

# ‘An incredibly vile sport’: Campaigns against Otter Hunting in Britain, 1900–39

DANIEL ALLEN,<sup>1</sup> CHARLES WATKINS<sup>2</sup>  
AND DAVID MATLESS<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Physical and Geographical Sciences, Keele University, ST5 5BG, UK*  
[D.Allen@keele.ac.uk](mailto:D.Allen@keele.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup>*School of Geography, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK*

[Charles.Watkins@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Charles.Watkins@nottingham.ac.uk)

<sup>3</sup>[David.Matless@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:David.Matless@nottingham.ac.uk)

**Abstract:** Otter hunting was a minor field sport in Britain but in the early years of the twentieth century a lively campaign to ban it was orchestrated by several individuals and anti-hunting societies. The sport became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century and the Edwardian period. This paper examines the arguments and methods used in different anti-otter hunting campaigns 1900–1939 by organisations such as the Humanitarian League, the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports and the National Association for the Abolition of Cruel Sports.

## Introduction

In 2010 a painting ‘normally considered too upsetting for modern tastes’ which ‘while impressive’ was also ‘undeniably “gruesome”’ was displayed at an exhibition of British sporting art at the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle. *The Guardian* reported that the grisly content of the painting was ‘the reason why it was taken off permanent display by its owners’ the Laing Gallery in Newcastle.<sup>1</sup> The painting, Sir Edwin Landseer’s *The Otter Speared, Portrait of the Earl of Aberdeen’s Otterhounds, or the Otter Hunt* had been associated with controversy since it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844 (Figure 1). At its centre an exhausted hunter holds an otter aloft over a pack of baying otterhounds. The otter is impaled on a barbed hunting spear and is about to be flung down for the hounds. The painting was commissioned as a commemorative portrait of his pack of otter hounds by Lord Aberdeen (1784–1860), then foreign secretary and later to become prime minister. Diana Donald argues, however, that ‘the resulting canvas, six and a half feet high, had no precedent in British sporting art’ in the way it combined ‘archaic pageantry and brutal actuality’ with the hunter twisting the spear so the otter does not immediately fall to the hounds. Although celebrated by reviewers in the *Illustrated London News* and *Athenaeum*, the subsequent engraving failed to sell well and John Ruskin argued in 1846 that Landseer ‘before he gives us any more writhing otters, or yelping packs’ should consider whether such a scene was ‘worthy of contemplation’.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1. Sir Edwin Landseer, *The Otter Speared, Portrait of the Earl of Aberdeen's Otterhounds, or the Otter Hunt*, 1844; Laing Gallery, Newcastle <http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/laing-art-gallery/collections.html>.

John Mackenzie points out that Landseer did not 'decry human participation in the raw cruelty of the natural world. Human involvement is, rather, glorified as an imperative of command over nature, perfectly conveyed in *The Otter Hunt*.'<sup>3</sup> Ruskin's critique of the painting did little to diminish the popularity of Landseer's art in the nineteenth century and hunts, hunters and otter hunting increased substantially in popularity, reaching a peak in the Edwardian period.<sup>4</sup> The fifteen hunts in existence in 1880 had grown to twenty-two by 1910.<sup>5</sup> Spearing was no longer permitted in the popular modern form. Mr Collier's Otter Hounds were the last to abandon the spear in 1884, 'as his field did not care to see so gallant a beast suffer such an end'.<sup>6</sup> By the twentieth century most otter hunters spoke of the 'remote and barbarous days of the spear',<sup>7</sup> and broadly disregarded spearing as one of the 'blood-thirsty methods used by our forefathers'.<sup>8</sup> The seasonality, setting and pedestrianism of otter hunting appealed to Edwardian sporting and leisure sensibilities. Summer hunting across rugged river valleys offered strenuous physical exertion in the sun, whilst facilitating a picnic and a paddle. Otherwise inaccessible wild and watery landscapes could also be explored: 'in otter hunting, the hounds, the invigorating air of

the early morning, and the superb beauty of England's valleys and dales constitute the chief attractions . . . the quarry itself is quite a secondary consideration'.<sup>9</sup>

In this paper we consider the ways campaigns against otter hunting were carried out in the period 1900 to 1939. The most important organisation calling for the protection of otters in the Edwardian period was the Humanitarian League, founded in 1891 by Henry Salt, who published his pamphlet *Humanitarianism* in the same year. It was the only organisation that called for the legal protection of otters at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Promoting the 'humane principles . . . of compassion, love, gentleness, and universal benevolence', the Humanitarian League clearly set itself apart from other reform oriented bodies. Their aim, 'to enforce the principle that it is iniquitous to inflict avoidable suffering on any sentient being', was tied to both the criminal law and prison system, and the prevention of cruelty to animals. The belief that 'any sentient being' deserved protection from 'ill-treatment' generated a comprehensive list of animal related activities marked for legislative change. Vivisection, the slaughter of animals for food, the fur and feather fashion trade, and blood sports were all targeted.<sup>11</sup> Recognising that such causes may be dismissed as 'sickly sentimentality', the League made a point of stressing that their underlying principles were not merely 'a product of the heart . . . but an essential portion of any intelligible system of ethics or social science'.<sup>12</sup> In order to share these principles with the public, the League adopted a strategy that involved open meetings, lobbying of influential individuals, letter writing campaigns to newspapers and magazines and the production of pamphlets, monthly journals and other scholarly publications.<sup>13</sup>

### First calls to protect the otter

One of the first men of influence to join the Humanitarian League was Colonel William Lisle Blenkinsopp Coulson (1841–1911). Brought up as a sportsman and still a keen angler, this well-known Northumberland country gentleman and Justice of the Peace was 'a staunch and fearless friend of animals'.<sup>14</sup> After retiring from the army he devoted much of his time to lecturing in schools across the country about the fair treatment of animals. From the late 1890s Coulson had also launched a prolific letter writing campaign against otter hunting in local, regional and national newspapers. In 1901 he also contributed a four page paper, 'The Otter Worry,' to the League's sixty-three page pamphlet *British Blood Sports: 'Let us go out and kill something'*. Here he labelled otter hunting as the second cruellest blood sport:

With the exception of the hare-hunt men and women possibly never sink so low as they do when they join an Otter-Worry. There is no danger, no risk, absolutely no excuse for this form of baiting except the insensate one of a lust for blood.<sup>15</sup>

Although this document only had a small readership it proved to be the earliest written condemnation of the sport from an organisation. Coulson thought hare hunting was crueller than otter hunting because the hare was 'timid' 'defenceless' and 'nervous', whereas the otter was a 'gallant little animal' which 'died after a long hard-fought battle'.<sup>16</sup>

Otter hunting was compared unfavourable to other types of hunting. A key criticism was of the voyeurism of watching the otter die. Coulson compared the death of the fox with the death of the otter to emphasise the cruelty of the latter. With fox hunting, he argued, 'few perhaps ever see the death, and it is over almost in an instant' but, 'owing to his strength and cat-like tenacity of life', the otter 'fights long and dies hard'. Consequently 'everyone can watch, and most do watch, the end' and 'people collect from far and near' and 'watch in cold blood for minutes together the frantic death-agony of the brave little animal who has never done injury to anyone assembled. It is a brutal, demoralising amusement.' Here, the criticism of otter hunting seems to be directed more at the spectator's reaction to the prolonged 'death-agony', than the actual experience which the animal is going through. It appears to be more about human behaviour than animal suffering. The hypocrisy of clergy preaching high moral standards and Christian virtues yet killing for fun was regularly exploited by members of the Humanitarian League. In 1901 Coulson had written that: 'Some of the clergy revel in it – the very men who pose afterwards as the expounders of high morality'.<sup>17</sup> Coulson later complained that clergy, more generally, did little to criticise otter hunting: 'Seldom do we hear from the pulpit any protests against acts of cowardice and cruelty that would shame savages. What humbugs we are!'<sup>18</sup>

