

Rural Matters

Rural policing in Kent – a magazine for residents and businesses

Autumn 2020



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**Kent
Police**



Killing wildlife – men jailed



Drone supports crime prevention



Rural Task Force latest action

Plus the latest news on rural and environmental policing in Kent

Welcome to Rural Matters

Welcome to Rural Matters. See inside for the latest on the Kent Police Rural Task Force. There are now more officers countywide dedicated to tackling and preventing crime in the countryside. We've the latest news on how these officers, partners and colleagues are working to protect and support Kent's rural communities. Email your Rural Task Force team – rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

Team Leader



Inspector
Dave Smith
07800 675376

Rural Sergeant



Sergeant
Darren Walshaw
07870 252185

North Division – 07528 989095

- PC Paul Williams
- PC Adrian Goodsall
- PC Nathan Southern
- PC Marc Pennicott

East Division – 07980 978202

- PC Dan Perry
- PC Matt Lehman
- PC Harry Callaghan
- PC Michael Sutton

West Division – 07580 236308

- PC Luke Jorden
- PC Tom Smith
- PC Nick Lingham
- PC Anna Verrall

Rural Crime Co-ordinator



Doug Robertson
07972 004578



More rural contact information, see back page.

Report non-urgent crime online



Go to www.kent.police.uk/report



Report a crime, incident or non-injury collision in minutes



Receive your confirmation email and reference number immediately

To remain anonymous contact Kent Crimestoppers online or call **0800 555 111**.



New Twitter account!

Your Rural Task Force PCs have a **new** Twitter account [@kentruralpolice](https://twitter.com/kentruralpolice)

The team regularly Tweets updates on what they've been doing and any live incidents.

Follow for the latest news and information.



Latest news

Three jailed for hunting and killing wildlife – phone messages reveal offences

Phone messages revealed how a group of hunters killed badgers, foxes and hares for 'a bit of sport' with their dogs.

Three men have now been jailed after the WhatsApp messages uncovered by RSPCA investigators, working closely with the Kent Police Rural Task Force, revealed a string of cruel offences against wildlife.

Matthew McWilliam Junior of New Romney, Jethro Smith of Hothfield near Ashford, and Harry Noble, of Stowting, had pleaded guilty to a number of welfare offences involving wilfully exposing wild animals and their dogs to injury and pain.

The first two men had appeared at Folkestone Magistrates Court on 21 July when they were each jailed for four months, deprived of their dogs and disqualified from owning any animal for life. At the court on 24 September Harry Noble was also jailed for four months and banned from owning dogs for life.

RSPCA Special Operations Unit officer Pippa Boyd said: 'After investigating another individual for wildlife offences in East Anglia we found a Whatsapp chat

that appeared to be a large hunting group. There were a number of messages in the group from Harry Noble.

'A warrant was executed at Noble's address in March 2019 and his phone was seized. Messages revealed comments, photos and videos related to offences against badgers and foxes. He also recorded voice notes and posted messages about his friends who he went out with for 'a bit of a sport' with their dogs.

'In some of the videos, dogs can be seen setting upon a badger. The conversation also relates to setting the dogs on foxes and hares.'

This discovery led to three further warrants at properties in Ashford, Maidstone and New Romney in October 2019. A total of four dogs were seized, who will be rehomed by the RSPCA.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'We work closely with the RSPCA on a range of animal welfare issues, providing support and evidence capture in order to assist them in securing convictions.

'In this instance an intelligence led approach was taken which led to successful convictions for offences



Harry Noble, one of three men jailed for animal welfare offences

under the Wildlife Act. These individuals' actions were not only criminal but barbaric and cruel. We are committed to working with the RSPCA to send a message to those

participating in illegal blood sports that their actions will not be tolerated.' The judge ordered Smith to pay £4,450 costs. McWilliam and Noble £2,000 each.

Hare coursing suspects' seized car crushed after getting stuck in field

Suspected hare coursers tried to drive off from police across a field but their Subaru Impreza got stuck in the wet ground.

They fled on foot and Rural Task Force officers were able to seize the vehicle at Higham, Rochester. Because it had never been registered it was crushed and recycled.



Latest news

Latest technology helps rural officers track crime

The Rural Task Force not only carries out regular patrols to tackle crime countywide its officers also use specialist equipment to help in investigations.

One of the team's Rural Crime Strategy objectives is to make the best use of the latest technology to maximise community intelligence and reduce crime.

They have access to night vision, thermal imaging and have their own drone with a pilot in each of the Rural Task Force sub teams.

The use of the drone has boosted the team's ability to track down stolen items. Officers working with local teams have been able to find stolen vehicles, including vans and farm equipment, in woodland and other less accessible terrain.

It has also been used to track nuisance riders and unlawful quad bike activity. Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'The use of drone technology is a great asset to the team in tackling various issues within the rural community. We have not only been able to locate stolen property and apprehend offenders.

