



## **Drag hunting, Bloodhounds ('clean boot') hunting and Trail hunting**

For those who think that some sort of 'hunting' should continue because it's a grand old British tradition – it can. Drag hunting and bloodhounds hunting (known as 'hunting the clean boot'), in which the hunt follows an artificial trail and not a live animal, involve many of the elements of the 'sport', but without killing wildlife. In fact, they have been a popular country pursuit for as long as other forms of hunting. They are not to be confused with 'trail' hunting, which is very different.

### **Drag hunting**

Drag hunting (not to be confused with trail hunting) can provide an alternative to the use of a pack of foxhounds in the countryside while minimising the risk to wildlife. It was created in the 1800s.

The hounds hunt an artificial non-animal scent (mostly aniseed) pulled by a drag, laid down over a predetermined route. Because the route is predetermined the hounds can be kept safely away from livestock, vulnerable crops, roads and railway lines. The route can also be organised so that the risk to sensitive and fragile habitats can be minimised and the drag hunts kept away from areas where they are unwelcome and/or can pose a threat to other domestic and farmed animals. The drag is not laid in areas known to have foxes in them, and the location of the trail is known to the huntsman so he can stop the hounds if they accidentally follow a live quarry scent. All these precautions explain why it is very rare for accidental fox kills to happen during drag hunting.

Most fox, deer and hare hunts decided not to convert to drag hunting after the Hunting Act 2004 was passed.

### **Bloodhounds hunting**

This is similar to drag hunting, but bloodhounds are used instead of foxhounds, which are quite a different breed in both looks and abilities, and are known to have a

very acute sense of smell. Rather than hunt an artificial scent laid by a drag, the bloodhounds search for the scent of human runner (one or more) who rewards them at the end with praise or treats. This type of hunting is also known as 'hunting the clean boot', and it had already been in existence for many years prior the hunting ban.

Because these hounds have never been trained to hunt animals, incidents of the hounds chasing or killing foxes or hares are highly unlikely, making this type of 'hunting' the safest for wildlife.

## **Trail hunting**

Most registered fox and hare hunts claim to now be 'trail' hunting – an activity that did not exist when the Hunting Act 2004 (the 'Act') was drafted. It is an entirely new invention which purports to mimic traditional hunting but uses an animal scent trail (some hunters claim to be using fox urine imported from US fur farms) laid in areas where foxes have a natural presence. Those controlling the hounds are not told where the scent has been laid so if the hounds do 'accidentally' follow a real, live animal scent, the hunt can claim they did not know. It is not the same as drag hunting (a legitimate sport which existed before the Act and although it also uses packs of foxhounds it does not mimic traditional hunting of wild mammals). During 'trail' hunts, many foxes and hares are 'accidentally' chased and killed.

The League believes 'trail' hunting is simply a smokescreen for illegal hunting. When a wild mammal is chased or killed during a trail hunt, the hunts often pass it off as an 'accident'. This is because to be guilty of an offence under the Act it must be proven that there was 'intent' to hunt a wild mammal with dogs and so 'accidents' are not caught by the Act. As a result, many allegations of illegal hunting are not properly investigated or prosecuted when suspects claim an animal was chased or killed by 'accident'. In these circumstances, the police or the Crown Prosecution Service may consider the case too difficult to prosecute because of the high criminal burden of proof. The League is calling for the Act to be strengthened by adding a recklessness clause to prevent the law being so easily circumvented in this way.

The main differences between drag hunting, bloodhound hunting and 'trail' hunting are set out below.

| <b>Drag hunting &amp; bloodhounds (clean boot) hunting</b>  | <b>Trail hunting</b>   |
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| Created in the early 1800s  | Created in c. 2005   |
| Objective is to practice a sport using hounds to search for an artificial or human scent without the pursuit or killing of wild animals | Objective is to 'mimic' traditional fox hunting  |
| Sports that exist long before the hunting ban   | A recent invention considered a temporary activity in the hope that the hunting ban will be lifted                               |
| Specific rules set by the Masters of Draghound and Bloodhound Association (MDBA)  | No written rules   |
| Non-animal-based scents   | Fox scent  |
| Hounds are not trained to follow live animal scents   | Hounds are still trained to follow live animal scents  |
| Takes place in areas not specifically known to be inhabited live quarry   | Hounds taken to search for the scent in areas where live quarry presence is likely   |
| Does not specifically use areas, meets and fields where traditional hunting took place  | Uses the same areas, meets and fields where traditional hunting took place   |
| For drag hunts, huntsman and whipper-in always know where the scent was laid  | Huntsman and whipper-in deliberately do not know where the scent was laid (if indeed a trail was actually laid)                  |
| Focus is on the riders following the hounds, who are encouraged to find the scent quickly   | Focus is on the hounds searching for a scent rather than encouraging them to find it at the start so riders can join the pursuit |
| Mostly scent laid only around 20 minutes earlier than casting the hounds to find it   | No time limit on how much earlier the scent may be laid before casting the hounds to find it                                     |
| No terriermen present and no need for them  | Terriermen follow the hunt and still pursue foxes underground  |
| Hounds always kept under close control so no 'accidents' chasing live animals   | Hounds left unsupervised for long periods, which increases the likelihood of 'accidents' chasing and/or killing of live animals  |