

Could this be a way forward?

As Hunting Kind gains momentum, we are pleased to receive fresh views on hunting from supporters such as this considered and insightful piece from Patrick Graham.

“I have written the following as I feel this angle is deeply under-represented in our fighting of the ban. I think it carries more gravity and explanation into why hunting with dogs exists and gives a view that relates us to environmentalists which may paint a clearer picture to any that need to hear it.”

There is a rising tide of individuals in environmental lobbies across the UK and indeed the world who are raising awareness of the cornerstone effects that wolves have on ecosystems and the importance of trees. I do not need to delve into the full effects wolves have, as this information can be found in most literature involving

Yellowstone National Park and in recent applications to reintroduce them in Scotland. However, I could argue a strong likeness between hunting with dogs and the environmentalists' rewilding efforts, including the introduction of wolf packs, in every aspect.

Let us replace the outfit called a ‘Hunt’ with ‘Wildlife Trust’. Hunting with dogs and environmentalists have a common goal and that is to promote healthy ecosystems. The best hunting grounds are always the most biodiverse lands, typically owned or managed by the hunt (Wildlife Trusts), and the hunting itself takes place to maintain the balance, much like the role of wolves, to prevent foxes and deer from dominating. Hunts ‘Wildlife Trusts’ work tirelessly and invest funds year-round to purchase woodlands, to protect them from agriculture and lay cover to enhance biodiversity in which deer and fox thrive.

Through strong community relationships with landowners and farmers, hunts gain access to vast swaths of land for tasks like hedge and cover laying and removing wire fences. This collaboration with farmers, landowners and greater community is the backbone to why game, woodland and cover were protected in the UK. It was the barrier that stopped mono culture taking over and the more ignorant opposition, from people who do not understand, the hunts have had to deal with, the harder this has become to maintain. As visualised by the growth of fields, clearing of cover and loss of diversity the UK has been experiencing.

Had hunts been promoted in 2004, there would be a ready supply of funds to plant trees and rewild land, along with a supportive rural community. It is distressing that this aspect is overlooked, especially since the only difference between us is our belief that dogs (wolves) are better and more natural than a lone rifleman. I would like to emphasize a few critical areas where dogs and wolves align and where indeed hunting with dogs, surpasses other methods. Both hunting with dogs and wolves target the old and weak, without engaging in trophy hunting or promoting the dominance of a single reared or favoured species. They both play a crucial role in regulating fox and deer populations, which has undeniable benefits for ecosystems.

Rifles have significant limitations due to safety concerns, such as backstops, limited visibility during certain hours and the potential for catastrophic injury. While I do not mean to discredit rifles, the ban has only increased rifle deaths, led to a surge in snares and no commercial rewilding incentive or community involvement. Rifleman, which heartbreakingly have no seasonal restriction on fox and hare, have taken legal precedent over hunting with dogs, that have self-regulated to avoid pursuing either quarry when they have young in spring and summer.

Cover, foxes, hare and deer were always left for the hunts, or in other words, the rural community. Thanks to Labour, they are now being controlled in far worse and indiscriminate ways, along with minimal rewilding work. The question I pose to the environmental, anti-hunting, pro-wolf lobby is why is it not considered cruel when wolves take part in these activities? Both dogs and wolves kill, but they do not eat foxes, while deer are a source of sustenance for many.

There are four significant advantages to hunting with dogs over releasing wolves. Firstly, we can control the dogs to avoid livestock. This would mean government subsidies for lost stock will



not be needed. Secondly, it also allows hunts to continue carrying out their great roles in the countryside tapestry. Thirdly, it limits excess and controls balance. Fourthly, hunting with dogs is an occasion for all (despite what anti-hunting folk are told). Hunting folk come from all walks of life, town and country. The Waterloo Cup was famous for its crowd being a mix of the snobs and yobs. All hunting fields across the UK compile a wide range of folk coming to take part in an activity that promotes wildlife and the environment, sustainably and naturally. This community is involved year-round, engaging in tasks like cover laying, hedging, drystone walling and assisting farmers. It is also a community in the countryside which is open to all who ask. Or was, until it was forced underground and we have seen the subsequent decline of people engaged in rural affairs.

As a side note, 99% of all people that hunt with lurchers, terriers and ferrets are not any form of landed gentry. Most come from the industrial towns in the north and across Wales. No one in their right mind could point a finger in their direction for diversity loss or cruelty when taking game that is locally sourced, sustainable food source. The rise of modern-day poaching and driving fields is a direct result of the ban. Clubs used to accommodate hare coursing and would pay farmers handsomely to allow the hares to thrive. After the ban, the clubs disbanded and the hares were shot by farmers. Those who continued had to poach as they could no longer obtain permission from a law-abiding farmer. Steep penalties for coursing have driven the need for folk to get away quickly, hence the start of the field driving and not walking. I am sure all environmentalists would still marvel at the sight of a cheetah in chase and not question the cruelty in its chosen method. Everyone condemns the actions of a small unscrupulous group that engage in rural and wildlife crime. The dumping of various hare, rabbit and pheasant carcasses recently outside a community shop and village primary school in Hampshire



caused widespread shock and outrage.

The wealthy may constitute a proportion of a day's mounted hunting (some of the mounted portion), but this is how it is all paid for. I should point out that they are dressed head to toe in sustainable clothing and riding a horse, which is powered by grass. Everyone else is paid or follows on foot or bicycle. I am not blind to the odd car and quad as well. No one is trying to ban football or other such patron-funded activities, which includes most rewilding projects, by the way.

There is great concern over young people's access to the countryside today. One reason is because of the growth of farm machinery and fields leading to reduced labour. However, Labour banned

the last bastion of the rural community in 2004, which brought everyone together into the woods and fields four days a week to promote nature. Not to mention the miners and their hunting cultural heritage that was stopped in its tracks and pushed out of the countryside by the ban. Environmentalists often lead anti-hunting lobbies, yet most seem to favour the return of the wolf. We say, can we just keep hunting with dogs... and we are also up for the wolves... and the trees and the diversity and the community and the sustainability...

Perhaps hunts should be renamed, i.e., The South Dorset Environmental Group. This group spends twelve months, four days per week promoting woodland, cover and diversity, and five months, three days a week acting as the absent wolf. The South Dorset Environmental Group Saboteurs, clad in nylon clothes and balaclavas, would then probably garner less support...

“And there came a time when those who hunted the woods and plains found no favour in the eyes of gods or men. And mankind heaped scorn on the silent men who lived by the laws of the chase, while those who drove oxen or rooted swine became esteemed. But the wise said, find a scribe who will record the prowess of these men in letters, so that when the keepers of oxen and swine no longer find favour, men will think more kindly of those who chased and slew the deer and the boar.”

SANSKRIT LEGEND
- PATRICK GRAHAM

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