

Is it necessary for humans to intervene in the fox population?

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Introduction

When we got the choice to choose a topic which we want, we did not know why fox hunting is done and how. We wanted to find out what people in England, but also in Switzerland think about this topic. Also, we wanted to know the reasons why fox hunting is banned in England and what the reason for hunting foxes was originally.

General information

Fox hunting is an activity which is done in the countryside. Hunting originated in England in the sixteenth century. For the hunting of foxes, the hunter needs horses and foxhounds. Hounds are a breed of dogs that chase after red foxes. The hunters follow the hounds on foot or on horseback. Hunting was practiced in England until it got banned in 2005. People who are in favour of this sport say that it is a part of their culture and it is useful as pest control as they think foxes are a nuisance. On the other hand, opponents say that hunting is cruel to animals.

According to the law in Switzerland there must be a main reason to hunt the foxes. But for most hunters it is just a hobby, so every hunt would be a violation of law. For more than 30 years there have been studies which show that hunting does not reduce overpopulation or even control pests. The result of this is that many animal friendly people want to introduce a law which is against unnecessary fox hunting in Switzerland.

In England a law against fox hunting has been in force since February 2005. According to the Countryside Alliance, the number of fox hunters has augmented to 45,000 since the ban. On Boxing Day, which is the second Day of Christmas, there have been about 300 packs of hounds and almost 250'000 spectators going out to hunt despite the ban. Therefore, the number of killed foxes increased every year. People who chase foxes despite the law must expect custodial sentences.

Methods

In Wetzikon

The first thing we had to do was to get informed about hunting in England. We chose this topic because we wanted to learn something about the culture of England. Since we had no information about fox hunting, we had to find pages in the internet on which we could find facts. We watched videos of hunting and we wrote down all the vital things.

Secondly, we looked for some questions we wanted to get answered. The following are our questions we had at the beginning:

- Reasons for fox hunting
- Effects of fox hunting on the fox population
- Fox hunt in general
- Animal protection
- Where it is practiced
- Who performs the fox hunt

Then we had to find an interview partner for our interview about fox hunting. We wrote an email to a journalist called Darren Slade who wrote an article in the Daily Echo on the 11th July 2015 with the title “Dorset MP backs vote to allow fox hunting”. It sounded very interesting but unfortunately, he did not answer us. So, we had to find another interview partner. Since the badger group told us that they will have an interview with a representative of the RSPCA, which is a British animal charity organisation, we got interested. We wrote an e-mail to David Bowles who is working for RSPCA. Luckily, we got an answer from him quite quickly, so we could compile the interview questions and fix the appointment.

After we had prepared the interview, we had to find three questions for pedestrians in Bournemouth for our survey. We wanted to create questions which are informative but still short. This question and the summary of what the people think about our topic is written in the survey part.

In Bournemouth

On the 23th of September we went to Bournemouth Square and interviewed random pedestrians for our survey. On one evening we did our analysis of the survey. Because we changed our main question, we had to go to Bournemouth Square once more. One more time we asked pedestrians for their opinion about our main question “Is it necessary for humans to intervene in the fox population?”.

On the 27th of September we finally had the interview with Mr. Bowles in a little restaurant near the town centre. It was very interesting, and we could ask him everything we wanted. Fortunately, we were able to record the interview and write down his answers on the evening after our interview with Mr. Bowles.

Because we wanted a comparison of Switzerland and England we created an online survey with the same questions which we asked the people in Bournemouth about our topic. We sent it to friends and our family. About 40 people completed the survey. We are very pleased because we have a great comparison with answers from Bournemouth.

Also, we wrote an E-Mail to a specialist called Dr. Sandra Gloor. She is a biologist specialising in wild animals working for the SWILD, a community of biologists based in Zurich, and did her PhD about Zurich city foxes. We sent her similar questions like the ones we asked Mr. Bowles during the interview.

Finally, we had to get all our information to put them in to a summary for our report.

Interview

Interview with Mr. Bowles (RSPCA)

In the following paragraphs, we summarize the information he gave us when answering our questions.

