

A CASE FOR A PROPER BAN ON HUNTING

Glen Black, Protect the Wild
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our report, titled **A Case for a Proper Ban on Hunting**, offers a thorough examination of hunting practices during the 2023/24 season. It focuses on fox, hare, and deer hunting with hounds in England and Wales.

The report utilised a combination of data from anti-hunting groups, public reports, and activist observations to evaluate the prevalence and impact of hunting on wildlife, communities, and individuals. And it examined policing and shortcomings in existing legislation, going on to propose recommendations for a more robust legal framework to properly ban the hunting of mammals with dogs.

INTRODUCTION

This report responds to mounting concerns about the efficacy of the Hunting Act 2004 in prohibiting mammal hunting with hounds.

Despite this legislation's intent to halt such practices, ongoing reports from anti-hunting groups raise questions about the continuous pursuit and killing of wildlife by hunting groups across England and Wales. Commissioned by Protect the Wild, this report aims to comprehensively evaluate hunting practices during the most recent season. Its primary goal is to examine reported activities of various hunting groups, analyse the frequency of wildlife pursuits and killings, and assess their impact on local communities and wildlife populations.



PHOTO CREDIT: SOUTH NORFOLK HUNT SABOTEURS

KEY FINDINGS

Protect the Wild's A Case for a Proper Ban on Hunting report details widespread wildlife persecution during the 2023/24 hunting season, documented through incidents reported by anti-hunting activists and the public.

Despite legislative strides, the Hunting Act has failed to eradicate wildlife persecution, with many hunts persisting in illegal practices nearly two decades after the ban. Matt Longman, the Police Chiefs' Council lead

on hunting, contends that trail hunting serves as a smokescreen for illegal fox hunting, exploiting loopholes in the Hunting Act and undermining its enforcement.

Furthermore, policing responses to hunting incidents vary across regions, with proactive measures seen in some areas like Gloucestershire Police, while others struggle with inter-force coordination and resource allocation.



PROTECT THE WILD'S MOST NOTABLE FINDINGS FOR THE 2023/24 SEASON INCLUDE:

The financial burden of policing hunting events is significant, exemplified by the **£14,322 spent on policing the Kent Hounds' Boxing Day parade**, highlighting the costs involved in managing these activities.

Regular operational costs associated with policing hunting activities, like Leicestershire Police's expenditure of £7,350.78 under Operation Enlighten for 2023/24, highlight financial challenges and resource allocation issues faced by law enforcement.

Instances of coercion and aggression by hunt supporters, such as blocking and pursuing anti-hunting activists for miles, underscore the confrontational nature of these encounters and their impact on community safety.

Gloucestershire Police stands out for its active response to hunting-related incidents, issuing fines and taking decisive actions during operations, contrasting with reported instances of inadequate response in other regions.

Nottingham Hunt Saboteurs documented instances where **hunts used deceptive tactics, such as claiming to follow trails laid with imported fox urine**, despite evidence disproving such claims through investigative reporting.

The complexity of **policing hunting events is compounded by logistical challenges** and the need for coordinated responses across agencies, as seen in incidents handled between Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Police.

Violence associated with hunts remains a concern, with documented cases of physical assaults on anti-hunting activists, highlighting safety risks and community tensions exacerbated by these activities.

Traffic offences and road havoc are widespread within the hunting industry, with quad bikes following the hunt regularly seen with more passengers than they're legally allowed to carry on a public road as well as missing front and rear number plates.

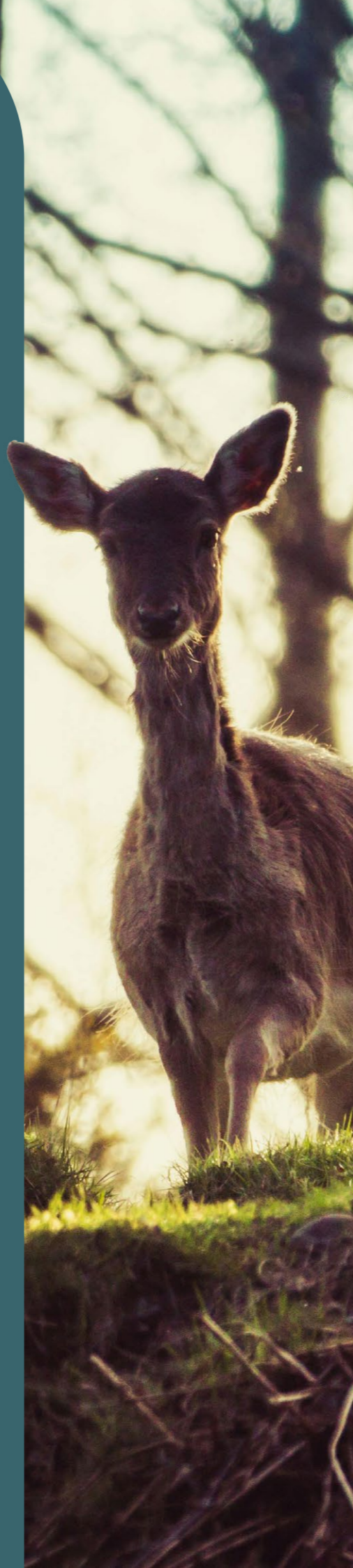
The impact of trail hunting, despite purported regulatory frameworks, includes instances where **hounds inadvertently or intentionally chase live quarry**, raising questions about the effectiveness of current oversight.

Overall, the report concludes that existing legislation and enforcement efforts are inadequate to effectively prevent wildlife persecution, underscoring the need for comprehensive reforms to protect wildlife and ensure safety for communities.

REASONING BEHIND THE REPORT

From the onset of our involvement in the anti-hunt movement, we have been keenly aware of the widespread prevalence of illegal hunting practices throughout the UK. Through these years, our focus and advocacy against hunting led us to acknowledge the invaluable efforts of hunt saboteur and hunt monitor groups. These dedicated groups tirelessly combat illegal hunting through diverse methods, often documenting their observations and experiences on the ground. However, we noticed there was a lack of centralised collation and comprehensive analysis of the data and reports compiled by these groups. Despite the commendable work of these individuals and organisations in documenting first-hand accounts, there was a need to consolidate these scattered reports into a singular, comprehensive overview.

To address this gap, last year marked the first of our now annual reports on the findings of a six-month-long initiative aimed at consolidating this scattered data into one place. The primary objective of this endeavour was to create a consolidated report that presents a detailed overview of the prevalent issues surrounding illegal hunting. This report stands as the second year of our rigorous research efforts, intending to shed light on the impact that hunting has on both wildlife and people and supporting our calls for new legislation to better protect wild animals.



METHODOLOGY

Protect the Wild’s A Case for a Proper Ban on Hunting report followed, for the most part, the same guidelines as Hunting: A Case for Change. We looked through 2312 reports published by hunt saboteur and monitor groups, newspapers and members of the public from 1 July 2023 to 30 April 2024. Information sourced from social media, news websites, and in some cases direct contact between Protect the Wild and the people involved.

Using qualitative assessment, we extracted numbers from the texts to compile a database broken up into categories of incidents that the anti-hunting movement has long opposed and raised awareness of.

Category	Number	Definition
Foxes chased	335	Foxes seen pursued by one or more hounds. This might be directly behind the fox, or where it’s clear the huntsman is pursuing a fox.
Foxes killed	29	Foxes seen killed by hounds, or where the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming.
Hares chased	40	Hares seen pursued by one or more hounds. This might be directly behind the hare, or where it’s clear the huntsman is pursuing a hare.
Hares killed	1	Hares seen killed by hounds, or where the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming.
Deer chased	150	Deer seen pursued by one or more hounds. This might be directly behind the deer, or where it’s clear the huntsman is pursuing a deer. In the case of staghounds, only the intended deer was counted.
Deer killed	26	Deer seen killed by hounds, or where the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming.
Dig outs	6	Dig outs caught in the act, or where there is clear circumstantial evidence of a dig out connected to the meet.
Traffic offences	327	Illegal road or vehicle use including overloaded quad bikes on public roads, missing front and rear number plates, MOT or tax more than a month overdue, and dangerous driving. Photo or video evidence was required.

Road havoc	280	Disruption to traffic on public roads by hunt, hounds or supporters. Only incidents with uninvolved members of the public were counted. Also included trespass onto railway tracks. Photo or video evidence was required.
Minor attacks	239	Physical harassment and attacks that don't result in serious or lasting injury, or attacks on vehicles. Also included were bigoted verbal attacks such as transphobia, racism, and ableism.
Major attacks	16	Physical attacks with a weapon or that result in serious injury. Also included attacks where there was no serious injury but the scale of damage was high.
Trespass	251	Hunt using land that they are not allowed on, whether to hack or hunt. This might be widely known such as National Trust land or land that's clearly not meant for hunting such as cemeteries. Counts other land where the report explicitly states knowledge of a lack of a permission.
Sett interference	124	Blocked badger sett entrances, hunt or support walking on sett entrances or hounds marking to ground at setts.
Other non-quarry	99	Any animal chased or killed that's not traditional hunting quarry, i.e. fox, hare or deer.
Police attended	351	The number of police cars reported to have been present during a meet.

In the case of foxes, hares and deer killed, the figures assume a preceding pursuit. While hounds sometimes 'chop' an animal, in which they kill with no or very little chase, this isn't common. As a result, when considering the figures for kills, it's important to keep in mind that they also involved the hounds chasing the creature beforehand.

The two key differences in data collection for this report when compared with Hunting: A Case for Change are:

- The category of "Other non-quarry" in the 2022/23 report was split into the "Sett interference" and "Other non-quarry" categories in the current report. This was a result of recognising the overwhelming rates of sett interference looked at during the 2022/23 report.
- Much greater attention was given to traffic offences, including analysing photos and videos for evidence of overloaded quads and missing or mismatching number plates. This is reflected in the much higher figure when compared with the previous season's data.

It's important to note that Protect the Wild is not gathering primary evidence. A Case for a Proper Ban on Hunting is an account of reports made concerning the actions and behaviour of hunts across England and Wales. Doing so provides an overview of how hunts are affecting human and wildlife communities across the two countries during the 2023/24 season.

The data was sourced from a total of 88 hunt saboteur and monitor groups and anti-hunting campaigns. All other reports including news articles, personal social media posts and police statements formed an 89th category named "Public". By comparison, the 2022/23 report gathered data from 76 sources including the public. Often this meant multiple reports would cite the same incident, in which case the data was cross-referenced before assessing the impact of that incident. In other cases, similar incidents might have two different stated outcomes. Where that happened, Protect the Wild erred on the side of caution and marked it down in the least severe category available.

In all circumstances, Protect the Wild took a conservative approach in its qualitative assessment. For example, if it was unclear whether hounds killed a fox, then it wasn't counted towards the final "foxes killed" figure. Or, if an assault was mentioned but no or few details were given, then it was marked as a minor attack. A Case for a Proper Ban on Hunting therefore represents the low end of incidents during the 2023/24 hunting season in England and Wales.

Protect the Wild did not consider mink/ otter hunting packs or hare coursing for this report.



CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS AND TRENDS

Despite the legal framework in place, hunting practices continue, exploiting loopholes and gaps in legislation. Acts of violence against activists have been recurrent, creating a hostile environment that inhibits holding hunts accountable. Hunts often operate without oversight or observation, potentially leading to increased wildlife pursuits and community issues beyond reported figures.

The report highlights the imperative for stricter regulations and enforcement, advocating for a comprehensive ‘Hunting of Mammals Bill.’ This proposed legislation aims to remove all loopholes and act as a watertight ban on all hunting with hounds. It would involve imposing stricter penalties for violations, implementing enhanced measures to prevent unobserved hunts from flouting the law. Recommendations put forth include a ban on ‘trail hunting’, making landowners more liable, increasing ‘search and seizure’ powers, and ensuring hunting groups are held accountable for their actions. The report concludes by urging policymakers to consider these critical insights and put their support behind the Hunting of Mammals Bill as the most effective way to properly ban all hunting with dogs.

IMPACT ON WILDLIFE



FOXES

Data gathered from throughout the 2023/24 hunting season revealed that hunts chased 335 foxes and killed a further 29, totalling 364 incidents of fox hunting. There were at least a further five cases where evidence strongly suggested hunts had killed a fox although the kill itself wasn’t seen. This figure broadly mirrors Protect the Wild’s analysis of the previous 2022/23 season where it was a respective 324/42 split totalling 366 foxes hunted.

Much like the 2022/23 season, though, these reports were not evenly spread across the country. **The five hunts with the most instances of fox hunting attributed to them accounted for more than one-third of the total:**

Hunt	Foxes chased	Foxed killed	Total
Blackmore and Sparkford Vale	43	2	45
Beaufort Hunt	27	2	29
Wynnstay Hunt	22	3	25
North Cotswold Hunt	17	0	17
Warwickshire Hunt	16	1	17
			133

By itself, the Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt (BSV) accounted for 12.83% of total reported fox chases and kills during the season by itself. This is up from last year’s 9.25%. The 2022/23 season top spot was occupied by the Warwickshire Hunt, with a similar percentage of incidents (12%). This year, the Warwickshire Hunt was responsible for just 4.77%. The report will look more closely at this later. Meanwhile, reports of the Beaufort Hunt accounted for 8.05% of the 2023/24 season’s total – nearly doubling up on last season’s 3.82%.

