
Operation Sparrow

A partnership approach to a rural crime issue

*A report by Inspector **2091 Darren Alderson**, **Huntingdon Sector Commander***

Operation Sparrow

Operation Sparrow a rural: crime initiative running for 6 years within the Central Division of Cambridgeshire Constabulary, targeting illegal hare coursing.

September 1999 the operation was reviewed.

Review team.

- Police
- Countryside Watch
- RSPCA

Questions: To what extent was the operation being run on problem orientated lines?
How successful was the operation?

Answers: Large amounts of police resources were being utilised on an operation had not been subject to any substantial analysis.
The constabulary was not utilising fully other agencies that could assist
Inconsistent responses by officers to hare coursing incidents.

The following sources were used to define the problem:

- Command and Control data.
- *The current status of the brown hare (Lepus europaeus) in **Britain**, (Hutchings, R. and Hams, S.)*
- Feedback from farmers via the Countryside Watch.
- Prosecution data.
- Staff Office data.
- Feedback from officers involved in the operations.
- *Hare Coursing A Guide*

From this analysis responses were drawn for the 1999 — 2000 season.

- Resource commitment reduced by 90%.

- 12 officers identified to staff operations — 4 per operation.
- Training on poaching legislation for these 12 officers.
- RSPCA more closely linked to operation.
- Customs and Excise co-opted for assistance with specific offences.
- Countryside Watch and police remained **main** drivers.

Continuing analysis took place throughout the 1999 — 2000 season revealing.

- ◆ Offence days changed from weekdays to weekends.
- ◆ Hotspots remained relatively constant
- ◆ Gathering areas identified
- ◆ Offenders identified

The analysis was utilised in refining our response to the problem.

End of season analysis revealed.

- ◆ A 25% increase in incidents of hare coursing. (317 up to 397)
- ◆ No decrease in prosecutions.
- ◆ Support for the operation growing both internally and externally.
- ◆ Southern and Northern Divisions recorded up to 60% increases.

The same analysis process was used prior and during the 2000 — 2001 season and further responses and objectives set.

Results at the end of 2000 — 2001 revealed.

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- 59% decrease in illegal hare coursing in Central Division. (397 down to 164)
- Northern Division showed a similar decrease to Central.
- Southern Division recorded a static figure for hare coursing.
- Marked decrease in prosecutions.

From this end analysis it was felt that the operation was now successful and that the reduction had not been caused by factors such as the weather or a substantial decline in the brown hare.

Operation Sparrow

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Cambridgeshire Constabulary is a predominately rural force with two large urban centres, Peterborough in the north and Cambridge in the south. The force is divided into three divisions; the Northern and Southern Divisions are based around the urban centres, the Central Division covers the vast central and largely rural area of the county. Rural Cambridgeshire can be defined as ideal hare coursing tenitory with its large expanses of sparsely populated and remote areas encompassing large open fields, and its preponderance of brown hares.

The objectives 1999-2000.

Traditionally the operation was intended to reduce the incidents of hare coursing and reduce the fear of crime within the rural areas of the Central Division. Added to these objectives in 1999 – 2000 was a target to reduce the resource spend on the operation by 90% without a reduction in prosecutions. To assist in the achievement of these aims an objective to increase the knowledge base of those officers involved was also added. The desire to make the operation a truly multi-agency affair was also set as an objective.

The success criteria set was a reduction in hare coursing within the given season, October to March. Linked to this was the criterion of the same or more prosecutions for hare coursing and poaching offences. The amount of successful prosecutions was seen as a way of measuring the increase in knowledge base of those officers involved. A measure for any reduction in the fear of crime within the rural areas was less easy to set. A rolling programme of Parish Council visits by the Huntingdon Sector Commander during which the aims, objectives and impacts of the operation were relayed and the amount of press releases of a positive note were seen as a **way** of testing the public's response to the operation. Countryside Watch sought direct feedback from farmers to the operation to assist in this area.

Identification and Prioritisation.

The problem of hare coursing itself is well documented within the rural areas of Cambridgeshire both by the farmers and the constabulary. Hare coursing being an ancient pastime for the area. The farmers themselves take great pains to ensure that the constabulary is kept aware of the problem and as such the identification of the broad problem was not difficult.

