

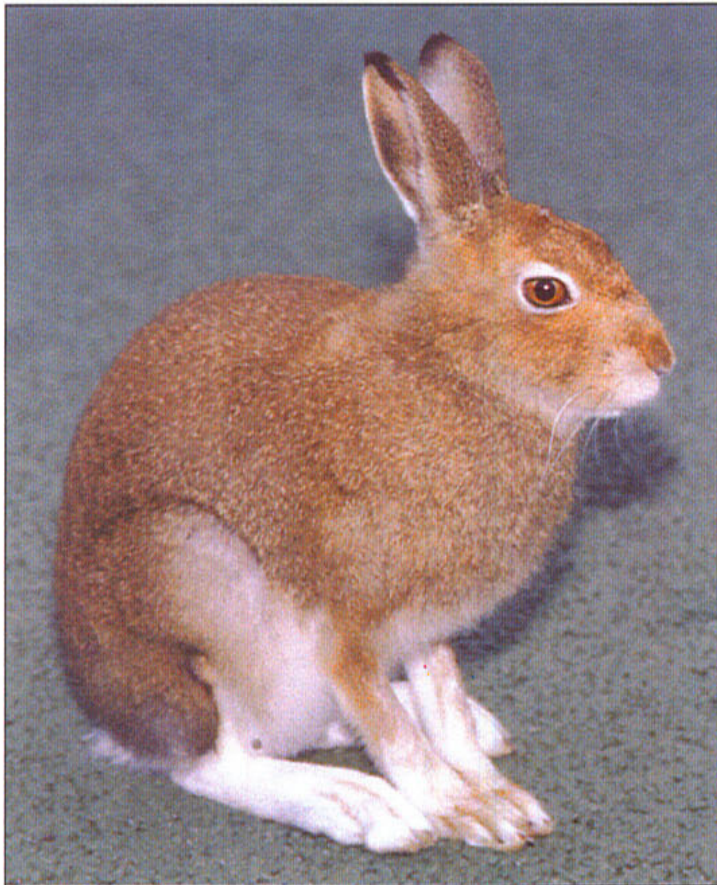
Stoat (whitrit)



The stoat is believed to have been introduced into the islands in the 17th century. Although rarely seen, it is thought to be widely distributed throughout Mainland. Rabbits, young blue hares and ground-nesting birds, are likely to form the major part of its diet in Shetland. Be careful not to confuse stoats with their larger cousin, the polecat-ferret, a recent introduction into the

islands, but one that presents a far greater threat to our native fauna. Stoats are much smaller, less than one foot (30 cm) long. They have a longish tail, which always has a dark tip. In summer, the coat is two-tone, chestnut brown above, contrasting with yellowish-white from the chin to the belly. In winter many turn white, but they still retain the blackish tip to the tail.

Blue Hare



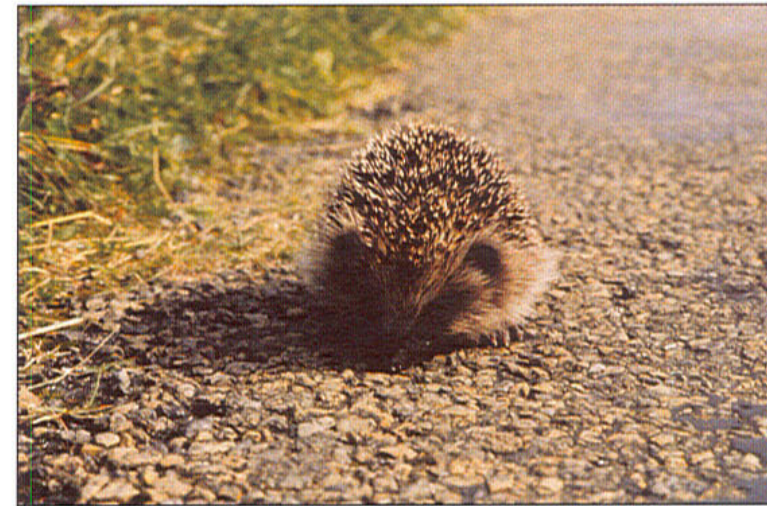
The blue hare, also known as the mountain hare, was first introduced to the Kergord estate in 1907. Subsequent introductions have taken place on Ronas Hill and on the island of Vaila. Shetland, with its abundance of heather moorland, and comparative lack of predators, is well suited to this species. It has now spread to several areas on Mainland, although its precise distribution is poorly known and there is little information on numbers. The only similar species is the rabbit. Blue hares are best identified by their larger size, longer, black-tipped ears, longer legs and bounding gait. Some turn partially or totally white in winter.

Otter (draatsi)

The otter is perhaps Shetland's most popular mammal, especially with visiting tourists. Globally, otters have suffered a dramatic decline throughout much of their range, although there have been recent signs of recovery in some areas. In Shetland the population is thought to number around 1,000 individuals, making it important in an international context. Shetland's otters need a combination of soft peat (for excavating their holts), freshwater (for cleaning salt from their coat), and offshore kelp beds (for feeding). Although we know they are distributed right around the coast of Shetland, many areas have never been surveyed properly. Shetland's otters have a shorter life expectancy (just 3 years) than their Mainland counterparts, which means that the population could fluctuate markedly over a relatively short period of time.

Hedgehog

Hedgehogs were introduced to the Tingwall Valley in the middle of the 19th



century. They thrive in Shetland in the absence of any predators, and have spread through much of Mainland and been introduced to many of the inhabited islands. While much of their food comprises earthworms, beetles, spiders and slugs they also have an appetite for bird's eggs, so they present a threat to ground-nesting birds. Hedgehogs have

often been observed systematically working their way through all the nests in a tirrick colony. By recording hedgehogs throughout the year we may also build up a better picture of their hibernation habits in the islands.

Other Mammals

Other land mammals found in Shetland include rabbits, polecat-ferrets, house mice, field mice and brown rats. Occasionally vagrant bats from the British mainland or the continent find their way here too. SBCR also welcomes any records of these other mammals which will help build a clearer picture of their status and distribution. With a common species, like the rabbit, there is little to be gained from recording individual sightings. It would, however, be very useful if you could tell us which one kilometre squares you have seen rabbits in. These can be identified from OS Maps by a four figure grid reference (e.g. HU1750 would represent the one kilometre square that includes the Loch of Watsness)