

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR COUNTING THE CRIMES 2

Background to Counting the Crimes 2.

FWG = Frontline Wildlife Guardians. “FWG” includes both saboteurs and monitors and anyone who is involved in direct action.

“Counting the Crimes 2” is the second report in the series “Counting the Crimes - police response to hunt-related calls.” (CTC). CTC was written and published by Action Against Foxhunting in 2020.

CTC was:

“An evidence-based report detailing the problems and the possible solutions to the difficulties that arise between police and anti-blood sports groups in the ineffective enforcement of the Hunting Act 2004.”

<https://www.actionagainstfoxhunting.org/counting-the-crimes/>

The collected evidence from CTC showed that:

- Police response to hunt-related incidents is highly variable. It varies between police forces, and between police officers. There is no consistency.
- Most police, even in rural areas, have received no training whatsoever in relation to illegal hunting.
- Some officers and some forces are biased towards the hunt and against Frontline Wildlife Guardians (FWGs).
- There is evidence that, as an organisation, the police are prepared to allow the crime of illegal hunting to go unpunished.
- Pro hunting groups are satisfied with the way the police respond to hunt-related calls; but anti blood sports groups are not.
- Some police choose to disregard their code of ethics and act without “fairness and impartiality” when dealing with FWGs.
- The relationship between the police and the FWGs has broken down completely in some areas, leading to a failure to report possible crimes.

CTC asked the police to examine their attitudes to FWGs, their enforcement of the Hunting Act and their ability to recognise and take action when faced with a call to illegal foxhunting.

Many police forces responded positively to the report and welcomed our research. A key issue is communication with FWGs, many of whom do not readily engage with the police. CTC offered police an insight into the issues, and an opportunity to

discuss them openly with AAF.

We sent CTC to all chief constables in 34 rural forces and monitored replies.

- We held meetings with 13 forces.
- We had email exchanges with a further 9 forces.
- 6 forces sent us a single email only.
- We had no response from 6 forces.
- In addition to this, we met with DCC Paul Netherton.
- We also held phone conversations with two of the forces who responded by email.

Executive Summary for CTC2

In between the publication of Counting the Crimes (Sept 2020) and the majority of our discussions with police, the Hunting Office webinars were exposed (Nov 2020). At the meetings, we discussed the webinar, but the guilty verdict (confirming that trail hunting is foxhunting) had not occurred. The majority of Counting the Crimes 2 (The Police Response) was completed before the verdict. We had already concluded that the webinar exposure was enough to show beyond any doubt that trail hunting is foxhunting, and the verdict confirmed this. However, we have reviewed the body of the report to reflect the importance of the verdict. Please click [here](#) for an explanation of the webinars and the verdict.

CTC2 is

“An evidence-based report detailing the response from police to “Counting the Crimes”. It includes 34 individual reports on rural police forces, showing how they responded to CTC; the present relationship between them and local anti-hunting groups; their ability and willingness to enforce the Hunting Act 2004, and any plans they have for improvement.”

Published Autumn 2021

THE EXPLANATION OF OUR RESEARCH CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)

COUNTING THE CRIMES 2 CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)

Our research and our communications with police revealed this:

1. **Some forces are prepared to address the issues in CTC (relationship with FWGs and proper enforcement of the Hunting Act) and others are not.** CTC2 includes reports on individual rural police forces. The reports show each force’s attitude, and whether they have plans for improvement. It is

crucial that FWG groups know if their local force is addressing the issues. AAF believes that these forces should be given a fair opportunity to prove that they can improve in the field. We also recommend that FWGs engage positively with these forces.

2. **Police are presented with repeated opportunities to tackle illegal hunting, but often fail to take them.** In our discussions with police, resources and the low priority of breaches against the Hunting Act were cited as reasons for not tackling illegal hunting. However, police are constantly being called to hunting incidents. Once an officer is at the scene, limited resources and low priorities are no longer relevant. Despite this, it is rare for an officer to challenge a hunt, so opportunities to enforce the Hunting Act are repeatedly being missed.

3. **With regard to enforcing the Hunting Act, police forces operate as entirely separate organisations.** Forces are unaware of initiatives or attitudes in other forces. This is why there appears to be no clear national direction for tackling illegal foxhunting. However, while this is convenient for the hunting lobby, it is not deliberate by the police. The low priority of illegal foxhunting means that the issue receives very little attention UNLESS it also concerns public order.

4. **Police websites are inadequate with regard to helping members of the public recognise illegal foxhunting.**

5. **While the NPCC has produced national guidance on hunting (to be revised shortly), there is no requirement for any force to use it.** All the local aide memoires we saw were heavily focussed on public order and did little to help with spotting or investigating illegal foxhunting. Some forces did not have a local aide memoire and did not appear to make much use of the national guidance either.

6. **The focus on public order is a significant barrier between police and FWGs. It is also avoids focus on breaches of the Hunting Act.** All police are familiar with public order issues but very few know much about illegal foxhunting. This means that officers are far more likely to challenge FWGs in a vehicle, than challenge hunters on horses.

7. **When out on a call, police officers habitually ask for names and addresses, causing friction between FWGs and police.** Officially, police

should not ask for details unless they are speaking to the driver of a vehicle, or they have good reason to believe the person has committed an offence. They are rarely seen to ask the hunt for the same details, even when they have been called for illegal foxhunting. This has to change.

