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**'Animal Maiming in the New Forest as an instrument of protest and punishment, during the wardenship of the Duke of Bedford: 1746-1771'.**

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Abstract

During the Duke of Bedford's tenure as Lord Warden of the New Forest, many instances of animal maiming were documented in the correspondence with his assistants, estate managers and Forest officials. These included accounts of the stabbing of horses, injuries to cattle, poisoning of dogs and killing of deer. The motives for conducting acts of maiming have been closely associated with forms of covert political protest, such as poaching, breaking enclosures and burning hayricks, which were generally committed as part of an organised campaign of discontent. However, attacks on animals were also undertaken as a form of punishment or petty revenge, with the animal acting as a proxy for its owner. The cases in the New Forest, I will argue, were also acts perpetrated to frustrate the Lord Warden's attempts to advance his policy for protecting the venison and vert, by intimidating his keepers and law-abiding tenants. I will also contend, that in some cases the perpetrators were not actually demonstrating against their own discontent but were being incited by senior officials to use such violence in order to disguise high-level dissatisfaction with Bedford's attempts to correct the maladministration of the Forest and to hide their own corrupt activities.