

# THE COTSWOLD HUNT

15<sup>th</sup> July 2002

Rt Hon. Alun Michael, MP  
DEFRA  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3JR

Dear Mr Michael

Please find enclosed a joint submission from the Cotswold Hunt, Gloucestershire as requested in your letter dated 31<sup>st</sup> May 2002. Please note we are a traditional pack of foxhounds, hunting the country that runs broadly between Cheltenham and Cirencester. I hope that you will find this helpful. If you have any queries, or wish for further clarification I can be contacted at the address above.

Yours sincerely

R G Cooper Esq., MFH

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the report which follows we address, we hope, the key issues raised by the letter received from Rt Hon. Alun Michael MP. Specifically, we address those issues which arise in respect of cruelty and utility, both of hunting with hounds and alternative methods of fox control. Much of our submission is framed in response to particular findings and conclusions drawn in the Burns Report.

## **2.0 CRUELTY**

In the Burns Report, the authors make several references to “the chase”<sup>1</sup>. We are of the view that the use of this phrase is misleading, particularly in describing the behaviour of a hound which hunts, the great majority of the time, by scent alone. Because the way in which a hound hunts is not accurately described by the term “chasing” we believe that further misconceptions follow regarding (i) the length of time a fox may be “closely pursued” by hounds, and (ii) the implications this may have for fox welfare.

To clarify the misconceptions about the way a hound hunts we thought it would be helpful to spell out the facts. This is based on our own experience, and that of our huntsman and foot followers. The latter are very often in the best position to view a hunt as it unfolds, and it is from their experience in particular that we have drawn when discussing fox behaviour.

A hound hunts predominantly by scent. At the beginning of a “draw” hounds will be cast into a covert to, so-called “find a fox”. What they will “find” in the majority of instances will be the scent of the fox, if indeed, they find at all. Their ability to follow this scent will depend on the scenting conditions: on a good scenting day they may be able to follow the “line” of a fox long-since departed; on a poor scenting day they will be unable to pick up and hold to the line of a fox that has only recently left the covert.

If they do succeed in holding the line, a handful of hounds may begin to speak. This may be the point at which the Macdonald report times the beginning of the “chase”. In the overwhelming majority of instances nothing remotely akin to what we would define a “chase” subsequently takes place. Hounds continue to work out the line encountering various obstacles. These obstacles may cause them to check, hit off the line the wrong way or indeed lose the line altogether. Within the Cotswold Hunt country, as indeed within the majority of lowland hunt country, the obstacles are such (roads, railways, woodlands, fields of livestock etc.) that it is extremely rare for hounds to hunt the line of the same fox continuously and unimpeded.

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<sup>1</sup> The Burns Report, talks of (para 6.43) an “..average length of chase above ground ..... of 16 to 31 minutes”). This sentence is taken from the Bateson & Harris 2000 report, which in turn lifts it from the Macdonald, 1996. We believe it would have been helpful if the Burns team had examined this statement in more detail, particularly in the light of the conclusion drawn in 6.49.

The fox, if viewed at this stage, may be moving away from the sound of the hounds but, in our experience, does not display the behaviour of something being “chased”. After being initially disturbed, many foxes will stop, listen and clean themselves before moving on again, very often quite slowly. Some will not move on at all, but will be observed lying up. This is not surmise, this is the result of close observation by our hunt followers, many of whom have been following hounds for decades. Such behaviour does not appear to be in any way consistent with an animal experiencing duress.

In our experience, this pattern — hounds hunting intermittently and the fox moving ahead in a similarly stop-start way — is very typical of a day’s hunting in the Cotswolds. Very often it will result in the scent petering out. Hounds are then gathered together and our huntsman will ride on to the next draw.

We believe it is erroneous to use the term “closely pursued” for anything but the very closing stages of a hunt. During the great majority of time that hounds are hunting a “line” the fox’s behaviour — if indeed the fox is anywhere to be seen — gives no indication that it believes itself to be hunted.