First of all, the RSPCA, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, is the largest animal welfare charity in the UK. To reach the public, the RSPCA has three main methods. About 600'000 people support the organisation. These members talk to other people in public and influence people's opinions. Moreover, RSPCA also makes use of the media, for instance television, radio, Facebook (about 650'000 followers), Twitter (about 250'000 followers) and newspapers. The most important goal for the RSPCA is not to influence through the media, but to influence the public with the aid of the supporters. According to David Bowles, people talking to each other often have more influence about each other's opinion than the media. The media is important as a platform, but humans are still social creatures, so they listen more to people they trust in.

The work with the government is important as well for RSPCA because the government makes the laws (for animal protection). So Mr. Bowles is in touch weekly with the national government of England. But in these days, he does not speak about fox hunting to them owing to the 2005 ban of traditional hunting with foxhounds. The laws for animal protection are basically created by the European Union. But specific laws are made by the UK or even the English government. In addition, there are local laws, but they are not that important for the RSPCA. Nowadays many representatives of animal protection organisations (or in general economy) are looking to Switzerland. The reason is that nobody knows what will happen with the English economy after BREXIT and Switzerland is a neutral pole in the middle of Europe, which is independent, but cooperates with the European Union.

From the RSPCA's point of view, it is acceptable to shoot foxes because of problems they cause, but it is not acceptable at all hunting these animals with foxhounds and terrify them since it is so cruel, David Bowles said.

David Bowles does research in libraries, journals and scientific papers. The RSPCA has several wildlife hospitals, so the employees observe these animals to explore their behaviour as a part of their job. Another method of researching is talking to people. He told us that he posts stories and information on social media or in newspapers as soon as he is sure that what he claims is factual and true. An important principle for the RSPCA is to prove that all the projects they are working on have a scientific base, and always to tell the truth, otherwise the public will not support RSPCA after if it posts faulty claims. On the other hand, David Bowles contacts the media and advises journalists about the public's opinion on a topic.

When we asked David Bowles whether he agrees with the pedestrians of our survey that foxes can be a pest, he said it depends on the situation. He understands farmers whose chickens are eaten by foxes. Despite this, foxes only come into towns for food. His opinion is that it is the humans' fault foxes are coming into gardens or even into houses. If the people did not put their rubbish out, foxes would not come (as frequently as they do now) into town. It is so easy for them to get food. Mr. Bowles informed us about the improvement in the area he lives in by introducing containers in the neighbourhood. Due to the fact that the foxes cannot open the containers, the rubbish doesn't lie all over the streets anymore. Neither is it noisy at the night, because there are not so many foxes around that might fight. He guesses that the situation will improve by using the containers. Secondly, we were wondering whether the stories we read in BBC about incidents where urban foxes attack children are true. David Bowles told us that approximately once a year there is an incident with a fox attacking a child. But the media are always publishing these kinds of incidents immediately to make the fox problem look like a real catastrophe.

David Bowles mentioned three important aspects which are relevant for our main project question: the (red) fox is not one of the ten most popular wildlife animals in England. Additionally, the fox population is not increasing, numbers are still the same as they were years ago. The reason why people still go hunting with foxhounds is because there has been a ban in force in the UK for 13 years, while before that, traditional hunting had been legal for about 500 years. The English people still think of it as a part of their culture. However, David Bowles thinks that the ban will not be abolished, because the RSPCA was fighting for the ban since the year of 1976.

Finally, we can say interviewing David Bowles was extremely informative and interesting for us and for our main question. He believes that humans must not intervene into the population of foxes but think of their own behaviour in a world with wild animals. Maybe one day humans will get the point and would be able to solve the problem by changing themselves.

Interview with Ms. Gloor (SWILD)

Ms. Gloor is a biologist specialised on wild animals working for the SWILD, a community of biologists based in Zurich.

To our question if she thinks that the media controls people's opinion, she replied that it is not a fact, but it is possible that the media is important and helps on building an opinion about something.

First of all, she said foxes are very intelligent animals and learn quickly. This means that they can survive in different places even in towns and cities. Foxes are only a problem for humans when they start killing chickens and other little animals as well as pets.

Furthermore, she does not believe today's methods of fox hunting are useful for reducing fox populations. Therefore, she is against humans intervening into the fox population by hunting them. If an animal is injured, it is the most simple and humane way to kill them by a gunshot.

