

REPORT:

# Wildlife Crime

The 2012/2013 Season

LAUNCHED AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, 17TH JULY 2013

We work to expose and end the cruelty inflicted  
on animals in the name of sport

# Foreword from the Chair

## Welcome to the League Against Cruel Sports' Wildlife Crime Report 2012/2013.

As a charity concentrating on the issue of cruel sports, and the animal welfare issues involved, we have traditionally produced a 'Hunting Report' into the fox, hare, deer and stag hunting seasons. However, whilst much of what we do continues to be related to hunting activity, our work has shown the prevalence of wildlife crime outside of this issue, and we have taken the decision to refocus this report on the wider persecution of wildlife.



That said, our intelligence continues to show that a large number of registered hunts operate in contravention of the Hunting Act 2004, and use a variety of methods to try and evade detection and prosecution. This criminality is geographically widespread and offences are committed regularly by every section of society, often in an organised and planned way.

However, illegal hunting is just one aspect of wildlife crime and this report highlights the extent of the issue, its diversity and regularly changing nature. This report goes beyond appraisal of traditional hunting groups and considers the broader affects of wildlife crime on individuals, animals and communities.

The League is committed to exposing wildlife criminals operating in the name of sport. Through our Wildlife Crimewatch line we receive excellent support and intelligence from members of the public who are sickened by others' blatant disregard of the law, the welfare of animals, people and communities. This intelligence has enabled us to become a leading agency in the fight against wildlife crime.

To those that persecute wild animals we say - If you decide to commit wildlife crime, the League will use every legal method and process to expose what you are doing or will assist in prosecuting you through the judicial system. Intelligence comes to our Crimewatch line from people close to you who detest what you do and care for wildlife. We do, and will continue to, work with the police at local and regional level, other Non Government Agencies (NGO) and the media to enable this to happen.

Many thanks.

**Iain Blake-Lawson**  
Chair, League Against Cruel Sports

**We work to expose and end the cruelty inflicted on animals in the name of sport.**



# About the League Against Cruel Sports

The League Against Cruel Sports is a registered charity that brings together people who care about animals. Like the majority of the public, we believe that cruelty to animals has no place in modern society. We have no political bias. We were established in 1924 and are unique because we focus on cruelty to animals for sport.

## What we do

We expose the barbaric nature of cruel sports and the people involved; identifying what action should be taken. We raise awareness and campaign for change by lobbying government, politicians, and businesses. This includes campaigning for new laws and helping to enforce existing laws by working with the police to bring to justice those who commit illegal acts of cruelty for sport. We also offer advice to people whose lives are being detrimentally affected by cruel sports.

## Our aim

We work to expose and bring to an end the cruelty inflicted on animals in the name of sport.

## Our approach

Through investigation and lawful campaigning, we encourage the public and law makers to recognise their responsibility to protect animals from suffering cruel acts in the name of sport. We raise awareness of the issues through the media and enlist public support to put pressure on law makers. We work to change people's behaviour, gain new legislation, and enforce existing laws that are in place to protect animals from cruel sports in the UK and across the globe.

## Our campaigns

Our core campaigns are hunting with dogs, dog fighting, bullfighting, shooting including trophy hunting and snares and zero tolerance of wildlife crime. We also campaign against the badger cull and for the welfare of racing animals.

We also have campaigns in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The League Against Cruel Sports receives no Government or National Lottery funding and relies on the generosity of our supporters to help fund our campaigning and investigative work.

Our supporters come from all walks of life and we continue to attract new members, donors and campaigns worldwide.



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# Contents

Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Wildlife Crimewatch	6
Where does the League's Intelligence come from?	
Hunting with Dogs	8
Hunts' Structure and Organisation	8
Key Hunting Days	9
Hunts Deflecting Monitoring Activity	9
Other Victims of Wildlife Crime: Hunt Havoc	10
Hunted Animals and Prevalence of Wildlife Crime	12
Fox Hunting	12
Deer and Stag Hunting	13
Mink and Otter Hunting	14
Hare Hunting	14
Hare Coursing	14
Badger Persecution	15
Fighting Animals: Dog Fighting	16
Wildlife Crime Gangs	16
Case Study: The Grimsby Operation	17
Police and Legal	18
The Police and Wildlife Crime	18
The Under Reporting of Rural Crime and Wildlife Crime to the Police	18
Prosecutions and Convictions	18
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	19
National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU)	19
Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)	19
Police Liaison	19
Court Cases	20
Heythrop Hunt	
Meynell and South Staffordshire Hunt	
Crawley and Horsham Hunt	
Conclusion	21

# Executive Summary

- Wildlife crime is a hidden crime, often not reported, but with serious impact on both animals and humans alike. The League Against Cruel Sports believes it is important to raise the profile of, report on and call for action on the persecution of animals, and strives to be a leader in this area.
- Wildlife Crime is widespread across the UK. Registered hunts continue to act illegally on a regular basis and there is sound intelligence to suggest that these groups are taking steps to evade detection and prosecution.
- Despite the Hunting Act 2004 foxes are still being kept for later release for hunting. This is in direct contravention of the law, and also against the hunting fraternity's own argument of hunting being an effective form of pest control and wildlife management.
- Due to the prevalence of wildlife crime, 2012/13 has seen a significant investment in the Operations Team at the League, and into our Wildlife Crimewatch confidential line to enable members of the public to report crimes and get help and advice on related issues.
- During the 2012/13 period, the League recorded 311 incidents of wildlife crime. which will be incorporated into intelligence figures to enable assessment of levels of wildlife crime.
- As a result there has been a ten fold increase in intelligence reporting. This has allowed for a more detailed assessment and means that in 2012/13 the League has become the leading NGO for handling intelligence solely on mammalian wildlife crime.
- Public confidence in rural policing remains poor. Only 38% of incidents reported to the League were also reported to the police. Where incidents involved firearms, just 35% were reported to the police. This low figure means that existing reports on wildlife crime are very likely to underestimate the problem, and a direct result of this is that the police resources allocated to it are likely to be insufficient. We need to break out of this under-reporting and under-resourcing mentality, and recognise the persecution of wild animals for the crime that it is. The League works closely with law enforcers, other animal agencies, and key decision makers on this issue to effect change for animals.
- 12% of all reported incidents reported contained what we term 'hunt havoc'. This is where the incident impacts on humans as well as animals, and involves clear disruption of the normal way of life, often in contravention of other laws. The West Country, and the Welsh/English border constitute just 16% of the geographic area of England and Wales yet make up 56% of all hunt havoc cases.