For a fox to be killed above ground, there is a point at which it must be overtaken by hounds. In our experience here in the Cotswolds, this period of close pursuit takes place over a relatively short distance and for a period rarely exceeding one minute, and typically for less than 30 seconds. This tends to be the time it takes, given the nature of our country, for the fox to leave the cover of one obstacle, say a wall, and reach the cover of another.

Most importantly, because of the nature of the Cotswold country, which includes areas of dense scrub and vegetation, we estimate that a high percentage of all foxes killed in a season, and easily one-third, will be killed “in-covert”, and very soon after hounds are first put in to draw. Clearly, under these circumstances, no hunt takes place.

The kill if it does take place — and this is far from inevitable, particularly on the banky, more heavily wooded lands which form the edge of our hunt country where a fox’s natural agility permits it to evade hounds quite comfortably — is, in our experience, extremely swift.

Our experience of the hunt and of fox behaviour does not lead us to conclude that hunting causes unnecessary suffering. The evolution of a hunt, the relatively short period in which a fox may be “closely pursued” — if indeed it is — the swiftness of the kill — where it occurs — are not, in our view, cruel<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> It is our view that the conclusions drawn in 6.49 and 6.67, regarding fox and hare welfare, respectively, are unsupported by the evidence contained in the body of the text. Indeed, some of what is presented could equally support an opposite conclusion to that drawn by the authors. This is particularly marked in the case of the points made on hare hunting. For example, the authors comment (6.63) “that for a good part of the time, however, the hare may not be aware that it is being pursued”, a statement which accords with our own extensive experience of fox behaviour. The Report also states that, “if the hare is caught by the pack, insensibility and death follow very swiftly”. It makes a similar statement in 6.48 regarding the swift death of the fox. Despite this, and the authors’ admission about the lack of scientific evidence about the welfare effects on the fox and the hare, they still feel sufficiently confident to conclude that, “We are satisfied, nevertheless, that this experience seriously compromises the welfare of the hare/fox”. Not only do the authors fail to substantiate this conclusion, they also fail to define

In our view, there are three tests which can be applied to judge whether hunting with hounds causes unnecessary suffering:

- ?? potential for stress
- ?? swiftness of death
- ?? certainty of outcome

**Potential for stress** We are of the view that the potential for stress only occurs on those occasions where the hunt ends in a period of close pursuit by hounds. What, if anything, a fox suffers in the very short period when hounds are in “close pursuit” is a point for debate and the Burns Report, by its own admission, offers no scientific evidence on this matter. There is, however, a strong and growing body of scientific opinion from leading veterinarians that this “stress” is physiological, rather than psychological<sup>3</sup>.

The evidence of our own foot followers supports this view. They have said that where a fox is viewed after it has been closely pursued by hounds but escaped — perhaps by nipping under a gate — it is often seen to cease its “flight” quite quickly, typically by breaking back into a trot and moving on purposefully, but unhurriedly, in the way that it would normally cross open country.

**Swiftness of death** In our experience, where a fox is over-run by the hounds death is almost instantaneous. We are far from convinced that this is true of other forms of fox control including shooting, except where this takes place at very close range. [It should be noted that the only circumstances where it is possible to consistently shoot a fox in the head at close range and effect an instant death is where a fox has gone to ground and is located and dug down to with the aid of a terrier].

**Certainty of outcome** There is neither ambiguity nor uncertainty about the outcome of a hunt with hounds: the fox is either killed outright or escapes unharmed. This cannot be said of shooting.

We are of the strong belief that neither of these three tests can be applied individually and that any method of fox control must meet all three criteria. In other words, it is not sufficient to say that the act of shooting a fox is stress-free if there is sufficient cause to believe that, in the act of shooting, a number of foxes may be wounded and consigned to suffer a slow death. Nor, is it acceptable to apply the test of certainty of outcome if the death that results is slow and prolonged (as is the case for example with a method such as poisoning).

## **2.4 Use of terriers**

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this newly introduced concept “a serious compromise to welfare”. This shows an unacceptable lack of intellectual rigour.

<sup>3</sup> Dr L.H.Thomas & Professor W R Allen, 2001, “A veterinary opinion on hunting with hounds”, up-date of a submission to the Burns Inquiry.

