

Delaneys Case Report

Background. The Irish Mountain hare is an endemic sub-species unique to Ireland. They are protected under legislation and are an exempted wild mammal under the Wildlife Acts and may only be hunted under the terms of the Wildlife (Wild Mammals)(Open Seasons) Orders 2005 to 2012. This may only be done through shooting with licensed shotguns, hunting in Regulated Coursing Matches or hunting by packs of beagles and harriers. The Open Season is from September 26th until February 28th every year.

NPWS has noticed a significant increase in this unlawful hunting activity in the last 18 months. The dogs used are hounds that hunt by sight such as greyhounds, salukis, whippets for speed and stamina crossed with terriers and collies for aggression and intelligence. This gives a 'lurcher' and can be a mix of all of the above to varying degrees. The saluki type mix is becoming synonymous with hunting hares because of their huge stamina.

Unlawful hare lurching consists of men walking in lines across open type fields during the day time and once a hare is roused a dog is slipped and the hare is killed or escapes. There is an 'unofficial lurching season' from August to February but it is common for protagonists to hunt all through spring and summer then using the excuse they are training younger dogs. Hares are being killed all year round from our observations and there are concerns of local population crashes due to continual hunting pressures including during the breeding season where pregnant or nursing hares are killed.

Incident. On 21/10/15, whilst on patrol in the Little Brosna Callows area of Offaly, NPWS Regional Manager, Pdraig O'Donnell and Conservation Ranger, Noel Bugler observed two men with two lurcher type dogs each walking in formation through the open callows hunting for hares. A suspicious car with a dog crate in the back was also seen parked in a gateway some distance away. The men entered a large field and NPWS staff observed two of their dogs chasing a hare around this field in front of them.

NPWS staff intercepted and interviewed the men and cautioned them for hunting hares on lands without permission. Details were given as James Delaney, Bay 2 Ballyknock, Cashel, Co. Tipperary and his brother John Delaney, Bay 1 Ballyknock, Cashel, Co. Tipperary. The vehicle was also searched for further evidence but nothing was found.

Court Case. The case was heard in Tullamore District Court on October 24th 2016. Both Defendants availed of Legal Aid and pleaded guilty in respect of one Summons each for offences contrary to Section 23(5)(b)(i) of the Wildlife Acts – hunting a hare, an exempted wild mammal, otherwise than under and in accordance with a permission or licence. State Solicitor for Offaly, John Hughes, outlined the case details and responded to Mitigation requests by the Defence solicitor by outlining the chronic problem of unlawful hunting of hares by lurchers in the Irish countryside.

Judge Catherine Staines applied the Probation Act and both defendants produced €250 each to be donated to Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland and the Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust. She warned of community service and custodial sentences if the defendants came before her court for similar offences in the future.