With the pressures on resource allocation within the constabulary it was clear that to continue with a heavy resource spend on the operation was not feasible. This spend had reached 40 regular and special constabulary officers

a day on occasion, many of whom were working on cancelled rest days. However it was identified that there was a need to ensure that the rural communities and farmers received support and as such the year 1999-2000 was seen as a watershed for Operation Sparrow.

For the above reasons a meeting took place during August 1999 to review the operation. The remit of this meeting was to discuss and decide if there was a future of Operation Sparrow, if there was a future what form should it take and who was to drive it forwards.

The Review Team

Central Division Operations Manager, Superintendent Haddow.
Cambridgeshire co-ordinator for Countryside Watch, Daphne Brown.
Huntingdon Sector's Community Liaison Officer, PC Richard Carter.
Inspector Lewis Tricky for the RSPCA.
Central Division Support Inspector Darren Alderson.

This team quickly decided that Operation Sparrow in its then form could not continue but that a streamlined operation could be a feasible option but only after analysis was completed to properly identify **the problem and realistic responses**.

Areas of Responsibility

The team further decided to formalise the responsibilities within the operation.

Countryside Watch

Direct Liaison with the farming community. Responsible for providing an agent to work in the Force Control Room on operational days to provide a one point contact system for the farmers, thus ensuring all coursing incidents were co-ordinated on the day.

Cambridgeshire Police

To provide a response capacity to coursing and to undertake prosecutions of offenders for criminal acts.

RSPCA

To provide a response capacity to coursing and to undertake prosecutions of offenders for animal cruelty type offences.

Customs and Excise

Sleeping partners who would prosecute all offences in breach of the excise laws, such as the illegal use of red diesel.

Defining the Problem by analysis.

Police Command and Control Data

As luck would have it historical data regarding incidents of hare coursing within the Division had been kept and so it was an easy task to recover this **vital information and programme** it into our response. Importantly this information was broken down into parish location and of equal importance into incidents by day and time, thus we were able to identify the size of the problem the hot spot areas and days of the week when most offences took place.

By further detailed analysis of the separate Command and Control incidents it was also possible to see that many separate incidents on a given day involved the same offenders and that some offenders returned time and time again. Police National Computer checks on vehicles involved and analysis of prosecution data showed that offenders regularly came from as far afield as Scarborough and Kent.

Feedback from farmers via Countryside Watch

Ms Brown was able by her contacts to give some indication as to whether the data held by the constabulary was realistic, feedback from farmers showed that although reporting was not at 100% we were certainly recording a high percentage.

*The current status of the brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*) in Britain.* (Hutchings, R. and Harris, S.)

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This Joint Nature Conservation Committees publication states that 'whilst East Anglia constituted 5.1 percent of the land area of Britain, it contained 19.8 percent (162,100 hares) of the total brown hare population' (Hutchings, R. and Harris, S. p.38). The survey also showed that hare populations had declined and was most pronounced in western pastoral areas (Hutchings, R. and Harris, S. p.41). From this we were able to confirm the attractiveness of East Anglia for hare coursers.

Prosecution data

This data was difficult to obtain although the Huntingdon Sector Community Liaison Officer, PC Carter, had recorded some information. From this and Command and Control information we were able to produce a figure a 30 or so prosecutions for the year 1998-1999.

Staff Office data

Again a difficult area to obtain information, a conservative figure was used to cost the operation for the year 1998 — 1999. The figure used £131.46 per officer was taken at constable level and did not include overtime, vehicle costs, food, etc. No costs were calculated for custody officers, or AJU time, etc. Using this somewhat loose system the cost to the constabulary for the year 1998 — 1999 was calculated to be around £19,000.

In addition to the above an unknown figure for the Countryside Watch and the RSPCA could be added.

Feedback from officers

Practical problems were identified from this source.

- a) The use of Transit vans and saloon cars was highlighted as a problem, 4 by 4's were required and were in short supply.
- b) Some officers knowledge of the poaching laws was nebulous this resulted in a perceived lack of positive action in some instances.
- c) Cancelled rest days were causing disquiet and a lowering of moral on operational days.
- d) The amount of officers involved was seen as unwieldy with officers spending large amounts of time chasing around the division one step behind the coursers.
- e) Communication although reasonably good suffered in radio black spots, some of these areas being amongst the prime coursing areas.
- f) A perceived lack of an intelligence led approach to the operation.
- g) Officers indicated that offenders saw the area as ideal and were not overly concerned with police action.

