



Operation Randall

tackling rural crime
Newsletter

Issue 33 | April 2023

 @RuralCrimeNfk

Introduction

Welcome to another newsletter, I'm sorry for the lack of a newsletter last month - unfortunately, due to operational reasons, it's been difficult to find the time to sit down and put this together.

Which leads nicely on to my next line: it's been a busy couple of months! Alongside all the rural jobs, we were also called on to provide support following the discovery of the World War II bomb in Yarmouth. As a team we provided 24/7 drone cover to monitor the situation and the cordon put in place. This took us away for several days as we all know.

We have also had the end of a couple of cases, some joint operations with other agencies alongside all the daily jobs, patrols, and crime prevention visits and of course, the new investigations that have come into the team. I will touch on a few of these later in the newsletter.

In addition, we have started another round of training with colleagues in the control room. This includes delivering basic rural and wildlife crime training to all call takers, including our 101 call takers who take 1000s of calls a week. I have long felt that the training we deliver to our control room is essential as they're often the first people everyone talks to. Of course, there's a lot of information for them to remember and if they don't know the answer...they'll know who to contact.

Later this month we will be at the Euston Game and Country Fair on Saturday and Sunday the 22nd and 23rd of April. This is an event that the Special Constabulary do a fantastic job of organising and we will join them alongside Suffolk Rural Crime Team too, do come and see us!

Heritage Crime

This month we have produced two leaflets to educate and inform the metal detecting community. One that offers more information on the responsibilities of the metal detector to secure permission to detect on private land and another that explains the offence of nighthawking and how it can be reported to the police. Nighthawking remains a problem and is when metal detectorists enter land without permission from the owner, and detect – despite the name this very much happens during the day and night! These have been distributed to the Local Finds Liaison Officer at Norwich Museum and a local metal detecting club.

We have also introduced a new Heritage Community Rural Advisory Group (CRAG) that will meet quarterly. This new group will include representatives from the Norfolk Archaeological Trust, PAS, National Trust, Historic England and English Heritage. This will focus on issues that affect our shared historical assets.



NEED TO TALK TO US?

PC Chris Shelley | christopher.shelley@norfolk.police.uk | 07900 407106

Hare Coursing—OP Galileo

So, at this point of the year, although we consider the season finished at the end of March, we also know hare coursing can happen all-year-round and we continue to ask people to be vigilant and report any concerns to us. Generally, we see far fewer incidents in the coming months as the crops start to grow too tall for offenders to use sight hounds on prey and the ground starts to become too firm and runs the risk of injuring the dogs. Although we haven't finished assessing this year's numbers, I think it's clear to say without too much trouble that the number of reports of hare coursing are well below what we've seen in previous years. In fact, this continues the downward trend as we have seen a rapid decline in recent years of the number of hare coursing incidents reported to us. Just a few years' ago, we were receiving more than 300 calls a year - a quick look at this year and I know we don't have anything close to that figure. We know hare coursing continues to be an issue and it's one we're determined to tackle as a rural crime team and indeed, as a police force. I think the changes in legislation that give us greater powers and create new offences, as well as better collaboration with forces and partners across the county – for example, the national OP Galileo but also, more locally, as part of our 7 region approach – have helped to significantly reduce the number of reported incidents with all forces reporting a decline in calls. That said, I can report that in February PC Lovelock from the rural crime team and local officers from Breckland reported four individuals for going equipped for hare coursing after being found acting suspiciously. Their vehicle was seized, and we're investigating further.

Nesting Birds/OP Easter

We are now well into the bird nesting season with many of our early breeders well into their spring/summer

season. I have seen Swans laying on nests with eggs, the crows in the trees building their huge untidy nests and even seen some very early ducklings.

In this season, it is important to remember all wild birds' nests are protected when being built and when in use. So, if you need to cut any trees, hedges or do any work in your guttering, roofing arches or even garage rafters please be mindful. If you have a nest present, you must not remove it until the Autumn once the season is finished.

This month also sees the launch of the national operation, OP Easter which is aptly named as it involves tackling egg theft. Fortunately, this isn't such a large issue as it once was but it's one we all need to be aware of. If anyone knows of any individuals taking or collecting eggs illegally, please contact us as soon as possible.

Poaching

An area of emerging concern for us in the last few weeks is illegal poaching of deer and other species including geese. Many of these are now being targeted out of season and from land on which we know those responsible do not have permission to be on. They are not only stealing from the land, but they are also causing significant damage.

