

Northumbria 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 Northumbria 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. We are happy to meet on line.



How did the force respond to CTC?

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

For Email response - was the response detailed?

- ✓ Yes
- No

How do you rate the response?

1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

Why have you given this rating?

The response was considered and detailed. However, it was disappointing that the officer who responded did not appear to believe that illegal foxhunting happened at all, let alone repeatedly. In another email, he called allegations of illegal foxhunting "conjecture" - despite the number of reports received by AAF and other organisations, not to mention the amount of evidence there is online.

Were there follow up emails and did the force reply?

✓ Yes

– No

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

1	2	3	4	5
-	-	✓	-	-

For the forces who met with us, how useful was the meeting?

1	2	3	4	5
-	✓	-	-	-

Why have you given this response?

The meeting was not useful. We did not speak to a police officer - we spoke to the Wildlife Co-ordinator and Planning Officer. The officer had no practical experience in the field with FWGs and hunts.

They were as open as possible bearing in mind how little is known about illegal hunting within this force. Many questions we asked were clearly not something the force representative we spoke to had knowledge of. It was useful in that we spoke to an administrative officer who had received the same training as the 8 WCOs in the force so we could gauge the general level of training/knowledge in this area.

A knowledgeable local FWG (currently completing a PHD on hunting) who

joined us in the meeting said this: *“In the meeting, it was clear (the officer) knew nothing about illegal hunting, tactics or behaviour, he couldn't answer when I asked him he knew what roll tongue was or how to establish illegal hunting was going on.”*

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

1	2	3	4	5
✓	-	-	-	-

Why have you given this response?

Nothing we said made any difference. About the webinar, the officer said this: " it is clear to me that the participants were fully cognisant of the potential for their conversations to be accessed by persons outside their organisation and they conducted themselves accordingly. Ostensibly, the presentations were about staying on the “right side of the law” whilst trail hunting, and whilst I am not a legal expert I do not believe any laws were broken by those giving the presentations." We now know that one of the speakers is being prosecuted for his involvement in the webinar; the Northumbria officer was completely wrong in every respect.

This does not give us confidence in their approach to illegal foxhunting if they are that easy to deceive.

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

- Yes
- No
- ✓ They have done the opposite. An incident with Northumbria Hunt Watch on 12th December worsened the already awful relationship. This was an opportunity to improve it, but the police did not take it.

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?

In lieu of an aide memoire they say Instead, “advice and information can be accessed by the officer themselves via their phablet or by Communications Centre and conveyed to the officer attending the scene should they need it. Advice can also be sought from WCOs and the Wildlife Co-ordinator.”

How well trained are the police in this force?

1	2	3	4	5
-	✓	-	-	-

Why have you given this response?

There are over 6000 officers in this enormous police force. There are 8 WCOs and a handful of others who have been trained.

If the officer allocated is a Wildlife Crime Officer, then they should have attended a National Wildlife Crime Officers Course and received training in wildlife law including the Hunting Act 2004. Most other officers will not have received specific training in the Hunting Act. Training is provided by the Wildlife Training Consultancy. The officer we spoke to had received this training as had the 8 WCOs in the force and there were also 5 ex WCOs who would have received it. The 8 WCOs are only WCOs alongside their other duties.

Here are some quotations from written responses by a TRAINED officer:

“Those reports that allege unlawful fox hunting, in the majority, are without evidence to substantiate the claim. Usually these are simply sightings of foxhunts which are actually trail hunting. Actionable evidence from persons claiming to have witnessed a fox being hunted is invariably non-existent or poor and insufficient to continue with an investigation. Nonetheless if there were evidence of illegal fox hunting Northumbria Police would take positive action where appropriate.”

In response to the question about asking for trail maps, the officer said: *“I do not believe that this is done as a matter of course but where allegations are made that a trail hunt is in fact an unlawful fox hunt, officers may request details from a Hunt Master of where the trail has been laid as part of their investigation.”* However, we know that when officers attended a call for illegal hunting, no trail map was asked for.

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?

We know of one incident where Northumbria police officers were described as "brilliant" by the anti-hunt group who called them. However, this is an isolated incident.

With the lack of knowledge and training in the force there is bound to be bias in the field albeit some of it unconscious. Also the Police Standards complaint re incident 12/12 (including an unedited video) was not upheld. Presumably this was reviewed by an officer/officers who believe trail hunting is the norm as per the quotes above.

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?

1	2	3	4	5
✓	-	-	-	-

Why have you given this rating?

