

Animal Voice - December 2007

Campaign newsletter of the Irish Council Against Blood Sports

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01. Christmas Message

The Irish Council Against Blood Sports wishes all its friends and supporters a happy and peaceful Christmas. We thank every one of you for your campaigning efforts and support throughout 2007. Together, we will continue making a difference for Irish animals throughout 2008.

02. Restricted licence for Ward Union deer hunt

The Ward Union deer hunt has been issued a restricted licence by Environment Minister, John Gormley. While the Irish Council Against Blood Sports was hoping for a complete licence refusal by Minister Gormley, we welcome the fact that the licence issued is quite restricted and that the deer will not actually be hunted by the dogs.

However, we are very concerned about Condition No. 12 of the licence, i.e. that the deer shall be driven by mounted riders "to an end point" (to create a scent for the dogs to follow), which no doubt will terrify and stress the deer, and it should be borne in mind that it is an offence under the 1911 Protection of Animals Act to "over-drive" or "terrify" an animal.

We are also very concerned that given the manner of re-capture, i.e. wrestling the deer to the ground, with at least one deer being choked to death during same, that this abuse may continue.

In a statement issued on Wednesday (19 December 2007), Minister Gormley emphasised that "the licence is strictly conditioned so that the actual pursuit of a stag by hounds is not permitted."

"The licence with the conditions I have granted to the Ward Union Hunt will allow for the hunting of stags in a manner which will provide for the protection of the stag and the general public," the Minister stated. "In effect it permits the Ward Union to release a deer to lay a scent trail along the course of the hunt, but I am insisting that the deer must be recaptured before the hounds are released and the full hunt gets underway. I believe that the conditions attached to the licence address my concerns from a wider public policy perspective about the public safety issues surrounding the hunting of a large animal by a large group on horseback and a pack of hounds through an increasingly urbanised countryside."

The Irish Council Against Blood Sports has reiterated its contention that hunting these deer is illegal, and now more so than ever, given the recent legal opinion by Professors Clive Symmons and William Binchy, published in the current edition of the Irish Law Times. On the question of the licensing of the Ward Union under the 1976 Wildlife Act, they state that because the deer are captive deer and part of a domesticated herd, the Ward Union deer "are protected under the Irish animal welfare legislation - the Protection of Animals Acts."

03. Hunt is illegal, say eminent legal experts

Legal experts have outlined that the Ward Union deer hunt is illegal under current animal protection legislation. ICABS brought their compelling Irish Law Times report to the attention of Environment Minister, John Gormley as he considered the licensing of the hunt.

Legal opinion by Professors Clive Symmons and William Binchy of Trinity School of Law (published in the latest edition of the Irish Law Times) concludes that the Ward Union hunt is "illegal" under the 1911 Protection of Animals Act, and that it shouldn't be licensed under the 1976 Wildlife Act, as the deer are not wild animals.

ICABS has been campaigning against the Ward Union hunt for almost twenty years and we have been appealing to successive Environment Ministers to stop giving it a licence.

We earnestly appealed to Minister Gormley to stand firm against the Ward Union bullies, and their backers in the Fianna Fail cabinet, and bring an end to the suffering of these vulnerable animals. With top legal experts confirming that this hunt is illegal, the time has never been better to act, we told the Minister.

04. ICABS Christmas Cards - Download now!

Show you care about animals this holiday season - choose from our selection of 9 exclusive Christmas cards. Click on Latest News at www.banbloodsports.com and scroll down to "ICABS Christmas Cards" (06 December 2007) to make your selection. Simply print, fold and give to your friends, family and loved ones.

05. ICABS Christmas appeal to landowners

This Christmas, the Irish Council Against Blood Sports is making a special appeal to Irish farmers to make their land a cruelty-free zone. Highlighting the cruelty of hunting and the pain suffered by animals, we are asking all landowners to say no to their local hunt.

We appeal to them to imagine the fear experienced by a fox as the baying hounds and hollering hunters inch closer; the distress it feels as its heart pounds in its chest and its internal organs start failing from the sheer exertion of the chase; the absolute agony it suffers when a terrier takes a bite out of its belly or hounds rip it to shreds. This is the kind of cruelty that will take place on St Stephens Day and week after week into 2008 unless landowners do the decent and compassionate thing and have the courage to say no to their local hunt. No animal deserves the horrendous fate of the foxes, mink and hares chased and violently killed by packs of hounds.

ACTION ALERT 1

If you are a landowner, immediately make your land off limits to all hunts. If you have friends who are landowners, please tell them that they can make a difference by making their land a haven for wildlife. Please click on "Farmers" at www.banbloodsports.com to read our Troubled by the Hunt Leaflet and download a "No Hunting" sign to display around the boundaries of your property.

