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Lord Bonomy's Review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002.

As a sheep farmer/ shepherd and country person I have first hand experience of the practicalities of this review. I understand how working dogs work, whether they be gundogs, sheepdogs or fox hounds. I also understand the damage that can be done by certain wild mammals, notably a fox. A fox is a clever and cunning animal and would always try and to avoid detection.

I liaise with my local gun pack and they will come over here twice a year to control foxes. On the day I will discuss what areas I would like covered and where they can go and not to go. The master of the gun pack will keep any followers with him away from the pack and the guns. Over a large area of ground they come with a pack of dogs and team of guns. While searching for foxes the hounds are well controlled in moving forwards over a large area of terrain towards where the guns are positioned. It is this control of a large number of dogs over a large area that makes it possible. It is this aspect of flushing that would be completely lost with 2 dogs. Firstly finding the fox in open terrain or woodland then controlling the flush of the fox to the guns would be virtually impossible. What if the guns wounded the fox and there were just 2 hounds there to dispatch it? That's not what I would call animal welfare or humane.

Two years ago I had a big problem with young lambs being taken from a certain field at night during lambing. It was the same pattern each night so I worked out what area the fox was likely to be in. Having established this I asked the gun pack to come in and help but with only 2 dogs and guns rather than a pack of dogs. With a flock size of 1500 ewes lambing I just wanted two dogs so as to minimise the disruption to the lambing flock and all the young lambs. We found the fox in the area I had hoped but were unable to flush him to the guns and the job failed. I continued with losses that lambing and hoped that the gun pack would find him that winter when I asked them back. They did dispatch a fox and this year at lambing I did not have the losses.

Having seen first hand the damage that can be done by a fox, the taking of young lambs as well as the damage to ewes that have been cast on their backs overnight, the details of which I will refrain from writing about but the result is I have to humanly put them down. An upsetting task. (I have pictures to back up these claims)

It is very evident that foxes need controlled and from my personal experience flushing them with two dogs is a complete waste of time and banning packs of dogs will be very detrimental to the countryside as well as the long term welfare of the fox.

David Mactaggart