



Operation Randall

tackling rural crime
Newsletter

Issue 35 | June 2023

 @RuralCrimeNfk

Introduction

Welcome to another month's newsletter - it's certainly been a month to remember. I often feel very privileged to be in the role I am, tackling some of the more unusual crime types that we, as police, deal with. A very quick scan through indicates, as a team, we have dealt with; blue tits, buzzard, theft of sheep, livestock worrying, GPS thefts, access issues, illegal trail riding, bluebells, crimes at historic churches, illegal metal detecting, damage to cordons of nesting birds, great crested newts, seagulls, and so much more in such a short space of time. Police work is often seen as one of the most varied jobs and the world of rural crime takes it to a whole new level of variety.

Myself, PC Alex Lovelock and PC Chris Holmes got out in the sun one weekend this month, with our all-terrain vehicle, looking to tackle illegal and anti-social behaviour around motorbikes in Thetford Forest. Many people were pleased to see us as they enjoyed a walk or cycle. We also stopped and spoke to several motorbike riders to make them aware of what they can and can't do, making sure their vehicles were also road legal. If you wish to use an off-road bike, please do so responsibly in areas it is allowed, otherwise you could find us seizing your bike at great cost to yourself.

As I write this, the weather has taken a slightly unseasonably cold turn again. Looking ahead we do

hope the weather does improve slightly. This month, we have Open Farm Sunday on the 11th June. This is an initiative which has been around for several years now and many farms run free events for people to visit working farms. A quick search of 'Open Farm Sunday' will help you find events happening close to you. At the end of the month, on Wednesday 27th and Thursday 28th of June, we will be at the Royal Norfolk Show again. This is a fantastic event showcasing so many elements from agriculture, rural way of life and so much more. Do come and see us if you are in attendance, we will be in the emergency services village as always.

Lawnmower Thefts

With summer finally around the corner, we have started to see a few lawnmower thefts, in particular (as is often the case) ride on lawnmowers. Please consider where you store these machines. Can they be put behind unmoveable equipment (cars/trailers with wheel clamps) so they cannot be removed. Please also mark them covertly and overtly with a postcode/surname so should we recover these items we know who they belong to. They also become less attractive in the illegal second-hand market.



NEED TO TALK TO US?

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

Sheep (Lamb) Thefts

You may have seen in the news the theft of 3 lambs from Sandringham area last week.

Three women arrested on suspicion of theft after three lambs were reported stolen from a field in West Newton have been released on police bail.

The women, aged in their 20s and 30s, were arrested in Slough and taken to Maidenhead police station for questioning.

They are due to answer police bail on 6 July 2023 at King's Lynn Police Investigation Centre.

The lambs are still missing.

Anyone who has information that could help the investigation is asked to contact PC Christopher Holmes at Norfolk Police on 101 or via email at Christopher.holmes2@norfolk.police.uk quoting crime reference 36/37355/23

This follows an earlier incident this year which was reported to us has resulted in the following – this is not linked to the other incident in anyway:

A woman from Norwich has been charged with stealing a lamb and causing unnecessary suffering to an animal.

Gemma Barnes, age 33, of St Leonards Road, Norwich, was today charged with stealing a lamb and causing unnecessary suffering to an animal in Norwich on 11 April 2023. She has also been charged with two counts of witness intimidation in Norwich on 23 May 2023.

In addition, Elenor Kenny, age 18, of Ashleigh Gardens, Wymondham, has been charged with two counts of witness intimidation in Norwich on 23 May.

If you see anything suspicious or you feel uncomfortable what you are seeing in a field at any time let us know immediately. Farmers generally will not be loading 1 or 2 sheep up, or into vehicles. They will generally load large parts of the flock into a fit for purpose trailer and generally in daytime hours (likely to be earlier in the coming months to avoid peak heat).

GPS Thefts—Continue

Unfortunately, we saw another theft from a farm in relation to GPS systems this month. This is very costly for those involved in so many ways. There are a couple of points which have come out of this which are key for others to consider. This farm had several machines which were not touched, all of those were covered by overt CCTV systems whereas sadly the tractors targeted were not covered by CCTV. Make it obvious that you have taken steps to protect your property such as signs saying, 'CCTV in operation'. Do not hide your cameras.

We are starting to see farmers install aftermarket trackers which could prove beneficial moving forward – the only systems we have recovered in this country had this sort of technology fitted within. The other systems we have recovered have been abroad after they have left the country. The use of tag type tracking devices can be very affordable solution. We continue to ask farmers overtly mark their systems using permanent marker, or engraver with postcode and surname. Consider painting the dome - a yellow dome on top really sticks out. Blend it in or paint it any colour making it less attractive to the resale market. We also continue to ask farmers to remove the kit where possible.

