

Hares

Lepus europaeus occidentalis

The European brown hare was introduced from England in 1851 and has now spread throughout most grassland areas. Hares prefer open farmland (such as dairy farms), plantations, orchards or similar cover and can travel up to four kilometres to feed. Hares look similar to rabbits, but are a lot bigger and have black tipped ears.

Why are Hares a pest?

They are a problem in orchards and on horticultural and forestry blocks, where they eat bark and young shoots. Even a single hare can cause severe damage to newly-planted shelter belts, young trees, cuttings, crops and plant nurseries. Hare damage to trees is distinctive. Small trees are usually bitten off at 45 degree angle, and uneaten chips of wood and bark are scattered around the base of the tree. Female hares have two to eight litters a year, with an average litter size of two.



Control

Hare control work should be carried out before young trees or crops are planted. Hares do not generally take baits so it is not possible to poison them effectively. Shooting (particularly night shooting), is the main control method, but this must be repeated regularly to prevent numbers building up again. Hares will not come out during high winds or heavy rain. At certain times of the year, especially May to early June, hares can be seen during the day.

Night Shooting

Night shooting is the most effective method of controlling hares. Look for animals feeding and for their eyes, which shine red at night. When shooting, approach the area quietly, into the wind if possible. Move along the edge of the cover shining a light ahead with steady sweeps. Do not shine the light beyond shooting range and ensure you do not illuminate yourself as this disturbs the hares. Once an animal is sighted, hold it in the outer edge of the light until ready to shoot. If the hare starts to move, don't chase it, take the light off it for a few seconds, then put it back on the same spot (hares often stop once the light has been taken off them). If it runs to a fence or cover, follow it with the light as it will invariably stop for a second before going through a fence or into cover. You must have a firearms licence before using a firearm. Use a gun with extreme care, especially where there are likely to be people or animals in the vicinity. Remember that a .22 bullet has a range of 3kms.

Horizons offers advice and information, and if appropriate a user-pays service, to assist the control of these troublesome pests. The hare is identified in Horizon's Animal Pest Management Strategy as a 'Non-Statutory problem animal' This means that it is an undesirable animal, but has not met all the criteria for inclusion as an animal pest. Where values in High Value Conservation Areas (HVCA) are at risk and in other exceptional circumstances these animals may also be controlled by Horizons. HVCA's are important areas of native bush and wildlife habitat in the Region.