This force is not well-trained. Also, there appears to be very little motivation for the police to do anything at all about illegal foxhunting.

From the information we have received and from our research, it appears this force doesn't acknowledge that illegal fox hunting is an issue or that it even happens. Therefore, they cannot be expected to take effective action. The force cannot apply legislation without knowledge of the crime.

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?

The incident with Northumbria Hunt Watch on 12/12/2020 is typical. Police regard FWGs as the originators of the trouble, not the hunts (who are the root cause - and who are undoubtedly breaking the law).

Any other comments?

We are aware of one fair and unbiased WCO in the force. He recognises some evidence may not be good enough for prosecutions, but that all of it can be valuable intelligence. Once intelligence is gathered and a picture built up and knowledge gained, then they will be in a better place to investigate and build a case.

But this is unfortunately this does not appear to be the norm in Northumbria.

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 that 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.

Overall, how do you rate this force?

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

1	2	3	4	5
-	✓	-	-	-

There appears to be a clear reluctance from the police to recognise that illegal foxhunting happens at all. There are very active anti-hunt organisations in this area, numerous reports of hunt violence and a significant number of complaints about the hunts from members of the public who have been intimidated and disturbed by the hunt. Northumbria Police do not appear to be concerned at all by the effect the hunt has on the public, let alone on the foxes. We have had reports of two local farmers who are frightened to challenge the hunt about their behaviour on their land. It appears to AAF that the hunt are in effectively in control in Northumbria.

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

Northumbria Police force need to acknowledge the extent of the law-breaking by the hunts. Even if the evidence is not good enough for a prosecution, there is enough for the police to recognise the hunts are breaking the law. Northumbria Police force should also understand that the hunts are controlling many who might want to object to their behaviour. Intimidation is stopping members of the public from speaking out - this is something the police can and should address.

There are 12 hunts operating in Northumbria. Illegal hunting is a real issue in

this county. Better training and a competent aide memoir is needed urgently. There are only 8 WCOs with some training and this training clearly doesn't equip them with the skills to recognise and investigate illegal hunting. Other officers have not received any specific training at all.

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 reports and media reports mentioning the hunt and the police

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/222654042675144>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/723821897815599/permalink/1498839576980490>

2/1/21 Not a hit report but NHW preparing dossier on how police dealt with crimes and incidents of Tynedale Hunt.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/178432293763986>

26/9/20 Tynedale Hunt – FWGs call Police who attended and were fantastic.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/176042504002965>

16/9/20 Braes of Derwent hunting – Police called twice and did not attend.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/209156117358270>

12/12/20 Tynedale Hunting – Police attend

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/209178874022661>

12/12/20 Police hold FWGs long enough for hunt to escape.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/222625162678032>

2/1/21 Tynedale hunt terrorise alpaca herd 3 times before christmas. Police do not prosecute.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/205157184424830>

6/12/20 Police notified by FWGs with evidence of Tynedale Hunt violent behaviour.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/179234783683737>

29/9/20 Braes run amok in Tendercare Kennels, Owner's cat killed and dogs, staff and visitors scared by incident. Owner calls police who attend but allow hunt to continue.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/189535209320361>

7/11/20 Braes seen chasing fox – Police notified.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/178521853755030>

26/9/20 Tynedale cub hunt – Female FWG followed and cornered by supporters vehicles who intimidate and threaten. FWG calls police and concerned shop keeper tells her to wait in shop for police. Excellent response from police.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/189291882678027>

6/11/20 Tynedal threaten and intimidate FWGs – Police investigating.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/188832692723946>

4/11/20 Braes hunt- Police called.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/185766869697195>

23/10/20 Tynedale hunt – aggressive & violent, police informed.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/211817113758837>

16/12/20 Tynedale hunt aggressive and intimidating, FWGs call police who attend and question them, trying to criminalise their activities, biased police.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthHW/posts/184373886503160>

17/10/20 Tynedale hunt – 2 tyres on FWGs vehicle punctured, police informed.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/723821897815599/permalink/1455170321347416>

6/11/20 Tynedale – Police investigating.

NE Hunt Monitors

<https://www.facebook.com/NEhuntmonitors/posts/1055840744880793>

30/12/20 Hunt spotted in Humshaugh, police attend.

<https://www.facebook.com/NEhuntmonitors/posts/984926938638841>

29/9/20 Braes kill cat, police called.

<https://www.facebook.com/NEhuntmonitors/posts/1050769418721259>

22/12/20 Vehicle collision, woman assaulted, police attend.