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# The Case Against Hunting with Dogs

## Introduction

In May 2015 the Conservative Party won the general election and pledged to make good on its manifesto promise to hold a free vote on repeal of the Hunting Act (2004). Yet almost as soon as the ballots were counted we began to hear from a new generation of Conservative MPs opposed to hunting and committed to protection of the Act. This prompted a change of course for the Government and in July 2015 an attempt was made to water down the Act through amendment rather than a free vote on repeal as promised.

In the end the Government realised that even this backdoor route to repeal was doomed and the proposal was withdrawn hours before a vote. But the Hunting Act is still under threat. The pro-hunt lobby has vowed to continue its fight for repeal, and the Government has reiterated its commitment to a vote on the issue.



Photo © Dan Belton

Hunting with dogs was banned in Britain more than a decade ago because of the cruelty it inflicts on wild mammals such as foxes, hares and deer. **The overwhelming majority of Britons do not want it to be made legal again. This report sets out why.**

## Hunting is cruel

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**"I've been a veterinary surgeon for almost 20 years and involved with animal welfare on many different topics including hunting with dogs. The Burns inquiry confirmed what most of us knew; hunting with dogs is not effective, not efficient, not humane and the rural economy does not rely on it. Britain took a big leap forward in banning an outdated, violent and pointless means of pest control. The ban needs enforcing, not repealing. Our international reputation when it comes to welfare matters will take a devastating blow if the act is repealed. It must not be allowed to happen."**



**Emma Milne BVSc, MRCVS**

## Hunting is unnecessary

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**"Having been associated with the agriculture industry for 50 years with lambs and free range chicken neither I nor any of my tenants have ever found it necessary to persecute foxes. With simple and inexpensive stock management methods the fox can be free to play its useful role in the control of rabbits and rats."**



**Graham Cooper - Livestock farmer**

## Hunting is not about 'fox control'

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"The hunting world's last possible justification for repealing the Hunting Act has been well and truly blown out of the water."

**Clifford Pellow - Ex-huntsman**



## Hunts also kill hares and deer

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"When you say hunting, everyone thinks of fox hunting; in fact there are upwards of 80 beagle and harrier packs specifically targeting hares. The general public has no stomach for hunting and even less stomach for the hunting of hares or hare coursing. Naturally, The Hare Preservation Trust supports the view that this most iconic of British mammals should not be hunted at all. No animal should be pulled to bits by dogs for sport."

**Jane Russ, Chairman - Hare Preservation Trust**



## The Hunting Act is effective

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"The Hunting Act 2004 is the most successful piece of wildlife legislation in the UK's history, with hundreds of prosecutions under its belt. Compare this to Scotland, where the devolved legislation allows for an unlimited amount of dogs to be used for a hunt, and where there have been no prosecutions of hunts. The courts have ruled that the Hunting Act in England and Wales is effective, enforceable, and needed. Hunters seeking to repeal the Act have spent the last five years lobbying on the assumption that this Government will deliver a promised free vote which they have failed to do because they know they would lose it - the fairest thing would be for them to put an end to uncertainty over the future of the Act once and for all - it will not and should not be repealed."

**Rt Hon Alun Michael**  
**South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner**



## The Hunting Act is popular

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"For some years I have been doing my own research amongst the public. The almost invariable response I get is: Fox hunting? Any hunting! Any cruel sports! They simply don't belong in a so called civilised country. Surely it is time they all went extinct?"

**Bill Oddie OBE, Vice President**  
**League Against Cruel Sports**



## Hunting is cruel

**The scientific evidence is conclusive: foxes, deer and hares suffer physiological and psychological stress when chased by a hunt, 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)<sup>1</sup> established this as fact back in 2000, and that is why hunting with dogs for sport was banned in Britain over a decade ago.