Terriers represent a very important part of fox control, during normal hunting and for lambing call (see 3.1). We employ a full time licensed terrier-man, whose tasks during the summer include ride clearance, covert laying and fencing. He also maintains the woodland and coverts owned by the Cotswold Hunt. All terrier work undertaken by the Cotswold Hunt takes place under a strict code of conduct, with the landowners' /farmers' permission and fully in adherence with the legislation laid down in the various Protection Acts, including those for wild mammals and badgers.

The role of the terrier is to locate a fox that has gone to ground by barking. Once located the terrier-man digs down, removes the terrier and quickly despatches the fox. We believe that there are several important points to be made regarding the use of terriers. First, it is the only certain and humane way of shooting a fox (see 2.0). Second, it is the only way of despatching a wounded fox that has gone to ground. Paradoxically, an increase in the government's preferred method of fox control, shooting, would require a commensurate increase in the use of terriers for the location and despatch of wounded foxes (see 3.2.2). Third, in terms of any stress caused to the fox we are far from sure that it is any greater than that caused to badgers currently being trapped as part of the governments own Krebs trials. Indeed, we believe that there is a very strong case for arguing that any stress suffered would be much lower: (i) because the fox has gone to ground in an environment in which it feels secure, and (ii) the length of time elapsed before it is despatched is only a fraction of that endured by a trapped badger.

### **3.0 UTILITY**

#### **3.1 Fox control: hunting with hounds**

Among our landowners and farmers, hunting with hounds is an important method of fox control. Indeed for the majority, hunting with hounds is the single most important method of fox control employed on their farms. This is particularly true among farmers; less so among landowners operating large, commercial shoots.

Of key importance to our farmers is that fact that our service is provided free and is carried out by "outside contractors". In the Cotswolds, as elsewhere, there is an acute shortage of labour on farms. Many of our farmers are seriously short-staffed and grossly over-worked, often operating one-man businesses. What is rarely appreciated, but is touched upon by the Burns Report authors, is that pest control is a skilled job and exceptionally time consuming. This applies equally to setting and checking snares as it does to shooting foxes. Considerable effort is required, often for little reward. One of our farmers commented, "I simply do not have the time, or the energy, to sit up night after night, in the vain hope I may shoot a fox".

The majority of our livestock farmers view the level of fox control offered by hunting with hounds as sufficient to keep the population at tolerable<sup>4</sup> levels. In common with many

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<sup>4</sup> Many farmers and landowners are quite clear in their assertion that what is tolerable with traditional fox hunting methods still permitted would rapidly become intolerable if hunting were to be banned. We are in no doubt that a ban would lead to an increase in fox culling, by legal or illegal means, and to a commensurate increase in fox suffering.

hunts, where farmers experience a specific problem with a fox or foxes we offer a free “lambing call” service. The main call for this service tends to be during April, among the later lambing flocks, where lambs are born outdoors, although we do receive a number of calls each year from farmers losing lambs that have been born indoors and turned out with the ewes at 2 to 3 days old. [We discuss the issue of fox predation on lambs in more detail later].

In the majority of instances we will use a few couple of our most experienced the hounds for our lambing call service. There are occasions when we judge the situation to be unsuited to hounds, when one of our staff will attend with a rifle and lamp. However, we are strongly of the opinion that the use of hounds offers by far the best method for tracking down and despatching a rogue fox. Hounds are put into a field of lambs to pick up and hunt the “drag” of the fox back to its earth. If they have picked up the correct drag there will be carcass evidence at the earth. The fox will then be dug out and despatched<sup>5</sup>.

One of the serious drawbacks in using a rifle is that, apart from the very real wounding risks, it is often a highly indiscriminate way of killing foxes. Anyone who has watched a field of ewes and lambs at night may view a number of foxes entering the field and travelling through the flock. By no means all, or indeed any, of these foxes will be lamb killers. Unless it is possible to catch a fox in the act of taking a lamb, what tends to happen is that a large (sometimes very large) number of foxes are shot, including inevitably vixens with cubs below ground, before the problem ceases. Even then this is far from conclusive evidence that the rogue fox has been killed.