Beyond these five, a further four hunts were associated with ten or more reports of chasing and killing foxes:

Hunt	Foxes chased	Foxed killed	Total
South Dorset Hunt	13*	1	14
Essex and Suffolk Hunt	13	1	14
Cattistock Hunt	13*	0	13
Cheshire Hounds	11	0	11
Eggesford Hunt	8	2	10
			52

* Includes a fox that was chased during a joint meet of the Cattistock Hunt and South Dorset Hunt on 25 January 2024

Although these are the most prolific culprits, a vast majority of foxhound packs were reportedly witnessed chasing a fox at least once during the season. Of the 109 packs reportedly involved in some sort of incident, 37 packs weren't reported to have hunted a fox. That means around two-thirds of hunts were witnessed chasing or killing at least one fox throughout the season.

Even for those not reported to have got onto a fox, many were seen involved in equally harmful anti-wildlife behaviour. Anti-hunting activists saw five packs rioting onto deer and another three rioting onto hares. In one extreme case, the Taunton Vale Foxhounds were present at a joint meet of the East Cornwall Hunt where Kernow Sabs and West Cornwall Hunt Saboteurs witnessed a group about to start digging out a badger set. The Taunton Vale huntsman, Ben Lowe, was watching on at the time.

Overall, just 28 packs weren't witnessed causing some sort of harm to wildlife. That's 25.68% of 109. The majority of these were packs visited between just one and three times by anti-hunting activists. It's therefore possible to speculate that the lack of wildlife

persecution on their part was a tactical decision, believing they could spare a day of no hunting and get back to business once sabs and monitors weren't present.

The three-quarters of hunts witnessed chasing a fox ran the length and breadth of England and Wales. That means hunting foxes isn't a problem of a single hunt or even a specific region but endemic within the hunting industry.

One other notable claim made by a number of groups throughout the season was the ongoing use of bagged foxes. Protect the Wild recorded that sab groups strongly suspected the use of bagged foxes at a meet 16 times throughout the season. While there was no incident as conclusive as the Cotswold Hunt bagged fox found in an artificial earth during the 2022/23 season, in one case East Yorkshire Coast Hunt Saboteurs said it caught two terriermen "manhandling a live fox". Video it shared showed the two men passing what appears to be a small fox between themselves next to a white pick-up truck. The incident occurred during a joint meet of the Bedale Hunt and Zetland Hunt on 18 November 2023.

In one unique case, Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs relayed that a hunt supporter had seen a fox chased up into the branches of trees by hounds from the North Cotswold Hunt. It appeared that the fox had escaped into the trunk and climbed up its hollow interior. Although reports of this are rare by sabs and monitors, Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs noted that this behaviour is "well documented in hunting literature".

Welsh Border Hunt Sabs shared a photo on 18 February 2024 that sums up the impact of hunting on foxes. Captioned "The reality of

hunting!", it shows the top half of a dead fox with some intestine and other innards spread across their fur. Most shocking of all, though, is the eyeball. It has popped out of its socket and sits on top of the head, the pupil fully dilated, vacantly staring. This horrific image, taken at a meet of the Radnor and West Hereford Hunt, encapsulates the stress and terror that hunted foxes experience.

HARES

Reports for the season revealed hunts chasing 40 hares and killing one. Most of these incidents were the result of foxhound packs rioting onto hares while searching for a fox. Of the 40 incidents, only seven were connected with beagle or hare-hunting harrier packs. **They were:**

- Black Combe and District Beagles x 2
- Catterick Beagles
- Dunston Harriers
- Royal Agricultural Beagles
- Pimpernel Beagles
- Warwickshire Beagles

It was the Cottesmore Hunt, a foxhound pack, that killed a hare. North London Hunt Saboteurs said the hunt's hounds rioted onto and killed a hare during its 18 November 2023 meet in Gunby, Lincolnshire.

These figures are broadly similar to the 2022/23 season, when there were reports of hunts chasing 29 hares. There were no reports of hunts killing hares.



According to Wildlife Guardian, during the 2022/23 season there were 57 beagle packs, 11 harrier packs and seven basset packs active across England and Wales. There was at least one fewer hare hound pack by the 2023/24 season because Sheffield Hunt Saboteurs reported on 15 September 2023 that the Ecclesfield Beagles had disbanded. Meanwhile, Severn Vale Hunt Saboteurs reported in the run-up to the 2023/24 season that the Leadon Vale Basset Hounds had disbanded. The sab group later reported, on 2 March 2024, that the Woolaston Bassets had ‘scooped up the dregs’ of the Leadon Vale, effectively amalgamating the two packs.

Of further note on hare hunting, whilst harriers were traditionally hare-hunting hounds, today’s harrier packs are mostly

trained to hunt foxes. There are only a couple of true hare hunting harrier packs remaining – Dunston Harriers and Holcombe Harriers – and both of those were reported throughout the season to have started following artificially-laid trails.

Without those two, there remained 58 packs of hare hounds active throughout the season. The fact that there were only six reported incidents is a testament to the impact of direct action. Beagle and basset packs are hunted on foot rather than from horseback. That means the hunt isn’t able to outrun saboteurs and monitors, making them more vulnerable to activists. In some ways, it’s an achievement to have caught six separate incidents of beagles hunting hares at all.

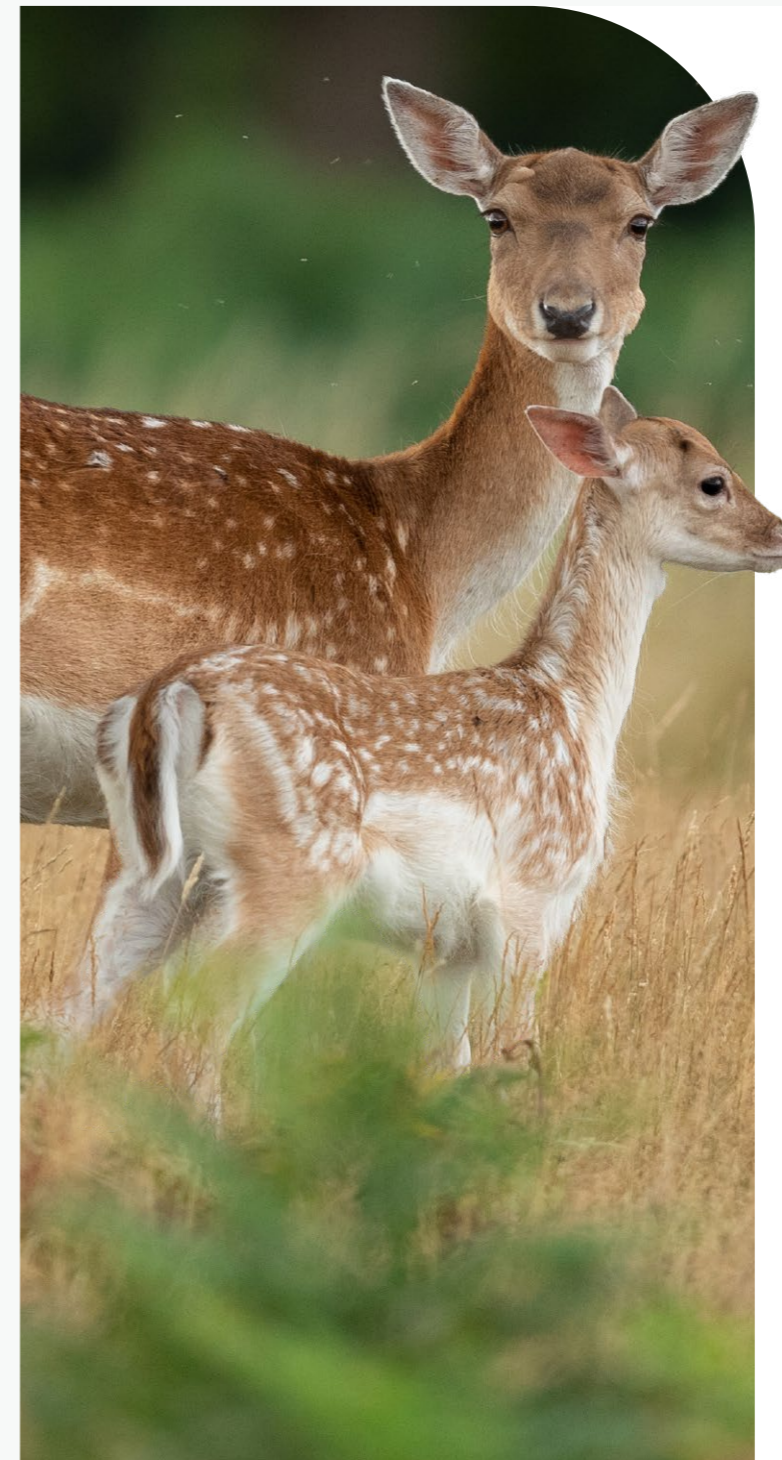
terrain of the Newlands Valley made keeping up with the hunt more difficult. These three key factors – lack of light, adverse weather and rough terrain – likely emboldened the Black Combe and District Beagles to continue despite the presence of sabs. As a result, Lancashire Hunt Saboteurs reported that the pack chased at least two hares. This wasn’t the only case of hare hunts continuing after sabs showing up but others will be looked at later in the report.

Most beagle and basset packs are able to hunt with relative impunity. They are less frequently visited by activists and therefore are likely to be chasing and killing hares more regularly. Nonetheless, the impact that sabs and monitors turning up to foot pack meets has two clear messages. Firstly, that anti-hunting direct action works. Secondly, that these hunts are continuing as though the Hunting Act doesn’t apply to them.

Date	Hunt	Group
18 November 2023	Warwickshire Beagles	Severn Vale Hunt Saboteurs
10 December 2023	Black Combe and District Beagles	Public (reported by Stop Hunting on the Nation’s Land)
26 December 2023	Royal Agricultural College Beagles	Bath Hunt Saboteurs
21 January 2024	Black Combe and District Beagles	Lancashire Hunt Saboteurs
27 January 2024	Pimpernel Beagles	Wildlife Crime Action
28 February 2024	Catterick Beagles	Calder Valley Hunt Saboteur

In five of the reported incidents, sabs and monitors found hounds chasing a hare as they arrived and before the hunt was aware of the activists’ presence. Once their presence became known to the hunt, the huntsman gathered the pack up and returned to the meet. This reflects a general apprehension amongst beagle and basset packs. When sabs turned up before they left their meet, they abandoned that day’s hunting altogether.

There were a few exceptions, however. The first was on the 21 January 2024 meet of the Black Combe and District Beagles. Lancashire Hunt Saboteurs reported that the hunt, having met and started at 7.30am, continued with a full morning’s hunting before packing up. Activists faced low light and extremely adverse weather conditions from the impending Storm Isha, while the



DEER

There was a total of 150 incidents of hunts chasing deer and 26 cases of hunts killing deer. As with hares, though, this total figure is the result of two different contexts that offer two different stories.

The first is hunts that intentionally chased deer. The 2023/24 season saw sabs and monitors attending more staghound meets than ever before. Reports cited incidents at 53 different meets, which were scattered throughout the season, with a handful more resulting in no incidents at all. The Devon and Somerset Staghounds and the Quantock Staghounds saw roughly equal amounts of attention, but the Tiverton Staghounds mostly escaped observation by activists. There were no public reports of the elusive Cheldon Buckhounds, a pack that South West Animal Rights Movement claimed is still active.

In total, staghound packs were responsible for 63 incidents of hounds chasing deer – although this figure doesn’t include the herds of deer that are harassed before the hunt’s

desired victim is separated out. They were also responsible for 17 of the 26 deer killed.

Hunt	Chased	Killed
Devon and Somerset Staghounds	23	12
Quantock Staghounds	40	4
Tiverton Staghounds	0	1
	63	17

There were just three meets during the season where a staghound pack reportedly failed to chase or kill deer:

- Devon and Somerset Staghounds – 10 August 2023
- Devon and Somerset Staghounds – 15 August 2023
- Quantock Staghounds – 15 February 2024

There were also two meets where North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs said the Quantock Staghounds didn't engage in any "prolonged" chasing of deer. The first was on 18 March 2024 and the second on 28 March 2024.

Nonetheless, the high ratio of deer chased and killed by staghound packs reveals how lethal the few remaining deer hound packs are nearly 20 years after the Hunting Act.

The other half of the deer figures tells a story of how the very presence of a pack of hunting hounds in the countryside is a threat to wildlife in itself. Foxhound and harrier packs were responsible for 87 of the total reported deer chase incidents and nine kills. This is due to the hounds erroneously following the scent of a deer rather than the intended quarry, also known as 'rioting'.

