

PRESS RELEASE

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From **Durham Biodiversity Partnership**

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Contacts: Helen Ryde 0191 5843112

Subject: Hare today, gone tomorrow?

Durham Biodiversity Partnership has today launched a survey to establish the numbers and locations of brown hares in Darlington, County Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The public are being asked to record where and when they see brown hares on their journeys throughout the County and pass this information onto the partnership to allow them to monitor the local population.

The brown hare was once a very common and widespread farmland species, with as many as four million present during the late 1800s. However over the last century there has been a significant decline in population, with numbers estimated to have dropped by about 75 percent since the Second World War, with the most substantial decline occurring from the early 1960s onwards.

During 2002-2004 an initial Brown Hare Survey was carried out across the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan area. Now five years on the partnership wants to establish how the local population has changed since this time and whether numbers are still declining. This evidence will then be used to target project work to help conserve and boost brown hare numbers in this area.

Survey forms will be available from Durham Wildlife Trust Visitor Centres at Low Barns near Witton-le-Wear, Bowlees near Middleton-in-Teesdale and Rainton Meadows near Houghton-le-Spring, Durham Biodiversity Partnership (contact Helen Ryde on 0191 5343112) and local libraries. Alternatively visit www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk to fill in record details online.

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If you are interested in spotting brown hares, have a look when you go past large open fields. Hares are mostly active at night but so are mainly seen in the early morning or at dusk.

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Durham Wildlife Trust's purpose is to protect wildlife and promote nature conservation in County Durham, the City of Sunderland and the boroughs of Gateshead, South Tyneside and Darlington. Through the management of 25 Nature Reserves and a variety of species and habitat recovery projects, the Trust is one of the most active environmental organisations in the region. By acting as a focus for a variety of community groups, schools and individuals, the Trust engages people in the issues around nature conservation and the wider environment. It also manages four visitor centres and campaigns on behalf of over 8000 members.

Durham Biodiversity Partnership includes many organisations who are working to conserve wildlife in the Durham area. The executive partners are: Durham Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Northumbrian Water, The Environment Agency, Tyne Tees Farming and Wildlife Group, Gateshead Council, South Tyneside Council, City of Sunderland, Darlington Council and Durham County Council.

Records from the survey will also be shared with the Exploring your Environment project, which holds a database of wildlife and habitat information for the North East Region.