

## Leicester Police Force

[Counting the Crimes 2](#) (CTC2) was written by Action Against Foxhunting in Autumn 2021.

CTC2 is a follow up to our first report [Counting the Crimes: Police Response to Hunt-Related Calls](#).

CTC2 consists of the main body of the report and reports on 34 English police forces.

The report for Leicester Police Force is set out below.

All the reports on other forces can be found [here](#)

The report is based on a large amount of [research](#). Some of the research is included in the report, and the rest is available on request. To the best of our knowledge, everything is correct.

[The conviction of Mark Hankinson](#) occurred as we were writing this report. We know that the public will be looking to the police to take action against those who hunt foxes illegally and we hope that this report will be of use as it includes practical advice. The report is intended to be helpful and honest, rather than critical.

For the Facebook links, we are aware that posts on social media are not always completely accurate. We have tried to verify the contents, and have contacted many of the posters for further information. Some have replied, and some have not. We are always interested in hearing different views of the same incidents, and if police are able to provide further insight, we would be happy to include this.

FWG – Frontline Wildlife Guardian. The term includes both saboteurs and monitors.

If any force wishes to discuss the report, please contact us [info@actionagainstfoxhunting.org](mailto:info@actionagainstfoxhunting.org). We are happy to meet on line.



**How did the force respond to CTC? You can select multiple options.**

- One email
- ✓ Exchange of emails
- ✓ Meeting
- No response at all

**For Email response - was the response detailed?**

- ✓ Yes
- No

**Look at the content and the usefulness of the response.**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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**Why have you given this rating?**

The initial email response didn't answer the questions posed in CTC. Instead, it listed the items discussed at a meeting with FWGs. It also focused on the conviction of a sab. We felt that this was rather provocative. However, after we had met with the force, another high-profile incident occurred involving FWGs and Leicester Police. We asked questions about the incident and Leicester Police responded promptly and in detail.

**Were there follow up emails and did the force reply?**

- ✓ Yes
- No

**For the forces who met with us, how do you rate this response?**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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**Why have you given this response?**

We met with an assistant chief inspector and we appreciated the time he spent with us. They have since invited us to another meeting.

**For the forces who met with us, how open were they?**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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**How useful was the meeting?**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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There have been so many unpleasant incidents involving Leicester Police and FWGs in which the police have appeared biased. We have a number of named officers who appear to have hunt connections. We did not feel entirely satisfied that the difficulties between the police and FWGs were really "unpacked" as Leicester Police did not accept that their officers were responsible in any degree (even partially). However, the most useful outcome was the clear and stated desire for the police to move on from their historical problems and start creating a more respectful relationship with FWGs. This will only work if Leicester Police do not target FWGs unnecessarily and begin to understand that they are just members of the public, making an effort to prevent illegal hunting. They recognise the issues surrounding the policing including the difficulty in engaging with FWGs

**For all forces: how willing was this force to take on board what we said?**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	✓	-	-	-

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**Why have you given this response?**

Unfortunately, not long after the meeting, Leicester Police was again

featured in Social Media reports, where they escorted FWGs out of the county. The FWGs felt humiliated by this and we felt that it undermined the progress we had made in the meeting. However, the email exchange between AAF and Leicester Police concerning the false firearms accusation (by the hunt) in April 2021 resulted in the police agreeing to raise the broad issue of false reports with the hunt at their next meeting. **An update on this would be useful.**

**Has this force taken any actual steps to improve their relationship with FWGs?**

- Yes
- No
- ✓ Other

**What steps have they taken?**

Leicester Police have repeatedly said that they are always open to conversations with FWGs. They said they are "always seeking ways in which we can improve our approach to the intricacies of hunting legislation." They say they want to engage with groups but recognise there is a historical problem with trust. They acknowledge the legislation behind the both the Hunting Act and trespass laws is "not good". They welcome end of season reports from FWGs and really want better quality evidence from them in the hope of securing prosecutions.

Leicester Police met with AAF and said that they would like to improve the relationship between FWGs and themselves.

**Does this force have an aide memoire or any guide to policing illegal hunting?**

- Yes
- ✓ No

**How well trained are the police in this force?**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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## **Why have you given this response?**

Leicester Police say they are well-trained and that Operation Blackthorn is efficient. The police say they have "invested again in training specific officers under our dedicated operation titled 'Blackthorn' to ensure our officers responding to crimes and incidents have an enhanced knowledge of the current issues. We have appreciated the support provided to the training by the League Against Cruel Sports which helps ensure the officers have a greater awareness of the issues from all perspectives. The training has included an input on drones and we will be deploying the drone as part of our commitment to reduce and prevent crime related to policing hunting. " However, conversely we have received comments from FWGs expressing disappointment in the lack of proactive policing re blocked badger setts and the presence of terriermen and also delaying FWGs (to the benefit of the hunt). Police have said that they "no strategic or operational objective to delay FWGs".