There were 39 different hunts connected with rioting onto deer and chasing them, and four connected with rioting onto deer and killing

them. These figures include many of the most prolific fox hunts including the Beaufort Hunt, BSV, South Dorset Hunt and Wynnstay Hunt. However, it also includes hunts at the other end of the scale such as Braes of Derwent Hunt and Taunton Vale Foxhounds, which rarely had reports of chasing or killing foxes. As with the figures for rioted upon hares, the figures show it's part and parcel of hunts throughout England and Wales.

In three instances, deer were even chased at a meet that was otherwise a legitimate trail hunt, highlighting the threat a pack of hounds poses to wildlife regardless of why they are there. They happened twice during a meet of the Suffolk Hunt and once during a meet of the Waveney and Norfolk Harriers.

Of the four deer killed by rioting hounds, two didn't appear on the list of chases: Albrighton and Woodland Hunt and Fitzwilliam Hunt.

The most curious incident of all was shared by West Cornwall Hunt Saboteurs on 21 January 2024. The group shared several long-distance photos of hounds in a field along with hunt staff dressed in a green jacket. He, along with three casually dressed people, are on foot in a field. The scene is reminiscent of hunting with a beagle pack. **As a result, West Cornwall Hunt Saboteurs initially identified them as the Lambo Beagles and said it was:**

“Sneaking around in the bushes nr Stithians. Allegedly they chased deer and then shot a stag.”

It is unusual for footpacks to hunt deer, even accidentally, let alone kill one. Even more so by shooting them. If the report – which initially came from a member of the public – is accurate, it reflects a very uncommon format for a hunt to take.

The group later retracted the claim that it was “not the original Lambo Beagles” but

an offshoot of that pack. Protect the Wild asked West Cornwall Hunt Saboteurs about the incident during the writing of this report but no further information has come to light. The hunt therefore remains unnamed.

Ultimately, the figures show that hunts are a threat to deer whatever their type or intention. In cases where the hunt has set out to intentionally pursue deer, the activity is particularly cruel. The National Trust banned deer hunting from its land in 1997 following a report it had commissioned into the activity. Dr Patrick Bateson found that deer were more stressed and damaged after a three

hour pursuit by hounds than after a collision with a vehicle.

Three hours was taken as an average length of chase, but they will often go for longer. North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs reported on an 11 September 2023 meet of the Quantock Staghounds where it chased a single stag for six hours. Therefore, it is essential to remember that while the numbers for deer – and foxes and hares – are a horrifying story in themselves, each also contains a much deeper story of cruelty and terror.

DIG OUTS

There were fewer reports of dig outs this time around. Protect the Wild saw just six reports, compared with last season's ten.

Date	Hunt
21 September 2023	Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt
25 September 2023	Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt
14 October 2023	East Cornwall Hunt
4 November 2023	Mendip Farmers Hunt
10 February 2024	Herefordshire and Clifton Hunt
2 March 2024	Taunton Vale Foxhounds East Cornwall Hunt (joint meet)



Undoubtedly a major factor in this near-halving of figures was the exposure of the Avon Vale Hunt by the Hunt Saboteurs Association. It made the private footage public in February 2023, leading to the disbanding of the hunt and prosecution of some of the people involved.

This appears to have sent waves through the hunting industry, one outcome of which was far less willingness to engage in dig outs when sabs and monitors are present. When the activists aren't around, however, some hunts reportedly continue as normal. **For example, Kernow Sabs said of the 14 October meet where no activists were present that:**

“East Cornwall hunt not only hunted several foxes at their opening meet on Saturday but also dug one out in front of everyone.”

Then, in March, West Cornwall Hunt Saboteurs shared video from the 2 March joint meet between the Taunton Vale Foxhounds and East Cornwall Hunt. It showed three men walking away from the camera, one of whom had just got up from the ground. They walk uphill while a member of hunt staff is seen at the top with hounds. Groups present on the day explained that the three men were terriermen and that the hunt staff was the Taunton Vale huntsman. Furthermore, the location the sabs caught the terriermen was both a Site of Special Scientific Interest and contained a badger sett.

The fact that this practice continues despite its damning exposure of cruelty at a national level is an example of how committed some hunts are to continue hunting wildlife. However, like with hare hunting figures, we can also see in its reduction what impact the anti-hunting movement – and in particular those on the ground – is having even as the law struggles.



IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

HUNT VIOLENCE

The 2023/24 season once again saw prolific low level aggression against sabs and monitors as well as a number of acts of serious violence. In total, Protect the Wild found 239 reports of minor attacks and 16 reports of major attacks. For comparison, Protect the Wild found 198 minor attacks during the 2022/23 season and 13 major attacks. The definitions of these are found in the methodology section.

Sixty four different hunts were associated with minor attacks, ranging from the Albrighton and Woodland Hunt through to the Zetland Hunt. That is roughly 40% of all the hunts that sabs and monitors visited throughout the season. For the most part, sabs and monitors reported just one or two instances of aggression and violence by hunts and their followers. However, some hunts faced regular reports of minor violence.

Hunt	Minor attacks
Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt	32
Cottesmore Hunt	23
Beaufort Hunt	14
Royal Artillery Hunt	11
Puckeridge and Essex Union Hunt	9
Cattistock Hunt	9

Some of these acts of minor violence stood out from the array of pushes, shoves and robberies.

Weymouth Animal Rights said that a 26 September 2023 meet of the BSV saw “rent-a-thugs” attack a sab from behind, stealing her camera, and repeatedly knocking her to the ground while the attackers assaulted another sab with a tree branch. They then stole a body camera and gizmo from this second sab. A week later, North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs wrote that “rent-a-thugs” with the BSV had stolen a camcorder and body camera from sabs in front of master Anthony Mayo during a meet on 3 October. The groups reported both incidents to the police. Then, on 19 February 2024, Dorset Echo said that Dorset Police had charged Shane Chapman with two counts of common assault and one count of theft. These related to the incidents described by the two sab groups.

Chapman previously received a two-year criminal behaviour order in 2018 after livestreaming poaching offences including catapulting pheasants and jumping on a pheasant as the bird attempted to escape.

In another unnerving incident, cars were attacked at the homes of two different hunt saboteurs. North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs and Weymouth Animal Rights both pointed fingers at “thugs supporting the... Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt” after car windows were smashed, tyres slashed, and attempts to enter houses were made on 5 October 2023. While the culprit(s) of the attack remain unknown, North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs noted that it came just days after the 3 October robberies.

There were also a number of incidents of bigotry, with groups citing racism several times. North London Hunt Saboteurs said one of their sabs faced racist abuse during an ‘away day’ with Cumbria Hunt Sabs at the Coniston Foxhounds. Staffordshire Hunt Saboteurs said it experienced racism from a “mob from the pub” during a North

Staffordshire Hunt meet at the Falcon Inn, Woore, on Boxing Day 2023. A rider with the Surrey Union Hunt was filmed making racist remarks at sabs during a 28 October 2023 meet that also saw widespread confrontations between drunk supporters and sabs. And on 6 January 2024, a member of the Wynnstay Hunt’s security team made racist remarks at a sab that ultimately led to a guilty plea in court on 15 July 2024.

Alongside racism, there were reports of hunt members or supporters engaging in sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. **And in one shocking incident of ableism, the Wight Sabs said of an 18 November 2023 meet:**

“Without doubt the most disturbing behaviour was when the Isle of Wight Foxhounds support team stood near [group vehicle] Raven and mocked our 18 year old navigator whilst his Mother went for a call of nature. They joked about his autism and how they were surprised he was left alone in the car but at least his Mother left the window open, they called him a spastic and said he’s still on the boob before resorting to paedophile comments.”

In a unique case of minor aggression, West Sussex Hunt Sabs reported that one hunt follower threw “bangers” at sab vehicles whilst they were on the road. The group said one banger “frightened an elder [member of the public], who was nothing to do with sabs”. This incident occurred during a meet of the Crawley and Horsham Hunt on 25 November 2023.

While these are some of the standout incidents, hunts across England and Wales were associated with low levels of aggression. Acts of serious violence were no less widespread although – fortunately – were much less commonplace.

Date	Hunt	Description	Groups
22 Aug 2023	Devon and Somerset Staghounds	Assailants assault sab and break his nose then rob equipment	Devon County Hunt Saboteurs Mendip Hunt Saboteurs
22 Aug 2023	Devon and Somerset Staghounds	Vandalise sab vehicle and drag sab out of it to assault them then rob equipment	Devon County Hunt Saboteurs Mendip Hunt Saboteurs
26 Sept 2023	Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt	Hunt follower attacks sab with thick branch	North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs Weymouth Animal Rights
30 Sept 2023	Flint and Denbigh Hunt	Whipper-in rides down sab in open field	North Wales Hunt Saboteurs Roaming Sabs
28 Oct 2023	Surrey Union Hunt	Hunt follower headbutts sabs	Brighton Hunt Saboteurs East Surrey Hunt Saboteurs Guildford Hunt Saboteurs North London Hunt Saboteurs Surrey Hunt Sabs South Coast Hunt Saboteurs Surrey Hunt Monitors West Sussex Hunt Saboteurs
18 Nov 2023	Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt	Rider tramples sab with horse	North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs Weymouth Animal Rights Wildlife Crime Action
18 Nov 2023	Weston and Banwell Harriers with West Somerset Vale	Terriermen attack sab with spade and kick and punch him whilst on the ground	Mendip Hunt Saboteurs Somerset Sabs
25 Nov 2023	South Shropshire Hunt	Terrierman drives quad into farm owner, knocking him to the ground and breaking his leg	Public
27 Nov 2023	Quantock Staghounds	Hunt master attacks sab with whip	Mendip Hunt Saboteurs North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs Wildlife Guardian
23 Dec 2023	Grove and Rufford Hunt	Co-ordinated attack on sab vehicle with weapons while sabs are inside	Sheffield Hunt Saboteurs
26 Dec 2023	Isle of Wight Foxhounds	Support team member punches sab in the eye, causing "extremely serious" injury	The Wight Sabs West Sussex Hunt Sabs

1 Jan 2024	Southdown and Eridge Hunt with East Sussex and Romney Marsh	Four assailants vandalise sab vehicle, repeatedly punch sab inside, and rob equipment	Connacht Hunt Saboteurs East Surrey Hunt Saboteurs South Coast Hunt Saboteurs
17 Feb 2024	Burton Hunt	Assailants attack sabs with broken pool cue and rocks	Lincoln Hunt Saboteurs Nottingham Hunt Saboteurs Sheffield Hunt Saboteurs
24 Feb 2024	Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt	Supporter punches sab in the back of their head and knocks them to the ground, requiring medical advice	Dorset Against Blood Sports East Kent Hunt Saboteurs East Surrey Hunt Saboteurs North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs South Coast Hunt Saboteurs Weymouth Animal Rights Wildlife Crime Action
24 Feb 2024	Middleton Hunt	Huntsman attacks sab to the ground with whip	Jorvik Hunt Sabs York Anti-Hunt League
22 April 2024	Quantock Staghounds	Follower seriously assaults elderly monitor	Mendip Hunt Saboteurs North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs Wildlife Guardian

In most cases, the serious violence appeared to be explosions of violence by hunts that faced increasing or ongoing pressure by activists. This is particularly clear in attacks by the two staghound packs. The 22 August 2023 incident during a meet of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds marked the first serious incident of violence by one of the three staghound packs since its saboteur and monitor scrutiny began ramping up at the start of last season.

These figures also highlight some hunts' willingness to use serious violence in the longer term. The BSV needs little explaining, but it is not the only one. The Grove and Rufford Hunt has long associations with dangerous attacks including one hunt follower driving their car at speed into the side of Manchester Hunt Saboteurs' vehicle in 2019

and a group of masked followers attacking Sheffield Hunt Saboteurs, including slashing tyres, in 2023. Both incidents ultimately resulted in at least one prosecution.

Although 16 acts of serious violence across the entire season equates to a very minor percentage, each one of those caused traumatic physical and potentially emotional damage to the victims. People who were there to prevent the harmful and criminal actions of hunts – or, in the case of the South Shropshire Hunt incident, a man that didn't want the hunt trespassing on his land. In the 19th year after legislation was supposed to have outlawed hunting, these attacks shouldn't be happening at all. Much like the aggression and violence landowners face when confronting hare coursers, attacks on sabs, monitors and other anti-hunt people are completely unjustifiable.

HUNT HAVOC

When looking at hunt havoc, Protect the Wild collected the figures into three categories: Road havoc (which included rail havoc), traffic offences and trespass. **The number of reported incidents falling within these categories was high:**

Category	Total
Road havoc	280
Traffic offences	327
Trespass	251
	858

TRAFFIC OFFENCES

The most outstanding of these are traffic offences, which included lack of MOT or tax, missing registration plates, and illegal use of a vehicle. Of the 128 hunts that had reports of criminal and anti-social behaviour made against them, 72 were involved in some sort of traffic offence.

The overwhelming majority of these offences were committed by terriermen and other hunt followers using quad bikes. Missing plates and overloaded quads were widespread, representing either a negligent attitude towards road safety or a wilful ignorance of road laws – or both.

Whatever the individual reason, it suggests such attitudes are normalised within the hunting community.

