

Review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002

Submission to Lord Bonomy

I am a member of The Berwickshire Hunt and am making this submission in a personal capacity rather than as an 'officer' of the Berwickshire Hunt.

The Berwickshire Hunt provides a fox control service for the benefit of farmers, shoot owners and landowners generally. It operates within the above law and does this effectively by using a whole pack of hounds to flush foxes to guns for humane despatch.

My wife and I run a small farm on the edge of Greenlaw. We have sheep, which lamb at this time of year, and we also have chickens and ducks. Two and a half years ago we lost 16 of our 18 ducks to what we assume was a fox. They are adept killers when they get the chance.

The Hunt operates in countryside which is very diverse including woodland and forestry; moorland; grazing land and cultivated land. This diversity of land use makes it essential for a whole pack of hounds to be used to flush foxes to guns. Without enough hounds to put pressure on foxes, they would never be flushed effectively enough to shoot them safely.

In order to help in this endeavour and to cover the ground efficiently, while helping to control the hounds at work, it is considered best to do this with horse-mounted followers, although there are also foot followers and the people with guns use bikes for access. It is often not possible to cover the ground fast enough on foot; bikes can be noisy and can alert foxes to their presence; it is often necessary to cross countryside and rivers that are inaccessible to bikes. Horses are normally best for this purpose, although in some terrain and in adverse weather conditions, even they can find it difficult.

I believe that this allows for proper, effective and humane control of mammals, such as foxes, under the Act. Keeping a close presence with the working hounds, which is best done on horseback for the above-mentioned reasons, ensures that the necessary level of protection is also afforded to any other mammals.

There is significant support from farmers and landowners in controlling foxes in this way; generally in a farming area it is understood by the public that foxes need to be controlled to prevent loss of lambs and poultry. Domestic cats can also fall victim to foxes. There would not appear to be any public demand for a change in the way foxes are controlled.

I am not aware of any complaints that The Berwickshire Hunt might have had as to it not doing its job properly and Police Scotland seems content that there are no issues for them either. In other words, the Act is being enforced and complied with.

Tim Culham

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