

PROTECT

WINTER ISSUE

2022



LEAGUE
AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS

Landmark win for hunted animals

Find out how your support and our campaigning helped to bring about the end of trail hunting on National Trust land.

Welcome to your winter issue of Protect



win in recent months and we are more determined than ever to capitalise on that momentum. So, please continue your good practice of standing with us this year and continuing your much appreciated support.

Final note for those of you who want to explore more about the League, please feel free to visit Protect Extra, the online edition of this magazine, where you can find even more updates, actions and activities.

Head to league.org.uk/protectextra

Keep a eye on your post box for the new-look raffle mailing coming out in February, and we'll be back with another edition of Protect in the Spring.

Emma
Editor

Jonathan
Designer

End Hunting, Shooting, Animal Fighting and other cruel sports and the associated practices that enable them.



Win the hearts and minds of a broader audience.



This issue at a glance



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Landmark moment for animals, the League, and our supporters.

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Don't forget to visit league.org.uk/protectextra



In supporters we trust

Hot on the heels of the guilty verdict in the Mark Hankinson case another major landmark event happened – National Trust members voted by a landslide to ask the board of trustees to ban trail hunting licences.



It had been a campaign that ran for more than 600 days. Back in the early-pandemic world of early 2020 we asked you, our supporters, to back a motion put forward by Dr Denise Taylor to ask the National Trust to ban trail hunting on its land.

It was the continuation of a campaign we ran in 2017 – narrowly losing the vote that time because the chairman backed the status quo.

Chris Luffingham, deputy CEO, at the time lived near the office and he was the only one allowed to go in and check the post. What he found astonished him.

“We were in the early part of lockdown, where people had to have a very good reason to leave their houses. We felt it would be incredibly difficult for our supporters to print out a form, sign it, find a stamp and post it to us in time for us to forward it to the National Trust.

“We needed 50 forms, but every day I went into the office they just kept coming. It was fantastic and shows how passionate our supporters really are. We ended up with hundreds, and the motion was accepted.”

The campaign we had planned in January 2020 was heavily reliant on face-to-face campaigning and had to be rapidly redrawn to go online.

Our aim was to draw attention to the fact that if trail hunting was a real, safe pastime, then why would hounds be found on roads and railways? Why would badger setts be blocked? Why do terrier men even exist? Why do livestock get terrorised? Why are domestic pets endangered by the hunt?

And why do the hunts trespass on land where they’re not welcome?

The answer, as we all know, is that trail hunting isn’t real. It’s a sham, a mirage, a fiction and a smokescreen.

Our aim was to repeat the message over and over again, while urging supporters and members of the public to back the motion when it came to the National Trust’s AGM.

The National Trust is one of the UK’s largest landowners and it owns or is responsible for managing 250,000 hectares or 620,000 acres of land. At its height in 2016/17 the National Trust issued 79 licences to 67 fox hunts to engage in trail hunting on its land.

Of course the pandemic had other ideas, and the AGM was cancelled.

Happily the motion could be deferred to the 2021 AGM, so the hard work of our supporters was not wasted.

‘...we all know that trail hunting isn’t real. It’s a sham, a mirage, a fiction and a smokescreen...’



With pandemic restrictions being lifted as the vaccine programme was rolled out, we could return to Plan A, and go back to Covid-safe on-the-street campaigning in England and Wales.

Nick Weston, head of campaigns, said: “It was amazing to be back on the road again, being able to stand with supporters and League volunteers talking to the public about why the issue is important and what they could do to help.”

The Trust, head quartered in Swindon, Wilts, usually holds its AGM in the town, but had decided to move it to Harrogate in Yorkshire.

Our plan was simple: though we knew most of the votes would have been cast online or via post, we would ask as many of our supporters as possible to join us in Harrogate to ensure those attending knew how much their vote would count.

“We were utterly staggered by the number of supporters who came to help,” said Nick.

“The whole of the front of the convention centre was a sea of green League T-shirts, flags and placards. It was immense and sent the strongest message possible to the hunts.”

And then came the best news from the AGM.

The motion to ban trail hunting gained 76,816 members’ votes, a majority of 38,632 over the 38,184 who voted against.

The largest voting turnout at a National Trust AGM in its history.

