

# Tales from Hillside Farm

## The Hare *Lepus europaeus*



April 2022



# Bird of the Month

Is not a Bird...Its a

## Hare

*Lepus europaeus*

# About the Hare

Normally a shy animal their behaviour changes dramatically in spring and they can be seen in daylight boxing and generally cavorting, which gives rise to the saying “as mad as a March hare”. Hares live for up to twelve years. They have jointed, or Kinetic skulls which is unique among mammals and very large ears help them to dissipate heat. Seen most frequently on arable farms and seen less frequently where foxes are abundant or where there are many common buzzards or high rabbit populations. They usually do not live in groups.

Sexual maturity occurs at seven or eight months for females and six months for males and breeding season lasts from January to August. They give birth in a shallow depression or flattened nest of grass called a form. Young hares are adapted to the lack of physical protection, and are born fully furred and with eyes open. Litters can consist of three or four young and females can bear three litters a year. They tend to be polygynous, Females have six-weekly reproductive cycles and are receptive for only a few hours at a time making competition among bucks intense. Scientists of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW) in Berlin have determined that European brown hares can develop a second pregnancy whilst the previous litter is not delivered.

The hare has been a traditional symbol of fertility and reproduction in some cultures. It is thought that the Easter bunny was originally a Hare but, it was so steeped in Pagan folklore that it was deemed ‘unfitting’ for Christian purposes. However the Hare is at its most visible at this time of year in Northern Europe. The sight of groups of hares in the fields would have been a sign of the onset of spring (and therefore Easter) possibly connected with the German and Dutch tradition of the Easter Hare



# Poetry

## The Ears Of The Hare.

Some beast with horns did gore  
The lion; and that sovereign dread,  
Resolved to suffer so no more,  
Straight banish'd from his realm, 'tis said,  
All sorts of beasts with horns -  
Rams, bulls, goats, stags, and unicorns.  
Such brutes all promptly fled.  
A hare, the shadow of his ears perceiving,  
Could hardly help believing  
That some vile spy for horns would take them,  
And food for accusation make them.  
'Adieu,' said he, 'my neighbour cricket;  
I take my foreign ticket.  
My ears, should I stay here,  
Will turn to horns, I fear;  
And were they shorter than a bird's,  
I fear the effect of words.'  
'These horns!' the cricket answer'd; 'why,  
God made them ears who can deny?'  
'Yes,' said the coward, 'still they'll make them horns,  
And horns, perhaps of unicorns!  
In vain shall I protest,  
With all the learning of the schools:  
My reasons they will send to rest  
In th' Hospital of Fools.

By Jean de La Fontaine



## Memory

One had a pretty face,  
and two or three had charm,  
but charm and face were in vain,

because the mountain grass  
cannot but keep the form  
where the mountain hare has lain

William Butler Yeats



An Arctic Hare.

An Arctic Hare we now be-hold.  
The hair, you will observe, is white;  
But if you think the Hare is old,  
You will be very far from right.  
The Hare is young, and yet the hair  
Grew white in but a single night.  
Why, then it must have been a scare  
That turned this Hare. No; 't was not fright  
(Although such cases are well known);  
I fear that once a-gain you're wrong.  
Know then, that in the Arctic Zone  
A single night is six months long.

By Oliver Herford



# Stories

Hares laying eggs...I am not sure this is a story really, but I couldn't write one of these booklets without mentioning birds...

It is thought that because Hares, hide from predators by making a shallow indentation in the soil known as a form and Lapwings often inhabit the same territories as hares and make a scrape of a nest on the ground. As Lapwings were known to use a hare's form as a nest, Eggs were often found in a form and therefore assumed to have been laid by the Hare!

Plover's eggs were an expensive delicacy in Victorian Europe, Queen Victoria favoured her plover eggs cooked in aspic and Mrs Beaton supplied several recipes.

They may in fact be the original Easter Eggs, Egg pickers, decimated the populations of Lapwings and in 20 years they had stripped the whole of southern England as far up as Lincolnshire. In the later 1880's plover eggs had to be gathered from the Scottish highlands and Holland. In 1926 the Lapwing Act (Wild Bird Protection Bill) officially stopped the practice and prohibited anyone to take, use, have possession of or consume the eggs or birds and also protected their nests.

Historians believe the origins of Easter eggs are derived from custom of the egg hunt. As Lapwing eggs hidden in the long grasses they would be fairly difficult to find, it was possible that the garden and chocolate Egg became a good substitute.

They were mentioned in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. In the Netherlands, there was a competition to find the first peewit egg of the year (het eerste kievietsei). A quarter of the total European population of birds breed in the Netherlands, so this is an important country. Whilst it is now forbidden to pick up found lapwing eggs, it was especially popular in the province Friesland. Gathering peewit eggs was prohibited by the European Union, but Friesland was granted an exception for cultural-historical reasons until 2006 when it was formally banned.



