



## A guide to identifying Mountain Hare dung

Created to support participants in the **Volunteer Mountain Hare Survey**  
[tinyurl.com/MountainHareSurvey](https://tinyurl.com/MountainHareSurvey)

Mountain hares produce two types of faeces:

1. Soft droppings made of partially digested food, called 'caecal pellets' are produced from a part of their digestive system and then are re-ingested directly from their own anus, usually during the day while at rest, in order to gain valuable extra nutrients and replenish gut flora.
2. Hard faecal pellets are produced while they are active, usually during the night. It is the hard faecal pellets that you can see on the hill, and which the following guide describes.

**Mountain hares** produce discrete, hard, fibrous, slightly flattened, round pellets around 1 – 1.5 cm in diameter, sometimes slightly tapered at one end. Fresh pellets are usually yellowish or sandy-brown with a greenish tinge.

**A key characteristic of mountain hare pellets is that they are very fibrous and contain fragments of undigested plant material which are visible with the naked eye within the surface of pellets, or when broken up.**

See overleaf for comparison with other dung.



Mountain hare pellets are slightly flattened, round pellets approximately 1–1.5 cm in diameter.



Mountain hare pellets contain coarse fragments of plant material.



Mountain hares excrete faecal droppings while active; moving, feeding, being vigilant.



These can occur more or less anywhere where they spend time in their environment.



Pellets can be found singularly, or in loose clusters.



Mountain hare pellets can accumulate and be very numerous around prominent features in the landscape.



These include fence posts, or around particular rocks and hummocks that hares might investigate or spend time.



Older pellets become increasingly bleached white and start to break down over time, with vegetation fragments becoming more visible.



Several species that share the landscape with mountain hare have similar droppings that could cause confusion. This guide aims to help prevent some common misidentifications.

Critically, sheep and deer dung does not usually have the fibrous texture of mountain hare dung. However, dung can be highly variable, and its characteristics differ with the age of the individual that it came from, their diet and the environment. Furthermore, pellets change appearance over time as they weather.

It is also worth noting that brown/European hare and mountain hare distributions can overlap, and it is not possible to reliably distinguish brown hare and mountain hare pellets by visual inspection.

It is therefore not always/often possible to identify which species dung came from, so consider any potential for misidentification that relates to your survey location, and if in doubt, don't record. Note that if you find the dung above c. 600 metres it is very unlikely to be brown hare.

### European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

Rabbits tend to be found at lower altitudes than mountain hares, but their distributions can overlap. Rabbit dung is similar to that of mountain hare, but smaller – usually 1 cm or less in diameter, darker in colour (usually black), usually harder than those of mountain hare, and can be very numerous near warrens, or around prominent features in their habitat.



European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)



