



LEAGUE
AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS



MINK HUNTING

An information leaflet on mink hunting.

WHAT IS MINK HUNTING?

Mink hunting is an illegal activity involving the use of scent hounds (Otterhounds and Foxhounds) to chase and kill American mink.

It is a crime under the Hunting Act 2004.

As far as we are aware there has never been a conviction for mink hunting in the UK.





WHY IS THE LEAGUE AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS INTERESTED IN THIS?

The League campaigns to end cruelty in the name of sport and this includes mink hunting.

Using our supporter-funded Animal Crimewatch reporting system we can receive information which can help us to end this type of cruelty.



**ANIMAL
CRIMEWATCH**

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT MINK HUNTING?

The American mink was first imported to Great Britain in 1929, to farm their fur and through a series of escapes and releases led to the establishment of a self-sufficient feral population in Devon by the late 1950s.

Mink and otter are part of the Mustelidae family which also includes badgers, stoats and weasels.

Otter hunts began to target mink after their initial quarry – otters – suffered significant population declines and it became illegal to hunt them in 1978. Mink hunting is banned in England and Wales by the Hunting Act 2004 as it bans the hunting of wild mammals with dogs (regardless if they are native or not).

Research by the League shows there are 20 mink hunts across England (15) Scotland (1) and Wales (4). Each hunt territory has a large area but is focused on rivers and streams.

Mink hunting is inextricably linked to fox and hare hunting.

Six mink packs share kennels with fox hunts and one shares with a hare hunt kennel.

Some fox hunt members join mink hunts when the fox hunting season ends.

Mink hunts operate in a similar way to fox hunts. They have the same structure of participants including a Master, Huntsman, Kennel Huntsman etc.

Appointed hunt staff may wear a uniform (of a kind) which will typically be a coloured waistcoat, breeches, long socks, and a bowler hat or cap.

They will usually have a terrier man walking with the group with his terriers and may have a spade or shovel.



There may be a licenced firearm/shotgun licence holder carrying a firearm.

The staff (Master) may carry a long staff/pole called an otterpole.

During a mink hunt, the hounds are followed on foot as they walk or swim along riverbanks in search of mink. Unlike otters, mink have small territories estimated to be less than a mile of river bank and, as such, will not run long distances to escape from hounds.

Once scented, the mink is chased before being caught or escaping underground or up a tree. If caught, the mink is pulled apart by the pack. Mink below ground will be dug out and either killed by a terrier or released so it can be hunted again by the hounds or shot by the licenced firearms holder.

The hunt will continue to chase the mink from one refuge to another which can last up to two hours.



WHAT KIND OF DOGS ARE USED?

Scent hounds are used.

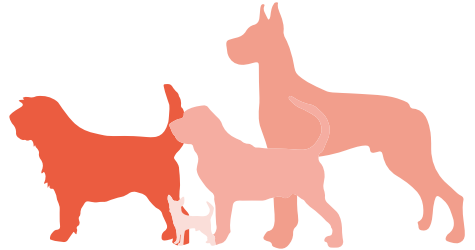
The predominant breed is the Otterhound.



Otterhounds are capable swimmers and have webbed feet

Sometimes the pack will also have retired Foxhounds.

Size comparison of the Otterhound



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MINK AND AN OTTER?

Key differences between a Mink and an Otter:



Mink (*Neovison vison*)

- Much smaller than an otter
- The American mink is an invasive non-native species
- The American mink is not a protected species
- Have a short range of 1-3 km
- Lifespan is eight years, but few live beyond two years
- Can be seen in daylight
- When swimming it doesn't create a bow wave
- Has a pointed nose
- Bushy tail
- Eyesight is better on land so will hunt for rodents, birds, amphibians
- Will kill even when not hungry



Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

- Much bigger than a mink
- A native species
- A protected species
- Can have a range of up to 30km
- Lifespan of an otter is 10-15 years
- Is nocturnal
- When swimming the otter creates a bow wave
- Have a broad flat nose
- A thick and muscular looking tail
- Will hunt for food in the water
- Only kill for food.

WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

It is accepted there is a season for mink hunting which starts at the end of the fox hunting season on the 1st April and continues through the summer until the end of October.

Mink hunting is undertaken during daylight hours usually on a Saturday and Bank Holidays starting mid morning 10/11am through to mid afternoon 2/3pm.

WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?

Mink hunting takes place along the banks of rivers and streams



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Often describing where the incident is taking place/took place can be difficult. You can download and use the free app called **what3words** which can easily pinpoint your location. Every three metre square of the world has been given a unique combination of three words.



When using a mobile device, the app also allows you to take photographs. The image will be dropped onto the map and the three words for the exact location provided. This does not automatically save, so a screenshot will need to be obtained.



WHAT3WORDS

This app is also used by some police forces and will help them as well if you report the incident.



WHAT'S THE LAW?

Mink hunting is an illegal activity under the **Hunting Act 2004**.

For more information see our information leaflet on **Hunting with dogs** on our website.

It is highly likely that otters will be an alternative quarry if discovered by the hounds and as such there are other offences relevant (in addition to the Act) as they are a protected species.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Otter are specified under **Schedule 5** as an animal which is protected.

Section 9(1)

Subject to the provisions of this Part, if any person intentionally kills, injures or takes any wild animal included in Schedule 5, he shall be guilty of an offence

Section 9(4)

Subject to the provisions of this Part, a person is guilty of an offence if intentionally or recklessly—

- (a) he damages or destroys any structure or place which any wild animal specified in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection;

- (b) he disturbs any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or

- (c) he obstructs access to any structure or place which any such animal uses for shelter or protection.

Section 10 are the exceptions to Section 9

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Otter are specified under **Schedule 2** as a European Protected Species of animal

Section 43(1) Provide details of the offences committed and includes:

A person who:

- (a) deliberately captures, injures or kills any wild animal of a European protected species,

- (b) deliberately disturbs wild animals of any such species,

- (c) deliberately takes or destroys the eggs of such an animal, or

- (d) damages or destroys a breeding site or resting place of such an animal, is guilty of an offence.

Section 43(8) A person guilty of an offence under this regulation is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or to both.

Trapping of mink



The trapping of mink (as a non-native species) is permitted in law provided the mink is dispatched humanely and not released back into the wild.

There are two types of trap permitted:

- Live capture traps (Cage trap)
- Spring traps (Killing trap)

Often mink live capture traps will be placed on a floating raft



WHAT CAN I DO?

- If you suspect mink hunting is happening now, we recommend you call the Police using 999 if you feel the matter is urgent and the law is being broken, alternatively call 101 for non emergency.
- When calling the Police, ask for an incident reference number, which can help when you contact us.
- The incident can be reported to us via our online reporting form <https://www.league.org.uk/forms/animal-crimewatch-report> or by calling our confidential Animal Crimewatch line on **0300 444 1234**.
- It would be helpful, if you can (without putting yourself at any risk) make a note/record any vehicle registration numbers, obtain photographs/video footage of the hunt and any illegal activity.

Contact Animal Crimewatch to report your concerns. Please call **0300 444 1234**

<https://www.league.org.uk/forms/animal-crimewatch-report>



**ANIMAL
CRIMEWATCH**

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League Against Cruel Sports is a registered charity in England and Wales (no.1095234) and Scotland (no.SC045533)

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