

Rural Matters

Rural policing in Kent – a magazine for residents and businesses

Spring 2023



In this issue:



**Kent
Police**



Rural theft – items recovered



Lambing alert – keep
dogs away



Protect our wildlife
from harm

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

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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

Anyone with information about suspected crime can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously by calling **0800 555 111** or using the anonymous online form.

Crimestoppers.
0800 555 111
100% anonymous. Always.

Twitter account

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

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

Follow for the latest news and information.



Latest news

Rural officers recover stolen goods from multiple burglaries

Items believed to have been stolen in burglaries across Kent and beyond have been recovered by Rural Task Force officers.

They included a quad bike, dozens of hedge trimmers and other stolen tools. Officers had been investigating the stolen quad, reported missing from a shed in Five Oak Green in January.

They used specialist equipment to track the bike to the Bean area, where the vehicle and other suspected stolen items were found.

Officers have already identified several owners related to burglaries reported in Kent and London.

RTF Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'We're still in the process of identifying the owners of these items. Burglary is such an intrusive crime and costly for victims and we are pleased to have recovered this

equipment and been able to get some of it back to the rightful owners.

'Kent has more farms and smallholdings than most other counties in the South East and this unfortunately means there are opportunities for criminals intent on stealing high value items including tractors, quad bikes and horse boxes. It is always a good idea to mark property clearly, so that if, in the unfortunate event, it gets stolen we can get it back to the owners a lot quicker. My team regularly provides farmers and other business owners with advice on how they can protect their equipment, and we also help tackle a wide range of other issues including wildlife offences and fly-tipping.'

To read more about the support available for those living in rural areas and reporting a crime visit the Kent Police website.



Birds of prey deaths investigated – rare goshawk found

Rural Task Force officers are investigating the deaths of a rare goshawk and a buzzard, whose bodies are being examined for forensic clues.

Both birds of prey are protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Goshawks are elusive and rare in the South East and Kent, with less than five breeding pairs recorded. They were all but extinct nationwide at one point and have only slowly recovered in very limited numbers with only 600-700 countrywide.

The RSPB and Woodland Trust say both habitat loss and persecution remain a threat.

The body of the goshawk was recovered in the Ashford area. The Rural Task Force Team, who are all trained Wildlife Crime officers are also investigating the death of a buzzard on 3 February.

A member of the public reported it falling into a garden in Otham Street,

Maidstone, around 3.30pm.

RTF Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'These birds are protected and with colleagues from the RSPCA we are investigating the incident involving the buzzard and the goshawk and carrying out tests to establish what caused their deaths.'

There were a number of people, walkers and residents

in their gardens at the time of the buzzard incident. Anyone with information should call **01622 604100** quoting Rural Task Force reference **16-23** or call Crimestoppers anonymously on **0800 555 111** or complete the online form on the website.

White stag shot, see wildlife report **page 5**.



The dead goshawk was x-rayed

Hunting with dogs animal welfare investigation

Four police forces supported the RSPCA with arrests and seizing of dogs in a cross-border investigation into animal welfare and wildlife offences linked to hunting with dogs.

Kent Rural Task Force officers and colleagues from Norfolk, Sussex and Thames Valley supported the large RSPCA operation. Searches were carried out at premises – including hunt kennels – across a number of counties on 18 January with six arrests made and 22 dogs seized, including terriers.

These included four arrests made in East Kent. The men involved – aged 21 to 66 – were released under investigation while inquiries continue.

Protecting our wildlife – team trained to safeguard natural heritage



Kent Police Rural Task Force officers are specially trained to investigate offences where animals, plants or habitats may be at risk of harm.

Whether it's bats, buzzards, badgers and most recently beavers living in Kent, the team will work with relevant partners to prevent and prosecute animal offences and crimes against protected species.

As Wildlife Crime Officers the Rural Task Force are called on to deal with offences as varied as birds of prey, including peregrine falcons and most recently a rare goshawk, being found dead, to developments threatening roosting bats; songbirds being trapped and eggs stolen; badgers or foxes hunted with dogs or anti-social behaviour threatening habitats, both inland and on the coast.