The first published call for the protection of otters came from Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston (1858–1927) who has been described as 'one of the main instigators of the scramble for Africa on the ground' and 'considered himself a naturalist above all else'.<sup>19</sup> He is remembered today for his monumental two-volume *Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages* (1919–21); for his natural history collections now held at Kew, the British Museum, and London Zoo; and for his identification of the okapi (*Okapi johnstoni*) in the Congo in 1901.<sup>20</sup> He was a founder member in 1903 of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire and an opponent of big game hunting. The object of this society was to create a 'sound public opinion' on the destruction of wild animals throughout the British Empire, especially Africa, and establish game reserves.<sup>21</sup> Big game hunter Sir Henry Seton-Karr and otter hunter Mr David Davies, Member of Parliament, were among its sixty-one ordinary members.<sup>22</sup>

Johnston condemned otter hunting and urged the government to give the mammal legal protection in his 1903 publication *British Mammals*. He argued that if the government 'cared for the preservation of beauty in England, the otter would long ago have been placed on the protected list, and would not have been subjected to the indiscriminating attacks of sportsmen'.<sup>23</sup> Considering Johnston's establishment position and his enthusiasm for hunting in the Empire, this was a powerful request. It also shows that people other than animal welfarists and sportsmen were concerned with the hunted otter. What are perhaps more interesting are his reasons for wanting to preserve the otter. He reported that in certain otter hunting regions such as Wales, Devonshire, and Sussex, the otter was being 'rapidly extinguished' by the actions of 'unreflecting, red-faced, well-meaning, church going, rate-paying persons on the plea that it eats salmon or trout. Now, what nonsense this is!'<sup>24</sup> For Johnston, otter hunters were not cruel they were simply misinformed. At this time the main justification for killing otters was the damage they did to fish stocks.

With this in mind Johnston seemed to overlook the behaviour of otter hunters and instead placed blame on anglers:

Salmon is produced in such enormous abundance in North America and Norway, and is so very unlikely (owing to its habit of resorting to the sea) to become exterminated in British waters by the otter, that it would be a shame if this remarkable aquatic weasel . . . were extirpated . . . to gratify the anglers craze.<sup>25</sup>

Johnston's opinion of the otter and motivation for its protection were also quite unusual. Rather than defend its sentient or sporting qualities, he was much more concerned with its aesthetic role in the landscape. In his view, otters were more visible than fish and therefore their lives were more valuable: 'the time has come when active steps should be taken to promote the preservation of the otter, a creature far more beautiful, wonderful and "obvious" than any fish'.<sup>26</sup> For Johnston the otter was not a special animal, it was one of many 'beasts, birds, and reptiles' which potentially added to the 'future happiness of the world'. Otter hunting presents to him 'a picturesque scene, with the scarlet-coated, white-breeched men armed with spears, with shaggy hounds, and the landscape set with great marsh marigolds . . . and the sunshine of May'. He thought that the aesthetics of otter hunting could be maintained if 'public opinion or legislation' limited the killing of otters to 'ten per annum in any one county' and then 'it might be possible to keep up a picturesque sport without unduly lessening the number of otters in our rivers'.<sup>27</sup> The idea of introducing a 'slaughter limit' helps to explain why his case for protecting the otter did not play a part in the rhetoric of the Humanitarian League or the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports. Yet although Johnston was not directly involved, his argument brought into prominence the campaign for the otter.

### **Raising public awareness**

The national profile of otter hunting was raised in July 1905 when the press reported an incident that became known as the Barnstaple cat-worrying case. In this case, which was brought by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Master of the Cheriton Otter Hounds, Mr Walter Lorraine Bell, and three of its members were found guilty of charges relating to cruelty to cats. The incident was widely reported and horrified the public. The otter hunters involved had been using cats in a specially constructed wooden tunnel to train their young terriers to 'bolt' otters. The cruelty was not disputed and Bell's defence to the charge showed little remorse. First, he insisted that cats had been used, as he could not always get hold of a badger. Second, he felt that as he had bought the cats they were his own property and third, he argued that it was less cruel to use a cat than a badger as worrying the latter badly injured the dogs.<sup>28</sup> He did however 'come to the conclusion that their conduct had been reprehensible'.<sup>29</sup> Bell was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour and John Church, the Hunt's Whip, received half that sentence. Having been allowed bail, the pair's charges were later revised on appeal to a five pound fine, on the understanding that Bell gave a donation of one hundred pounds to the North Devon Infirmary.

The Humanitarian League's reaction to this case was interesting. Rather than focussing solely on the incident, they redirected their attention to the public's response to it. This allowed broader questions to be raised by the publisher and campaigner Ernest Bell (1851–1933). He had been influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson and was a keen member of the Vegetarian Society and the Humanitarian League and after 1893 devoted much time and money to 'administration and fund-raising for three main reform causes: vegetarianism, humanitarianism, and animal welfare'. He sat on the governing bodies of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the National Canine Defence League, the Cat's Protection League, the Pit-Ponies Protection Society, and the Animals' Friend Society.<sup>30</sup> Ernest Bell noted in the *Animals' Friend* journal soon after the prosecution that 'it was quite right that the press should express horror at such barbarity' but questioned whether 'the deliberate worrying of otters for amusement' was 'any less cruel or reprehensible than the worrying of cats'.<sup>31</sup> For Bell, the only difference between an otter and a cat was their legal status. He wanted society to step back and reconsider the moral distinction between wild and domestic animals. Alongside this broad criticism, the incident was also used to expose the behaviour of 'sportsmen' in general. Bell argued that it offered an insightful 'glimpse into the mind of the sporting man',<sup>32</sup> and provided further evidence of 'the barbarous spirit engendered by indulgence in blood sports'.<sup>33</sup> In these terms, this exceptional incident was absorbed into the broader campaign against blood sports.

The Humanitarian League's strategy was that whenever an article mentioning otter hunting appeared in a newspaper or magazine, League members would bombard that publication with letters of protest. A prime example was when an article appeared in the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1905 edition of *Madame*, a magazine aimed at wealthy women, proudly informing readers about the first lady Master of Otter Hounds, Mrs Mildred Cheesman. After introducing her pack, the Crowhurst Otter Hounds, the article listed the women who actively enjoyed the sport: 'Of the invariably large and influential following we may mention Mrs Mantell, Mrs Killogg-Jenkins, and Miss Woodruffe, Mrs Trimmer and Miss and Mrs J. Awbrey'.<sup>34</sup> This was the month when the Barnstaple cat-worrying case was in the public eye. Six weeks later, on 9<sup>th</sup> September, the magazine's editor revealed that many readers had 'taken umbrage' with the article, and invited further correspondence on the subject. A selection of letters was then published under the title, 'Should Otters Be Hunted?' The first letter, by Reverend Joseph Stratton, argued that men were judged in relation to their treatment of animals. A 'true man' would kill fierce animals 'with as little pain as possible', while those 'he destroys for food, or raiment, he will destroy mercifully'. But 'model men' would 'find *pleasure* neither in torturing, nor annihilating any of them'.<sup>35</sup> The second letter from 'An Old Fashioned Sportsman' denounced otter hunting on sporting grounds and used the Barnstaple cat-worrying case to strengthen his argument:

