

# HUNTING WITH DOGS

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Against Cruel Sports, even though I  
was its Chairman and Chief  
Executive...”*(Richard Course)

Read what the defectors say...

## INTRODUCTION

For decades opponents of hunting have argued that the activity should be banned because it is cruel and unnecessary. It is hard to see how necessity is relevant in these circumstances but we all agree that responsible citizens have a duty to ensure we do not inflict unnecessary suffering on animals whatever the circumstances.

Nevertheless it is also the responsibility of organisations and politicians who claim to have genuine welfare objectives in mind, to ensure that if their campaigns are successful that wildlife will benefit.

This leaflet looks at the views of several significant leaders and members of the animal rights movement spanning thirty years. All have held key roles within the League Against Cruel Sports which forms a significant part of either the Campaign for Protection of Hunted Animals, Deadline 2000 or more recently, Countdown to A Ban.

In each of the following examples the individual concerned have not mysteriously become pro hunting. What has happened is a bold and brave acceptance that laws seek to abolish regulated hunting are, in most circumstances, likely to lead to worsening animal welfare standards in the UK and thus are likely to inflict increased suffering on the wild mammal population.

These people are not pro-hunting. Nor have they a view on any of the other issues relating to this topic. Theirs is a position taken as a result of years of careful study and public campaigning. Without exception they acknowledge that this is not a simple issue but that the current proposals of the lead organisations are flawed.

In addition, a growing proportion of the veterinary industry has expressed its concern about the possibility of legislation that bans hunting with dogs. For welfare reasons alone, two out of three rural vets have opposed a ban.

Those of us in the Countryside Alliance Animal Welfare Group urge anybody who has a genuine interest in improving animal welfare standards to think very carefully about the comments contained within this leaflet. We all agree that there can be no liberty to be cruel, but we also should agree that in the real world the culling and management of populations is a necessity and must therefore be carried out to the highest standards.

It takes courage to reach conclusions about animal welfare which are at odds to ones natural instincts. However we all have responsibilities in this regard and to shirk them would be to neglect the animals at the centre of this debate.

The Alliance believes that farmers, landholders and managers should have a range of control methods at their disposal. No one method is necessarily suitable for all circumstances. The Alliance therefore supports shooting, trapping and snaring as methods of controlling pest species providing they are carried out by properly qualified and competent operatives.

**Richard Course**  
**Former Chairman and Executive Director of the League Against  
Cruel Sports for thirteen years**

“Having spent 13 years of my life leading a professional campaign against hunting, I know just how easy it is to mislead people, compared with the difficulties of informing them. It is very easy for the League Against Cruel Sports to say “it is wrong to kill an animal just for fun”. People who are not conversant with farming, wildlife conservation and nature will, of course, readily agree with such a statement.

It is a lot more difficult to get the truth and the facts through ears that do not want to hear, and eyes that do not want to see. **But after 13 years of discussing and debating this issue I found it impossible to ignore the truth and facts about hunting.**

**I have come to despise the League Against Cruel Sports, even though I was its Chairman and Chief Executive, simply because these people know as well as I do that the abolition of hunting will not make any difference to the welfare of foxes, hares or deer.** Mankind will always be at war with creatures that damage or destroy. Just as people in towns and cities will not tolerate rats in their houses, farmers cannot be expected to tolerate foxes in hen houses or deer in wheat fields.

To abolish hunting is to say: “You must not kill pests by the relatively quick kill or escape method of hunting but you can kill by other methods that cause a lot more real pain and suffering. When one asks “Why?” the only truthful answer is “Because I do not like the fact that you get some enjoyment out of it.” Frankly, it does not matter whether a man in a slaughterhouse enjoys his job or hates his job. Normal people enjoy their Sunday roast and their bacon for breakfast. It really is as simple as that.

I still have a concern about animals suffering pain. So do most hunting people. They do not go hunting for blood and guts and pain. They simply know that foxes have to be killed and they also know that the quick death in the jaws of a dog is preferable to hours or even days in a snare.