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

New Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code

This past month has seen the launch of the new Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code which goes hand in hand with our OP Seabird national project to protect our coastal wildlife. This really useful webpage has collated a huge amount of information and links, in an easy to read format: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-and-coastal-wildlife-code/marine-and-coastal-wildlife-code-advice-for-visitors>

It includes tips on how you could disturb wildlife and general advice for acting responsibly around wildlife. It also covers use of jet skis, how to report wildlife crimes and dead/injured marine life and how to get further training if you are interested.

Sadly, over the bank holiday weekend, we were made aware of a few individuals who continue to cause issues particularly at Snettisham near Hunstanton. We are incredibly lucky to have a tiny little bird called Ringed Plover (amongst several others including the beautiful Oyster Catcher) who nest along our coastline. These birds are in significant decline and under real threat. They nest on the ground and their eggs look like small pebbles (to naturally prevent predation) which makes them incredibly vulnerable to humans and dogs destroying them. For this reason, the RSPB (and other organisations/ estates) cordon off small areas to allow these birds to rear their young in a degree of safety.

Really disappointingly it was reported to us that someone has cut the ropes and pulled poles out around these nesting areas. This is not acceptable. Not only is it criminal behaviour, in regards to the damage, but the persons responsible also run the risk of committing wildlife offences of damaging and destroying wild birds nests. These cordons are in place to try to prevent people committing offences. They are in place for a short period of time and in the grand scheme of our coastline, cover a very small area. Please respect them. They will be obvious and are all signposted as to why they are in place. Dogs should also be kept on leads and prevented from going into these areas for a couple months. You are responsible for your dogs' action. If your dog destroys a nest, you are criminally responsible for that. Over the years I have heard the classic 'my dog is really well behaved its fine he doesn't need

to be on a lead'. That may well be the case however if someone sees your dog off the lead, someone else will think its ok to do so and will result in dogs which aren't so well behaved causing significant damage.

It should also be noted that several of these beaches involved in this project are actually privately owned and public are given permission to use them. We could find these permissions withdrawn in years to come as these estates have a legal duty to promote and protect wildlife. If they cannot do it with the compliance of the public we could see access withdrawn completely which would be huge shame and a situation nobody wants to see.

We will be increasing our patrols in these key areas for the next few months, and if anyone has any information in regard to those responsible for the damage please get in touch.

Dogs on leads/Countryside Code

Following on from this we have the inland issue of dogs worrying sheep. Sadly again a few individuals think its acceptable to allow their dog off in fields with sheep or close by.

This has led to some shocking scenes in the past few years with piles of dead sheep and seriously injured lambs, this is completely unacceptable. We will always take the strongest possible action in identifying those responsible.

It is as simple as if a field has sheep or cattle in it, keep your dog on a lead. Whilst your dog may not chase the sheep (it could quickly change!) their presence can cause significant distress and suffering to livestock.

Again, we could find ourselves in similar situations as above where parts of our countryside become closed to the public if people cannot keep dogs on leads. There are plenty of specially designed areas now to take your dog to allow them off the lead safely.

Again, your dog may be an old dodderly gorgeous lab but if you let it off the lead, the next person with a young hyper spaniel comes along sees your dog off the lead and thinks it's acceptable to let their dog off and that then continues. We all have a responsibility to do the right thing and encourage others to do so.

The police will never
ask you for cash or
your bank details.

STOP...
this is a scam!

THE
TRAP



Wildlife Crime Update

As I touched on above, it has been an incredibly varied month. We have managed to finalise an investigation in relation to destruction/disturbance of a protected European species, namely Great Crested Newts. This work required a licence from Natural England which was in process however was not in place at the time of the work. This licence is now in place, restorative work has been carried out and a donation to a local wildlife charity has been paid as part of a community resolution. If you plan to carry out any work that requires or likely to require a licence, please make sure the licence is fully in place before work is carried out.

We have also had a number of reports of nesting birds being disturbed and destroyed. These can be incredibly frustrating crimes to deal with as we need to prove the nest is active. That said we have stepped into contacting a few builders/developers where it looks like work is going to be carried out damaging such nests these have including seagulls, house sparrows and blue tits over this month. All nests are protected whilst being built or active, they cannot be removed until the end of the season around the end of August.

Also, we had a slightly unusual call when a landowner was accused of damaging some bluebells whilst replacing an old worn-out track. Whilst bluebells are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, they're an exception under the legislation and protected from being offered for sale and linked offences rather than like many of the other plants listed under the act from destruction.