The aerial images produced have been used to evidence the scale of damage caused by vehicles driving on land.'

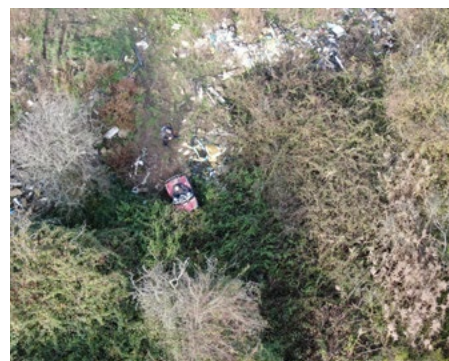
With heritage crime frequently linked to the investigation of offences in the rural environment, specialist skills and equipment are invaluable

The theft of unique historic artefacts can be highly organised and executed, often at isolated sites or at night – both inland and at sea to target wrecks.



Rural Task Force officers now have specialist binoculars and night vision cameras following a Heritage Watch grant from Historic England. This equipment helps members of the team prevent and investigate crime and anti-social behaviour around heritage sites such as 'nighthawking' unlawful metal detecting.

It can also be used in the investigation of off-roading – the inappropriate use of 4 x 4 vehicles, motorcycles and BMX bikes, which can cause serious damage to important archaeological sites.



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Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw



Hare Coursing – Op Galileo

Kent Police continues to work with forces nationwide under Op Galileo to tackle illegal hare coursing.

The Rural Task Force has been busy operating dedicated patrols to tackle the seasonal issue which is illegal, cruel to the animals involved and causes harm and financial damage to farmers' land and livelihoods.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'This period has continued to be busy for the Rural Task Force. Since the start of harvest as expected there has been an increased number of reports in relation to hare coursing. The team has planned days of dedicated patrol already booked into their duties. Our Rural Crime Co-Ordinator Doug Robertson is working hard collating analytical data around vehicles and locations to support the team in their work.

'It is important all incidents are reported and recorded with us – which can be done via Country Eye App, online or by calling 999 or 101 as appropriate. This is the second year Kent Police continues to work with other forces across the country with the national operation name of Op Galileo. Anyone reporting hare coursing activity should quote this name.'

Due to the increase in hare coursing reports the Rural Task Force recently targeted the Wingham area.

The team located two Suzuki Jimnys driving around Palm Tree Lane and Ratling, shining high powered torches across the fields. The vehicles made off pursued by the officers but the offenders began blinding them by shining their high powered torches. The occupants made off but in one of the abandoned vehicles the



Hare coursers cause damage to land and property

officers found two dogs and two dead hares, which were both DNA swabbed before being seized. The vehicle was also forensically examined and the investigation is continuing.

In another incident officers were called to a report of poaching in the Stalisfield area. They traced a suspicious Honda CRV to Lenham where the vehicle and five men

were searched under the Poaching Prevention Act.

Officers found several dead partridges, a large number of ball bearings, powerful torches and slingshots. One man was reported for summons for poaching offences. Officers have also investigated incidents on the Isle of Sheppey, Rochester, Adisham and Maidstone.

Satellite navigation thefts from tractors – be alert

Farmers are being warned to be alert to tractors being targeted for thefts of satellite navigation equipment.

The systems cost several thousand pounds to buy for each tractor and there were recent reports of them being stolen in the Stansted, Sevenoaks and Wrotham areas, with five vehicles targeted between the evening of Monday 7 September and the early hours of 8 September.

Rural Task Force PC Dan Perry said: 'These pieces of equipment are essential for farmers – losing them to thieves as well as losing the information they hold, can have a very detrimental

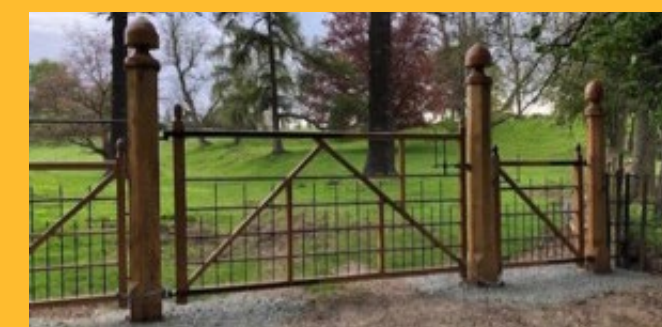


impact on their businesses.

'We are asking anyone who may have seen anything suspicious to call us. Motorists who drive in these areas are also asked to check any dash cams which may hold important footage.'

Call Kent Police on 01622 604100 quoting reference 08-0238 or contact Kent Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111, or by using the online form.

Can you help?



Country Park gates stolen

Distinctive metal gates stolen from the country park near Faversham are still missing.