Some traffic offences stood out as particularly egregious. On 14 October 2023, for example, a Beaufort Hunt quad bike follower drove with a child passenger on

public roads. Photos shared by Cirencester Illegal Hunt Watch show the quad bike was designed only for a single passenger. At the same meet, the sab group said it saw a child “hanging on to the back of a 4x4 sitting on the spare wheel”. Meanwhile, there were numerous reports of quads designed for a single rider but carrying three people whilst on a public road. East Herts Sabs shared a video of one such instance from a 23 December 2023 meet of the Puckeridge and Essex Union Hunt, for example, while Northants Hunt Saboteurs shared a photo of one such overloaded quad at a 23 September 2023 meet of the Cottesmore Hunt.

In a slightly different type of traffic offence, Weymouth Animal Rights shared a photo of one follower of the Cattistock Hunt driving at “full speed” on a public road in thick fog. The quad bike they were on didn’t have any lights.

Despite how common these offences were, there was little police action on it during

the 2023/24 season. While the previous season saw Warwickshire Police take action against hunt-related quad bikes, there were no such cases throughout 2023/24. In fact, the opposite was true. **Wildlife Guardian reported on 3 April 2024 that Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary had decided not to pursue a traffic offence related to the Hursley Hambledon Hunt:**

“On 02 March we filmed the terrier/ trail layers of the Hursley Hambledon Hunt riding dangerously overloaded on a quad bike on the public highway. Despite reporting this correctly and providing all the evidence they needed, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary refused to investigate. This has been recorded by Hampshire Police as Road Related Incident. Unfortunately, we will not be actively investigating this crime as there are currently no further lines of enquiry.”

An accompanying screenshot shows two people on what is clearly a single person quad, driving along a public road.

On 23 December 2023, a young woman was killed in a quad bike accident near Shipton Moyne, Gloucestershire. The Beaufort Hunt

was meeting nearby at the time and initially there was public speculation as to whether she was with the hunt. **As a result, Wiltshire Hunt Saboteurs said:**

“Sabs across the region have been relentlessly reporting to local police forces the problem with overloaded quads racing around the streets in this area, bearing excessive and unbalanced overhanging loads, and illegally carrying passengers on single seat quads, and sadly it is looking like our many fears have come to fruition.”

The Beaufort Hunt have since publicly stated that the woman was not connected with the hunt, and there’s no public evidence to suggest she was following it that day.

Nonetheless, Wiltshire Hunt Saboteurs’ statement highlights how the issue of dangerous and illegal quad bikes attached to hunts is not a new issue. Moreover, that activists have continuously attempted to ring the bell on this issue. Protect the Wild’s collated figures reveal that hunts across the board are regularly involved in this type of offence. Nevertheless, it remains woefully under-policed.

ROAD HAVOC

To some extent, road havoc and traffic offences go hand in hand. However, specifically, this category was used to account for incidents of hunts and their followers causing serious problems on public roads. Incidents could include blocking public traffic, hounds loose on roads in front of vehicles, dangerous riding or driving by followers, and other road-based anti-social actions. It also incorporated incidents of hunts or their hounds on active railway lines.

Such reports were made against 70 different hunts. Not only is this figure similar to that of traffic offences but also represents a vast majority of the same hunts. Like other figures, a handful of reports are made against most hunts with a handful of hunts spiking the figures.

The names of those hunts won't come as a surprise: Beaufort Hunt, BSV, Cottesmore Hunt, Mendip Farmers Hunt, South Dorset Hunt, and Warwickshire Hunt.

In addition to blocking traffic, the 2023/24 season saw at least 10 reports of cars hitting hounds that the hunt had left to run loose on roads.

Date	Hunt	Area
31 October 2023	South Dorset Hunt	Glanvilles Wootton, Dorset
11 November 2023	Derwent Hunt	Ebberston, North Yorkshire
20 December 2023	Stevenstone Hunt	Bulkworthy, Devon
26 December 2023	Cottesmore Hunt	Exton Park, Rutland
13 January 2024	Derwent Hunt	Cumboots, North Yorkshire
20 January 2024	South Dorset Hunt	Bovington, Dorset
10 February 2024	Middleton Hunt	Great Givendale, North Yorkshire
14 February 2024	Radnor and West Hereford Hunt	Monkland, Herefordshire
7 March 2024	Hunsley Beacon Beagles	Howden, East Riding of Yorkshire
9 March 2024	Mendip Farmers Hunt	West Harptree, Somerset

Most of these cases were less severe, with cars clipping hounds and injuring them. However, the 11 November 2023 incident was more serious. In screenshots shared by East Yorkshire Coast Hunt Saboteurs, posts to a local Facebook group said that a hound had “just been hit by a car on the A170” and that “the lady who saw it get hit said the poor thing flew up in the air”. Later, Devon County Hunt Saboteurs said the Stevenstone Hunt’s hound on 20 December “went all the way under” a moving hunt support car “but fortunately appeared to have missed the wheels”.

Sadly, there were also two more serious incidents involving hunting hounds. On 30 December 2023, the Hunt Saboteurs Association and Devon County Hunt Saboteurs shared images of two hounds that were hit on the A30 near Okehampton, Devon. One hound was taken to a vet, who put them to sleep due to the injuries, while sabs found the body of the second hound at the side of the road. Devon County Hunt Saboteurs said that it suspected the hounds belonged to the Mid Devon Hunt, which was hunting less than a mile from the hounds’ bodies that day.

East Northants Hunt Saboteurs then shared on 19 February 2024 a post from another local Facebook group that said:

“Anyone going on the A43 try to avoid, it’s at a standstill both sides. There was a load of hunting dogs dead in the road and some running in the road and into the bushes. Was not a nice sight and very upsetting for some people.”

What this particular post points out is that, in addition to the cruelty such collisions dole out to the hounds, they also cause harm and trauma to members of the public.

An article by Northamptonshire Telegraph the following day confirmed the incident. It said that “at least three dogs” were killed in the collision, which the local police said involved “a number of vehicles”. In its post, East Northants Hunt Saboteurs said the hounds belonged to the Pytchley and Woodland Hunt. The hunt later suspended the remainder of its hunting season as a result of the incident.

These two cases come on the back of another collision that killed a hound during the 2022/23 season, that time involving the Grove and Rufford Hunt. It shows that although such extreme incidents aren’t

frequent, they are commonplace. They should, of course, not happen at all. Activists and campaigners have regularly pointed out that if hounds were following a pre-laid trail, who is laying trails across roads?

Hounds on railways make this point even starker. Protect the Wild found eight reports of hounds on active lines throughout the season. Fortunately none of these resulted in any collisions or injuries. Yet the hounds should not be on the railway lines at all. If they were following a trail, that would imply the trail layer trespassed across the track, which is in itself a criminal act. On the other hand, it would make more sense if the hounds were following the scent of a wild animal desperate to escape.



TRESPASS

Despite hunts and their followers using trespass as a regular accusation against sabs and monitors, hunts themselves regularly use land that they have no permission to be on. The 251 reports of hunt trespass nearly doubles the 137 reports picked up in Protect the Wild's report for the 2022/23 season, highlighting just how prevalent this issue is.

These acts of trespass occur on two different types of land: that which belongs to major public landowners that have banned hunting such as the National Trust, Forestry England, and Natural Resources Wales; and trespass onto small privately owned land including farms, gardens and businesses.

Fell packs were among the worst offenders for trespassing. These foot packs hunt foxes in the Lakeland fells where a lot of land is owned by the National Trust. Between them, five fell packs were responsible for 31 incidents of trespass including 18 by the Melbreak Foxhounds alone. More incidents of trespass were reported in Cumbria than in any other county. Almost all of these involved the fell packs using the land of three organisations that have explicitly banned hunting and trail hunting: National Trust, Forestry England, and the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA).

The fell packs were reportedly seen on National Trust land at least 15 times during the season, Forestry England land eight times, and LDNPA land five times. There were also reports of the Coniston Foxhounds on Woodland Trust land and the Blencathra Foxhounds on Cumbria Wildlife Trust land. All of these organisations are explicit in their position against all hunting including trail hunting and the boundaries of their land are widely available. No human-laid trail should cross onto these properties and certainly not

repeatedly. Moreover, these trespasses were sometimes connected to more insidious acts.

The Hunt Saboteurs Association wrote that:

“On 26th February [2024], Cumbria Hunt Sabs filmed the Eskdale & Ennerdale Foxhounds marking a fox to ground, and then the huntsman and terriermen trying to bolt the fox, on National Trust-owned Rakerigg, near Langdale.”

The predicament for the fell packs is that so much of their traditional hunt countries is owned by the aforementioned major landowners. They are unable to conduct a full day's hunting without using land they have no permission to be on. The frequency with which this happens should alarm the organisations, but given the scale of challenges many of them face in other areas, they may not be able to police it effectively.

Cumbria and Lancashire sab groups wrote in an article published by the Hunt Saboteurs Association on 29 January 2024 that they continue passing their evidence onto the respective organisations. However, to date, there's been no notable action taken against the fell packs publicly.

Of course, trespassing on this type of land isn't limited to the Lake District. Hunts across the country were seen on land owned by these types of major landowners, with reports in the south-western counties of Devon, Dorset and Somerset being particularly prolific. In one positive move, in September 2023, the National Trust banned the Chiddingfold, Leconfield and Cowdray Hunt from using its Petworth House property as a meet. Surrey Hunt Monitors said the decision came after it filmed and published footage of the hunt pursuing a fox cub. However, this was the

only notable action by a major landowner throughout the season.

Beyond the major landowners, hunts regularly trespassed into people's residential gardens and on farmland where they weren't welcome. The Cheshire Hounds were frequent offenders, with 13 reports of trespass including onto a golf course and builders' merchant premises.

There were also a number of notably unique incidents:

- The Wynnstay Hunt were responsible for a disturbing case where two hounds reportedly chased children between the ages of eight and ten during hound exercise on 21 July 2023. Cheshire Monitors said the pack was trespassing on private land near the Wynnstay Hunt kennels at the time.
- Twice the Royal Artillery Hunt were reported to have trespassed into Ministry of Defence Impact Areas. These are regions that may have unexploded bombs in the ground. Salisbury Hunt Saboteurs said the hunt was in such an area near Larkhill on 14 October 2023 while Wildlife Guardian reported similar near Bratton on 21 October 2023.
- Albrighton and Woodland Hunt hounds rioted uncontrolled through the grounds of a special educational needs school on 27 February 2024. Manchester Hunt Sabs said that, in trying to block sabs from intervening in the situation, the hunt also prevented taxis there to pick up students.
- Mendip Hunt Sabs said that hounds from the Mendip Farmers Hunt “terrorised” a domestic dog on 9 March 2024. The walker and dog were in East Harptree Woods at the time, a Forestry England-owned woodland.

- On 23 March 2024, the Wight Sabs said hounds from the Isle of Wight Foxhounds invaded a football pitch during a match.

In one sad case, a resident of Powys in Wales said hounds trespassed into her garden as they tore apart a fox. She filmed the incident, which occurred on 22 November 2023, and the footage was shared publicly by Nation.Cymru. To date, the hunt responsible isn't publicly known.

The unpredictable route taken by foxes, hares and deer is a fundamental factor in many people's enjoyment of hunting. It isn't easily replicated by the controlled nature of pre-laid trails. Hunt trespass is an expression of the unpredictability of chasing wildlife and its frequency is another piece of circumstantial evidence pointing at the hunting industry's widespread criminality.

NON-QUARRY VICTIMS

For the 2023/24 season, Protect the Wild disambiguated what was a single category in the previous report: non-quarry incidents. The decision to do this was the result of recognising that sett interference was frequent enough to warrant its own statistic separate from livestock worrying and other incidents as well as badgers being the locus for persecution in themselves. The figures for 2023/24 bore this decision out.

Protect the Wild recorded a total of 124 reports of sett interference and 99 incidents involving non-quarry species such as farmed and domestic animals. That means sett interference makes up 55% of the combined figure.

The most outstanding single incident was reported by Suffolk Action for Wildlife. The monitoring group said that, during a meet of the Thurlow Hunt on 28 December 2023, the group found “no less than 14 setts blocked”. Terriermen or other people associated with hunts will block sett entrances to prevent foxes from escaping underground when pursued.

Protect the Wild was unclear on whether these were 14 sett entrances or 14 actual setts but presumed the former when marking this incident down. As a result, the incident was marked down as five total setts – although this may itself have been wide of the mark, as it may have been a single sett. Nonetheless, photos accompanying the report showed entrances fully blocked and with branches stuck inside of them. If these were all linked to a single or a few setts, they could seriously deplete or even eliminate the air supply for badgers stuck inside. Furthermore, sett interference is itself a

crime under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 with a potential custodial sentence. Something of this scale shows premeditated and intentional illegal activity in support of hunting.

