

## Avon & Somerset Constabulary

[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 on Avon and Somerset 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.



**UPDATE 27/1/22**

Since publishing **Counting the Crimes 2**, Avon and Somerset Constabulary have made significant efforts to tackle illegal foxhunting. Officers are receiving training in all aspects of hunting and attitudes are changing. In the field, FWGs report that officers are proactively policing hunts, when they can.

The force is also engaging with anti-hunting groups in order to build relationships.

This is a dynamic situation, and we will watch its progresses.

In the meantime, the report below shows the situation as it was at the end of the 2020 season.

**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

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

1	2	3	4	5
-	✓	-	-	-

**Why have you given this rating?**

The content of the response, while detailed, is inconsistent with the way A&S officers respond to hunting related calls in the field.

Were there follow up emails and did the force reply?

**No**

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

1	2	3	4	5
✓	-	-	-	-

**Why have you given this response?**

Responsive to emails but no interest shown in improving training and knowledge.

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

- Yes
- No
- ✓ Other

**What steps have they taken?**

Since Counting the Crimes was published, there is none we are aware of. However early in 2020, in the Burnham on Sea Office, a WCO held a meeting with many different FWG groups, including AAF. On the other hand, another officer is believed to hunt (or has hunted) with the Beaufort. As this is well known it is bound to create trust issues.

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

Yes

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

1	2	3	4	5
✓	-	-	-	-

**Why have you given this response?**

It appears there is a 4-stage procedure if there is evidence of "unlawful activity" from

the hunt: 1. Discuss the matter with the hunt 2. If more unlawful activities reported, monitor the hunt. 3. If appropriate, advise the hunt about their conduct. 4. After all these states THEN consider investigating and submitting to the CPS. The use of the word “consider” is significant. Even when there is clear evidence of illegal hunting, the force is not necessarily going to take action. This is in direct conflict with A&S’s response to Counting the Crimes where they stated “they would endeavor to investigate all allegations reported to them”. It appears that illegal hunting is an exception to this; but the force did not admit this in their responses to our report.

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

1	2	3	4	5
✓	-	-	-	-

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

The force responded that their 7 WCOs have ongoing training provided by the National Wildlife Crime Unit. We don't know what this comprises of.

### **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

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

70% dissatisfaction rate on our survey. We have had sight of emails from an AAF member extensively detailing a case where the police appear particularly biased. It also appears to be a policy with A&S police to ignore calls from FWGs in the field even if they are being threatened, or subject to, violence. A&S police have stated that FWGs should remove themselves from harm, if they feel threatened. However, this is not always possible, as FWGs are frequently surrounded and prevented from

leaving by the hunt. Also, by telling FWGs to remove themselves from harm, they are then allowing the hunts to break the law. Upholding the law is the responsibility of the police but A&S often fail to respond to calls concerning illegal hunting. They are refusing to take action themselves; this leaves the prevention of crime up to the FWGs who are prepared to risk their own safety to protect wildlife. FWGs will never, if they can help it, leave an animal in danger.

**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?**

A&S's procedural guidance is so weak that the hunts are effectively permitted to hunt illegally all the time. Police inaction is permitting the hunts to injure and intimidate FWGs as they please. In the opinion of AAF, we believe that it is only a matter of time before someone is killed. If that happens, the police will share the responsibility with the actual perpetrators.

We have not said this for any other force.

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

Yes

**Why have you given this response?**

Information and incidents recorded by FWGs show that A&S either ignore calls about illegal foxhunting or treat them as Public Order incidents.

**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
✓	-	-	-	-

### **Any other comments?**

A well-trained, well-informed force is much needed in Avon and Somerset. The Mendip Farmers Hunt are well known for their alleged violence and illegal hunting. There is plenty of photographic and video evidence of this which, if not strong enough to stand up to the Hunting Act requirements should be viewed as intelligence or information. Lord Mancroft hunts with the Beaufort, he was a high profile speaker on the leaked webinars where it was admitted trail hunting is merely a smokescreen.