We have also had one or two well-meaning calls reporting Larsen traps being set illegally. Upon checking these have been set correctly, they can often look slightly odd. A Larsen trap generally involves a live bait bird in one section which attracts other corvid species (i.e. magpie/crow). That bait bird must have food, water, perch and shelter at all times to meet its welfare needs. Corvid species do need controlling magpies can be real devils. They will pick the backs of sheep and even eyeballs out of lambs, they will also take eggs from other bird species. We would always rather check these traps are being used correctly if people have concerns.

Heritage Crime Update

Norfolk and Suffolk Heritage crime officers have been collaboratively working on a large case, involving four Norfolk males illegally metal detecting on the Roman scheduled site at Baylham in Suffolk. The weight of evidence gathered has led to all the males pleading guilty. This, along with a lot of behind the scenes forensic and phone work, has led to a vast amount of intelligence being gathered around the organised nature of this sort of crime commonly referred to as 'nighthawking'. Two men, involved in another incident, were also charged for going equipped for illegally detecting in North Norfolk. If you have any information relating to individuals or places where nighthawking is occurring, please contact PC Holmes by emailing

Christopher.holmes2@norfolk.police.uk

PC Chris Holmes and Sgt Matt Paine also attended a Cultural Heritage Crime Networking Event last week with colleagues from across the county and other experts in heritage crime. This was an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences in investigating heritage crime.

We have seen a few church thefts over the past week, not just in rural settings but also in some built up areas. These thefts have included musical instruments to irreplaceable pieces of history. At the start of the month, we also had a theft of lead from a rural church in Hanworth.

These buildings are not only religious sanctuaries for some people, they are of huge importance to the local communities and need our support. If you see something suspicious, please get in contact with us immediately. In general people should not be climbing on roofs of church's unless authorised work is being carried out. The below image has been produced by OPAL team to provide some advice to those responsible for looking after these buildings.

YANA

RURAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Helpline

0300 323 0400

helpline@yanahelp.org

In The Countryside in June

Livestock farms will be as busy as ever this month with several having the added pressures of agricultural shows including the Royal Norfolk Show. They will be spending days preening and washing the stock ahead of showing them in the ring over the two-day spectacle. These show prizes can carry significant importance as they can add value to the stock. If you get a chance to visit the livestock rings, spend some time watching these stockman showing their stock off. It takes months of training, cleaning and trimming to get them looking as good as they do and is a great opportunity to see the many different breeds and their unique features. These agricultural shows are also a lifeline to rural communities. They bring large numbers of likeminded individuals together, who are often from isolated backgrounds, for a few days enjoying each other's company, sharing ideas and stories. They have been a long-held tradition for hundreds of years.

Many of the sheep flocks in the fields will start to look a little more naked this month as shearing gets under way. Shearing is a costly business these days, the value of wool is very poor and it doesn't even cover the cost of shearing. The shearing has to be done for welfare reasons once a year. It is no longer a profitable by-product these days. It used to be an incredibly profitable industry during the industrial revolution and before the importation of cotton, but those days are long behind us. Some farmers are now in fact breeding sheep which naturally shed their wool, similar to malting dogs and this is becoming a sought-after breed characteristic. This shows how agriculture can evolve in changing times.

Farms will also be dosing wormers and fly repellents to sheep and cattle to protect them from two of the biggest threats over summer. Whilst there are industry concerns around the use of wormers (in particular with some worms becoming resistant to the wormers used) so many now only do this when necessary, rather than routinely. The use of wormers is generally seen as necessary as we don't have enough land to rotate around, to allow stock to be on constantly clean ground. These worms, like in humans and other animals, can cause serious illness and death if left untreated.

The fields are already starting to change colour, most of the

oilseed rape has turned green now with the yellow flowers being replaced with the green seed pods which will eventually turn brown/black as they become ready for harvest. The fields of winter barley are now well in ear and starting to turn a wispy green as the ears swell and grow, this will shortly be followed by the winter wheat coming into ear ahead of harvest maybe towards the end of this month although more likely beginning of July.

The countryside remains in full song with so many of our native and visiting birds present, I saw my first swallows last week sitting on top of a telephone line chirping away in their very distinct way which to me is one of my favourite sights of summer. Many of our native species have already had their first clutch of chicks. The likes of tits, blackbirds and corvid species will now be looking to have a second clutch. Our meadows, roadsides, and woodlands are literally bursting with life with flowers popping up everywhere and bees busy pollinating and collecting pollen. June can really be a great month to get out and enjoy our natural world before it gets a little too hot or dry with everything turning brown (if anything like last year!).

Final Words

Thank you again for reading. No doubt this month will be a busy month with so many summer events planned. Please note there will not be a newsletter next month due to the Norfolk Show and also planned leave. We will return at the end of July. That said the wider team will be available so please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any concerns.