**Red deer** are a relatively sedentary species and not equipped for a forced chase lasting an average of three hours and covering 12 miles or more. Scientists have concluded that the physical and mental stress this causes, including damage to muscles and blood cells as well as physical exhaustion **'could hardly be more severe in welfare terms.'**<sup>2</sup>

**Hares** have evolved to sprint at high speeds for short periods to escape predators. They cannot match the stamina of hunting hounds who will continue the chase until the hare is exhausted and can run no more. The Burns Report concluded that **'this experience seriously compromises the welfare of the hare.'**

**Foxes** naturally escape predators by going underground, but hunts employ staff to block up these 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.'**



No animal has evolved to cope with being chased by 40 dogs and dozens of riders on horseback, some shouting and horn blowing, all trying to prevent the animal's escape. **This is not natural.** The Burns Report agreed, stating:

*'There is concern about deliberate direct interference by people with the quarry's flight... such interference, whether in relation to deer or other animals, also seems to sit uncomfortably with the notion that hunts usually embrace hunting an animal in its wild and natural state.'*

**Autopsies reveal hunted foxes are not killed quickly**, but endure numerous bites and tears to their flanks and hindquarters - causing enormous suffering before death<sup>3</sup>. Foxes forced to face terriers underground can suffer injuries to the face, head and neck, as can the terriers<sup>4</sup>.

The Burns Report also raised serious concerns about the practice of hunting female red deer when they have calves as it puts the female in a position of having to **choose between saving herself (by fleeing) or staying with her calf.**

Many fox hunts operated in March, April and even early May when female foxes are likely to have cubs in an underground den. If she is hunted while out finding food, **her young cubs will die as they are completely reliant on her for food and warmth.**





According to Professor Donald Broom, Professor of Animal Welfare, University of Cambridge:

“When a mammal like a hare is chased by a predator like a dog, it will show physiological changes associated with extreme fear. These include greatly elevated heart rate and high levels of emergency adrenal hormone production as well as other changes in hormone levels and enzymes.

Extreme responses like those shown when chased by a predator can result in reduced life expectancy due to the immediate dangers of injury during very vigorous activity and greater risk of cardiovascular or other breakdown as a consequence of the response.

**We must conclude that, whether or not the hare is caught, its welfare is very poor during the chase and for periods afterwards which will be prolonged in some cases.”<sup>5</sup>**

According to Marc Abraham BVM&S, MRCVS:

“As a practicing vet of nearly 20 years with a passionate interest in animal welfare, I believe repealing the Hunting Act would be a gigantic step backwards for Britain; leading to immense suffering for foxes, hares, and deer. Glorification and celebration of what is always an extremely stressful experience for the hunted animal is not only barbaric, but on the rare occasion they manage to escape alive, causes lactic acid build-up in the pursued animal’s blood and muscles resulting in severe pain. That is why hunting was banned more than a decade ago, and why it must be consigned to the dustbin of history forever.”



# Hunting is unnecessary

## Fox numbers have not increased under the Hunting Act

Mammal monitoring by the British Trust for Ornithology shows that fox numbers were stable from 2004 to 2012<sup>6</sup>. The authors of a paper based on these results concluded: **“Our data provides no evidence that fox numbers have increased since the ban.”**

The Peoples’ Trust for Endangered Species’ 2012 Living with Mammals Survey revealed similar results: **“The proportion of sites recording foxes has stayed more or less the same over the ten years of the survey, going against claims in the media that we are increasingly overrun by foxes”**<sup>7</sup>. Their Mammals on Roads survey, which records the number of mammals seen dead on the road, also showed **no change in fox numbers between 2005 and 2011**<sup>8</sup>.

**The uniformity of results between studies with different sampling methods reinforces the accuracy of these results.**

## Fox predation does not have a significant impact on farming incomes

**Studies consistently show that predators and misadventure (e.g. going missing) account for only 5% of annual UK lamb losses**<sup>9,10</sup>, with the actual number lost to foxes being very difficult to determine and likely to be overestimated<sup>11</sup>. According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)<sup>12</sup>, the main causes of lamb loss are: abortion and stillbirth; exposure and starvation; infectious disease and congenital defects.

Establishing whether a lamb was killed by a fox, or died as a result of bad weather or illness and subsequently scavenged, is very difficult. **Thus foxes may be blamed for killing a lamb when they simply found it dead or dying**<sup>13</sup>.

A study on two Scottish hill farms found **less than 1% of lamb losses could be confidently attributed to fox predation**<sup>14</sup>. Based on market values at the time, the authors calculated this equated to a revenue loss between £112 and £298 per year. They concluded: **“Fox predation is not a significant cause of lamb mortality on hill farms and the overall financial impact of fox predation on lamb production is likely to be small.”**

Advice from Natural England to livestock farmers is clear: **“Protection of livestock and control of damage is preferable to fox destruction. Investment in adequate poultry housing is preferable to a continual commitment to killing foxes. Also, there is no substitute for good husbandry to ensure that livestock are healthy and able to withstand the sudden onset of bad weather that may result in stock deaths for which foxes are blamed.”**<sup>15</sup>

## Foxes help farmers

During its lifetime, a **single fox can save the average British crop farmer between £150-£900 by feeding on rabbits**. This translates to an annual benefit of at least £7million across Britain<sup>23</sup>.

