



HUNTING WITH HOUNDS
AND SHOOTING

By Louise Clark

FOREWORD

Fox hunting and game bird shooting are both blood sports which are still endemic in the British countryside.

This leaflet will take you on a journey exploring both practices but in the light of the emergence of a greater concern for the welfare of animals.

People increasingly care about animal cruelty and there is of course the old adage that "Britain is a nation of animal lovers".

A dictionary definition of blood sports is "any sport that involves animals being killed or hurt to make the people watching or taking part feel excitement".

Is it right to endorse or participate in the chasing and killing of foxes, or to blast a pheasant or partridge out of the sky simply for fun?

I am not alone in thinking the answer is no. I am not alone in feeling a sense of revulsion at the killing of our fellow creatures for entertainment.

Polling consistently shows widespread support for better animal welfare policies in our country and an opposition to blood sports.

Fox hunting was of course banned 20 years ago. But despite the argument being won by people who cared about protecting animals

from cruelty, the fox hunters did not accept the result and carried on hunting.

They exploited loopholes in the law and created so-called trail hunting to conceal their hunting of foxes from the public, police and courts.

The race is now on for stronger fox hunting laws to help consign fox hunting to the history books once and for all.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of game birds are confined to small, cramped cages for breeding purposes to produce the 61 million pheasants and partridges released into the countryside every year. Simply to be shot.

I hope this leaflet inspires you to develop your interest in the animals that are the victims of blood sports and to help campaign for more protections for them and a kinder society for our wildlife.

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LEAGUE
AGAINST CRUEL SPORTS

HUNTING WITH HOUNDS AND SHOOTING

Introduction:

Whenever animals are involved with human practices, this gives rise to issues which are worthy of moral consideration. Primarily, it calls into question whether human beings are to dominate or co-exist peacefully with the rest of creation. From a theological perspective, the creator of the universe is regarded as a loving being, who cares for the whole of his creation, and consequently cares for animals. If human beings are in a position of power over animals, it seems that to be consistent with responsibility and care, they ought not to abuse this power by causing harm to animals.

Hunting with Hounds:

Morality questions whether human beings should chase and kill an animal purely for entertainment or sport. The animals involved are foxes, deer (both stags and hinds), hare and mink.

The case against hunting with hounds has a long history. Those who support the act of hunting with hounds wish to dispel the arguments that hunting with hounds is unnecessary, cruel and barbaric. Nevertheless, after 80 years of campaigning and political lobbying by the League Against Cruel Sports and other animal welfare organisations, Parliament was persuaded that hunting is indeed, unnecessary, cruel and barbaric. Hunting with dogs was banned in Scotland in 2002 and the law came into force in England and Wales on February 18th 2005. The legislation made it illegal to hunt foxes, deer, hare and mink. However, legislation is yet to be passed in Northern Ireland.

Those who support hunting tend to bring out well heard and traditional arguments focusing on culling, job loss, tradition, enjoyment and countryside pursuits. If we look at these in



Red Deer in Winter – picture credited to the League Against Cruel Sports

turn, we quickly realise that they do not alter the fact that humans are involved in hunting purely as a means of enjoyment. Seeing an animal pursued to exhaustion and then ripped to pieces for human entertainment is clearly ethically untenable and fails to promote a compassionate society when it comes to animals.

The argument from culling states that the fox population needs to be kept under control and hunting is the most effective method. However, there are many answers to such an argument:

- 1) Culling is unnecessary. During the foot and mouth outbreak, hunting was suspended and revealed that this made no overall difference to the fox population. If one fox is eliminated, another simply takes its place.
- 2) If the issue is protection of farm-stock, then livestock can be better protected; for example by bringing chickens into secure shelter at night. Moreover, investigations have revealed artificial earths which entice foxes to breed in a hunting area. Therefore in areas where these exist, hunters are not hunting solely for the welfare of the farming community. In

addition, foxes, for example, can benefit arable farmers by catching mice and rabbits which graze on their crops.