Moreover, there could not be any hunting if the quarry species were exterminated. Therefore, hunting people make sure that there is quarry around for the next season. The fishermen and game-shooters do the same. But if we take away their incentives by abolition we will lose much of our wild life and that is what real conservation is all about. It is the difference between idealism and reality.

It took me 13 years to accept that point, not 13 minutes of reading misleading and professional propaganda.” (*April 1988*)

**James Barrington**  
**Former Executive Director of the League Against Cruel Sports from**  
**1988 to December 1995**

“What is often missing from the argument is a willingness to look at the full picture and to discuss the repercussions of a ban. One thing is certain: if hunting with dogs is to be proscribed, other methods to kill foxes currently in use will take its place. These methods are not all preferable to hunting as far as the suffering of animals is concerned and some will be harder, if not impossible, to bring to account.

For example, shooting is often hailed as a humane alternative to hunting, but it can take different forms. The marksman with a rifle and spotlight may be one, but in certain parts of the countryside, such as wooded areas, rifles cannot be used and so shotguns will be the weapons chosen. Shooting a fox with a shotgun at a distance greater than 25 yards can cause injury rather than death and yet this is bound to happen more often in a post ban period. The use of the snare will also increase.

The real danger is that we move from a position where some animals are, of course, caused suffering to one in which more animals are caused an even greater degree of suffering, though virtually no one will see it or know about it, let alone control it. Where, then, is the overall gain in animal welfare? (Tribune – 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2001)

“What fox hunting does do, however, is provide a reason for some landowners and farmers to tolerate foxes to a greater degree than they might otherwise. Simply remove the hunt and the fox’s status is fundamentally changed, with the result that some farmers and landowners will deal with the animal in other ways.” (Smallholder – February 1998)

“The alternative [to hunting], as laid out in the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill, which has just passed its second reading, would be a series of draconian measures which are likely to cause more suffering to foxes – though probably unseen and unaccountable.” (Smallholder – February 1998)

**Liz White**  
**Ex hunt saboteur and former member of the League Against Cruel Sports who now hunts**

“Hunting is part of the country life and destroying it will put a lot of people out of work and be worse for the animals. They will have to be shot instead – and that means many will be wounded. We kill them outright.” (Sunday Times – 17<sup>th</sup> March 2002)

**Mark Halford**  
**Ex hunt saboteur and former member of the LACS and Hunt Saboteurs Association**

“I am aware that few of the total number of foxes killed each year are, in fact, accounted for by hunting with hounds, but that doesn’t make it any less a reasonable method of control. Compared with shooting, gassing and trapping – which are often indiscriminate, often inefficient and clearly detrimental to other wildlife – give me hunting any day.” (Daily Telegraph – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2000)

“At our last meet of the season, we killed a slow fox very quickly in the open after a short run. It had been shot and wounded and was dying of gangrene. Now, wouldn’t you rather see foxes killed instantly by a hound, instead of suffering for weeks like that one did?” (Daily Telegraph – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2000)

“The fox is killed instantly and I believe it is a humane killing. I have seen many worse sights where foxes have been left injured after being shot and were riddled with gangrene. But when you’re hunting you kill it or you don’t.” (The Times – 26<sup>th</sup> December 2001)

“I was nervous about chasing and killing a fox, but now I can say I have never seen anything cruel and I really enjoy it.” (The Times – 26<sup>th</sup> December 2000)

## Graham Sirl

### **Spent nine years as Head of West Country Operations for the League Against Cruel Sports and left in May 2001**

“Having recently left the League Against Cruel Sports after nine years as head of Westcountry operations, I now feel I should put forward my own views on deer hunting with hounds.

I have not changed my view that hunting with hounds is unnecessary and involves cruelty to the individual deer being hunted. However, I do now believe that hunting with hounds does play an integral part in the management system for deer on Exmoor and the Quantocks. In some instances, hunting in general is a constitutive part of Westcountry rural community life. Those who do not acknowledge this to be true, or similarly choose to ignore same, are turning their backs on an argument they know is difficult to win.

