

# Terrier work

**Most registered fox hunts use the services of terriermen – individuals employed to find, dig out and kill foxes that have found an underground refuge during a hunt. This activity has also become a ‘sport’ in its own right, attracting several thousand enthusiasts who kill an estimated 50,000 foxes a year for fun. These independent terriermen operate in small gangs, armed with dogs, nets, and spades.**

## What is terrier work ?

Most people are familiar with the illegal practices of badger digging and baiting, in which terriers are sent underground to find badgers, often resulting in both dog and badger suffering appalling injuries. The badger is then dug out of the sett by the terriermen. When terriermen send their dogs underground to find foxes, however, they are acting within the law because foxes are not afforded the same legal protection as badgers.

When a fox finds underground refuge during a hunt, terriers are sent into the earth to locate it. If the terrier finds the fox, an underground battle may ensue between the two animals – one in which both fox and dog can suffer horrific injuries. The fox is then either flushed from the earth by the terrier or is dug out and shot at close range by a waiting terrierman.

Gamekeepers also use terriers to find foxes in underground ‘earths’ during the breeding season. The vixen stays with her dependant cubs, making her an easy target. At other times of year, foxes are more likely to live above ground. Although gamekeepers claim that their intention is to ‘flush’ the vixen so that she can be shot, some animals become trapped underground, perhaps staying to defend their young. In either event, the terrier probably kills the fox cubs, increasing the ‘tally’ of foxes culled.

## The cruelty of terrier work

Terriers attacking foxes underground often inflict severe wounds. Terriers can also suffer extensive injuries during underground battles with foxes. The occurrences of scars on the dogs, caused by these fights, are celebrated in hunting literature and in the nicknames given to the dogs. The RSPCA has successfully prosecuted a number of terrier owners for failing to seek veterinary treatment for terriers injured in such encounters. Foxes, however, are not afforded the same legal protection.

Post mortem evidence has confirmed that some foxes suffer multiple injuries when terriers are used in earths.

If the same process were to be inflicted on badgers, it would be called “badger digging or baiting” and those responsible could be prosecuted for cruelty.

Independent terriermen are often not licensed to carry the firearms needed to humanely kill a dug out or flushed fox.

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## Conclusions of the Burns Inquiry

The Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales, chaired by Lord Burns, commissioned post mortems into two foxes dug out by terriermen. In one case the examination found evidence of *'trauma before death.'* In the second case it was found that the fox had to be shot twice. Once it had gone to ground a terrier was sent down and after 25 minutes of digging the fox was found. The first shot went through the animal's shoulder and failed to kill it so another shot was required. The post mortem examination found that it had suffered multiple bite wounds on the face and top of the head, damage to the right eye and bite wounds around the throat before it was killed.

The Burns Committee concluded that, *'...the activity of digging out and shooting a fox involves a serious compromise of its welfare, bearing in mind the often protracted nature of the process and the fact that the fox is prevented from escaping.'*

## Fox baiting

In Scotland some aspects of terrier work have a different meaning than in England and Wales. In the Highland region, where there is little soil, foxes do not use earths. They usually live in scree, 'cairns', which are in essence boulder debris left by erosion. These have several outlets, and terriers are used primarily with the intention of flushing foxes to guns. Underground fights are less likely to occur because of the multiple outlets from the cairn. The terriers are sometimes trained to bark, to drive foxes through the cairns. Sealyham terriers are also used in the unique Caithness habitat known as the 'flow' country. Foxes lie up on this giant floating bog much like hares, or in heather or gorse. The Sealyhams work as small packs to flush them to guns.

Scottish MSPs call the English system of terrier work 'fox baiting' to distinguish it from the practice of flushing foxes to guns, which most Scottish gamekeepers claim they carry out. On 19 September 2001 the Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of Mike Watson's Bill of which he said *'the third principle is to ban fox-baiting where dogs are used to bait and fight foxes underground.'* The Rural Development Committee, reporting on Mike Watson's Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill stated, *'The Committee makes it clear that it abhors any such form of 'fox-baiting', whether carried out using dogs or otherwise...'*