- 3) It is clear that the primary intention of the hunting trip is for the sake of the hunters to enjoy the chase and kill. Even if culling was necessary, more humane ways could be employed. For example, a darted sedative could be used. A single dog could locate the fox and then the fox could be humanely put to sleep. If the dog fails to locate the fox, the fox would not be injured.
- 4) The hare population is in decline and yet hare coursing is defended. This means hare-hunting is not about pest control. As well as coursing, which is often undertaken by trespassing, there are over fifty hare hunts across England and Wales which hunt on foot with beagle packs. They are cruelly breaking the law after often given permission by the land owner to access their land.

Next, hunt supporters turn to the argument which states that jobs will be lost in the enforcement of a ban on hunting with dogs. Therefore, the legislation is not justified.

Again, there are answers to this:

- 1) Hunts can convert to drag hunting, which means that they can also plan their route so as to avoid livestock, private property, roads etc. Although hunters may feel this is artificial, live animals are not involved in the chase which stops the cruelty, but allows the continuation of the meets. This would mean minimal loss in employment among kennel hands and grooms, for example.
- 2) Money spent on hunting can be channelled into other areas of the rural economy, creating alternative jobs. This would keep job loss to a minimum.
- 3) Cruelty to animals is not a justified or ethical means of employment. For example, one could take on employment as a professional hit-man, but this would

not make this right. The suffering to animals caused by hunts is substantial and intolerable. Annually, fox-cubs are killed in training young hounds and hounds are killed once they are no longer fit to use or if they do not make the grade.

The third argument emphasized by the hunt fraternity is that hunting involves a pageantry and tradition that has kept alive a way of life for centuries.

Again, there are three arguments which can account for this argument:

- 1) If hunts convert to drag hunting, the tradition and pageantry can be conserved.
- 2) A traditional practice does not mean the practice is morally acceptable. In medieval times, torture was traditional, but that did not make it right. As moral sensitivities become aware of an evil within a practice, moral advancement demands an end to that practice. Hunting involves such an evil, so modern society must enforce a ban.
- 3) The tradition of "bleeding" belongs to an archaic society and should be outlawed. The practice is carried out as an initiation into the hunt. The new member, often a pre-teen child, is smeared with the blood of the dead animal.

The argument based on enjoyment contains two premises. First, it is felt by hunt supporters that human beings have the right to pursue their hobbies free from the threat of legal prosecution. Hunting comes under the guise of a civil liberty. Secondly, hunted animals are killed quickly with a single bite to the neck. There is minimal suffering involved for the quarry and no blood lust from the hunters.

The arguments here seem to be the easiest to disprove. There seems to be acceptance by the hunting community that to enjoy

the killing of an animal is actually morally wrong. Therefore, they skirt around this by avoiding stating that they simply enjoy it. This means their arguments invariably end up contradicting each other.

- 1) To enjoy the suffering of another creature is morally obscene.
- 2) Evidence of suffering is clear and refutes the argument that there is minimal suffering for the hunted animal: a) There is video footage of animals being chased over long distances and then torn apart. It is a fallacy that the kill is instant. b) Evidence also shows the pain and terror involved as the animal is savaged to death. c) Young fox cubs are used to train young hounds. Injuries occur and death is not instant since the hounds are inexperienced. d) Video evidence shows foxes being dug out by terriers, after they have fled underground. They are then re-released for the hounds, thus allowing and actively encouraging the chase to continue. e) Hounds are bred for stamina as opposed to speed – so prolonging the chase. f) Post mortem results reveal the fox suffers before death. The “massive bruising and haemorrhage around the chest and abdominal wounds suggest that this damage occurred before death.” Such analysis contradicts the pro hunt position.

To add further weight to the arguments against hunting, the Burns Inquiry which was published in June 2000 states that hunting with dogs “seriously compromises the welfare of the fox..., deer,...hare...and mink.” (www.huntinginquiry.gov.uk) In addition, the Burns Inquiry stated that fewer than half the jobs which the Countryside Alliance estimated to be at risk were likely to be affected. Scientific evidence (along with common sense) also shows that deer suffer in the chase.

Hunters also express the opinion that hunting is a countryside issue and therefore those in cities should not become involved in banning

practices which allow the proper running of the countryside. In response to this, it can be said that many people in the countryside are in favour of a total ban. They have experienced first hand the havoc, disruption and intimidation caused by hunts.



