

Submission to the Review of the Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act

[REDACTED]

Professional Terrierman, [REDACTED]

Author Note

Please do not publish the name of this organisation, the individual submitting this evidence or their contact details, or in any other way make these details available to the public.

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Introduction

It is clear to me that the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 is providing a sufficient level of protection for wild mammals, while at the same time allowing effective and humane control of mammals, such as foxes, where necessary. It is my firm belief that any changes to this Act bringing in tighter regulations regarding the control of wild mammals in Scotland with dogs would have a severally detrimental effect on animal welfare and my ability to manage the pest species, such as foxes, in the Scottish countryside. I implore Lord Bonomy to recommend to Scottish Ministers that this Act remain unchanged when he makes his report to the Scottish Government.

Examples

To give Lord Bonomy an idea of the ways in which I am involved in using dogs to control pest species I shall now give a brief description of the way I use dogs in my activities, which I hope may be of some informative value.

I am to the best of my knowledge the only full time professional Terrierman in Scotland so I am fully employed for my services. My job comes with a salary and a tied house and I am employed to control foxes with my terriers in association with [REDACTED].

On a typical hunting day we will have a list of farms or estates that the landowners want us to hunt on. We have our own registered guns as well as Gamekeepers and Farmers who will attend if we are on their land. We will have pre-arranged what areas we are flushing and if there are any areas to avoid.

We will use local knowledge to strategically place guns around the cover. Typically foxes will use the same runs year after year in fact generation after generation. I feel confident enough that I could put myself or a gun in a position that they would be able to take a humane shot at a flushed fox and this knowledge only grows greater the more time you spend in an area, eg; Gamekeepers will often tell you "when we beat cover for driven pheasants that a fox always runs along this track".

We are in contact by use of CB radios and once everyone is in position the huntsman will cast the hounds into the cover in the hope of finding and flushing out a fox. We use Foxhounds and depending on the area that we are hunting we could possibly have up to thirty five hounds out on a hunting day.

The hounds will flush any animals in the cover out to the guns waiting around the cover where any foxes can be shot as quickly and humanly as possible. There are however three possible outcomes to this form of pest control:

The fox could be killed outright.

Hounds have found their fox and they have hunted it through the cover and flushed it to a waiting gun that has taken a clean humane well placed shot, this could happen within seconds of the hounds entering the cover.

The fox could be wounded.

If a fox is wounded then the hounds will hunt by scent and dispatch the wounded as soon as is possible to reduce any suffering.

The fox may go to ground.

Sometimes foxes, especially after they have been wounded, will go into a hole in the ground or a cairn, i.e. a pile of stones, where a terrier will be used to dispatch the animal and reduce its suffering.

Effective and Humane Control

It is paramount to the welfare of quarry species that no limit is placed on the number of hounds to be used. Some foxes need pressurising to move and I fear one or two hounds wouldn't get the fox out into the open quickly. Also scent is a peculiar thing and every hound is different some will be able to hunt in woodland and on the same day not be able to hunt in whins. Some hounds are larger and will run through woodland faster and others are smaller and able to push in under brambles they all play a little part in making a pack an effective tool in a landowners pest control armoury.

Much of the land we hunt is sheep farming hill country, largely big banks of gorse. Often this land is very rocky and would not be a safe place to discharge a high powered rifle without risking a ricochet. Trying to locate a lone fox in ten acres of gorse would be neigh on impossible without a pack of hounds.

As a terrierman my role is also very important. If a fox is located underground I will enter a single terrier with a locator collar on and the fox will either be flushed out and shot, flushed into a purse net and shot or it may sit tight underground and the terrier will hold it at bay until I can dig down and remove the terrier and then shoot fox. I prefer to use purse nets than to allow free shooting as this gives me greater control. I have a shot pistol and once the fox is in the net I have complete control over the situation and can use my pistol for humane dispatch at point blank range ensuring the job is efficiently and with very little room for any errors that could happen with free shooting.

The Act is Working

I believe the Act is working just fine without any need for change. The Act banned what the opponents objected to and at the time the Act was passed the SSPCA and animal rights groups such as IFAW and LACS all recognised that flushing to guns was an important part of fox control.

I am employed by one of the mounted hunts and we are in the public eye. I get good feedback when we attend local country shows and when we parade at the Royal Highland Show there is a massive support and interest from the general public. We act within the law and due to unruly and anti-social behaviour from so called hunt saboteurs we have had a lot of correspondence with the local police. We are completely transparent and always inform the Police what area we are in and they have attended and monitored many of our hunts over the last 2015/16 season and are happy that we are working within the law whilst still being able to offer landowners a service.