

MARCH 2010

North West Brown Hare Project

Species:

Brown Hare (*Lepus europeus*)

IUCN Status:

Least concern, decreasing

Country:

England

Organisation:

Greater Manchester Biodiversity Project



The brown hare has suffered a 75% decline in England since the 1960's (Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust). The significant decline in the UK population subsequently led to it being designated a UK BAP priority species in 1994. The substantial decline is due partly to changes in land management and agricultural intensification, but also from poaching and illegal coursing. One key problem facing the brown hare in the region is the lack of systematically collected

and analysed data. The project will therefore generate valuable data on the current density and distribution of brown hare and guide implementation of habitat management to increase populations in the region. The Tracking Mammals Partnership has identified the North West as having a significant decline in brown hare populations between 1995-2007, making it an important area to focus efforts and help build a sustainable landscape-scale network for the conservation of brown hares.

A dedicated project officer will conduct and coordinate surveys, supported by volunteers, building and expanding upon the survey started by the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside in 1999. Survey data will be analysed using DISTANCE software and mapped on GIS to calculate population densities, and correlate data with habitat. The project aims to improve our understanding of the brown hare population and distribution within Greater Manchester, North Merseyside and South Lancashire. Highlighting isolated or fragmented populations to link up or expand populations into areas where they are absent, delivering landscape scale benefits to farmland biodiversity. This will directly inform the Greater Manchester, Lancashire and North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plans providing baseline data on which to underpin targets and contribute to the achievement of these targets.

The project officer will work with key partners, including Natural England, FWAG, United Utilities, The Wildlife Trust and Local Authorities, to facilitate delivery of practical conservation to benefit brown hare. This will be in a number of ways depending on land ownership, such as, the creation of site management plans, signing up to Entry/Higher Level Stewardship or joining up to the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, to manage land appropriately for brown hare, as well as benefiting other wildlife, such as farmland birds. A number of events will also be organised to provide guidance to landowners of best practice habitat management.