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My Name is Marc Dradge, I am Professional Huntsman to The Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Hunt based in Houston Renfrewshire. My job involves the day to day care and training of hounds and the hunting of them on fox control days, a career I have been involved in for nearly forty years, the last six of which have been here operating under the provisions of the Protection of Wild Mammals(Scotland) Act 2002. A position that has given me first hand experience of working within the legal confines of the Act, prior to the Act coming into force hunting was conducted much as it had been for the past 300 years, hounds being kenneled in the village for nearly 200 of them. We do both mounted and foot days, both follow the same format, with foxes being flushed to guns, with the exception that on mounted days every effort is made to simulate an old fashioned hunt, to try and preserve the tradition, with the mounted followers taken on a cross country ride while the hounds work. They are there to finance the operation, i.e. the feed and care of horses and hounds and running expenses, on these days we will have from 3-5 experienced guns, with safety and efficiency the main concern. Foot Days are at the Landowners, Farmers and Keepers request, and can have in excess of 30 guns if large forestry plantations are being hunted, also call outs before and during lambing if there are problem foxes to deal with, especially "lampshy" foxes that cannot be shot.

We liaise closely with Police Scotland, they are informed of each days location, time and date and when the operation is over, we only hunt on ground with the owners consent and are issued with an incident number for each day. We run our operation alongside all other methods of fox control, but there will always be situations and areas which suit hounds, forestry, heavy covert or places where the use of high velocity rifles are not suitable, and where lamping is not possible or efficient. A full pack of hounds in forestry or heavy covert will pressure a fox to flush to guns far quicker, and account for wounded or injured foxes more swiftly or track the wounded fox to its earth where it can be dispatched as soon as possible. When a fox is shot with a shotgun and wounded, the "shock" renders it pretty much scentless, a full pack covers far more area, and will result in far faster accounting of an injured fox. Two hounds no matter how experienced do not put enough pressure on a fox, who will try and dodge about and evade hounds in covert making the flushing process far slower. While we used very experienced guns, and wounded foxes are rare it does happen and we do all we can to limit any suffering, limiting us to two hounds would make this much harder.

We try to preserve the tradition and appearance of a mounted hunt while operating under the constraints of the Act, it works albeit not ideal, but it works.

Marc Dradge

Huntsman Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire Hunt

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