8. **Training on the Hunting Act is highly variable.** It is unlikely that an officer attending a hunt-related call will have enough knowledge of the Hunting Act to recognise illegal foxhunting. When challenged, many of the forces we engaged with were keen to address this and some have already taken positive action. However, the training does come with a caveat. While it is offered by the League Against Cruel Sports, it is also offered by the Countryside Alliance and “trained” officers are likely to have had input from both organisations. The CA (we assume) will be telling officers that hunts are “trail hunting”, and it will conflict with the League’s training. At the very least, officers are unlikely to know whom to believe. We hope that the webinar scandal has shown police which of these two organisations to trust.

9. **Organisationally, police are keen to avoid unconscious bias, but it is very clear from our research that there is much room for improvement with regard to the way FWGs are treated.** CTC drew attention to the assumptions that officers make about “stereotypical” FWGs. This is heavily linked to the public order issues, the familiarity of the police with public order law and unfamiliarity with the Hunting Act.

10. **Police forces do not accept that there is organisational bias either towards the hunts or against FWGs.** Officers on calls make decisions as they see fit at the time. It is justifiable to conclude that if 15% of the population is in favour of foxhunting, then 15% of police officers are also in favour of it. Given the dedication of pro hunters to their cause (of continuing to hunt despite the law, and obstructing FWGs) and the evidence we have collected in CTC and CTC2, we believe that pro hunting officers usually act in an unprofessional way towards FWGs. However, this should not be confused with lack of training, which can be perceived as bias.

11. **Police want to engage with hunting groups and with FWGs.** They say they do this in order to keep the lines of communication open. Many forces said that they are criticised by the hunts as well as by anti-hunting groups. Some said that there was no communication at all between police and the hunts as well as no communication with FWGs.

12. While there is no doubt that there are some pro hunters in the police force, it is also true to say that many officers are impartial and act fairly. It is also highly likely that most officers who appear not to be impartial are just poorly trained.

13. Police are keen to give FWGs guidance on collecting evidence for illegal hunting. We have included this advice in the report.

CTC2 makes the following recommendations

- All forces should acknowledge that illegal foxhunting is widespread and develop a clear policy to address this. The Hankinson verdict on 15 October 2021, means that police can no longer ignore it.
- All forces should recognise and tackle increasing hunt violence towards FWGs.
- Officers in the field should be prepared to tackle breaches of the Hunting Act and not resort to the more familiar public order issues.
- All police websites should provide information for the public about illegal foxhunting, in some detail.
- All forces should have robust aide memoires, for use in the field by officers who are called to illegal foxhunting. It is crucial that officers can recognise illegal foxhunting when they see it happening in front of them.
- All officers likely to attend hunt-related incidents should receive training on the Hunting Act.
- Officers involved in hunting or other bloodsports should not also be involved in hunt-related investigations or actions; the conflict of interest is untenable and damaging.
- All forces should regard FWGs as a resource in the same way as they do Neighbourhood Watch groups.
- All forces should recognise and tackle hunts' anti social behaviour, and understand the extent of the negative impact on members of the public.

Contents of Counting the Crimes 2

PART ONE: THE HUNTING ACT

What the police said about the Hunting Act
AAF's comments and recommendations

PART TWO: EVIDENCE FOR PROSECUTIONS

What the police said about evidence gathering for illegal fox hunting

Suggestions from the police about how to improve the quality of evidence from FWGs

AAF's comments and recommendations

PART THREE: INFORMATION AND INTELLIGENCE

What the police said about information and intelligence
AAF's comments and recommendations

PART FOUR: BIAS AND PERCEIVED BIAS

What the police said about bias
AAF's comments and recommendations

PART FIVE: THE EFFECT HUNTING HAS ON THE GENERAL PUBLIC

What the police said about the effect that hunting has on the general public
AAF's comments and recommendations

PART SIX: HUNT VIOLENCE

What the police said about hunt violence
AAF's comments and recommendations

PART SEVEN: LOOKING FORWARDS and CONCLUSION

- Acknowledging hunt crimes
- Enforcing the Hunting Act in the field
- Police Websites and Social Media
- Training and Aide Memoires
- Improving the relationship between police and FWGs
- Hunt violence and the effect hunts have on the public

PART EIGHT: REPORTS ON INDIVIDUAL POLICE FORCES

REPORTS ON FORCES CAN BE FOUND [HERE](#)

List of Forces

1. Avon and Somerset Constabulary
2. Bedfordshire Police
3. Cambridgeshire Constabulary
4. Cheshire Constabulary
5. Cleveland Police
6. Cumbria Constabulary
7. Derbyshire Constabulary
8. Devon and Cornwall Police
9. Dorset Police
10. Durham Constabulary
11. Essex Police
12. Gloucestershire Constabulary
13. Hampshire Constabulary
14. Hertfordshire Constabulary
15. Humberside Police
16. Kent Police
17. Lancashire Constabulary
18. Leicestershire Police
19. Lincolnshire Police
20. Ministry of Defence Police
21. Norfolk Constabulary
22. North Yorkshire Police
23. Northamptonshire Police
24. Northumbria Police
25. Nottinghamshire Police
26. South Yorkshire Police
27. Staffordshire Police
28. Suffolk Constabulary
29. Surrey and Sussex Police
30. Thames Valley Police
31. Warwickshire Police
32. West Mercia Police
33. West Yorkshire Police
34. Wiltshire Police