Overall, the report on wildlife crime in 2012/13 continues to show that this is a key area in terms of our work to protect animals, both wild and domestic. Yet again, our statistics show that key players in this are hunts, with hunters frequently out of control and breaking civil and criminal laws. We seek to expose this problem as a means of helping effect prosecutions where possible, exposing the perpetrators of wildlife crime, and by educating the public on the issues involved so that animals do not continue to be used in the name of sport.



# Introduction

Wildlife Crime can be defined as any act or omission that has been made illegal through UK or EU regulations or legislation, and occurs against any species of wild bird, animal, and fauna, in addition to any habitat, resting place or shelter for defined species.

In plain English this means that there are laws which set out what you must, or mustn't do, to birds, animals or fauna, and if you are in contravention of that you are committing a wildlife crime. A good example would be where a group of people set out to intentionally hunt a fox with a pack of 20 dogs. Prior to the Hunting Act 2004 this activity would have been legal, but changes to the law now mean this is illegal. Another example would be the blocking of a badger sett, which is in contravention of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. This often happens where illegal hunting takes place, as a means of preventing the fox 'going to ground' by seeking refuge in the badger sett.

Wildlife crime is committed throughout the UK, in both rural and urban areas, and can be committed by individuals acting on their own, or in groups. Both offenders and their offences are diverse, and both groups and individuals can adapt to changing

circumstances to facilitate criminality. This reality makes tracking and recording wildlife crime exceptionally hard. The League's Wildlife Crimewatch line allows members of the public to report information from within the communities affected, and is therefore critical to enable successful recording of crime, and the deployment of investigative resources.

In previous years, the League has produced annual reports that focus specifically on hunting with dogs. However, the expansion of our team of investigators and our significant increase in calls to our Wildlife Crimewatch line we are now able to reveal the true diversity and insidious nature of this type of crime. This report therefore seeks to detail some of the issues that have been raised in the period from July 2012 to April 2013, a period which covers the main months of activity within the traditional hunting calendar.

## Wildlife Crimewatch

The League's Wildlife Crimewatch line is the first and only dedicated confidential reporting hotline for wildlife crime in the UK.

The line provides the League with thousands of pieces of intelligence each year, which is sorted and prioritised to enable the charity to help convict criminals, educate the public and key decision makers on the problems involved and ultimately help stop animal cruelty.

Between 1st July 2012 and 14th April 2013, there were 207 online reports submitted and 848 calls made to the Wildlife Crimewatch service. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Where does the League's Intelligence come from?

The League collects data and information through recognised intelligence reporting systems. This has led to an overall reduction in incident reporting during the last hunting season, but a massive increase in intelligence. An 'incident' is where a distinct activity has taken place, such as a person taking his dogs to interfere with a badger set. 'Intelligence' relates to information on a future incident or about the criminal behaviour of an individual or group.

2012/13 has seen an increase in intelligence reporting of over 1000% and from 98 submissions to 1,115. These logs have generated 1,491 separate pieces of information.

## CASE STUDY:



## A typical weekend on the League Wildlife Crimewatch line



Saturday is a traditional day for hunt meets and is often busy on the Wildlife Crimewatch line, where incidents of suspicious behaviour and hunt hounds causing inconvenience, fear, injury and damage are, sadly, very common.

Winter hunting schedules had become backed up due to bad weather, equine herpes and conflicts within the hunts, meaning that the final weeks of the season were expected to be especially busy. Over one weekend in February, the Wildlife Crimewatch line took 16 reports relating to suspicious or illegal behaviour:

**CALL 1:** Report of a fox kill and hound death in Carmarthenshire. Young caller has witnessed both deaths and has evidence of the offences. They have been extremely shocked by what they have had to witness. This incident is under investigation, but images are already circulating on social media of the shocking event.

**CALL 4:** Caller reporting animal cruelty in the Wiltshire area. Details taken and steps made by the Wildlife Crimewatch team to find someone to investigate the cruelty.

**CALL 6:** Hunting currently in progress on land behind the caller's house. Foxes and deer are known to be in that area. Details taken to add to our intelligence data and we gave the caller advice on the how to report the matter to the Police to get the best outcome and advise was given on how to prevent damage to his own property and protect his pets.

**CALL 9:** Poultry owner having on-going problems with the local hunt in the north of England. On this occasion, the house owner is reporting fox earths being dug next to her land. Sadly, but not unusually, this family are trying to sell their property and move away, as they have decided they would rather lose money on the sale than have to stay in an area where their lives are so badly affected by the hunt.

**CALL 10:** Caller has witnessed what would appear to be blatant illegal hunting in the Midlands. This is the second occasion that they have seen this from their garden, the last being at Christmas. Caller has details of future hunt meets that are usually kept secret and provides these to help our Investigators.

