



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2018-00898

**Keyword:** Crime

**Subject:** Illegal Hunting

### Request and Answer:

Your request for information has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Act I can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold information to which your request relates. The decision has been taken to disclose the following.

### Request

I am Lecturer in Conservation Biology at Queen's University Belfast (though originally local to Castledawson). I study wildlife specialising in the ecology of hares. In Mid-Ulster (between Magherafelt and Moneymore) there is a non-native invasive hare species that was deliberately introduced (probably in the 1960/70s) and is causing problems for the native Irish hare. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has funded much of my research to undertake population monitoring to tracking changes in their numbers. We have recently recorded a dramatic decline in hare numbers locally. I give two recent public lectures in the area (one to the Cookstown Wildlife Trust and another to the Megargy & District Game & Conservation Society) where multiple attendees reported a "plague" of men illegally hunting hares in a form of open coursing known locally as 'lurching' using greyhound-type dogs to capture hares. Farmers have reported such activities as a nuisance with people trespassing on their land. We surveyed hares with remote cameras and have recorded such activity on camera; though the identity of the person(s) involved could not be established as their face doesn't appear in images. We have reason to believe the activity is sufficiently common in the area between Magherafelt and Moneymore as to be a cause for the dramatic decline in hares observed in our surveys.

Consequently, I would like to submit a Freedom of Information Request to obtain anonymised data on the numbers of incidents of illegal hunting (lurching) constituting wildlife crime and land trespass filed with the Mid-Ulster Local Policing Team over the last 5-10 years. I understand it may be difficult to extract this information depending on how such reports are classified e.g. anti-social behaviour etc. But any information you can give me on the change in the prevalence of such activity would be very valuable in helping us interpret changes in the local hare population.

### Answer

Wildlife Branch have advised there is no specific search engine for 'hares', they searched for hares included in the 'other' category and under F District. Please see details in the table below. Please note some incidents may have been categorised in other records as lamping / foxhunting / firearms offence / other etc., if this is the case this will not have shown on the search. Wildlife Branch have advised they have only included the statistics where hare has been specifically mentioned. Please

also note these figures are dependent on who entered the figures onto the system and are subject to change.

Year	Number of Incidents
2018	Nil
2017	Nil
2016	1 INCIDENT OF ALLEDGED HARE HUNTING
2015	Nil
2014	Nil
2013	Nil
2012	RECORDS INCOMPLETE
2011	RECORDS INCOMPLETE
2010	RECORDS INCOMPLETE

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.pnn.police.uk).

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk)

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.