

Land Management Committee
Trail Hunting licencing
3 December 2020

Background Papers

Policy on hunting and disturbance of wild animals (2017)

Introduction

The unauthorised hunting or killing of any animals on Trust land is prohibited under the byelaws (byelaw 7).

Trail hunting is an activity that can be licenced by the Trust on the land under its jurisdiction in accordance with the above policy, adopted in 2017.

Ledbury Hunt and Croome and West Warwickshire Hunt apply most years for permission to lay trails on Trust land for their trail hunt activities. These meets are closely monitored by MHT Staff.

The issuing of licences for trail hunt activities is an operational matter. However, in the current circumstance, the endorsement of the Trustees is being sought for what can be a highly emotive matter.

Webinar appearing to show how the laying of trails can be used to mask unlawful activities

On the 13th November, an online webinar led by the Hunting Office (the executive arm of the governing bodies for hunting with hounds in the UK) and attended by hunt staff and masters, was leaked by the Hunt Saboteurs Association. The content of the webinar held in August this year, appears to include advice and encouragement for deceiving onlookers in order to avoid being caught breaking the law. References are made to the use of trail hunting as a ‘smokescreen’ for possible illegal hunting activities, and to portray “trail hunts” as a legitimate event.

Excerpts from the webinar have been published on line by various organisations.

A national police investigation into the content of the webinars, led by Devon and Cornwall Police, with assistance from the Crown Prosecution Service, is now underway to determine whether any crimes have been committed.

In response to the announcement of police involvement, the National Trust, Forestry Commission England, United Utilities, Lake District National Park and Natural Resources Wales have all now announced a suspension on trail hunting licences for the remainder of the season.

The Trust has, as of 30 November, received 26 emails calling for the suspension of trail hunting licences for the season.

At the writing of this paper, MHT had not received applications for any proposed trail hunt meet dates for this 2020/21 winter season, as per the hunting policy. Under the policy, 1 month's advance notice is required before the first date, followed by a formal application for a licence no less than 10 days before the proposed meet date.

At the time of writing, trail hunting events are prohibited under current Covid restrictions, but restrictions under the Tier rules are unclear.

Proposed action

Whilst the police investigation into the content of the webinar is ongoing, MHT should suspend all hunt licences for the remainder of the 2020/21 season.

This position will be reviewed in preparation for the 2021/22 season and will include any outcomes from the police investigation.

Practical considerations

Should the issue of licences be suspended, Hunts may still cross land under the jurisdiction of MHT along roads, bridleways and easements. If we receive reports of the Hunt activity on MHT land, MHT staff will attend and monitor as required.

RECOMMENDATION:

All licences for Trial Hunts are suspended for the rest of the 2020/21 season.

Beck Baker
Community and Conservation Officer