**CALL 12:** A number of witnesses have seen what appears to be illegal hunting on a residential estate in East Anglia. After being given advice by the Wildlife Crimewatch team, the matter is passed to the local police to investigate and for the huntsmen to be interviewed.

**CALL 14:** In Devon, a caller reports two hunts that are illegally hunting. The caller explains how they run a horse livery and have lost business due to horse owners being scared of their horses being affected by the local hunt. Caller reports 'hunt havoc' happening for six of the last eight years, including one case where a ten-year-old child was knocked over. On another occasion, a resident horse aborted a foal and required an expensive blood transfusion. Caller mentions that their neighbour, a crop farmer, has also expressed his frustration with the hunt, but is nervous about speaking out for fear of the ramifications.

# Hunting with Dogs



As an organisation with a successful history of campaigning against cruel sports, hunting with dogs is what the League Against Cruel Sports is best known for amongst a large section of the general public.

We have almost 90 years of experience on this issue, and are seen as experts in the field in terms of understanding what it is, being able to identify it, and crucially with our expanded team of Investigators, being able to act on it. As such, a high proportion of the wildlife crime reports received to our Wildlife Crimewatch line concern reports of illegal hunting, and the picture they reveal is stark for the animals, and humans, concerned.

## Hunts' Structure and Organisation

Wildlife crime is often a hidden crime, as by the nature of where it is perpetrated there is often no-one around to witness it, aside from the offenders. In terms of illegal hunting activity this is a very different situation. There are over 200 fox hunts within the UK, before you even take into account stag, hare and mink hunts, and these usually involve tight communities. This presents problems in identifying and reporting wildlife crime, as efforts can be made by those communities to hide criminal activity.

In 1850, a Master of the Foxhounds ranked higher than a Bishop or an MP<sup>1</sup>. Even today, there still exists a strong hierarchical, almost military organisation behind the sport of hunting. This hierarchy is important in the hunting field for the operation of the hunt, but it is also critical when attempting to deal with minimising the damage caused by the sport when those that offend are caught and prosecuted. There are reports of hunt masters being quick to offer apologies in supposed hunting accidents, and of some hunters taking a more aggressive stance. Examples of this have been when cars are damaged by hunt horses and supporters and members of the hunt are quick to blame the car driver for the road accident. When things go wrong, there is a slick PR machine that seeks to reduce collateral damage and encourages under reporting, especially in the media.

In July 2012, a member of a hunt was convicted of firearms offences relating to the shooting of a hunt monitor, who was simply a person who attempted to monitor the hunt's activities to check for illegal hunting. Despite being a serious firearms offence, this incident

was significantly under reported, even though the firearm was a rifle with a shortened barrel and the offender was found to be in possession of further firearms. Had this been an inner city gang firearms cache seizure, there would no doubt have been a much more comprehensive media response.

Minimising the impact of negative publicity is a crucial strand in deflecting the truth behind hunting and hunt havoc. In February 2012, the former Master of a Welsh Hunt was found with a handgun in the glove box of his car, which was only reported locally.

## Key Hunting Days

Boxing Day and New Year's Day are key fox hunting days and unsurprisingly the Wildlife Crimewatch line received a high volume of calls from 26th to 28th December 2012, alleging illegal hunting and instances of hunt havoc. There was considerable national and regional media coverage linked to hunting meets and the League's reported incidents of illegal hunting.

### **Hunters are hunted: Campaigners claim three hunts still kill foxes with hounds despite ban.**

League Against Cruel Sports claim some are simply ignoring the ban and continuing the barbaric act of allowing hounds to savage the helpless animals<sup>2</sup>.

### **Most Britons support fox hunting ban, survey finds**

Poll before Boxing Day meets show 76% are against moves to make fox hunting legal, rising to 81% for deer hunting<sup>3</sup>.

### **Former police officers monitoring Boxing Day fox hunts**

The League Against Cruel Sports said it has spent more than £1 million on professional investigators and former officers to police Boxing Day hunts.

It comes after a senior Conservative cabinet minister told The Daily Telegraph that David Cameron cannot repeal Labour's ban on fox hunting<sup>4</sup>.

### **£1m charity team finds 'evidence to prosecute three hunts'**

Former police officers recruited by a charity to investigate illegal fox hunting have found evidence enough to prosecute three hunts since the start of the season last month, it was claimed last night<sup>5</sup>.

## Hunts Deflecting Monitoring Activity

This season saw reports that suggested 'meet cards', equivalent to the hunts 'fixture list', for the season were being withheld from open sites and locations. There was also a suggestion that frequent location changes and times were being used to deflect monitoring. This raises questions in terms of transparency and openness of the legal 'trail hunting' that many hunts claim to undertake. If there is nothing to hide, then there is no need to act so secretly.

In 2012, on several separate occasions, there were attempts made to identify who the new League investigators were and where they lived. There were instances of challenge and assault of investigators during monitoring operations. Meanwhile a national hunting magazine<sup>6</sup> carried an article on how defensive techniques needed to be employed by hunters to prevent detection.

A team of people were identified as being available to support hunt groups in deflecting monitoring activity. One hunt carried out re-screening of supporters to identify any covert activity within their group<sup>7</sup>. Spotters were identified in March 2013 and marshals with walkie talkies were seen operating alongside hunts in the West Country.