And the motion won by a larger margin than the entire number of votes cast in 2017.

There were tears of joy on the streets of Harrogate that afternoon.

Chris takes up the tale again: “Their members’ voices could not have been louder, sending a clear message to the board of trustees that enough is enough and trail hunting should be banned on trust land.”

“...We were utterly staggered by the number of supporters who came to help...”



The vote was eventually ratified at a meeting of the National Trust’s board in December, when they agreed to stop issuing licences to hunts for trail hunting. They have so far refused to use the word ‘ban’, but in a statement they also recognised that the Masters of Foxhounds Association (MHFA), hunting’s administrative overseers, have lost their confidence that hunting laws are always obeyed. That was following the trial and conviction of Mark Hankinson.

Happily, the move from the National Trust followed hot on the heels of Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the largest landowner in Wales, also banning trail hunting.

The NRW said in a statement that: “The outcome of the court case against a senior leader of the MFHA has resulted in a loss of confidence in the organisation’s ability to ensure its activities are carried out within the law and terms of its agreement.”

We, and you our supporters, still have a job to do: to continue lobbying other major landowners such as Forestry England, United Utilities, the Church of England, Crown Estates, Duchy of Cornwall, local authorities, the national parks authorities, and the Ministry of Defence to follow the National Trust and Natural Resources Wales in banning the practice of trail hunting.



The moment we received the news; the motion to ban trail hunting at the National Trust received majority ‘yes’ votes!

Lifting the smokescreen

Mark Hankinson Trial

Mark Hankinson, former director of the Masters of Foxhounds Association, has appealed his conviction for encouraging others to use trail hunting as a cover for illegal foxhunting. But how did he come to be convicted?

It was last Autumn that one or two of us at the League were told about the existence of recordings of three training webinars organised by the Hunting Office.

We were told that two of those webinars, obtained by an organisation called Stop The Cull, would finally blow the lid off the Countryside Alliance's turgid mantra that 'trail' hunting is a legal activity.

The League did not record the webinars, but we were given copies in strict confidence and were unable to tell people about them until legal issues had been overcome and then they would be released to select media.

The next week or so felt agonising. There was an issue of defamation and copyright. Frantically, and despite a volley of legal threats, we tried as many ways as possible to get the webinars into the public domain without undermining their credibility, all the way up to Westminster.

And then, late one Friday night, they were released by the Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA).

But the legal issues hadn't gone away. So, while they were shared on social media, neither we nor the regular media could release them. We knew our supporters would see them and wonder why we kept silent.

But we had a plan: the League made the official complaint to police, which prompted an investigation to be launched by Devon and Cornwall Police. The webinars could finally be reported.

Thanks to you we redoubled our efforts to urge landowners across the country to suspend access to the hunts: within a week more than 200,000 emails were sent by you to landowners, and our celebrity friends also took up the campaign. Other anti-hunting organisations were running similar actions on social media.





As a result, more than 2.3 million acres of previously hunted land in England and Wales was denied to hunts.

Then we waited.

In February 2021 we finally heard that Mark Hankinson, one of the six people who spoke on the webinars, had been charged with intentionally encouraging or assisting others to commit an offence under the Hunting Act 2004, contrary to Section 44 of the Serious Crimes Act 2007.

In the intervening six months we went back on the road with our National Trust campaign, welcoming many of our supporter groups and volunteers at our events asking people to urge the National Trust to make its 'pause' of hunt licences into a permanent ban.

Your actions targeted hunting enablers, like online auction site Jumblebee, and together we helped councils bring motions to ban access to hunts on their land; many succeeded, some did not, and they are continuing to this day.

'...Thanks to you we redoubled our efforts to urge landowners across the country to suspend access to the hunts: within a week more than 200,000 emails were sent by you to landowners, and our celebrity friends also took up the campaign...'



We also got on with other campaigns in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland while we waited impatiently for September. We also joined a coalition of 50 charities lobbying the government to properly redefine its stance on animal welfare.

Our work behind the scenes in Westminster saw the webinars brought up in parliament and taken to the highest levels of government – and we wrote about it in parliament's official publication.