Before going to the Westcountry, I had followed deer hunting in the New Forest. There this form of hunting was truly only carried out for recreational purposes. Management was carried out by Forestry Commission keepers and the use of the rifle. Following the commission's ban on deer hunting on its land, the forestry authorities increased cull figures. This was not surprising as they do regard deer as pests. In the Westcountry, more deer are shot than killed by hounds. **Take away hunting and the management system will break down.**

**Over the years, and many meetings with landowners and others, I have come to the conclusion that in the event of a total hunt ban, the deer population will be decimated. This view is shared by many, including some who remain independent on the hunting issue.**

As well as the 50-plus registered stalkers already operating on Exmoor, a ban will attract an influx of inexperienced guns from outside the area. The end result will be a significant drop in deer numbers, together with an increase in injured and wounded animals. Because of landowners such as the National Park and the National Trust, the deer will survive, but it will take many years before the population recovers to today's figures.

**Sadly, a ban on hunting will not save one animal's life. The current Bill before Parliament will do little for animal welfare.** It seeks the abolition of one method of killing, hunting. Unfortunately, it still leaves many more, which will continue to be used for so long as they are legal. Greater protection is needed for the quarry species, therefore prior to, or following a ban, amendments must be made to the Wild Mammals Protection Act 1986. Failure to bring in such protection will inevitably lead to an increase in activities such as fox, deer and hare drives. This will be nothing short of unmanaged, indiscriminate slaughter.

Deer must also become an asset to the local community via tourism, not to be hunted, but to be viewed and photographed by visitors and residents alike. Finally, I would urge all those currently involved in deer management, on both sides of the argument, to sit down and plan for the future. Hunting as we know it could be finished. It is up to you to seek and find the humane alternative before it is too late.” (*letter to regional press – 10<sup>th</sup> May 2001*)

## Miles Cooper

### **Spent twelve years as representative and investigator for the Hunt Saboteurs Association, the League Against Cruel Sports, the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Campaign for Protection of Hunted Animals and left in May 2002**

“Once again hunting is under consideration by the Labour government. In the not too distant future the public will probably be urged by anti-hunt groups to support a ban. There are certain implications of which the public should be aware. All hunting bills have exempted ‘gun-packs’: this form of hunting involves hounds being put into a wood where they flush foxes from cover in order that they may be shot. This practise will most likely continue after a ban. For many years I campaigned (with the League Against Cruel Sports and the Hunt Saboteur Association) for a ban on hunting yet my research has led me to conclude that a ban on ‘sport’ hunting would be detrimental to animal welfare.

Such a ban would destroy the paradoxical relationship between Hunts and the fox. This relationship, provides the fox with a degree of protection through higher farmer tolerance and arises out of the dual function of the hunt in removing a pest and providing sport. A ‘sport’ hunting ban will alter the status of the fox and leave farmers with little reason to tolerate foxes on their land. As a result there will be an increase in shooting.

Flushing to guns, whilst sounding clean and clinical, runs the risk of foxes being wounded before either escaping or being killed by hunting dogs: a factor not present during traditional ‘sport’ hunting days. Also ‘gun-packs’ can hunt and kill a far higher number of foxes than traditional hunts: in terms of numbers of animals hunted and killed greater suffering is caused. In addition, ‘sport’ hunting’s season finishes as foxcubs are being born. Since fox predation is concentrated at this time of year a ban on ‘sport’ hunting, with lower farmer tolerance, will increase the likelihood of culling centred on breeding earths: a practise which carries with it an increased welfare cost since orphaned cubs will need to be located and killed. This gives rise to serious animal welfare implications.

I urge your readers to think carefully about the likely animal welfare implications of a ban on ‘sport’ hunting. For those who genuinely seek improvements all is not lost however. Indeed, by placing all hunting under the strict control of a statutory licensing system, and by amending existing legislation, it will be possible to generally improve wild mammal welfare as opposed to allowing the current situation to degenerate into chaos.” (*letter to the regional press – July 2002*)



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