# Rabbits and hares

(Lagomorpha)

Rabbits and hares are part of a small order of mammals called lagomorphs. They are herbivores (feeding only on vegetation) with enlarged front teeth (anterior incisors) which never stop growing; an adaptation for gnawing. Characteristics lagomorphs share include large ears, long hindfeet and the digestion of soft faecal pellets during the day.

Image 20: Brown hares, image sent in through Mammal Tracker app

Lagomorphs are ecologically important as prey as they are predated by many mammals species and predatory birds including foxes, stoats, polecats and buzzards.

# Rabbit

*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

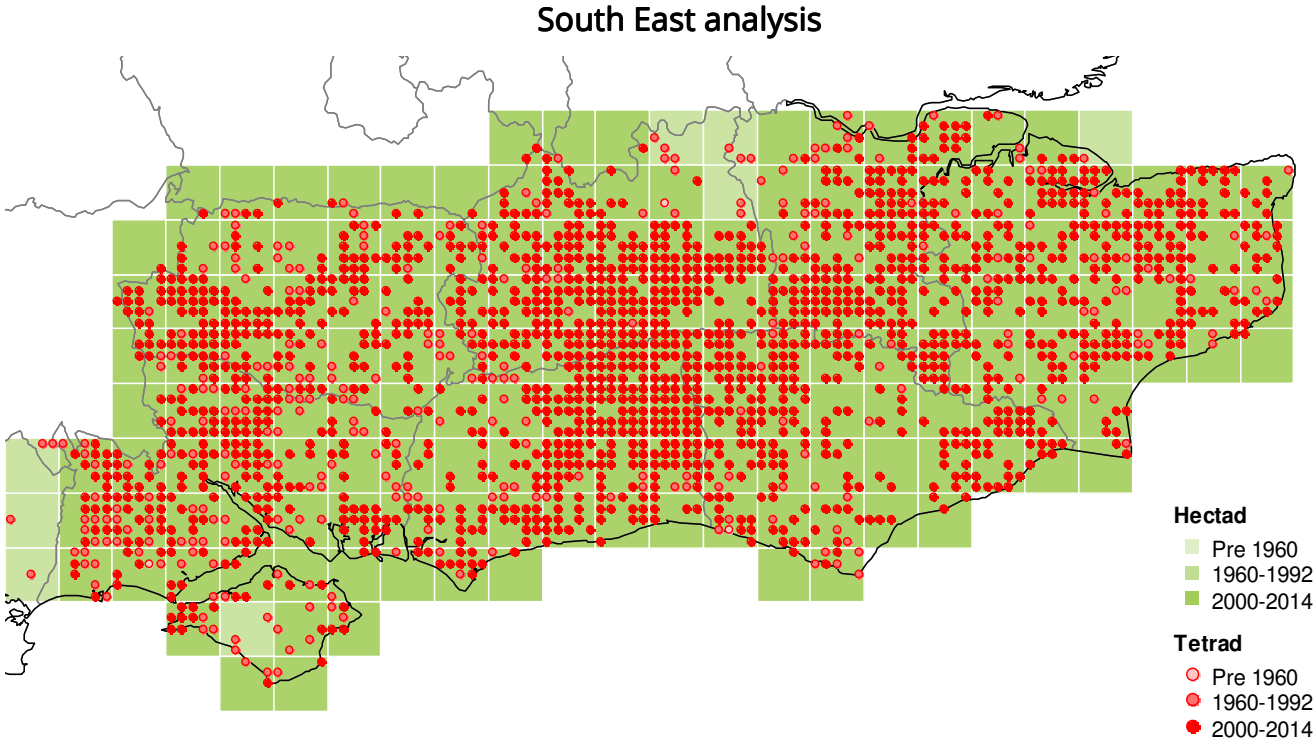


Figure 51: South East distribution of rabbit records, showing three time periods of data at both hectad and tetrad level

Rabbits are a very well established species all across Great Britain and Ireland, including many of the smaller islands. They are thought to be most widespread in the East and South East of England, as well as Wales. The South East is also one of the places that they are thought to be most abundant in the British Isles. Figure 51 supports the idea of their wide range in this area. The alpha hull shown in Figure 52 displays this distribution clearly, with 94% of the region covered.