## **3.2 Alternative methods of control**

### 3.2.1. Practicalities

Snaring, shooting, and possibly trapping, are the alternative, legal methods of control available to our farmers and landowners. However, in assessing which methods are “practical” we believe it is extremely important to draw a distinction between the practicalities for farmers and the practicalities for landowners.

Many, if not most, of the shooting estates in the Cotswolds employ full-time gamekeepers, and other staff who can be deployed on the task of fox control. These employees have access to rifles and tend to be more skilled in using them. Typically, the estate will invest in high seats and specially adapted vehicles for lamping. In addition, these estates, by virtue of their attraction for pheasant and partridge shooting, are often infinitely better-suited to shooting foxes than many, if not most, of the small and medium-scale farms within our hunt country.

On these farms, fields are smaller, coverts are natural not planted and so more random in their size and distribution, characteristics which do not lend themselves readily either to viewing a fox or to shooting it cleanly. In addition, there tends to be a much greater density of roads, houses, footpaths and bridleways, all of which pose significant risks to public

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<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that, in our experience, the majority of these rogue foxes tend to be old dog foxes, foxes that have been injured in some way, often from gunshot wounds, and barren vixens.

safety. Indeed, much of what the authors conclude regarding the uplands in 5.39, would apply in large parts of the Cotswolds, except that the suggestion that dogs be used to flush foxes to guns would be highly impractical (see 3.2.2) and the risks to the general public are very much greater.

Taking all the foregoing comments into account, it is our view that the burden of a ban on hunting with hounds would fall heavily, and disproportionately, on our farmers, for whom hunting with hounds and our lambing call service, often represent the main, or only, practical methods of fox control open to them.

### 3.2.2 Welfare issues

#### *Use of rifles*

We note the conclusions made by the Burns Report in points 6.58 to 6.61. In respect of the conclusions drawn at 6.60 we would make the following points with regard to the use of lamps and rifles. First, a percentage of foxes will be wounded, not killed outright. Whatever the number we believe this is unacceptable. Without doubt woundings will be higher if lamping with rifles were to become more widespread among unskilled practitioners. There is no mention made in the Burns Report of what happens to foxes wounded by a rifle. But, in practice there is no follow up, nor is follow up practical at night. Even a severely wounded fox may run on quite strongly and would be impossible to find subsequently. Indeed many wounded foxes will, if they can, go to ground and die there.

We can find no mention in Burns Report of the nature of wounds and wounding by rifles and shotguns. Unsavoury though it may be it needs to be faced, particularly if there is to be a fair judgement of the relative welfare implications of different methods of fox control. We find, and receive reports of, a number of foxes that have been wounded by guns. Last season, this included two foxes missing limbs, a fox with a gun shot wound to its back, another with a wound to its stomach and one missing an eye.

The authors comment that “terriers are used at present by gamekeepers and others to despatch cubs which have been orphaned in this way”. This is a clear (but perhaps unintended) illustration of the severe welfare implications of continuing blanket fox culling throughout the breeding season. Moreover, it would be more accurate to say that “in some instances terriers are used”. There is no guarantee that the individual who has shot a lactating vixen will (i) bother to find the cubs; (ii) have a terrier; (iii) know where the cubs are to be found or (iv) succeed in locating the actual litter that has been orphaned. It is also important to bear in mind that a vixen may be hunting some distance, easily up to one mile, from where her cubs may be located, and this distance will necessarily increase as the cubs grow bigger. Once the cubs are above ground they will be even harder to locate and, it would be impossible to do this with a terrier. Moreover, all this will be taking place at night. Taking these facts into consideration it is our view that a large majority of litters of cubs will die of starvation as a result of the vixen being shot.

The authors comment that “there are a number of instances where lamping is not practicable or safe”. Indeed, we would point out that the bullet from a rifle with the correct calibre to shoot a fox can travel two miles and still kill somebody. For exactly this reason,

there are very many locations within the Cotswolds where, because of the topography, the backdrop and the proximity to houses, that even a highly skilled markman would consider it too dangerous to use a rifle.