We have been notified of several bags of deer carcasses, and carcasses themselves left at the side of the road mainly in the Breckland and Broadland areas, and we are increasing patrols in the areas in question. We are also looking at any forensic opportunities available to us. Please let us know if you or anyone you know is offered any meat, particularly venison, from an unusual source or you have any information on those individuals involved.

WhatsApp Group

The Operation Randall WhatsApp group is expanding. At present the group mainly consists of partner agencies, key landowners and administrators of other social media rural groups. I am currently looking at increasing the size of this group so if you meet one or more of the above criteria – work for a partner agency, key landowner or you administer another rural group on social media - or if you think you would benefit or be able to contribute in any way, I want to hear from you. You can contact me on email at christopher.shelley@norfolk.pnn.police.uk

Wildlife Crime

One of the reasons why it wasn't possible to share the newsletter last month was because of a report we received concerning an incident in Hingham. I've shared our latest press release below for further details. This investigation remains very much ongoing.

'Three men arrested in connection with an incident in Hingham have been released on police bail.

Officers were called to Hingham shortly after 3.30pm on Monday 20 February 2023 following a report that a group of dogs had entered the garden of a private property in the village without permission and killed a fox.

Following enquiries, officers arrested two men aged in their 20s from the Swaffham area on suspicion of hunting wild mammals with dogs, criminal damage and having a dog dangerously out of control.

A man aged in his 60s from the Beccles area was also arrested on suspicion of hunting a wild mammal with dogs and having a dog dangerously out of control.

They were taken to Wymondham Police Investigation Centre for questioning and have been released on police bail while enquiries continue.

In terms of other wildlife investigations, we have been involved in 19 investigations to varying degrees over the last two months. Sadly, we have sadly seen several dead raptors (Buzzards, Kestrels and Red Kites) reported in some unusual circumstances. To date, every one that we have submitted for lab analysis has returned a negative result for shot but has tested positive for Avian Influenza. This means no further testing can be done to establish if that was the reason for the death or indeed if there are other natural underlying issues or something more sinister. We continue to work with the RSPB, Defra and APHA to keep an accurate record of what is found and where. Work is also ongoing with the National Wildlife Crime Unit to look at further testing beyond the AI diagnosis because while it's quite possible AI was the reason for death, we always want to completely rule out foul play.

We have also had several badger sett disturbance offences and suspicious deaths. We've completed some x-ray analysis for some of the badgers which have showed that the death is highly likely to be a road traffic collision. This is something you

traditionally tend to see a little more of at this time of the year as badgers' hierarchal set up means that some lesser family members can be pushed out of the sett as young is born to 'stronger' females. Of the badger sett disturbance offences, one was later confirmed as a fox den and with the landowner's permission, we captured some lovely footage. The landowner is really pleased as he is looking to encourage wildlife, and I can honestly say I have never seen such a large fox den – it was amazing to see. The other one we dealt with this month involved some work on a tree that was carried out above ground on top of the badger sett. This is always very difficult to deal with as there is some discussion about how much disturbance a badger can take above ground. However, suitable advice was given by officers and no further work will be carried out at this location until the correct licence is in place.

Speaking of licences, sadly, we have had several activities carried out without official Natural England licences being in place. We are currently dealing with two bat offences where building work has destroyed or modified a bat roost that is protected all year round.

There is also an incident involving work on a pond on a building site before the licence has been authorised and paid for, which means the work completed around a pond is highly likely to have disturbed hibernating Great Crested Newts and therefore illegal. These three all remains ongoing currently and discussions are ongoing with relevant authorities in how best to deal with these matters. Not all these cases end up in court and may be suitable for out of court agreements and disposals to further enhance habitat recovery.

Another incident which is currently being dealt with by local officers is an incident in which a person's cat, which was missing for a number of days, has returned home with a Gin trap on its legs. Fortunately, the cat is OK but these traps have been illegal for more than 60 years and yet, incredibly, we pick up a couple of these illegally set every year. A gin trap is a spring trap that basically has teeth edges (as per below) and although it isn't illegal to own a Gin trap, it must never be set. If you are using a spring trap of any kind, it must be set up so not to catch untargeted species so it must be in a tunnel or artificial cover, and correctly fitted baffles.

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This week we picked up a legal fenn trap that was set in a tunnel made of two roofing slates! This means there was absolutely nothing in place to stop untargeted species (hedgehogs, birds, stoats etc.) entering the trap and either becoming injured or killed. This is illegal and simply not good enough. There are many organisations out there that can provide training and advice, as well as rural crime officers.