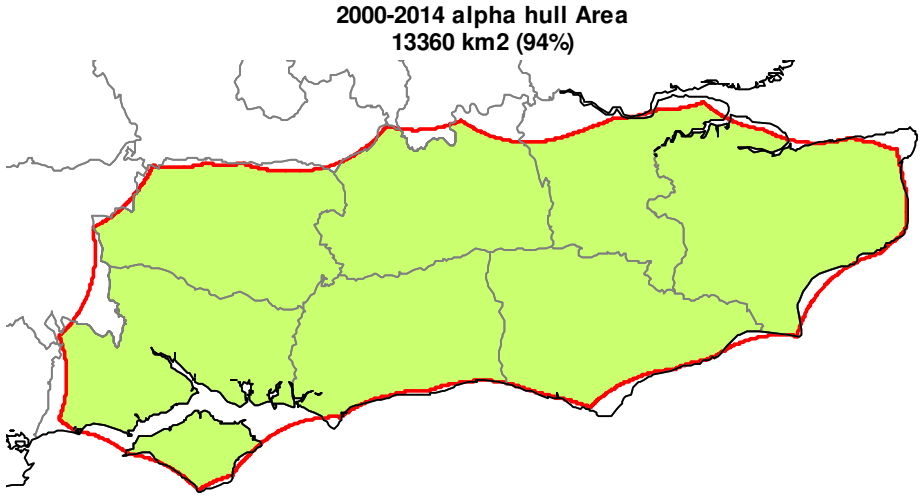


Figure 52: Alpha hull representation of rabbit South East distribution for 2000-2014 records

# Rabbit

*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

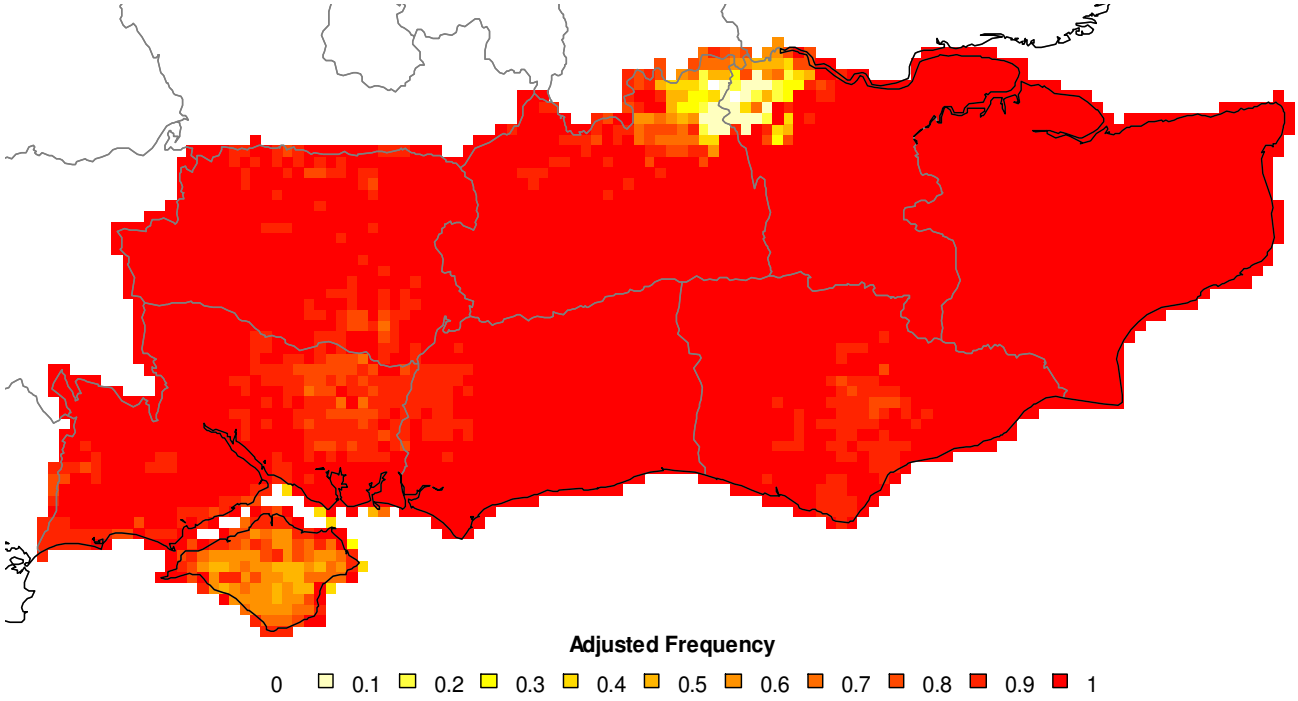


Figure 53: Frescalo map displaying rabbit predicted South East distribution based on 2000-2014 records

The Frescalo map for the rabbit has a high certainty that the distribution predicted for the species is correct, shown by the map's mostly red colour, rather than yellow. This certainty is based on a high number of tetrads in the region containing records of rabbits.