Organised hunts have to carry out pre-meditated action to ensure successful illegal hunting, despite frequent claims that illegal hunting is an accidental activity. Fox hunting by organisations often requires preparative behaviour such as the building of 'artificial earths', where a man-made structure is built or provided to encourage foxes, and to ensure they

are present in the hunting area. In 2011, the League undertook a project to look at this activity, and inspected over 130 artificial earths, covering 24 hunt countries (the defined area in which each hunt operates) in 16 counties<sup>8</sup>. Intelligence relating to the building of artificial earths has continued through the 2012/13 season<sup>9</sup> and there has been a high volume of reporting on the use of bagged foxes; a term used to cover the situation where a fox is kept in captivity having been dug out and caught previously for later release for hunting to ensure that those who have paid for a day's sport are not disappointed<sup>10</sup>. On 3rd May 2012, a member of the Fitzwilliam Hunt was convicted of keeping a bagged fox<sup>11</sup>. He was convicted of two offences, one under the Hunting Act and one under the Animal Welfare Act, and fined £2065 in total.

The continued use of bagged foxes and artificial earths dispel the myth that hunting is anything more than sport. If foxes need to be reared or kept for release this is nothing to do with wildlife management or pest control but blatant sport and the need to put on a chase for the paying participants.

43% of intelligence received relating to bagged foxes concerned activities in the West Country, with the rest spread evenly amongst the North, Midlands and Wales. While a proportion of the intelligence on bagged foxes and their release into the wild for later capture for sport were suggested to be urban myth, the scrutiny and diversity of the intelligence received suggest this to be a very real and active pursuit.

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## Other Victims of Wildlife Crime: Hunt Havoc

Hunt Havoc is a term used to describe the undesirable impact and consequences of hunting on individuals, families, businesses and communities.

Often these activities are a criminal offence in their own right, although this is not always the case. Typical hunt havoc cases involve issues such as trespass, firearms offences, traffic chaos, livestock disturbance and even domestic pet fatality. These matters can be devastating to those involved, and clearly highlights how wildlife crime cannot be looked at in isolation to human impact.

This season, 12% of all reported incidents reported to the League contained havoc. This havoc season began in September 2012, with a stag hunt out of control at a campsite in the Exe Valley<sup>12</sup>. October 2012 saw four reports of hunt havoc, eight incidents in November, twenty one in December, eleven in January and twenty three in February and March. Traditionally, Boxing Day hunts create havoc and there was another temporal spike at the end of the season, in February and March. The latter spike could be due to an attempt to recover days lost in a winter plagued by bad weather and equine herpes.

Last year, the havoc hotspots were in Devon and the English/Welsh borders, with Devon being high in volume but the Borders usually containing the worst or most severe cases. This has been replicated for the second season running. Many cases involve criminal damage caused by horses or dogs that are out of control but interestingly, these incidents are rarely recorded by the police as crimes. They are often linked to hunting and therefore seen as non-recordable offences by the Police. This severely impacts on efforts to assess the true impact of illegal hunting on more regular crime patterns.

Commonly a behaviour that is present in many havoc and non-havoc cases are Road Traffic Offences. These could be caused by unnecessary obstruction or misuse of vehicles on roads or drink driving. The drivers of quad bikes are regularly seen to be committing offences. On several occasions reported via Crimewatch, road accidents have taken place and then not reported to the Police.

In 2012/13, seventeen incidents of suspected illegal hunting involved firearms. A firearms incident would typically be one where a witness has seen a firearm, loaded or otherwise, but cannot make any comment as to whether firearms offences were actually being committed. Occasionally reports are received that may constitute breaches of the s20 Firearms Act 1968<sup>13</sup> of trespassing with a firearm. In July 2012, a South Pembrokeshire Hunt supporter allegedly shot a hunt monitor. He was jailed for 3½ years for firearms offences during a hunt, including having possession of a handgun with a shortened barrel and a pistol grip under the front passenger seat of his car. There were also ten rounds of ammunition designed to explode on impact. Sixteen more firearms were found at his home address<sup>14</sup>.

Hunt havoc has a huge impact on individuals, domestic animals and communities where people live in fear of hunt activities, either during an incident or in anticipation of when and where one will occur.

The League's Wildlife Crimewatch line receives many calls from human victims of hunting. Often, these

are residents and farmers living in tenant and tied accommodation that are reticent to air their views and require time and support to report their stories. Work is on-going in developing good links with the Victim Support Service.

In January 2013, two hounds belonging to a hunt were allegedly impaled on spikes. There has also been continued reporting of hounds being shot by hunting packs, which relates to hounds that are old or perhaps unable to be trained.

Animal abusers are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people and four times more likely to commit property crimes than individuals without a history of animal abuse<sup>15</sup>. There have been a number of reports through the season, both with intelligence and within open source reporting of the courts, of serious sexual offending within hunt groups. In May, the former huntsman of the Tiverton Stag hounds was convicted of rape after a hunt ball and Chester Crown Court is currently hearing another case of alleged sexual offending involving a former hunt master.



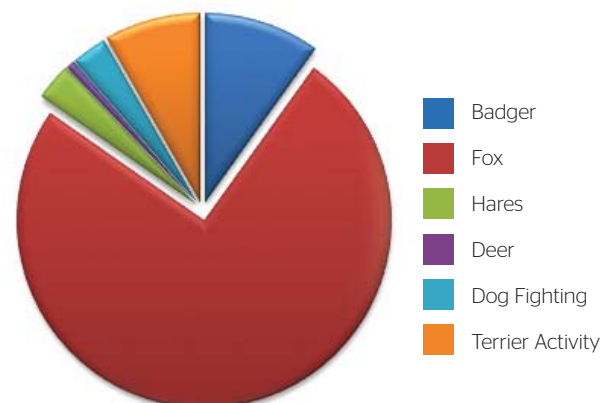
# Hunted Animals and Prevalence of Wildlife Crime



Incidents reported to the League and intelligence can be broken down by species, as illustrated right. This ratio has changed little over the preceding two years and reflects the League's core activity as being fox hunting, which comprised 64% of incidents and 81% of intelligence in 2012/2013. This also reflects our continuing efforts to preserve the integrity of the Hunting Act 2004 amidst concern from the general public that criminality associated with organised hunting continues to be overlooked.