Foxes also **aid commercial forestry by predated species that can damage young trees**, such as voles and rabbits.



## Killing does not control fox numbers

A 2006 study investigating the effect of culling in Welsh forests found high culling pressure led to increased fox numbers<sup>16</sup>. Comparing fox faecal counts before culling began (autumn) and when it ended (spring) showed spring fox numbers were highest where the culling pressure had been highest. The authors concluded *“culling undertaken by fox control societies, mounted hunts and rangers appeared to have **no utilitarian value with respect to reducing fox numbers.**”*

The Mammal Society conducted a large-scale survey of British fox numbers in 1999-2000. Using fox faecal counts from a large number of sites, they estimated the rural fox population to be 225,000 adults<sup>17</sup>. The year-long ban on hunting imposed during the 2001-2002 foot and mouth outbreak was used to investigate the impact of hunting on fox numbers. The faecal count was repeated on a subset of the original sites after the temporary ban. This second survey **showed no significant change in fox numbers and in fact, in most regions, the average fox density had declined slightly**<sup>18</sup>.

Further studies show that **when fox territories become vacant, they are taken over by new foxes very rapidly, generally within 3 to 4 days**<sup>19,20</sup>. So lethal control results in a high turnover of young individuals rather than a stable population of longer-lived animals, but the population size remains the same<sup>21</sup>.

Culling may actually exacerbate problems of predation. Immigrating foxes may exert higher levels of predation than a stable population as incomers may have to survive on highly visible livestock while learning where to find food in their new habitat<sup>22</sup>. In other words, **culling may actually be detrimental to farmers.**



## Hunting is not about 'fox control'

In May 2015, a League investigation revealed 16 fox cubs held captive in a barn linked to a fox hunt, shedding light on the widespread and routine manipulation of fox numbers by hunts.



While the scale of this fox 'factory' was shocking, it's **not an isolated case**. In 2012, an employee of the Fitzwilliam Hunt was convicted under the Animal Welfare Act for holding a pregnant fox captive in cruel conditions<sup>24</sup>. During the height of the campaign for a hunting ban, both the Sinnington and Cottesmore hunts were caught

keeping fox cubs captive<sup>25,26</sup>. **Intelligence received by the League implicated more than 20 hunts in this practice in 2014-15.**

Pre and post ban, there have been many exposés of hunts building and maintaining artificial earths – man-made structures designed to mimic fox earths and provide a place for foxes to breed and shelter – and providing supplementary food for foxes. **This widespread practice was even acknowledged by hunters in submissions to the Burns Inquiry.**

The Inquiry's response further undermines hunters' claims of 'fox control':

*'...it is hard to reconcile any use of artificial earths by the hunts with the argument that foxes are a pest and that their numbers need to be controlled through hunting... **the active use of artificial earths, with a view to hunting, is inconsistent with the stated objective of controlling fox numbers.**'*

In 2011, six years after hunting was banned, a League investigation found that the use of artificial earths was widespread. Evidence of structure maintenance and supplementary feeding of foxes was recorded at sites in 14 counties, on land used by 21 hunts<sup>27</sup>.



In June 2011 a League investigator filmed a man dumping a barrel of offal near an artificial fox earth on land owned by a Master of the Cattistock Foxhounds and regularly hunted by them. The same man was later filmed at the hunt's kennels.

**According to Clifford Pellow, a kennelman and huntsman for 23 years and now retired, these incidents are just the tip of the iceberg:**

*"I've worked with many hunts across the country and seen foxes kept in milk churns, cages and sheds and encouraged to breed in artificial earths so there's a ready supply to be hunted. I've even seen a fox deliberately strung up in a tree to send the hounds into a frenzy, so it's no surprise to me this cruelty carries on."*

*Though hunts insist they are there to provide a wildlife control service, the fact they break the Master of Foxhounds Association rules over and over again shows that this just isn't the case. **They're still in it purely for the blood 'sport', with a nasty, cruel streak and no respect for the law.**"*





## Hunts also kill hares and deer

Much of the debate over hunting focuses on foxes, yet hares and deer were also traditionally hunted with dogs. In fact, **before the Hunting Act was passed, one third of hunts in Britain targeted brown hares** with packs of beagles, basset hounds and harriers. **Hare coursing**, where two sighthounds such as lurchers or greyhounds are set upon a single hare, was also banned by the Hunting Act.

