

Queen's University issues stark warning for the Irish hare

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Researchers at Queen's University Belfast have issued a stark warning about the future of the Irish hare and the threat it faces from the European 'brown' hare, which has set up home in Mid-Ulster and West Tyrone.

Dr Neil Reid from Quercus (Queen's University's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science), said: "In March 2011, the Northern Ireland Assembly voted to outlaw hare coursing in Northern Ireland to protect the future of the Irish hare. But our native hare remains vulnerable to another serious threat – that of the invading European hare."

European hares are found in Britain and continental Europe, but they have been highly successful in invading many countries beyond their native range in south-west Europe and parts of Asia. There have been many studies on their impact on native [species](#). Dr Reid reviewed these studies to get a clearer picture of how much of a threat the invading species might be to the Irish hare.

The study, published in the international journal *Biological Invasions*, suggested that European hares exhibit strong competition for habitat space and food resources with native species, most notably other hare species. It also warns that disease and parasite transmission and climate change may give the invading European hare an edge over our native species.

Dr Reid added: "The Irish hare represents an evolutionary unique lineage, which is restricted to Ireland where it has been present since before the last glacial maximum, making it one of our few native mammal species. Hence, it has been isolated for 30,000-60,000 years. So the discovery that both species are hybridising in the wild is very worrying."

The scientific community is so concerned that a panel of international experts, from the Lagomorph Specialist Group of the International Union for the [Conservation](#) of Nature (IUCN), the world's foremost authority on threatened species, signed a foreword to accompany the paper as an urgent call for further research and are calling for a European hare Invasive Species Action Plan (iSAP) and Eradication Strategy.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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