I belong to an old family of Tory sportsman who have been brought up to view with disgust such amusements as involve the fiendish cruelty and worrying of one poor little animal for many hours by a motley crowd of men, women and even children, some armed with spears... The recent exposure in Devonshire, where a master of otter hounds was sentenced to imprisonment... for torturing cats to death, should show the public the lengths to which cowards will go when once they begin to gratify blood-lust.<sup>36</sup>



The third, by Lady Florence Dixie, took the opportunity to publicise the Humanitarian League's work on blood sports. Finally the author of the original article, J. C. Bristow-Noble, responded resentfully that 'On behalf of some of these daughters of Eve, I have now to state that it is of their opinion that the quarry, as is frequently the case, should always be allowed to escape'. This reversal shows that the campaigning did have an impact, albeit a small one, on the public perception of the activity. But Bristow-Noble emphasised that 'we should . . . feel thankful that the Masters of the various packs of otter hounds do not share this opinion'.<sup>37</sup>

The first malpractice to be exposed in otter hunting itself was an incident that occurred on the River Tweed on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1907. Writing in the *Morning Leader*, Colonel Coulson described how an otter, which had been hunted for seven hours, was struck and killed by a blow from a metal-shod stick wielded by an otter hunter in a boat. The exposure was made all the more effective by the contradictory responses from the otter hunters involved. Initially L. C. R. Cameron, author of *Otters and Otter-Hunting* (1908), was 'incredulous' that the incident could have happened at all while F. G. Aflalo, editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Sport*, thought the reports demonstrated the ignorance of the critics of hunting.<sup>38</sup> When, however, other members of the Hunt were 'moved to action by the scandal',<sup>39</sup> earlier attempts at concealment were also exposed. This in a sense gave the League the moral high ground. By planting a seed of doubt into the minds of readers over the accuracy of hunting reports, it also implied that otter hunters could not be trusted. Henry Salt also argued in the *Morning Leader* on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1907, almost two months after the incident, that such scandals as 'this bludgeoning of a hunted otter' and the 'recent worrying of cats by the master of the Cheriton Otter Hounds' were 'a sign that cruelty in one direction often leads to cruelty in another, and that in such a sport as otter-hunting the line between practice and malpractice is apt to be overlooked'.<sup>40</sup>

### **Putative Otter Hunting Bill 1906**

As a result of the Humanitarian League's campaigning, by 1906 otter hunting had become an issue of public debate. During the 82<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Meeting of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on 21<sup>st</sup> May, Stephen Coleridge tapped into this public feeling, and unexpectedly proposed that the committee should prepare a bill to make otter hunting illegal. A barrister by profession, Coleridge who 'hated cruelty in all its forms'<sup>41</sup> was fully aware of the power of publicity and as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals did not oppose blood sports, this proposal was a radical move. The fact that otter hunting was singled out suggests that Coleridge felt this particular activity was vulnerable enough to be prohibited. He presented the case for his unauthorised but 'friendly amendment' at the Egyptian Hall, Mansion House. He stressed that he was not a sportsman and had 'never shot a bird nor hooked a fish in my life' but 'became involuntarily the witness of an otter hunt' while 'sketching beside a pool'. He saw that 'miserable little animal was pursued by men with large poles with spikes in their heads, men who would put on a tall hat and go to Church on Sundays, while women disgracing their sex stood by and lent their countenance and encouragement to the brutal proceedings'. When the otter reached temporary sanctuary in a holt 'twenty

men got on to the bank and endeavoured by jumping and other means to force the earth down into the unfortunate animal's hiding place' until 'worn out by fatigue and fright surrounded by men and dogs' the otter 'became as easy prey to its enemies'. He proposed that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals should 'take its courage in both hands' and accept his amendment: '*That it be an instruction from this General Meeting of Subscribers of the RSPCA to the Committee, forthwith to secure its presentation to Parliament, the object of which shall be to make otter hunting illegal.*'<sup>42</sup>

Although Coleridge's speech was welcomed with loud cheers and rapturous applause, the chairman of the committee was far from impressed by the impromptu inclusion of the subject. He declared that Coleridge was 'entirely out of order in discussing this matter now', adding that he was 'not speaking of the merits of the subject, but only say it is out of order now.' Coleridge replied that:

If at your Annual meeting such a motion as that is out of order, then I say this great Society will stultify itself if it does not hear me. (Cheers.) Still, if I am ruled out of order I will resume my seat. [After a pause.] It is quite clear from the applause with which my remarks have been received that the subscribers of the Society do wish to hear me. (Cheers.) My object is only to insure that this Institution shall fulfil the great purpose for which it was founded.<sup>43</sup>

Coleridge won the audience at the meeting over to his case. It may be that he saw otter hunting as a useful device for testing both the political elasticity of the Society and the penetrative influence of the Humanitarian League. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the two members of the audience who stood to offer their support were both members of the Humanitarian League. The first to second the motion was Ernest Bell who pointed out that otter hunting was just as 'unsportsmanlike' as 'shooting birds from traps'. He argued that if the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals did not oppose otter hunting then 'it is quite certain that some similar Society will do so to the utter shame of our Society here'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, if the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals did not introduce a bill, then the Humanitarian League would do so.

The chairman eventually agreed to put the resolution to the meeting and it was carried with acclamation. This approval generated considerable adverse reactions and increased press coverage. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, received several telegrams from masters of otter hounds opposing Coleridge's criticism and justifying their sport. Mr Rose of the Eastern Counties Otter Hounds described the proposed Bill as 'most unfair and ridiculous' and argued that otter hunting was 'grossly misrepresented': 'Long spiked poles are never used for the purposes suggested, but for assisting followers across ditches, rivers and fences'. He had seen 'a Master of a pack last summer throw a man into the river for striking at an otter with a walking stick'.<sup>45</sup> This opposition to the Bill was surprisingly effective. After only two months, the pressure on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals proved too much and in July 1906 *Animal World* announced that the committee was not prepared to take any action on the motion moved by Stephen Coleridge with regard to otter hunting. The committee concluded that 'the promotion of legislation and especially of controversial legislation, is not desirable at present' and should instead 'be undertaken as far as possible by individuals'.<sup>46</sup> Coleridge, Bell and others argued in articles in *Animals' Friend* magazine and *The Humanitarian* that this



reversal was unconstitutional and illogical.<sup>47</sup> Some of the recurring questions included: ‘Have we reached such a pitch of humaneness in our treatment of wild animals that no further legislation is desired?’ and ‘What made it more desirable for individuals, rather than Societies, to promote such legislation?’ These questions got no response from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the putative otter hunting bill became for many just another means to criticise its inadequacy and hypocrisy.