A few days earlier, Mendip Hunt Sabs published footage of terriermen with the Mendip Farmers Hunt blocking a badger sett. The incident, which was caught on a covert camera, shows two men digging with shovels with a timestamp of around 09:46 on 23 December 2023. A caption in the video said the men dug “into the sett spoil heaps and [filled] the entrances with mud”. A second clip, timestamped around 14:13 on the same day, shows hunt staff watching on as hounds search through the woodland. As Mendip Hunt Sabs explained in text accompanying the video, it showed “clear intention to illegally hunt foxes”.

Not all instances of sett interference were blocked entrances though. Many cases also involved hounds marking to ground at setts as well as clear prints of recent human presence on setts. A total of 35 hunts were connected by activists to sett interference in aid of hunting. However, some of these turned up more frequently than others.

Hunt	Reports of sett interference	Number of meets
Heythrop Hunt	22	13
North Cotswold Hunt	22	15
Middleton Hunt	13	8

The top two are the result of investigation and public reporting by Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs, who deserve particular credit for their commitment in documenting setts. On 5 May 2024 the group published its sett incidents table for the hunting season. What it highlighted is not only how frequently some hunts block setts, but also that it’s not limited to one or two ‘bad apples’ but in fact part of the fabric of fox hunting, naming seven hunts in the area involved with the practice. This is borne out by the data, which shows that there were reports of sett interference by 34 different hunts from the Zetland Hunt in County Durham to the Dartmoor Hunt in west Devon.

In one further grisly incident, Weymouth Animal Rights reported how sett blocking was found alongside another clear sign of illegal hunting: feeding foxes. **It said that at a South Dorset Hunt meet on 19 December 2023:**

“Sabs from the Mendips who had arrived early on the scene, went in just south of Moathills to a small wooded area called The Willow Bed. The reason being was because there were fresh quad bike tracks that led straight to a Badger sett. ... What the Mendip Hunt Sabs found was shocking. Not only was the sett freshly blocked but there was a huge pile of freshly butchered deer legs!!”

A second set of deer legs was found outside the wood.

It’s not possible to extrapolate any data on how frequently setts are interfered with on a national scale from the information available other than to say that it is practised by many fox hunts throughout England and Wales. Reporting on sett interference is highly subjective and down not only to activists finding them in the first place but also the

capacity or skill in recognising a blocked sett entrance. The signs are easy to miss during a day’s sabbing or monitoring. Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs’ commitment therefore results in the most reliable data publicly available.

A badger also appeared on the list of non-quarry incidents. Hull Wildlife Protectors said that on 27 January 2024, the Holderness Hunt’s hounds killed a badger during a meet at Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire. The group said it believed a fox disturbed a badger while running from hounds and, in their excitement, the hounds picked up the scent of the badger. Video shows a man named as the huntsman literally running away from the monitor and jumping a stream with the pack of hounds following behind. Hull Wildlife Protectors said the huntsman was putting the badger’s dead body into a bag at the time.

Hull Wildlife Protectors also reported that the Holderness Hunt’s hounds killed a partridge on 28 December 2023. In total, the Holderness Hunt were connected with six incidents involving non-quarry animals. This meant it was one of the most reckless hunts during the 2023/24 season, though not at the top. In total, 50 different hunts were connected with this type of recklessness throughout the season. Nineteen of these turned up more than once, though some were much more frequent offenders than others.

Hunt	Reports of non-quarry incidents
Flint and Denbigh Hunt	8
South Dorset Hunt	8
Holderness Hunt	6
Beaufort Hunt	5
Cheshire Hounds	4

By and large, most of these incidents involved hunts worrying farmed animals although causing no grievous injuries. Foxhounds, staghounds, harriers and beagles were all represented in these figures. However, there were also some cases where hounds killed the animal.

Shropshire Hunt Sabs said that the North Shropshire Hunt hounds attacked a sheep during a meet near Hodnet on 25 November 2023. The sheep died from their injuries. In another incident on 27 February 2024, North Wales Hunt Saboteurs found a dead pregnant ewe in a field that hounds from the Flint and Denbigh Hunt had previously run through. The group connected the two events. And in a slightly different outcome, Cotswold Hunt Saboteurs and Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs reported how a sheep worried by the North Cotswold Hunt ran into a bramble bush, which tangled around the sheep’s throat. The sabs were able to save the sheep before the creature died.

There were even two cases of hounds targeting farmed alpacas. Norfolk/Suffolk Hunt Saboteurs shared footage of a young alpaca chasing a hound that had entered their pen. The video was filmed during a joint meet of the Thurlow Hunt and West Norfolk Foxhounds on 20 November 2023 near Little Bradley, Suffolk. However, a more deadly situation was reported by BBC News. On New Year’s Day, hunting hounds killed an alpaca near South Molton, Devon. Anti-hunt groups identified the hounds as belonging to the Tiverton Stag hounds.

While the quality of these creatures’ lives as farmed animals is questionable anyway, they don’t need the added anxiety of hunting hounds terrifying them. Moreover, livestock worrying is widely condemned by farmers and police, and hunts shouldn’t be an exception to that.

Domestic animals didn’t escape harassment by hunts either. **As early as 15 August 2023, during hound exercise, the Essex and Suffolk Hunt were reported by local news outlet Hadleigh Hub as having attacked a dog in Layham, Suffolk. It said that:**

“Police are investigating after a dog being walked on a lead was attacked and mauled by a pack of hunt hounds in Layham near Hadleigh

“The elderly dog walker was left shocked and upset by the incident.”

There were, in total, seven reports of hounds spooking and attacking cats, dogs and horses.

Date	Hunt	Description
15 August 2023	Essex and Suffolk Hunt	Dog attacked
6 September 2023	Monmouthshire Hunt	Cat chased
29 October 2023	Unknown	Cat killed
5 December 2023	Badsworth, Bramham, York South Hunt	Horse spooked
13 January 2024	Portman Hunt	Kittens chased
24 January 2024	Eggesford Hunt	Dog worried
9 March 2024	Mendip Farmers Hunt	Dog worried

The case of hounds killing a cat on 29 October is particularly unique. The report was made by a member of the public that lived in the Belle Vale area of Liverpool. This is an area on the edge of the city but still an urban location. Furthermore, the closest known hunt is the Cheshire Hounds, who are kennelled more than 20 miles away on the other side of the Mersey. Despite this, CCTV video of the footage clearly shows four dogs that bear a strong resemblance to foxhounds chasing and killing the cat. The occurrence of the attack on a Sunday suggests that, if these hounds belonged to a hunt, they may have escaped during hound exercise. Protect the Wild is not aware of a resolution to the incident, though, so a question mark remains over who was responsible.

The hunting industry has a long history of harassing, harming and killing farmed and domestic animals. What these figures and cases illustrate is how that continues even 19 seasons after the Hunting Act came into place. The fact that it happens even when hunts aren’t meeting – as with the 15 August 2023 incident – highlights that endangering others is part of the fabric of hunts.

ANALYSIS

FOX HUNTING

Nearly 20 years after the Hunting Act was supposed to end the hunting of mammals for fun, it seems the hunting industry continues with an arrogant attitude towards wildlife, humans, and the law.

An incident fitting into one of Protect the Wild's categories for analysis took place at 1016 meets. That's 44.81% of the 2267 meets attended by hunt saboteurs and monitors during the 2023/24 season. There were a further 45 reports in the "public" category. These reports involved 128 different hunts including two unknown packs. This is perhaps a tenth of the total number of hunt meets that is likely to have occurred during the season.

Using Wildlife Guardian's hunt database, there are 231 hunts within the scope of Protect the Wild's research. Assuming an average of three meets per hunt during the cubbing season from the earliest known meets on 5 August 2023, two per week during the main season, and then two per week for the three staghounds' meets up until the last known meet on 22 April 2024, Protect the Wild calculates there was a total of 19,048 days of hunting during the 2023/24 season.

However, the hunting industry itself offered up very different figures. In the 13 September 2023 issue of *Horse & Hound*, head of the British Hound Sports Authority viscount William Astor said that the 2022/23 season had "more than 11,000 days of legal or exempt hunting with hounds". Later, in an article published 11 April 2024, the Countryside Alliance's head of hunting Polly Portwin told *Dorset Echo* that "more than 12,000 days of trail hunting take place each year". There is potentially a very simple reason for this disparity, however.

PHOTO CREDIT: SOUTH NORFOLK HUNT SABOTEURS



Using the main season calculation explained previously leads to a result of 10,672 meets. Including the staghound packs' meets up until the final known meet on 22 April 2024, that total is 10,687. This is slightly lower than the hunting industry figures above, but a low average may account for the shortfall as some hunts will go out up to four times a week during the main season. It's fair to assume that Astor and Portwin are speaking only of the main season and ignoring the cubbing season, which the hunting industry has notoriously had little explanation for.

Between the earliest known cubbing meet or autumn stag hunting meet on 5 August 2023 (Devon and Somerset Staghounds) until Friday 27 October – as many hunts hold their opening meet on the last Saturday of October – assuming an average of three cubbing meets per week, there would have

been 8361 meets. This makes up Protect the Wild's estimated 19,048 days of hunting for the season.

These numbers say that incidents were reported at just 5.33% of total possible hunt meets throughout the season. However, given that most meets are not attended by activists or seen by the general public at all, it's actually a staggering figure. It means one in every 20 meets is connected to some sort of criminal and/or anti-social act. Combined with the aforementioned 44.81% of attended meets resulting in a report on some sort of incident, the numbers point to something deeply and systemically wrong with the hunting industry.

Protect the Wild will look at two of the most reported on hunts to expand beyond just the numbers.

BLACKMORE AND SPARKFORD VALE HUNT

Of all the BSV meets attended by sabs and monitors, 40 resulted in reports of some type of incident, many of which were the hunting of foxes. The opening meet of the BSV's 2023/24 season took place on 28 October 2023. Meanwhile, its final meet was on 24 February 2024 and well attended by saboteurs. Wildlife Guardian states the hunt meets four times a week during the main season. This would have given the hunt 69 meets. However, the British Hound Sports Authority suspended the BSV following the Channel 4 News's airing of North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs' footage of its hounds killing a fox. According to Weymouth Animal Rights, this suspension lasted just three weeks and lost the hunt 12 days of hunting.

During the cubbing season, the BSV is likely to have met at least as frequently as four times a week but possibly even more regularly. Protect the Wild saw no definite figure for the BSV's cubbing season meets so for the sake of calculation, we'll assume four times a week again. That means there was, between the earliest cubbing meet attended on 19 August 2023 and the final Thursday before the opening meet, approximately 39 meets.

The overall figure might be slightly lower owing to some hunts abandoning meets due to heavy rainfall and flooding through the winter, though there's no clear evidence the BSV did this.

Regardless, it means the BSV had approximately 96 meets during the 2023/24 season. A total of 29 meets or 30.2% involved chasing or killing a fox. If averaging the total number of foxes chased or killed, then the BSV chased or killed a fox nearly 47% of the time. Two of these meets also included chasing a hare and a deer. There was also one meet where the BSV's hounds rioted onto a deer but didn't reportedly chase any other animal.

These figures are broadly similar to Protect the Wild's findings on the hunt during the 2022/23 season, displaying consistency in the hunt's behaviour and actions over time.

The BHSA suspended the BSV on 24 January 2024. The authority, which says it is the "governing body" for registered hunts in England and Wales, suspended the hunt after Channel 4 News aired footage filmed by North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs. The video, taken from a drone on 4 December 2023, shows hunt staff watching on as the hounds allegedly pursue and then kill a fox on a farm near Yenston, Somerset. At the time of writing, four men from the hunt pleaded not guilty to all charges connected with the incident.

Its first meet after the suspension took place on 15 February 2024, during which North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs said the hunt chased two foxes "despite the presence of someone from the British Hound Sports Authority". In fact, sabs reported the BSV chasing six foxes between 15 February and its final meet on 24 February.

Protect the Wild draws a number of concerning conclusions from these figures. First is the BHSA's claim to legitimacy. Its oversight appears to mean very little to the BSV, which continued to hunt unlawfully even after a suspension and with someone from the organisation reportedly in attendance. Given the BHSA's tacit role of laundering the hunting industry's reputation and preventing further criminalisation of its activities, the actions of the BSV show that the BHSA is weak at best and complicit at worst.

This is bolstered by its initial lack of action. The footage was filmed on 4 December 2023, with North Dorset Hunt Sabs reporting on it the same day. Its report included clear screenshots from the drone video as well as additional camcorder footage showing hounds chasing a fox earlier in the day. The sab group said police had attended and launched an investigation. Despite these factors, it took the BHSA 52 days or 7.5 weeks to take action against the BSV. In that time, a further seven foxes and one hare were reportedly chased. In the season leading up to 4 December 2023, sabs and monitors already reported the hunt having chased 30 different foxes as well as Wildlife Crime Action publicly sharing footage of the BSV 'breaking up' a fox that the hounds had just chased and killed.

Given the hunt's notorious history, as well as its actions towards wildlife just in the season alone, it's hard to find any legitimate justification for the BHSA to have waited until Channel 4 News's exposé before taking action against the BSV.

