

As a child I loved horses and ponies and everything to do with them. Of course, I read every pony book I could get my hands on, wanting to absorb everything I could. In many pony stories of that period it was taken for granted that taking part in fox-hunting was part of being a rider, and although I never saw hunting where I lived, close to Epping Forest, I absorbed information about etiquette such as how to greet the Master and how to care for your pony after a hard day out with the hounds. I took part in quizzes which required that kind of knowledge, too, eager to show how much I'd learned. It amounted to indoctrination: the ethics of hunting were never questioned.

Later I saw the 'doublethink' of lavishing attention, care and respect on horses and ponies while seeing foxes and even deer as prey animals. Sadly, young riders are still trained in this cognitive dissonance through the Pony Clubs attached to hunts and the encouragement given to attend children's meets during holidays and half-terms.

The good news is that it's impossible to imagine the publication of a present-day story for young readers in which fox-hunting or even 'trail hunting' is perfectly acceptable; it'd never get past the 'gatekeepers' of the book world. In fiction for young readers, hunting is now firmly in the past – where, in my opinion, it belongs.