The team are also involved with national campaigns against hare coursing (Op Galileo) and illegal fishing (Op Traverse) and work with

agencies such as the RSPCA, RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the NFU, Bat Conservation Trust, Angling Trust, Historic England and the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

Their work covers animal welfare such as suspected cruelty cases, game poaching and dog theft, and organised criminal activity like smuggling of protected animals.

They investigate those who illegally trap or kill wild animals; those who deliberately persecute animals, such as badger baiting or illegal hunting

with dogs or the shooting or poisoning of birds of prey or where – through ignorance – animals or habitats may be harmed by inadvertent or careless behaviour.

What follows can be prosecution through the courts or guidance and words of advice to ensure legislation is adhered to and people understand the laws around nature.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'Kent has diverse wildlife, from many species of birds, marine life, foxes, badgers and deer to bats or in recent times

beavers, which have been reintroduced into the county at a specific site.

'Our Rural Task Force officers are trained to investigate illegal activity and persecution but can also offer advice on habitat preservation, restrictions, licences and protective measures.

'We work closely with our partners and have been involved in successful prosecutions involving illegal trapping of songbirds, animal welfare cases and through our seven-forces agreement, those caught poaching and hare coursing.'

White stag shot in woods – can you help the investigation?

Rural Task Force officers are investigating after a white stag was found shot in the face in Cobham Woods.

It's the second deer found dead in the area, the first was on 20 January, the second on 26 February near Albatross Avenue. Both had gunshot

wounds to the face, believed caused by a high-powered rifle.

Although it's a remote spot, police are appealing for anyone with information about people or vehicles seen near the area of the incidents, believed to have happened at night, to come forward.

Rural Crime Co-Ordinator Doug Robertson said there was no evidence other animals were used to hunt the deer. He said: 'The manner in which they were shot would have caused a significant amount of suffering and the use of a powerful firearm in a location accessible

to the public presents a high risk to any other person in the area. We are working closely with partner agencies to identify those responsible.' Call the appeal line **01474 366149**, quoting **26-0273**, or Crimestoppers anonymously **0800 555 111**.

Beavers – protected species living in Kent

The re-introduction of wild beavers has already been successfully achieved in selected parts of the UK, including Scotland, Devon and Kent.

From 1 October 2022, the European beaver became a protected species in England – following Scotland – under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. As a European Protected Species they have species level protection under law.

Once a native animal, beavers were hunted to extinction in the British Isles 400 years ago but are now building their distinctive dams at selected monitored sites – including an East Kent nature reserve, through a scheme involving the Kent Wildlife Trust and partner agencies.

It follows national recognition of the importance of beavers as natural engineers to help restore wetlands, particularly where machinery is less efficient and very costly to do the same job.

Two pairs of Norwegian beavers were first introduced in the early 2000s at the Kent site, followed later by an additional family group.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'Beavers now have the protected status of being classed as a European Protected Species and like all protected wildlife in Kent need to be treated with respect. It is important both members of the public and landowners are aware of their status and the laws and required licences which safeguard them from disturbance or harm.'

The Beaver Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England and local beaver protection groups work with landowners to ensure the positive aspects of beaver activity are recognised and any management requirements properly licensed.

For more information see the Environment Agency/Natural England websites.



Deer fed biscuits in unsuitable 'home' seized

Rural Task Force officers worked with the RSPCA to remove a young fallow deer which was being kept in unsuitable conditions in a back yard.

A warrant was issued in January under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 around animal welfare, which enabled the deer to be removed from a back garden in the Sevenoaks area. The site was strewn with items which could pose a hazard. It was reported it

was being fed on biscuits and not food sufficient to its needs and had been frightened by a motorbike and been seen being walked like a pet.

Rural Crime Co-ordinator Doug Robertson said: 'The RSPCA took possession of the deer for it to be de-bonded from human contact and then released into an appropriate deer park.'

The RSPCA said the deer had since spent four weeks

recovering and receiving specialist care at a wildlife charity before being transferred to a managed herd. An investigation is still ongoing under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Deer Act 1991.

