

APRIL 2025



The second annual report on activities of mounted hunts since the enactment of the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023

Background

Using a pack of dogs to chase and kill foxes was banned in Scotland in 2002. However, a number of mounted hunting organisations were determined to continue this activity under the guise of “flushing to guns” – supposedly a way of shooting foxes. By October 2023, film evidence supplied by the League Against Cruel Sports convinced the Scottish Government that the law needed to be strengthened by limiting the number of dogs used in flushing to guns to two – in line with the Legislation in England and Wales. The 2023 Scottish Act also included a provision for exceptional licenses to be given for the use of more than two dogs to flush to guns.

The League raised concerns that the license to use more than two dogs could become a loophole used by those who had shown their determination to continue using packs of dogs to chase and kill foxes. The League also raised concerns about these organisations using drag hunting as a smokescreen to mask illegal hunting.

Ongoing illegal hunting

Using film evidence from the last year, supplied by the League (and in one case, the Glasgow Sabs) Police Scotland are currently investigating the following for illegal hunting:

- **Jedforest Hunt** – suspected of illegal hunting with two dogs
- **Independent Hunter** – suspected illegal hunting while using a license to flush to guns with more than two dogs
- **Dumfries and Stewartry Hunt** – suspected illegal hunting while using a license to flush to guns with more than two dogs
- **Kincardineshire Foot Pack** – suspected of illegal hunting with more than two dogs

‘The League also raised concerns about these organisations using drag hunting as a smokescreen to mask illegal hunting.’

Drag Hunting

Trail hunting – where packs of foxhounds in England and Wales are said to be following a “fox-based scent” was banned in Scotland by the 2023 legislation as it was recognised to be a potential loophole that could be exploited by those determined to continue using a pack of dogs to chase and kill foxes. Drag hunting – where packs of bloodhounds follow a human runner, remains legal in Scotland. Drag hunting is closely regulated by the Master of Bloodhounds and Draghounds Association (MBDA). Drag hunting is an equestrian sport designed to provide a thrilling ride over jumps through land not always available to riders. The MBDA assist new drag hunts in sourcing bloodhounds and accept new members on probation before accepting them as full members. There is one MBDA member in Scotland – the Fife Bloodhounds.

The following three organisations claim to be “drag” or “simulated” hunting but are not members of the MBDA and they continue to use foxhounds that have been bred and trained to chase and kill foxes.

- **The Duke of Buccleuch Hunt**
- **The Berwickshire Hunt**
- **The Jedforest Hunt**

The League has film of the Duke of Buccleuch Hunt’s pack of dogs following a scent across a blind bend in a road – a dangerous and unlikely place to lay a scent.

We also have film of the Berwickshire Hunt’s pack of dogs searching areas of thick gorse which would be impenetrable to a human runner or someone laying a scent. Reports that this hunt’s dogs were rampaging through private gardens were also made to Police Scotland.

In the case of the Jedforrest Hunt, one day a week they claim to “drag hunt” with a full pack of foxhounds for the first hour of the day before going on to flush to guns with two dogs.

Licensing the use of more than two dogs to flush to guns

The new Act tasked NatureScot to oversee applications and compliance monitoring of the use of licenses to use more than two dogs in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances would include:

- Evidence of serious predation of livestock such as lambs
- Evidence that all other methods of dealing with such predation had been tried and failed

At first sight, this evidence-based approach appeared to be a robust way of ensuring that no Hunt associated with the abuse of the previous Act would gain access to these licenses.

However, over 60 licenses were issued during the 2024/2025 period. At least two were used by an Independent Hunter and the Dumfries and Stewartry Hunt. Both are now under Police Scotland investigation for illegal hunting while using these licenses.

NatureScot

The League is grateful to NatureScot (NS) for ongoing communications and monthly meetings during this past hunting “season”. However, a number of obstacles that fatally hinder their ability to oversee applications and license compliance have emerged:

- NS do not have the capacity to scrutinise information contained in license applications. In general, assertions that the applicant has a serious predator problem and that they have tried all other remedies short of using two dogs are accepted at face value and licenses are issued.
- NS do not have the capacity to regularly monitor license compliance. When they do, advance warning of monitoring is given to the organisers. The reasons given are firstly, that it avoids wasting NS time if the activity is postponed and secondly, for the “health and safety” of NS staff.