### *Use of shotguns*

We find it altogether extraordinary that the authors appear to be endorsing the use of unregistered shotgun packs in the Uplands, when by their own admission they say “we are less confident that the use of shotguns, particularly in daylight, is preferable to hunting from a welfare perspective”. A shotgun is not a suitable weapon for killing a fox and wounding by shotguns can be very high. Indeed a figure of 15% to 20% was reported in one submission to the Inquiry, which in our view is sheer butchery.

It is possible that a proportion of these wounded foxes will be killed subsequently by the hounds. However, the government should be under no illusion about how frequently this happens. A wounded fox will travel some distance and, if it can make it to sanctuary, will go to ground. For this fox to be found and killed a number of things have to happen. (i) The gun pack needs to register that a fox has actually been wounded (given the potential wounding rates there may well be several). (ii) Shooting will need to cease in order that hounds may be gathered and put onto the line of the wounded fox. (iii) Hounds will need to successfully follow that line (see our comments in 2.0 regarding the inherent difficulties of doing so). (iv) The fox will need to be caught above ground or, if it goes to ground, dug down to with a terrier and despatched. We think it unlikely that many, if any, of these conditions will be met leaving us to conclude that a potentially large number of foxes will be left to die.

There also appears to be a very clear inconsistency in the authors conclusions in point 9.100 and their apparent endorsement of the use of gun packs. What is shooting a fox as it leaves a covert with a line of guns, if it is not “deliberate interference by people with the quarry’s flight”? Indeed the sheer perversity of this comment lies in the fact that, whereas in hunting, the bold and strong foxes will succeed in leaving the covert; when foxes are driven onto guns it will be many of the bold and strong foxes who will be shot or shot and wounded.

### **3.3 Regional distinctions**

The study on the different culling practices in upland Wales, the east Midlands and west Norfolk (see 5.7 to 5.9 ), appears to have led the authors to draw a distinction between the lowlands and the uplands. We believe this distinction is of no merit. The first point that we would make is that the lowlands of Britain are not homogeneous and there are as many, if not more, differences within lowland areas as there are between lowland and upland areas. Parts of our Cotswold hunt country share many similarities with areas of enclosed moorland, whilst on the edge of the Cotswold escarpment the landscape and the farms have much in common with areas of Devon and Dorset.

Many lowland areas, including large areas of the Cotswold hunt country, will have culling practices much closer to those shown for upland Wales. Thus, the figures presented for the east Midlands and west Norfolk are not representative of all lowland areas. Indeed, we

suspect that the percentage figures presented in the report (5.8 and 5.9), particularly in respect of the numbers of foxes shot with rifles, are heavily skewed by the intensive culling of foxes which takes on estates running commercial shoots. This is unfortunate because it appears to lead the authors to draw several conclusions regarding the utility of fox hunting in lowland areas, for example, in para 5.36 they say “the overall contribution of fox-hunting... is almost insignificant in terms of the management of the fox population as a whole”. This is followed in 5.42 with “In lowland areas, hunting by registered packs makes only a minor contribution to the management of the fox population and terrierwork, especially by gamekeepers, may be more important”.

The error that the authors make in drawing this conclusion is to judge utility and fox management solely on the basis of the number of foxes killed. For the majority of our farmers the fox control service provided by the hunt (hunting, terrier-work and lambing call) is judged to be of extremely high utility and, as we have already emphasised, sufficient to keep the fox population at levels that can be tolerated. This may not be the case on an estate running a commercial shoot and releasing thousands of intensively-reared game birds, where the objective may be to achieve a much lower density of foxes than that created by the traditional method of fox hunting. This can be particularly true during the late Spring and early Summer when the Cotswold hounds, along with all other registered packs, cease hunting to protect the vixens with cubs, and culling by gamekeepers may start-up or continue on shooting estates.

We would contend that it is entirely irrelevant to a judgement of utility whether gamekeepers kill more foxes than the hunt. Utility is defined by the usefulness to the person or persons who use the service. It is also, as we have illustrated, largely a matter of tolerance. At the extreme, if you take the view that the “only good fox is a dead fox”, then traditional fox hunting methods will have much lower utility than a concentrated campaign of shooting and snaring.