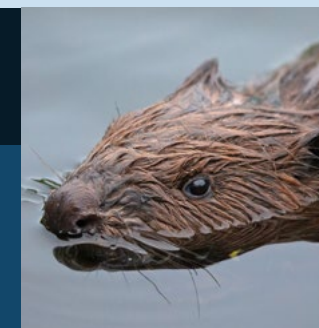


After rehabilitation it was released into a managed herd

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

This lists beavers as a European Protected Species. This means it is an offence to:

- deliberately disturb a beaver – this includes any action likely to impair their ability to survive, breed or rear their young
- deliberately injure, capture or kill a beaver
- damage or destroy the breeding site or resting place of a beaver
- possess, control or transport a beaver
- sell or exchange a beaver
- offer a beaver for sale or exchange



Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

- Prohibits the release of beavers into the wild except with a licence.
- Makes it an offence to use any trap or snare for the purpose of killing, taking or restraining beavers. It is also an offence to set a trap or snare in place to cause injury to a beaver.

Some management activities near or in a site of special scientific interest may need permission from Natural England under this legislation.



The deer was found in unsuitable conditions



Rural officers recover stolen digger

A digger worth more than £15,000 taken from a building site in Sevenoaks was recovered by Rural Task Force officers. It was reported stolen with a £1,000 Wacker Plate and last seen in Lambarde Road on 17 February. Officers tracked both stolen items and an emergency warrant enabled them to enter a garage where they suspected they were hidden and recover them. Anyone with information which could help the investigation should call **01622 604100** quoting reference **20-0477**.

FarmWatch – help police track crime

Now with nearly 1,700 members FarmWatch WhatsApp continues to be an effective way to share information with Rural Task Force officers directly. It enables them to act swiftly – resulting in stolen property being recovered and offenders stopped in their tracks. Anyone interested in joining their local group email the RTF at **rural.task.force@kent.police.uk**

Gang who stole £100,000 worth of equipment jailed

Stables and rural buildings broken into to steal £100,000 worth of horse equipment were targeted by an organised crime gang,

Two men were jailed on 3 February at Maidstone Crown Court after admitting conspiring to steal horse equipment across Kent. A third man was given a suspended sentence.

The eight stables and rural premises were broken into after dark in Faversham, Paddock Wood, East Peckham, Mereworth, Blue Bell Hill, Sittingbourne, Kemsing and Maidstone from 3 May to 17 May 2020.

The gang forced open doors and disabled alarms, before making off in vehicles, sometimes across open fields. Investigators identified a Vauxhall Zafira following a break-in at stables near Bearsted on 17 May which was spotted by a patrol in Maidstone the next day.

Frank Matthews, 27, of Crispin Court, Coxheath, admitted



Jimmy Price

eight burglaries; Lewis Collins, 25, of Clare Place, Maidstone admitted six and Jimmy Price, 28, of Well Street, Loose, admitted involvement in seven. They were charged with conspiracy to burgle and Matthews with dangerous driving after the identified car failed to stop. Detectives were able to prove all three were responsible for several break-ins. Matthews was jailed for two years three months, Price for two years four months and



Frank Matthews

Collins one year six months, suspended for two years.

Detective Constable Rob Fagg, of the Chief Constable's Crime Squad, said the gang did not spare a thought for the impact of their crimes. He said: 'These men targeted remote rural locations to steal a considerable amount of equine equipment from horse owners. The victims will have spent many years collecting expensive saddles, tack and in some cases specialist equipment.'

Poaching re-offender must do unpaid work for breaching order

Three men caught poaching with dogs on private land in Sheppey have been fined and one ordered to do 120 hours unpaid work.

Rural Task Force officers were called to farmland in Queenborough on 31 October 2022. One of the men was in breach of a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) already in place for similar offending.

Albert Wilson and Jimmy Adcock were summonsed to court for trespassing in pursuit of game. Officers seized eight dead rabbits, a catapult, ball bearings, and hunting knife.

Sydney Samuels was charged with breach of an CBO and trespassing in

pursuit of game. At Medway Magistrates Court they all pleaded guilty on 15 February.