## **How do you rate this force's behaviour in the field with regard to illegal foxhunting and incidents involving FWGs?**

- Always appear biased
- ✓ Usually appear biased
- Sometimes appear biased
- Rarely appear biased
- Never appear biased

## **Why have you given this response?**

There are many reports of apparently biased police in this force. This is based on the feedback from 5 different FWG groups. Many of these groups do communicate with other forces. As mentioned, historically there is a trust problem and often the past is bought up by FWGs. The force also (presumably inadvertently) created a negative response by openly encouraging gamekeepers and young farmers and NFU personnel to become to be directly involved in the Wildlife Crime Unit. Many of these people are likely to have strong links with bloodsports. There are a number of officers with definite or apparent links with hunting in this force although Leicestershire say they would not be allowed to be part of Operation Blackthorn. The force also say officers are asked if they have any interest in hunting before being involved in Blackthorn, this is not a legal requirement and many other forces do not ask this question relying totally on "unconscious bias" training. They did also appear to move one particular officer who was particularly looked upon with suspicion by FWGs away from hunt related incidents to another area of the force. Whilst most FWGs are not comfortable interacting with Leicestershire police, some FWGs have said they recognise Leicestershire are trying to liaise more. One said: "Leicester is a very rural county, and hunting is quite well embedded in the culture there. The police reflect the local population unfortunately in that respect but there will be people who see both sides in any

organisation."

However, in the meeting we had with police, the officers felt that the rating "usually appear biased" was unfair. We hope to review the situation at the end of the season and consider if the actions of officers in the field have been neutral.

**Looking at the response to our FOI asking about police systems and organisation with regard to foxhunting, how do you rate their ability to take action on illegal foxhunting?**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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**Why have you given this rating?**

The League Against Cruel Sports thinks that very few police forces are truly competent at investigations and prosecutions with regard to illegal foxhunting and that Leicester is not an exception. However, the police assured us that Operation Blackthorn officers were well-trained and that if there was an illegal hunting investigation, one of them would be involved. Other police forces were not so confident as ANY officer might do the investigation, whether they were trained or not. Leicester Police have prosecuted the Quorn, however, so it seems that they are willing to present evidence from all sides. The League agreed that the force presented the case well and the failure of the prosecution was not the fault of the police. Rather, it was the incompetence of the CPS that lost the case.

The lack of trust between the police and FWGs may inhibit further prosecutions.

**Do you think the force focuses too heavily on public order as opposed to dealing with illegal foxhunting?**

- ✓ Yes
- No
- Other

**Why have you given this response?**

There is no doubt that public order is a significant issue. In the Operation Blackthorn statistics, "Assault" is the biggest category. A greater focus on illegal hunting might bring down the assault numbers.

Quote from an FWG who does engage with some forces "The current approach to policing hunts in Leicester is pretty much just public order and crowd control if hunt sabs turn up, and to leave the hunts alone if there is no sab

attendance."

**Take into account willingness to engage with AAF, willingness to engage with FWGs, actions in the field etc.**

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1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

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**Any other comments?**

Leicester Police were willing to engage with AAF. However, there is so much anger and mistrust from the FWGs, that any real improvement in the relationship is unlikely unless the police start to take different approach in the field. They were particularly open and willing to engage with AAF but are undoubtedly held back by the historical issues of trust with FWGs. This is arguably exacerbated by the fact that there is a particular interest in hunting in Leicestershire compared to most other forces which MAY well mean more officers have hunting links. However, this force has moved officers away from policing hunting and does ask questions about hunting interests which equally other forces don't. They also do ask the hunt for trail maps on occasions although there is no legal obligation for the hunts to provide these and as far as we are aware they don't. The hunts in turn accuse the police of being biased against them.

**In the opinion of AAF, how can this police force improve?**

Given that it is unlikely that most FWGs will engage with Leicester Police, it is for the police to make the first move. Next season, on any hunt-related call, police should listen to the FWGs when they are reporting illegal hunting and they should challenge the hunts about their activities. AAF is aware that the historical problems will stick with Leicester Police and that a change in attitude will happen slowly.

Leicester Police must recognise that the leaked webinars from the Hunting Office (exposed in November 2020) and the resulting conviction of Mark Hankinson have changed everything. Regardless of the outcome of any court cases, what was stated in the recordings cannot be unsaid. The Hunting Office made it clear trail hunting IS fox hunting and there was much talk about ways to create a "smokescreen" to cover up illegal hunting and disrespectful comments were made about the police. The Hunting Office represents all registered hunts in England and Wales therefore the discussions were relevant to all police forces.