Offers of League support and assistance to NS

The League has offered to assist and enhance NS's capacity by seconding two highly trained and experienced field workers to NS during the period that licenses are issued. NS declined this offer for "GDPR and Personnel" reasons.

Subsequently, in March 2025, the League submitted a comprehensive Data Sharing Application to NS which requested details of when licenses are issued, their location and the number of guns and dogs licensed to be used. We await a NS decision on this application. If NS agree to such data sharing, the League will be able to assist their future license compliance monitoring of the vast majority of licenses without prior notification of the license holders.

The continuing use of Foxhounds

The problem

To date, NatureScot have licensed the use of foxhounds or fell hounds in all flushing to guns licenses that we are aware of. The League believes that these dog breeds are totally unfit for use in flushing foxes to waiting guns. Appendix 1 contains an extensive range of independent or country sport sources that endorse the fact that foxhounds are bred and trained to hunt, chase and kill foxes. Fell hounds are a type of foxhound.

Flushing to guns

Flushing to guns is an activity where a disturbance is created inside cover where foxes are suspected to be hidden from sight. The disturbance results in the fox leaving the cover. It should then be shot dead by waiting "guns" – usually men with shotguns.

The purpose of using the dogs is to scare the fox into leaving the cover. It would be an offence if the dogs were to kill the fox in the cover or to hunt it outside of the cover.

Foxhounds and Fell hounds

Both breeds have been bred and trained over the past 200 years to hunt and kill foxes

In short, UK hunting organisations and dog specialists from Europe and the USA all agree that foxhounds have been bred to have an innate drive to hunt and kill foxes.

Dangers if licensed for use in flushing to guns

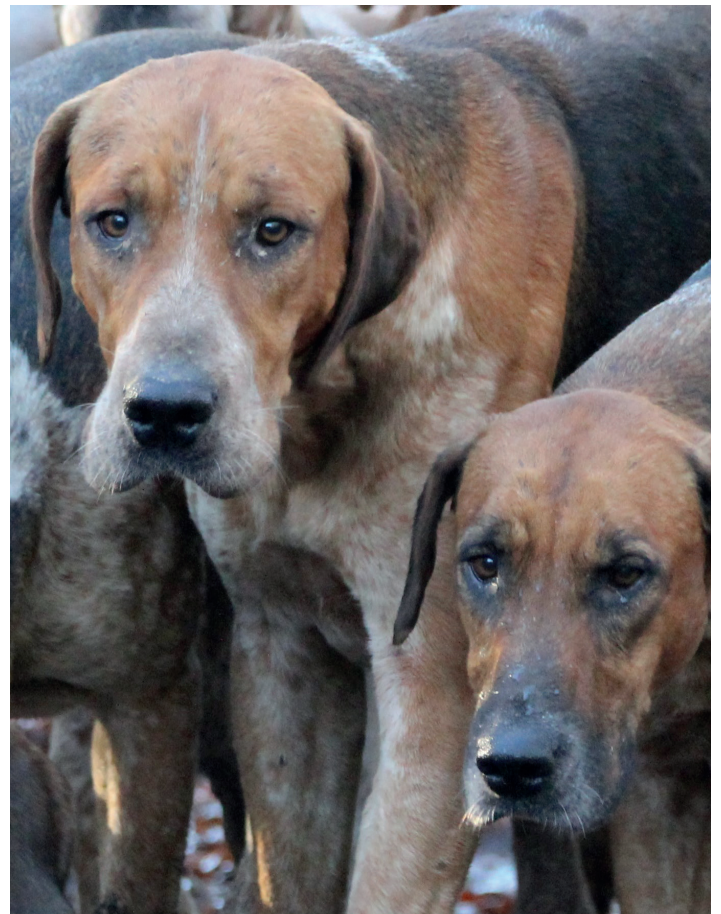
If foxhounds and fell hounds are used to flush to guns, there is considerable danger that:

1. The hounds will chase and kill foxes in the cover, particularly in large areas of cover.
2. The hounds will emerge from the cover just behind the fox, making it impossible for the guns to fire for fear of hitting the hounds. The hounds will then continue to chase and kill the fox.
3. The activity causes a smokescreen for illegal hunting as was found in the successful prosecution of the Jed Forrest Hunt in 2017 and in dozens of League videos of flushing to guns both before and after the Hunting with Dogs Act, Scotland, 2023.