ACTION ALERT 2

Urge the Minister for Agriculture to amend the Protection of Animals Act so that foxes, hares, mink and all wild creatures are protected from unnecessary cruelty.

Minister Mary Coughlan, Department of Agriculture, Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-607 2000 or LoCall 1890-200510. Fax: 01-661 1013. Email: mary.coughlan@oireachtas.irlgov.ie

Dear Minister Coughlan,

I am writing to implore you to act to ban foxhunting and all blood sports in Ireland.

Minister, foxhunting is cruel from beginning to end. The foxes suffer great stress and damage to internal organs during the gruelling cross-county chases. When they try to escape underground, terriers are sent after them to viciously attack them and drag them out into the open. The squealing, injured and terrified foxes are then mercilessly killed by a hunt terriermen. Other foxes will die a despicable death as they try to evade capture - they are violently knocked off their feet by the pack of hounds and eviscerated.

Minister, I appeal to your sense of compassion to urgently intervene to save the fox from this barbarism. No living creature deserves the fate of foxes in foxhunting. The fox is one of Ireland's favourite wild creatures and is beneficial to farming interests by keeping down the numbers of mice, rats and rabbits which form part of its natural diet.

I implore you to amend the Protection of Animals Act so that foxes, hares, mink and all wild creatures are protected from unnecessary cruelty. Thank you. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

[Name/Location]

06. Ward Union licence decision hits the headlines in Qatar

Minister John Gormley's decision to issue a restricted licence to the Ward Union has hit the headlines in the Arab emirate state of Qatar.

Qatar's leading English newspaper, The Peninsula, reported that "an Irish tradition dating back more than 150 years was ended yesterday, when the country's only stag hunt was told it could no longer chase live deer due to security and animal welfare concerns."

Quoted in the report, Minister Gormley stated: "The licence with the conditions I have granted to the Ward Union Hunt will allow for the hunting of stags in a manner which will provide for the protection of the stag and the general public...In effect it permits the Ward Union to release a deer to lay a scent trail along the course of the hunt, but I am insisting that the deer must be recaptured before the hounds are released and the full hunt gets underway."

The newspaper went on to highlight how "greater urban sprawl and a strong anti-bloodsports lobby are putting increasing pressure on all hunts".

07. No bird bounty, Minister assures ICABS

The Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs, Eamon O Cuiv, has assured ICABS that there will be no bounties offered for the killing of crows and magpies. ICABS had expressed concerns to the Minister after learning that an MEP had called for a national cull of the birds.

Describing the birds as "pests" and accusing them of causing "environmental havoc", Fine Gael MEP, Jim Higgins, claimed that "a major national cull is needed to control their numbers" and that a bounty should be considered.

However, in a letter to the Minister, ICABS outlined how a National Parks and Wildlife Service representative confirmed to us that these birds are not considered major pests.

"We urge you to refrain from introducing any such bounty or encouraging the mass slaughter of crows and magpies," we stated. "We are not aware of any scientific data which supports the claims that the population of these birds has 'exploded' or that they cause 'environmental havoc'."

ICABS is pleased to report that the Minister has dismissed the calls for a bounty on the birds.

"There is no question of me introducing or calling for the introduction of any such bounty," he assured ICABS.

08. Call for Garda investigation into alleged foxhunt incident

In November, the Irish Council Against Blood Sports called for a Garda investigation into allegations that the Westmeath Foxhounds club threw a live fox, which had been dug out of the earth, to a pack of hounds to be killed. According to an article in the Irish Independent, the appalling incident allegedly took place last week at Walderstown, County Westmeath.

The foxhunters' so-called Code of Conduct, agreed with the Department of Agriculture in the late 90s, is a total sham and nothing short of a 'Code of Cruelty'. This voluntary code allows for the digging out of foxes and the use of hunt terriers to viciously attack the fox underground. Before this flimsy document was drawn up, the Irish Council Against Blood Sports called for, at the very least, the practice of digging out of foxes to be banned. However, the Department of Agriculture, with the then Minister Joe Walsh at the helm, gave it the seal of approval.

It is our belief that the digging out of foxes, using terriers, and throwing them live to hounds is routine in foxhunting and carried out with impunity. These sickening events usually take place in the depths of the countryside, away from public view, and not even the general hunt followers would normally be exposed to such horrors. Indeed, the code of conduct conveniently stresses that "reasonable efforts shall be made to ensure that digging out will not become a public spectacle".

The Irish Council Against Blood Sports is calling on Mary Coughlan, Minister for Agriculture, to draw up legislation outlawing the barbaric practice of foxhunting with hounds in line with our neighbours in the U.K. which has outlawed the hunting of wild animals with dogs.

ACTION ALERT

Please contact Agriculture Minister, Mary Coughlan, and demand that she urgently introduces a national ban on foxhunting due to the despicable cruelty involved.