Hunting scene – picture credited to the League Against Cruel Sports

ASWA President, The Rt Revd Dominic Walker, former Bishop of Monmouth, states that “gaining pleasure from killing sentient beings cannot be pleasing to God.” God loves the whole of creation and not just human beings. In 1930, Bishop Herbert Henley Henson of Durham reprimanded one of his clergy on becoming a master of beagles. He wrote “I feel that it is owing to my position and to yours that I should tell you that the announcement causes me both surprise and distress... Personally I am inclined to agree with the former Dean of St Paul’s (William Inge 1860-1954) that ‘to take pleasure in killing our helpless cousins in fur and feathers seems to me to be a disgusting relic of barbarism...’ I should be lacking in my duty if I did not remonstrate with you on action which seems to be inexpedient and unfitting.”

Entertainment and pleasurable pursuits are morally neutral in themselves, but if they cause unnecessary suffering to others, whether human or animal, they cease to be so and are clearly morally wrong. The church should therefore speak out against needless cruelty if it is going to be consistent in its values of mercy, love and compassion.

Biblical passages also suggest that humans and animals should live at peace with one another so hunting with dogs cannot be justified. For example, Isaiah 11:6-9 longs for a very different future: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the lord as the waters cover the sea". Romans 8, in the New Testament, says "we know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together" and this points to the interconnectedness of the suffering world and the need to be mutually responsible for limiting the suffering of others.

Post ban, the emphasis has shifted to monitoring those involved in this 'sport' and further lobbying government to strengthen the law. Many hunts have defied the law and continued to hunt illegally. Monitors aim to collect video evidence and often face intimidation and abuse in the process. A sign of illegal hunting is the hounds being out of control. Although hunts are legally allowed to exercise their hounds, the hunt masters must be in control to ensure the hounds do not pick up a scent. Hunts claim that deaths since the law have been 'accidents', but monitors aim to ensure that deliberate accidents are not taking place.

Evidence suggests that nearly every fox hunt and many other hunts around the country are breaking the law, that is, until they see monitors present. The importance of monitoring the hunts is made clear by the words of Graham Bridgeman, Chairman of the Eggersford Hunt who remarked, "It's not the police we've got to watch, it's the antis with their video cameras".

The Labour Manifesto of 2024 promised to end trail hunting. This term was used post-ban by the hunting fraternity, but has also been adopted in common parlance. A ban on trail hunting would be a firm way to crackdown on illegal hunting. In trail hunting, an animal based scent can be legally laid for the hounds to follow. However, much evidence shows that trail hunting is a smokescreen which allows traditional hunting to continue so live animals are chased and killed. Hounds are trained to a scent and will follow an actual animal if they pick this up. ITV exposed that this is really a disguise for hunting live animals. A genuine trail would not be laid on roads, private land or in areas where the prey animals are known to reside. Terrier men also continue to join the hunts. These would be unnecessary in a genuine pre-laid trail as it is not necessary to flush out any animal which has gone to ground. It is estimated that only 3% of hunts lay a trail and only 0.04% of these are genuine. The National Trust banned trail hunting on its land in October 2021 in recognition that it was simply a disguise for actual hunting. It has also now been banned or suspended on over 3 million acres of land, including the land of the Ministry of Defence which suspended trail hunting in September 2024.



Picture of fox – Louise Clark

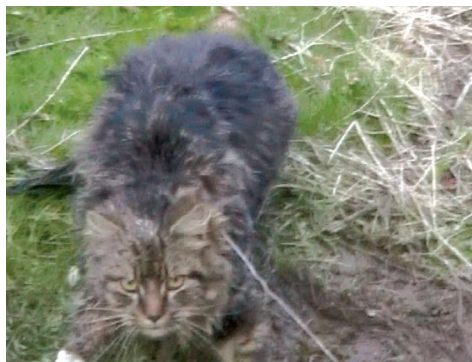
Shooting:

There are many different issues involved within the ethical spectrum when it comes to live quarry shooting. Pheasants, grouse and partridges are the gamebirds particularly involved. Issues connected with this industry are 1) predator control (including the use of snares) to protect the birds, 2) the intensive breeding of birds and their subsequent release and 3) the shooting itself.