# Fable

## The Hares & the Frogs

The Hares were so persecuted by the other beasts, they did not know where to go. As soon as they saw a single animal approach them, off they used to run.

One day they saw a troop of wild Horses stampeding about, and in quite a panic all the Hares scuttled off to a lake, determined to drown themselves rather than live in such a continual state of fear.

However just as they got near the bank of the lake, a troop of Frogs where frightened by the approach of the Hares and jumped into the water.

“Truly,” said one of the Hares, “things are not so bad as they seem: “There is always someone worse off than yourself.”



Thomas Bewick

# Medieval

## From Medieval Manuscripts

The hare is a timid beast, and a fast runner. It can change sex, so that it is sometimes male and sometimes female.

Pliny the Elder [1st century CE] (Natural History, Book 8, 81): The white hares of the Alps are thought to eat snow in the winter, for they turn color when the snow melts. Some say that the hare is as many years old as it has folds in its bowels, and that it is a hermaphrodite that can reproduce without a mate.

Isidore of Seville [7th century CE] (Etymologies, Book 12, 1:23): The hare (lepus) is so called from levipes (light foot), because it runs fast. It is a timid animal.

Gerald of Wales [c. 1146 – c. 1223] (Topographia Hibernica, chapter 12): There are a great number of hares, but they are a small breed, much resembling rabbits both in size and the softness of their fur. In short, it will be found that the bodies of all animals, wild beasts, and birds, each in its kind, are smaller here than in other countries; while the men alone retain their full dimensions.



# Folklore

## Three & Four Hares

Three hares are found in sites all over Europe and Asia from as early as 600 CE. Although its meaning is not explained from any of the medieval cultures where it is found, it is thought to have a range of symbolic associations with fertility and the lunar cycle, but are also seen as a puzzle with the running hares sharing ears forming either a square or a circle. This one from Chagford in Devon



Four Hares illustrations are also widespread and found a number of medieval manuscripts Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 764, folio 26v. It's sometimes called a 'rosette of hares'



## Hare & the Moon

And finally I couldn't leave this without mentioning the moon and the Hare.

The moon-gazing hare is an almost universal motif, it is related to fertility and believed to bring growth, re-birth, abundance, new beginnings and fortune. However, I can find surprisingly little research or evidence about the Hare and the moon, there are a number of stories about rabbits and the moon but much less about the Hare.

The Ancient Egyptians believed hares were intrinsically linked to the moon's cyclical movement, being masculine when waxing and feminine when waning.

The May full moon is sometimes referred to as the Hare Moon.



## My list of things I can do to continue to protect our beautiful world and its inhabitants?

1. Join conservation groups
2. Support Charities who protect habitat and wildlife
3. Encourage good practice in Fishing, Farming and Land management
4. Vote with my purse, dont support substandard practice in anything.
5. Sign petitions to protect birds and habitat
6. Share my love of wildlife with friends and family
7. Sign petitions to end persecution and improve understanding
8. Dont use pesticides or poison in the Garden
9. Let the grass grow, insects love dandelions and daisies.
10. Grow wildflowers and plant native trees.
11. Encourage insects to the garden it all starts with the insects.
12. Put up bird Boxes

Some links for further information:-

[British Trust for Ornithology](#)

[RSPB](#)

[Birdlife](#)

[The Wildlife Trusts](#)

[The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust](#)

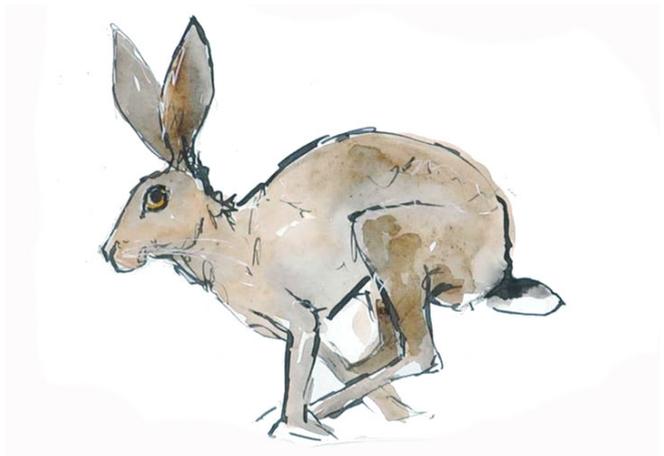
[Plantlife](#)

[Hare Preservation Trust](#)

This is essentially a research project, I aim to look at a different bird or animal each month as a way of deepening my knowledge.

I enjoy gathering poetry, songs, facts, stories and information to further understand, celebrate and share the depth on breadth of the relationship between humans and birds, from the medieval bestiary, folk lore and fables, with their often strange didactic and allegorical meanings, to ways in which we can help them in the wild today.

More of my work can be found on my [website](#) including greetings cards, prints, printmaking, original drawings, paintings and related products.



# SEE YOU IN



## May

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