Sample Letter

(If you have time, please compose your own personal letter. Otherwise, send the short sample letter below. Be assertive, but polite, in all correspondence. Thank you.)

Minister Mary Coughlan, Department of Agriculture, Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-607 2000 or LoCall 1890-200510. Fax: 01-661 1013. Email: mary.coughlan@oireachtas.irlgov.ie

Dear Minister Coughlan,

I was appalled to read in the Irish Independent about allegations that a hunt in Westmeath tied a rope to fox, pulled him out of the ground and fed him alive to the pack of hounds.

Minister, foxhunting is cruel from beginning to end. The foxes suffer great stress and damage to internal organs during the gruelling cross-county chases. When they try to escape underground, terriers are sent after them to viciously attack them and drag them out into the open. If the squealing and injured fox is not killed after being mercilessly dug out of the ground by terriermen, it will die on the run after being knocked off its feet by the pack and eviscerated.

Minister, I appeal to your sense of compassion to urgently act to save the fox from this barbarism. The fox is one of Ireland's favourite wild creatures. No living creature deserves the fate of foxes in foxhunting.

Please ban foxhunting now.

Thank you, Minister. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

[Name/Location]

09. Predictable outcome as foxhunters investigate themselves

The Irish Council Against Blood Sports has described as "predictable" the outcome of an "investigation" into allegations that a fox dug out of the ground during a hunt in Westmeath was tied up and fed alive to hounds. ICABS has expressed its deep scepticism after hunt body, IMFHA, dismissed the cruelty claims.

According to a report in the Westmeath Topic newspaper, the Irish Masters of Foxhounds Association maintained that "there was no evidence whatsoever that a rope or anything similar was used" and rejected claims that the fox was thrown to the hounds. They did not deny that the dig-out - one of the most cruel aspects of foxhunting - took place.

"The IMFHA said that they unreservedly accept the account of what happened as stated in an interview conducted with the whipper-in who supervised the dig," the newspaper reported.

In response, ICABS spokesperson, Aideen Yourell, described the outcome as predictable. "The Irish Council Against Blood Sports is entirely sceptical of the Irish Masters of Foxhounds and their so-called 'investigation' into the allegations that a fox was tied and fed live to a pack of hounds," she said. "The outcome, clearing Westmeath Hunt of cruelty, was predictable given that, in effect, the hunters were investigating themselves."

"The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, said recently that self regulation does not work and nothing could be more true in relation to foxhunters and other blood sports groups," she continued. "This incident highlights the cruelty of foxhunting, involving the digging out of foxes during hunts, which the Westmeath Hunt has not denied and which is routine in foxhunting. Those who follow this hunt and give it their support can not but be aware of this barbarism - no longer can they turn a blind eye and pretend such things do not happen. By their participation they are endorsing and contributing to the cruelty."

ICABS has called on the Gardai to investigate the allegations.

10. Tony Gregory questions Ministers about foxhunt cruelty

ICABS Vice-president, Tony Gregory, TD has questioned the Agriculture and Justice Ministers about "allegations of extreme cruelty to animals" during a foxhunt in County Westmeath.

Please see below for the two Dail Questions along with the replies.

Parliamentary Questions and Answers

Question 520 - Answered on 4th December, 2007

Tony Gregory: To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will request a report from the Garda authorities on the allegations of extreme cruelty to animals (featured in the Irish Independent on 23rd November 2007 involving the Westmeath Foxhounds Club); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Written reply.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. Lenihan): I am informed that a complaint regarding the incident referred to was received by the Garda authorities and is under active investigation. As this is an ongoing Garda investigation it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Question 416 - Answered on 4th December, 2007

Tony Gregory: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will request a report from her Department officials on allegations (serious breaches of the agreed code of conduct by Westmeath Foxhounds Club featured in the Irish Independent on 23rd November 2007); the action she is taking; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Written reply. Ref No: 31992/07 Proof: 489

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: (Mary Coughlan) By way of background, I should point out that the Hunting Association of Ireland (HAI), which encompasses bodies that represent organised fox hunting in Ireland has in place rules and procedures which apply in particular to the practices of digging out, bolting and earthstopping. This initiative was taken after my Department had conveyed to the bodies its concern about such practices. The bodies concerned have also given specific written assurances that they are committed to ensuring compliance with and enforcement of these measures and to imposing sanctions on anyone found not to have complied with them.

As regards the matter referred to in the Question, I have received preliminary information about the incident and I have asked my officials to meet with the HAI to discuss the matter further.

