



Issue 34 | May 2023

 @RuralCrimeNfk

Operation Randall

tackling rural crime
Newsletter

Introduction

This month sees us moving into hopefully the warmer months of the year which bring long days for all to enjoy. It also gives us an opportunity to visit many summer events where we can engage with lots of people from various backgrounds. I will touch on a few that have already taken place and future plans.

This month has been busy. Myself and PC Alex Lovelock visited a charity Young Farmers Clay Shoot at Swaffham a couple weeks ago, sunny fresh day with many people of all ages enjoying a good day of sport. We spent around an hour or so having a chat with various groups and giving an opportunity for people to raise queries and concerns.

I also crossed the border a few feet into Suffolk to the RSPB reserve at Lakenheath (big thank you to the reserve for hosting us!) to film a special project for a TV program which, all being well, should go out at the end of this month. Keep an eye on socials for confirmation of when this is going out.

Myself, PC Alex Lovelock and PC Chris Holmes have received a day's training to be able to drive our ATV (All-Terrain Vehicle) which will give us

opportunities to get to hard to reach areas and cover much bigger areas on patrols. We hope to deploy the vehicle a few times over the summer period before it will really come into its own, patrolling our countryside in relation to hare coursing and monitoring hunting with hounds and those who protest.

On top of that we further engagements with a local YFC, visited Norfolk Wildlife Trust at Holme Dunes to discuss a few issues, attended the Euston Game and Country Fair alongside all the normal day to day police work - it's been a busy one!

Fishing Closed Season

Since March 15 the closed fishing season has been in place and remains in place until June 15. During this time, its an offence to fish on any rivers in the county and we will continue patrol key areas alongside our Environment Agency colleagues.

The reason for the closed season is it allows our native species to spawn and repopulate our rivers for the year ahead. The closed season does not apply to most private fishing lakes and similar but some clubs do impose their own rules so be mindful of this when heading to the lakes.



NEED TO TALK TO US?

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

Menscraft—a men’s mental health and wellbeing charity

I want to share details of Menscraft - a men’s mental health and wellbeing charity. We know rural isolation and mental ill health exists in our rural communities, and Menscraft runs a variety of activities and programmes. I’ll let Steve Hunt – the charity’s Breckland co-ordinator, tell you more about it below:

Menscraft is a men’s mental health and well-being charity run by a non-clinical team based at Norwich’s Maddermarket. As well as providing one-to-one support for those facing life’s challenges, they also run social groups called Pit Stops, and around these, other activities, and programmes such as fishing, walking, snooker, music appreciation, woodland experiences, and anything else you can think of or suggest.

There are 13 Pit Stops running weekly across Norfolk and Steve Hunt runs the Dereham branch on Tuesday 2-4pm at the Memorial Hall, Watton on Wednesdays at The Charlotte Harvey Community Centre 2-4pm, and Thetford on Thursdays at the Charles Burrell Centre 2-4pm.

The idea for the Pit Stop came about by using a metaphor for men and cars. “Some of us are old bangers (like me!), but there’s room in our garage for shiny new models too. A lot of us need a good valeting... but, being blokes, we tend to put it off for as long as we can. We’re not always that careful about the quality of the fuel we put in the tank, and an oil change is overdue. Above all else, we need our Pit Crew: a group of other people to help maintain ourselves and enable us to be our best selves so that we can be better brothers, sons, partners and fathers.”

The Pit Stop brings men together through activities

and conversation to build friendship, connection, and a sense of belonging. The inspiration for these Pit Stops is the idea of men functioning best when they have the solidarity of their own pit crew: other men who they can regularly check-in with for support, understanding, laughter, light-hearted and stimulating discussion and activity.

Wildlife Crime

I am pleased to say this month hasn’t seen any major issues. PC Holmes has completed an investigation in to a bat roost entrance being destroyed/blocked. This was done without the correct mitigation in place at the time this has since been implemented and the individual involved has been dealt with using an out of court disposal. There is no excuse when it comes to wildlife for not understanding the law when carrying out work around protected species, please be mindful of this.

