

HUNTING

VICTORY! In February 2005, hunting with packs of dogs became illegal. This means that hunts cannot encourage a pack of hounds to chase a fox and then rip the fox to pieces. Mink hunting has also been banned, as has hare coursing and stag hunting.



This is a huge and long overdue step towards eliminating animal cruelty. It remains to be seen whether hunts will abide by the law, or break the law and face prosecution.

What was hunting all about?

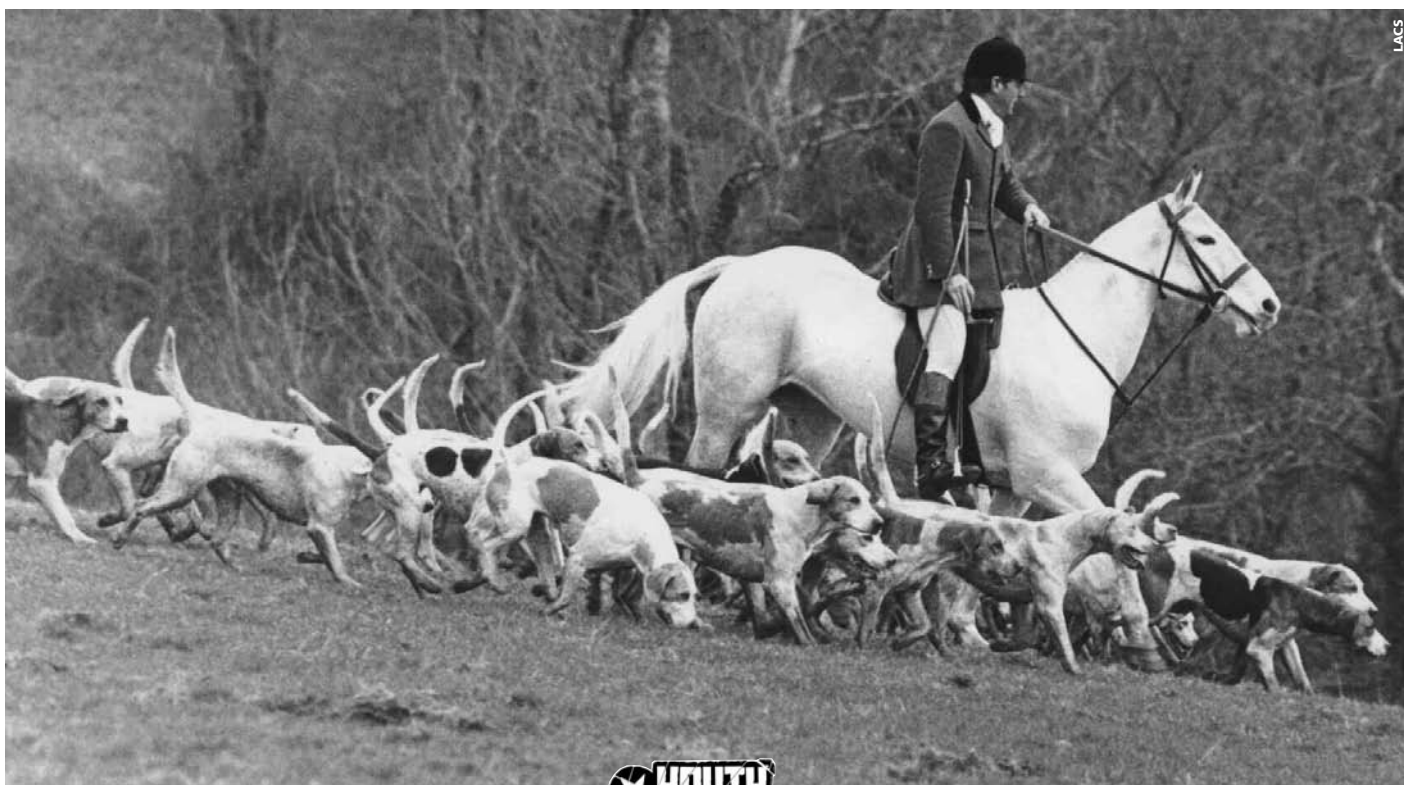
The hunting of wild animals (such as red deer, wild boar, hares and wolves) with dogs was a traditional 'sport' of kings and rich landowners. When wild boars and wolves became extinct, and the deer herds declined, hunters wanted a new 'quarry' (the name given to the animal who is chased) – the fox. Around 8 - 10,000 cubs and 10 - 12,000 adults met this fate each year. Fox hunting existed for 250 years. The official fox hunting season began on 1 November and ended in April, although some hunts would hunt until May.