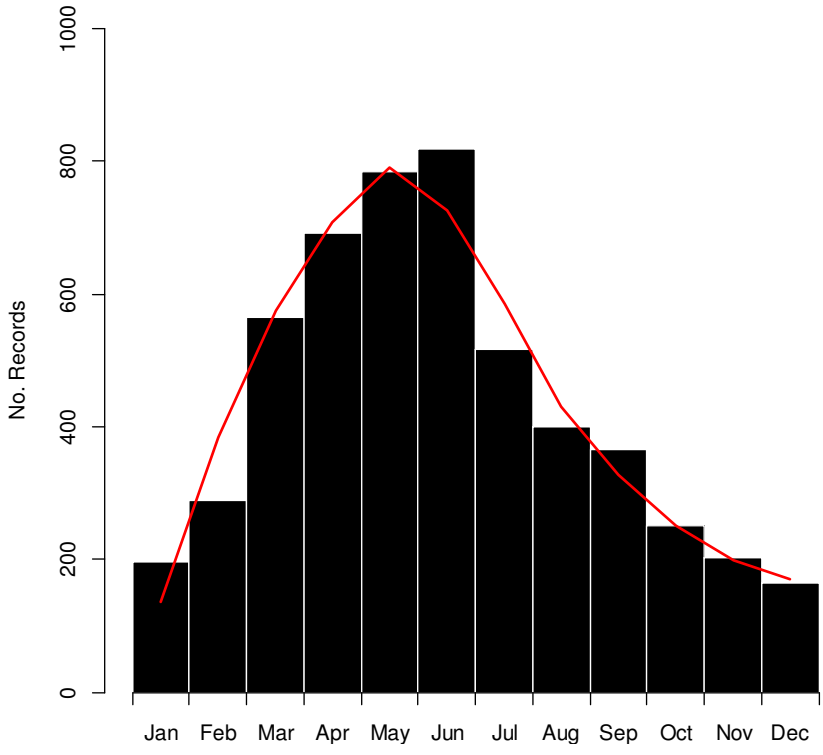


Figure 54: Phenology histogram displaying monthly record submission

The rabbit phenology histogram in Figure 54 reveals that a large proportion of records are submitted in spring and early summer, with a notable decline in records submitted throughout the rest of the year. The highest number of records are submitted in June, when rabbits are commonly seen in grassland, farmland, parkland and gardens. The fewest records are submitted in December. This may well be just as much to do with recorder effort as it is to do with rabbit activity as people are outdoors less to record them.

