

LOOKING FORWARDS AND CONCLUSION

Acknowledging hunt crimes

1. Police forces cannot continue to deny that illegal foxhunting is happening all the time and in every county where there is a hunt. The webinar, the guilty verdict from the Hankinson prosecution, the overwhelming amount of information provided by the FWGs and the public, opposition from groups such as AAF, the hunts' own secretive, defensive, obstructive behaviour, and the increasing media attention - all of these are impossible to ignore.
2. Police have repeatedly said that they are **personally neutral** with regard to foxhunting. The statutory aim of the Hunting Act is:
 - a. *“to prevent or reduce unnecessary suffering to wild mammals” and that “causing suffering to animals for sport is unethical and should, so far as practicable and proportionate, be stopped”.*
3. When police say they are **personally neutral** about foxhunting, this can arguably mean they are also neutral on the subject of “unnecessary suffering to wild mammals” and that they have no feelings either way about animal cruelty. AAF believes that police would not openly say that about any other offence - the use of cannabis, is an example, or theft. Hunting is a leisure activity; it is not a cause and it is not worthy. Whatever the hunts claim, they are not helping society in any significant way. Hunting deserves no higher status than any other leisure activity. This status is a legacy of the past, where hunting was the “sport of kings and gentry”. It is the opinion of AAF that the only reason why police who say they are “personally neutral” is because they feel a peculiar deference to the outdated status of hunting. AAF believe this could be a root cause of the police's reluctance to acknowledge hunting as a crime.
4. Gloucestershire Police have recently shown they don't subscribe to deference in the face of the hunts and AAF commend them wholeheartedly. If Gloucestershire can adopt this strategy, surely all forces can?
https://www.gloucestershirelive.co.uk/news/regional-news/major-crackdown-illegal-fox-hunting-6170184?fbclid=IwAR22SoeREQnR433AyhhAmSOcY0gKTzcRZ8IDapnG2g_F63wyQgSKFt2NUpo

Enforcing the Hunting Act in the field

5. AAF understands that resourcing is an issue. However, there is no reason why officers should not be able to take action when they are present at a hunt, or called out on the day. There is also no reason why police cannot challenge the hunts and ask key questions at the time. Training, however, is absolutely crucial (see below).

6. Targeting FWGs when called out by FWGs because they are witnessing a breach of the Hunting Act is unacceptable. This aspect was considered in Part Four of this report, "Bias".
7. Trust between the public and the police is crucial. We have stated previously in this report that we believe that no officer who has any connections whatsoever with the hunt should be permitted to answer hunt-related calls, neither should they become Wildlife Crime Officers. The damage that pro-hunting officers have done to the local relationship between FWGs and the police is extensive.
8. Foxhunting is a crime, not an opinion.

Police websites and social media

9. The police should also help the general public to recognise illegal foxhunting by covering it in detail on the force website. Police complain that they are called out by the members of the public who have just seen "red coats on horses" but no chase in progress. If the public is better informed, police are more likely to receive relevant calls. It also acknowledges the crime publicly.
10. Our "Field Guide" (see below) would be a good starting point for improving websites.
11. Police could also use their own social media to show that they are taking the crime seriously. This does not use up precious resources, but it does send a clear message to the hunts as well as the public

Training and aide memoires

12. Practical advice for all forces hoping to train their officers can be found here:
[Practical Advice for All Forces](#)
13. Our Field Guide for officers called to a hunt-related offence is available for download here:
[Field Guide for Officers](#)

We do not expect forces to use it as it is, but it is a starting point for any force that is committed to dealing with this offence.
14. Training is always available from the League Against Cruel Sports. Please email MartinSims@league.org.uk for further details.
15. We strongly advise police forces not to use the Countryside Alliance for training. This is because the Police Liaison Officer was/is Phil Davies. Because of Mr Davies part in the leaked webinars, the Wildlife Crime Unit has decided to cut ties with him:
<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-10-25/countryside-alliance-national-wildlife-crime-unit-membership-under->

[review?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=Orlo&utm_content=Hankinson+](https://www.theguardian.com/comment-and-analysis/2021/09/03/animal-rights-activists-police-hunts)

Improving the relationship between police and FWGs

16. Many forces have accepted that officers do hold a stereotypical image of animal rights activists in their minds. It is important for all forces to recognise that this image is thirty years out of date.

17. The image is heavily linked to the choice of clothing made by FWGs. When active in the field, FWGs need to wear practical clothing and some choose to wear face-coverings. Where they are used, it is for safety reasons. Hunts like to photograph FWGs and identify them. This was confirmed by Hunting Leaks:

<https://huntingleaks.is/2021/01/11/evidence-of-illegal-countryside-alliance-hunting-office-database-revealed/>

18. For example, the writer of this report who was not wearing a face covering, (and never has), was recently told by a huntsman “You live in..., don’t you?” This comment was designed to intimidate.

19. FWGs also have a stereotypical image of the police.

20. Police habitually ask FWGs to give their names when they engage with them. FWGs are reluctant to identify themselves because they do not trust the police. FWGs believe that police are gathering their names in order to pass them on to Counter Terrorism Unit. The Countryside Alliance are keen to spread this idea:

<https://huntingleaks.is>

However, the NPCC has confirmed that this is untrue: email (Adrian Woon, 3/09/2021):

“There isn’t an agreement for information sharing between police and the Countryside Alliance beyond what would be the case for any other group, i.e. anybody has the ability to provide information to police through arrangements such as Crime Stoppers... Please be assured that an individual stopped in the vicinity of a hunt conducting monitoring activity would not by nature of their involvement in the hunt be categorised as a ‘domestic terrorist’.”

It is right and appropriate for officers to request details of individuals they deal with when allegations of potential offences have been raised.”

21. Police are not legally able to pass on information to the hunt about FWGs. If this does happen, then the matter should be reported.

“GDPR and DPA would legally prevent us from releasing information and it would go against the principles of disclosure that we’re governed by.”

I would highlight that if an FWG had reason to believe that information was being inappropriately shared or released by police to a third party this would potentially be a disciplinary matter and I would urge it be reported as an official complaint to the home force.”

22. For the relationship between FWGs and police to improve, each group must engage with the other.
23. When we have asked FWGs to join us in our meetings with police, most state that it would be a “waste of time”. Some believe that they would be putting themselves in danger, and some refuse to engage on a point of principle.
24. AAF believes that the police should do more than simply invite FWGs to a meeting (as many have). For the FWGs to trust the police, the police need to change how they respond when answering hunt-related calls. Engage positively with FWGs wherever possible; seek their advice. Many FWGs are approachable and knowledgeable.
25. FWGs’ reluctance to give personal details also affects their decisions about whether to report hunt crimes or not. AAF would like to see all hunt crimes reported. Several police forces have suggested that FWGs make greater use of Crimestoppers. All reports made to Crimestoppers are anonymous.

<https://crimestoppers-uk.org/about-the-charity/general-enquiries/thank-you>

The effect hunts have on the general public and the issue of hunt violence

26. Illegal hunting is far from being ‘only’ a wildlife crime. AAF were taken aback by the response to our survey “The effect that hunting has on people living in rural areas” (as detailed above.) We did not anticipate the level of fear, inconvenience and revulsion the public are clearly suffering at the hands of the hunts.
27. Equally, the ever-increasing degree of violence reported by FWGs attempting to stop wildlife crime in the countryside is truly shocking. Both the public and FWGs in the field seeking to prevent wildlife crime need the full support of the police in order to ensure the law is upheld.