

## WEST MERCIA POLICE

[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 West Mercia Police 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

**How do you rate the email response?**

1	2	3	4	5
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Why have you given this rating?**

The response was wordy and lacking in content. West Mercia showed no interest in engaging with AAF with a view to improving their understanding and response to hunt-related calls. Given the high-profile exposee of the way the force dealt with the 'Fox Cubs Cruelty' case, and the introduction to our report by the author of 'Fox Cubs Cruelty', we would have expected full engagement. 'Fox Cubs Cruelty' provided an account (with much supporting evidence) of West Mercia's attempts to prevent the prosecution of the Herefordshire Hunt staff for feeding live fox cubs to hounds.

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

- Yes
- No

**How willing was this force to take on board what we said?**

1	2	3	4	5
-	✓	-	-	-

**Why have you given this response?**

They didn't answer questions on CTC. They merely said that officers are trained and make every reasonable effort to enforce legislation.

West Mercia showed no interest at all in improvement. They appear to be satisfied with their performance in this area, despite the public criticism.

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

- Yes
- No
- ✓ Other

**What steps have they taken?**

Not that we are aware of however some officers have a reasonably good reputation with FWGs

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

- ✓ Yes
- No

**What do you think of the guide/aide memoire?**

1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

### Why have you given this response?

Not seen, but it is a LACS Hunting With Dogs Act booklet

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

1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

### Why have you given this response?

West Mercia say " Currently West Mercia Police have 45 officers and staff who have undertaken additional wildlife crime training, in addition to 82 officers/staff who have undertaken specific briefing on The Hunting Act within the last 2 years. Officers & staff are located throughout the force." They use a LACs booklet.

### 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?

Officers can appear reasonable in the field. But FWGs have said that one of the WCOs in West Mercia actually hunts. This is bound to create a perception of bias. Also, West Mercia police attended "Let's meet the Hounds" day. This can also be perceived as bias.

Many FWG groups in this area are dissatisfied with the police. They say that not only do some West Mercia Police turn a blind eye to illegal foxhunting, but that they actually make an effort to stop the FWGs in their vehicles so that they cannot follow the hunt.

**Looking at the response to our FOI asking about police systems and organisation with regard to fox**

**hunting, how do you rate their ability to take action on illegal foxhunting?**

1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

**Why have you given this rating?**

Given the number of trained officers, it would seem that this force should be able to take action on illegal foxhunting. However, in practice, this doesn't appear to happen.

**How well trained are police?**

1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

**Why have you given this rating?**

Training does appear to be given importance. Reasonable number of officers trained.

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

- Yes
- ✓ Other
- No

**Why have you given this response?**

Response from this force is inconsistent and it has proved impossible for AAF to find a pattern. We can only conclude that some officers take illegal

foxhunting seriously and others do not. Some officers prefer to stop and question FWGs, but do not stop and question the hunt.

### **Any other comments?**

Regardless of the outcome of any court cases relating to the Hunting Office webinars which were exposed November 2020, 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. 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.

We have also received reports that West Mercia call operators refuse to provide incident numbers for hunting-related calls.

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

There appears to be a noticeable lack of consistency in this force with no clear direction provided to officers with to enable them to tackle illegal foxhunting. West Mercia Police Force should recognise that some officers show significant failures with regard to enforcing the Hunting Act and engaging with anti-hunting groups, and others don't. One group of FWGs wrote an open letter in 2019 to West Mercia explaining who they are and what they do. As far as we know, the letter was ignored. It is important that West Mercia begins to have direct dialogue with FWG groups - and if they (understandably) refuse, then AAF is always willing to meet and discuss the issues.

There is good reason for anti- hunting groups to suspect that hunt supporters exist in all ranks of the force. This damages the force's public image. Many FWGs do not trust the force at all. We also believe that the majority of officers are trying to do a good job, but when it comes to wildlife crime, they might be prevented from tackling it by senior officers. If this is not the case, West Mercia should at least attempt to exonerate themselves with some open dialogue.

FWGs are a potential resource for police and should be viewed as such.

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 and Media Reports involving West Mercia Police and hunting

<https://www.facebook.com/staffordshirehuntsabs/posts/452713945368782>

Dec 2019 Open letter to West Mercia police (and others). Not known if there was any reply.