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

This force must accept that illegal foxhunting is widespread. The leaked Hunting Office webinars (exposed November 2020) revealed that the hunts wish to deceive the police into believing that they are trail hunting when they are foxhunting. Disrespectful comments were made about the police and at the time of writing, one person is due in court for offences relating to the webinar. However, regardless of the outcome, what was stated in the recordings cannot be unsaid. The Hunting Office said that trail hunting was a “smokescreen” for illegal hunting. The Hunting Office represents all registered hunts in England and Wales therefore the discussions were relevant to all police forces.

Avon and Somerset have a Rural Affairs Unit. This unit should take action to prevent illegal hunting.

A&S are not committed to dealing with illegal foxhunting. They commit their limited resources to dealing with public order, as opposed to dealing with illegal foxhunting. Illegal foxhunting is the source of the public disorder, but that is rarely addressed.

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 Avon and Somerset Police

<https://www.facebook.com/CIHWatch/posts/2729174374026538>

9/9/20. Beaufort hunting cubs, obstruction, Covid rule breaking. Police informed.

<https://www.facebook.com/wiltshirehuntsabs/posts/3234881133216109>

19/9/20. Mendip Farmers hunt hound killed on A39 (no police mentioned presume informed)

<https://www.facebook.com/BristolHuntSaboteurs/posts/3357904420972639>

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/posts/3336524353101655>

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/posts/3405977419489681>

26/9/20. Mendip Farmers hunt. Violence against FWGs. Illegal hunting. Police attended.

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/posts/3353678471386243>

27/9/20. Avon & Somerset Police find resources to target those monitoring the badger cull.

<https://www.facebook.com/somersetwildlife/posts/784544602126970>

9/10/20 post. North Yorkshire Police say they investigate all reported wildlife crime? Questioned why can't Avon and Somerset do this?

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=634422744105557>

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/photos/a.2093836904037079/3378225588931531/?type=3>

10/10/20. Mendip Farmers hunt. Ball bearing attack on FWGs. Other violence. Presume reported to police.

<https://www.facebook.com/CIHWatch/posts/2763167963960512>

17/10/20. Beaufort hunt kill. Footage sent to Avon & Somerset police

<https://www.facebook.com/bathhuntsabs/photos/a.601836823203055/3481388275247881/?type=3>

22/11/20. Sean White, Avon and Somerset police officer is part of the Beaufort Hunt?

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/photos/a.2103228733097896/3514218211998934/>

29/11/20 post. In 2004 the Mendip Farmers hunt stated they were going to ignore the ban.

<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/somerset-second-highest-county-autumn-4773048?fbclid=IwAR0M0cHNXF28jTlYa9prtoXq5KsL8YuvgeAXRmfcZaN3VajjzplHsD63n2l>

7/12/20 article. Somerset is the second highest county in the country for reports of illegal hunting

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/posts/3548184358602319>

12/12/20. Mendip Farmers hunt, violence and illegal hunting. Believe the police weren't notified as per AAF comment on the post.

"I've called the police many times.. they just don't care or willing to help"

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/videos/1507534049635806>

15/12/20 post. Video showing an example of the abuse Mendip Hunt Sabs suffer. The homophobic abuse was reported to police Feb 2020. Still no response from the police despite Mendip Hunt Sabs chasing up several times.

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/posts/3581889161898505>

26/12/20. Police attend aborted 26/12 Mendip hunt. Questioned FWGs.

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/photos/a.2093836904037079/3588888691198552/?type=3>

29/12/20. At least 4 hunts out. Police involved

<https://www.facebook.com/CIHWatch/posts/2825111441099497>

29/12/20. Threatening, intimidating behaviour from Beaufort Hunt and support. A hunt supporter claimed she was a special constable.

<https://www.facebook.com/somersetwildlife/posts/844194606161969>

29/12/20. Seavington hunt reported to police, ref no 534, video evidence also provided.

<https://www.facebook.com/mendiphuntsabs/posts/4312874832133264>

11/9/21. Mendip Farmers hunt. Fox killed. Multiple assaults and equipment stolen including cameras with evidence on.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=4449838538413704>

7/9/21. Not known if reported to police but this may be useful for training purposes. Blatant cub hunting.