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Hare Coursing A Guide to Police Officers (Joint Eastern Counties Working Party on Hare Coursing)

From this source we were able to take cognisance of the views of the Joint Eastern Counties Working Party on Hare Coursing who produced the guide. The guide included advice on offences, factors for farmers to consider, practical solutions and what landowners could be encouraged to do.

With the analysis completed a further meeting took place between the parties and the following responses agreed.

Response to the problem

Response One

Command and Control Data showed that weekdays were the busier days for coursing and not as had been thought the weekend days.

Operational days were programmed in for the hot spot days.

Response Two

The resource spend could not be sustained and had been shown from the analysis too ineffective.

A pool of twelve officers were hand picked from which four would work any given operational day.

Response Three

Patchy knowledge of the poaching laws had been identified as being an issue.

PC Carter and Ms Brown liased with the Force Legal Department to identify usable offences from the myriad available.

The team of twelve officers was given a training day at which the poaching laws were discussed. Outside agencies were invited to give presentations, the RSPCA, Fisheries and Customs and Excise obliged.

Response Five

Inappropriate allocation of vehicles had been raised as an issue.

Two 4 by 4 vehicles were identified on the division and instruction given that Operation Sparrow would have first call on them on operational days.

Response Six

Cancelled rest days had caused disquiet amongst officers involved and were causing kickbacks on division with re rostered rest days.

No rest days would be cancelled to facilitate the operation.

Response Seven

Limited use of intelligence had led to limited results.

Command and Control data would be used to inform directed patrols. This would be supported by active use of intelligence from farmers generated by officer visits to high frequency locations and via feedback direct to Countryside Watch.

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Response Eight

The support of the RSPCA was seen as beneficial but due to the size of the operation had been dissipated and had not been effective.

The RSPCA inspectors would work alongside the officers, this was easy to achieve due to reduced operation size.

Response Nine

Communication had been problematic due to the large area covered and black spots for radios.

Allocation of two mobile phones to the operation one for each vehicle, thus allowing easy contact between the vehicles and from control direct to the officers without waiting for clear air.

Ordinance Survey maps were purchased to allow precise locations to be identified, farmers were encouraged by Countryside Watch to give map references when reporting instances of illegal hare coursing.

Response Ten

Offenders lack of concern with regard to police action.

A proactive approach to any offences revealed was expounded to the officers. The training day had identified an offence that did not have a requirement to have witnessed hare coursing, being on the land with a dog was enough, this became our main tool.

All con and use offences were actively sought out. Officers were also supplied with tank dipping kits by Customs and Excise thus enabling offences of illegal use of red diesel to be prosecuted.

The RSPCA agreed to prosecute any offences of animal cruelty and actively sought stolen dogs by use of microchip scanners.

Response Eleven

An operational order was written to support the operation and ensure that the new ethos and drive was elucidated to the officers concerned.

Response Twelve

The analysis had revealed that many officers had little confidence in the operation.

In an effort to enhance the, operation and show management support for it bright and shiny things were purchased. Two hard impact boxes to carry all the required equipment, boxes of vinyl gloves, maps, dipping kits, torches, medical kits in case of dog bites. Welly boots were provided if required and packed: lunches, and as mentioned 4 by 4 vehicles and additional training.

Response Thirteen

The media had always shown an interest in hare coursing and the response to it.

It was decided to aggressively seek media releases to advertise the new approach.

Response Fourteen

The operation had traditionally been managed by an acting inspector this was seen as problematic due to the rapid change over in the particular post.

The operation was tasked to Inspector Alderson to manage for the division, he had recently arrived from Cambridge City and as such was unlikely to be posted away from the division for at least a year.

Ms Brown and PC Carter were seen as key players and as such worked hand in hand with Inspector Alderson. Inspector Tricky from the RSPCA was identified as the link person with that organisation.

Response Fifteen

Lack of knowledge of hare coursing had been identified within the Force Control Room.

Ms Brown gave training sessions to FCR operators on hare coursing.

Response Sixteen

An Aide Memoir was produced and supplied to officers to assist in the proactive approach to hare coursing.

Response Seventeen

The forces helicopter was authorised for use on a call out basis for the operation. It was used with success on the first operational day.

Response Eighteen

Regular meetings were to held between the **management team, with Mr Haddow being updated as required.**

Now we have the responses how do we implement them?

The responses were ordered to ensure that the operation began from a firm base and was not seen as a knee jerk reaction to a problem. Thus they were implemented prior to the beginning of the season.