# Brown hare

*Lepus europaeus*

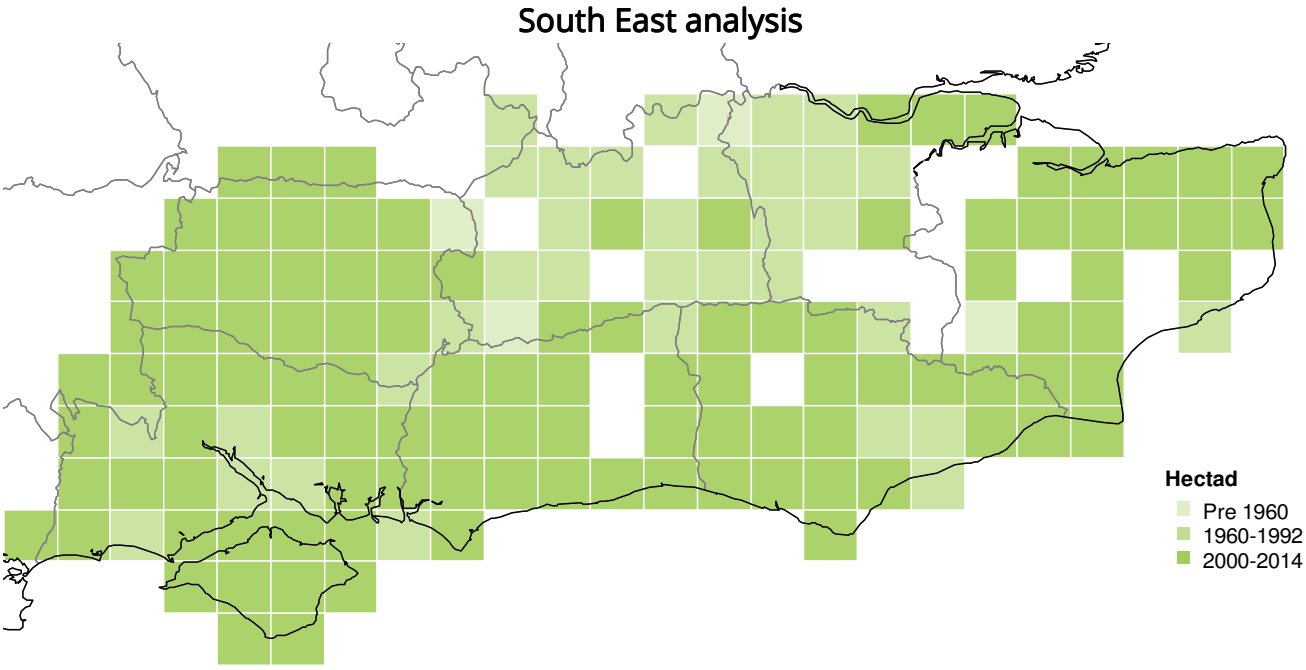


Figure 55: South East distribution of brown hare records, showing three time periods of data at hectad level

The South East distribution map for the brown hare in Figure 55 only displays records at a hectad level, with no dots representing tetrads. The reason for this is that data for brown hares is considered sensitive, due to the hare coursing that still goes on, so it was decided that a lower resolution was best. Figure 56 below shows the overview of the brown hare's range as an alpha hull map.

Although found in many areas across the South East, the brown hare has become much more patchily distributed in the last century. Surrey has seen much lower numbers in the last decade, as can be seen in Figure 55. Reasons for the decline are thought to be related to a range of factors including agricultural intensification, predation and disease. It is due to this decline in distribution and numbers that the brown hare was made a UK BAP priority species for conservation. The Isle of Wight, however, does have strong populations of brown hares.

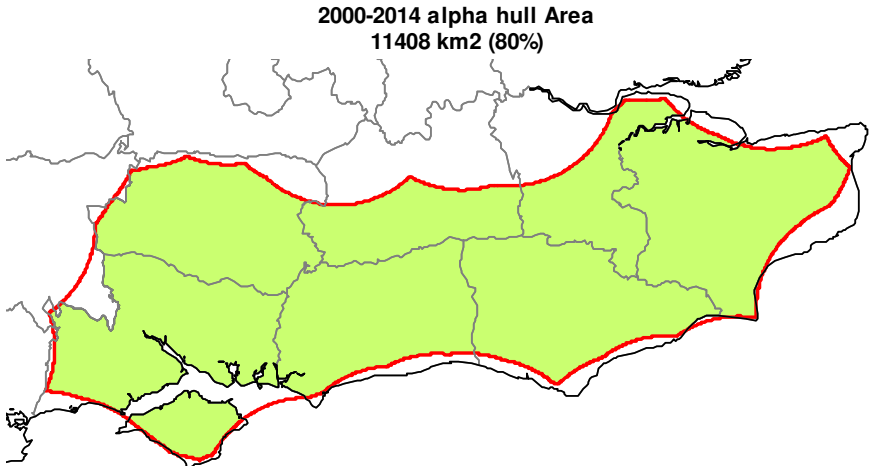


Figure 56: Alpha hull representation of brown hare South East distribution for 2000-2014 records