In this regard, the Deputy will be aware that while my statutory powers currently extend only to farm animals, matters such as those involved here are governed by the Wildlife Acts and the Protection of Animals Acts. I am fully committed to promoting good practices that respect the welfare of all animals and my Department is currently progressing a number of animal welfare-related commitments from the Programme for Government including consolidation of responsibility for the welfare of all animals (including non-farm animals) within my Department and the introduction of a comprehensive Animal Welfare Bill to update existing animal welfare legislation.

Please click on Politicians at www.banbloodsports.com to view more Dail Q & A

11. Calling all Carlow/Kilkenny supporters

If you are in County Carlow or Kilkenny and would be interested in teaming up with like-minded individuals in the area to raise awareness about blood sports, please get in touch with us now. Simply email your name and contact details (phone number, email address) to info@banbloodsports.com and we will pass them on to others who respond. Proposed activities include collecting petition signatures, distributing leaflets and political lobbying. Thank you.

12. MS Ireland defends acceptance of hunt donations

Multiple Sclerosis Ireland has rejected an appeal from ICABS to refuse donations from groups involved in animal cruelty.

After learning that a fox hunt had announced a fundraiser ride, we contacted MS Ireland's head office and asked them to show solidarity for our campaign by refusing any money raised.

We asked MS Ireland to watch our online video which shows the hunt digging a fox out of the ground with a terrier biting into its head - <http://www.banbloodsports.com/v-fox.htm>. The squealing fox with bleeding head is prised from the jaws of the dog, thrown into a sack and eventually released before a pack of hounds which rip its body apart.

"We hope that you can agree that the animal cruelty in the video and in foxhunting in general is truly appalling," we stated in our correspondence to the charity. "Please refuse the donation and deny the hunt the opportunity to gain positive publicity by fundraising on your behalf." Sadly, our plea was turned down by the charity.

"As a charity we have to raise over 9 million Euro per annum to ensure the delivery of our essential services," said Fundraising Manager, Paul Collins. "Whilst we can sympathise with your concerns we are dependent upon the general public undertaking fundraising [and] I hope you can appreciate these reasons for accepting donations from hunts."

If you would like to appeal to MS Ireland to refuse future donations from blood sports groups, please write to:

Anne Winslow, Chief Executive, MS Ireland, 80 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
Tel: 01 678 1600. Fax: 01 678 1601 Email: info@ms-society.ie

13. Anti-hunt campaign is "well organised" says hunt group

The chairman of the Hunting Association of Ireland has described those campaigning against hunting as "passionate" and said that the anti-hunt campaign in Ireland is "well organised". Gavin Duffy also revealed that the HAI was "broke".

According to The Irish Horse section of the Irish Farmers Journal, Mr Duffy made the comments at a pro-hunt meeting in Navan.

"HAI chairman Gavin Duffy told the recent Navan protest meeting that hunting was seriously under threat and that the association was broke," the report outlined. "He said that the anti-hunt faction were passionate about their objectives [and] were well organised."

14. The truth about foxes: new ICABS slideshow

Visit the "Videos" section at www.banbloodsports.com to check out our new slideshow which presents the truth about foxes on Irish farms. Featuring quotes from ecologists and wildlife experts, viewers will learn that foxes are beneficial to farming interests and are not the pests foxhunters claim them to be.

Please pass on a link to the slideshow - <http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=5TAJUtlAxRw> - to your farming friends and ask them to make all of their land off limits to foxhunters. Thank you.

15. Galway SPCA criticises pro-hunt TD

The Galway Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has criticised Galway East TD, Noel Treacy (Fianna Fail) after the Sunday Times revealed that he is one of the Dail Deputies who have defended the Ward Union deer hunt.

"The Galway Society for Prevention of cruelty to animals are saddened by Deputy Noel Treacy's support of the Ward Union hunt," the Galway SPCA said in a statement. "We ask the voters of Galway East to lodge a complaint to Deputy Treacy's office - noel.treacy@oireachtas.ie"

16. Beverley Flynn TD urges Minister to refuse deerhunt licence

Mayo TD, Beverley Flynn, is one of the latest member of Dail Eireann to call for an end to carted deer hunting in Ireland. Deputy Flynn contacted Environment Minister, John Gormley, in November to highlight the "considerable public opposition" to the Ward Union hunt among constituents.

According to a report in the Sunday Times (November 18th, 2007), the Independent TD wrote to Minister Gormley to put forward the case for refusing a licence to the widely condemned hunt. "I have been approached by a number of constituents who have expressed concern over the possibility of your issuing a [hunting] licence," she stated in her correspondence. ICABS has written to Deputy Flynn to thank her for her stance on this issue.

The Sunday Times went on to reveal some of the TDs who have defended the Ward Union. These were named in the paper as Darragh O'Brien (Fianna Fail, Dublin North), Christy O'Sullivan (Fianna Fail, Cork South-West) and Noel Treacy (Fianna Fail, Galway East).

