

Hares

Lepus europaeus occidentalis

The European brown hare was introduced from England in 1851 and has now spread throughout most grassland areas.

Hares prefer open farmland, plantations, orchards or similar cover and can travel up to four kilometres to feed.

They are a problem in orchards and on horticultural and forestry blocks, where they eat tree bark and young shoots. Even a single hare can cause severe damage to newly-planted shelter belts, young trees, cuttings, crops and plant nurseries. Hare damage to trees is distinctive. Small trees are usually bitten off at a 45 degree angle, and uneaten chips of wood and bark are scattered round the base of the tree.

Female hares have two to eight litters a year, with an average litter size of two.

Control Methods

Hare control work should be carried out before young trees or crops are planted. Hares do not generally take baits so it is not possible to poison them effectively. Shooting is the main control method, but must be repeated regularly to prevent numbers building up again.

Shooting

You must have a licence before using a firearm. Use a gun with extreme care, especially where there are likely to be people or animals in the vicinity. Remember that a .22 bullet has a 3km range.

Shooting at night with the aid of a spotlight is generally more effective, but at certain times of the



year, especially May to early June, hares can be seen during the day.

Night shooting

Night shooting is the most effective method of controlling hares. Look for animals feeding and for their eyes which shine red at night.

Hares will not come out during high winds or heavy rain, but in warm conditions they will feed during light drizzle. Approach the block quietly, into the wind if possible. Move along the edge of the cover shining a light ahead with steady sweeps. Do not shine the light beyond shooting range and ensure you don't illuminate yourself as this disturbs the hares.

Once an animal is sighted hold it in the outer edge of the light until ready to shoot. If it starts to move,



Type of Firearm

A scope sighted .22 rifle is recommended. Subsonic ammunition can be used in conjunction with a sound suppressor. This reduces the noise of a discharging rifle to a low "pop" so animals and people are not disturbed or frightened.

Only subsonic ammunition, which can be purchased from most sports stores, should be used with a sound suppressor.

Type of Spotlight

Use a reasonably powerful lightweight spotlight.

A helmet or head mounted light is preferable but a light fitted with a bracket on which the muzzle of the rifle can be rested is satisfactory. A simple bracket fitted to the top of the hand held light using a 5cm length of polythene hose cut in half lengthways will fit most rifle muzzles. A bracket made of steel reinforcing rod bent to the correct shape and covered with plastic hose or tape is also satisfactory.

don't chase after it, take the light off it for a few seconds, then put it back on the same spot (hares often stop once the light has been taken off them). If it runs to a fence or cover, follow it with the light as it will invariably stop for a second before going through a fence or into cover.

The most suitable power source for the light is a 12-volt motorcycle battery carried in a pouch on the belt, over the shoulder or on the back. Always keep the battery the right way up, preferably in a plastic bag, so no acid is spilt on clothes or skin.



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