



An Inconvenient and awkward Alliance?

EARLIER this month I received notice that my quarterly membership subscription to the Countryside Alliance (CA) was due. I have been a member for many years.

I shall not bore you by repeating the numerous good works that this organisation performs as they do that well enough themselves. But as a lifelong hunting man, among the CA list of recent achievements, the line that drew me up short was: "Ensured a workable solution for hunting in Scotland".

A premature statement indeed. Licensing criteria has not yet been produced, despite the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act receiving Royal Assent earlier this year.

The SNP Environment Minister Mairi McAllan's start point of 'The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill would ensure there was no place for hunting with dogs north of the border' would no doubt put her in an awkward situation if that 'workable solution' were to be the case.

But the more awkward 'elephant in the room' is that there is an increasingly worrying, fundamental difference of opinion between 'hunting' and the view of the chairman and chief executive of the Countryside Alliance. Let us hope that these views are not shared by the wider CA board.

What unites us all is that we are operating under what is undoubtedly bad law

By 'hunting' I include members of the British Hound Sports Association (BHSA) along with every other member of the natural hunting community, whether they hunt with sighthounds, terriers, scenting hounds, ferrets, falcons or gundogs. Many individual conservation hunters are unaffiliated to any group. Many are supporters of Hunting Kind.

What unites us all is that we are operating under what is undoubtedly bad law, the *Hunting*



Act 2004. This had nothing to do with animal welfare or wildlife management, as has now become evident. The *Scottish 2023 Act* has just followed the same prejudiced and wilfully ignorant example.

The CA view is that it does not consider a review of wildlife law to be necessary, does not support the recently announced BHSA campaign for hunting and furthermore, heralds the Scottish licensed outcome as not only a success but the 'way forward' for England and Wales.

The Telegraph published an excellent article in May, which called for research into the fox population and its methods of management, proposed by vets as well as wildlife management academics. This followed an earlier article revealing that the RSPB in principle endorsed the use of dogs to trail foxes that had been shot and wounded.

The ensuing media coverage on TV and radio highlighted the fact

that a call for scientific research is a sensible and acceptable response.

There has been more pro-hunting PR in the last two months than there has been in the last 10 years and that is because 'hunting' has had enough of being thrown to the dogs and is now representing hunting from a hunting perspective. Politicians and the public are beginning to engage positively, and it is all beginning to come together.

The CA chief executive responded to the unprecedented media coverage in his *The Cruelty of the Hunting Act* article... 'anecdotal evidence suggests that fox numbers in many upland areas may have increased...' He added: "The pressing concern for hunting must therefore be to change widely-held perception, especially amongst Labour politicians, that not all hunting is being carried out

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legitimately. In the short term this is the only game in town because unless we are able to stave off the worst intentions of hunting's enemies in the Labour Party and the animal rights movement, there will be few, if any, hunts left. It would be the most pyrrhic of victories to ultimately win a debate about hunting's role in wildlife management, but to find that in the meantime the infrastructure of hunting has been dismantled."

Well, that is precisely what the BHSA is rolling out with its accreditation scheme, training and education, its field trials and its decisive disciplinary stance (through the Hound Sports Regulatory Authority).

The review of bad law is also a key aim. The moral unease of Daniel Greenberg, who drafted the *Hunting Act 2004*, led him to state: "What's actually happening here, is that we are legislating against a minority on a moral issue and I thought we didn't do that?" And went on to say: "Instead of an effective measure, therefore, the *Act* and Bills for it



Can there be a workable solution for hunting with dogs in Scotland?

were largely an exercise in what it has now become fashionable to describe as 'virtue signalling'."

Circa £30 million was spent by animal rights extremists to bring about the *Hunting Act 2004*, using the 'smokescreen' of animal welfare, absorbing 700 hours of Parliamentary time (and cost). Not one penny has subsequently been spent by any of these organisations to establish whether there have been any beneficial outcomes, because they recognise fully that there has not.



Around £30 million was spent by extremists.

Defra proposed the Law Commission's wildlife law project in July 2011. The rationale behind the project was, 'In the last two centuries wildlife legislation has developed in a piecemeal fashion... The result is that current legislation governing the control, exploitation, welfare and conservation of wild animals... has turned into a complex patchwork of overlapping and sometimes conflicting provisions'.

The project's terms of reference expressly excluded review of the *Hunting Act*, as it was felt counter-productive to consider an issue as politically polarised as hunting.

