

Wheatland Farm
Winkleigh
EX19 8DJ

Jason Marles
Master of the Eggesford Hunt,
Eggesford Kennels

16.1.18

Hounds hunting foxes across Popehouse Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest, trespass of hounds across Wheatland Farm and surrounding properties, and dogs out of control on private property, 13 February 2018.

We write to formally record our distress and outrage that the Eggesford Hunt has again allowed hunting hounds to enter Popehouse Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest and trespass across the land at and around Wheatland Farm, EX19 8DJ, despite lack of land owner permission and despite the legal protection afforded to all wildlife on the SSSI.

You were told to get the dogs out of Popehouse Moor by co-landowner, Maggie Watson, at 13:13. By this time hounds, in numbers ranging from 1 to about 20, had already been running amok across the SSSI, across the land immediately around Wheatland Farm's holiday lodges, and across our neighbours' property at The Old Shippon for more than half an hour.

They had enraged owners Ian Ripper and Maggie Watson, had seriously scared our 11 year old son, and had appeared about to attack our neighbour Jo Campbell.

The incursion onto Popehouse Moor was reported to Devon and Cornwall Police by phone on 13 February at 13.20 by Ian Ripper, joint-land owner, who was given a report number 362.

It took us a further hour or so of running from field to field to disrupt the dogs' chasing of our wildlife.

In your visit to us of the same evening you proffered the excuse that you "had no idea that the site existed". Wheatland Farm has twice won Visit England's top national award for sustainable tourism in the past 10 years (2012, 2015), with considerable local press coverage. Popehouse Moor SSSI, which is approximately 4 miles from your kennels, has had legal protection since 1989 (nearly 30 years). It is marked as a SSSI on publically-accessible land use maps. We also note you have been in your role as Hunt Master for nearly a year, and have local connections extending back further. Landowners of Wheatland Farm and Popehouse Moor have refused the hunt permission to enter for the past 15 years at least, and we remind you and your committee of the similar incident on 07 February 2015, the most recent for which we have documentary evidence for the Hunt's trespasses (we believe there have been other events too), and about which a complaint was made to the Devon and Cornwall Police's Wildlife Crimes Officer. On that occasion, complaints to the Hunt were met with abusive behaviour both face to face and online. We appreciate your visit on Saturday evening to apologise for that day's events, but feel that empty words, whether civil or not, are no longer enough.

Protection of the SSSI under section 28E of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Natural England's formal list of prohibited 'Operations Likely to cause Damage' to Popehouse Moor SSSI include: recreational or other activities likely to damage features of interest; changes in game

and waterfowl management and hunting practice; and the killing or removal of any wild animal, including pest control.¹

Any of these activities are illegal without written consent from Natural England² whether or not landowner permission is granted - and we repeat that it is not.

Trespass

According to the League Against Cruel Sports' 'Troubled by the Hunt?' guide³, entry onto land by hounds alone can constitute civil trespass. It is our clearly stated and well established business model to manage the whole of Wheatland Farm for wildlife, including foxes, - as explained to the Hunt in 2015 (and, incidentally, as evidenced by a recent fox-watching post from a guest on our facebook page). Allowing your fox hounds to rampage across the farm when the hunt has previously been warned off seems to us to constitute an intentional disruption of that lawful activity - ie aggravated trespass⁴.

Out of control dogs

Eggesford Hunt hounds were out of control. Six people (3 at the Old Shippon, 3 from Wheatland Farm) spent Saturday afternoon trying to chase the hounds off private property on and around Wheatland Farm, including the SSSI. Our 11-year old son was scared the hounds would attack him, and says he was almost knocked to the ground by racing hounds when he came to one of the Wheatland Farm holiday lodges to find an adult. We again draw your attention to disruption of our lawful activities by your trespass. It is entirely unacceptable to have hunting dogs running uncontrolled around holiday lodges where people are staying.

The hounds were also running around the gardens of the residential houses - the Wheatland Farm farmhouse, and the Old Shippon, and around the stables at the Old Shippon. Ian Ripper witnessed one hound turning and growling threateningly at Jo Campbell on the drive at The Old Shippon, as she tried to get it away from her distressed horses. George Ripper saw the hounds racing around a horse paddock, spooking the horses there. Earlier in the afternoon the hounds were causing a considerable traffic hazard on the road leading to Wembworthy from Heywood (witnessed by Ian Ripper and other local people). By your own admission during your visit, 2 hounds were still missing well into the evening. Indeed, we could still hear the hunting horns, as well as howling hounds, well after dark.

Our neighbours tell us they have not had a visit from you, despite us showing you the way to their door. They also tell us they will be writing separately to formally register their complaints and remind you that land at The Old Shippon is closed to the hunt.

Action we request you to take

- This letter will be sent recorded delivery, but nevertheless we ask you acknowledge receipt in writing.
- We request that you respect the boundaries set out in the attached map, including the boundaries of Popehouse Moor SSSI. Our land is closed to the hunt, hounds and supporters at all times.
- Further, since the Hunt is either unable or unwilling to control the dogs and prevent them illegally entering Popehouse Moor SSSI and chasing wildlife, we ask that you ensure the hunt stays far enough away from this area for the wildlife in the nature reserve not to be an attraction to your hounds.

- We ask that you notify us of future hunts in the area by email to info@wheatlandfarm.co.uk, with a least 3 days warning.

Sincerely,

Maggie Watson

Ian Ripper

cc.

Becky Aston, Natural England Advisor for Popehouse Moor
DC Collins, Beat Manager, Torridge, Devon and Cornwall Police
D and J Campbell, The Old Shippon, Winkleigh
Geoffrey Cox, MP

WildlifeCrime@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk

1. <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Consent/1005725.pdf>
2. <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/141089/response/346202/attach/html/3/RF11800%20response.pdf.html>
3. [www.nwhsa.org.uk/Troubled by the Hunt.doc](http://www.nwhsa.org.uk/Troubled_by_the_Hunt.doc)
4. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/33/part/V/crossheading/disruptive-trespassers>