Our planning for the court case began weeks ahead of time. We did pre-recorded interviews, we crafted our branding, we planned our 'smokescreen' stunt for outside the court on the first day, and we took the message to the heart of hunting: to addresses relating to the three key people on the webinars; Mark Hankinson, retired chief inspector Phil Davies, and of course House of Lords incumbent Lord Benjamin Mancroft.

It is hard to describe in words the magnitude of what would happen if the verdict was guilty. Most of us dared not dream: we hoped for the best, but we very much planned for the worst.

Hankinson said he talked about using trail hunting as a smokescreen to confuse the sabs, who he said would stoop as low as hurting both horse and hound in their efforts to stop the hunt.

It became evident on the first day that the trial, initially scheduled for two days, would last into a third, and then the judge would likely retire to consider his verdict.

No-one could do anything more. It was in the hands of Wolverhampton Polytechnic alumni Judge Tan Ikram, deputy chief magistrate of England and Wales, to decide whether that threshold had been met. We returned to 181 Marylebone Road on 15 October, ready for whatever the judge might say.

Back were the banners, the T-shirts, placards, supporters and volunteers. Back too was our 'huntsman', ready to turn up in shackles should the verdict go our way.

And into court we went. Or at least, those who could find a seat.





As the judge began reading, those of us watching began to raise our hopes. There was a lot of quoting directly from the webinars.

And then from the judge came blow after blow after blow to the defendant, to Tim Bonner sitting in the gallery, to his organisation the Countryside Alliance and to the Hunting Office. Until finally...

GUILTY.

“In my judgment, he was clearly encouraging the mirage of trail laying to act as cover for old fashioned illegal hunting. Whilst he didn’t use overt words, he implied it again and again”

Judge Tan Ikram, Deputy Chief Magistrate for England and Wales

More than 100 people were taught how to carry on killing foxes without being prosecuted or to use trail hunting to create the element of doubt that meant a court would have no choice but to dismiss the case.

And we only know about this because the pandemic forced the hunts online: Zoom caught them out. We can only speculate how often this ‘advice’ is given out to hunts up and down the land.

But enough is enough.

The £3,500 fine Hankinson had to pay – and is now appealing - is paltry but beside the point.

The cost to the hunts must be that they can surely never, ever use the defence of trail hunting in court again.

The cost to the hunts must be a new, robust Hunting Act being passed through parliament.

The smokescreen has been lifted.

And, with the continued support and determination of you, our supporters - not to mention all the anti-hunt organisations involved in obtaining and distributing the webinars - behind it should be a bright future for persecuted wildlife.



Mark Hankinson, former director of the MFA.



Northern Ireland hunting bill fails, for now

Thanks to Sinn Fein and members of the Democratic Unionist Party recently voting against the Hunting of Wild Mammals (Northern Ireland) Bill, the country remains, for now, the only part of the UK that still allows hunting with dogs.

The Bill was intended to prohibit hunting wild animals with dogs, trail hunting, and terrier work, and if it passed it would have been the most robust piece of anti-hunting legislation in the UK. It would have closed the loopholes and exemptions that hunts in England, Wales and Scotland use as a smokescreen for old fashioned illegal hunting.

The Northern Ireland Assembly is due to hold its next election on 5 May, when those who voted to dismiss the bill will face their constituents – you - at the polls.

Not all our hard work is awarded in-the-moment but we’re here for the long game and will be working with the Alliance Party to resurrect this issue in the next session so that one day soon the barbaric ‘sport’ of hunting with dogs can finally be outlawed for good.



Scotland

A land of opportunities for wildlife



The League's goal to end cruel sports and improve the welfare of our wildlife has taken many decades and the fight still goes on. Scotland is no stranger to cruel sports whether it's fox hunting or grouse shooting and the public's appetite to end animal suffering is an opportunity we must take.

Fox hunting was meant to end in 2002 with the 'Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act' but still, by exploiting legal loopholes as a guise, the League's professional investigations team has proven it continues. This prompted commitments from the Scottish Government, for the last several years, to really end fox hunting. Finally, a real ban that aims to close the loopholes is to be introduced during the next year of government. Flushing with more than two dogs is due to end and 'trail' hunting, a guise under which some people continued to cruelly kill our foxes, will also likely be outlawed in Scotland in the next year.

