

# Kidnapped for cruelty:

The truth behind claims that hunting is 'wildlife management'

In May 2015, a League Against Cruel Sports investigation revealed 16 fox cubs being held captive in a dark barn located just 200m from the Middleton Foxhound's kennels.

An employee of the hunt, their terrier man who is registered as living at the hunt kennels, was filmed entering the barn. A police investigation discovered that the cubs were from at least four separate litters. **We believe these young cubs were kidnapped from their families for the sole purpose of being hunted – and this is not an isolated case. Hunts routinely manipulate fox numbers to ensure there are always plenty to be hunted. This is the real 'wildlife management' of hunting.**

## Capturing foxes to be hunted is widespread

In just the last 15 months our Wildlife Crimewatch hotline received information on 20 hunts suspected of capturing foxes to be hunted. It was one of these tip offs that led to the discovery of the 16 cubs near the Middleton Foxhounds' kennels. While the scale of this fox 'factory' is shocking, it is not the first time this practice has been exposed. In 2012 the Fitzwilliam Hunt's terrier man was convicted under the Animal Welfare Act for holding a pregnant vixen captive in appalling conditions<sup>1</sup>, and during the height of the campaign for a ban on hunting the Sinnington Hunt was filmed rearing cubs for hunting<sup>2</sup>.



One of the 16 fox cubs discovered in the barn.

According to Clifford Pellow, a kennelman and huntsman for 23 years and now retired, these are not isolated incidents:

*"I've worked with many hunts across the country and seen foxes kept in milk churns, cages and sheds and encouraged to breed in artificial earths so there's a ready supply to be hunted. I've even seen a fox deliberately strung up in a tree to send the hounds into a frenzy, so it's no surprise to me this cruelty carries on."*

*Though hunts insist they are there to provide a wildlife control service, the fact they break the Master of Foxhounds Association rules over and over again shows that this just isn't the case. They're still in it purely for the blood 'sport', with a nasty, cruel streak and no respect for the law.*

*The hunting world's last possible justification for repealing the Hunting Act has been well and truly blown out of the water."*

## Encouraging foxes with artificial earths and feeding

Pre and post ban, hunt monitors have witnessed and recorded abundant evidence of hunts artificially manipulating fox numbers to ensure a ready supply of animals to be hunted. In 2011, six years after the hunting ban came into force, we conducted a nationwide investigation into the use of artificial earths by fox hunts. These are man-made structures designed to mimic fox earths, usually made out of drain pipes or concrete blocks, and provide a place for foxes to breed and shelter. **We found the practice was widespread, with evidence of structure maintenance and supplementary feeding of foxes at sites in 14 counties, on land used by 21 hunts<sup>3</sup>.**

In November 2014, employees of the North Cotswold Hunt were filmed dumping dozens of dead chickens, rabbits and eggs at an artificial fox earth over a period of several weeks, and then hunting in the same area<sup>4</sup>. In May 2015 we received footage of dead chickens being dumped outside an artificial fox earth where the Pytchley Hunt had been filmed hunting just months before<sup>5</sup>.



A fox cub peers out of a drain pipe, part of an artificial fox earth located on land used by the Pytchley Hunt. An abundance of dead chickens, deliberately dumped at the site, fill the entrance.

## Why would hunts encourage or rear foxes?

For all the pro-hunt lobby's claims of fox control and wildlife management, hunting is really about prestige. Ensuring that foxes are killed when esteemed guests ride with the hunt and on important days such as the final meet of the year is important for the hunt's reputation. Providing food and shelter for wild foxes means the hunt will always know where to find foxes on hunting day.

Rearing fox cubs could serve several purposes. Some may be released during 'cub hunting' season in early autumn when young hounds are taught how to track and kill by chasing fox cubs. Others may be released at artificial fox earths dotted throughout the countryside when old enough to fend for themselves, thus providing 'quarry' for the upcoming hunting season.

In some cases the purpose could be more disturbing. For several years our Wildlife Crimewatch line has received reports of a trade in foxes, with hunts in areas with healthy fox populations providing foxes for those in areas where the animal is scarce. While technically this would qualify as wildlife management, we're sure it is not what politicians have in mind when they talk about the wildlife management carried out by hunts. In fact, we know most politicians, like most people, will find these practices appalling.

## No justification for a return to hunting

This investigation, along with the numerous exposes of hunts providing artificial earths and food for foxes, demonstrate that hunting has absolutely nothing to do with fox control or wildlife management. It is certainly not natural. Fox cubs belong with their parents and adults should have to forage for food, not have it delivered to their doorstep. **The truth is that hunting is simply a cruel sport without any justification.**

**We urge all MPs to stand against this cruel and unnatural treatment of wild animals and vote against repeal of the Hunting Act.**



In June 2011 a League investigator filmed a man dumping a barrel of offal near an artificial fox earth located on land owned by a Master of the Cattistock Foxhounds in an area regularly hunted by them. The same man was later filmed at the hunt's kennels.

<sup>1</sup>Peterborough Telegraph (2012) Hunt terrier man fined over fox 'in a barrel'. 3rd May. <http://tinyurl.com/pjx9nlt> • <sup>2</sup>Sengupta K (1998) Storm over fox cubs reared for hunt. The Independent, 28th June. <http://tinyurl.com/nfadzc> • <sup>3</sup>League Against Cruel Sports (2011) Hunts and artificial earths <http://tinyurl.com/pws6mev> • <sup>4</sup>Evelyn R. (2014) Footage shows foxes being fed in area where hunting takes place. ITV News. <http://tinyurl.com/q9npa6n> • <sup>5</sup>League Against Cruel Sports (2015) Kidnapped for Cruelty Expose <http://tinyurl.com/ntpklodr>