## Fox Hunting

There are 186 registered fox hunts in the UK<sup>16</sup>, most of whom will be active two to three times a week throughout the traditional hunting season, which runs from November to March/April. They will use a pack of hounds to hunt a fox, with the hunt staff and



Source: League Against Cruel Sports Crimewatch Intelligence Reports 2012/13

followers mounted on horse back or in pursuit on foot, with hunt supporters also following on foot or by car.

As hunting does not come naturally to a fox hound the fox hunts actually start their season in July/August with around 3 months of activity designed to train new hounds to the pack. This period involves the pack being sent to hunt fox cubs, and has traditionally been referred to as 'cub hunting' or 'cubbing', but was euphemistically renamed 'autumn hunting' by the hunting fraternity when the activity was made illegal under the Hunting Act 2004. This season saw the first hunt being prosecuted successfully for cub hunting, when the Meynell and South Staffordshire Hunt were convicted on 9th August 2012. The hunt were very quick to distance themselves from the offending huntsman but were still refused permission to hunt on National Trust land as a result of the conviction.

Cub hunting was first reported last season on 11th July 2012 in the West Country; in August 2012 in Gloucestershire; and then more heavily reported in Wales, Surrey, Essex and Yorkshire in early September 2012; followed by Durham and Northumberland; and finally Wiltshire and Leicestershire in October 2012. Cub hunting was held up this season due to weather conditions and the late harvest<sup>17</sup>.

## Deer and Stag Hunting

There are three deer/stag hunts in the UK, all based in the South West region of England and who are generally active two to three times a week during the traditional hunting season which runs from August to April, depending on the age and sex of the animal being hunted<sup>18</sup>. The hunted deer is selected in advance of the chase and once separated from the herd is chased for an average of 3 hours across approximately 20 km by hounds, riders and hunt supporters.

The Quantock Staghounds have been the most heavily reported deer pack in 2012/13. On 18th October 2012, a deer had to take refuge in a reservoir to avoid capture<sup>19</sup> and on 1st October 2012, a stag was killed on or near National Trust land<sup>20</sup>.

In March 2013, footage was obtained of the County Down Hunt in Northern Ireland releasing a deer from a trailer to be hunted through the County Down countryside near Katesbridge. The practice of transporting a deer to a location to be hunted is known as 'carting', an illegal activity that hunts have long denied goes on in Northern Ireland. However, this latest exposure is not the first time that hunts have been suspected of this cruelty. In 2011, a trailer



registered to the County Down Hunt was seized by police and the USPCA, when it was found to be carrying two live stags, which, it is believed, were about to be released and hunted.

In February 2013, the League released a new film to highlight the cruelty associated with hunting to coincide with the eight year anniversary of the Hunting Act. The first footage in this film showed what takes place during a stag hunt, demonstrating the severity of the cruelty inflicted upon stags that fall victim to cruel hunts.

## Mink and Otter Hunting

There are about twenty mink hunts in the UK, most of whom will be active once or twice a week during the traditional hunting season, which runs from April to October<sup>21</sup>. The activity takes place on foot, using a pack of mink hounds to hunt along a river bank in the summer months. Mink hunting is fairly regularly reported to the League, most notably in the River Wye and Cumbria areas, beginning in June. Whilst it cannot be confirmed that otters are being hunted, one of the locations used for mink hunting last summer was known to be the home of a female otter with cubs. In July 2012, reports were received that a gamekeeper from an estate in the Wye Valley was also killing buzzards and badgers, as well as being involved in mink and otter hunting.



In early August 2012, otter hunting took place by the River Caldew in Cumbria. The River Caldew is part of the River Eden Site of Special Scientific Interest (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) and a Special Area of Conservation (European Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC).

In Mid December 2012 in the North of England, entrances of several of the active otter holts had been blocked up with stones and/or pieces of wood. In July 2012, in Hampshire, there was alleged otter shooting at a private estate because of loss of carp<sup>22</sup>. In January 2013, anglers in the Ringwood area claimed otters had eaten £35,000 worth of fish stocks from their two lakes<sup>23</sup>.

## Hare Hunting

There are 84 registered hare hunts in the UK<sup>24</sup>. Hares are hunted using a pack of hounds followed by hunt staff and followers on either horseback by Harrier packs, between August and March, and on foot by Beagle and Basset hound packs between September and March.

Intelligence submitted in 2012/13 indicates that there are at least 13 different registered packs of beagles or bassets that are hunting hares illegally. Intelligence also suggests that these packs continue to hold hare hunting festivals. Some hunts are known to travel to the Republic of Ireland to hunt hares (where this practice is still legal). These packs are spread throughout the UK. However, they remain highly secretive and there has only been one conviction under the Hunting Act relating to a registered pack of hounds.

In 2009, the huntsman and joint master of the Wick and District Beagles admitted hunting hares after evidence collected by League investigators was submitted to the Police. The Wick and District Beagles are now defunct<sup>25</sup>.

Hares also face illegal persecution from lads with dogs/hare coursers and are subject to legal driven hare shoots, usually in the East of England. Hare hunts also make professional DVDs to show them laying trails<sup>26</sup>.

## Hare Coursing

The aim of hare coursing is for two dogs (usually greyhounds or lurchers) to compete against each other in pursuit of a live hare. Wagers are placed on which of the two dogs will be the quickest to turn and catch the hare<sup>27</sup>. Gambling is a hugely important aspect of the sport and coursers will travel great distances to participate in the activity. In 2011, the

League identified that there were strong links between dogs being imported from Northern Ireland and mainland hare coursing in East Anglia<sup>28</sup> which goes further to supporting the importance of cross county police operations.

