

# Brown Hare

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## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Lepus europaeus*

**AKA:** European hare

**Native to:** Continental Europe and northern parts  
Western and Central Asia.

**Habitat:** Farmland, grassland, woodland, coastal sand  
dunes, marshes and moorland

The Brown hare is a medium sized mammal, about the size of a domestic cat, with considerable plasticity in size and fur coloration. The native distribution of the species includes most of Europe except the UK, Ireland, Scandinavia and some Mediterranean regions. *L. europaeus* was introduced into Ireland in the mid-late 19th century for the field sport of hare coursing. Subsequent natural spread is generally restricted to young males, who can disperse over several kilometres.

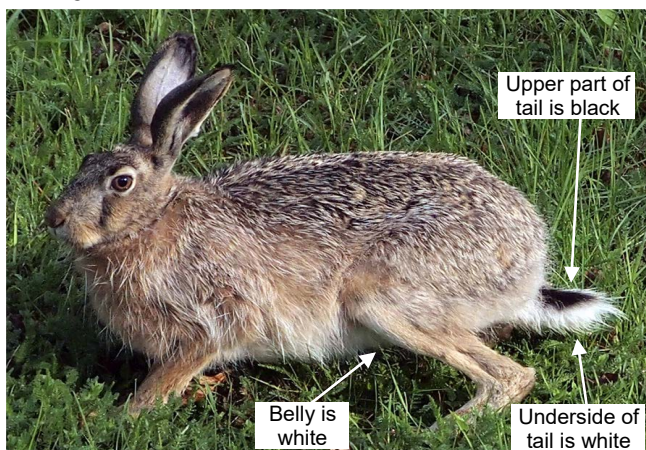
There are 3 lagomorphs in Northern Ireland, along with the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) the Brown hare have been introduced. The Irish mountain hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*) is the only native lagomorph, all 3 can be easily distinguished but discrimination in the field by untrained observers can result in dubious records.

**The Brown hare is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and as such, it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.**

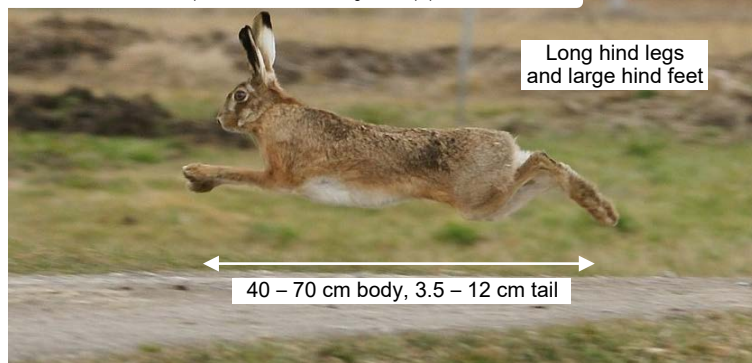


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## Key ID Features



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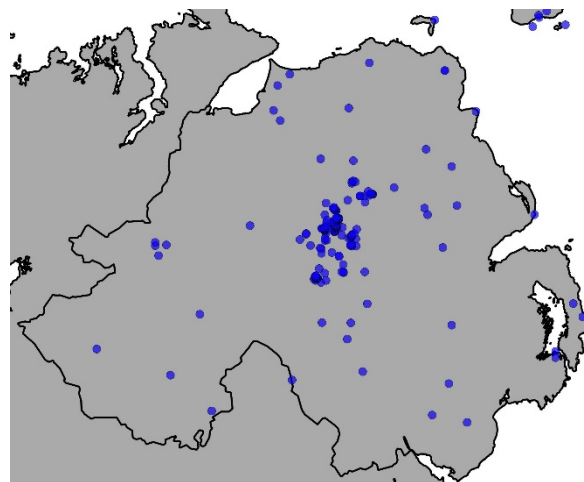
## Impacts

In some areas where they have been introduced Brown hares have become an agricultural and forestry pest, particularly in arable habitats or in orchards. Due to the presence of other existing grazing species it can be difficult to separate the impact of *L. europaeus*.

The Brown hare can be ecologically damaging through competition and hybridisation with native species (*L. timidus hibernicus*) and potential overgrazing of rare plants communities. There is direct evidence of hybridisation (and, hence, competition for mates) with the Irish mountain hare. Widespread hybridisation not only causes interspecific competition but threatens the genetic integrity of mountain hares.

## Distribution

The Brown hare has been introduced on 6 occasions to Northern Ireland between 1867 and 1880's. A survey in 2005 estimated a population of 2000 individuals in the mid- Ulster and west Tyrone.



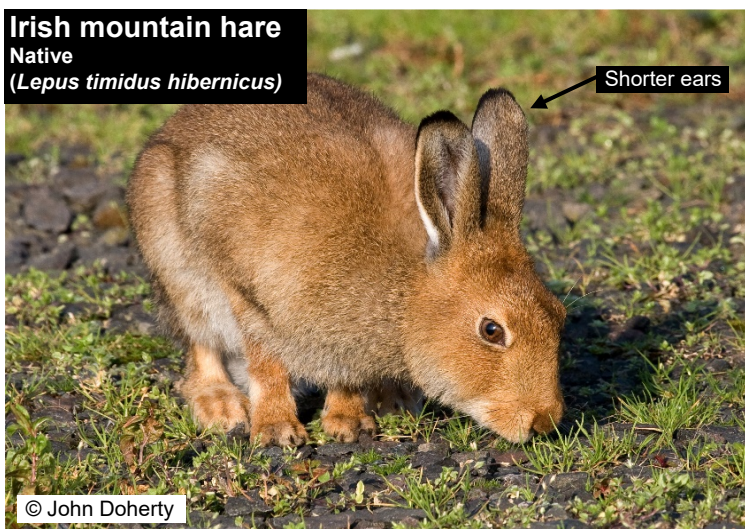
Source: NBN Atlas Northern Ireland

<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000080218>

Check website for current distribution

## Similar Species

**Irish mountain hare**  
Native  
(*Lepus timidus hibernicus*)



© John Doherty

Reddish brown  
fur in summer



© John Doherty

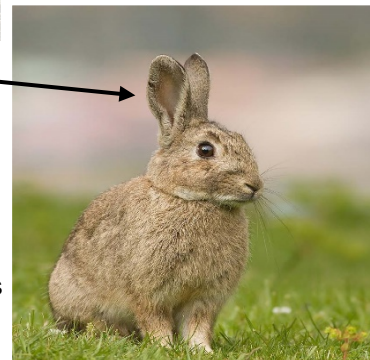
### European rabbit

Non-native  
(*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)



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Rabbits have proportionally  
shorter ears and hind legs



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The European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) can grow to 1-2kg which is much smaller than hares species. Hares commonly reach 3.8-4 kgs.

### References and further reading:

CABI *Lepus europaeus* (Brown hare) datasheet - available at <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/77227>

Hughes M, Reid N, Montgomery I, Prodohl P, 2009. Verification of hybridisation between introduced European and native Irish hares. Report prepared by the Natural Heritage Research Partnership, Quercus for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Northern Ireland, UK.

Reid, Neil. (2012). European hare (*Lepus europaeus*) invasion ecology: Implication for the conservation of the endemic Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*). *Biological Invasions*. 13. 559-569.

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