Tackling grouse shooting in Scotland is a newer campaign for the League and we came at the right time – when the Scottish Government started to consult on grouse moor reform. As a founding member of the REVIVE coalition for grouse moor reform, we have led the way in calling for an end to the circle of destruction that surrounds the industry. By bringing together animal welfare, environmental, and social justice organisations we are tackling a huge land use, and very powerful people with a vested interest in maintaining the blood sport, with a strength and breadth that is unique in Scotland.

We are leading the way to ending the worst form of grouse shooting - driven grouse shooting. Driven grouse moors depend on the killing of hundreds of thousands of foxes, stoats, weasels, crows and 'non-target species' like hedgehogs to maintain unnaturally high numbers of grouse for sport killing. Since starting our campaign three years ago we have already; raised the profile of the circle of destruction that surrounds controversial industry; become a stakeholder in government deliberations; and made a wide array of other changes far more likely.

The coming few years are going to be crucial to the campaign as the government introduces legislation for reforming our moors. This will be our opportunity to create some big wins for our animals across huge swathes of Scotland.

We can truly judge the character of our country by how we treat and give a voice to those without one. The work of League staff over the years, and the work we continue to do, is currently making a real impact for our wildlife. Thanks to your support, we are genuinely changing the country for the better.



The wonder of winter



Red Deer on Baronsdown by Paul Tillsley

One of the benefits of living in the south-west of England is that the first signs of spring begin to appear even before winter has finished its work. Trees and bushes have barely lost their leaves and fruits when their buds start swelling again, and hazel catkins and pussy willows adorn the hedges.

Being out on the League's wildlife reserves, you can't help but notice how location, height and aspect affect how quickly spring develops. The fields on the top of Baronsdown are over 1,000 feet above sea level and the weather is noticeably more extreme there than lower down in the Exe valley. Spring creeps its way slowly up from the valley floor until it eventually reaches the top fields, some weeks later. As the sun rises higher in the sky with each passing day, parts of the reserve that haven't seen the sun's rays for a couple of months are suddenly bathed in warm sunshine again. While trees in some parts of the reserve are already in full leaf, trees here are only just waking again.

Snowdrops are always the first flowers to appear, even piercing through frozen ground to send forth their deceptively robust flowers, which provide a valuable source of nectar to early awakening bumblebees. Soon, daffodils will join the snowdrops and then a succession of other flowers will join them. Baronsdown is blessed with many varieties of cultivated flowers in addition to native wildflowers, as a result of planting going back centuries. Winter can still have a sting in its tail, but it never lasts long, as days grow longer and the sun's rays give out more heat.

Large birds, such as ravens, will soon be making their nests on the League's reserves and small birds have already started checking out the various nesting boxes we have placed in the woods. Badgers have been busy cleaning out their setts, which is a clear sign that badger cubs are about to be born below ground and fox cubs won't be far behind. Deer don't have the luxury of a cosy underground den, so they will wait a while before giving birth.

This winter we have had to fell a lot of ash trees that were infected with ash dieback disease and were becoming hazardous. It is an expensive but necessary task and the loss of so many trees is bound to have an effect on the species that rely on them. However, ash is a very vigorous tree species, and it is hoped that the survivors will soon be able to propagate themselves again. In the interim it will be interesting to see what else springs up in place of ash. Nature usually finds a way to bounce back if we give it the chance.

The League's reserves have been protecting wildlife for more than sixty years and thanks to your support they continue to be beacons of positivity and hope.



1st place, Beautiful Birds: The Conductor by Joanne Goostrey



1st place, Beloved Dogs: Flying Mabel by Steve Midgley

2021 Animal Photography Awards

The results are in, and we are proud to announce the winners of this year's photography competition.

Late last year we invited our supporters to enter the 2021 Animal Photography Awards. We received an overwhelming response and more than 1,500 captivating photos were submitted in the Beautiful Birds, Wild Mammals and Beloved Dogs categories. It was a heartwarming experience to see how you have been interacting with nature in such a positive way.

Our celebrity judges – Bill Oddie, Matt Maran and Hannah Stitfall – were delighted to be part of this event and it is our pleasure to present the winning photos. Congratulations to Joanne Goostrey, Steve Midgley and Richard Birchett who were awarded first prize and received £150 prize money and an exclusive online photography class with our award-winning judge, Matt Maran.