Operation GALILEO<sup>29</sup> was launched in August 2012 by Lincolnshire Police in an attempt to respond to the illegal activity of hare coursing. The operation cited 1,200 incidents reported in Lincolnshire alone in 2011/12. Early reports were also received of hare coursing problems in the Thames Valley<sup>30</sup>.

By December 2012, the team in Lincolnshire had reported 76 people in relation to hare coursing offences and seized eight vehicles and six dogs.

In March 2013, the Operation GALILEO team suggested they had received 800 reports of hare coursing between September 2012 and March 2013, a drop from 1,200 in the previous season. 190 prosecutions have been brought and 90 people warned<sup>31</sup>.

Throughout the season, a number of people have been convicted of hunting with dogs relating to hare coursing, regularly these offenders travel huge distances to commit offences.

On 13th August 2012, a team travelled 200 miles from Northumberland to Hull. These distances provide an operational opportunity to utilise ANPR systems<sup>32</sup> on arterial routes and any joint working in future should be cognisant of that opportunity.

Police in Scotland ran Operation LEPUS and were quoted as saying that *"there is growing evidence of a link between wildlife crime like hare coursing and other types of crime occurring in rural areas, such as theft of farm machinery, fuel and equipment"*<sup>33</sup>.

In December 2012, Cambridgeshire Police reported having dealt with 116 instances of hare coursing since the beginning of the season. This resulted in 23 people being reported, three arrests and seven vehicles being seized. The dedication of police resources and the increase in reporting by the local community has had a deterrent effect with police revealing there had been a drop in the number of reported hare coursing incidents in the county from 40 in November 2011 to 32 in November 2012<sup>34</sup>.

By April 2013, there was noted to be some displacement of hare coursing offenders, possibly due to the high profile activity in the Fen areas. More hare coursers were identified by the Police and convicted and potential targets were identified by the League as a result of high profile media activity. The Irish Cup took place in February with prize money at one of the races totalling €130,000.



## Badger Persecution

### Badger Cull Related Incidents

A growing number of incidents have been reported that link the Government's proposed badger cull - in an effort to reduce incidences of bovine TB - to deaths of badgers that are being found by roadsides. While there is not enough evidence to make a comparable link, the League's tactical assessments in 2011 suggested that there could be an increased level of badger crime, linked to the anticipated cull, and there were early indications of this trend continuing in August 2012.

In September 2012, there were reports of the companies that would be involved in the cull and some suggestion of an individual offering independent advice on how to gas badgers in setts<sup>35</sup>.

Interestingly, there are indications that this could be happening again as the badger cull is set to begin in summer 2013 in the pilot areas of West Gloucestershire and West Somerset, with Dorset as a back up area.

The cost of policing the badger cull is estimated to be £4,000,000 over a 4 year period<sup>36</sup>. This will not be met under existing policing budgets, but traditionally there are many consequential policing costs associated with major operations that affect constabularies. There will also be an impact on tourism in the cull areas<sup>37</sup>.

### Badger Persecution Relating To Hunting

Badger sett disturbance and offending has been sporadic throughout the hunting season this year. In January, however, there was a 300% increase in reported illegal badger sett activity and related speculation about links to the badger cull.

A paper written by a research team from Bangor University, the University of Kent and Kingston University, called *"Innovative techniques for estimating illegal activities in a human-wildlife-management conflict"* has revealed the estimated rate of illegal badger killing. Using a method known as the randomised response technique (RRT), the research has shown over 10% of livestock farmers in Wales had illegally killed badgers in the 12 months preceding the study<sup>38</sup>.

### Fighting Animals: Dog Fighting

The League has received much higher levels of reporting relating to dog fighting in 2012/13, mostly based in urban areas. This is believed to be a direct result of increased publicity of the Wildlife Crimewatch number and it is noticeable that intelligence sources in this area are from a very different background from those reporting on rural wildlife crime matters.

Often the sources are living within housing estates affected by the activity, or are from smaller charities or animal welfare groups. In September 2012, intelligence was received of activity in Birmingham, East Ham in London and Gwynedd in Wales.

September 2012 saw the emergence of a theory that domestic pets were being stolen to be used as bait for fighting dogs, when cats were allegedly being taken in the North of England<sup>39</sup>.

In November 2012, further reports of dog fighting were received, including activity in Northern Ireland, Wales and Sussex and during the same month there were further reports of cats being used as bait. In December 2012, there was reporting linking Eastern Europe with the UK on dog fighting and trading dogs.

January 2013 saw reporting of dog fighting in the Leicestershire area and a breeder in Somerset cross breeding solely for the purposes of fighting. Dog fighting intelligence has also been received concerning safe houses in London and, nationally, regarding the use of pets as bait dogs.



## Wildlife Crime Gangs

While intelligence received on wildlife crime gangs is often very detailed and quite specific, links and trends are difficult to identify, due to the disparate nature of the reporting.

The League is also beholden to other organisations or the Police to take these cases forward to operational action. Few of the cases, whilst specific, are taken from raw intelligence reporting to a result.

In January 2013, three members of an animal cruelty gang, all men from Grimsby, were given custodial sentences after they admitted 30 charges

between them, including causing animal fights between dogs on foxes and badgers and causing unnecessary suffering to foxes and dogs contrary to the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

All three were sentenced to four months imprisonment and barred from keeping animals for 10 years.

## CASE STUDY:

## THE GRIMSBY OPERATION:

# Intelligence in Action

In March 2013, three men from Grimsby pleaded guilty to animal cruelty after being confronted with evidence that showed them laughing while they committed a string of sickening acts of cruelty to animals.