We have seen a number of reports of nesting birds being disturbed or nests destroyed by hedge work. A couple of these reports remain under review as to whether they meet the criminal threshold - it is a criminal offence to destroy any nest which is being built or active. Where possible please avoid doing any work on trees and hedges until the end of the Summer.

Over the last week we have also received a report of a number of dead ducks and pigeons turning up in Swaffham, evidence suggest these have been killed using ball bearings. We are looking at investigative opportunities in relation to this but if anyone knows anything about this matter is encouraged to contact us.

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

Operation Easter

The national enforcement campaign to protect our nesting wild birds is underway for 2023.

Egg thieves will go to any lengths to raid the nests of rare wild birds. Operation EASTER is determined to stop them in their tracks.

The taking of wild bird eggs is a serious crime yet it remains an illicit hobby for some determined individuals. Whole clutches of eggs can be taken from some of the UK's rarest birds with potentially devastating impacts. The eggs are stored in secret collections.

Detective Inspector Mark Harrison from the UK NWCUC says: "Operation Easter has stood for over a quarter century and this is a vital piece of police work that could easily go overlooked. "This year we are stepping up our attempts to protect the UK's rarest birds of prey from would be thieves as we have seen the increase in wild taken chicks and eggs that have entered the legitimate falconry industry. This criminality causes us some concern for the ongoing nature status of the some of the world's most iconic birds of prey. The NWCUC co-ordinate the policing response, ensuring dedicated Police Wildlife Crime Officers from the participating UK police forces receive an up to date intelligence briefing, problem solving plans and access to specialist investigators from the NWCUC. As always, the success of this operation relies of the public who are our eyes and ears and our key partners who raise the profile of such crimes to keep them a priority for UK wildlife crime policing." Operation EASTER was developed in Scotland 26 years ago. The operation is now facilitated by the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCUC) in conjunction with police forces and partner agencies across the UK. The operation targets egg thieves by sharing intelligence and supporting enforcement action.

In recent years, the operation has also been expanded to cover some emerging trends of criminal behaviour such as the online trade in eggs and the disturbance of nests for photography.

If you have any information on egg thieves, or those who disturb rare nesting birds without a license, you should contact your local police by dialling 101 - ask to speak to a wildlife crime officer if possible. Nesting will be in full swing in April so please contact the police if you see anyone acting suspiciously around nesting birds.

Information can also be passed in confidence to Crimestoppers

via 0800 555 111.

Dogs on leads/Countryside Code

This month saw the launch of the national OP Seabird campaign for 2023. As many will be aware, we focus our patrols in relation to OP Seabird during the winter months around our seal colonies at Winterton and to a lesser extent Horsey. During the summer we move around the coast to our extremely vulnerable ground nesting birds at places like Holkham, Holme Dunes, Snettisham and Heachem. Many of these beaches will have cordoned off areas to allow these birds to nest in peace. These birds, in particular the Little Tern, is in massive decline and currently red listed as a species of most concern, their nests are so vulnerable to predators as well as equally intentional and unintentional disturbance by humans. Please respect the cordoned off areas and please keep dogs on leads where signs are to assist the protecting of this amazing birds. Just because your dog is well behaved, if someone sees your dog off the lead the next person thinks their dog can be off the lead and so on. It creates a chain reaction please obey the signs in place they are there for a reason and we all just need to do our little bit to help.

The key message for the OP Seabird project is Enjoy, Respect, Protect very similar to our Countryside Code for inland areas too Respect Everyone, Protect the environment, Enjoy the outdoors. You will also see such signs around keep dogs on leads in certain places due to ground nesting birds or because livestock is present. Dogs trampling over these almost invisible nests will cause irreparable damage and the worrying of livestock is another offence. There are plenty of areas designated for allowing dogs off leads should you wish to including along our coastline.

It's also important that not everyone has the same feelings towards dogs and some people could be incredibly scared by a dog coming running up to them and therefore choose to go to areas where dogs should be kept on leads – everyone has a right to enjoy our countryside and coastline without fear of what might happen please respect this.