### Anti-hunting publications

The first publication solely concerned with exposing the cruelties of otter hunting was Joseph Collinson’s 1911 *The Hunted Otter*, a twenty-four page booklet in Ernest Bell’s ‘A. F.’ Pamphlet Series. Collinson had previously led the Humanitarian League’s campaign against flogging and was described by Henry Salt as ‘a young north-countryman, self-taught, and full of native readiness and ingenuity, who at an early age had developed a passion for humanitarian journalism’.<sup>48</sup> His argument in the *Hunted Otter* was driven by quotations from thirty published sources. He denounced otter hunting as ‘the lowest-down pastime that has survived into the twentieth century . . . with exception of the three spurious sports’ of carted-stag hunting, rabbit coursing and shooting pigeons from traps.<sup>49</sup> He focussed on several key themes including the hunting of pregnant otters and the demoralising effects of participating in the hunt. Collinson quotes from the second chapter of Isaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler: Or the Contemplative Man’s Recreation* (1653): ‘God keep you all, gentlemen, and send you meet this day with another bitch otter, and kill her merrily, and all her young ones too’.<sup>50</sup> By setting this against contemporary instances he insinuates the unchanging attitudes of otter hunters over the centuries. He provides a ‘typical instance’ from a *Monthly Review* (June 1906) article by J. C. Tregarthen:

An otter’s cub was captured and confined in the stableyard of a house near a river where the mother had been hunted during the day. At night, in company with her other cub, she came to the yard and tried to liberate the little captive, but without success. At dawn she withdrew to the river, where she was again hunted, but after several hours’ pursuit managed to escape. Nothing daunted, she returned at nightfall to the yard and once more endeavoured to free her cub, but with no better result than before. It is pleasant to read that after such heroic conduct on the part of the poor beast, the hunter’s heart softened and the whelp restored.<sup>51</sup>

If anyone interpreted this anecdote with a smidgen of sentimentality, as a narrative of a protective mother rewarded for her ‘heroic conduct’ with the release of her whelp, the harsher realities of such freedom were instantly put into perspective with a quotation from L. C. R. Cameron:

Resentment at disturbance of the normal conditions impels her to leave her couch in which she has laid her cubs; the promptings of the maternal instinct compel her to return forthwith to her offspring. Even if she is prevented from doing so, she will hang about the place where they are, and perhaps be killed ‘wet’ when the cubs, too, will perish.<sup>52</sup>

This indiscriminate killing of females and cubs was shown to be by no means isolated. The candid words of Reverend E. W. L. Davies in his 1886 chapter on 'The Otter and his Ways' helped to reinforce this point:

Bitch-otters yielding milk . . . are not infrequently killed, even in the summer months, and then, of course, the whole litter is destroyed . . . the killing of baby cubs must needs go on, though a grief and pain to all concerned in their ultimate destruction.<sup>53</sup>

To show that this practice was not a thing of the past, Collinson then lifted more recent examples from the May 1906 *Animals' Friend*: 'An otter, after being worried for four hours, gave birth to two cubs, and was afterwards hunted for two hours more before she was killed'. From *The Field* for 18<sup>th</sup> June 1910 came a report that: 'Too many bitches are killed at this time of the year (June), the dog otters making themselves very scarce'. For campaigners, the killing of indefensible cubs and protective mothers was the antithesis of fair play, sportsmanship and manliness. Instead as Collinson argued, 'the hunting and worrying of otters while caring for their offspring' proclaimed 'only the insensate cowardice of the men and women' concerned.<sup>54</sup> Otter hunting 'involves the harrying of females heavy with young, the destruction of mothers in milk, the lingering starvation of a number of suckling cubs, and a heavy death roll' and the 'the aggregate of animal suffering caused is necessarily great'.<sup>55</sup>

The 1911 pamphlet attempted to shed light on the overall 'death roll' of otter hunting. Drawing his facts from *The Field* of 8<sup>th</sup> October 1910, Collinson explained that the Eastern Counties Otter Hounds had recorded a total of twenty-two otters, the Border Counties accounted for twenty-five, and the Hawkstone finished with forty. He also pointed out that Geoffrey Hill of Hawkstone had killed 544 otters between 1870 and 1884, and that William Collier of Culmstock had also accounted for 144 between 1879 and 1884. Although Collinson made a point of exposing these figures, he did not comment on them in any way. This may have been because the facts were incomplete or because the figures seemed to speak for themselves. The latter is probably more in keeping with the prosaic style of the pamphlet. As to the 'quickness' of the kill, campaigners pointed to the duration of separate hunts as evidence to the contrary. A subsection in the *Hunted Otter* (1911) entitled 'Hunted for Seven Hours' described the lengthy pursuit of a female otter by the Culmstock Otter Hounds in 1910.

Another aspect of otter hunting that attracted critical attention was the type of people involved and the behaviour it induced. Men, women and children could all actively participate together in this sport. Otter hunters were of course proud of this fact; it was one of the many peculiarities that set it apart from other field sports. Opponents, on the other hand, were offended by this inclusivity. Joseph Collinson argued that a 'deplorable feature of this sport is that its followers include all sorts and conditions of people: ministers of religion with their wives, young men and young women, sometimes even boys and girls'. Moreover, the intimacy of otter hunting meant that 'not only are they present at these infamous scenes, but, like the huntsmen, are worked up to the wildest pitch of excitement' and moreover 'join in the final worry and the performance of the obsequies, when the spoils of the chase are distributed'.<sup>56</sup> Unlike other blood sports, the main excitement in otter hunting was seen to derive from the involvement in

the visceral spectacle of the kill. Offering close proximity and participatory practices of seeing ('gazing') and doing (the 'stickle'), any member of an otter hunt could participate in 'infamous scenes'. Added to this, the physical characteristics of the otter meant that the 'final worry', much like the preceding pursuit, could be more prolonged and more of a spectacle than in hunts of other animals. Indeed, Coulson, Collinson and other campaigners believed that 'the kill' had ill effects on the mental well-being of every person involved. According to Coulson those who engaged in the kill became 'virtually maddened by it'.<sup>57</sup> George Greenwood made a similar observation in the 1914 publication, *Killing for Sport*: 'Men – and, good heavens! women too – seem frenzied with the desire to kill.'<sup>58</sup>

This 'desire' had different implications for different sorts of people. In women and children it induced behaviour that was not in keeping with certain ideas about gender and youth. An anonymous informant writing in *The Humanitarian* in August 1908, for instance, questioned the unwomanly conduct of the ladies in the field:

The conduct of the women is beyond me to describe . . . What can look more ridiculous than a middle-aged woman, hurrying along, mile after mile, through wet grass and muddy pools, climbing fences and walls, her clothes sticking to her body and her hair half down her back?<sup>59</sup>

For many, the behaviour of these dynamic and somewhat bedraggled women, clad in sodden attire, was far from ladylike. In the minds of campaigners it not only 'looked ridiculous', it was unacceptable. If the mere presence of women was condemned, then the role they played in, and joy they gained from, the death of the otter was shocking.

The war had a dramatic effect on otter hunting and campaigns against the sport, although individual hunts dealt with the hostilities in their own ways. Reflecting on the period, W. H. Rogers of the Cheriton Otter Hounds wrote:

Some doubts were expressed as to the propriety of hunting while so many poor fellows were being killed and wounded in the trenches, but the view prevailed that if the Hunt was once dropped it would be very difficult to restart it, and that those who were away would wish us to keep things going against their return.<sup>60</sup>

This 'carry on as normal' sentiment was initially broadly endorsed, but could not be sustained by all. The Hawkstone Otter Hounds disbanded in 1914, putting down most of their hounds. Sydney Barthropp, Master of the Eastern Counties Otter Hounds, died fighting in France in 1914, which led to their disbandment soon after. The Master of the Wye Valley Otter Hounds, on the other hand, styled himself as a utilitarian, hunting through the war 'not for sport, but in order to keep down the head of otters in the interests of the fisheries'.<sup>61</sup> Alongside the overall decrease of otter hunts and otter hunters was the dramatic reduction of advertised meets and reports in the national and regional press. This meant the League had far fewer opportunities to criticise otter hunting and by 1918 it recognised that it was 'the extravagance of spending vast sums of money on hunting and shooting', rather than the cruelty of blood sports, which aroused public resentment.<sup>62</sup>

And as a relatively inexpensive sport, such social changes meant otter hunting had become a less appealing target for them.