Based on intelligence initially supplied by the League, all three were given custodial sentences after they admitted 30 charges between them, including causing animal fights between dogs on foxes and badgers, and causing unnecessary suffering to foxes and dogs contrary to the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

The Magistrate hearing the case commented that the men “took sickening pleasure in inflicting cruelty and death.” All three were sentenced to four months imprisonment and barred from keeping animals until further notice.

Evidence presented against the men showed that their campaign of animal abuse had been prolific, sustained and well organised. Following a series of warrants in August 2012, all three of the defendants’ homes were raided

leading to the discovery of over 10,000 photos of animal abuse and dog fighting equipment, including treadmills and breaker bars (sticks used to break up a dog fight). Injured and suffering animals found at the addresses were also seized.

The League received a tip off from a member of the public through the Wildlife Crimewatch line. When the Charity started its investigations, it was deeply shocked by the severity and extent of the evidence it uncovered. Once sufficient information had been uncovered, the League passed the case to the RSPCA, to consider it for prosecution, which they did.

At the time of the court case, RSPCA Inspector Cliff Harrison said:

*“This is the most disturbing case I have investigated in my 23 years with the RSPCA. I have spent the last*

*14 years with our Special Operations Unit and can say that we have never before discovered such a comprehensive collection of images showing the very worst acts on cruelty imposed on wild mammals and to the dogs continually used to fight them.*

*“This case is nothing to do with legitimate pest control or lawful ‘country pursuits.’ It is about three men who went out to deliberately inflict terror and suffering on wild mammals on a regular basis.”*

Many of the individuals identified through this type of wildlife crime are terriermen or gamekeepers, who by the nature of their roles are intrinsically linked to hunting and shooting activities and, from intelligence received at the League in 2012/13, West Yorkshire is seen as the primary hotspot for wildlife crime gangs.



# Police and Legal



## The Police and Wildlife Crime

Most police forces have community engagement strategies linked to serious and organised crime<sup>40</sup>, rural crime and counter terrorism. For example, Kent Police's Wildlife Crime policing response is part of their Partnerships and Communities team<sup>41</sup>.

## The Under Reporting of Rural Crime and Wildlife Crime to the Police

Under reporting of crime in rural areas, as identified in two successive Strategic Assessments by the League, contributes to a reduction in rural policing resources. This area of concern was raised in *Farmers Weekly*<sup>42</sup> in November 2012 from data provided by the Countryside Alliance<sup>43</sup>, citing one police officer for every 1,037 rural residents compared with one police officer for every 581 urban residents.

If rural crime victims could have sufficient confidence in impartial policing in rural communities, crime figures would be more accurate and the levels of rural policing might increase proportionately.

The League's report into the 2011/2012 hunting season identified an unwillingness to report wildlife crime to the Police. Sadly, this trend has continued this year, with only 119 of the 311 incidents reported via Wildlife Crimewatch also reported to the Police (38%). This is at a lower level than last year.

The number of wildlife incidents reported to the Police where firearms were present is lower too (35%), although this is from a very small reporting level of 17. There is some anecdotal suggestion that in some policing areas, wildlife crime is being taken more seriously than it has in the past, but this cannot be quantified.

## Prosecutions and Convictions

The League presents cases to the Police for onward presentation to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Evidence for these cases is gathered predominantly through covert monitoring of hunts, based upon previous intelligence that they are illegally hunting.

In May 2012, there was a successful prosecution by Sussex Police of the Crawley and Horsham Hunt, with

evidence obtained from the Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA). The Meynell and South Staffordshire Hunt were the first hunt to be convicted of cub hunting, again with evidence obtained by the HSA. Latterly, the RSPCA successfully prosecuted the Heythrop Hunt for a number of offences from evidence received from the HSA and Protect Our Wild Animals. At the time of writing this report, the League has a number of cases in preparation from the 2012/13 season, and 7 people have already been charged with 15 offences following the charity's investigations. There are a number of additional cases in the pipeline awaiting summons to be issued which include section one Hunting Act 2004<sup>44</sup> offences<sup>45</sup>, Animal Welfare Act 2006, Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 offences.

## Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

The CPS role in the justice system is an important one. However, the League remains concerned that they do not give wildlife crime cases the priority they deserve, often deciding not to pursue perfectly viable cases.

## National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU)

The NWCU, launched in 2006, is a multi-agency operation, which gathers, analyses and co-ordinates wildlife crime intelligence.

Even though the Unit has expanded and become more intelligence focussed recently, it cannot hope to process all wildlife crime inside the UK, as well as international crimes that transit the country. While the Unit's priorities and funding streams currently lean heavily towards conservation, there is a new NWCU Strategic Assessment due in September/October 2013 which may change its priorities.

The funding of the NWCU remains under threat and even though it was granted a reprieve in 2013, there is no guarantee that this will be continued past 2014. The League will continue to campaign for the Unit's survival, as we did this year, while preparing for a future that does and doesn't involve the NWCU and building upon our existing strong relationships with other wildlife NGOs.

## Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)

The League has pro-actively engaged with the new PCCs, both with candidates before the elections in November 2012 and with a number of elected PCCs through 2013. The PCCs have taken a role previously associated with the police authorities, and each PCC has to swear an oath of impartiality. Where suitable, PCCs have been briefed on levels of incident and intelligence reporting relating to their policing areas.

Wildlife crime is important to many PCCs. Vera Baird QC of Northumberland has said she was delighted that funding for the NWCU had been saved, also stating that, *"My postbag proves that local residents are concerned about wildlife crime"*<sup>46</sup>. Meanwhile Derbyshire's PCC, Alan Charles, has promised to tackle wildlife crime and cruelty to animals<sup>47</sup>.