All officers would benefit from a much greater understanding of the issues surrounding illegal hunting and the motivations of FWGs. We have created three helpful documents:

[Practical Advice for All Officers](#) – this includes training advice

[A Field Guide for Officers](#) – to use if they are called to a hunt  
[A Study - Why sabs and monitors are not protesters.](#) – an insight FWG organisations.

### Hit Reports and Media reports mentioning hunting and Leicestershire Police

Leicester Police have seen this list of reports and have commented on some. Their comments are in italics.

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-58328233?fbclid=IwAR2jy\\_m15W6nkkq7CR6dTdpadypIcqNS8eVlxwWbRaI9nuVA08gQHcl3RUg](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-58328233?fbclid=IwAR2jy_m15W6nkkq7CR6dTdpadypIcqNS8eVlxwWbRaI9nuVA08gQHcl3RUg)

26/8/20. Quorn hunt members escape prosecution. Police handling of the case questioned.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/3328370053899175>

26/9/20. Cottesmore clearly cub hunting.. Alleged covid breaches

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/3344138272322353>

1/10/20. Cottesmore clearly cub hunting. Presence of Leicestershire police on the phone deters hunt support from aggressive behaviour.

<https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterHuntSabs/posts/4012513795432522>

24/10/20. The Fernie. Sexist remarks made to female FWGs. Police allegedly say "if you don't like it then why are you here?" *Police have pointed out that there is no actual evidence to support this and have offered to investigate if they have more details.*

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/3443776042358575>

31/10/20. Common Assault incident lodged with the police. Crime number given.

<https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/police-create-new-team-tackle-4726772?fbclid=IwAR2VdovoMB1CeF1vOlnbr6XVwUDrstuiYSMfTfRUwn5ttgKc7TszgC8F5W4>

23/11/20 Leicestershire Police recruit specials "The team will be led by Special Sergeant xxx, who works to support the farmers of England and Wales in his full time job with the National Farmers Union (NFU)." This would be seen as a conflict of interest by many as the NFU are generally seen as having links with hunting/other bloodsports. *Police explained to us why they are in regular contact with the NFU as it is important to engage with rural communities.*

(related to the report above, a 2019 advert for recruiting gamekeepers (amongst others) to work in crime also created controversy)

<https://m.facebook.com/leicspolice/posts/10157151897916170>

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/3527901660612679>  
7/12/20 Cottesmore hunt. Several blatant Covid breaches.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/3559727434096768>  
19/12/20 Cottesmore hunt attack a vehicle driven by a female FWG. Police informed. Various other incidents of threats and violence.

[https://www.itv.com/news/2021-03-29/hunt-masters-suspended-after-riding-out-with-hounds-during-lockdown-for-70th-birthday-surprise?fbclid=IwAR3pazxfZIKlp6kQqRmHpCjj82CuUK6v6a\\_NZ82iyM88fGPbJclrSFbfUC0](https://www.itv.com/news/2021-03-29/hunt-masters-suspended-after-riding-out-with-hounds-during-lockdown-for-70th-birthday-surprise?fbclid=IwAR3pazxfZIKlp6kQqRmHpCjj82CuUK6v6a_NZ82iyM88fGPbJclrSFbfUC0)

18/3/21. Quorn hunting in Leicestershire during lockdown. Outcome unknown at time of writing

<https://www.facebook.com/ManchesterHuntSabs/posts/4536758956341334>  
24/4/21. Dove Valley Mink Hounds falsely tell police a Sab is armed 24/4. A lengthy email exchange followed between AAF and the Chief Inspector.

Quotation from FWG

“The upshot is - we will no longer meet with plod as it was a waste of time. All they did was defend the hunters, have a go at us, keep arresting us for no just cause and they were only trying to gather intel on sabs.”

**Post from last season for reference -**

<https://www.facebook.com/HertfordshireHuntSaboteurs/posts/1532746943557320>  
April 2020 - Leicestershire Police know the hunts waste their time

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/4329152133820957>  
<https://www.facebook.com/NorthantsHuntSaboteurs/posts/4335629686506535>  
<https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/local-news/hunt-saboteur-suffers-broken-ribs-5949188>

18/9/21. Cottesmore hunt. FWG in his 60s suffers broken ribs following an assault.

[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=4356748911061279&id=678149598921247](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=4356748911061279&id=678149598921247)

25/9/21. Cottesmore hunt a week after the above incident. More violence