Continuing analysis

The very nature of the offence meant that constant analysis using all the sources available was carried out throughout the year.

Changes as a result of the ongoing analysis.

- a) The hot spot days quickly reverted to weekend days.

The operational days were changed accordingly to weekend days.

Some individuals were identified as repeat offenders.

By the use of PNC and information from officers, letters were sent to individuals outlining what Operation Sparrow was about and where they fitted into it.

- b) Placing Control Room staff in the Major Incident Room along with a Countryside Watch, member had always controlled the operation; this became difficult due to staffing levels in the control room.

The Countryside Watch member moved into the main area of the control room and worked directly with the Central Division operators. There was no perceived reduction in effectiveness caused by this move.

Review 1999-2000 Season

At the end of the season Superintendent Haddow chaired a meeting between the management team, the following analysis was evaluated.

Command and Control data.

Debrief sheets from officers involved, including the RSPCA inspectors.

Prosecution data.

Costing.

Feedback from farmers again via Countryside Watch.

Media returns.

Results

- a) This evaluation showed that we had not achieved our stated object of a reduction in hare coursing. (See Appendix B)
- b) There had not been any decrease in prosecutions, they remained at 30 for the season.
- c) Evidence at b) was taken to show that our objective of increased knowledge amongst our officers had been successful.
- d) With the reduction in resource spend the costing came in very favourably. (See Appendix C)
- e) The operation was seen as being a multi-agency affair with the Countryside Watch, RSPCA and Cambridgeshire Constabulary being active members and the Customs and Excise being sleeping partners. Whilst the farmers were appreciative of our efforts they had not seen any reduction in incidents of hare coursing and voiced their concerns.

The objectives 2000 -- 2001.

From the analysis at the end of the 1999-2000 season we set our objectives for the forthcoming season.

1. To reduce instances of hare coursing in the Central Division.
2. Reduce the fear of crime in the rural areas.
3. Retain the resource spend at 1999-2000 levels.
4. Increase the membership of Countryside Watch.
5. Retain prosecution levels.
6. Target known offenders.

Defining the problem by analysis.

The analysis techniques and sources used for the 1999-2000 season were retained.

A meeting was held prior to the new season between the new Central Division Operations Manager, Superintendent Sunman, Ms Brown, PC Carter, RSPCA Inspector Tricky and Inspector Alderson now the Huntingdon Sector Commander to discuss the analysis.

Inspector Alderson's new post meant that additional support from the constabulary was required and as such Inspector Skepper was added to the team. Inspector Skepper took on the managing of the operational days but it was deemed important to keep the continuity of the operation together and as such Inspector Alderson remained to head the operation.

Police Command and Control Data

This was used as in the previous year to identify that the weekend days remained the busiest days, it identified the hot spot areas and again identified offenders and the vehicles used.

Feedback from farmers

This confirmed that we still had a problem and that the population of brown hares was still with us and had not migrated.

Prosecution data

This confirmed that the legislation being used was suitable for our aims and was understood by magistrates.

Staff Office data

This confirmed that we had not cancelled rest days and that we had been able to resource the operation without difficulty.

Feedback from officers

The officers confirmed that problems of the previous year had largely been resolved. They advised the management team of the following:

- a) The small size of the operation meant that they felt better able to react to calls for service.
- b) **The use of 4 by 4 vehicles had greatly enhanced their capabilities.**
- c) The use of mobile phones had resolved much of the communication problems.
- d) The use of analysis to target their efforts was seen as having a direct result on prosecutions.
- e) But that further benefits could be abstracted from the analysis, the main one being the targeting of the areas where the coursers gathered prior to moving onto the fields. This information had come to light from Command and Control data, and feedback from both the farmers and the officers.
- f) Importantly moral amongst the officers was high.

Res^pponses 2000-2001

Response One

Operational days were programmed in for the hot spot days.

Response Two

The two 4 by 4 vehicles were retained and earmarked for Operation Sparrow operational days.

Response Three

Command and Control data would be used to inform directed patrols. This would be supported by active use of intelligence from farmers generated by officer visits to high frequency locations and via feedback direct to Countryside Watch.

Response Four

The RSPCA inspectors would continue to work alongside the officers.

Response Five

It was decided to continue to seek media releases to advertise the operation.

Response Six

The operation would remain with Inspector Alderson but that Inspector Skepper would manage the operational days.