### The campaign in the inter-war period

The Humanitarian League was dissolved in 1919, and the main organisation to campaign against otter hunting became the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports, founded in 1924. The principles of this League echoed those of its predecessor, that it was 'iniquitous to inflict suffering, either directly or indirectly, upon sentient animals for the purpose of sport'.<sup>63</sup> The driving force was Henry Amos, who had worked as a government official and been secretary of the Vegetarian Society from 1913. In 1923 he diverted his attention to blood sports. His letter writing campaign against rabbit-coursing on Sundays in Surrey led to its prohibition in 1924. In the same year Amos organised the Leeds Rodeo Protest Committee which successfully 'scotched' several attempts to import and establish rodeo in England. The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports publicised its views in much the same way as the Humanitarian League and from January 1927 they started producing a monthly journal *Cruel Sports*.<sup>64</sup>

In 1931 Ernest Bell, co-founder of the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports, resigned in protest at Henry Amos's continual criticism of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. President Stephen Coleridge, his successor Lady Cory and several other members did the same. The following year Bell and his followers formed the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports. Like the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports, the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports advocated the state regulation of British wildlife, and were outraged by the hunting and coursing of highly sentient creatures for sport. The main institutional differences were in their 'ideals' and 'methods'. The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports based itself on the radical elements of the Humanitarian League. Holding an extreme and uncompromising policy, it developed more dynamic methods in an attempt to gain both publicity and prohibition. The National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports, which was formed by an individual who had originally been part of those more radical elements, preferred a gradual approach to abolition and identified educating public opinion as its immediate objective.

The public profile of otter hunting was raised by the publication in 1927 of Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter: His Joyful Water-life and Death in the Country of the Two Rivers*. Williamson's book was based on considerable personal research and knowledge. He followed the Cheriton Otter Hounds from 1924 and subscribed to *Records of the Cheriton Otter Hounds* produced by William Rogers, Master, in 1925. He met his future wife Ida Hibbert at an otter hunt, and proposed to her at a hunt ball. Williamson dedicated *Tarka the Otter* to William Rogers. Following its publication, the book received widespread publicity when Williamson was awarded the Hawthornden Prize in June 1928. In *The Times* on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1928 Williamson was described as 'the finest and most intimate living interpreter of the drama of wildlife'. Tarka soon became an iconic literary figure, and otter-hunting was made tangible to a new and wide audience.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 2. 'Demonstration at a Meet of the Bucks Otter Hounds', *Cruel Sports*, June 1931.

The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports was the first organisation to engage directly with otter hunters at otter hunts and the first ever protest against otter hunting appears to have taken place in 1931. On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April, a small group of members from the Oxford Branch assembled in Islip to demonstrate against the Buckinghamshire Otter Hounds (Figure 2). Although this demonstration was by all accounts 'quiet and orderly', the encounter did produce a rather interesting spectacle. As the otter hunters arrived at the meet, the first thing they saw was a line of demonstrators with banners bearing the words 'Abolish the Shameful Sport of Otter-hunting' and 'Stand up for the Helpless'. They were then handed leaflets. After some lively verbal exchanges between the Huntsman and League members, the Branch Secretary Mrs Chapman attempted to address the crowd by standing on a chair. This act of individual defiance was, however, soon silenced by the laughter of the unreceptive audience. When interviewed by the *Oxford Times*, Mrs Chapman explained 'We went to Islip because we thought we ought to make a special protest against otter-hunting'. She argued that 'Otter-hunting is an incredibly vile sport, because it is deliberately carried on in the breeding season' and was amazed 'that a larger number of influential people do not feel it their duty to make active protests against these things. We appeal to the chivalry of English men and women to make these so-called sports impossible.'<sup>66</sup>

A fortnight after this event, on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1931, the second reported demonstration against otter hunting generated a rather more hostile response. Staged at Colchester's North Railway Station, on this occasion members of the Colchester Working Group were the chief agitators and the Eastern Counties Otter Hounds the agitated. Although this 'unusual interlude' was tolerated with good humour at first, one follower of the hunt retaliated by burning a number of leaflets. *Cruel Sports* illustrated this incident with a photograph headed 'Burning the Truth!' According to the League's *Report* for 1931, the demonstration at Colchester 'resulted in a local ban being placed on the hounds'.<sup>67</sup> These



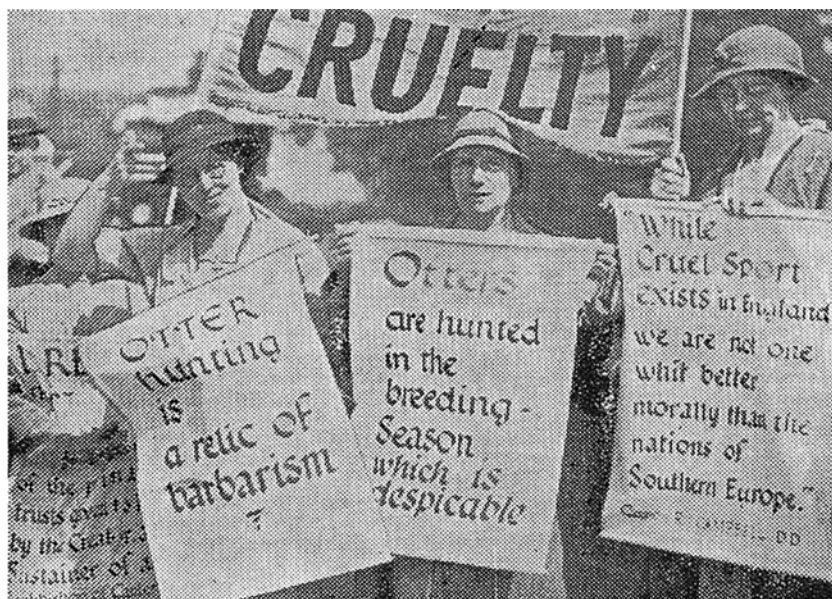


Figure 3. 'Leeds Women Protest at an Otter Hunt', *Cruel Sports*, August 1935.

kinds of demonstrations continued throughout the 1930s. In August 1935 *Cruel Sports* reported that a group of women from the Leeds branch had protested against the Kendal and District Otter Hounds in July. Again this article was accompanied with a striking photograph of several ladies holding banners (Figure 3). 'Otter-hunting is cowardly and unmanly'; 'Otters are hunted by people who should know better'; 'Otter hunting is a relic of barbarism'; 'Otters are hunted in the breeding season which is despicable' were just some of the 'truths' blazoned on boards that day.

We can gain an insight into the exact message they were trying to make from the letter which was handed to the master, Sir Maurice Bromley-Wilson, and followers:

The Leeds branch of the League for Prohibition of Cruel Sports has organised this protest against otter-hunting to indicate that there is a growing public feeling against this and other so-called sports. It is amazing to us that men and women can find pleasure in hunting living creatures for hours, putting them to considerable distress and pain, and then watching their exhausted bodies being torn to pieces by hounds.

The letter argued that 'no reasonable excuse can be found for such conduct, misnamed sport' which was 'morally wrong' and 'barbaric'. It argued that if it were necessary, otters 'should be cleanly killed, i.e. shot' but they felt that many otters were 'preserved for hunting, a shameful blot on our civilisation'. The letter proposed that drag hunting 'provides all the thrill of the chase without a living victim, and we earnestly request you to consider its adoption in preference to hunting live creatures'.<sup>68</sup> These public demonstrations shed light on the respectability of the animal welfare movement. The social image being constructed is of a group of people who are not just morally right,





Figure 4. 'Glorying over being "blooded" at an Otter Hunt', *Cruel Sports*, 1928 p. 85.

but are more decent than the hunters, who are by contrast portrayed as disreputable, aggressive and shameful.

