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NPWS secure a successful prosecution for illegally hunting hares with lurchers in Offaly

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht's National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) brought a Wildlife Act case before Judge Catherine Staines in Tullamore District Court on July 15th 2019.

The case was prosecuted for the Minister by William Maher, BL and the State Solicitor for Westmeath, Peter D. Jones. Two individuals were summonsed for hunting hares, an exempted wild mammal otherwise than under and in accordance with a licence, under the Wildlife Acts with lurcher type dogs and also with interfering with the breeding and resting place of a protected wild animal. The incident occurred in Clongawny and Clonlyon Glebe in North Offaly on March 23rd 2018.

District Conservation Officer Noel Bugler outlined to the court that, following a response to public complaints, they observed a number of men with lurchers walking in formation across private farmland and cutaway Bord Na Mona Bog. This was in an area with chronic problems of illegal hare coursing with lurchers. This method of walking in formation with dogs ready to slip on roused hares in open fields and bog land was hunting for hares and not any other species in their experience.

Officers outlined to the court that the illegal hunting of hares is a huge issue for NPWS in parts of the country and can lead to declines in hare populations locally such is the pressure some areas are under from this illegal activity. This is compounded by hunting during the breeding season of the hare. NPWS are continuing to work with An Garda Síochána on tackling the issue in problematical areas.

Judge Staines convicted the men on both summons but reserved sentencing for a future date as the individuals were not in court.