BEAUFORT HUNT

Sab groups across the Cotswolds and Southwest regularly attended the Beaufort Hunt's meets, with 42 of them resulting in a reported incident. Like BSV, Wildlife Guardian lists four hunting days a week for the Beaufort Hunt during the week. However, it may hunt even more frequently during cubbing. Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs said on 6 September 2023 that it suspected the hunt "may be out every morning now apart from Sunday".

The earliest Beaufort Hunt meet attended by sabs or monitors was on 6 September 2023 while its final meet likely took place on 16 March 2024. Meanwhile, its opening meet occurred on 4 November 2023. In October 2023, Cirencester Illegal Hunt Watch said

the Beaufort Hunt meets five times per week during cubbing. Going with this slightly more conservative figure for cubbing (rather than Three Counties Hunt Sabs' statement of six meets a week), the Beaufort Hunt approximately 118 meets throughout the season, though this figure may be slightly lower for similar environmental reasons as mentioned for the BSV.

Sabs and monitors reported 20 of the Beaufort Hunt's meets involving a chase or kill of a fox. That equates to 16.94% of probable total meets. When averaging the total number of foxes chased and killed, that ratio rises to 24.58% or one-quarter. In addition to this, the hounds were reported to have rioted onto deer twice.

NATIONWIDE ESTIMATES

The BSV and Beaufort Hunt were the top two most reported-on hunts visited during the 2023/24 season. Because of this, they represent some of the best information publicly available on how unmonitored hunts might chase and kill foxes. In this case, the BSV represents an upper limit on estimates and the Beaufort Hunt represents a lower limit. **As already illustrated, there are a couple of different ways to present this information:**

Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt	
Percentage of meets with foxes chased or killed	30.2%
Percentage average of foxes chased or killed	46.87%
Beaufort Hunt	
Percentage of meets with foxes chased or killed	16.94%
Percentage average of foxes chased or killed	24.58%

As a result, in absolute numbers for foxhound and fox-hunting harrier packs (167 hunts – 13,984 meets):

National Estimates		
Percentage of meets with foxes chased or killed:	Upper 30.2% (4223 meets)	Lower 16.94% (2369 meets)
Percentage average of foxes chased or killed:	Upper 46.87% (6554 foxes)	Lower 24.58% (3475 foxes)

This is a reflection of the total number of foxes that may be chased or killed if we assume that the most egregious of the monitored hunts reflect a general intention of all hunts. Several examples during the 2023/24 season showing that this is not beyond the realm of possibility.

For example, Shropshire Wildlife Monitors said in October 2023 that the United Pack had “been bragging about getting their 100 fox kill this season” [sic]. Those in the hunt may have said this as bravado and/or to rile the monitors up, of course, but it is suggestive of where the hunt’s mind is at. It’s worth noting that in the hunting industry’s submissions to the Burns Inquiry – which ultimately led to the Hunting Act 2004 – it said hunts killed on average 0.77 foxes per day. Given the United Pack meet two to three times a week during the main season, that ratio could easily pan out to about 100 kills in a season. The monitor group reported the hunt chasing a fox on 17 February 2024, while the hunt was also present at a 13 October 2023 joint meet with the Wynnstay Hunt where Cheshire Borderland Monitors reported hounds chasing four foxes. However, the United Pack went relatively unmonitored throughout the season so its unknown just how many foxes it chased and killed.

Roaming Sabs provided a fantastic insight into the behavior of a hunt when it believes it’s only amongst friends. On 11 February 2024, it published a report from a Vale of

White Horse Hunt meet of the previous day where a member of Roaming Sabs had gone undercover amongst the hunt’s support. As well as hunt support talking about fox hunting “like it was pre-ban”, the report explained how unbridled the Vale of White Horse Hunt was about its hunting of foxes. **After supporters got involved in pushing two foxes back to pursuing hounds, one fox was unable to get away:**

“... the fox once again broke out of the wood, at this point exhausted, and ran towards the road with 2 hounds right behind.

It ran in to the hedgerow where the hounds seemed to lose it momentarily, unfortunately support were on the road and pushes the fox back right into the hounds, who killed it.

Whilst the hounds ripped apart this poor creature, the huntsman blew for a kill and support everywhere could be heard yipping and cheering.. like a scene from a horror film.”

After the hunt killed this fox, it continued hunting up until the Roaming Sabs member left.

The Vale of White Horse Hunt narrowly avoided prosecution in 2022 after footage captured by Hunt Investigation Team showed it hunting a fox. Meanwhile, during the 2023/24 season, sab groups reported

one instance of it chasing a fox and two of it killing foxes. It also made local news for rioting onto three deer near Cirencester on 4 December 2023. This hunt is an example of how bloody-minded hunts can be, especially if they believe they aren’t being watched by sabs and monitors.

One final insight into the rate of killing by hunts was provided by the Facebook page ‘Cumbrian hunt sabs 1987-2015’. On 14 March 2024, it published historic data of how many foxes the fell packs had killed from the 1978/79 season until the 1991/92 season. The numbers varied greatly between hunts and seasons, hovering around the 70 mark but going as low as 46 and as high as 115.

While these are figures from long before the hunting ban, they provide practical examples for how many foxes a hunt could kill in a season.

With this in mind, it’s probably fair to say that for all the problems of the Hunting Act, it has gone some way to mitigating the worst excesses of hunts. This is perhaps best shown in one final way of calculating the potential number of foxes killed throughout 2023/24: by taking an average across all known meets

during the season. With 364 reports of foxes chased or killed over 2312 meets, that gives a potential 2201 foxes potentially chased or killed by 167 hunts during the season. This figure is much lower than the 14,000 to 15,000 the hunting industry claimed during the Burns Inquiry. The Hunting Act could be a major factor in this reduction alongside changing tactics by anti-hunting activists, though there may also be a number of other reasons as well.

It’s also worth remembering that hunts may chase and kill out of sight, even with sabs and monitors present. **Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs noted in November 2023 that:**

“Sadly hunts kill foxes and we just don’t know about it. One hound can kill a fox and dig outs can happen unseen.”

It is imperative, then, to remember that a single fox is one too many. With a lower potential of 2201 foxes and an upper potential of 6554 foxes chased and killed during the 2023/24 season alone, it’s clear that wildlife persecution and illegal hunting are a fundamental part of the hunting industry that continues 19 seasons after the ban.

HARE HUNTING

As previously discussed, most of the 41 hares reportedly chased and killed during the 2023/24 season were the result of hounds rioting onto their scent. In total, 33 were by foxhounds and eight were by beagles or harriers. One incident even occurred during a meet of the Cheshire Forest Hunt, which is otherwise regularly reported as following an artificially laid trail. This is an example of the ambiguity of legitimate trail hunting, something this report covers in a separate section.



The 33 chases and kills occurred at 30 different meets. That means 1.29% of all meets attended by sabs or monitors reportedly involved foxhounds rioting onto hares. That figure alone implies 165 meets of foxhound packs involved rioting onto or killing 181 hares. Of course, the true number may be much higher even for attended meets because – as pointed out with fox kills and dig outs – foxhounds chasing hares may happen out of sight.

The clearest observation drawn from these numbers is the lack of control hunt staff have over hounds. Anti-hunting campaigners have long called for adding a ‘recklessness’ clause to the Hunting Act in order to proscribe alleged accidents. The rate of hounds rioting onto hares, an example of what could be considered a genuine accident (insofar as hares aren’t the intended quarry for foxhounds), provides firm grounding for such calls. However, Protect the Wild would go a step further and say that it’s illustrative of the danger hunts pose by their mere presence in the countryside. The example of the Cheshire Forest Hunt underlines this message.

There is a specific reason that most reported hare chases are the result of foxhounds getting onto the wrong scent. Most remaining hare hunts today are beagle and basset packs that are hunted by humans on foot. That means they aren’t able to gallop away from activists like mounted hunts can and, as a result, are much more vulnerable to disruption. As a result, rather than try continuing to hunt when activists turn up, more often than not the hunt will simply pack up and go home.

During the 2023/24 season, however, Protect the Wild read about seven examples where beagle and basset packs continued hunting despite sabs and monitors arriving:

Date	Hunt	Activist group(s)
6 October 2023	Dummer Beagles	Northumberland Hunt Watch
14 October 2023	Purbeck and Bovington Beagles	Weymouth Animal Rights
29 October 2023	Huckworthy Bassets	Wildlife Crime Action
18 November 2023	Warwickshire Beagles	Severn Vale Hunt Saboteurs
21 January 2024	Black Combe Beagles	Cumbria Hunt Saboteurs Lancashire Hunt Saboteurs
27 January 2024	Pimpernel Beagles	Wildlife Crime Action
3 February 2024	Downland Beagles	Brighton Hunt Saboteurs

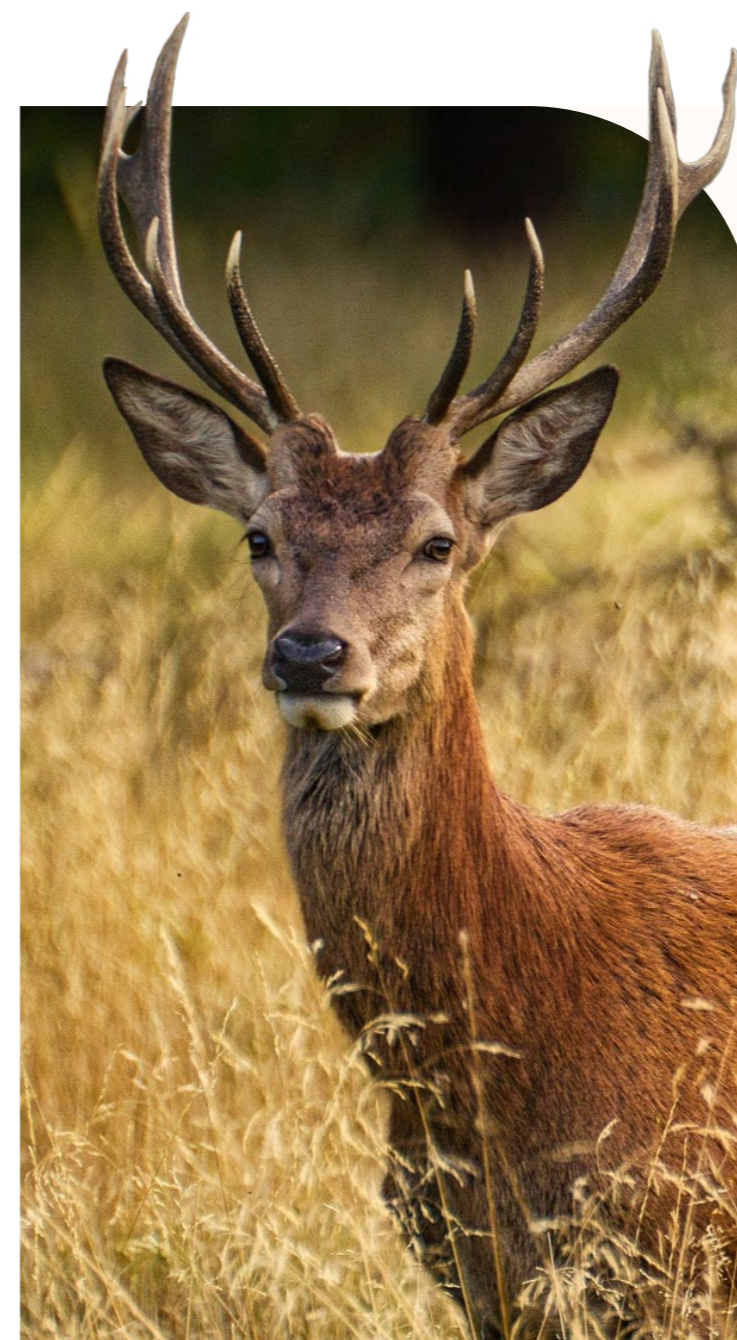
Of these, three meets also resulted in activists witnessing the hunt chasing hares: Warwickshire Beagles, Black Combe Beagles, and Pimpernel Beagles. The Black Combe Beagles’ meet even took place on National Trust land, from which all hunting is banned.

In total, there were reported incidents at 25 beagle, basset and hare-hunting harrier pack meets – although the two harrier packs (Dunston Harriers and Holcombe Harriers) were regularly reported to have followed artificially-laid trails throughout the season. One such incident involved a public report in March 2024 of a car hitting a hound believed to be part

of the Hunsley Beacon Beagles. Another involved the Clifton and Chillmark Foot Beagles worrying sheep on 2 March 2024. And at a Royal Agricultural College Beagles meet on Boxing Day 2023, police issued a hunt supporter with an on-the-spot fine and licence points after he drove while filming with his phone.

The reason for highlighting all these cases is that, while intentional hare hunting remains relatively under-represented in the numbers, that doesn’t mean they are any less anti-social or lethal. The low figures are down to the greater difficulty in tracking down the hunts in the first place. Unlike mounted hunts, which get to their meets in large horseboxes, foot packs can transport hounds in pick-ups and smaller vans while followers can arrive in normal cars. This makes them much more inconspicuous.