Thirdly, from Sandra Gloor's point of view humans need to get aware of animals' feelings and fears. An example she gave us was that some time ago, people did not know that guinea pigs do not want to live alone. Humans did not know that they suffer until they die from being lonely. Nowadays, it is not possible to buy one single guinea pig anymore, luckily. So, her idea of avoiding cruelty on animals is to not keep people in the dark about animals in general, but to inform them.

Finally, the SWILD is working currently on a huge project about the increase of hedgehogs in neighbourhoods.

Survey

Result of survey in England

1. Is fox hunting a current topic in public?

Not really because at the moment it is not the season for hunting. Usually they talk more about it in the winter at Christmas time. But generally, they do not talk that much about it because it has been banned for a while now.

2. Do you deal with the topic fox hunting in your family or with your friends?

Most people do not talk about fox hunting. Especially now there are many topics which are more interesting for them. But some of them have families or friends who used to go fox hunting at the time when it was still legal. It was interesting to see that all of them who deal with this topic live in the countryside of England. And all of them said that actually it is not necessary nowadays to hunt foxes, it is just a quite old tradition and part of the British culture.

3. Are you personally against or in favour with fox hunting?

Most of the people are against fox hunting, whereas there were some people who were in favour of the traditional way of hunting. These persons said that they supposed that this traditional way of hunting is a really old tradition and should not be lost. On the other hand, most people said that this is not a humane way to kill animals and should not be unbanned ever again. In fact, a lot of the people we interviewed who were against fox hunting, said it would be okay for them if the animals just were shot. They said the cruel thing about fox hunting is the hunt, where the foxes are afraid and run for miles just to get away from the hounds which are chasing them which is such a horrible way to be killed.

4. Is it necessary for human to intervene in the fox population?

The people who were against fox hunting just said that they supposed that fox hunting is cruel and should not be done. Moreover, they did not say that the foxes are a problem for them. On the other hand, there were a lot of pedestrians who said that it is necessary to intervene in the fox population. When we ask them why, they told us that sometimes they think the fox hunting is necessary to reduce the fox population because they are a danger to animals and people. Some people interviewed said they would say that fox hunting is a good thing. The answers showed us that the people do not really know a lot about fox hunting because as we just found out the fox population is not a problem either for animals or for people.

Result of survey in Switzerland

About the question if fox hunting is a current topic in public, the answers were different. Nearly the half of the interviewees said yes. In England it is the opposite. But even if this is a topic which is popular, practically all the interviewees do not speak about fox hunting in their family, the survey participants in England either. The main difference to England was that in Switzerland, there isn't one specific day which is set for hunting. So, England, at Christmas time, there are families who talk about it. People in Switzerland only talk about it when there is an article in the newspaper or a show on the television about foxes. Concerning the question whether the interviewees were in favour or against fox hunting, the answer in Switzerland was unanimously against. When there are too many foxes or they are ill the majority wants a hunt to take place. But also, the majority does not want an unnecessary hunt just to kill the animals. In England there is another reason why people want fox hunts take place: it is that they do not want that the foxes to eat the farmers' animals and come into town to destroy items in the garden and eating the rubbish.

Results

Online Research

While doing our online research we only found some facts about fox hunting like the season for fox hunting or who goes hunting. But we could not find out what the normal people, who do not deal daily with fox hunting, said about this topic.

So during our language exchange in Bournemouth we got really interested in newspaper articles. We read some interesting articles from different newspapers, for instance BBC and the Independent (this was a suggestion by a Police officer). Moreover we read some posts on the webpage of the RSPCA.

Summary of article researches:

On BBC we found an article from 2013 that reported a baby's finger was severed by a fox` bite in a city. There were even more incidents like this one.

The cause for the minimization of the fox population was an outbreak of "sarcoptic mange" (Krätze, verursacht von Krätzmilben). This disease has caused a severe reduction of foxes in cities in the past 30 years. Animal behaviour experts say that many urban foxes have already gotten quite accustomed to humans. So many of them are looking for food or dens in human homes and places where people are. People themselves cause the problem by not stopping the foxes instead of giving them more food. They should block the way to their houses to keep them away.

Even Larissa's host family once had a red fox in their neighbourhood, an animal that was fed by all the local people. To sum up, people do not need to intervene because when illness' break out, the population gets even smaller. Our opinion is that nature manages wildlife in it is own good way without the intervention of humans.