Bonomy Review

Lord Bonomy, in his Review of the 2002 hunting ban in Scotland estimated that around 20% of foxes were killed by hounds during flushing to guns. (Lord Bonomy Review 6.19)

He also said that flushing to guns "may well have resulted in hounds on occasion engaging in chasing a fox after it had been flushed from cover. (Lord Bonomy Review 6.5)



Evidence from 2025

Police Scotland and NatureScot are already investigating an incident where foxhounds are filmed chasing a fox while under license.

Proposed solution

NatureScot should not issue licenses for flushing to guns using foxhounds or fell hounds. There are many dog breeds that are not bred and trained to hunt, chase and kill foxes. The above dangers are not likely to be faced if other breeds are used in flushing to guns.

The intent of the Hunting with Dogs 2003 (Scotland) Act was to end the barbaric use of a pack of hounds from hunting and killing foxes and other wild animals. NatureScot should ensure that this intention is achieved by disallowing the use of foxhounds in flushing to guns.

Foxhounds should also not be used in drag hunting or simulated hunting for the reasons given above.

Recommendations

- **NS should agree to the terms of the Data Sharing Application submitted by the League**
- **Police Scotland should continue to actively investigate any future allegations of illegal fox hunting**
- **Drag hunting should only be undertaken by accredited members of the Master of Blood and Drag Hounds Association**
- **NS should not issue any licenses to use more than two foxhounds**



Appendix 1

Sources confirming that foxhound are bred and trained to hunt, chase and kill foxes

Wikipedia

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Foxhound

*"The English Foxhound has been **bred for over two hundred years**, with the stud books dating back before 1800."*

Horse and Hound

<https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/tag/foxhounds>

*"The foxhound is the epitome of English sport in the field. Developed in England in the late 16th century, **the foxhound was selectively bred for its exceptional hunting abilities, in packs, to pursue and scent foxes.**"*

"They have been bred for the sole purpose of hunting the fox..."

Fieldsports Channel

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=961995155633223>

Ed Swales, Hunting Kind *"**These hounds will continue to do what they were bred to do and continue to hunt in France. They're foxhounds – the clue's in the name.**"*

The Foxhound Club

<https://www.foxhoundsclub.co.uk/breed-standard/foxhounds-types/>

*"One must be mindful that **these hounds are bred to have the athletic ability to hunt their quarry.**"*

*"They make their own decisions. **They pick up the scent of the fox and run.** They move and turn. They climb hills. Jump fences. **All on their own initiative.**"*

American Kennel Club

<https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/hound/>

*"They can be **so driven by a primal instinct for pursuit that not much else, including training, matters to them.**"*

Pets4homes

<https://www.pets4homes.co.uk/dog-breeds/foxhound/>

*"**Foxhounds are bred to hunt and have a strong prey drive.**"*

Hill's Pet Food Breed Guide

<https://www.hillspet.co.uk/>

*"The English foxhound's **passion for hunting and finding the source of an interesting scent** may prompt them to wander."*

*"Training and socialisation are important for the English foxhound, **especially if the dog is not pursuing their ancient calling of hunting.**"*

**Federation Cynologique Internationale (AISBL)
Secrétariat General: 13, Place Albert 1er Brussels – 6530**

<http://www.fci.be/Nomenclature/Standards/159g06-en.pdf>

*"Behaviour/Temperament - Stamina and endurance, **natural ability to hunt.** Friendly and not aggressive."*

Dog Time

<https://dogtime.com/>

*"The English Foxhound was originally a **hunting dog breed, designed to pursue foxes in the English countryside.**"*

Wag!

<https://wagwalking.com/breed/english-foxhound>

"Although they were bred for hunting fox, they are also excellent companion pets and watchdogs."

*"**Purpose - hunting foxes**"*



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