.

Biodiversity Tip No. 35

Retain or create a Hare's corner.

An undisturbed day-time resting place, with plenty of cover - particularly rushes and good quality hedgerows.



Conservation Status

The Mountain Hare is listed under the EC Habitats & Species Directive (92/43/EEC) and Article 17 requires that member states regularly undertake national conservation assessments of its status.

The current status of the Irish Hare within the criteria of i) Range, ii) Population, iii) Habitat for the species and iv) Future prospects was assessed as Favourable with the overall national conservation assessment stable in common with the two most recent Article 17 reports (dated 2013 and 2019).

It was noted that the apparent improvement in status from 2007 to 2013 reflected improved knowledge/ more accurate data rather than actual population change.

Management Tips

On the farm:

- Retain permanent pasture for grazing livestock, extensive grassland is favored by the Irish hare.
- Retain semi-natural farmland habitats (natural, unimproved or semi-improved).
- Retain or create hedgerows, woodland copses and scrub areas to provide lie-up sites (daytime resting places), known as the 'Hare's corner'.
- If Irish hares are present, be observant for leverets during farming operations, including rolling and mechanical grass cutting.

Reduce pesticide and herbicide inputs:

- Minimise artificial fertiliser use. They reduce floristic diversity as well as reducing cover (e.g. rushes).

Similar species

They are much larger than rabbits. They may be confused with Brown hare found west of Lough Neagh, in N. Ireland. They are smaller and have black on top of their tails.

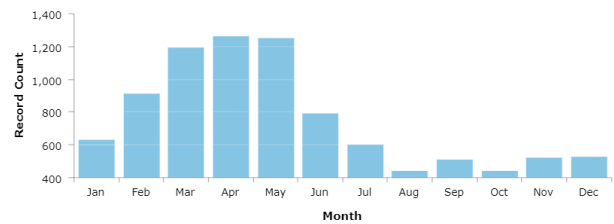
Need some help with identification?

Just drop us a line, we'll be happy to help:
pollinators@biodiversityireland.ie

When?

Can be seen throughout the year, more sightings occur during the breeding season.

Records per month across all datasets



National Biodiversity Data Centre, Ireland, Irish hare *Lepus timidus* *susp. hibernicus*, image, accessed October 2023.

[Irish Hare \(*Lepus timidus* subsp. *hibernicus*\) - Detail - Biodiversity Maps \(\[biodiversityireland.ie\]\(http://biodiversityireland.ie\)\)](#)

Where on the farm?

Found in uplands and lowlands. It uses agricultural grasslands, arable land, coastal grasslands and bogs.

Value

- Intrinsic value, as a unique Irish species.
- In the mating season, hares engage in dramatic courting rituals and there are often squabbles as they kick, box and chase each other, which explains the old saying, "as mad as a March hare".



Irish hare. Photo: K. Murphy

Further Info

Young Irish hare, known as leverets, are born as early as January and as late as October. Each female can produce 1 to 3 litters per year and there are usually 1 to 4 leverets in a litter. They are able to see and move shortly after birth and the mother usually conceal them separately, returning to allow them to suckle. They are usually weaned at 4 weeks.

They make shallow depressions, called forms, in sheltered locations. They provide good concealment and can be in tall grass or bare ground, such as a tillage field.

They eat mostly grasses, but this can vary between habitats and the time of the year. They will eat heather and sedges if available. They will consume a variety of plant species and one study found they used 26 different species. In poor winter weather and snow cover, they will browse on willow and birch species.

Brown hares occur in Northern Ireland, they can be ecologically damaging through competition and hybridisation with the native Irish hare.

Hare coursing - although a protected animal the Irish hare is classified as a game species and can be hunted and coursed (chased with muzzled greyhounds) between 12 August and 31 January.

Useful Links

The Vincent Wildlife Trust have information here:

[*Irish hare – The Vincent Wildlife Trust*](#)

Information on the non native Brown hare:

<https://invasives.ie/app/uploads/2022/01/Brown-Hare.pdf>

National hare survey and population assessment. 2017 to 2019. NPWS.

[IWM113.pdf \(npws.ie\)](#)

Record here

Your records will help us build a picture of farmland biodiversity in Ireland. If you're happy with your identification, you can submit your record.

- On the National Biodiversity Data Centre website:

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/record/biodiversity-on-your-farm#7/53.455/-8.016>

Affected by a change in climate?

Population dynamics have been closely associated to climate oscillations and the Irish Hare's population size historically with the Northern Atlantic oscillation (autumn weather).

Studies predict the Irish hare's range will contract in a south-easterly to a north-westerly direction under global as Irish mean temperatures rise and the southeast becomes drier (Leach et al., 2015; Caravaggi et al., 2017).

The Farmland Pollinator Officer post is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as one of its contributions to assisting implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025.



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



**An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta**
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



**An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council**



**An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
agus Fiadhúlra**
National Parks and Wildlife Service

The National Biodiversity Data Centre is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Register Number: 730718.