The hunting and killing of female otters during the breeding season was a recurring theme in anti-hunting literature. Throughout the period campaigners repeatedly pointed to this subject as proof of the 'inconsistency and heartlessness'<sup>69</sup> of the hunting fraternity. As this practice was almost exclusively<sup>70</sup> confined to otter hunting, they also tried to divide the hunting fraternity by distinguishing the sporting conduct of otter hunters from fox hunters, stag hunters and hare hunters: 'If the sporting set consider it unsporting to hunt some animals in the breeding season, why does this not apply to otters?'<sup>71</sup>

Although in political terms women gained full equality of suffrage in 1928,<sup>72</sup> socially, much of society still subscribed to the Victorian notion of womanhood. The idea of the 'fairer sex' taking part in manly or savage amusements was regularly invoked to shock the public.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s however verbal disapproval was replaced with more subtle visual rebukes. *Cruel Sports* magazine readily employed this strategy. During the summer months its pages were sprinkled with photographs of women and girls being blooded at otter hunts. These snaps, which had been taken by otter hunters, were lifted from local newspapers then republished with evocative captions. In 1928, it showed a cheerful young woman 'glorying over being blooded at an otter-hunt' (Figure 4).<sup>74</sup> In 1929, there was a picture of a middle-aged woman and a teenage girl being blooded by the Joint Masters of the Wye Valley Otter Hounds in front of a crowd of smiling spectators. The large bold title above the image read, 'Women being "blooded" at an otter-hunt'.<sup>75</sup> Each of these examples shows how a certain body of evidence, produced by otter hunters

to promote their sport, was used by campaigners to argue their case against it. On rare occasions women were singled out for criticism during this period:

Why the educated, rich, or the uneducated for the matter of that, have nothing better of more edifying to do with their time is beyond one's comprehension. And as to the women, they evidently have no sense of shame, or pity, for the torture these poor little creatures undergo.<sup>76</sup>

There is a real sense that women should have had the emotional authority to know better.<sup>77</sup>

The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports also publicised isolated malpractices to strengthen their argument. On 4<sup>th</sup> April 1928, for instance, several daily newspapers reported that an otter had been stoned to death by fifty working men in Workington. After being chased by the crowd, the female otter took refuge in some brickwork under a bridge. The men then lit some cotton waste, smoked out the otter, and pelted it with stones. With no 'sportsmen' involved, the incident gained universal condemnation from otter hunters, members of the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports and the general public. In the *Daily Sketch*, Mr Harding Matthews, an individual with no declared interest, wrote:

Are we to believe that Workington breeds people so utterly spineless as to allow, in public and in broad daylight, the brutal murder of an inoffensive, wild creature? Is there no legislation which would enable, say, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to get upon the track of the Workington murderers and make them suffer? The evidence seems clear enough.<sup>78</sup>

Members of the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports were also outraged by this murderous behaviour and equally critical of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but they had a slightly different response to the event. As with the Barnstaple cat-worrying case of 1905, attention was redirected from the actual killing to the animal in question. Addressing the issue in *Cruel Sports*, a member with the pseudonym 'Wansfell' could not see how it was fair to hold the 'Workington roughs' up to obloquy without doing the same to devotees of organised otter hunting. In fact, this member felt that the latter was worse than the former:

In the one case a crowd of men became infected with a sudden attack of blood lust, and were carried away by the excitement of the moment to the temporary exclusion of all feelings of humanity. Afterwards everyone who took part in the orgy was probably ashamed of himself. In the case of an organised hunt, the followers deliberately engage in a series of barbaric acts, skilfully camouflaged by all the trappings of an elaborate ritual... The regular otter hunter deliberately indulges in cruelty without the saving grace of feeling shame – on the contrary, the returning cars and local tap rooms ring with the complacent boastings of the 'lords – and ladies – of creation'.<sup>79</sup>

By placing value on the life of the animal, it was not the act of killing that was condemned, but rather the killers' reaction to such an act. Unlike the working men who may have regretted the spontaneous event, sportsmen not only celebrated their own form of killing; they had created organisations that expected it to occur on a regular basis. The passage not only stresses the moral inconsistency of the public, it also underlines the hypocrisy of sportsmen.

The National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports sought to enlist the support of well-known individuals, including the journalist and author H. E. Bates (1905–1974) who became a mainstream country writer. He was also a member of the National Society for

the Abolition of Cruel Sports and an unwavering opponent of otter hunting. Bates wrote a regular column, 'Country Life', in *The Spectator*, and two volumes of nature essays, *Through the Woods* (1936) and *Down the River* (1937). The latter is essentially a personal consideration of riverside life along the Ouse and the Nene. In a series of vignettes, Bates fondly describes the rivers, the creatures, the trees, the flowers, the buildings and the people that make up the watery landscape. The chapter entitled 'Otters and Men' is important. Here Bates presents a very personal and very committed attack on otter hunting in a style of writing quite unlike his own. In August 1938 the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports gained permission to reprint the chapter in leaflet form. The following month the four-page leaflet, *Otters and Men*, was issued at the price of 1d.

Bates wrote this chapter on the basis that he liked otters but, despite living within a mile of a river valley, had never seen one in the wild. Although in the book he admits this was partly due to the animal's nocturnal behaviour, in the shortened leaflet the omission of the introductory paragraph made otter hunting the prime reason for his misfortune. He reported that around 450 otters were killed every year which meant that 'in my short life of thirty years . . . something like twelve thousand otters have been killed in England for the purpose of fun'. This fun was 'one of the reasons why it is so difficult for me, and for that matter anybody else, to get a sight of an otter'.<sup>80</sup> The word 'fun' is the binding theme in Bates' argument. Throughout the essay he applies the term to a number of situations to discredit the idea that animals are killed for 'public safety, natural history, protection of farmers or sporting exercise'.<sup>81</sup>

Bates begins by considering the main 'excuse' for killing otters, the supposed need to reduce predation on fish. He agrees that the otter 'lives on fish, but so also do herons and wild duck and pike and kingfishers and cats and men and women'. Moreover, 'otters are not hunted by fishermen', but by people 'whose notions of fun' are to 'go out and kill something'.<sup>82</sup> In these terms, if 'fishermen', as the only people with 'a genuine grievance against' otters, did not feel the need to hunt and kill them 'on the grounds of revenge', then the animal was not a pest. With no utilitarian reason for killing, the hunted otter was simply 'something' killed for 'fun'. To reinforce this point Bates goes on to outline the 'enjoyable' aspects of the sport. To help do this he compares otter hunting with fox hunting. In the latter, the fox has some chance of escape but in the former 'the otter's chances of escape are clearly much less'. To stress his dissatisfaction, he targets two features specific to the sport, the prolonged duration of the pursuit and spring and summer hunting:

To make it pleasant for otters as well as man, otters are hunted not only for a long time, for seven or eight or ten or eleven hours at a stretch, but in spring. This is clearly a splendid time. Rivers are then lovely with kingcup and ladysmock, meadows are starred and belled with daisy and cowslip, and, above all, the female otter is in cub. But what matter? She is about to be afforded the pleasure, the privilege, of being harried and hunted and having her living guts ripped out by forty human beings, twenty or thirty hounds and some terriers.<sup>83</sup>

The underlying motivation for these very specific criticisms is a much broader belief that all living beings feel pain and suffer. For Bates, such suffering could not be enjoyable

for the sufferer and should not be enjoyable for onlookers. He uses heavy irony to get his point across:

Fun is a curious word. It has many meanings and perhaps I misconstrue it? And since I have never seen an otter, except behind the glass of a painted case, who am I to say that the otter does not enjoy the fun of having its belly bloodily ripped?

