

Hunting with dogs

Illegal and Indefensible

The scientific evidence is conclusive; foxes, deer and hares suffer physiological and psychological stress when they are chased by a pack of hounds, and this suffering occurs whether or not they are eventually killed.

A parliamentary inquiry into hunting with dogs (commonly referred to as the Burns Report)¹ established this suffering as fact back in 2000, and that is why hunting with dogs for sport was outlawed a decade ago.

Contrary to what some pro-hunt groups claim, being chased by up to forty dogs under human control while surrounded by shouting, horn blowing hunters is not natural for any species and constitutes a serious compromise of animal welfare:

- Red deer are a relatively sedentary species and are not equipped for a forced chase lasting an average of three hours and covering 12 miles or more. Scientists have concluded that the physiological and psychological stress this causes, including damage to their muscles and blood cells as well as physical exhaustion, **'could hardly be more severe in welfare terms.'**²
- Hares have evolved to sprint at high speeds for short periods to escape predators. Hounds under human control will continue the chase as long as they are told to and are aided in their pursuit by hunters who keep them on the hare's trail. The Burns Report concluded that **'this experience seriously compromises the welfare of the hare.'**
- Hares killed by coursing, where sighthounds (usually lurchers) compete to catch and kill a hare, suffer broken ribs and limbs, ruptured abdomens and organ damage³.
- Foxes escape predators by going underground, but hunts employ staff to block up underground escape routes the morning before a hunt meet, forcing an unnaturally long chase. If a fox does succeed in escaping underground, hunt staff send terriers down the hole to trap the fox while they dig it out and then shoot it. Again, the Burns Report concluded

that the inability to escape dogs underground causes the fox 'extreme fear' and is a **'serious compromise of its welfare.'**

- Autopsies reveal hunted foxes are not killed quickly, but endure bites and tears to their flanks and hindquarters - causing great suffering before death⁴.
- The Burns Report also raised serious concerns about the practice of hunting hinds (female red deer) who have calves as it puts her in a position of having to choose between saving herself (by fleeing) or staying with her calf.
- Many fox hunts operate in March, April and even early May when vixens (female foxes) are likely to have cubs in an underground den. If the vixen is hunted while out finding food, her young cubs will die as they are completely reliant on her for food and warmth.

Most British people oppose this cruelty.⁵

- **80%** think fox hunting should remain illegal
- **86%** think deer hunting should remain illegal
- **88%** think hare hunting and coursing should remain illegal
- **74%** think sending terriers below ground to find foxes should be made illegal

The Hunting Act is the most successful piece of wild animal welfare legislation in history.

With an average of one prosecution a week, the Hunting Act outperforms all similar wild mammal legislation in England and Wales, having both the highest number of convictions since it was introduced (400+ from 2005 to 2014) and the highest conviction rate (65% of charges laid under the Act have resulted in convictions).

The vocal minority who want the Act repealed cling to outdated arguments to justify this cruel sport; however:

- Research shows fox numbers have been stable since 2004, proving that hunting did not limit their numbers⁶.
- According to government agencies, 95% of lamb losses are due to poor farming practices^{7,8}, with confirmed losses to foxes less than 1%⁹.
- Killing foxes does not control fox numbers. A dead animal leaves an empty territory that is filled by a new fox within 3-4 days¹⁰.
- Brown hare numbers in Britain have declined by 80% since the 1880s and they are now a conservation priority in the UK¹¹.
- Stag hunts typically killed a deer on only half of their hunting days, making it an extremely ineffective method of population control.



- ¹ Burns, L., Edwards, V., Marsh, J., Soulsby, L. & Winter, M. (2000) Report of the committee of inquiry into hunting with dogs in England and Wales. The Stationery Office, London.
- ² Bradshaw, E. L. & Bateson, P. (2000) Welfare implications of culling red deer (*Cervus elaphus*). *Animal Welfare*, 9: 3-24.
- ³ University of Cambridge, Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine: Post Mortem Reports on 12 hares killed at Coursing Meetings in March 2000. In: Burns, L., Edwards, V., Marsh, J., Soulsby, L. & Winter, M. (2000) Report of the committee of inquiry into hunting with dogs in England and Wales. The Stationery Office, London.
- ⁴ Department of Clinical Veterinary Science, University of Bristol (2000) Report on post mortem findings in hunted foxes. In: Burns, L., Edwards, V., Marsh, J., Soulsby, L. & Winter, M. (2000) Report of the committee of inquiry into hunting with dogs in England and Wales. The Stationery Office, London.
- ⁵ Ipsos MORI Hunting Poll 2014. <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3499/Hunting-Poll-2014.aspx>
- ⁶ Wright, L.J., Newson, S.E. & Noble, D.G. (2014). The value of a random sampling design for annual monitoring of national populations of larger British terrestrial mammals. *European Journal of Wildlife Research*, 60:213-221.
- ⁷ Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (2004). Improving Lamb Survival. <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/welfare/onfarm/documents/lambsurvival.pdf>
- ⁸ Natural England (2011). Species Information Note SIN004, fourth edition. Available from: www.naturalengland.org.uk
- ⁹ White, P.C.L., Groves, H.L., Savery, J.R., Conington, J. & Hutchings, M.R. (2000). Fox predation as a cause of lamb mortality on hill farms. *Veterinary Record*, 147: 33-37.
- ¹⁰ Giuglioli, L., Potts, J.R & Harris, S. (2007). Animal interactions and the emergence of territoriality. *PLoS Computational Biology*, 7: e1002008.
- ¹¹ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010) UK priority species pages – Version 2. http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/_speciespages/410.pdf

The truth is that some people simply enjoy killing animals.

Some enjoy it enough to flout the law and continue hunting. However, these illegal hunters could be curbed with just three straightforward changes to the law:

- **Prohibiting the use of dogs below ground**
This is arguably where the worst cruelty occurs in hunting, not only to foxes pursued underground with limited opportunity to escape, but also to the dogs sent below ground to find them and either flush them out or hold them at bay.
- **Inserting a 'reckless' provision** to ensure the killing of wild mammals during a trail hunt cannot be passed off as an 'unfortunate accident'.
- **Increasing the punishments** available to the courts so that the Act is brought in line with other animal protection legislation.



It is time to build on the successes of the Hunting Act and ensure the spirit of the legislation is fulfilled. We urge all Members of Parliament to declare their support for this popular Act and commit to making it even better.

League Against Cruel Sports New Sparling House, Holloway Hill, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1QZ
Telephone 01483 524 250 Email info@league.org.uk www.league.org.uk

 /LeagueAgainstCruelSports  @LeagueACS