With 60 beagle, basset and hare-hunting harrier packs listed on Wildlife Guardian active during the 2023/24 season, there were an estimated 3428 meets of such packs altogether. Unlike fox hunts, due to the low range of data, it’s impossible to guess at how much harmful and criminal behaviour hare hunting causes. However, what little evidence is offered throughout the 2023/24 season suggests that there is little difference between it and the actions of fox-hunting packs.



DEER HUNTING

Sab and monitor groups put a lot of time and effort into taking on staghound packs during the 2023/24 season. As a result, the deer chased and killed figures looked very different from the 2022/23 season, where activists had only just begun to chip away at the three deer hunts.

The ratio of deer chased to deer killed by staghounds outlined in the Impact on Wildlife section when compared with the figures for instances of other packs rioting onto deer illustrates how lethal they are. Whilst the three staghound packs comprised 63 of 150 instances of deer reportedly chased, they were also responsible for 17 of the 26 deer

killed. That means they were responsible for 21.25% of all hunted deer, or 65.38% of deer killed. **Moreover, Protect the Wild found just six reports where staghound packs neither chased nor killed their victims:**

Date	Hunt	Reporting Group
10 August 2023	Devon and Somerset Staghounds	Wildlife Guardian
15 August 2023	Devon and Somerset Staghounds	Wildlife Guardian
22 August 2023*	Devon and Somerset Staghounds	Devon County Hunt Saboteurs
18 September 2023	Quantock Staghounds	North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs
15 February 2024	Quantock Staghounds	North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs
23 March 2024	Quantock Staghounds	North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs

* The two sabs present at this meet faced serious and violent attacks by hunt supporters, curtailing their report of the day.

There were reports on 60 different staghound meets in total, meaning they successfully chased or killed at 90% of reported meets. That is despite the presence of sabs and monitors. Such brazenness is down in part to the unique loophole exploited by deer hunting packs: the research and observation exemption. This caveat in the Hunting Act (Schedule 1, 9.2) allows for two or fewer hounds to chase deer for scientific research so long as the dogs are “kept under sufficiently close control to ensure that it does not injure the wild mammal”.

As a result, staghound packs don’t usually allow the hounds to attack or savage the deer. Instead, they use pairs of hounds to chase the deer to exhaustion. Because this can sometimes take many hours, the hunt will relay pairs of dogs throughout the day. However, it is the chase and not the kill that is most distressing to the deer, as outlined in the Impact on Wildlife section.

Furthermore, as sabs and monitors spend increasing amounts of time with these hunts, the more they see how regularly the packs

fail to even exploit the loopholes and instead just go for hunting that is illegal. **For example, on 2 October 2023, North Dorset Hunt Sabs said the Quantock Staghounds had that day used six hounds at once for hunting, explaining that:**

“... a roe deer was flushed out and ran across a field on the opposite side of the valley past Roebuck Farm. A short while later, six hounds came out and followed her scent before circling back to the maize. The huntsman [sic] then appeared on foot and encouraged them back onto the scent! Did he think she was a stag? Since the CPS dropped our case with the 3 hounds chasing a stag, they now think they can use as many hounds as they like!”

Extrapolating data for the entire season from the reported figures gives leads to a stark conclusion. Likely more than 200 deer faced prolonged chases by staghounds throughout the 2023/24 season – and that figure doesn’t include the group’s deer chased at the beginning of the hunt when the huntsman

is attempting to single out the individual they desire. This figure is likely similar for every season, too. Despite this, neither the hunts nor the organisations they’re allegedly conducting research for have publicly produced documentation supporting claims of scientific study.

What they have produced during the season, though, is evidence of serious physical violence. Between them, the staghound packs were responsible for four major attacks. As well as the two sabs attacked during a Devon and Somerset Staghounds meet on 22 August 2023, the Quantock Staghounds were also connected with two incidents of serious violence.

During the first, on 27 November 2023, Mendip Hunt Saboteurs said a hunt master attacked a sab with a whip and destroyed their camera while North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs reported the same master was carrying a shotgun with him on his horse at the time. In the second incident, Wildlife Guardian said one of its volunteers was “seriously assaulted” during a meet on 22 April 2024. No further details were publicly available at the time of writing.

The level of violence associated with staghound packs is high despite the hunts allegedly hunting within the law. Combined with the high rate of successful chases and kills by the hunts, they present a uniquely cruel form of hunting that continues despite a supposed ban.

The remaining 87 deer chased and nine deer killed were the result of other types of hounds rioting. Thirty nine hunts reportedly rioted onto deer, nearly all of which were foxhounds.

The exception to that is the previously discussed unnamed foot pack that split off from the Lambo Beagles in Cornwall. **The most egregious of these were:**

- Royal Artillery Hunt: 7 deer
- South Dorset Hunt, Cotswold Vale Farmers Hunt: 6 deer each
- Cotswold Hunt, Fitzwilliam Hunt, Portman Hunt: 5 deer each

Meanwhile, eight non-staghound packs were connected with killing deer: Albrighton and Woodland Hunt, Essex and Suffolk Hunt, Fitzwilliam Hunt (killed two deer), Heythrop Hunt, Kent Hounds, Stevenstone Hunt, Waveney and Norfolk Harriers, and the aforementioned unknown foot pack. That means, in total, 41 different hunts were reported to have rioted onto deer throughout the season. That is 32.6% of all hunts (including staghounds) who had some sort of report made against them during the season. While the chases are often for much shorter periods than dedicated deer hunting, they can nonetheless last for several seconds or minutes before control over the hounds is regained.

If the 32.6% figure was expanded to all known hunts in England and Wales, that would be equivalent to 75 hunts rioting onto deer during the season. This figure underlines the problem of having hounds in the countryside in the first place. As Protect the Wild will cover further in the Trail Hunting section, it is not even necessary for hunts to want to chase wildlife for them to cause harm, distress and death.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE LAW?

In total, there were 587 reported incidents of hunts chasing and killing foxes, hares or deer. That is one-quarter of all meets attended by sabs and monitors or witnessed by members of the public. If this was scaled up to every meet, that implies a possible 4762 meets involved the hunting of wildlife during the 2023/24 season.

If the majority of these were simply accidents, as hunts have claimed in the past, then it shows that the industry is overwhelmingly reckless. An accident rate of 25% would be unacceptable for any industry let alone one that was legislated against 19 years ago. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that these aren't accidents at all.

During the period of the 2023/24 season, the most notable hunting conviction was that of the men involved with the Avon Vale Hunt videos that showed foxes pulled from a dig out and thrown to foxes. Yet even after this, anti-hunting activists reported six instances of dig outs happening or about to happen. Those cases were clearly not accidents. Moreover, each one of those required the implicit or explicit approval of people running the hunt.

In addition to this there was also plenty of videos showing hunts continuing to intentionally chase wildlife. In one of the starkest examples Protect the Wild came across during its data gathering, Lincoln Hunt Saboteurs shared footage in January 2024 of the Burton Hunt apparently using voice and horn calls to encourage a pack of hounds to chase a fox who is just seconds ahead of the pack. The huntsman uses his horse to block sabs from intervening. At the time of writing, police had charged the huntsman under Section 1 of the Hunting Act for illegal hunting. Another example is the previously discussed drone footage of the BSV.

The numbers on wildlife persecution during the 2023/24 season paint a picture of widespread lawbreaking. These are backed up by the numerous incidents that sabs and monitors have worked hard to document alongside the experiences of otherwise uninvolved members of the public. As a result, the data paints a picture of an industry that is overwhelmingly reckless at best or intentionally criminal at worst.

This second point of view is shared by Matt Longman, the Police Chiefs' Council lead on hunting, who said in April 2024 that:

"I have to agree that trail-hunting is a smokescreen for illegal fox hunting. ... Quite simply, the hunting community is using loopholes in the law to get away with hunting. We all know it's happening."

Ultimately, it highlights the Hunting Act as an ineffective piece of legislation. While it has made some strides in reducing the egregiousness of the hunting industry, it has failed to achieve its aim of ending the persecution of wildlife for leisure. Yes there were signs that a minority of hunts had started following trails, but that has come nearly 20 years after the fact. Moreover, as the section on trail hunting will point out, there is no guarantee that it prevents harm to wildlife or that hunts won't hunt wildlife during a 'trail' meet.

During the writing of this report, a new government was elected. The Labour Party said on page 59 of its 2024 election manifesto that it would "ban trail hunting". While there are no details accompanying this pledge, it signifies the potential for new measures in England and Wales that mirror those recently adopted in Scotland. It would afford police greater powers to hold the hunting industry legal accountable. A stronger law would, hopefully, reduce the harassment and violence faced by activists and the anti-social behaviour experienced by local communities. But most importantly, it could save the lives of hundreds if not thousands of foxes, hare and deer every year.

POLICE

The role of policing has shifted in recent times. For more than 15 years following the Hunting Act, many anti-hunting activists had an uneasy relationship with the police, blaming them for failing to take action at best or acting in collusion with the hunt at worst. In some areas this hasn't changed. However, in others, there are clear signs that police are now taking the lawbreaking of hunts much more seriously.

There were, in total, reports of 351 police units in attendance at hunt meets throughout the season, though this doesn't account for Boxing Day events. Each of these units would usually have comprised at least two officers, so that number can be at least doubled to estimate how many individual police officers were present. Of the 50 counties from which hunting incident reports came in, 12 had no police presence reported at any point.



The police forces most frequently attending hunt meets were:

County	Police units reported
Gloucestershire	34
Somerset	25
Cheshire	20
Suffolk	20
Cumbria	18

Protect the Wild’s figures on policing didn’t differentiate between who called the police because knowing with certainty in any specific instance isn’t guaranteed. Instead, what these figures highlight is which counties place a priority on the policing of hunting and anti-hunting activities.

Meanwhile, a slight breakdown of figures offers some insight into the volatility of certain hunts. **Those that had police turn up most frequently at their meets were:**

Hunt	Police units reported
Cottesmore Hunt	26
Essex and Suffolk Hunt	17
Flint and Denbigh Hunt	15
Wynnstay Hunt	14
Puckeridge and Essex Union Hunt	13
Weston and Banwell Harriers with West Somerset Vale	13

It’s perhaps unsurprising that many of these names were featured in the section on minor and major attacks.

One event that does have specific budgets, though, is the policing of Boxing Day events.

Through a freedom of information request, West Kent Hunt Saboteurs were able to get Kent Police’s costing for the Kent Hounds’ Boxing Day 2023 Boxing Day parade in 2023. On 31 January 2024, the group said the “cost to the taxpayer” for the event in Elham was £14,322. For

comparison, during the 2022/23 season, the sab group found that the total cost for Boxing Day policing of the East Kent Hunt in Elham and Ashford Valley Hunt – the two hunts that amalgamated to form the Kent Hounds – in Tenterden was £16,401.

Meanwhile, Protect the Wild submitted a freedom of information request to Leicestershire Police. Its ‘Op Enlighten’ oversees the constabulary’s response to hunting and anti-hunting matters. A previous freedom of information request submitted on 4 March 2024 through website WhatDoTheyKnow found that it has run since 2022, replacing the notorious Operation Blackthorn. **The police response also explained that:**

“Multiple officers are ‘Op Enlighten’ trained which is an input covering legislation and operational deployments.”

And that:

“As part of Op Enlighten – officers make and maintain contact with members of the hunt community and those who oppose the activity.”

Protect the Wild submitted a freedom of information request to find out the cost of Op Enlighten. It said the total cost for 2023/24 was £7350.78 but didn’t provide a breakdown of that figure.

Ideally, Protect the Wild could obtain policing costs of this type for a wide range of hunting-related policing incidents. However, doing so is difficult because most call outs fold into regular policing and therefore don’t have specific budgets or costs assigned to them.

An example of this is seen in a response to Protect the Wild’s request for information regarding the 10 February 2024 meet of the Sennybridge Farmers. South Wales Hunt

Saboteurs, which was present on the day, said it arrived to find five police vehicles already in attendance of their own initiative.

Following a freedom of information request, Dyfed-Powys Police said to protect the Wild that it:

“was a pre-planned operation following on from previous reports regarding the hunt. This was led by Rural Crime team, with support from Neighbourhood Policing Team, response and drone officer.”

However, when asked about costs, it replied that:

“There is no information held in relation to the cost of officer deployment on the day, due to being on a ‘business as usual’ Policing basis. There was no specific cost code for this operation.”

While South Wales Hunt Saboteurs said that this type of self-motivated presence was rare until recently, it also highlighted a questionable dynamic between the police and hunt. **The sab group said that:**

“It later transpired that on Tuesday, a police officer had phoned the hunt ‘master’ to let him know about the operation. He had phoned again on Friday evening to confirm, by which time hunt master Nigel Evans was able to let the police know where they would be going.”

This, of course, provided the hunt plenty of time to arrange a legal spectacle for the police, thereby bringing into question the effectiveness of this operation and whether it was money well-spent. Such dynamics touch deep nerves around the relationship between policing and hunting, with long-held beliefs by many in the anti-hunting movement that

there is some sort of collaboration between the two. A belief that appears to occasionally have been borne out by real situations.