Rabbit pellets

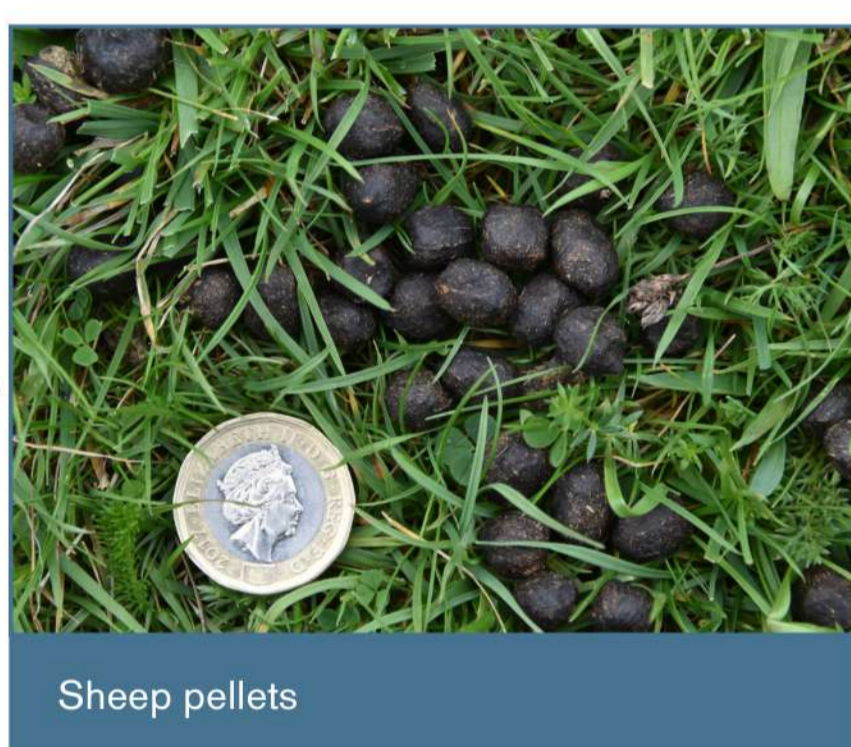


Rabbit (left) & mountain hare (right) pellets

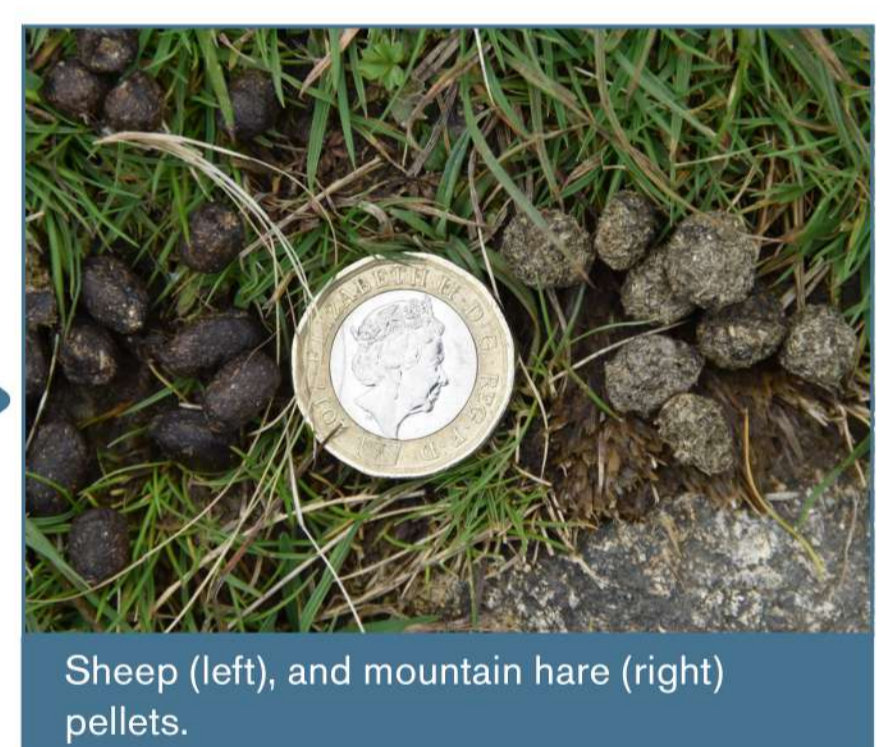
Deer and sheep dung can also be common in some upland areas, but can usually be distinguished from mountain hare pellets by their darker, usually black or brown, colour and the fact that their pellets are more cylindrical in shape and often have a distinctive point at one end and a dimple at the other. Sheep and deer pellets are often stuck together in clumps rather than single pellets.



Sheep (*Ovis aries*)



Sheep pellets



Sheep (left), and mountain hare (right) pellets.

Red deer pellets can be difficult to differentiate from mountain hare, especially as they become weathered, because they can be rounder and have vegetation fragments visible. Red deer pellets are usually larger than mountain hare pellets, typically 2-3 cm long by 1.5 cm diameter, but size is variable and can be similar to that of mountain hare. Usually dark-brown to black in colour, and often deposited in pellet groups.



Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)



Fresh red deer pellets (left) compared to mountain hare pellets (right)



Older, weathered red deer pellets (left) compared to mountain hare pellets (right)

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Red deer (left) and mountain hare (right) pellets, opened up to show difference in texture.

Mountain hare dung is characterised by a coarser texture with distinct plant fibres and/or fragments identifiable in the pellet.



Species/Group	Size	Shape	Colour	Appearance
Mountain hare	1- 1.5 cm in diameter.	Slightly flattened, round pellets. May taper towards one end.	Yellowish- to sandy-brown, with green tinge. Bleach to white with age.	Discrete, hard, and fibrous. Vegetation fragments easily visible.
Rabbit	1cm or less in diameter.	Round	Dark brown to black.	Discrete, small pellets. May be highly aggregated.
Sheep	Variable	Variable, but usually cylindrical and usually with a distinct point on one end, and a depression on the other.	Darker, usually black or brown.	Usually discrete pellets in groups/clusters, may be stuck together in clumps.
Deer	Variable with species and diet, but typically 2-3 cm long by 1.5 cm diameter.	Cylindrical, often with distinct point on one end, and depression on the other.	Black to dark brown. Roe deer often shiny black. Some pellets fade to lighter brown with age.	Usually distinct pellets, but may be stuck together in clumps.