Hunting is cruel and unnecessary. But pro-hunt organisations say hunting is necessary for pest control; that banning it will be an infringement of their civil liberty; and that a ban would have disastrous effects on the countryside.

The RSPCA, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), and the League Against Cruel Sports believe that hunting is a sport – not a method of pest control that the cruelties it inflicts is morally outrageous, and that the economic effects of a ban will be minimal.

Here are the reasons why.

### Hunting is cruel

- **Fox**: “The overall contribution of traditional foxhunting… is almost certainly insignificant in terms of the management of the fox population as a whole.” (Burns report).
- **Hunting makes no contribution to regulating fox numbers, there is no case for widespread fox control.** (Professor Stephen Harris, Bristol University. DEFRA public hearings, 2002).
- **21,000–25,000 foxes are killed annually by registered hunts (Burns report) compared with a fox population of 240,000 adults plus 425,000 cubs born each year.** (Baker & Harris. How will a ban on hunting affect the British fox population?, 1997).
- **When hunting was stopped during foot and mouth there was no significant change in fox numbers.** (Baker, Harris & Webbon. Mammal Society survey, 2002).

### Hunting with dogs


- **“The behaviour of the hunted animals leads me to conclude that they are suffering fear especially when they are unable to escape the threat such as deer at bay or foxes trapped underground.”** (Professor David Morten, University of Birmingham. DEFRA public hearings, 2002).
- **“Scientific studies show that lengthy hunts with hounds impose extreme stress on red deer and are likely to cause them great suffering.”** (Professor Patrick Bateson. The Behavioural and Physiological Effects of Culling Red Deer, 1997).

### Hunting is unnecessary

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Mink

■ “It is clear that the contribution made by mink hunts to the control of mink populations nationally is insignificant.” (Burns report).

■ 400–1,400 mink are killed annually by 20 hunts in England and Wales. (Burns report).

■ There is no firm data on the numbers of mink killed by trapping, but research shows that intensive trapping in an area can remove most of the local population. (Burns report).

Public opinion favours a ban

■ 82% of the public believe deer hunting should not be legal; 69% think foxhunting should not be legal; and 77% think hare hunting and coursing should not be legal. 76% is the average of these three figures. (MORI, November 2003).

■ 80% of the public think hunting with dogs is cruel. (MORI, December 2002).

The impact of a ban

■ Legislation to abolish cock fighting was described by 18th-century proponents as “oppressive and a gross infringement of our liberties.” Recognise the argument? (Howlett. The Royal Pastime of Cock Fighting, 1709).

■ “There is no right in that Convention [European Convention on Human Rights] to inflict cruelty upon animals… no one has the right under the Convention to engage in cruel sports, whether using their own property or on public property.” (Rabinder Singh QC of Matrix Chambers, 2002).

■ “No society can do without intolerance, indignation, and disgust, as they are the forces behind the moral law… I suppose that there is hardly anyone nowadays who would not be disgusted by the thought of deliberate cruelty to animals.” (Lord Devon. Morals and Criminal Law, 1963).

■ “The moral case against hunting is one of the strongest in ethics and theology.” (Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey, University of Oxford. 2003).

■ “In terms of national resource use, the economic effects of a ban on hunting would be unlikely to be substantial, especially in the context of the drastic changes taking place in the agricultural sector.” (Burns report).

■ Between 6,000–8,000 full-time equivalent jobs depend on hunting, but only 700 of these result from direct employment by the hunts. (Burns report).

■ “All hunts have a responsibility to give their loyal hounds a second chance and I find it inexplicable for hunts to suggest they would shoot their hounds in the event of a hunting ban. Speaking from experience, the great majority of hounds can become rewarding pets for suitable people, or could be used instead for drag hunting. Likewise, hunt horses can simply be utilised for other equestrian activities.” (Michael Thomas, ex Chairman of the New Forest Buckhounds, founder of the New Forest Draghunt and hound rehomer).

Hunting must now be banned

■ “[Hunting]… will be banned.” (Tony Blair. BBC Question Time, 8 July 1999).

■ In 2001 the government made a manifesto pledge to “enable parliament to reach a conclusion on this issue.”

■ “We have said we will resolve the issue [hunting] during this parliament, and so we will resolve the issue during this parliament.” (Tony Blair. Queen’s Speech Debate, 26 November 2003).

■ “Whatever legislation parliament passes will be enforced by the police. Those who are currently proposing civil disobedience need to fully understand that we will take action.” (Alistair McWhirter, Chief Constable of Suffolk Police. Standing Conference on Country Sports, October 2003).

The hunting year

■ About 30,000 hounds are currently kept by 304 live quarry hunts in England and Wales. (Burns, ‘Baily’s Hunting Directory 2003–2004’).

■ Foxhunting occurs from August/September to March/April.

■ Deer hunting: mature stags are hunted from August to October; hinds are hunted from November to February; ‘spring’ stags (usually two to four years old) are hunted in March and April.

■ Hare hunting does not have a statutory closed season, although Association of Masters of Harriers and Beagles registered packs hunt from September to February.

■ Hare coursing by registered clubs takes place from 15 September to 10 March, unregulated and illegal coursing is widespread.

■ Mink hunting usually takes place between April and October.