## Police Liaison

The League continues to establish and develop strong and productive working relationships with the Police, including by offering training on Hunting Act enforcement, as provided by the League's Head of Enforcement, a former Wildlife Crime Officer.



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# Court Cases

## Heythrop Hunt - First Corporate Conviction

In December 2012, Oxfordshire-based Heythrop Hunt was found guilty of illegal hunting at Oxford Magistrates' Court, the first time a hunt had faced corporate charges. Members of the Heythrop Hunt, which Prime Minister, David Cameron, had previously ridden with, pleaded guilty to four charges of intentionally hunting a fox with dogs on land in the Cotswolds.

Independent monitors, some of whom were associates of Protect Our Wild Animals (POWA), filmed the Hunt on several occasions during November 2011 and February and March 2012 in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. It brought the footage to the attention of the RSPCA, which, in turn, brought the case to court.

The Heythrop Hunt admitted a charge relating to hunting a wild mammal, namely a fox, with dogs contrary to Sections 1 and 10 of the Hunting Act 2004. Hunt Master Richard Sumner and Huntsman Julian Barnfield of the Heythrop Hunt also pleaded guilty to charges brought by the RSPCA. The prosecution said hounds had been encouraged to chase foxes - which is banned under the Hunting Act 2004.

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*"While overstretched police resources struggle to investigate such offences, the RSPCA will not turn away. Our job is to argue for better animal welfare laws and to ensure they are properly enforced. Given the sheer weight of evidence, for me, the decision to prosecute was never in doubt"<sup>48</sup>.*

Gavin Grant

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Barnfield was fined £1,000 and ordered to pay £2,000 in costs. Sumner was fined £1,800 and ordered to pay £2,500 costs and the Heythrop Hunt was fined £4,000 and ordered to pay £15,000 costs. All three were ordered to pay a £15 victim surcharge. Both Sumner and Barnfield have since retired from their positions.

## Meynell and South Staffordshire Hunt - First Cub Hunting Conviction

In August 2012, two members of Meynell and South Staffordshire Hunt were found guilty at Southern Derbyshire Magistrates' Court, in what was the first ever conviction for illegally hunting fox cubs with hounds. Hunt Master John Greenall and terrierman Glen Morris were both found guilty of being "engaged in illegal

cubbing" based on video evidence obtained by hunt saboteurs, and were subsequently fined.

The Judge said she had taken note of the fact that John Greenall had given the Police what he claimed to be an innocent explanation in an interview. He had chosen not to give evidence at his trial and she concluded that this was "because his evidence would not bear scrutiny". She said: "I am satisfied so that I am sure that both defendants engaged in illegal cub hunting; they were active participants in intentional hunting and I find the case proved against each defendant."

Steve Harris, Head of Enforcement at the League speaking about the verdict at the time said: "We are very pleased that Derbyshire Police thoroughly investigated this case and that the Crown Prosecution Service were willing to allow a court to decide on who was telling the truth."

## Crawley and Horsham Hunt

In May 2012, three people were convicted and fined for five different counts of illegal fox hunting. Andrew Phillis, Neill Millard and Rachel Holdsworth of the Sussex based Crawley and Horsham Hunt were found guilty at Haywards Heath Magistrates' Court for breaches of the Hunting Act. Andrew Phillis a former huntsman, had previously been found guilty of illegally hunting a fox on two occasions in January 2011 and found not guilty of one charge of illegal hunting in February 2011.

Rachel Holdsworth who was acting as the hunt's *whipper in* - or the person responsible for assisting the huntsman in particular, keeping the pack together - was also found guilty of illegal hunting on the same dates in January and joint master Neil Millard was found guilty of breaches to the Act on one of the dates in January 2011. All three denied the charges claiming that they had been trail hunting and following a scent at Marlpost Wood and Shermanbury Place when the offences took place.

Rachel Holdsworth and Neil Millard were fined a total of £1,500 and ordered to pay £2,500 each in costs. Andrew Phillis was sentenced at a later date. Commenting on the verdict at the time of the case, the League's Chief Executive Joe Duckworth said:

*"This is a fantastic result and proof that hunters who think they can flout the law and chase and kill wild animals illegally will be brought to justice."*

*"The verdict comes in the same week as the League's new investigations team is launched and this will act as a real catalyst for our team of professional investigators to get out there and collect evidence which will help bring even more wildlife criminals to justice"<sup>49</sup>.*

# Conclusion

This report has shown the level and extent of wildlife crime across the UK. This often hidden activity has been shown to have serious impacts on both animals and humans alike and it is clear that more needs to be done to tackle the problem.

Recent landmark prosecutions have revealed the organised subterfuge which still exists amongst many organised hunts and League intelligence reveals that this deception is also prevalent within other wildlife criminal groups.

The season has seen a ten fold increase in intelligence reporting, which has included; foxes being encouraged to breed and in some cases captured for later release before a hunt, an increase in badger persecution, and a dramatic rise in the number of reports of urban dog fighting.

The investment into operational activities has placed the League as one of the leading NGOs for handling mammalian wildlife crime intelligence. The expanded operations team are better positioned to gather evidence of illegality and provide additional resources for the police to bring the perpetrators of wildlife crime to justice.

Public confidence in rural policing remains poor, and so the League will work with Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces to help to ensure wildlife crime is understood and prioritised correctly. The League will continue to campaign for wildlife crime to become a recordable offence and will not stop our investigations to expose the cruelty inflicted on our wildlife for sport.

The League continues to use our expertise to help stop wildlife crime but we need your help.

The League receives no Government or National Lottery funding and relies on the generosity of our supporters to help fund our campaigning and investigative work. If you would like to donate please call us on 01483 524250 or visit our website: [www.league.org.uk/donate](http://www.league.org.uk/donate).



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