From August until September hunters would chase fox cubs in order to get the new hounds used to the smell

of foxes. The dogs (or hounds, as they are known) did not hunt foxes by instinct, but had to be trained and encouraged to do so. The hounds who were not good enough at hunting would be killed. The same happened to hounds considered too old to hunt – at just five or six years of age!

The current situation

Even though hunting with dogs has been banned, hunts are allowed to send two hounds into a wood to 'flush out' a diseased fox into the open. And terriermen can 'dig out' a fox who has 'gone to ground', and shoot him or her dead.



So why did people go hunting?

'Foxes are pests who need to be controlled'

Foxes are often accused of killing chickens, but as the vast majority of chickens are imprisoned indoors in intensive 'battery' and 'broiler' units, few are in any danger from foxes. Hens who are free-range can easily be fenced in and/or securely locked up at night to keep them safe. Foxes are also accused of killing lambs, although the government agrees that less than 1% of all lamb mortalities are caused by foxes. Foxes are scavengers by nature and so tend to take lambs who are already dead. According to government figures, around 15% of newborn lambs die, principally from starvation, disease or exposure.

'Hunting is the most humane way to control foxes'

Hunting was not the most humane way to 'control' foxes. Foxes do not, in any case, need to be 'controlled' by people killing them. They are a valuable part of the British landscape, and their numbers are controlled naturally by how much food and suitable habitat is available. In 2001, hunting was suspended because of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and the government was worried that it would be spread far afield by horses being ridden across wide areas. During that period, when hunts were not allowed to chase and kill foxes, there was no increase in fox numbers. All the different ways that are used to kill foxes, such as snares, shooting, gassing, trapping and poisoning are cruel and unnecessary. However, hunting was the only method that was **designed** to be cruel. The whole point of hunting was that the chase lasted as long as possible. That was why the hounds were selectively bred

to have stamina and to run for a long time, instead of the hunt using dogs who could sprint for a short time (e.g. greyhounds). Not only was the chase exhausting and terrifying, but the final kill was violent and painful. If the fox tried to take refuge underground, for example in an earth or in a drain, then small, fierce terrier dogs would be sent down to fight with, and drive out, the fox to his or her death.



'Hunters preserve the countryside – they are conservationists'

Conservation was not what hunts were all about. The damage done to the countryside as the hunt churned up the ground, and as the followers blasted around the countryside in polluting four-wheel drives, can hardly be classed as considerate to the environment. Farmers are now paid by the government to conserve habitats such as natural woodland, so this is no longer a justification for hunting.

'Banning hunting will cause a loss of jobs, and lead to dogs being killed'

'Drag hunting' would employ the same number of people as traditional hunting. The hunt and the hounds follow a pre-laid false scent – usually composed of animal urine, droppings or an animal corpse. The scented cloth or animal remains will, typically, be dragged behind a mounted rider about half an hour before the hunt wants to set off. A switch to drag hunting means there is no excuse for killing the hounds. Unemployed hounds can always continue to be cared for by those who previously used them for hunting – or they can be rehomed.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Help Animal Aid to achieve a ban on other bloodsports – such as shooting and fishing. Order our *Stop Shooting Action Pack* and our *Angling Factsheet* and stickers.
- Join Animal Aid's youth group, *Youth4Animals*, and help campaign against hunting.