On-site Research

Firstly, we wanted to go to the Natural History Museum in Bournemouth for our on-site research, we also wrote an e-mail and asked representatives of the museum if they could answer a few questions for us. Sadly, they did not want to give us an interview because this topic was too emotive for them.

After talking to Ms. Waiblinger, we just decided not to go to the museum. We supposed that we would not have found anything that had something to do with our project. So, we struggled to find a place we could visit for our on-site research. Then we went to the cemetery looking for some foxholes. We reckon that we found some, which were a bit older and already plugged. Although we are happy with our research because we can imagine after finding foxholes (fox dens) that foxes may like places like cemeteries because there they will not be disturbed and have enough trees. In addition to this, Larissa saw a fox on her way home, in the night of Saturday to Sunday. The animal was walking between two houses and was searching for some food.

Personal experience

At the beginning of our project we did not really know much about fox hunting in England. The main reason for that is probably that in Switzerland we do not really deal with this kind of hunting. After some research we knew a lot about the random facts like hunting season and who does the hunting. From our survey, we got to know a lot about personal opinions of people living in the area of Bournemouth. They told us a lot about the fox hunting tradition and why it is important for them. Because of that, we can understand them and their opinion better now. Nevertheless we supposed that fox hunting in the traditional way is an inhumane way to kill foxes. We also reckon that it is unnecessary to intervene in the fox population because they are not a danger for the people.

Discussion

When still being in Wetzikon, we thought we would do the research for our project mainly on the internet. Later, when we got to Bournemouth we recognised that most of the research has to be either by on-site research or in our case asking the public. Fox hunting is a difficult topic for doing on-site research, so we concentrated on people's (pedestrians' and experts') opinions and newspaper articles. We guess that our starting-problem was that we have never done such a project on nature and technology before. In spite of our previous project for which we had to look for facts, we now had to explore a topic to answer one single question using scientific ways.

Our first hypothesis was finding out what influence the fox hunting has on the fox population and why it is still practiced. After our first meeting with Ms. Waiblinger and Mr. A we changed our main question and viewed almost our whole topic from another direction.

However, what we found out in the last few weeks, has not changed our opinion. We still think it is not necessary for humans to intervene in the fox population, neither should the tradition be saved. Wild animals are not bad. They are just free and do whatever they want to do. What we are trying to explain is that foxes are cute little animal that want to have a life as well and try to survive in this world. Animals with diseases or any other problem may have to be shot because it could be dangerous either for humans or for other wildlife. But this kind of animal killing should be without any cruelty, so the fox must not suffer. Foxes are such lovely animals.



In addition, the foxes' population like in general wildlife population is controlled by nature. This means people are not necessary to control any animal population and should leave it as it is.

For our next nature and technical project, we would suggest brainstorming right at the beginning of the project as well as making a structured schedule of research plans. We reckon we would know better now if we had to begin again.

Our methods doing some surveys and an interview with an expert were very helpful and logical for us. We really recommend doing these methods. One person we wanted to interview was very unreliable. The next time we would not email a person that often and ask them for a long time before as we would try to find another person to save the time we lost in this project.

A positive point we take out of our IDAF definitely is we all improved our language skills owing to the normality of talking English to interviewees and writing emails, reports and a presentation in English. We believe our surveys helped us the most due to the fact that we have been asking, listening and responding freely to pedestrians whose mother tongue is English.

We partially enjoyed doing the on-site research on the cemetery, but we really enjoyed talking to people about it and later on writing down our results while drinking a cup of warm coffee. The start in Wetzikon was kind of difficult which is the reason why we liked working in Bournemouth more than in Wetzikon.

Glossary

Foxhound	der Hetzhund
cruel	Quälerei
compile	zusammenstellen
Animal welfare charity	Tierschutz
Urban foxes	Stadtfüchse
abolish	abschaffen
intervene	eingreifen
Guinea pigs	Meerschweinchen

Pictures

These are pictures where foxes have might lived. We took them on-site in a cemetery.



References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox_hunting#United_Kingdom

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/hunting>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-fox-hunting-bring-back-ban-repeal-conservative-tories-general-election-rural-vote-a7726506.html>