There is also confusion within the Burns Report in the use of the term “management”. Indeed it is perverse to conclude, as the authors do in 5.42, that “hunting makes only a minor contribution to the management of the fox population”, as if the number of foxes killed should be the yardstick by which fox management and hunting’s “contribution” should be judged. The confusion possibly arises because we view “management” as a term used in conservation, as in “habitat management”, “woodland management” etc. Thus, fox management may require some fox control or culling, just as woodland management will require some tree felling. However the idea that woodland management is just about cutting down trees is clearly as ludicrous as the idea that fox management is just about killing foxes.

### **3.4 Fox management**

In our view there is a clear distinction between fox management and fox control. Hunting with hounds, in terms of fox management, has a number of important advantages over other methods. There is a closed season. It is operated systematically: hunts will visit parts of the country in rotation through the season. It is not *ad-hoc* other methods can often lead to over-culling in some areas, and under-culling in others. It is entirely open to public

scrutiny — anyone is invited to follow the Cotswold hounds provided that they follow the Country Code and adhere to the guidelines laid down by the Masters of Foxhounds Association — and it is regulated by strict codes of practice. Nor is it random and indiscriminate: the foxes that tend to be killed through hunting tend to be the weaker, older and sicker of the species.

## **4.0 FOXES AND LIVESTOCK**

In preparing this section of the report, we have drawn on the experience of our hunt staff in operating our “lambing call” service — the Cotswolds is an important region for sheep production — and on our discussions principally with sheep producers within our hunt country. We have also read the relevant sections in the Burns Report which deal with predation, notably 5.12 to 5.16.

### **4.1 Lamb predation**

Lambing in the Cotswolds is predominantly indoors, although a number of farms will run an early and a later lambing flock. The later lambing flocks lamb predominantly outdoors. Our discussions do not indicate any marked difference in lambs lost to foxes between indoor lambing flocks and outdoor lambing flocks, as suggested by the Burns Report.

This year, for example, one farmer lost 5 lambs from a field containing only 20 lambs over the space of just under one week. These lambs had been born indoors and turned out at around 3 days old. They were all doubles and apparently strong, healthy and well-mothered. A pattern developed of one lamb being found missing from the field each morning; no trace of the lambs were found.

Again this year, another farmer lost 20 lambs out of a total of 300 from his outdoor lambing flock. In this instance, all the ewes were scanned and marked according to whether they were expecting singles, doubles or triplets. The triplets were placed in a separate field. In total, of the ewes scanned to produce doubles, 20 were found to have only a single with them when checked in the morning. No trace of the lambs were found. This farmer said that the scan is exceptionally reliable<sup>6</sup> and that the relatively small size of the only lamb that the ewes had with them was a strong indication of there having been more than one lamb born. He also commented that, in his experience, still-born lambs tend to remain in the field.

Yet another farmer, also this year, lost a total of 30, out of around 1000 lambs born, to the fox. These were lambs born indoors and turned out at four days old in bunches of around 50. Most of the ewes had two lambs with them, all lambs and ewes were numbered. Initially, the losses were not apparent, as the farmer commented, “it is quite difficult to spot to begin with because the ewes are as happy with a single lamb as a double”. A number of farmers commented that some of the lambs lost to foxes may well go undetected — particularly in outdoor lambing flocks which are not scanned.

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<sup>6</sup> His comment was that the results for 1 out of 700 of the ewes scanned might be incorrect.

All the farmers that we have spoken to have said that twin lambs are much more vulnerable to predation than singles and that they rarely, if ever, lose singles to the fox. This is for two reasons: (i) among outdoor lambing flocks the first-born lamb is particularly vulnerable to predation whilst the ewe is lambing the second, and (ii) once outside, among flocks lambed indoors and outdoors, it is more difficult for a ewe to protect two lambs than a single. Nor does there appear to be any marked difference between predation on lambs born indoors and lambs born outdoors, with foxes taking both new-born lambs and lambs several days old<sup>7</sup>.