# Brown hare

*Lepus europaeus*

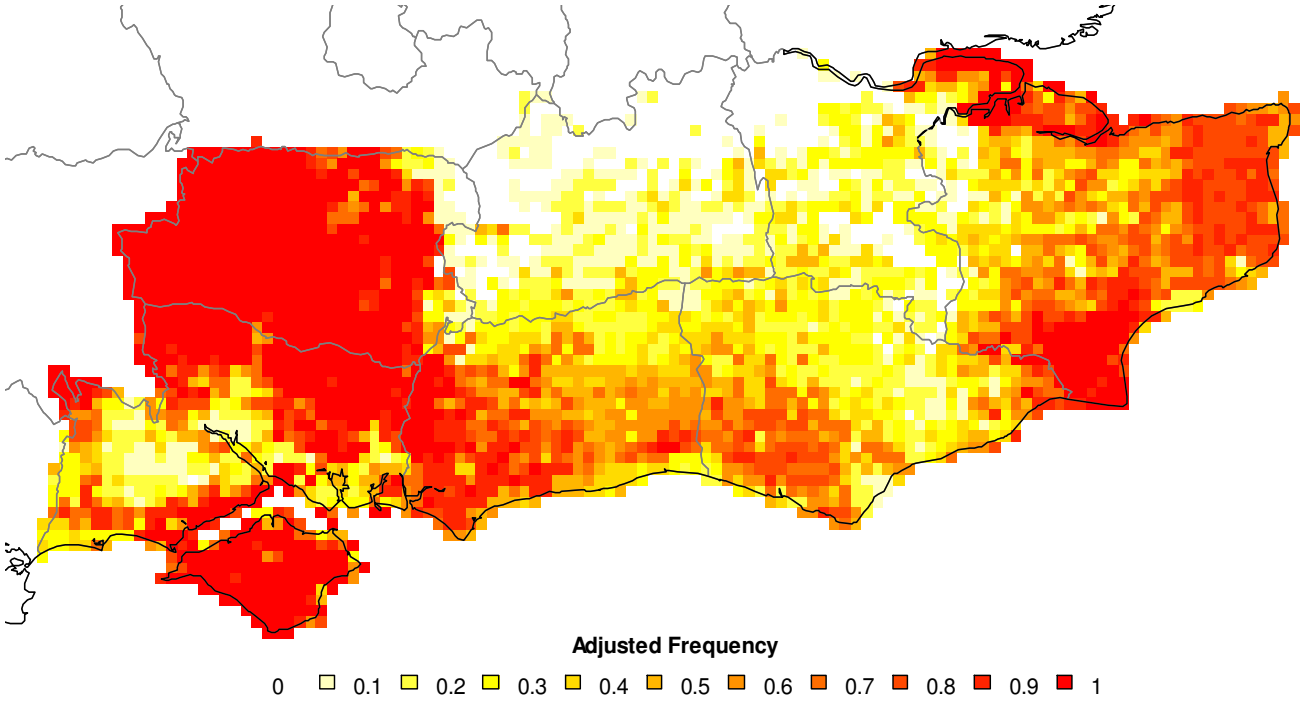


Figure 57: Frescalo map displaying brown hare predicted South East distribution based on 2000-2014 records

The brown hare's Frescalo map displays the decreased range of the species, compared to its once common occurrence across the region. This is shown by the yellow and white tetrads that imply a lower level of certainty that brown hare will be present in those areas, based on a lower number of tetrads containing records for them in those places.

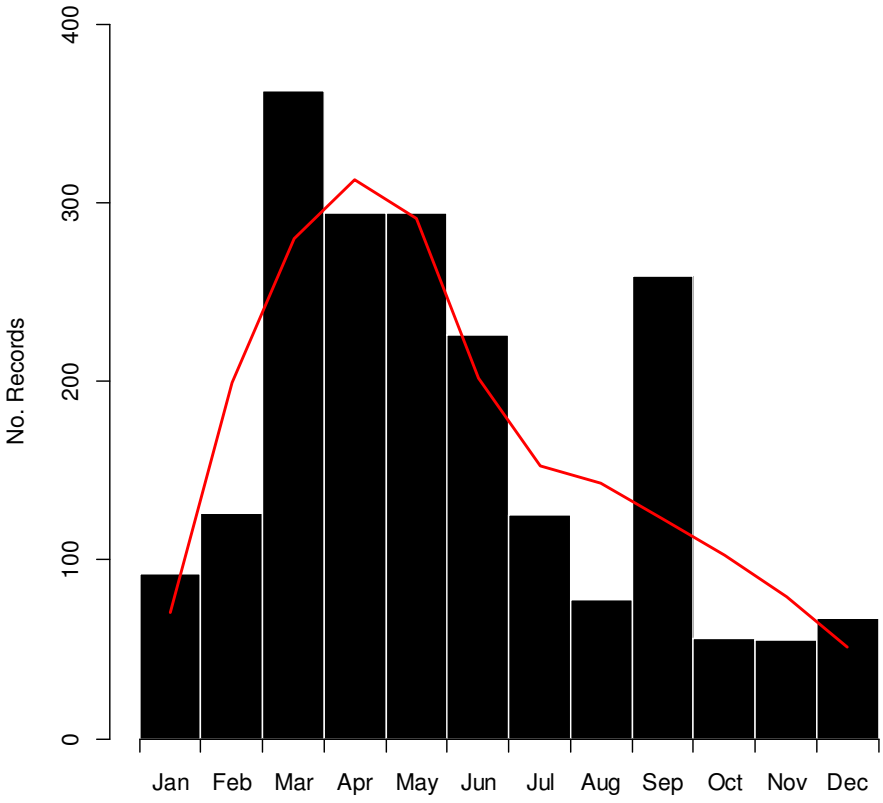


Figure 58: Phenology histogram displaying monthly record submission

The brown hare, like the rabbit, also displays a peak in data in spring and early summer. The highest number of records are submitted in March, giving weight to the popular term 'mad-March hares'. This is the time of year that courtship begins and hares are often seen 'boxing', whereby unreceptive females fight off the males. Hares are therefore seen more often in the spring.