1st place, Wild Mammals: Eye To Eye With A Beautiful Badger by Richard Birchett

If you would like to see other winners, as well as videos from our celebrity judges, please head to Protect Extra at league.org.uk/protectextra



Team League



Emma beat her personal best. Tom completed his first ever half marathon. And Rolf was congratulated for his efforts by fellow runners, interviewed by the event hosts and appeared in various local newspapers spreading the word of cruel sports.

Between them, our League Heroes raised £1,153. We are incredibly proud and grateful to them and hope they will take up the mantle again next year!

If you would like to take part in one of our sporting events, please visit:
league.org.uk/fundraise



Running for Fun(ds)

On 10 October, three League Heroes stood at the start line of the Royal Parks Half Marathon. Emma Smith wanted to beat her personal best. Tom Morton wanted to run a half marathon for the very first time. And Rolf Lewendon-Strutt was dressed as a fox to raise awareness of hunting amongst the crowd.

But ultimately, all three of our heroes wanted to raise money for the League; to provide vital funds for our campaigns work; and show their solidarity to persecuted animals.

It was a relatively muggy day, not ideal conditions for a 13.1 mile route, but the scenery was stunning, with the runners passing four of London's Royal Parks; Hyde Park, The Green Park, St James' Park and Kensington Gardens.

The crowd was electric and projected motivational cheers for the duration of the event, it was a real inspiration. It was also a morale boost for staff and League Heroes alike to see each other in the crowd. There were waves, cheers, and Rolf the Fox managed a running-hug with his two children who showed their pride from the sidelines.



Vanessa-Mae, Ambassador

We are delighted to welcome Vanessa-Mae as Ambassador for the League. As a world-famous violinist, Olympian and brave animal welfare campaigner, Vanessa-Mae brings her strong and credible voice to our team. Vanessa-Mae says:

“There is nothing sporting about watching innocent animals run or fight for their lives. As Ambassador for the League Against Cruel Sports, I urge everybody to help us support an end to the use of animals in cruel sports.”

Poetry Award Winner

Thank you to everyone who entered the recent Indigo International Wild Nature Poetry Award, created and managed by League Poet in Residence, Ronnie Goodyer. We were delighted to award our long-term supporter Sally King, winner of the League member category.

‘Small Men’ by Sally King

Bred in barren cages, row upon row
into the distance - boundless and bare.
Reared in pens, fed with grain, and guarded
by snares, traps, poisons, the calls of captive birds,
the bullet through the wing of a raptor,
the bullet through the heart of a white mountain hare.

More than fifty million tame birds
released from their pens come autumn,
to dash across unfamiliar roads,
to die in bitter frosts, these birds of Asia,
to be beaten to the firing squad,
to the line of guns: small men in breeches.

A single bird flies high, higher still,
away from the guns, trying to escape.
They all take aim - a living target.
Shots across the field. He falters, wounded.
A bronze arc across the sky. Falling.
Cheering. I did not cheer. For small men.



STOP PRESS

Greyhound racing vote delayed again

A controversial move to bring back greyhound racing has escaped being debated by Oxford City Council once again.

The League will continue to protest the move and urge councillors to demand the stadium be used for other activities instead, so watch this space for updates!

Campaigners and supporters from the League joined Oxford Vegan Action and PETA to protest the move from Galliard Homes to bring back greyhound racing at Oxford Stadium ahead of a crunch debate of Oxford City Council. But the council ran out of time to debate the motion and it has instead been delayed to a later meeting.

In 2020 alone, at least 200 greyhounds died trackside at stadiums across Britain, with 3,575 sustaining injuries despite a racing schedule reduced by a third due to Covid-19.



PROTECT EXTRA

Want to have access to even more articles, actions and activities? We have launched a new, interactive, digital version of Protect that you can visit and share.

Head online today to download winter activities for adults and children, learn how to spot the signs of hunting near you, meet the voice behind our Christmas kindness campaign and lots more.



Head to league.org.uk/protectextra

Cover Photograph: Urban Fox in Autumn by Derek Monaghan

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