Looking at some of the cases we have closed this month, some of you may remember the Otter that was killed in a trap in the Diss area last year. It was decided that this would be dealt with out of court using a community resolution – this was completed this month with some really positive outcomes for local wildlife. Sadly, we will never be able to replace the Otter that was killed, but the community resolution measures should enhance the habitat for many years to come and we are confident all involved have learnt from this mistake.

Catalytic Converter Thefts

Work is continuing to combat catalytic converter thefts after a spike across Norfolk.

So far in 2023 more than 100 such thefts have been reported.

The figures compare to a total of 12 in 2019 rising to 165 in the whole of 2022.

Norfolk Police is working to tackle the crime and is spreading the word about crime prevention, spotting suspicious activity, and reporting it promptly via 999.

Data shows some cars are more popular than others among thieves.

In Norfolk 43pc of vehicles targeted were either Toyota (mainly Auris and Prius) or Honda (predominantly Jazz, Civic or CR-V) models.

Officers are also now working with dealerships and asking them to ensure their customers are aware of the full range of crime prevention options.

Sgt Jason Ellis said: “We have seen a sharp rise in the number of catalytic converter thefts across Norfolk this year with the latest spate being across the north of the county.

“In response we are working with the public and dealerships to spread the word about security thereby making the devices harder to steal for thieves who are often in a hurry and looking for a quick hit.

“We have also introduced investigative and intelligence-led actions to disrupt those responsible.

“The advice is to take steps to protect your vehicle whether parking at home or in public and to report any suspicious activity such as people trying to get under cars.”

Police suggest members of the public consider the following points to reduce the likelihood of this type of crime taking place:

Alarms, lighting and CCTV can help deter criminals targeting vehicles.

Catalytic converters can be marked with etchings or spray-painted with heat-resistant paint to help identify them as your own.

Keep vehicles in secure buildings or garages where possible, or in well-lit, less isolated areas.

Park your vehicles in a way that would make access to catalytic converters more difficult.

Some dealerships offer free forensic marking and can advise on other preventative measures like installing a Catloc device.

Initially the thefts were reported in large, public car parks during the day but more recently have been happening in residential streets and driveways at night. People who spot anything suspicious are asked not to approach but to report it.

Catalytic converters are emission control devices fitted as part of the exhaust system.

They are stolen because they contain valuable metals.

Hybrid models are among the most popular because the dual power source means the metals are less polluted and corroded.

You can report information on catalytic converter theft by calling 999 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

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Dogs Worrying Livestock/OP Seabird

This month will see the launch of the spring element of OP Seabird - the national project launched to protect wildlife along our coast. We are lucky to have an amazing coastline in Norfolk that is rich in wildlife. One of those species most at risk currently is the Ringed Plover who choose to nest on a large part of our North Norfolk coast around The Wash. These birds, their nests, chicks and eggs are incredibly vulnerable to both natural predation, weather and outside elements without the intentional and accidental interference humans have.

These tiny birds nest on the stone bank/dunes and their nest is nothing more than a few pebbles with eggs laid in among the pebbles. The eggs could fall vulnerable to hedgehogs, foxes or even magpies. The RSPB launched Plovers in Peril – a project in which they monitor the nests along the Heachem and Snettisham area with the support of volunteer wardens who offer advice to keep people away from cordoned off areas to prevent them from damaging these beautiful birds' nests. One of the biggest issues, of course, is dogs who are off their leads and entering these zones. These birds are currently categorised as 'red list' and are in dramatic decline and need all our help. They also nest further along the coast, including at Holkham.

Although all the areas in question are cordoned off with ropes and signs, sadly we still see people entering these areas. This is obviously disappointing as it's only for a few months of the year and affects a small part of the larger beach. Please follow any signs keeping dogs on lead where required as this can make a huge difference. We will be out this spring and summer encouraging people to abide by the signs around our coastline. There will also be some ground-nesting birds inland (namely the Skylarks and Lapwings) which will need our help so, please always observe any signs.

Regarding dogs, this is an important time in the sheep farming calendar. I am sure you have already seen some lambs out in the limited sunshine we have had and there

will be many more over the next few months. Please keep your dogs on leads around any livestock as you never know how they will react. They may have been fine previously but if the livestock reacts differently, then your dog could react very differently too...and you could end up in court because of your dog's actions.

April in the Countryside

As the temperatures start to consistently remain warm, the countryside comes alive over the next few weeks. The hedges are already turning green, and many trees will start to show life. I would encourage everyone now to be very careful around doing any work in hedges in gardens etc, as birds start to build and occupy nests. Birds will of course nest in unusual places too (post-boxes, bins and plant pots amongst many others). Remember that all nests whilst being built and in use are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act no matter where they are located. You will probably see many more tits and finches in hedges and similar as they become more active in their breeding season.

