

Rabbits and Hares

hold a special place in
Springtime traditions



Image: pixabay

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This project is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal through the Community Services Programme

Rabbits & Hares

As Easter Sunday arrives, thoughts often turn to the playful and gentle creatures that have become symbols of renewal and joy—most notably, the Easter Bunny. Rabbits and hares have long held a special place in springtime traditions around the world, representing fertility, new beginnings, and the promise of life emerging anew after winter's hold. Here we include some interesting information on rabbits and hares.

Rabbits and hares are called lagomorphs. They are quiet similar to rodents. We have three species here in Ireland.

Rabbits were introduced to Ireland by the Normans in the 12th Century. They were brought here for food and fur. Originally they were kept in large warrens, but they soon escaped and spread quickly. Today they are found throughout Ireland. They live in a wide range of habitats including farmland, sand dunes and upland areas.

The Irish hare is one of Ireland's longest established mammals. They have lived here since the Ice Age. The hare lives in open habitats including grassland, salt marshes, upland bog and heaths.

The brown hare is an invasive species. They were introduced to Ireland in the late 1800's and early 1900's. It is not as hardy as the Irish Hare and most of the population died out. It still remains mostly in Northern Ireland and parts of Donegal. They prefer farmland and lowland areas.

Both rabbits and hares are herbivores. They eat plants, grass and wild flowers, they also eat bark and twigs. Both animals have a pair of large front teeth called incisors. These teeth grow constantly so they never wear down.

Rabbit kittens are born underground in a burrow. They are born blind and hairless. Within three weeks the kitten is weaned and ready to join the adults. Rabbit doe can have up to seven litters a year with up to ten kittens in each litter.

Hare leverets are born above ground. They are born with hair and their eyes open. They can be left unattended in long grass for safety and fed once a day.



Hares only have two to three litters a year with up to four leverets per litter. Rabbits and hares are a very important part of the food chain. They are the food source for many wild species like the fox, stoat or buzzards. Pet rabbits are popular in Ireland. They can live between seven and twelve years and in pairs for social health. They live on a diet rich in hay. Pet rabbits can live outdoors all year round but need to be protected from cold wet weather. They also need to be neutered and vaccinated.

Many folklore stories feature rabbits such as the following story recounted by John Boland, Ballina (as part of the Schools' Folklore Collection, [Dúchas.ie](http://Duchas.ie))

“Many years ago there lived a man in county Sligo who was very fond of fowling. At that time there was very few watches or clocks in the country districts. One bright summers morning he awoke having no timepiece. He thought it was all hours of the day. He dressed in haste and took his gun with him. Crossing over the fields in a lonely district with no houses nearby he suddenly spotted three rabbits romping in the dew together. He raised his gun and took aim and fired and killed the three rabbits with the one shot. When he arrived at the rabbits he found that they were dead. He took a string out of his pocket and tied the hind legs of the rabbits together and slung them over his shoulder so as to be ready for his next shot. As he went a few paces he felt the rabbits jumping on his back.

He laid down his gun and took down the rabbits from his shoulder. As they appeared not to be dead he raised his hand to stroke each of the rabbits a blow on the head to make sure they were dead. To his great surprise when he raised his hand to strike, what happened? Three little men sprung up in place of the three rabbits. They were dressed in red coats and silk tall hats.

Each little man was only a foot high. They spoke to the man in a very determined voice and warned him not to come so early in the morning in future. It was then he knew that it was very [he?] early in the morning. So he took up his gun and made for home. It was only then that the thought struck him that they were three fairies as there was a fort nearby. When he arrived home his father who was asleep in the kitchen as all country homes have a bed in the kitchen. His father remarked that he was very pale. Then the son told him the story. "You are very lucky that you were not turned into an oak tree as you interrupted the good people.

So that ended the man's shooting early in the morning. And he didn't go out shooting anymore.”

Sources:

The Schools Collection ([Dúchas.ie](http://Duchas.ie))
National Parks and Wildlife
Pets.ie.

EASTER FUN April 5th: Easter Kids Event, 12pm - 2pm

Planting fun on Easter Sunday!
Take a stroll around the Enniscoke
Ornamental Garden.
Don't forget to spot the **Easter
Bunny** hiding somewhere!
Then decorate a pot and plant a seed
to grow at home.
Free - donations welcome.
No booking necessary.
The Bright Sky Café open.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Artisan Market
11th April 11am – 3pm

Organic Plant Sale
11th & 12th April
11am– 3pm

North Mayo Heritage Centre
F26 FR94