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Building Site Thefts

Unfortunately, we are still seeing a number of the thefts from building sites. This is including everything from small plant, tools, and fuel. If you see something unusual at any of your local building and development sites please get in contact. If it doesn't look right its likely to not be!

We continue to encourage anyone who owns any tools or equipment to mark it suitably, so it is clearly marked as yours with postcode and name.

Engagements Events

As touched on, we attended the Euston Game and Country Fair a couple weekends back now which was a fantastic event. We were there with our Special Constabulary colleagues and also Suffolk Rural Crime Team, that Saturday's weather was brilliant, and Sunday wasn't bad until later in the day.

Myself and PC Sue Matthews attended a meeting of the Harleston Young Farmers Club to discuss issues affecting them as young members of the rural community. There was some really healthy discussions around many topics and they were a great bunch of young adults who we had a good laugh with.

Looking ahead this month we have been invited to an event with NFU Mutual and NFU down at Diss to discuss local crime issues in the rural community then the following month we have Open Farm Sunday June 11) and of course the Royal Norfolk Show with planning well underway for that one.

May in the Countryside

May hopefully brings us that moment to finally say Spring has sprung and summer is literally around the corner. The daffodils have nearly all started to wilt away and are replaced with the tulips in the coming weeks with all the different colours they have in the modern varieties. Snowdrops sit there simply in leaf building reserves up for next year now with our forests being carpeted by the bluebells. We are lucky in Norfolk to have some amazing bluebell forests; it is an offence to uproot any wild plant but bluebells are afforded additional protection so please enjoy the spectacle but please do not take these wild flowers. If you want to do your little bit now is a great time to plant some wildflower seeds in that corner of the garden you don't use or even just in a pot on your patio, it will provide pollen for our bees throughout the summer and will put on a real display.

If you step into our woodlands at this time of year, particularly in the early morning, you're welcomed with an absolute chorus of birds, it's enough to put a spring in anyone's step if you ask me. Many of our native birds are now in full swing - looking after egg clutches and rearing young as the month goes on, please keep your

distance from nests. Also, be mindful some smaller birds (always seems to be blue tits from experience) like to nest in obscure places (letter boxes, cigarette disposal bins, and even bins themselves) wherever they nest they are protected and need our help.

On our livestock farms most of the animals kept inside over the winter period are turned out to the meadows and marshes. I am sure you will have seen all the lambs doing well in the fields in recent weeks and you will notice they grow very quickly with the sun on their back and sugars coming into the grass too, the sight of lambs running around never gets old.

Due to the rather odd spring weather, our grass crops are a little behind as grass requires some warmth to really kick start its growth and, whilst we have had the odd warmer day, they have often been flanked with frosts either side stunting the growth. I haven't seen any silage cut yet but no doubt first cut will occur this month given the right weather conditions. Silage is a vital feed for livestock over the winter period, its basically the preserving of grass and all its goodness to feed them during the cold months. The silaging process in its simplest terms is the pickling and preserving of it either in giant clamps or bales (generally black wrapped) to preserve its goodness.

Along a similar theme, our arable farms have struggled to get the spring crops in the ground after an above average wet past couple of months, you just can't work wet soil as it will never dry. The oil seed rape is also noticeably late coming into flower this year whilst it is now in full swing creating an amazing scene of yellow fields across our countryside. The coming weeks are a vital time for arable farmers especially in Norfolk in getting next years sugar beet crop into the ground, if it isn't already, alongside fertiliser and insecticide programs. The industry is always looking at ways to reduce these inputs not only because of the current cost of them but also for the environment but they remain essential if we are to produce as much food as we need as a world. Modern technology has greatly assisted with reducing the use of these inputs as computers are now able to react to certain areas of fields needing more of something than others. This can only be a positive thing for our environment but also reduce the cost to produce the crop. Farmers and landowners do a huge amount for our environment so much of it goes unnoticed, one which you can't fail to notice at this time of year is the Lapwing scrapes. These are small pieces of land in a field which appear to have no crop growing and these are designed to give the vulnerable ground nesting bird somewhere to lay its eggs safely. Many are also reinstating hedge lines lost over the last 100 years, installing beetle banks, turning field margins to wild flower margins and so much more.

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