One of my favourite sites of spring is the return of the swallows (probably our most well-known migratory bird) and we should start to see them returning. Many of our other native species who spend most of the winter months hidden up in warmer areas become much more active. If you're lucky enough you could see badgers, hedgehogs, butterflies, and dormouse.

A lot of woods will start to have a distinctive purple to blue carpet where our beautiful native bluebells start to appear. Sadly, these all too often are targeted by thieves, and I ask anyone who witnesses someone uprooting bluebells to contact police immediately. They are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and all wild native plants are protected from being uprooted.

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Farms will be hitting a very busy period, many of our dairy and cattle farms will be looking at turning the cattle out. If you ever get the opportunity to watch cattle being turned out on to spring grass, take a moment to watch them. The moves they can pull for such a large animal is incredible to watch. I have already seen plenty of very young lambs around which is always lovely to see especially in the sun. Again, if you can sit and watch a field of ewes and lambs you may be lucky enough to see all the lambs playing together. You will often see the ewes quietly getting on and the lambs – often groups of between 30-40 lambs - all playing together. It's a brilliant sight to behold.

Many farmers will be breathing a sigh of relief as they turn out their stock in the coming weeks, look at their food and bedding stocks and see that all last year's hard work paid off. However, there is little rest. Preparations started back in Autumn 2021 for Winter 2022 with the planting of crops like winter barley and winter wheat, many grass fields would have had preparations too.

This month will see fertilising taking place alongside pest and weed control methods to make sure that this summer's harvest is good enough to see their livestock through Winter 2023. If we get a warm enough April, we may even see the first cut of silage taking place. The ideal time to cut the grass for silage is roughly a week before the full head of seed appears. This is when the plant contains the optimum amount of sugar and energy to produce the best quality feed.

As we move into the summer months and more grass is turned into silage and hay, it's important that visitors to the countryside take all their rubbish with them. If the litter ends up going through the machines and being digested by cattle and sheep, it can cause them serious harm. Enjoy the countryside, respect it and leave it how you found it!

Conclusion

Thanks for taking the time to read this month's newsletter. If you have any questions or concerns around anything included in this month's newsletter or would like to discuss anything else, please get in touch.

Let's hope we can start to enjoy some spring sun in the coming month!

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Press Appeals

Appeal following incident in West Norfolk

Officers are appealing for witnesses following an incident in West Norfolk last night.

At 9.20pm (Thursday 30 March 2023), we were called by a member of the public to reports of suspicious activity in Manor Road, Dersingham. Officers attended and confirmed a catalytic converter had been stolen from a Honda Jazz. Following further enquiries a black BMW was stopped on the A47 at Walpole Highway, Wisbech at 5.21am.

Two people fled the scene in the Mill Road area, in the direction of Terrington St John.

They are described as white males, about 6ft, wearing grey tracksuits.

Officers are now attempting to trace those individuals.

Anyone with information, CCTV or dashcam footage should contact Sergeant Charlotte Walker on 101, quoting CAD 451 of 30 March 2023.

Alternatively, you can call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously.

Police warning over suspected car buying scam

Police have issued a warning after two incidents targeting people in Norfolk who are selling their cars.

In both cases three men have visited a private seller after dark and tampered with the vehicle being advertised for sale.

The suspects then offer a lower than advertised price for it.

The first incident happened in Taverham, Norwich, on 15 March 2023 when three males went to look at a car that was advertised for sale (crime number

36/20412/23).

The owner believes that while he was distracted they did something to the engine which meant that during a test drive plumes of smoke came out of the back of the vehicle.

Claiming there was something wrong with it the suspects offered £6,000 less than the asking price, which he declined.

The owner has now been left with costs to rectify the problem.

The second incident happened in Holt on March 16 2023 (crime number 36/19291/23).

The victim who was selling his car was visited by three men he believes put something into the engine, then claimed there was something wrong with it.

They knocked the price down by more than £1,000 and after counting the cash the victim discovered it was still more than £100 short of the agreed price. Officers are keen to hear from anyone with information or dashcam or doorbell footage that could help the investigation.

They also advise caution when selling high value items and to arrange any viewings in daylight hours. If your vehicle suddenly develops a fault you should also question what has happened, and be aware of any distractions when potential buyers come to view your vehicle.

If you are concerned do not go ahead with the deal. Anyone with information should contact PC Andrew Saunders on 101 or email investigate@norfolk.police.uk.

Alternatively, contact Crimestoppers anonymously via 0800 555 111.

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