Moreover:

Pain, too, like fun, is a word of many meanings and it is not surprising, perhaps, that for many people the two things are synonymous. For such people the laceration of an otter's living flesh is an amusing thing. I do not find this in the least hard to believe.<sup>84</sup>

After mobilising factual evidence, graphic descriptions and controversial comparisons, Bates concludes his essay bemoaning the seeming insanity of the legal position of hunted animals. He is astonished that 'the law of this country still allows this rotten and most bloody exhibition of behaviour' and that such 'repugnant bloodiness' survives in 'a so-called civilised age and country'.<sup>85</sup> The opinion of H. E. Bates provides an insight into one person's perception of the immorality of hunting otters to death. It also shows just how much the mere thought of otter hunting could unsettle an individual. For Bates, much like Henry Salt, the pain and suffering experienced by animals were indistinguishable from those experienced by humans. For this reason, Bates believed that all animals, whether wild or domestic, should have the same legal rights. The aesthetic quality of animals was also important to him. One of the main reasons Bates spoke out against otter hunting was that he felt that a small minority had reduced his chances of seeing the otter. In his opinion everyone had a right to enjoy this animal in its natural surroundings, not just otter hunters. Bates wanted to reclaim the otter from this minority for the British public. By enlisting the opinion of H. E. Bates, the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sports hoped this sentiment would not only reach a more popular readership, but also move such people into joining the campaign against otter hunting.

### Conclusion

In 1844 Landseer's *The Otter Speared* polarised opinion about otter hunting which was condemned by many as barbaric. In 1939 another iconic image came out on the front cover of the *Picture Post* (Figure 5). This weekly magazine, first published on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1938, was a pioneering outlet for British photojournalism. Although its founder Edward Hulton was a Conservative, the publication was politically left leaning and its editors Stefan Lorent and Tom Hopkinson took an 'anti-fascist' stance. Covering 'the issues which most concerned . . . young and thoughtful . . . men and women',<sup>86</sup> the magazine had a massive readership. The first issue in 1939, for instance, sold 1,350,000 copies. The image in question fronted the issue released on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1939. Interestingly, the magazine did not choose a classic scene of hounds in a watery landscape. Instead, it focussed on one man, Mr Sidney Varndell. Varndell had mastered the Crowhurst Otter Hounds since 1905, and had missed only four days hunting in thirty-five years.<sup>87</sup> The photograph was taken by Felix Man, who had been an active photojournalist since 1929, had emigrated



Figure 5. 'Master of Crowhurst Otter Hounds', *Picture Post*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1939, Volume 4, Number 3.

from Germany to London in 1934 and was chief photographer for *Picture Post* from 1938 to 1945.<sup>88</sup> It depicts Varndell as a solitary figure deep in thought. Resting upon his well-notched otter pole and fully clad in hunting attire, he gazes into the distance. The small caption reads: 'OTTER-HUNTING. The Master of the Crowhurst Otter Hounds surveys a line of Country. See inside.'

Inside there is a six page pictorial feature, 'Hunting the Otter', written by Douglas Macdonald Hastings. Alongside the written article, twelve pictures are used to provide a step by step visual account of a day's hunting with the Crowhurst Otter Hounds. Each image is accompanied with a caption and a paragraph explaining the scene. The sequence of events is as follows: (1) 'The Master of an Otter Hunt Plans His Attack'; (2) 'The Followers are Arriving'; (3) 'Hounds are Released from the Van'; (4) 'The Crowhurst Pack Awaits the Signal to Move Off'; (5) 'The Hunt Begins'; (6) 'The Pack Moves Off to Find the Otter's Drag'; (7) 'A Huntsman and His Pole'; (8) 'Cutting off a Corner'; (9.) 'Hounds "Feather" as They Search the River Banks'; (10) 'Followers Take to the Water'; (11) 'This Is the Kill'; (12) 'The Whip Holds Up the Trophy'.



Perhaps surprisingly, despite four decades of campaigns against the sport, the article does not describe otter hunting as something controversial. Instead, it tells the reader that ‘the otter is hunted partly because it is tradition to do so; partly because he provides excellent sport, and partly because it is still necessary to regulate his kind’.<sup>89</sup> In addition to this justification, any suggestion of cruelty is light-heartedly dismissed:

It is improbable that most of the people who go otter hunting worry much about the humanities or the natural law of the thing. They might be horrified if you suggested that they wished the otter any harm. Hunting is a good excuse for a hard day’s exercise. And even we English – whose behaviour in the country is notoriously crazy – must have an excuse for wading through rivers in grey bowler hats, blue jackets and white flannel breeches. The otter is as good an excuse as the next one; and, after all, the beast usually escapes.<sup>90</sup>

The *Picture Post* styles otter hunting as just another peculiar pastime the ‘notoriously crazy’ ‘English’ enjoy in the countryside. In these terms the iconic image of Varndell could be seen as positively publicising the face of otter hunting. This indicates that despite the ongoing challenge from the anti-blood-sports movement, in 1939 hunting rhetoric still informed the public’s perception of otters and otter hunting.

### Notes

1. British Sporting Art, Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle. *The Guardian*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2010. The painting is currently in store at the Laing Gallery, Newcastle <http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/laing-art-gallery/collections.html>
2. Diana Donald, *Picturing Animals in Britain 1750–1850* (New Haven and London, 2007), pp. 295–6; Richard Ormond, *Sir Edwin Landseer* (London, 1981), pp. 184–7; Richard Ormond *The Monarch of the Glen: Landseer in the Highlands* (Edinburgh, 2005).
3. John M. Mackenzie, *The Empire of Nature* (Manchester, 1988), p. 33.
4. Daniel Allen, ‘A Delightful Sport with ‘peculiar claims’: The Specificities of Otterhunting, 1850–1939’, in R. W. Hoyle, ed., *Our Hunting Fathers: Field Sports in England after 1850* (Lancaster, 2007), pp. 143–64; Daniel Allen, *Otter* (London, 2010); Daniel Allen, ‘The Hunted Otter in Britain, 1830–1939’, in K. Middleton and S. Pooley, eds, *Wild Things: Nature and the Social Imagination* (Cambridge, 2013); Charles Watkins, David Matless and Paul Merchant, ‘Science, Sport and the Otter, 1945–1978’, in R. W. Hoyle, ed., *Our Hunting Fathers: Field Sports in England after 1850* (Lancaster, 2007), pp. 165–86; Karen Victoria Lykke Syse, ‘Otters as Symbols in the British Environmental Discourse’, *Landscape Research*, 38 (2013), 540–52.
5. The Masters of Otterhounds Association was formed on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1910. This official regulatory association was set up to standardise conduct in the field, eliminate internal squabbles over hunting countries and promote the otterhound breed.
6. Geoffrey Pring, *Records of the Culmstock Otterhounds, c. 1790–1957* (Exeter, 1958), p. 35.
7. Captain T. W. Sheppard, ‘Decadence of Otter Hunting’, *The Field*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1906, 658.
8. David Jardine Bell-Irving, *Tally-Ho: Fifty Years of Sporting Reminiscences* (Dumfries, 1920), p. 120.
9. Walter Cheesman and Mildred Cheesman, *Diaries of the Crowhurst Otter Hounds*, 1904, Unpublished, East Sussex Record Office, Reference AMS5788/3/1, p. 3.
10. This echoed broader concerns for non-human animals. The National Anti-Vivisection Society was founded by Frances Power Cobbe in 1875; the Plumage League was established in 1889 and became the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 1904. See Hilda Kean, ‘The “Smooth Cool Men of Science”: The Feminist and Socialist Response to Vivisection’,



