

First record of minimum Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus* Bell 1837) longevity in the wild.

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days in areas where it grows on rocks in shallow water. The alga seen on the Skerries seal also had the appearance of being an *Enteromorpha* species.

It is thought that algae might get the chance to grow on a seal's back if the animal spends long periods in the water without hauling out on rocks or sand banks. Such a situation might result if the animal is subject to frequent disturbance or if the haul-out site is washed by waves. The waters and shores in the area do not have excessive algal growth nor experience algal 'blooms' due to high nutrient levels so these factors are not considered relevant. This incident displays how adaptable these algae are in exploiting suitable habitat. The algal growth will of course be shed from the seal's skin with the hair at the next moult. The seal did not appear to be hindered in any way by the growth despite the fact that it must cause additional drag when the seal is swimming.

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First record of free-living Reeves' muntjac deer (*Muntiacus reevesi* (Ogilby 1839)) in Northern Ireland

The first verified record of a Reeves' muntjac deer (*Muntiacus reevesi* (Ogilby 1839)) in the wild in Northern Ireland (NI) was confirmed on the 3 June 2009 as a result of a road traffic accident near Newtownards, Co. Down (J554764). Veterinary Surgeon, Peter Rafter, examined the carcass and confirmed that the injuries presented were consistent with a recent deer-vehicle collision, including broken limbs, blunt trauma and scrape marks. The animal was a young buck judged to be between 1-2 years old due to juvenile pedicle and antler growth and short developing canine tusks. Identification was further verified by providing photographs to Trevor Banham (Forestry Commission, S.E. England) and Norma Chapman (deer expert and muntjac keeper in Suffolk, England). This is the first record of a new large mammal species in Northern Ireland since the introduction of Sika deer (*Cervus nippon* Temminck 1838) in 1870.

This record follows the first reports of muntjac in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) during 2007 when a free-living adult buck was shot near

Avoca, Co. Wicklow (John Griffin 2007 pers. obs.), with a second animal sighted alive shortly thereafter near Trooperstown (Wesley Atkinson 2008 pers. obs.). Muntjac are held and bred in captivity throughout Ireland (JTAD 2009 pers. obs.) and anecdotal sightings of the species in the wild in both NI and ROI have increased in recent years.

The Government in ROI have launched an aggressive control scheme in an attempt to eradicate any establishing population(s) by placing the species on the Wildlife (Wild Mammals) (Open Seasons) Amendment Order 2008. Should the species become naturalized it represents a significant threat to biodiversity including natural habitats and species of conservation concern. Reeves' muntjac was listed as one of the 'most unwanted' non-native species by Invasive Species Ireland (www.invasivespeciesireland.com). In Northern Ireland, an 'exclusion strategy and contingency plan' exists outlining the actions needed now that the species has been confirmed in the wild. Further sightings may be submitted to Dr Jaimie Dick at j.dick@qub.ac.uk.

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First record of minimum Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus* Bell 1837) longevity in the wild

Average longevity of the mountain hare (*Lepus timidus* L., 1758) has been estimated at nine years in the wild (Macdonald D. and Barrett, P. 1993 *Mammals of Britain and Europe*. Harper Collins Publishers, London) with a maximum recorded age of 18 years for one marked animal (Angerbjörn, A. and Flux, J. E. C. 1995 *Lepus timidus*. *Mammalian Species* 495: 1–11). However, the longevity of the Irish hare (*L. t. hibernicus* Bell 1837) is entirely unknown.

A total of 14 Irish hares was trapped and tagged at Belfast International Airport, Co. Antrim from February to April 2005. The sex,

age (juvenile or adult) and weight of each animal were recorded. Adults were taken as those individuals >8-10 months old defined by the fusing of the notch between the apophysis and diaphysis of the tibia and humerus (Flux, J. E. C. 1970 *Journal of Zoology* **161**: 75-123). Individual identification was made by a system of colour-coded ear tags (Roxan iD Ltd. Selkirk, Scotland) being inserted in the centre of the pinna of each ear. Each ear tag (6 × 34 mm) and puncture site was disinfected with 70 per cent ethanol prior to insertion.

An adult male, #001/002 'Blue/Blue', was tagged on 3 March 2005 weighing 3.8 kg and was sighted during a return site visit on 4 April 2007. An adult female, #026/003 'Green/Yellow', was tagged on 15 April 2005 weighing 4.0 kg and was sighted during return visits on 25 March 2010 and 19 October 2010. The latest possible date of birth for both individuals was spring/summer 2004. Consequently, they were at least 3 years and 6.5 years old, respectively. This is the first record of minimum Irish hare longevity in the wild. These observations suggest that ear tagging does not compromise animal welfare and is an effective means of long-term monitoring. Future research may utilize capture-mark-recapture methods.

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The first recording of a *Pipistrellus* sp. winter roost in Co. Antrim

On the 13 February 2010, the author was called to a dwelling house in east Belfast (J387762) to follow up a complaint about bats in the attic. The owner described hearing the bats over a period of a week and a half prior to the visit and, on entering the attic, saw them lined along the wooden beams. The owner also described finding a bat in the airing cupboard inside the property several weeks prior. At the time of the visit, the

bats had been silent for two days and no active bats were observed on entering the attic. However, a small number of droppings were found and based on size and shape they were concluded to be those of pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus* sp.). Within the attic some audible calls were heard, suggesting bats were still present and possibly in torpor under the attic lining.

A review of the weather conditions for this time period using U.K. Met Office records (Online at: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/2010/january/averages.html> and <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/2010/february/averages.html>. Date accessed: 31 March 2010) showed January and February of 2010 to have been the coldest on record in Northern Ireland since 1987, some 2.0 to 2.5°C below 1971-2000 averages. This raises the question as to why these bats were active during such cold weather?

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Bithynia leachii (Sheppard) (Mollusca: Bithyniidae) in Upper Lough Erne

The map in Kerney (M. P. 1999 *Atlas of the land and freshwater molluscs of Britain and Ireland*. Harley Books, Chichester) shows *Bithynia leachii* (Sheppard) to be recorded mainly from the River Suir drainage, the Royal and Grand Canals and the lower part of the River Shannon down to Limerick. More recently, it has been found in middle areas of the Shannon and in Loughs Bofin, Boderg, Mask and Conn (Mrs G. A. Holyoak pers. comm.).

In Britain *Bithynia leachii* is widespread in southern England but restricted to richer habitats and very rarely found in still waters (Kerney 1999 *op. cit.*). It occurs in one or two places in southern Scotland in canals, much as it has done until recently in Ireland. I report here the discovery of a colony on Upper Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh:

FERMANAGH. Kilmore Quay, H336311, 16 June 2008. Common on macrophytes under *Schoenoplectus* sp. in shallow water on an exposed stony/gravel shoreline.