

In addition to the above records, Dr. E. L. Prowse has seen black hares at Fort Augustus, St. Peters, Naufrage, Tracadie, Scotchfort, Heatherdale, Valleyfield, Launching and Stanley Bridge during the past few years. Mr. Earl Corrish of Southport has also seen a black hare in the Fort Augustus area and one in Harrington. This year an effort was made to collect specimens to determine if they were in fact wild hares and the four specimens collected to date this winter from hunters and trappers are snowshoe hares. No domestic black rabbits have been collected.

It has been suggested that one hare in 100,000 will be black (Mastin, 1975) and correspondence with game departments and museums across Canada has revealed that melanistic hares are indeed rare. However, the incidence of melanistic hares on Prince Edward Island seems quite high. (Many of these sightings were reported by personnel from the Fish and Wildlife Division only). It seems likely that close to one in every 100 hares on P.E.I. is melanistic.

Why should melanistic hares survive at all considering they stick out like a sore thumb in winter. One reason why they may be more numerous on P.E.I. is because we lack a major predator of the hare, the lynx. But other predators such as the fox, the goshawk and the horned owl are numerous enough. Melanistic individuals may be selected when fire-blackened areas make the animal better adapted through its now "protective" coloration. Certainly, the Pisquid - Fort Augustus area which was burned severely in the late 1950's seems to be a good area for melanistic hares. Or perhaps we have more melanistic hares here strictly because island animal populations often have different characteristics due to inbreeding. Whatever the reason, P.E.I. does appear to have a high percentage of melanistic hares. Have you seen one?

#### References

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- Mastin, Mary F. 1975. The Snowshoe Hare. Ontario Naturalist March 1975, pages 14 - 19.

- Rosemary Curley  
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