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## Wildlife Service hails first illegal coursing convictions in county

Story by Paul Neilan

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The first convictions for illegal hare coursing in the county has been hailed by the Parks and Wildlife District Officer.

Last Wednesday, 28th September, at Navan Court, three men pleaded guilty to coursing without a licence and were each fined the maximum €1,000 on two charges while a third resulted in the Probation Act being applied.

The conviction of the two Galway men and a Louth man for the offence at last February at Danestown, Balrath, is the first of its kind here, according to Dr Maurice Eakin of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which is based at Kilcarn, Navan.

"This is the first case ever taken to the courts in our district (Meath, Louth and Dublin)," said Dr Eakin.

"Illegal coursing is particularly prevalent in the northern and middle parts of Meath and Louth, as the large, flat fields are perfect for the lurcher dogs.

"Getting all the evidence needed to prosecute is difficult and luck plays a big part. More often, we chase them around the countryside and, on one occasion, follow them to the border.

"This is first time I've ever heard of a judge imposing a maximum penalty for a wildlife crime. Illegal hare-coursing is considered to be one of the most grievous wildlife crimes by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)," he added.

Coursing is licensed under the Wildlife Acts (1976 and 2000) to the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) and, as a condition of this licensing system, hares netted for coursing are released back into the wild. Illegal coursing occurs when men with lurcher-type dogs hunt the hares in the open countryside. The hunt continues until the dog catches and kills the hare or the hare escapes.

"Local staff of NPWS were delighted to be able to assist An Garda Síochána in bringing the present case against the three defendants to a successful prosecution outcome. They were particularly encouraged by the attitude of Judge Patrick McMahon and the imposition of heavy fines," said Dr Eakin.

<http://www.meathchronicle.ie/news/roundup/articles/2011/10/05/4006956-wildlife-service-hails-first-illegal-coursing-convictions-in-county>