- 1) Predator control (snares) to protect the birds:
According to extrapolations from the figures of the shooting lobby, every year, millions of animals are killed by employees of shooting estates. This includes predators of game birds such as foxes, birds of prey and other wild birds. The main means of predator control is the use of snares (wire nooses). However, other methods are also used, such as terrierwork/fox-baiting (sending a dog below ground to flush out a fox), illegal poisoning, trapping and clubbing. Legislation needs to be put in place and enforced in order to eradicate these vile practices. This would mean revising the Hunting Act to remove the exemption clause which allows for terrierwork.

Snares have been banned in many European countries, but remain legal in England and Northern Ireland. Labour's general election manifesto of 2024 contained a commitment to ban snares in England. Snares were banned in Wales in October 2023 and in Scotland from 25 November 2024. Several landowners have banned snares from their shooting estates, suggesting snares are not only cruel, but unnecessary. Even if the snare is checked regularly there will be suffering involved for the creature trapped and constricted within it. Moreover, in England, an animal can be legally trapped in a snare for up to 48 hours before the snare is checked. This is because the law states that a snare must be checked every 24 hours, but this can be avoided by checking the snare at for example, 00:05 hours on Wednesday, and 23:55 hours on Thursday. Foxes and rabbits, as well as non-target animals such as otters, badgers, livestock and pets can all be caught up in this extermination. In 2012, research by DEFRA indicates that three-quarters of animals caught and trapped are not the intended victims. Snares are, therefore, totally indiscriminate since they cannot differentiate between target and non-target animals and will tighten around any creature which moves through the vicinity.

The cruelty of snares is particularly linked to the fact that snares are designed to catch the animal around the neck. As the animal struggles, the snare tightens causing more panic in the captured animal. Snares can also catch animals around the abdomen, which again causes terrible injuries such as disembowelment, or around the leg meaning injuries are inflicted upon the animal in its attempts to free itself. Moreover, if snares are positioned near fences or bridges, the animals can end up hanging themselves if they try to escape.



Cat caught in snare – picture credited to the League Against Cruel Sports

Animals caught in snares can suffer horrific injuries and often die a slow, painful death as a result of strangulation, starvation or dehydration. There is popular support among politicians for a ban on snares as demonstrated by numerous early day motions in the House of Commons. Public opinion was highlighted in a 2014 Mori poll which found that 77% of the public said the use of snares to trap and kill animals should be illegal.

There are three main types of snare: free-running, self-locking and dual-purpose snares. Free-running snares, which are meant to be restraint devices, involve a wire threaded to enable movement in both directions. If an animal stops struggling, the snare will relax. However, once they become rusty or matted with fur, they can act as self-locking snares. Self-locking snares allow the

wire to run in one direction, tightening the snare without allowing slackening. These snares are illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which also bans the use of snares being set to target protected mammals such as otters and badgers. Dual-purpose snares can either be threaded in the form of free-running or self-locking snares.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) has compiled a code of good practice, which has been endorsed by DEFRA, telling users how to use snares. However, those who do not abide by this code are not breaking any law and cannot be prosecuted. Breaches of this code of conduct were found on numerous estates during investigations, including those estates linked to BASC who were not enforcing their own code on their own estates. With regard to legislation, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 previously mentioned also makes it an offence to set a trap/snare intended to injure or kill a non-target animal and the 2006 Animal Welfare Act says that the operator must avoid unnecessary suffering of any animal captured. Clearly, these laws need implementing to be effective. The Deer Act 1991, however, is another piece of legislation which makes it an offence to set a snare to catch deer.

There are also other forms of predator control such as shooting or trapping, which are used to preserve artificially high stocks of gamebirds (including grouse which are a native species) by killing other wildlife that may prey on the gamebirds. This also includes the illegal persecution and killing of birds of prey. On grouse moors, for example, there is a link with environmental degradation, river pollution and its subsequent link to climate change. Hares are also culled as there is an unwarranted fear that they carry a virus that poses a threat to grouse chicks.

2) The intensive breeding of birds and their subsequent release: One misconception about the gamebird industry is that the birds involved are wild birds who have

had a natural life prior to ending up on the dinner table. In reality, however, birds are captive bred in intensive, battery-style conditions and few end up as food. The industry is primarily concerned with maximising profits.