They were removed overnight on the 14-15 July. Details have been circulated through Heritage and Farm Watch and the rural community is asked to be on the lookout for them and report any information to the Rural Task Force.

Do you have information about a crime?

Calls to the independent charity Crimestoppers are anonymous. You can call **0800 555 111** or use the anonymous online form at **Crimestoppers-uk.org**



News in brief



Trailer stolen last year returned
A twin axle Ifor Williams Trailer has been recovered and returned to its owner after it was uncovered by Rural Task Force officers partially hidden on a piece of waste land. Enquiries made with Ifor Williams established it had been stolen from an owner in Sussex in January 2019,



Owner gets missing dump truck back
This dump truck and trailer stolen from Dover between September 25-26 was found by a Rural Task Force officer hidden in woodland. Both have been recovered and returned to the happy owner.

Land Rovers targeted – keep vehicles secure

Motorists are being advised to take measures to protect their vehicles after a spate of Land Rover thefts from outside homes. Since the beginning of July at least 11 Land Rovers have been reported stolen from areas including Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Sevenoaks and Maidstone. In some cases vehicles fitted with keyless entry systems have been targeted. Criminals using specialist tools are sometimes able to clone a fob's signal and relay it to another device, allowing them to enter and start the vehicle. An investigation has led to the arrests of four suspects and four of the stolen vehicles have also been recovered. Detective Constable Mark Beeching, of West Kent CID, said: 'Thieves are sometimes also able to fool security systems for keyless entry vehicles. To prevent this we would recommend owners check if their entry fobs can be turned off overnight and to also store them away from any household entry points. 'Drivers can also store their fobs in special bags, which can be bought from retailers,



- Crime prevention advice**
- Consider investing in CCTV and sensors which alert owners when someone walks near their vehicle or enters the driveway
 - Use a steering wheel lock
 - Lock all doors and close the windows whenever the vehicle is left
 - Make sure car keys aren't visible from outside the house ie through windows
 - Park in a garage, secure car park or well lit area if possible
 - Consider having windows etched with the vehicle registration number or use an invisible ink marker pen to mark these details and owner's postcode on the underside frame of the vehicle
 - Make a note of the chassis number

to prevent any unwanted communication between the vehicle and its keys. 'If you are unsure contact your vehicle manufacturer or local dealer for advice.'

Week of action targeting fly-tippers across Kent

Arrests were made and fines issued to fly-tippers during a week of action targeting metal and waste crime countywide. The Rural Task Force joined local authorities from 12-16 October to identify people disposing of waste illegally. They carried out targeted patrols and stop checks and visited scrap metal dealers to ensure accurate records were kept. Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'Fly-tipping is not just littering, it is organised criminality. The problem blights communities and some waste, like asbestos, can pose a significant health risk to the public. 'Everyone has a responsibility to tackle this issue and I would ask anyone having waste removed from their property to ensure those taking their rubbish are licensed to do so. Many are unaware they may be fined if their rubbish is linked to their household, even if they have paid someone to dispose of it. By working with



our partners and local people we can make a positive difference and protect our countryside.' The Kent Resource Partnership (KRP) Chairman, Councillor Nick Kenton said: 'We will continue to work together to combat this issue and encourage our residents to report fly tipping to councils as soon as possible.'

- **Thanet** – two fines issued to people who failed to have waste carrier's licences and a vehicle was seized.
- **Swale** – Black BMW linked to fly-tipping in Maidstone seized in the Sittingbourne area and a £400 fine issued to the driver.
- **Maidstone** – penalty notice issued after a driver stopped by officers in Detling was found to be transporting waste without a carrier's licence.
- **Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay** – stop check resulted in a man being investigated for scrap metal offences and a man was dealt with by the local authority after being stopped in Thannington transporting waste without a licence.
- **Dover** – four scrap metal dealerships visited. A Deal site issued with an improvement notice.



Protected birds killed

Rural Task Force officers are continuing to receive reports of protected hawks and other wild birds being shot and killed across the county. In one incident a woman in her garden heard what appeared to be an air gun and a peregrine falcon landed dead on her drive. It had an injury consistent with an air weapon. Despite three further shots being heard in the area of Pye Alley Lane in Whitstable officers were unable to find who was responsible and compare the pellet to a weapon.

It is the second peregrine falcon to be found shot in the county. Earlier this year a similar falcon – the world's fastest bird – had to be put down after it was found injured in the Birling area, believed targeted with a shotgun. Rural Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'All our Rural Task Force team are fully trained Wildlife Crime Officers. Falcons are protected and anyone killing then is breaking the law.'

Other birds reported being found dead included seagulls, around 25 crows and there have been reports of cormorants being shot. In other incidents reported to police a teenaged boy was reported to be shooting wild birds while his father was at work. His father was spoken to and the air weapon seized. An elderly man was also asked to hand over his air weapon after reports that seagulls and pigeons were being shot.