[https://www.huntsabs.org.uk/exposed-animal-abusing-wildlife-officer-s-links-to-fox-killer/?fbclid=IwAR0yg-](https://www.huntsabs.org.uk/exposed-animal-abusing-wildlife-officer-s-links-to-fox-killer/?fbclid=IwAR0yg-sw9AUSGvhj357eyq3TZy_PiNFxoCz_sfgPE6Z90yQsxFzkFvXJDI)

[swy9AUSGvhj357eyq3TZy\\_PiNFxoCz\\_sfgPE6Z90yQsxFzkFvXJDI](https://m.facebook.com/stop.the.cull/photos/a.258053550967020/2648924685213216/?type=3&source=57&_tn_ =EHH-R)

[https://m.facebook.com/stop.the.cull/photos/a.258053550967020/2648924685213216/?type=3&source=57&\\_tn\\_ =EHH-R](https://m.facebook.com/stop.the.cull/photos/a.258053550967020/2648924685213216/?type=3&source=57&_tn_ =EHH-R)

<https://twitter.com/wmerciapolice/status/1253963548960620544?lang=en> (see David Hash's comments)

11/5/20. Three links above all related to Gerry Plant West Mercia WCO being a keen hunter.

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<https://www.facebook.com/HerefordshireHuntSabs/posts/643760786318659>

13/11/20. Case against an FWG - no case to answer. North Herefordshire Huntsman.

<https://www.facebook.com/HerefordshireHuntSabs/posts/657728521588552>

3/12/20. 5/12/20 8/12/20 - North Herefordshire Hunt – Three meets, police attended two of them, positive comments

<https://www.facebook.com/ShropWildMonitors/posts/1318056308558159>

19/12/20. South Shropshire Hunt – FWGs call police who do not attend due to lack of resources

[https://yourherefordshire.co.uk/all/news/news-police-in-herefordshire-cracking-down-on-those-committing-crimes-against-](https://yourherefordshire.co.uk/all/news/news-police-in-herefordshire-cracking-down-on-those-committing-crimes-against-wildlife/?fbclid=IwAR3tZ6shfisOvrOBofhgL6Rujrxa4kyHeeHBXj53k6bR58y7NtO7E)

[wildlife/?fbclid=IwAR3tZ6shfisOvrOBofhgL6Rujrxa4kyHeeHBXj53k6bR58y7NtO7E](https://yourherefordshire.co.uk/all/news/news-police-in-herefordshire-cracking-down-on-those-committing-crimes-against-wildlife/?fbclid=IwAR3tZ6shfisOvrOBofhgL6Rujrxa4kyHeeHBXj53k6bR58y7NtO7E)  
[FcQN38](https://yourherefordshire.co.uk/all/news/news-police-in-herefordshire-cracking-down-on-those-committing-crimes-against-wildlife/?fbclid=IwAR3tZ6shfisOvrOBofhgL6Rujrxa4kyHeeHBXj53k6bR58y7NtO7E)

21/4/21. West Mercia police say they are cracking down on deer poaching. This response below was made on a closed Facebook site, posted by a member of the public 24/4/21:

*"Rural crime is NOT taken seriously by Herefordshire Police. They have failed spectacularly at policing illegal hunting by certain groups of well-connected people. They also do not respond when a report of an ongoing offence is logged. Ask anyone in our region who has tried to stop hunters with hounds trespassing on their land. Perhaps they will be proactive now. I wait with baited breath 😊"*

<https://www.facebook.com/shropshireagainstbloodsports/posts/256276119584631>

Police "getting cosy" with the hunt - in press. This article appeared in the pro hunt newsletter <https://www.thisishuntinguk.org/news> it is now no longer accessible but this was copied from the page when it was:

"The success with getting local police attending, helped in establishing relationships and positioning positively"

[https://www.facebook.com/messenger\\_media?thread\\_id=100024680319532&attachment\\_id=356187406108935&message\\_id=mid.%24cAABa-NBKLSBTjRPE17HO8C8g7pv](https://www.facebook.com/messenger_media?thread_id=100024680319532&attachment_id=356187406108935&message_id=mid.%24cAABa-NBKLSBTjRPE17HO8C8g7pv)

23/6/21. Facebook post by the Ludlow hunt "keep up kicking on and killing"  
Presume West Mercia police will be using this as intelligence?

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN\\_GK0T-GK1C&v=372549251242314](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&v=372549251242314)

14/9/21. Croome & West Warwickshire. West Mercia Police sent out to investigate an alleged trespass. Given lift in 'landowners' car who was allegedly complicit in the hunting.

AAF knows of 11 incidents of badger sett blocking reported to West Mercia Police last year (20/21 season). Out of these 11 reports, the FWGs were satisfied with three of the responses by the police.