The report was published in November 2015. It runs to 420 pages.

The Law Commission made 287 recommendations and produced a Draft Bill to effect many of those recommendations. The Draft Bill's primary objective was to supersede the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*. The Draft Bill was not proceeded with, and thus the majority of those recommendations have not been implemented.

The CA CEO continued in his *The Cruelty of the Hunting Act* article: "The political reality, however, is that the next debate over hunting legislation has already begun and it is about enforcement of the law, not the management of wildlife."

Overlapping and sometimes conflicting provisions

Really? Hunting people are not really listening to you anymore. An awkward Alliance by the sounds of it.

Why bother debating the enforceability of a bad law and not bother to review and research its effects on our wildlife and its management? Quite frankly, we think you've given up and are losing the mandate to comment.

Hunting Kind recently sought the opinion of the hunting community on some key points. In summary, every response supported a 'review of law' as well as the commissioning of scientific research. Not one respondent supported a licensed outcome for hunting based on the *Scottish 2023 Act*.

So, with all that in mind, a proposed solution:

- If you support hunting, in whatever form, join your relevant representative and regulatory hunting organisation (National Working Terrier Federation, Lurcher Clubs, BHSA etc.).
- Support a review of wildlife law.
- Support the commissioning of scientific research.
- Engage positively with your local MP.
- The CA to support the BHSA and hunting in the above objectives and actively promote hunting membership of various organisations.
- The CA having increased BHSA etc. membership and funds through publicity and promotion, then receives some dividend for that effort. So, the CA eats what it kills, in support of hunting.

If the CA were to revert to its original purpose of supporting and furthering the interests of hunting, optimising all this recent positive energy and PR, then that would be a sensible outcome and unity under those conditions is about all that's on the table from the conservation hunting community.

If the CA chooses not to, however, then it loses the mandate to comment on hunting in either the political or public realm. That mandate remains within the wider hunting community and its various membership organisations, along with sympathetic members of the public and politicians.

As seen from the Future Countryside conference at Hatfield House, on June 6, the same day as the BHSA's first annual general meeting, it seems that the Countryside Alliance has finally declared its hand. It will be very interesting to see how this pans out.

Ed Swales is a Hunting Kind Associate

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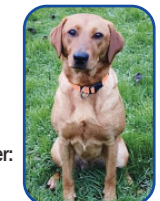
TARA COCKER SPANIEL BITCH **MISSING TOGETHER**



WINNIE JACK RUSSELL TERRIER DOG
Missing from Burrington, North Devon, since 24.05.23. Both are microchipped and neutered. Tara is brown in colour with a small white marking on chest. Winnie is white and tan in colour.
DogLost IDs: 184541 and 184542



ROSIE LABRADOR BITCH



Stolen from Swinton, Greater Manchester, on 08.12.20. Fox red in colour. Microchipped.
Greater Manchester Police - crime number: CRI/06FF/0026458/20
DogLost ID: 162749

TESS BORDER TERRIER BITCH



Stolen from Tyldesley, Astley, Greater Manchester, on 28.05.23. Red grizzle in colour. Microchipped and neutered.
Greater Manchester Police - crime number: CRI/06LL/0017319/23.
DogLost ID: 184632

WILLOW JACK RUSSELL TERRIER CROSS BITCH



Missing from Hullavington, Wiltshire, since 06.04.23. Black and tan in colour. Microchipped.
DogLost ID: 183522

ARCHIE ENGLISH SPRINGER SPANIEL DOG



Missing from Culleybackey, Northern Ireland, since 21.08.21. Liver and white in colour. Microchipped.
DogLost ID: 169370

MURRON JACK RUSSELL TERRIER CROSS BITCH



Missing from Brankholme Brae, Camdean, Fife, since 21.05.23. Black and tan in colour with white patch under chin.
DogLost ID: 184497

JOEY JACK RUSSELL TERRIER DOG



Missing from Moneygall/Cloughjordan area, on the Tipperary/Offaly border, Southern Ireland, since 25.04.23. Black and tan in colour. Has a scar on chin and docked tail. Microchipped and neutered.
DogLost ID: 183961

NAME WITHHELD BORDER COLLIE DOG



Missing from Paisley Road West, Ibrox, Glasgow, after being hit by a car on 09.06.23, so may be injured. Black and white in colour. Microchipped. Was wearing a blue rope collar.
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