

LETTERS

Deer hunting

Sir,

My first introduction to hunting was as a small child living in the country. I was walking along the edge of a field when a small, terrified animal shot by followed by scores of dogs and men on horseback. My reaction was of an overwhelming sense of the unfairness of the contest. And that sense of unfairness has not been diminished over the years by what I have seen and read. Comments in the two recent reports (Bradshaw & Bateson [2000] and Harris *et al* [1999]) have only served to reinforce the impression. The report of Bradshaw and Bateson (2000) for example, points to the increased stress occasioned by hunt followers obstructing the escape route of hunted deer (p 18).

'The noise from shouting, car horns etc that accompanies deliberate attempts to obstruct the path of a deer may, in itself, be a significant source of stress (see Price *et al* [1993]). Deer that are prevented from following a known escape route may be chased into unfamiliar countryside and become disorientated. Hunted deer are known to run through villages, gardens or even buildings. The adverse effects for these animals are likely to be considerable.' and that by Harris *et al* (1999):

'no 15, described as missing a leg below the hock, the result of an old wound. The deer was chased across a field and caught in a hedge by a dog where it was held and shot in the head using a pistol.

no 37, described as missing a leg below the hock, the result of an old wound. Deer 37 was fast hunted over 3km for 47min before turning to bay in water.

no 39, described as having a two inch hole in the shoulder, the result of a previous rifle injury. This deer was fast hunted over 7.2km for 45min before turning to bay in deep water.

no 28 sought cover early on and appeared unwell. Killing of this deer was delayed as

it ventured close to houses, It was hunted over 8km for 60min before being killed on dry land.'

I have seen farmed deer shot in the field by an expert marksman, one second they were feeding, the next dead. Stalking by competent marksmen is obviously a much more humane method of culling (if that is what hunting is all about) but only if it is done really competently. And both reports demonstrate that in this country inexperienced marksmen are permitted to shoot wild animals. We could learn from some of our more humane neighbours like Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In all these countries people who wish to shoot wild animals have to pass a stiff examination including:

- a study of the ecology and natural resources of the area, including numbers of each wild species, with a firm limit put on the numbers which may be taken;
- which guns and ammunition may be used for each species, and how to use them to avoid animal suffering;
- a certificate of competence in the use of the firearms, issued only after thorough testing, for example, by clay pigeon shooting.

Ruth Harrison
London, UK

References

- Bradshaw E L and Bateson P 2000 Welfare implications of culling red deer. *Animal Welfare* 9: 2-24
- Harris R C, Helliwell T R, Shingleton W, Stickland N and Naylor J R J 1999 *The Physiological Response of Red Deer (Cervus elaphus) to Prolonged Escape Exercise Undertaken During Hunting*. (Joint Universities Study on Deer Hunting). R & W Publications: Newmarket, UK
- Price S, Sibly R M and Davies M H 1993 Effects of behaviour and handling on heart rate in farmed red deer. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 37: 111-123

Sadly, we have learned, as the journal goes to press, of the death of Mrs Ruth Harrison on 13 June – Editor.

Sir,
Having studied the connection between deer hunting and the healthy state of the easily visible West Country herd of wild red deer for more than 30 years, I should like to comment on the paper *Welfare Implications of Culling Red Deer* in your February issue.

The statement that a second shot was necessary at 50 per cent of the kills for which the authors had visual evidence (p 12) gives a very false impression of how often it is necessary. Evidence submitted to Lord Burns' inquiry shows it to be 5 per cent or less. Similarly, hounds only attack deer on very rare occasions and the figure of 25 per cent that is quoted on the same page also bears no resemblance to what actually happens.

These statistics were based on the fact (stated elsewhere in the paper) that two kills were actually observed. The other two occasions on which the authors had 'visual evidence' were two videotapes provided by an anti-hunting organization. The latter are known to have filmed a large number of satisfactory kills during the past 10 years but these were not apparently considered; those provided by the hunts themselves were ignored because they were not electronically dated and so as Professor Bateson claimed in his report to the National Trust (Bateson 1997) 'could not be verified'.

With regards to shooting, many of your readers may be unaware that most deer are shot in the body, as recommended by the stalking societies, rather than the head or upper neck as was the case in this study, and many by land holders rather than expert marksmen. The wounding rate of 2 per cent came as stated from the stalkers themselves but two methods were used to support these. I would suggest that the figures from game dealers are optimistic since carcasses with multiple bullet wounds are not normally sent to them but are butchered at home. If the figures of

casualties found by Quantock Staghounds had been included in the calculations as surely they should have been, then the percentage would have been at least doubled.

D H S White
Taunton, UK

Reference

Bateson P P G 1997 *The Behavioural and Physiological Effects of Culling Red Deer. Report to the Council of the National Trust.* The National Trust: London, UK

Dr Bradshaw and Professor Bateson reply:

Mr White may have misunderstood the purpose of the video evidence, which was to supplement the visual observations we made of hunts during the 1995–1996 and early 1996–1997 hunting season. Hence, only videos of hunts that took place over this time period were used. To avoid claims and counterclaims as to the provenance of the videos, we decided to use as evidence only those that were electronically dated. This policy was made clear from the outset.

One purpose of observing hunts over a specified time period was to obtain data on the frequency with which certain alleged events occurred. At two of the four kills we witnessed the hunted deer were not killed cleanly, and at one kill the deer was attacked by hounds before being shot. No one would claim that such a small sample size is representative of what happens as a whole. This is why, in the *Discussion*, we concluded that: '...[these] events [ie non-instantaneous death, and attacks by hounds]...definitely do occur, but we cannot say with what frequency'.

We used three disparate methods to assess wounding rates by stalkers (including the analysis of carcass diagrams from game dealers). In Bradshaw and Bateson (2000a) we discussed the varied reasons why estimates generated using such methods may well be underestimates (Mr