Response Seven

Officers would continue to be directed by analysis and intelligence and would actively target identified gathering areas for coursers and those individuals identified as being involved in illegal hare coursing.

Response Eight

The management team would regularly meet to review the operation.

Continuing analysis

Again constant analysis was undertaken throughout the season from the sources.

Changes as a result.

- a) Operation Saddell (ALF Demonstrations around Huntingdon Life Sciences) meant that we had to ensure that we balanced our operation against the larger needs of this operation.

Thus we reduced Operation Sparrow days to once a month as opposed to the normal two.

We ensured that Operation Sparrow did not clash with Operation Saddell days.

- b) The foot and mouth outbreak meant that we had to revise the operation. Farmers were keen that we ran the operation as they were concerned about persons running over their fields.

An operation was run over two days with a remit of only attending direct calls for service and not employing the usual mobile patrol policy.

- c) We found that we could leave the notification of the operational days to the very last minute thus reducing the risks of leaks to those involved in illegal coursing.

Review 2000-2001 Season

At the end of the season Superintendent Sunman chaired a meeting between the management team, the following analysis was evaluated.

Command and Control data.

Debrief sheets from officers **involved, including the RSPCA inspectors.**

Prosecution data.

Costing.

Feedback from farmers again via Countryside Watch.

Media returns.

Results

- a) Hare coursing in the Central Division showed a 59%.
- b) Prosecutions also showed a marked decline.
- c) The costing remained favourable.
- d) Membership of the Countryside watch increased over the year from 491 to 659.
- e) Meetings to Parish Councils revealed that farmers were beginning to acknowledge a reduction in the instances of hare coursing on their land, this was seen as evidence of some impact upon the fear of crime.
- f) Media releases illuminating the decrease and the activities of the operation was published and was seen as a positive impact upon the fear of crime.

Questions

Was an external factor the reason for the decrease?

Analysis of Command and Control Data for the whole force showed that both Northern and Central Divisions had recorded substantial decreases whilst the Southern Division showed a static figure. Taking Southern as a control sample we could reasonably assume that the effects of the wet weather, which had been considered to possibly be the reason for the decrease, were not a factor.

Had we pushed the problem onto the other divisions and forces?

There is evidence for this as the Southern Division recorded a very high figure compared with Central and Northern Divisions. Also Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Royston, Herts showed no reductions for the year.

Why did the Northern Division record a reduction?

- a) Similar tactics used by a dedicated team of officers.
- b) They tended to run operations on the same days as the Central Division.
- c) The main area for coursing in the Northern Division is Thomey, which is a fairly small area.
- d) The gathering points for those coursing in the Northern Division tended to be on Central Division and as such came under the Operation Sparrow remit.
- e) There were a number of organised legal hare coursing events that tend to keep the illegal coursers away.

What next?