17. ICABS responds to misinformation from deerhunt supporters

ICABS has issued a response to misinformation circulated by supporters of the Ward Union hunt. Our statement, forwarded to politicians in Dail Eireann, addressed claims that a hunt ban would lead to job losses and the deaths of dogs. Extracts from our submission appear below.

Claims that a ban on carted deer hunting would lead to job losses is a cynical and misleading attempt to gain a modicum of sympathy for this cruel and indefensible blood sport. The Irish Council Against Blood Sports wishes to stress that there is absolutely no reason why a transition from carted deer hunting to the humane alternative of drag hunting need lead to any negative impact on local employment. Apart from the absence of the terrorised deer, drag hunting is identical to carted deer hunting vis-a-vis the horses and hounds involved, the workload for farriers and the level of animal feed required. Local veterinary surgeons would still have the business of tending to hounds and horses (we can't imagine any vet who would argue for a continuation of the hunt as causing suffering to animals is contrary to the Veterinary Council of Ireland's Code of Professional Conduct).

As for claims that any blood sports ban would hurt the horse sales industry, please see the following extract from the Farming Independent of 30th October 2007: "Although the introduction of the UK hunting ban was at the time heralded by many as the end to the Irish hunter trade its 'bad' effect went virtually unnoticed...We never had a better trade than when they brought in the ban," says Jim [an Irish horse dealer]. This shows that despite a ban in the UK, demand for Irish horses has not fallen. Hunters have suggested in the past that hunting gives an advantage to horses - any such advantage can, of course, be matched by drag hunts. The latter has the added benefit of bringing horses on challenging runs but keeping them away from hazards that could cause serious injuries.

In drag hunting, a member of the hunt simply drags a scented rag along the route the "hunt" is to take. He is given a sufficient head start and will remain unseen by members of the hunt and by the hounds. The pre-planned route he takes is kept secret so that the "hunt" remains unpredictable to the followers. Please see our short video presentations to see how successfully drag hunting works: <http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q25MHNZUn8> and <http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=gGKwAa91j9Q>

Drag hunting can also guarantee that horses and hounds stay well away from schools. Earlier this year, the Ward Union's pack of hounds chased a bloodied and screeching stag into the grounds of a primary school and left frightened young children in tears and running for safety (See: Bedlam as Ward Union invades school playground). The principal of the school was prompted to initiate the school's "Critical incident Plan" for the first time ever - this included instructing teachers to keep children inside the school.

"The school staff and parents immediately swung into action to ensure the safety of the children," she later recounted to listeners of Liveline, detailing how the pack of hounds chased the deer around the school grounds a few times. "It was a terrifying experience for me as an adult and I can just imagine that for children it would be very terrifying," she said.

The hunt was also condemned by infuriated parents. "It was a dangerous situation," commented one mother who said that with horses blocking the road, she was unable to get across to the school to see where her child was. Another observed that if anything had gone wrong, an ambulance would not have been able to get down the road which was clogged with hunt vehicles and horses. "It was the luck of God that no child was injured," she remarked. Meanwhile, the driver of a

local school bus described it as "an utter disgrace" and told of how hunt followers "held up the whole road" and gave the children "the finger" when they shouted out the window that hunting was cruel.

Other apologists for the Ward Union have claimed that a ban will lead to the slaughter of dogs and horses. This mean-spirited argument is without foundation - there is nothing to suggest that a changeover to drag hunting would result in a situation where less horses and hounds are required.

Yet another claim is that a ban on the Ward Union would represent an erosion of rural traditions. As demonstrated by the results of a Meath Post opinion poll which found that a two thirds majority of Meath people don't want the Ward Union, carted deer hunting is clearly a tradition that has outlived its welcome. Not only does it involve unacceptable animal cruelty but it has also been the subject of complaints from farmers and other landowners as well as from the parents of local school children and motorists in Meath and North County Dublin. Cockfighting, dog fighting and badger baiting were once seen as rural traditions - all cruel blood sports that have been outlawed. The countryside will undoubtedly be even better off without carted deer hunting.

For the animals that suffer, for the Meath majority who want the hunt stopped, for the image of Ireland as a decent and compassionate nation, carted deer hunting must be ended.

18. Farm group wants Ward Union banned

Rural campaign group, Farmers Against Foxhunting and Trespass, have joined the calls for a ban on the Ward Union deer hunt. In a statement issued at the end of November, chairman, Philip Lynch said: "A hunting ban would be music to our ears."

"We, the farmers of this country, are eagerly awaiting an announcement by Minister John Gormley banning the activities of the Ward Union Stag hunt," he stated, adding that they are also pressing for a foxhunt ban.

