

# HARE COURSING

## WHAT IS HARE COURSING?

Hare coursing is the pursuit of hares with dogs, often for the purposes of betting. It takes place on areas of flat, open land where the dogs can easily and visibly pursue the hare. It is typically carried out by large groups of people who travel long distances in often stolen or unregistered cars to gain access to suitable land. The season begins as soon as the crops are harvested and trails off as the new crop emerges in the spring.

## THE CRIME

Hare coursing has been illegal throughout the UK since 2005 when the Hunting Act 2004 made it an offence to hunt wild mammals with dogs. In recent years there has been a significant increase in incidences and the activity has become notably more organised with increasingly violent escalations. In Cambridgeshire alone the number of reported incidences between September 2015 and 2016 rose from 42 to 118, an increase of 181%.



## IMPACTS

Aside from being a breach of the Hunting Act, hare coursing has many other impacts, several of which are criminal. Field boundaries such as fences and gates can be damaged by motor vehicles forcibly trying to gain access to land. Once in a field it is common practise to film the chase from a moving vehicle which can inflict significant damage to the field and any crops within.

Farmers who have approached hare coursers have faced threatening behaviour, which has occasionally led on to assaults. Farmers are being intimidated on their own land and this has led to a lack of reporting due to a fear of violent repercussions.

The NFU has received reports of farms in the Cambridgeshire area who have suffered arson attacks. While difficult to prove the perpetrator, farmers in the locality do not believe that it is coincidental that it is occurring in an area where hare coursing is prevalent.

Murray Graham who farms 1,200 acres in Oxfordshire has been plagued with coursers over the 2016/17 season with incidences occurring on a weekly basis. He said that the worry of meeting coursers and the threat of retribution as a consequence of any confrontation means that 'you need to be careful on your own patch – you especially don't want to lead them home'.

Furthermore this intimidation is hampering everyday life and farm activities. One Cambridgeshire farmer will no longer allow his children out on the farm alone during coursing season and says that farming is becoming increasingly inefficient as activity is now being carried out around the measures put in place to prevent hare coursers from gaining access to land.

## NFU ASKS

- Improved cross border policing and sharing of intelligence between forces.
- Judicial system to implement the maximum penalty permitted for those convicted.
- Police should consider all of the legislative options available to them when dealing with coursers. These options could include crushing cars, and impounding dogs.
- Call centre operators must be trained on the correct terminology, and this training must take into account staff turnover.
- Sharing resources and best practice between forces.
- Provision of correct equipment such as suitable vehicles and footwear for rural officers to carry out their duties.

## PREVENTING HARE COURSING

- Consider methods of restricting access to your land, such as blockades in entranceways, strategic ditch digging and padlocking gates.
- Ensure that you consult your local rights of way access officer for guidance where public access may be affected. Also check that any ditches or other obstacles do not affect your cross compliance requirements.
- Always report incidences no matter how minor so that the police have an accurate reflection of the extent of the issue.

## REACTING TO A HARE COURSING INCIDENT

### Be prepared:

- Have field grid references ready – these will ensure police can locate you quickly.
- Find out if you have a dedicated rural crime officer with a direct contact number.
- Join your local countryside watch if available to gain forewarning of coursers in the area.

### CHECKLIST:

- If it is a 'live' incident always dial 999, otherwise dial 101.
- Make sure you clearly state 'hare coursing' to ensure that the incident is recorded correctly.
- Provide grid references with descriptions of specific landmarks for where you are located.
- If possible provide a description of the person including notable features, and also descriptions of any vehicles including number plates and any distinguishing features.
- Be discreet when collecting evidence. Approaching hare coursers whilst holding a camera may be inflammatory.
- Ensure that you receive and make note of your crime reference number.



**REMEMBER: ALWAYS REPORT A HARE COURSING INCIDENT.**