**The brown hare is listed as a conservation priority** in the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan, meaning we should be doing all we can to protect this vulnerable species whose numbers have declined by 80% since the late 1880s. While modern farming practices are the main cause of this decline, hare hunting and coursing also had an impact. **A return to these cruel sports could see brown hares wiped out in many parts of Britain.**

Although only three hunts that traditionally hunted red deer with hounds remain in England, this practice inflicts some of the greatest cruelty wild animals suffer at the hands of people.

**Professor Patrick Bateson, Britain's preeminent animal behaviour scientist**, published a study in 1997 on the welfare of hunted deer and the results shocked everyone, including him. Reflecting on his findings in the Times he wrote:

*"Red deer are not equipped with sweat glands in their bodies. They overheat when chased and their muscle fibre type is not adapted for endurance running. However, even these initial conclusions scarcely prepared me for the astonishing changes in the physiology of the hunted deer. In short, many of the physiological changes are seriously maladaptive and would not be expected to occur normally. **The pattern of the data suggests that the hunted animals are extremely frightened as they try to escape.**"*<sup>28</sup>

The members of the Burns Inquiry committee agreed, stating: **'hunting with hounds is a challenge to the welfare of deer that would not be tolerated in other situations of animal husbandry'**.

Additionally, deer hunts typically killed a deer on only half of their hunting days, making it an extremely ineffective method of population control.

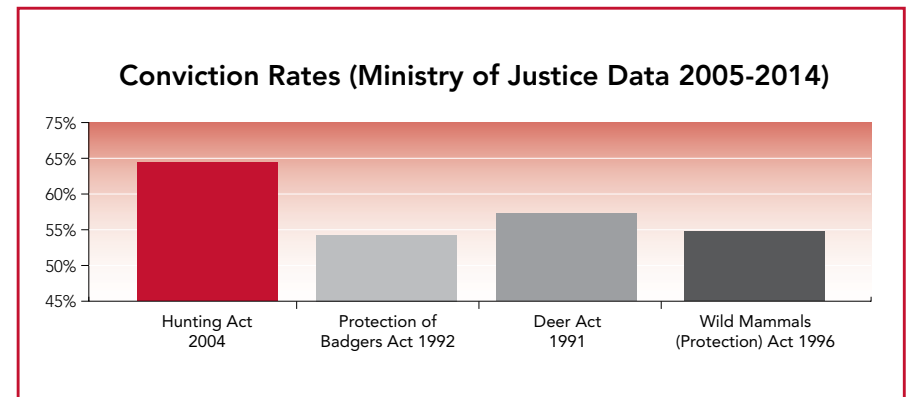
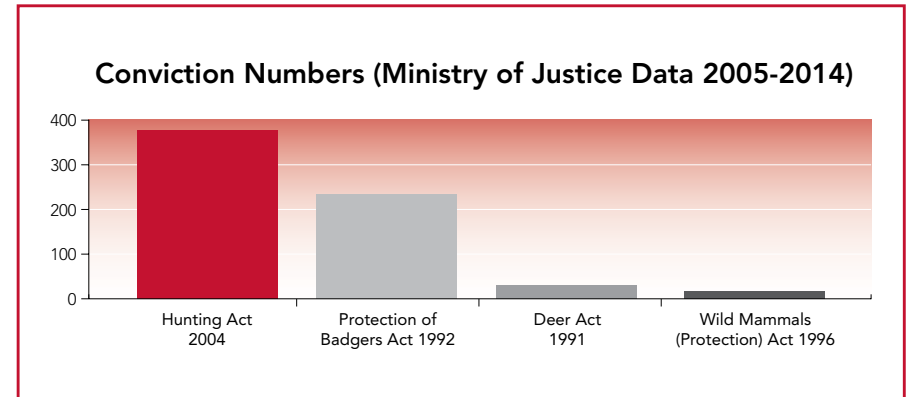