Around 62 million gamebirds are released into the UK countryside each year with as many as 57 million bought from caged/factory breeding farms. These birds are not even given the protection of any minimum standard as animals for sport are exempt from even the most basic welfare protections. Many are imported live into the UK, crammed inside crates and travelling for hours. Birds are kept in cramped, battery-style cages for breeding purposes before being released to be shot. Birds are bred in intensive conditions. This overcrowding obviously causes immense distress and frustration, but also feather pecking and cannibalism. In an attempt to prevent this, management practices tend to be used. These include masks; biting (a plastic ring (bit) is clipped onto the nasal septum to restrict vision and lessen the affects of aggression); and beak trimming (one third of the top part of the beak is removed with a heated blade.) These processes themselves, however, can inflict pain on the young birds. Mass breeding and release of pheasants means they are particularly susceptible to disease. In addition, if battery breeding cages are kept outdoors, there is no escape from the elements and no natural life at all. Controlling devices are also used in rearing gamebirds. An example of this is wing clipping where birds are restrained until their flight feathers grow back in time for their release.

Lesley Rogers, a professor of Physiology, shows how research has revealed that birds are capable of complex cognition. With this in mind, the way chickens are reared in intensive farms, confined without the ability to turn round, is far from morally acceptable. This can be applied to gamebirds which are kept nine or ten in a cage.

When the birds are released into the wild, they have limited ability to fend for themselves. This means the use of predator control devices as discussed above, are employed. Other hazards such as traffic and disease also prove to be a threat to the young birds. Moreover, the environmental implications of this mass release are, as yet, unknown. Clearly, it is a wholly unnatural process and is not unlike a sudden mass releasing of battery chickens into the wild. Although food does continue to be provided for a while, when this source is removed at the end of the season, the birds are on their own.

3) The shooting itself: One may question whether the death and injury caused to birds in the shooting process is justified because this gives some human beings pleasure. Luke 12:67 and Matt 10.28 report Jesus' words to be: "are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God." Birch has formulated a "creation-inclusive theology" based on Luke 12.67 in which he states that creation makes a difference to God. Therefore, this pictures God involved in suffering. This is not just human suffering, but God is involved "in the suffering of all...(his)...creatures, including the non-human animals of the creation." (Birch C "Living with the Animals: The community of God's creatures." – Geneva: WCC Publications 1997 p.36) This adds weight to the argument since the burden of suffering ultimately falls on to an ultimate being who bears every pain. This should motivate those who hold a belief to realise the importance of every individual creature who suffers.

Evidence has uncovered how some shot birds are not eaten, as claimed by the shooting lobby, but rather are left to rot after being dumped in pits as waste. Certainly, only 40% of birds dumped into the countryside are actually shot, with the remainder disappearing by the following year. The industry operates as a multi-million pound business in which

clients can pay up to £15,000 a day to shoot intensively reared gamebirds. Many birds are shot at by those without a good aim, causing fatal injuries and a slow death. As Peter Singer remarks, "if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration." (Singer P "Animal Liberation: A new Ethic for our Treatment of Animals" – London: Cape 1990 p.85) Those who support shooting or any other cruel activity involving animals should explain why they do not believe that unnecessary suffering is wrong. Animals are fellow beings with whom humans live and share this planet. If this position is rejected, not a lot can be said because compassion and other values are denied.



*Pheasants wasted and dumped -
picture credited to the League Against Cruel Sports*

Concern need not also be solely based in the harm and suffering caused to the live animal targets. The destruction and noise because of the shoots also causes an unnecessary disturbance to human beings spending time or living in the countryside. One particular village in the west country has complained due to the persistent and continuous blasts from nearby shooting estates.

Therefore, individuals should be encouraged to support businesses which have high animal welfare standards. Since it is undeniable that human activity has led to the destruction of many species and the planet as a whole, the responsibility lies with human beings to reverse this trend. Draper remarks that it is unfortunately the church who remained quiet over such matters, "sadly, complicit in promoting the theological idea that "creation" was ours simply to subdue and dominate." (Birch). However, Revd Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, suggested that we should "see ecology as a matter of justice for the human and non-human world...we are not consumers of what God has made...we are in communion with it." To draw animals into the sphere of compassion would bring about a more compassionate society, benefiting humans and animals alike.