"Foxhunters should be confined to hunting on their own lands, or on rented land. and by drag hunting only," the Kilkenny-based former IFA county chairman went on. "This would confine them to areas where they have written permission to hunt, and would ensure that they follow a pre-ordained route, unlike hunting a live quarry, which routinely leads them anywhere and everywhere, resulting in trespass and damage to lands."

"The government would have the gratitude and votes of farmers and other people around the country who are again this year, flooding the local newspapers with 'no hunting' advertisements and erecting 'private lands' signs on their property," Mr Lynch stressed. "A hunting ban would be music to our ears. We could relax and enjoy our Christmas, free from the activities of these countryside vandals."

Video: Landowners and hunts - A general video showing the problems caused to Irish farmers and landowners by hunting groups. To view our video, please click on VIDEOS at www.banbloodsports.com

19. Eagle Star urged to exclude coursing from 2008 calendar

ICABS has appealed to insurance company, Eagle Star, to keep coursing out of any 2008 calendars it may be sponsoring.

As highlighted by ICABS back in April, an Irish Examiner Sports calendar sponsored by Eagle Star gave the names and dates of two coursing meetings. In a letter to the company this month, we expressed our hope that if Eagle Star is sponsoring the next edition of the calendar that they will insist that coursing is excluded. "We would expect that, given the information about the animal cruelty provided in previous correspondence, Eagle Star will do everything possible to ensure that coursing is not featured this time round," we stated.

20. Pro-hunt email doesn't reflect company opinions: Sherry Fitzgerald

The Managing Director of estate agents, Sherry Fitzgerald, has assured ICABS that a pro-hunt email sent from one of its Meath franchise offices does not reflect the company's opinions. The author of the message signed herself as an employee of the branch and claimed that there were "thousands of reasons why [the Ward Union] should be supported".

The message, emailed to Dail Eireann, asked TDs to urge Minister John Gormley to issue a licence to the controversial hunt which a majority of Meath residents want banned.

"I kindly ask you [to] do anything in your power to push him to make a move on this issue," the message stated. "There are thousands of reasons why this hunt should be supported...any help you can give us in pushing minister Gormley would be hugely appreciated."

In correspondence to Sherry Fitzgerald's Head Office, ICABS highlighted the cruelty of carted deer hunting.

Also brought to the company's attention was the results of the recent Meath Post opinion poll which found that nearly two thirds of Meath residents want the Ward Union deerhunt banned. 64 per cent of those polled by the newspaper said that they want Minister Gormley to refuse a licence to the hunt.

"It would seem therefore that your employee is in the minority of those wanting to retain this cruel hunt," Campaign Director, Aideen Yourell stated. "We have no doubt that the vast majority of your clientele nationally would not support her view."

In response, Sherry FitzGerald Countrywide Managing Director, Ian McCarthy MIAVI, assured ICABS that the email reflected the views of one person and not that of the branch or the company as a whole.

"The email was written in an absolutely personal capacity reflecting the author's personal and individual opinions and in no way was it intended to reflect either the opinions generally of that particular Sherry FitzGerald franchise office, the company or its employees generally," he stated.

ICABS has conveyed this clarification to the TDs who originally received the email. We have outlined to them that views expressed in the message are representative of just one person.

21. Creatures of the Same God: new book from Revd Linzey

The latest book by "the greatest living writer on theology and animals" has just been published. Creatures of the Same God: Explorations in Animal Theology by Revd Dr Andrew Linzey further develops, updates and builds upon his previous influential works over the last 30 years.

"Dr Linzey began writing on theology and animals long before it was thought fashionable," explains Professor Elizabeth Stuart, Titles Editor at publishers Winchester University Press. "He has truly been a trail blazer, asking questions that few other theologians have dared to ask and encouraging new generations of scholars. Creatures of the Same God is a great book. It makes the rational, ethical and theological case for animals at a time when there is a dearth of rational discussion about how we should treat animals."

"Christianity has a poor record on animals," explains Dr Linzey. "Christians have variously thought that animals were just things, machines, tools or resources made for us. Churches should be leaders in the movement for the protection of animals, but animals are not even in the procession. This book is part of the much needed re-appraisal of the status of animals from a theological perspective."

Dr Linzey is a member of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oxford and was most recently appointed Honorary Professor of the University of Winchester. He is Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics and was previously a Senior Research Fellow in Theology and Animal Welfare at Mansfield College. Dr Linzey is currently an Honorary Professor in Theology at the University of Birmingham and Special Professor at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, Illinois.

Book details: Hardcover, 209 pages, Publisher: Winchester University Press, ISBN-10: 1906113009, ISBN-13: 978-1906113001. You may order the book at your local book shop or contact Stephen.Dowell@winchester.ac.uk for ordering details.

