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Two men have been prosecuted and convicted of illegal hare hunting with lurcher dogs at Tullamore District Court.

The case was brought on behalf of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with proceedings starting on July 15.

Two men were summoned for hunting hares, which are an “exempted wild mammal” under the Wildlife Acts.

The men were also accused of interfering with the breeding and resting place of a protected wild animal.

The incident occurred in Clongawny and Clonlyon Glebe in north Co. Offaly in March 23, 2018.

Noel Bugler, a district conservation officer with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), told the court that, following up on complaints from the public, NPWS officials observed a number of men with lurchers walking “in formation” across private farmland and cutaway Bord na Mona bog.

This was in an area that had seen “chronic problems” with hare coursing, he added.

Bugler outlined to the court that, in the experience of the officials, this walking in formation on farmland and bog was typical when hunting for hares, as opposed to other wildlife.

NPWS representatives said at the trial that illegal hare hunting was a “huge issue” for the service in parts of the country, and said it can lead to declines in hare population locally because of the “pressure some areas are under” from the activity.

A statement from the department said that the issue of illegal hare hunting is “compounded” by hunting during the hare’s breeding season.

NPWS said it is continuing to work with the Gardaí to tackle the issue in “problematical areas”.

The presiding judge, Catherine Stains, reserved sentencing until a later date, as the individuals concerned were not in the court.

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