# The Hunting Act is effective

**The Hunting Act is Britain's most successful wild animal welfare law.** Ministry of Justice figures show it out-performs all similar wild mammal legislation, having both the highest number of convictions since 2005 when it was introduced (381 from 2005 to 2014) and conviction rate (64% of charges laid under the Act have resulted in convictions). These figures not only put the lie to misleading prosecution and conviction figures put out by the hunting lobby, but also demonstrate that **the law is both workable and successful.**

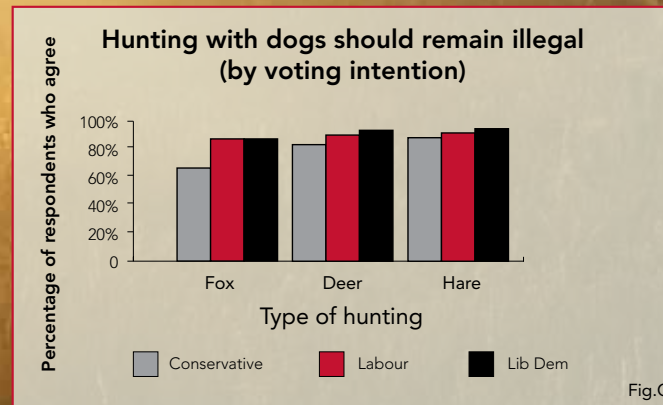
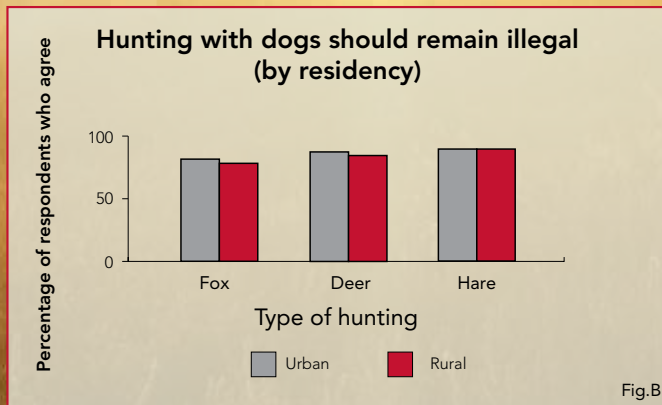
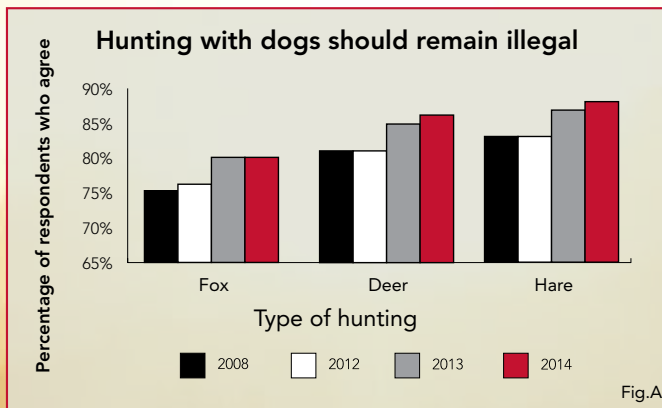


In addition to the 381 convictions recorded by the Ministry of Justice since 2005, there were a further 53 convictions under the Hunting Act as a result of private prosecutions brought by the RSPCA, the League Against Cruel Sports and IFAW, making a total of 434 convictions since the Act was passed. A further 36 people have admitted an offence under the Hunting Act to the police since 2005, for which they received a formal caution as an alternative to being prosecuted in court. **The total number of offences under the Hunting Act for which people have either admitted guilt or been found guilty since 2005 is therefore 470.** Similar private prosecution and police caution data are not available for the other three wild mammal laws featured in the charts opposite.



# The Hunting Act is popular

The Hunting Act is not only effective, it is also extremely popular. Public support for a ban on hunting has always been high and has increased since the ban took effect, with recent polls consistently showing support of 75% or higher (Fig.A). **The latest Ipsos MORI poll (2014) shows 8 out of 10 people in Britain think fox hunting should remain illegal**, 86% think deer hunting should remain illegal and 88% think hare hunting should remain illegal. Majority support exists in both urban and rural areas (Fig.B) and across the three main political parties (Fig.C).





Britain has a great tradition of compassion for animals.  
The Hunting Act (2004) enshrined it in law. It must be protected.

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