Buzzard found dead may have flown into power line

In another incident a dead buzzard was found in a rural area just outside Sittingbourne in July – similar to one found last year. After being x-rayed it was confirmed not shot but believed to have flown into a powerline. The landowner will be contacting UKPN to arrange for line markers to be installed to the lines.

Farm Watch WhatsApp – sharing information to beat crime

Online messaging system Farm Watch WhatsApp is a countywide scheme for fast time sharing of information between the Rural Task Force and the community. It has proved successful in recovering stolen property, vehicles and farm machinery and helping police deal with crime as it is reported. Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'Farm Watch WhatsApp continues to be a valuable asset with some great results with arrests and stolen property recovered. If anyone would like to join please email the team.' rural.task.force@kent.police.uk



Protect your farm equipment:
To protect and help trace stolen equipment record all serial numbers, take photos and consider additional markings such as DNA solutions and tracker devices. All of which will help police in recovering property should it be stolen.

Farm Watch WhatsApp is a tool to share information directly with the Rural Task Force team and not to be used to report crime. Any crimes should be reported in the usual way; 999 if a crime is in progress or 101 and online if non-urgent and don't forget the Country Eye App.



HMRC scam warning – 85 people targeted

A fraud where victims are led to believe they could be arrested for owing a debt to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs saw 85 reports to Kent Police in September. A woman in the Canterbury area lost £4,000 after someone claiming to be from HMRC demanded immediate payment and threatened her with arrest. In the Dartford area a woman was told she would be arrested if she didn't pay £6,000. The fraudsters made her download an app to transfer the funds. Detective Sergeant Alec Wood of the Volume Fraud Team said: 'These fraudsters prey on vulnerable individuals and use

scare tactics, like the threat of arrest, to rush people into making rash decisions and parting with large sums of money.'

- Avoid engaging with suspect callers – make a note of the numbers they are using and report them to HMRC.
- Stop and think before paying out any money or giving information, only a criminal will try to rush someone into payment – if in doubt challenge them.
- It's fine to refuse, ignore and reject calls – if you've given out financial details contact your bank immediately as they may be able to stop a transaction.

Partnerships

Rural team working with partners to protect rural communities



The team use their expertise to support Local Neighbourhood Policing Teams, PCSOs or core response officers. The team are all fully trained Wildlife Crime Officers.

Countryside Code

Remember

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Leave all gates as you found them
- Keep pets under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone



Key partners working with Kent Police to keep rural communities safe

Crime Rural Advisory Group

CRAG formed in 2012, brings together main rural stakeholders, including the National Farmers Union and Country Land & Business Association – representing a large percentage of land occupancy countywide. They bring their own insights to CRAG to help keep Kent Police informed on ever-changing issues in rural Kent.

web: www.btfpartnership.co.uk

email: michael.bax@btfpartnership.co.uk

phone: **Michael Bax 01233 740077**

Kent Association of Local Councils

KALC is a not for profit membership organisation serving member parish and town councils and parish meetings in Kent and Medway. It offers training, advice and services to member councils. KALC works with rural officers to disseminate information on their behalf, and to gather crime information from towns and parishes.

web: www.kentalc.gov.uk

email: kalc@kentalc.gov.uk

phone: **01304 820173**

National Farmers Union

The NFU champions British farming and provides professional representation and services to its farmer and grower members. Around 70 per cent of full time farmers are NFU members. They aim to support Kent Police to engage with members' extensive local knowledge,

working in partnership with CRAG and other stake holder organisations.

web: www.nfuonline.com

email: isobel.bretherton@nfu.org.uk

phone: **01730 711950**

Kent Fire and Rescue Service

KFRS is responsible for delivering fire and rescue services to more than 1.7 million people. Each year fire officers deal with around 16,500 incidents including road crashes, house and barn fires and more than 2,400 non-fire rescues. KFRS works with the Kent Police, NFU, and CRAG to provide safety and risk reduction advice to support the agricultural business community.

web: www.kent.fire-uk.org

email: enquiries@kentfire-uk.org

phone: **01622 692121**

Historic England

Historic England is a public body which looks after England's historic environment. There are over 400,000 protected sites and buildings in England and Historic England works across a range of partnership to prevent the loss and damage to our shared cultural heritage. Former Kent police officer Mark Harrison advises the organisation and works closely with rural officers and CRAG.

web: www.historicengland.org.uk

email: southeast@HistoricEngland.org.uk

phone: **01483 252020**



Country Land & Business Association

The CLA is the membership organisation for owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales and has been safeguarding the interests of landowners, and those with an economic, social and environmental interest in rural land for more than 112 years. The CLA South East Office works closely with the Kent Police to help achieve these aims.

web: www.cla.org.uk

email: southeast@cla.org.uk

phone: **01264 313434**