

*“Farming Memories” is an archive designed to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Isle of Wight’s Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation in 1963. The archive, a collection of sound recordings and photographs, has been gathered by Natural Enterprise on behalf of the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. Contributors include farmers, farm workers and people with fond memories of the Island’s wonderful countryside.*

*The archive has enabled us to produce a number stories relating to farming on the Island in the last 50 years.*

## Changes to Wildlife



*Rabbiting at Mottistone, 1950s Kindly contributed, Nigel Leppard*

The farmers we spoke to were unanimous in their opinion that overall wildlife on the Island has declined in 50 years, but as with all stories, there are winners and losers. Our farmers were in agreement over which species were increasing and declining, but in much less harmony over the causes.

The main winners in the wildlife stakes are buzzards and badgers. Losers include grey partridge, ground-nesting birds, sparrows, blackbirds, hedgehogs and hares. Some farmers have also noted a decrease in raptors. One farm worker said that there was almost a plague of hares in the 1960s - *“the hares were taking over”*.

The farmers we spoke to all had theories regarding the decline, although none were certain of the causes. Pesticides were blamed for the decrease in hares and some birds. One farmer felt that his switch to contract farming, where the silage was all cut within a day was detrimental to ground-nesters. He remembers *“when I came here in 1972 the lapwings used to come in clouds – I used to have to jump out of the tractor and mark where the lapwing nests were”*. Badgers were also blamed for this, and the decline in hedgehog numbers – another farmer said *“brock knows how to*



## 50 Years of Farming Memories in the Isle of Wight AONB



*peel a hedgehog open, no trouble at all*". Buzzards were blamed for a decline in small mammal numbers.

Little Egrets increased greatly in number in the 1980s and 90s, but has now slightly dropped. Rabbit numbers seem to fluctuate across the island, with waves of myxomatosis keeping numbers in check. Our photograph shows rabbit control on Mottistone Down in the late 1950s. Red Squirrel numbers were felt to be stable.

A threat to the Island's woodland had been its under-management. With small and often difficult to access woodland, it has been difficult to manage woodlands economically. The rising demand for woodchip and fuel logs has started to redress this, and one farmer had purchased and was working a woodland that had been neglected since the 1940s. Better management of woodland, and other farm stewardship schemes will help to encourage flora and fauna.