

## Scottish SPCA submission relating to the Hunting with Dogs Bill evidence session on 15 June 2022 for Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee

The Scottish SPCA special investigations unit (SIU) works undercover and acts on intelligence to expose some of the most serious crimes against animals. This includes animal fighting which involves suspects finding wild animals, including foxes, setting dogs upon them and in some cases filming the act and/or placing financial bets on the outcome of these fights. Video evidence that has been seized has shown footage of foxes and deer being attacked and killed by dogs and it is certainly a torturous and slow death for the animals involved.

Those involved in animal fighting often send a terrier underground to flush or corner an animal and use larger dogs, such as bull lurchers, to attack wild animals.

Badger baiters, those known to specifically target badgers, attach locator collars to terriers who are sent down in to badger setts to find an animal. Once the badger is cornered by the terrier, baiters will dig down, which can sometimes take up to eight hours, to expose the animal and set their dogs on it. Badgers can be ferocious, especially mothers protecting their cubs.

In some circumstances the terrier is lost, assumed killed, by a wild animal underground. The terriers can suffer terrible injuries to their muzzles and the Society has had circumstances where terriers have had their jaws ripped off. In the worst cases, vets have had to put terriers and other dogs to sleep due to the extent of the injuries after face to face combat with a wild animal.

The majority of those accused in animal fighting cases will give the excuse that they are hunting foxes with a licensed marksman. The following animal fighters used fox hunting as a defence for their crimes.

### Callum Muir

In May 2022, Callum Muir, 25, from East Ayrshire was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and an indefinite ban on keeping animals. The Scottish SPCA's SIU inspectors called the evidence some of the 'worst examples' of animal fighting they had ever seen. Callum Muir laughed as he watched wild animals screaming in terror and pain as they were being torn apart by his dogs.



All three of Muir's dogs had significant injuries across their faces. Terrier Pip and lurcher Bella, the two older dogs, had injuries across their neck and legs. Both dogs had several missing teeth as a result of the fights they'd been in, and the lack of appropriate veterinary treatment would have made the suffering even worse.

Mig the bull lurcher had some scarring to her muzzle and legs but as she was a much larger, stronger and younger dog, it's likely she'd been able to avoid serious injury up to the point of seizure.

#### Conran Connor

In February 2020, 20-year-old Conran Connor from Wishaw was sentenced to five months in prison and a 15-year ban on keeping animals after being found guilty of animal fighting. Knives were found in Connor's home with badger blood and DNA on them.



Images were found in Connor's possession of him posing with dead wild animals and his three dogs.

Other images seized as part of evidence confirmed his presence at badger baiting sites and showed his own dogs at the entrance to a badger sett. There were also images of men digging into the ground at night in woodland. Other pictures include a dog with injuries consistent with badger fighting.

Connor engaged in depraved acts that showed his complete disregard for animal welfare. He caused extreme levels of suffering to the wild animals involved and put his three dogs at great risk of injury or death, and failed to get any veterinary treatment when they were injured.

### Mark Cuthbert

Mark Cuthbert, 42, of Ayr, was sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment and given a 10-year ban on owning or keeping any animal in October 2019.

Not only was Cuthbert engaging his animals in fighting with badgers, foxes and other animals but he had been using the online selling site, Gumtree, to purchase cats for his dogs to kill.



The Scottish SPCA's SIU team found that his pets had injuries consistent with animal fighting and suspected he had been self-medicating his dogs to avoid drawing attention to his illegal activities.

### Sean Ward

In April 2019, Sean Ward from Port Glasgow was found guilty of being involved in, and filming, horrific animal fights and was handed a jail sentence and 20-year ban on owning or keeping animals.

Following the Scottish SPCA's investigation, 27-year-old Sean Ward was jailed for seven months. In text messages, Ward described setting dogs on a fox as 'some buzz' and a video in his possession showed a man restraining a live deer by its hind legs as other voices urged dogs to attack it.

The Scottish SPCA's animal helpline received a call from a person concerned for a Jack Russell terrier type dog they had seen in a remote field with several injuries. The injuries were found to be consistent with badger baiting which led inspectors to Ward.





This was a truly barbaric and horrific case which resulted in pain and suffering for the dogs in Ward's care and the wild animals targeted for 'fun'.

We hope this shows the Committee the extent of the injuries that can be caused to terriers through combat with a wild animal.

The Scottish SPCA would also like to end the suffering caused to terriers, larger dogs and the wild animals involved in animal fighting. By limiting the number of dogs and the introduction of a licence, animal fighting will be easier to enforce.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any further information.

Kind regards,



Mike Flynn MBE  
Scottish SPCA chief superintendent