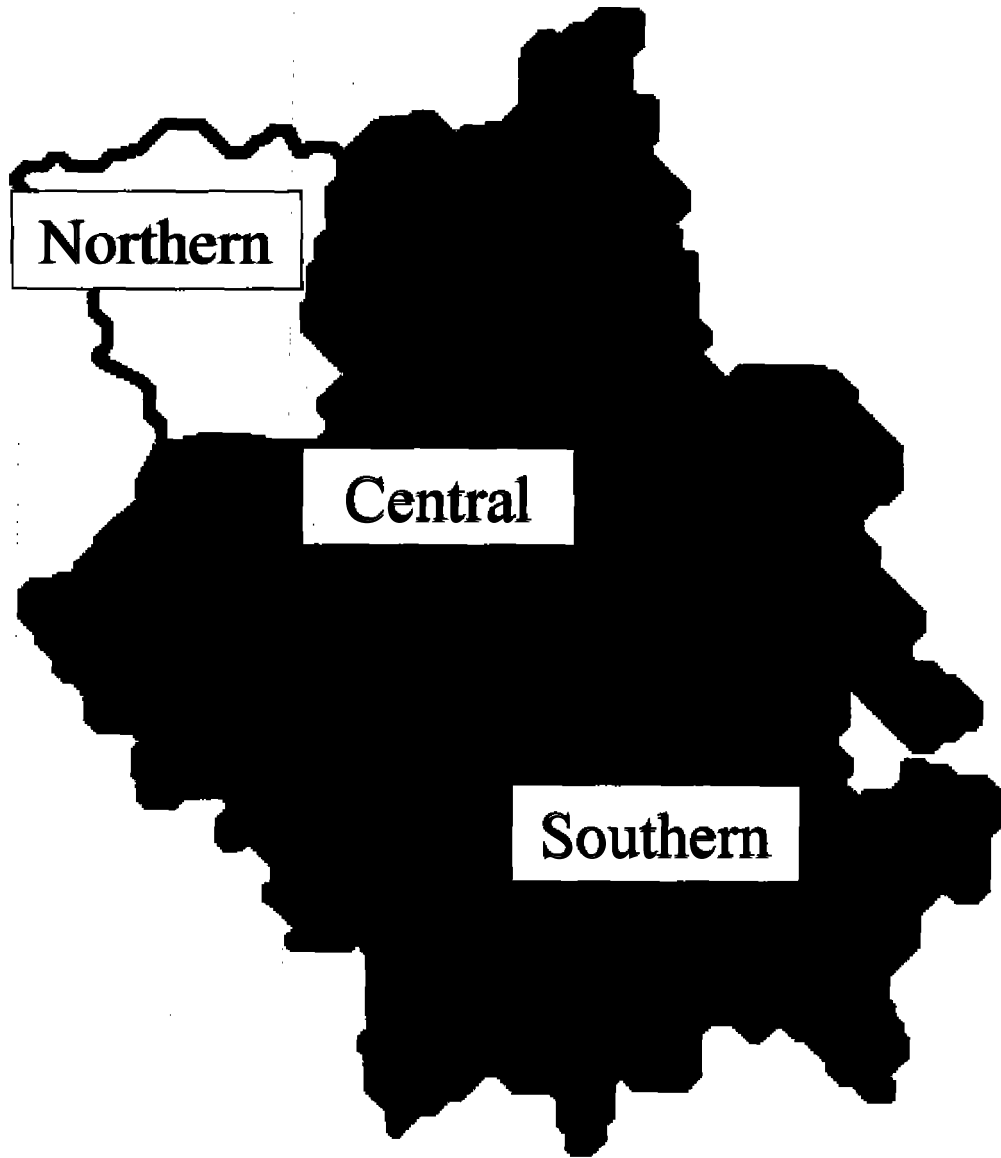
- a) The pool of twelve officers had reduced to eight by the end of 2000-2001 as a result of postings and such like. A training day is being considered for a revamped team for 2001-2002.
- b) Having possibly pushed the problem into the surrounding divisions there is an argument for a force wide operation. Opening discussions between the relevant sector commanders have been taking place.
- c) The handing over of the reins from Ms Brown, PC Carter and Inspector Alderson, the former two who are moving on, and the later who now has too many other commitments to give the operation the time it requires.

- d) **Short sharp training imputes for uniformed shifts in the Central Division on hare coursing offences to ensure some corparacy to incidents when officers other than Operation Sparrow officers attend incidents.**
- e) **The creation of a data base to hold all relevant information on the operation and to allow response officers quick advice on hare coursing legislation.**
- f) **Norfolk use a statement signed by a land agent that covers large areas, thus negating the need for individual statements in many instances from farmers. Cambridgeshire Constabularies Legal Department is currently assessing the statement.**
- g) **Further analysis prior to the setting of responses for the 2001-2002 season.**

Bibliography

- 1. *The current status of the brown hare (*Lepus eutopaeus*) in Britain,* (Hutchings, R. and Hams, S., 1996, Joint Nature Conservation Committees, Oxford University)**
- 2. *Hare Coursing A Guide to Police Officers (Joint Eastern Counties Working Party on Hare Coursing, 1996, Cambridgeshire Constabulary internal print)***

Appendix A



Appendix B

Hare coursing returns by year and by division.

Division	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Central	317	397	164
Southern	235	423	424
Northern	29	185	70
Totals	581	934	658

Appendix C

Costing by year

1998/99	1999/2000	2000/2001
f 18,930	£3,154.80	£3,679.60

Number of operations

1998/99	1999/2000	2000/2001
11	8	8

The costing represents only officer costs at constable level, and do not include vehicle hire, food, overtime, etc.

The 1998/1999 figures are conservative, due to the lack of any cost code for the operation a figure of 12 officers a day was used to arrive at the figure. In reality regular officers on operational days are known to have reached 20+ including a number of sergeants and at least 1 inspector.