22. Vicki Moore biography published

The Fight Against Animal Cruelty in Europe has announced the release of a book about the life of the late Vicki Moore. Life on the Line - The heroic story of Vicki Moore by Matilda Mench (ISBN: 1 904438 57) is published by The Bluecoat Press and can be ordered from www.lifeontheline.info or from any book shop. Price £7.99.

Vicki was a friend of the Irish Council Against Blood Sports and in 1999, in response to a request from ICABS, she highlighted the cruelty of bullfighting and bullrunning on RTE's Rodney Rice programme. Vicki revealed that the whole bullrunning industry is driven by greed in that the breeders can fetch up to £4,000 for an animal used in an event. Such bulls may have been rejected for bull-fighting, and would only fetch a couple of hundred pounds from the slaughterhouse. When Rodney Rice asked Vicki why she continued to do what she did, particularly after her horrific experience at the Coria bullrun, she replied that she had been "handed a sort of cross".

"I was asked to do it by Spanish people who feel strongly about this - and there are millions of people in Spain who feel strongly against this sort of thing, but who don't have a public voice. They begged me to try and publicise it and bring support from outside of Spain - from Europe - from anybody who would listen and help. My cross was handed to me. I thought long and hard about taking it up, but I did and it's been a long road, a sad road and a bitter road, but I just pray to God that eventually sanity will prevail and there will be some justice for the animals."

Vicki Moore - 1955-2000

23. Letters to the Editors

Deer dying is no reason to sneer
Irish Independent, November 24 2007
By Aideen Yourell, ICABS

Your columnist Kevin Myers recently wrote in support of the Ward Union carted deer hunt and sneeringly questioned if frightening them was "bad for their lickle-ickle hearts".

The answer to that is yes -- the stress of the chase can affect their hearts and, over the last few years, there have been two deer fatalities as a result of aneurysms.

Mr Myers may be interested to know about the fate of other unfortunate deer used for recreational purposes by the Ward Union hunt and their followers, as revealed to ICABS, under the Freedom of Information Act; a deer drowned in a quarry; a deer hanging by its front leg on barbed wire during a hunt; a deer choked while being re-captured by the hunt; and a deer which died as a result of fractured ribs.

Mr Myers then raises the legal possibility that the Ward Union might not need a licence because they don't "hunt", only "chase" their own deer.

Perhaps he is not aware that we have a law in this country prohibiting causing unnecessary suffering to animals -- the 1911 Protection of Animals Act.

The Ward Union, who hunt farmed deer, have been flouting this Act since its inception, while successive governments and law enforcers turned a blind eye.

No thrill in the chase of stag hunting
Irish Independent, 21st November, 2007
by John Fitzgerald, Campaign For The Abolition Of Cruel Sports

Kevin Myers seems to think that carted stag hunting is not cruel to deer because the intention is to chase but not kill the deer (November 16).

I would argue that this makes the sport even more cruel and unacceptable than activities in which animals are killed for reasons of food or pest control.

The stags are invariably used as playthings by the hunters.

They are hounded and terrorised for fun, for no other reason than to give a cheap thrill to a bunch of tin-pot aristocrats and social climbers decked out in fancy dress.

The widely acclaimed Bateson report in the United Kingdom led to a stag hunting ban on National Trust land.

That was even before the blanket abolition of baiting with hounds proved beyond any shadow of a doubt that hunted deer undergo an unacceptable level of stress and suffering when chased by packs of hounds.

This is a fact that common sense has dictated to be the case for many centuries.

So Kevin's contention that the stags take it all in their stride is utter nonsense.

Equally unfounded is his notion that supporting the Ward Union hunt would be a great vote-getter for the Government.

A recent opinion poll by a Co Meath newspaper showed that a two-thirds majority in the county favoured a ban on stag hunting.

And, not surprisingly, apart from objections on animal welfare grounds many farmers have banned the stag hunters from their property to safeguard crops and livestock.

Kevin describes the stag hunt as a green "organisation" that is in tune with nature.

I would suggest that an activity that causes immense suffering to an animal has no conservation or pest control value.

Also it is inimical to the well-being of the farming community.

It is no more an environmentally friendly practice than the burning of toxic waste in the open or the wilful pollution of our waterways.

Carted stag hunting is not even a light shade of green and Ireland's countryside will be a better place without it.