We would make two comments. First, because multiple births tend to be the norm in lowland flocks then, other things being equal, they will be inherently more at risk from fox predation than flocks, especially the hardy hill flocks, where ewes give birth predominantly to singles. Second, just because ewes are lambed indoors does not prevent fox predation. Indeed, high levels of fox predation are being recorded among indoor and outdoor lambing flocks on the Cotswolds, reflecting the fact that lambs continue to be vulnerable to fox predation at up to several days of age.

Both of these points would appear to cast some doubt on the Burns Report conclusion, 5.12, that “predation levels are generally higher in upland areas than in lowland areas [because of] the tendency for more lambs to be born indoors in lowland areas”. Drawing a distinction between the upland and lowland areas is of little help in explaining fox predation here in the Cotswolds. Nor can this crude regional distinction take into account local differences in the density and health of the fox population, both of which may offer an important explanation for local differences in the extent of fox predation.

In 5.14, the authors comment that “only 2% of otherwise viable lambs are killed by foxes in England and Wales”. Our discussions suggest that the figures on the Cotswolds may well be much higher than this in certain areas and in certain years. However, what was made very plain to us in discussing these figures with farmers was that in many instances the losses sustained from the fox can represent a very high percentage of total lambs lost overall. Again, this depends upon factors such as the weather, disease incidence etc.

Taken overall, lamb mortality is not high in the Cotswolds and, in an average season, farmers commented that they might expect to lose less than 5% of viable lambs. The farmer who lost 20 of his 300 lambs to the fox (just under 7%) has sustained only a handful of losses since among this group from other causes. In his case, fox losses have accounted for over 90% of total losses. This is not untypical. Another farmer we spoke to who, four years ago, lost a total of 55 lambs out of around 1000 viable lambs to the fox<sup>8</sup>, said that on average he would expect total lamb mortality of only 2%. In other words, in that year, he experienced close to three times his normal lamb mortality from the fox alone.

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<sup>7</sup> It is also not unheard for foxes to enter lambing sheds and taking lambs from pens, and we received one report of this.

<sup>8</sup> In this case, some lambs were disappearing from the field but others were simply being beheaded and left. We heard a similar story from another farmer who, three years ago, sustained very high losses: an estimated 20 out of 100, a very high percentage of which he ascribes to fox predation.

## SUMMARY

We would summarise the foregoing analysis as follows:

- ? Hunting is not inherently cruel. Over one third of foxes are killed very quickly, before leaving the covert. Of those that do leave the covert, only a small percentage will end up being “closely pursued” and then only in the closing stages of the hunt for rarely more than one minute, and usually closer to 30 seconds.
- ?
- ? Other methods of fox control result in potentially greater levels of cruelty. A percentage of foxes will be wounded by lamping with rifles and follow up is impractical. A higher percentage will be wounded by shotguns. Successful follow up by hounds (in the case of gun packs) is theoretically possible, but difficult to achieve in practice and little effort is made. Moreover, success or otherwise is unverifiable.
- ? The suffering caused to wounded foxes and to orphaned cubs from shooting is far greater than any possible stress caused to a fox being closely pursued for 30 or so seconds in its natural environment, with a high chance of escape.
- ? For our farmers, in particular, hunting with hounds is the single most important method of fox control employed on their farms. The burden of a ban on hunting with hounds would fall heavily, and disproportionately, on these farmers for whom hunting with hounds, and our lambing call service, often represent the main, or only, practical methods of fox control open to them.
- ? Drawing a distinction between the uplands and the lowlands is of little help in explaining fox predation here in the Cotswolds and, we suspect, elsewhere. High levels of fox predation are being recorded among indoor and outdoor lambing flocks. With average mortality levels in the region of around 5% of total viable lambs here on the Cotswolds, fox losses can account for well over 50% of total lamb losses and frequently more than this (90% in one case this year).
- ? The utility of hunting should not be judged on the numbers killed. Nor should any conclusions about the number of foxes killed by gamekeepers on large estates have any bearing on the utility of hunting for the majority of farmers in the lowlands for whom the hunt is the main, or only, viable option for fox control.
- ? Only hunting with hounds provides fox management, in the true conservation sense, as well as fox control.

R G Cooper, MFH  
Cotswold Hunt  
14<sup>th</sup> July 2002