

Foxhunting Terminology

This is a fairly comprehensive list of terms specifically related to fox hunting. Some of these terms are a trifle old-fashioned but, as we all know, foxhunters value tradition and "the old ways" above most other qualities.

All on – All hounds present and accounted for.

Babble – To give tongue on scent other than fox, or on no scent, or on a scent too faint to follow.

Bitch pack – A pack of hounds consisting only of bitches (females), referred to only as bitches, not as bitchhounds.

Blank – A covert is blank or has been drawn blank when no foxes are found. A day is blank when hounds do not find a fox.

Brace – When counting foxes, two equal a brace and three equal a leash.

Breakfast – The meal after hunting is over, no matter the time of day. Originally this was a meal served to early arrivals by the host or owner of the place where the hunt met.

Brush – A fox's tail.

Casting – Hounds attempt to recover the line after a loss. Hounds may cast themselves or the Huntsman may cast hounds.

Check – When scent has temporarily disappeared.

Coffee Housing – When people are chattering instead of paying attention.

Colors – The colored coat collar that distinguishes the uniform of the hunt, usually accompanied by hunt buttons; to be awarded colors is to be given the right to wear them.

Country – The area where a pack of hounds operates.

Couple – Two hounds. Hounds are always counted in couples, i.e. eleven hounds equal five and a half couple. Tradition has it that the extra half couple (hound) is the one who finds the fox.

Couples – A device for keeping two hounds joined for training.

Covert – (pronounced “cover”) A patch of woods or brush where foxes are apt to be found.

Cry – The sound given by hounds when hunting.

Cub – A weaned fox in his first year of life.

Cubhunting – The time spent hunting prior to Opening Meet, usually from mid-September to late October, used primarily to teach the young entry to hunt with the pack.

Den – A fox's hole.

Dog Fox – A male fox.

Dog pack – A pack of hounds consisting only of doghounds (males).

Drawing – Looking for a fox in a covert.

Earth – Any place a fox goes to ground for protection.

Entered Hound – A hound which has been hunted for one season or more. During his first season of hunting a hound may be referred to as an unentered hound.

Feathering – A hound “feathers” when he indicates, by actions rather than by voice, that he is on a line or near it. The stern is waved and activity is concentrated and intensified.

Field ("the field") – The group of members and guests, excluding the MFH and staff, gathered to follow hounds on

any particular day. There is a distinct protocol traditionally followed within the field. Long-time members with colors generally ride at the front. Newer members generally ride further back. Juniors ride at the rear. Anyone who is having a less than perfect day, either because their horse is acting up or their attire or equipment is less than standard, should ride at the back of the field. Individuals may elect to ride further back in the field than they are entitled to. No one should ride further forward than he or she is entitled to unless invited to do so.

Field Master – The person who is responsible for the field while out hunting. This may be the MFH or someone designated by the MFH. The field master has a difficult job. Most field masters would like to encourage members's interest and enthusiasm in hounds and hunting and will try their best to get the field where they should be. While providing this encouragement and explanation, the field master must also keep the field quiet so the hounds and staff aren't disturbed and so the day's sport isn't spoiled. As the MFH's delegate, the field master also has to ensure that civility and safety are upheld in the field.

Fixture Card – The printed schedule of hunt meets, listing times and locations.

Full Cry – When the entire pack is speaking to a line.

Ground – When the fox “goes to ground” he takes shelter, frequently in a hole or pipe.

Hark – 1) “Please be quiet and listen.” 2) Hounds rushing to a hound that has opened.

Heading a fox – To head a fox is to cause it to turn from its planned direction of travel. Every effort is made to avoid this.

Hilltoppers – Traditionally, hilltoppers would follow the hunt by riding from hilltop to hilltop, observing from a distance. Nowadays, most hilltopping groups are simply a second flight, following the first flight but going through gates rather than over jumps. Sometimes this group is known as the second flight or possibly as gate-riders.

Hold Hard – “Stop quickly, please.”

Honor – One hound honors another when he gives tongue on a line that another hound has been hunting.