A quote from St Isaac the Syrian portrays the sort of individual who exemplifies the compassionate life: "What is a charitable heart? It is a heart burning with love for the whole creation, for humans...for all creatures. Those who have such a heart cannot see or call to mind a creature, without their eyes being filled with tears by reason of the immense compassion which seizes their heart; a heart which is softened and can no longer bear to see or learn from others of any suffering, even the smallest pain being inflicted on a creature." (Birch p.59)

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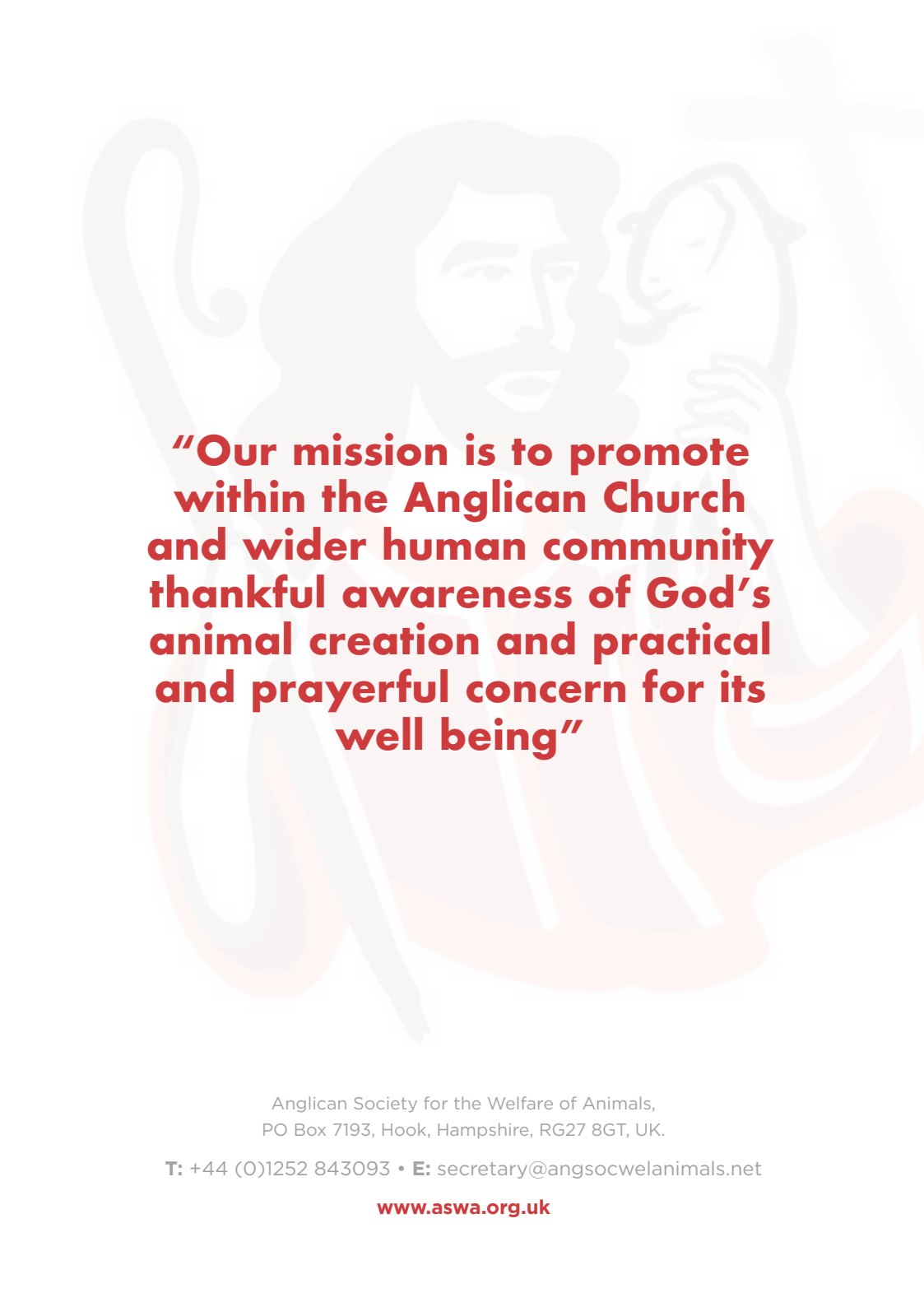
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within the Anglican Church
and wider human community
thankful awareness of God’s
animal creation and practical
and prayerful concern for its
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