Wilson, 29, of Cradducks Lane, Tonbridge and Adcock, 32, of Limsfield Road, Warlingham, Surrey, were fined £300 each and must pay £205 costs.

Samuels, 33, of Castlerough Lane, Sittingbourne, was ordered to do 120 hours unpaid work, fined £80 and ordered to pay nearly £200 costs.

Investigating officer, Sergeant Darren Walshaw, said: 'The east of England regularly suffers incidents of illegal hunting. Those involved are often linked to other offences, which can have an extremely



adverse impact on the rural community. Our seven-force collaboration was formed to create a borderless approach to address countryside crimes. We are working alongside the Crown Prosecution Service to reduce the number of reported incidents and prosecute those who choose to continue with this activity.'

Keep dogs under control to protect livestock and lambs

Keeping all dogs under proper control during the lambing season will avoid distressing attacks on sheep when they are most vulnerable.

In one of the worst cases of livestock worrying investigated by Kent Police, 27 ewes – all believed to be pregnant – were killed in a suspected dog attack between Christmas Eve and Boxing Day near Teynham last year.

And as new born lambs start to be born this spring, the Rural Task Force is urging all dog owners to take responsible action to keep their animals under control.

This means following signs, sticking to footpaths and keeping dogs on leads around livestock.

Those with gardens near fields should make sure their dogs can't escape and livestock owners should ensure all fencing and boundaries are secure.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'Unfortunately we continue to receive reports of livestock worrying

all through the year but spring is a particularly vulnerable time, with young lambs and pregnant ewes in the fields.

'Not only do attacks by dogs cause serious or sadly fatal injuries to livestock they also cause fear and distress in flocks – leading to ewes losing lambs. The animal welfare issues are distressing enough but these unnecessary and preventable incidents involving dogs also cause real financial hardship to farmers with the loss of their animals. We would ask all dog owners – and we have seen a number of breeds involved in these attacks – to take appropriate action to ensure their pets do not endanger livestock.'

Over £1,000 compensation has been reimbursed to livestock owners following two separate incidents investigated by the RTF during February. The owners of the dogs admitted the offences and a community resolution included compensation and enrolling their dogs on a Sheep Proof My Dog course.



Livestock attacks – signage available

The Rural Task Force has signage available for any livestock owners who have footpaths near their grazing fields. Contact the team for more information.

Responsible dog walking to protect wildlife

Out of control dogs also have a detrimental effect on wildlife.

Loose dogs are one of the biggest causes of wildlife disturbance – a particular problem when many species are breeding and vulnerable either on or near the ground.

Kent Wildlife Trust is urging dog owners to keep their pets on short leads now that birds are nesting and animals emerging from hibernation. Ground-nesting birds such as curlew, corn bunting and skylark are particularly at risk.

The trust said reserves in South Swale (Seasalter), West Blean and Thornden Woods, Queendown Warren and Sandwich and Pegwell Bay were the sites most affected by dogs off the lead.

Dog owners can help wildlife if they:

- Keep dogs on short leads on nature reserves and in the wider countryside
- Clean up after animals and dispose of dog waste in bins or at home
- Avoid using nature reserves if walking large groups of dogs



Meeting held for farmers and MPs to discuss rural concerns

Kent Police joined local farmers and MPs at a recent meeting to discuss concerns about safety and keeping property protected.

Members of the Rural Task Force team attended the

event at Chart Sutton in January.

It involved MPs Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid-Kent) and Helen Grant (Maidstone and the Weald), Kent Police and Crime

Commissioner Matthew Scott, local farmers and councillors.

One of the key concerns was trespassers on private land and poaching, including intimidation, and equipment thefts from rural premises.

Need to report a crime?

Do it online



Report non-emergency crime 24/7 using online services **kent.police.uk/report**



A quicker way for you to report crime and incidents



Receive email confirmation and reference number immediately

Access **Live Chat** by the blue circle in the bottom right corner of any Kent Police webpage



Partnerships

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.

web: www.btftpartnership.co.uk

email: michael.bax@btftpartnership.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**

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**

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**

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**



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