Famously, Wiltshire Police has had a number of high-profile incidents, including at least two officers who were exposed for riding with and following local hunts. That wasn't the only example, though. **North East Hunt Monitors said that an officer called to a 25 August 2023 meet of the South Durham Hunt (SDH):**

“proudly and confidently boasted that she rides with the SDH and that they always follow a scent.”

However, there were also high-profile examples of positive engagement between sabs and the police.

Severn Vale Hunt Saboteurs said that was filming the Royal Agricultural Beagles during a meet at Culkerton, Gloucestershire, on 3 February 2024. As it filmed from the roadside, a “pre-planned operation” by hunt supporters saw two vehicles blocking the sab group’s vehicle in. After escaping the block, the two vehicles then pursued the sab vehicle for 20 miles, with the group saying one had a “cudgel” on the dashboard. The group were on the phone to Gloucestershire Police throughout. Eventually, a rural crime patrol vehicle used a hard stop on the hunt vehicle immediately behind the sab car. The group said the second hunt vehicle has been stopped separately by an armed response unit.

Severn Vale Hunt Saboteurs described the situation as “unprecedented” and said it “proved” the hunts can no longer assume the police will protect them. Gloucestershire

Police stand out in their involvement with the hunting issue, topping the chart for most responsive police force. On Boxing Day 2023, officers even issued a hunt supporter with an on the spot fine and penalty points on their licence as a result of driving whilst filming Wiltshire Hunt Saboteurs with their phone.

Conversely, Wiltshire Hunt Saboteurs had problems with Gloucestershire Police on 24 February 2024 when trying to report the Beaufort Hunt illegally hunting a fox. It said Gloucestershire Police “ping-ponged” the incident between themselves and Wiltshire Police, with neither side taking responsibility of the location: the sewage works just outside of Didmarton. Though close to the county boundary, it is in Gloucestershire. The sab group said ultimately neither police force sent out a unit, highlighting a questionable response in this situation by even one of the most ‘pro-active’ forces in England and Wales.

It’s possible to speculate, though, that this isn’t targeted at anti-hunting activists specifically but a reflection on wider issues within policing. Nonetheless, the variable experiences of activists across England and Wales highlights a lack of uniformity over the policing of hunting. This was recognised and acknowledged by Matt Longman, the hunting lead for the National Police Chiefs’ Council, in a march 2024 interview with Channel 4 News.

He went on to add some of the strongest language used by police yet against hunting, saying that the 20 years of the Hunting Act:

“is fast becoming possibly one of the most farcical eras in criminal justice history.”

TRAIL HUNTING



That hunting is dangerous by design is clearly evident in trail hunting. While this term has become synonymous with the hunting industry’s lies, the 2023/24 season saw reports of actual trail hunting practised consistently by hunts in the field.

Sab and monitor groups reported a total of 42 trail hunting meets throughout the season. Eight hunts had more than one report of trail hunting attributed to them:

- Badsworth, Bramham, York South Hunt
- Blankney Hunt
- Cambridgeshire Hunt with Enfield Chase
- Cheshire Forest Hunt
- Dunston Harriers
- Holcombe Harriers
- Suffolk Hunt

- Waveney and Norfolk Harriers
- West Norfolk Foxhounds

However, it’s worth noting that where activists see hunts following a human-laid trail, they may not visit that hunt so regularly. As a result, the 42 figure and those hunts which regularly follow trails isn’t reflective of the overall national situation. On the other hand, some of these trail meets were one-offs carried out by hunts that were hunting wildlife at every other meet during the season.

Also of note is that five of these are in East Anglia, suggesting a co-ordinated effort in the region. What has motivated the co-ordination, though, remains less clear, although Protect the Wild was told that one hunt’s terrierman suggested the repercussions from the Avon Vale Hunt dig out video played a significant role.

Sab groups that have witnessed trail hunting have reported how different it looks to the hunting of wildlife. **Herefordshire Hunt Sabs said on 1 November 2023, for example, that:**

“...we have monitored the Ross Harriers when they were genuinely hunting an artificial scent. We have seen how closely their hounds are controlled to ensure they do not deviate from the laid scent, onto that of a wild animal. This requires huntsman and whipper in staff to ride right up close with the hounds...”

This tightly controlled environment appears as a regular feature in trail hunts. **Wiltshire Hunt Saboteurs said of a meet on 2 September 2023 where it witnessed the Wilton Hunt follow trails that:**

“The hounds, many of them new young ‘uns were under control throughout, there were additional whips in place to help keep them from straying onto a scent they should not be on. We were told they are now using four whips, to make sure the hounds do not pick up on any ‘accidents’. The hounds skirted woods and coverts, rather than being cast through them, riders followed the huntsman behind, rather than adopt the usual cubbing position around coverts which is how they usually would keep the young fox cubs inside by scaring them from exiting.”

Furthermore, the Wilton Hunt used an aniseed-based trail scent that was openly laid by runners in hi-vis jackets in front of the sab group. All of these factors strongly distinguish legitimate trail hunting from the fake trail hunting that most hunts have claimed to engage in for nearly two decades.

Nonetheless, even when trails are laid, harmful incidents arise. Cheshire Against Blood Sports said, for example, that the Cheshire Forest Hunt rioted onto a hare during its 23 December 2023 meet. South Norfolk Hunt Saboteurs reported that the Waveney and Norfolk Harriers’ hounds rioted onto a deer during the hunt’s Boxing Day meet. And Norfolk/Suffolk Hunt Saboteurs reported that the Suffolk Hunt rioted onto a group of three deer during a trail hunting meet on 3 February 2024.

As highlighted in the Impact in Wildlife – Deer section, this shows how the mere presence of hounds in the countryside presents a danger.

There were also a number of other types of incidents at these trail hunting meets. York Anti-Hunt League said that people had approached the group after a horse had bolted from their field due to the Badsworth, Bramham, York South Hunt’s presence. The incident happened on 5 December 2023 near Sykehouse, South Yorkshire. There were also a number of traffic offences and instances of road havoc reported in connection with trail hunts.

While trail hunting meets appear to involve fewer harmful incidents, they are not free from them. Given reports that hounds are still chasing wildlife even when legitimately following a trail, and considering the number of farmed and domestic animals that hunting hounds harass and kill, trail hunting is far from being an acceptable alternative to live quarry hunting.

Even as some hunts took up following human-laid trails and were able to explain how they did them, others continued using excuses associated with pretend trail hunting.

Nottingham Hunt Saboteurs, for example, said that on 30 October 2023 the Quorn Hunt had told it that:

“... the (imaginary) trails they were following had been laid by three elite trail layers (paid by the hunt) earlier in the morning ... He apparently then forgot this particular version of the smokescreen as he told the other foot team that HE had been laying the trails using imported fox urine.”

The imported fox urine story was a popular excuse used by the hunting industry for many years, but it has faced extensive evidence to the contrary. In May 2019, the Canary reported that claims this fox urine was imported from the USA were false. That’s because freedom of information requests made by activists such as National Dis-trust (now Stop Hunting on the Nation’s Land) to the Animal and Plant Health Agency showed that it hadn’t authorised any such importation since 2014.

Despite anti-hunting campaigners having long debunked the claims of imported fox urine, the fact that the Quorn Hunt still use it as an excuse shows how little it cares about trying to cover its tracks. This is especially clear as sabs and monitors now have examples of legitimate trail hunting against which to measure any such claims. It also highlights how heterogenous the hunting industry is, with attempts to self-regulate across the whole sector consistently failing.

In the end, what the reports on trail hunting also show is how easily hunts may slip between following an artificially-laid trail and one left by wildlife. As a result of the Hunting Office webinars that the Hunt Saboteurs Association leaked in November 2020, the phrase ‘trail hunting is a smokescreen’ became a popular saying. At the time it referred to the pretence of trail hunting – something that wasn’t even taking place. Now trail hunting is starting to occur. Everything about its practice by hunts so far, though, suggests an activity that could continue to cover for the hunting of wildlife.

Trail hunting is the smokescreen. Any legislation seeking to outlaw hunting in England and Wales must confront that.

CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this year’s report are a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges posed by hunting practices across the country. Despite existing legislation, which aimed to curtail such activities in England and Wales, our data-driven analysis reveals persistent exploitation of loopholes and inadequate enforcement continues to jeopardise the protection of wild mammals. This report serves as a call for decisive legislative action to address these deficiencies and properly protect British Wildlife.

Throughout the 2023/24 season, incidents of illegal hunting, whether under the guise of trail hunting or blatant disregard for legal boundaries, have underscored the urgent need for reform. From supposed “trail” setups to documented cases of wildlife pursuits and killings, the evidence is clear: the Hunting Act 2004 is failing to protect wildlife from exploitation and cruelty.

The time has come to advocate for the enactment of new legislation, such as the proposed ‘Hunting of Mammals Bill’, which will close existing loopholes, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and unequivocally ban all forms of hunting wildlife with dogs. This legislative initiative is not merely about closing legal loopholes but about upholding the imperative to treat animals with respect and compassion.

By aligning with public sentiment and ethical standards that reject the unnecessary suffering of wildlife, the ‘Hunting of Mammals Bill’ represents a crucial step forward. It seeks to marry up legal protections with societal expectations, ensuring that wildlife protection and animal welfare are prioritised above recreational activities that put wildlife suffering front and centre.

In conclusion, this report serves as a testament to the pressing need for legislative reform. It stands as a comprehensive indictment of the inadequacies of current laws around hunting and a rallying cry for lawmakers to act decisively in defence of wildlife. The ‘Hunting of Mammals Bill’ is not just a legal imperative but a moral imperative—one that demands swift and resolute action to protect English and Welsh wildlife for generations to come.



PROTECT THE WILD GIVES THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING GROUPS FOR MAKING THEIR EXPERIENCES PUBLICLY AVAILABLE, AND FROM WHICH WE HAVE DRAWN THE DATA USED IN THEIR REPORTS:

Bath Hunt Saboteurs · Beds & Bucks Hunt Saboteurs · Brighton Hunt Saboteurs · Bristol Hunt Saboteurs · Calder Valley Hunt Saboteurs · Cheshire Against Blood Sports · Cheshire Animal Rights Campaign · Cheshire Borderlands Monitor · Cheshire Hunt Saboteurs · Cirencester Illegal Hunt Watch · Cotswold Hunt Saboteurs · Cumbria Hunt Saboteurs · Derby Hunt Saboteurs · Devon County Hunt Saboteurs · Dorset Against Blood Sports · East Herts Sabs · East Kent Hunt Saboteurs · East Northants Hunt Saboteurs · East Surrey Hunt Saboteurs · East Yorkshire Coast Hunt Saboteurs · Geordie Hunt Sabs · Grafton Hunt Watch · Guildford Hunt Saboteurs · Herefordshire Hunt Saboteurs · Hertfordshire Hunt Saboteurs · Herts Wildlife Monitors · Hull Wildlife Protectors · Hunt Monitors · Kernow Hunt Saboteurs · Lancashire Hunt Saboteurs · Lincoln Hunt Saboteurs · Liverpool Hunt Saboteurs · Manchester Hunt Saboteurs · Mendip Hunt Saboteurs · Norfolk/Suffolk Hunt Saboteurs · Norfolk and Suffolk Against Live Quarry Hunting · Northants Hunt Saboteurs · North Dorset Hunt Saboteurs · North Downs Hunt Sabs · North East Hunt Monitors · North London Hunt Saboteurs · North Wales Hunt Saboteurs · North Yorkshire Hunt Saboteurs · Northumberland Hunt Watch · Norwich Hunt Saboteurs · Nottingham Hunt Saboteurs · Peak District Hunt Sabs · Peterborough Hunt Sabs · Plymouth and West Devon Hunt Saboteurs · Reading Hunt Saboteurs · Roaming Sabs · Salisbury Plain Hunt Sabs · Severn Vale Hunt Saboteurs · Sheffield Hunt Saboteurs · Shropshire Hunt Saboteurs · Shropshire Wildlife Monitors · Somerset Hunt Saboteurs · South Cambs Hunt Saboteurs · South Coast Hunt Saboteurs · South Devon Hunt Saboteurs · South Hampshire Hunt Saboteurs · South Norfolk Hunt Saboteurs · South Suffolk Hunt Saboteurs · South Thames Hunt Sabs · South Wales Hunt Saboteurs · South West Animal Rights Movement · Staffordshire Hunt Saboteurs · Stop Hunting on the Nation's Land · Suffolk Action for Wildlife · Suffolk and Essex Hunt Saboteurs · Surrey Hunt Monitors · Surrey Hunt Sabs · Teesside Anti Blood Sports · Three Counties Hunt Saboteurs · Welsh Border Hunt Saboteurs · West Cornwall Hunt Saboteurs · West Kent Hunt Saboteurs · West Midlands Hunt Saboteurs · West Sussex Hunt Saboteurs · West Yorkshire Hunt Saboteurs · Weymouth Animal Rights · Wildlife Crime Action · Wildlife Guardian · The Wight Hunt Sabs · Wiltshire Hunt Saboteurs · York Anti-Hunt League · York Hunt Saboteurs

And, of course, the many members of the public that were brave enough to speak out.