- History Workshop Journal* (1995), 40:1, 16–38; Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights* (London, 1998); R. J. Moore-Colyer, ‘Feathered Women and Persecuted Birds: The Struggle against the Plumage Trade, c. 1860–1922’, *Rural History*, 11 (2000), 57–73; see also Carl J. Griffin ‘“Some inhuman wretch”: Animal Maiming and the Ambivalent Relationship between Rural Workers and Animals’, *Rural History*, 25 (2014), 133–60.
11. The League established a special department to deal with Sports in 1895.
  12. Henry Salt, *Humanitarianism* (London, 1891), p. 3.
  13. Salt edited the two Humanitarian League journals: *Humanity*, later renamed *The Humanitarian* (1895–1919) and *The Humane Review* (1900–1910).
  14. *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1914, cited at <http://www.henrysalt.co.uk/friends/colonel-coulson>.
  15. Colonel W. Lisle B. Coulson, ‘The Otter Worry’, in Henry Salt, ed., *British Blood Sports: ‘Let us go out and kill something’* (1901), pp. 33–6, p. 34.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
  18. Coulson, ‘Otter Worrying – A Protest’, *The Humanitarian*, August 1908, 61.
  19. Mackenzie, *Empire*, p. 38.
  20. Roland Oliver, ‘Johnston, Sir Henry Hamilton (1858–1927)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [online].
  21. Mackenzie, *Empire*, p. 211.
  22. The latter formed a pack of Otter Hounds in Llandinam, Wales, bearing his name in 1906. This pack disbanded in 1919 when he became master of the Hawkstone Otter Hounds.
  23. Sir Harry Johnston, *British Mammals* (1903), p. 140.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
  25. *Ibid.*
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
  28. Ernest Bell, ‘The Barnstaple Cat-Worrying Case’, *The Animals’ Friend* (1906), 43.
  29. ‘The Cheriton Cruelty Case’, *The Field*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1905, 768
  30. Virginia Smith, ‘Bell, Ernest (1851–1933)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [online].
  31. Ernest Bell, ‘Cat Worrying by “Sportsmen”’, *The Animals’ Friend* (1905), 182–3.
  32. Ernest Bell, ‘The Barnstaple Cat-Worrying Case’, *The Animals’ Friend* (1906), 43.
  33. Ernest Bell, ‘Cat Worrying’, pp. 182–3
  34. J. C. Bristow-Noble, *Madame*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1905, 171, cited in Cheesman and Cheesman, *Diaries of the Crowhurst Otter Hounds*, p. 43 [Actually it was Mrs Kellogg-Jenkins, Battle, who had been born in San Francisco, 1911 census].
  35. ‘Correspondence. Should Otters be Hunted?’, *Madame*, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1905, 515, cited in Cheesman and Cheesman, *Diaries of the Crowhurst Otter Hounds*, p. 44.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
  37. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
  39. ‘Spurious Sports – “Sport with an Otter”’, *The Humanitarian*, October 1906, 75.
  40. *Ibid.*
  41. Stephen Coleridge was the second son of Lord Chief Justice of England, John Duke Coleridge, and great nephew of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Reverend H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Coleridge, Stephen William Buchanan (1854–1936)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
  42. Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, *1906 Annual Report* (1906), p. 127.
  43. *Ibid.*, p. 128.,
  44. *Ibid.*
  45. *Daily Mail*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1906, cited in Graham Downing, *The Hounds of Spring. The History of the Eastern Counties Otter Hounds* (Powys, 1988), p. 24.

46. 'The RSPCA and its Objects', *The Animal World*, July 1906, 154.
47. Ernest Bell, 'The RSPCA', *The Animals' Friend* (1906), 169–170; Reverend Joseph Stratton, 'The Abdication of the R.S.P.C.A.', *The Humanitarian*, August 1906, 59.
48. Henry Salt, *Seventy Years Among Savages* (London, 1921) p. 141.
49. Joseph Collinson, *The Hunted Otter* (1911), p. 19.
50. Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler: Or the Contemplative Man's Recreation* (1653), Chapter 2.
51. Collinson, *The Hunted Otter*, p. 6.
52. L. C. R. Cameron, *Otters and Otter-Hunting* (1908), cited in Collinson, *The Hunted Otter*, p. 6.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 20. A part of this pamphlet, which included this quotation, was reprinted in *Cruel Sports* magazine in 1929. Covering two pages (81–2), it was retitled "'Sport" and the Otter.'
57. Coulson, 'Otter Worrying – A Protest', *The Humanitarian*, August 1908, 60–1.
58. George Greenwood, 'Chapter 1: The Cruelty of Sport', in Henry Salt, ed., *Killing for Sport* (1914), p. 6.
59. 'The Otter Worry', *The Humanitarian*, September 1907, 164.
60. W. H. Rogers, *Records of the Cheriton Otter Hounds* (Taunton, 1925), p. 225.
61. L. C. R. Cameron, *Rod, Pole and Perch: Angling and Otter-hunting Sketches* (London, 1928), p. 52.
62. *Humanitarian*, April 1918, 100, cited by Michael Tichelar, "'Putting Animals into Politics": The Labour Party and Hunting in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Rural History*, 17 (2006), 213–34, 219; see also Michael Tichelar, "'A blow to the men in Pink": The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Opposition to Hunting in the Twentieth Century', *Rural History*, 22 (2011), 89–113.
63. The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sport, *Annual Report* (London, 1926).
64. The group's membership steadily grew from over 300 in 1925, to over 2000 in 1929, and 3000 in 1938.
65. Henry Williamson, *Tarka the Otter: His Joyful Water-life and Death in the Country of the Two Rivers* (London, 1927); William Rogers, *Records of the Cheriton Otter Hounds* (Taunton, 1925).
66. 'Demonstrations at a Meet of the Bucks Otter Hounds', *Cruel Sports*, June 1931, 51,
67. The League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports, *Annual Report* (London, 1931), 34. This is likely to be a ban by local landowners.
68. 'Leeds Women Protest at an Otter Hunt', *Cruel Sports*, August 1935, 59.
69. *Ibid.*, 3.
70. On occasions deer-hunters hunted and killed hinds-in-calf.
71. 'Otter-Hunting', *Cruel Sports*, August 1939, 58.
72. In February 1918 the *Representation of the People Act* gave all women over the age of thirty the right to vote. It was not until July 1928 that the age was lowered to twenty-one.
73. This is not to say that those within the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports subscribed to this notion. A high proportion of the League were women.
74. 'About Otter-Hunting', *Cruel Sports*, July 1928, 85.
75. "'Sport" and the Otter', *Cruel Sports*, June 1929, 81–2; this had first appeared in *The Western Mail*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1929.
76. Justice for the Animals, 'Otter-Hunting', *Cruel Sports*, October 1929, 128.
77. 'The Spirit of Otter-Hunting', *Cruel Sports*, August 1939, 62.
78. 'About the Otter', *Cruel Sports*, June 1928, 73.
79. 'Brutality of Otter-Hunting', *Cruel Sports*, June 1928, 74.

80. H. E. Bates, *Otters and Men* (1938), p. 1.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
86. T. Hopkinson, ed., *Picture Post 1938–50* (London, 1970), p. 8.
87. Varndell became huntsman in 1904. The following year he became joint Master with Mrs Mildred Cheesman who had been celebrated as the first lady master of otter hounds in the *Daily Mail* in 1905, as discussed earlier in this paper.
88. Colin Osman, 'Man, Felix Hans (1893–1985)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
89. Douglas Macdonald Hastings, 'Hunting the Otter', *Picture Post*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1939, 52–56, p. 52. Hastings (1909–82) became a leading war reporter for *Picture Post*.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 53.