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REVEALED! HOW CRUELTY AND BARBARITY RETURNED TO THE SUSSEX COUNTRYSIDE

AN UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION BY
THE LEAGUE AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS

Foxes thrown to hounds and tails cut off as 'trophies' during Sussex hunts

The animal stood no chance. Pursued by hounds and riders across the Sussex countryside, it sought refuge in a small fox hole on the edge of a ploughed field. Twenty minutes later – and after a frenetic dig out involving three men, spades and two terriers – the fox is dragged to the surface, held aloft and thrown to the waiting hounds. It is not clear whether the animal is alive when tossed into the air. But after ten minutes of being repeatedly savaged by hounds – encouraged by watching huntsmen – very little of the fox remains.

These shocking scenes were filmed during an undercover investigation into the activities of the Sussex-based Crawley and Horsham Fox Hounds during the autumn and winter of 2006. Secret filming carried out by the League Against Cruel Sports over a five month period has uncovered dramatic footage of scenes that have been described as a return to the “barbaric and cruel hunting practices of past eras” – and produced the most compelling visual evidence to date of a hunt operating illegally in defiance of the 2005 Hunting Act, which outlaws hunting with dogs.

The revelations will shock and appall the vast majority of the UK population who hate animal cruelty. They will also prove damaging to the hunt lobby which is vigorously campaigning for the pastime to be made legal again, and who claim hunting is concerned with conservation and operates with the highest regard for animal welfare.

The Crawley and Horsham Fox Hounds claim publicly to have switched to trail hunting in the wake

of the ban – in a recently filmed interview, Joint Master Jamie Hawksfield told reporters that the hunt no longer pursues a live quarry, instead dispatching hunt supporters to lay an artificial scent across a pre-determined route. The hounds and riders follow this scent through woodlands and fields as they would traditionally have done with live foxes.

Although exemptions in the Hunting Act allow foxes to be sought out and shot in certain circumstances, Hawksfield denied such activities were carried out by the Crawley and Horsham. Footage obtained by the League reveals a very different picture however, uncovering how live foxes have been systematically chased and killed by the Crawley and Horsham Fox Hounds during a series of highly secretive and frequently illegal hunts.

In one graphic sequence, the hunt is secretly filmed as it chases a fox with hounds along a wooded hedgeline, before forcing it to seek refuge underground. After being successfully extracted from its hiding place by the hunt’s terrier men, the fox is thrown to the hounds and torn apart as hunters look on. For the next ten minutes, hunt staff – including huntsman Andrew Phyllis – are filmed as they repeatedly taunt the hounds with the fox carcass and congratulate them for their efforts.

In a further incident captured on camera, two foxes are caught by the hunt within minutes of each other in a narrow strip of woodland – the huntsmen’s distinctive horn blow indicating a successful kill – and the bodies carried into a field where hunt

Covert film showing huntsmen cutting off the tails of two foxes - to be kept as trophies



Terriermen locate and dig out a cornered fox before throwing it to hounds. Huntsmen encourage the pack to further savage the carcass.

staff feed them to hounds. Terriermen are then secretly filmed slicing off the animals tails – fox brushes are traditionally revered as ‘trophy’ to signify a successful day’s sport.

Such disturbing scenes have not been witnessed by outsiders – or caught on camera – for many years and reveal a degree of cruelty and brutality long denied by the hunt lobby. And – although it is widely acknowledged that some hunts are continuing to kill foxes despite of the ban – the footage provides the most compelling evidence obtained to date of an individual hunt flouting the law.

One League investigator involved in the filming said: “This is a return to the cruelty and barbarism of the past. Hunters have long denied that these sorts of practices went on, even before the ban. To witness these actions two years after the ban came into force is simply shocking and illustrates just how far these people are prepared to go in order to fulfill their blood lust, even if it means breaking the law .”

Similar brutality is hinted at in further footage obtained by the League showing hunt terriermen as they embark on a three-hour dig out to locate and kill a fox that has sought refuge in an underground badger sett annex. A terrier was sent underground to confront the trapped animal – and nets placed over nearby entrances to prevent it fleeing. Under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 it is an offence to dig into or otherwise interfere with a badger sett. Terriermen Angus McKay and Jeremy Charman



denied to investigators that they were digging a badger sett but admitted to pursuing a fox, which is understood to have later been caught and shot.

A previous dig out by the Crawley & Horsham hunt is illustrated by graphic footage showing a trapped fox as it is brutally extracted from a similar underground refuge. After blocking its escape routes with wood, terriermen locate and finally shoot the animal. Numerous other incidents captured on camera undermine the hunt’s claim that they now only engage in trail hunting. In one sequence a live fox is pursued by hounds across a domestic garden, only a wire fence enabling the animal’s escape. In another, a fox has been killed in a meadow – huntsmen are

AFTER BEING SUCCESSFULLY EXTRACTED FROM ITS HIDING PLACE, THE FOX IS THROWN TO THE HOUNDS AND TORN APART AS HUNTERS LOOK ON.

Crawley and Horsham huntsman Andrew Phyllis is likely to be the focus of any inquiry following this investigation.

secretly filmed as they throw the carcass to hounds and watch as it is mauled.

Legislation brought into force in February 2005 makes it an offence to chase and kill live foxes using dogs except in highly specific circumstances known as 'exempt hunting'. Under the provisions laid down in the Hunting Act, a pack of hounds can only be used to pursue a fox for the purposes of flushing the animal out into the open to be hunted using a bird of prey. Similarly, two hounds can be used to flush out foxes from cover only if it is the hunts' intention to shoot the animal. Terriers can only be used to flush out a fox if it is proved that game bird interests in the vicinity need protecting.

Although the Crawley & Horsham did until recently own a bird of prey, there is no evidence that it was ever used to hunt a fox. And on virtually every occasion filmed, the huntsmen have been using a full pack of hounds - never just two. Trail laying has never been witnessed, despite claims that this is now the hunt's chosen activity.

The investigation follows widespread claims that hunts across the UK are flouting the law by continuing to chase and kill live foxes. Although many have admitted to breaking the law the footage uncovered at the Crawley and Horsham hunt provides the strongest visual evidence to date of illegal hunting. The first successful prosecution under the Hunting Act was against Exmoor huntsman Tony Wright last year, following a case brought privately by the League Against Cruel Sports.

Police forces across the UK have adopted a variety of stances on dealing with hunting offences, ranging from effectively turning a blind eye to the issue

- violations of the Hunting Act are regarded as non-recordable, placing them on a par with minor traffic offences - to pro-actively monitoring and vigorously pursuing individuals deemed to have broken the law. In Sussex, the police have made it clear that dealing with public order issues at hunt events is their priority. The findings of this investigation are expected to prompt a review of policing strategies.

The Crawley and Horsham Fox Hounds are based at West Grinstead in West Sussex and are regarded as one of the south of England's premier fox hunting packs. Nicholas Soames MP is counted amongst their high profile supporters. The hunt has previously been exposed for using artificial earths - man made underground structures designed to boost the local fox population and ensure a plentiful supply of animals to chase and kill. It has also come under fire for excessive use of force against anti-hunt campaigners with a pattern of attacks, injuries and threats against activists. The hunt continues to employ stewards to keep members of the public and anti hunt campaigners away.



Spades and terriers are used here to extract this fox from the ground. Once dead, the fox is quickly placed in a sack.



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