

Special briefing:

Outbreak of bovine TB discovered in fox hunt kennels



LEAGUE
AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS

- At least 25 dogs euthanized after an outbreak of bovine TB at a fox hunt kennels. This case, along with previous studies, demonstrates that hunting hounds can contract and potentially spread bTB
- The League Against Cruel Sports estimates that there are around 3,000 hunting hounds in the English bTB epidemic zone alone
- Given the potential bio-security risk this poses, we believe that Defra need to take decisive action and indefinitely suspend all hunting activities



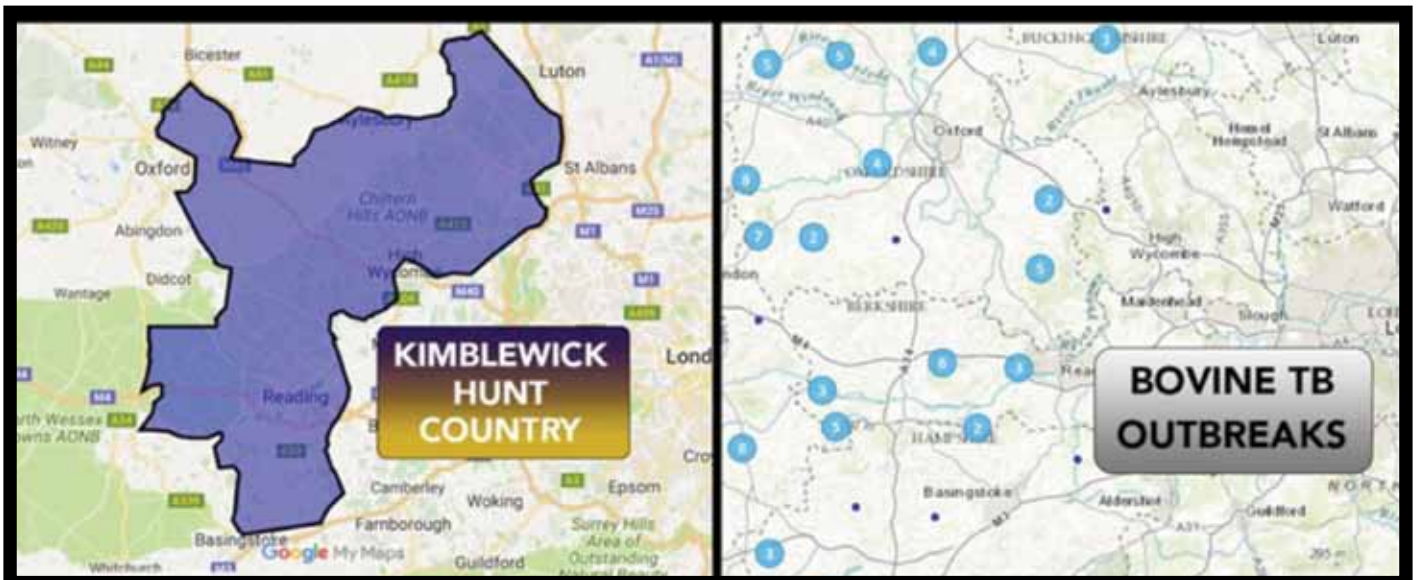
Introduction

Early in March 2017, the League Against Cruel Sports received a tip-off that a hunt had euthanized its hounds following an outbreak of bovine TB. After being contacted by a journalist, both Defra and the hunt confirmed that there had been an outbreak of bovine TB in the kennels.

This outbreak, and the response by Defra, raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the current bTB eradication strategy.

Hunting hound outbreak

The Kimblewick Hunt, based in Aylesbury, claim that the hounds contracted the disease from the infected carcass of a cow. The Master of Foxhounds Association posted a notice on its website to say that bTB at the hunt was suspected in December and had been confirmed in January¹. However, there is no way to confirm the source of the infection. It is possible the disease was contracted from an infected carcass but it's also possible that it was contracted by hounds running across farms which had an outbreak of bovine TB, from contact with cowpats, drinking water, or cow urine.





Kimblewick hunt kennels, including biohazard sign as enlarged inset

The Kimblewick Hunt covers a territory from Luton in the east to Oxford in the west and Basingstoke in the south, covering a large number of farms with bovine TB (see diagram overleaf).

After reports of the outbreak emerged, the League sent trained investigators to the kennels. Small signs declaring biosecurity measures were in place, although there was no indication of proper biosecurity measures such as vehicle disinfection.

While the Kimblewick took steps to shut down their hunting season once bovine TB had been confirmed, they also invited other hunts to come and use their territory during the season. Therefore hounds from other hunts would have come into the area, run across the potentially infected areas, and then returned home to other parts of the country.

*“What does the Kimblewick case tell us? Three things: First, that dogs are susceptible to bovine TB. Secondly, that farmers sometimes play fast and loose with regulations put in place for the good of all. And thirdly, that **hunting activities pose a real threat to the countryside**. Some bTB transmission is through exposure to excreta. If hounds can contract the disease through feeding on an infected carcass, they can contract it as they explore cowpats in the countryside. And what then is the risk of them spreading it further as they go on their merry way, from farm to farm in the course of a hunt?”*

Andrew Wood, former Executive Director for Science and Evidence, Natural England, and current Trustee for League Against Cruel Sports

Bovine TB and hounds

Bovine tuberculosis (bTB) is a bacterial infectious disease of cattle that can infect other species, such as deer, goats, pigs, cats, dogs, llamas, and badgers. It is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*), which is not the same bacterium that typically causes Tuberculosis in humans (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*), although humans can on occasion get infected by bTB as well.

It is not known the exact way other species get infected, but it could be by drinking the same water, sharing food, contact with faeces, close physical contact, or eating animals that had the disease. In cattle, it is mainly a respiratory disease, but symptoms may be different in other species.

A 2011 study in Ireland confirmed that hunting hounds can get infected with bTB². If hunting hounds are fed cattle that were infected with bTB, or are left to run in fields where infected cattle have recently been, there is the possibility that the dogs may become infected. Equally, as the transmission routes of this disease are not very well known, infected hounds left to roam in the countryside may be spreading the disease.

An indefinite suspension of hunting activities

The League Against Cruel Sports estimates that there are more than 3,000 hunting hounds in the English bTB epidemic zone alone, which may be out in the countryside an average of two days a week during the six-month hunting season.

Although hunting with hounds was banned by the Hunting Act 2004, hunts continue to take place. These usually claim to be ‘trail’ hunting or hunting under one of the exemptions of the Act, but the League believes these are false claims and most are hunting illegally³.

Where an outbreak occurs, farmers have to lock down their farms and restrict cattle movements in order to prevent the spread of the disease. Given this evidence that hounds used for hunting can carry bTB, we believe that the Government needs to respond urgently. Therefore **the League is calling for an indefinite suspension of all hunting activities, alongside an urgent inquiry into how the disease can be spread.**

¹ Master of Foxhounds Association News <https://tinyurl.com/l3norhs>

² Janhs, H, Callanan SJ, Mcelroy M, and Bassett H (2011) Post-mortem Findings in Irish Culled Hounds. Journal of comparative pathology 145(1):59-67

³ International Fund for Animal Welfare (2014). Uncovering the Trail of Lies: How trail hunting is preventing successful prosecutions for illegal hunting with hounds in the UK. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/nb7xkzm>