24. Petitions

Ban Blood Sports in Ireland in 2007

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/784506550>

Whales Revenge International Petition

<http://www.whalesrevenge.com>

Stop Dog Abuse

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/stop-dog-abuse.html>

25. Campaign Quotes

"Perhaps Mr. Myers could be the terrified, hunted beast that is chased down throughout the countryside by fun-loving men on horseback for a few hours, until he is left, heart near-bursting, quivering with fear in the corner of a field in Meath? Or maybe he too would take it all in his stride." (A post by Karl on the Irish Independent website, 21st November 2007, in response to a pro-hunt article by Kevin Myers)

"The Irish Council Against Bloodsports, which is based in Mullingar, has criticised this [foxhunt] code of conduct, describing it as "a total sham, and nothing short of a code of cruelty". "Before this flimsy document was drawn up, the Irish Council Against Blood Sports, which wanted and continues to want a total ban on the hunting of foxes with dogs called for, at the very least, the practice of digging out foxes to be banned. However, the Department of Agriculture, with Minister Joe Walsh at the helm, gave it the seal of approval," the Council Against Bloodsports stated. (Westmeath Independent, 1st December 2007)

"There is no evidence of this happening, there is no photograph." A Westmeath Hunt employee insisting that there is no evidence to prove that a fox was dug out of its den, tied up and fed alive to hounds during a hunt. (Irish Independent, December 20th, 2007)

"The Gardai are investigating the incident at Drumraney in which a fox was allegedly killed cruelly during a Westmeath Hunt outing, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy Brian Lenihan has revealed...Aideen Yourell, spokesperson for the Mullingar-based Irish Council Against Blood Sports has revealed this week that it was ICABS that lodged the complaint with the Gardai." (Westmeath Examiner, 22nd December 2007)

"As with many huntsman who cannot account for [i.e. kill] their fox, [the huntsman's] unhappiness was clear as he collected his hounds." (From an Irish Field report on the Co. Limerick Foxhounds, 1st December 2007)

"This fox ran in a circle and managed to run through not one bunch of cows but two before making good his escape to the 'big covert'..." (From an Irish Field report on the Co. Limerick Foxhounds, 1st December 2007)

"Yes, there are plenty of deer around, and whats more I can also state that I have found one shot with a small calibre round that obviously took a long time to die / I hold a deer hunting license and various Coillte permits for the first time this year, and each time I go out stalking I find myself more interested in watching these animals than in pulling the trigger." (From two separate posts on irishboards.ie on the subject of shooting deer 31st October, 2007)

"In the latest news on the Ward Union Hunt's attempts to have its licence renewed, the Irish Racecourse Trainers Association has come out in support of the hunt and called on the Minister for the Environment to issue the licence." (Irish Field, 1st December 2007)

"The Irish Council Against Blood Sports has welcomed the restrictions applied to the Ward Union Hunt Club licence issued in Co Meath for the hunting of deer. One of the 28 conditions is that the deer will not actually be hunted by dogs...However, the council was hoping for a complete refusal by Mr Gormley. And the council is concerned about the fact that the deer shall be driven by mounted riders "to an end point" (to create a scent for the dogs to follow), as they believe this will terrify and stress the deer." (Group gives guarded welcome to restricted hunt licence, BreakingNews.ie, 19th December, 2007)

"Packs of hounds have been banned from chasing stags in hunt meetings, Environment Minister John Gormley has announced. Granting a licence to the Ward Union Hunt Club, the minister imposed 28 strict conditions in relation to the welfare, conservation and protection of the animal and public." (Hounds banned from chasing stags, Press Association, 19th December 2007)

"The Irish Council Against Blood Sports said it was hoping for a complete refusal of the licence by Minister Gormley. But it said it welcomed the fact that the licence issued is quite restricted and that the deer will not actually be hunted by the dogs. However, the group is concerned about Condition 12 of the licence, which states that the deer will be driven by mounted riders 'to an end point' to create a scent for the dogs to follow. The Council believes this will terrify and stress the deer and it pointed out that it is an offence under the 1911 Protection of Animals Act to 'over-drive' or 'terrify' an animal." (RTE website, 19th December 2007)

"The permit issued by Mr Gormley allows the hunt to release a deer to lay a scent trail along the course of the hunt, but the deer must be recaptured before the hounds are released and the full hunt gets under way. The Hunting Association of Ireland gave the move a "reserved welcome" but is seeking clarifications over how the restrictions will be enforced. The Irish Council Against Blood Sports said it was hoping for a complete refusal of the licence by Mr Gormley. But it welcomed the fact the licence issued is quite restricted and the deer will not be hunted by the dogs." (Irish Examiner, 20th December 2007)

"The Agriculture Minister also said that her Department is currently progressing a number of animal welfare-related commitments from the Programme for Government. The Council Against Blood Sports says it welcomes this long overdue move, initiated by the Green Party in government, and the fact that for the first time, non-farm animals will get protection from cruelty. The Council says it hopes this will see an end to what it calls appalling treatment of foxes and other wild animals." (Midlands Radio 103 website, December 2007)

Tune in to the ICABS Channel

Footage of blood sport cruelty and the humane alternatives can be viewed on the ICABS Channel on Youtube - www.youtube.com/icabs or by clicking on "Videos" at www.banbloodsports.com

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