Hounds – A collection of dogs, known as a pack of hounds (never referred to as dogs).

Hunt -- In the old days, what we call a "good chase" or a good run would have been called a good hunt. See the term "meet" for more information.

Huntsman – The person who hunts hounds and is responsible for the care, breeding, and training of the hounds. At some hunts the Masters direct the breeding program. At some hunts one of the Masters acts as Huntsman. The Huntsman may be professional (in which case he is paid for his services) or he may be an amateur.

Kennel – The place where hounds are kept.

Lark – To jump a fence unnecessarily, when hounds are not running or when hacking home.

Lift – To carry hounds forward. The huntsman lifts hounds by encouraging them forward.

Line – The trail of the fox.

Mark – When a hound indicates that a fox has gone to ground.

Mask – A fox's head.

Master – This almost always refers to the Master of Fox Hounds (MFH), the person responsible for the hunting and the organization of the country. He or she is usually someone who has lived in the Hunt's country and hunted with the pack many years. As long as you are in the hunt field, the Master's word is law. At the meet, he is in charge and responsible for the entire proceedings. He is the host, making sure everyone is having a good day, and the chief of protocol, making sure rules and traditions are upheld, and the safety officer, making sure everyone is under control and behaving courteously and kindly. There may also be a Field Master appointed to lead the field.

Meet – The assembling of the hunt for the day's sport. The actual place is also called the meet.

Mixed pack – A pack of hounds consisting of both sexes.

Nose – The ability of a hound to detect and interpret the scent.

Open – When a hound first gives tongue on a line.

Opening Meet – The first meet of the Hunting Season proper, around the first of November.

Pad – A fox’s foot.

Panel – A jump built into a fenceline specifically for foxhunting.

Puppy – A young foxhound that has been weaned but has not been entered.

Rate – A vocal warning given to correct hounds.

Riot – When hounds are hunting any game other than the intended quarry.

Run – Describes the action after hounds find the line of a fox. A “good run” is also a “good hunt” (the term “hunt” should refer to a “run” and not to a “meet”).

Running Heel – When hounds are hunting a line in the wrong direction.

Scent – The smell of a fox and the physical and chemical phenomena by which the smell gets from the fox’s footprints to the hound’s nose. Scent can be good or bad, easy to follow or not, depending on various factors including the weather.

Speak – When a hound gives tongue. (One would never say a hound was barking . . .)

Staff -- Also known as Hunt Staff. The Huntsman, whippers-in, and Master make up the Hunt Staff. There may be additional staff members in some hunt clubs, like a Field Master.

Stern – The hound’s tail.

Stirrup Cup – A drink to be shared at the meet before hunting, so called because it was originally held at stirrup iron level by the person serving.

Strains of American Hounds – include Walker, July, Bywaters, Plot, Trigg

Tag – The white tip on a red fox’s brush.

Territory – The area officially designated by the MFHA where a hunt is allowed to operate.

Thruster – A member of the field who rides too close to staff or hounds.

Tongue – Cry. A hound “gives tongue” when he proclaims with his voice that he is on the line of a fox.

Types of Fox Hounds – English, American, and Crossbred. There are two breeds of fox hounds, English and American. Crossbred fox hounds are a mixture of English and American. Pennmarydels are a unique strain of American fox hounds which many consider to be a separate breed or type.

View – To actually see the fox. Should a member of the field view, he or she should quietly inform the Master right away.

View Holloa – The high pitched cry given only by a staff member when a fox breaks covert.

Vixen – A female fox.

Ware – A shortening of the word beware, i.e. ware hole, ware wire, etc. Should not be used to alert the field to passage of individuals. Instead use, “staff, please” or “huntsman, please,” etc.

Waving his stern – When a hound is wagging his tail.

Whelp – 1) A foxhound puppy prior to weaning; 2) an unweaned fox cub.

Whippers-in – The staff members who assist the Huntsman with discipline and behavior of hounds in the hunt field. They may also assist with kennel duties and hound exercising.

