



Operation Randall

tackling rural crime
Newsletter

Issue 36 | August 2023

 @RuralCrimeNfk

Introduction

Welcome to a slightly bumper newsletter this month! Apologies there was no update last month. As I touched on last time, a number of the team had various pieces of annual leave alongside several events, it just wasn't possible to get something out.

Since we last did a newsletter, we have had the Royal Norfolk Show which was a fantastic event bringing the rural world (and so much more these days) to the masses. We were part of the emergency service village again this year and had a chat with many people. Our fluffy little sheep proved very popular with kids who were do the classic pastime of collecting all the stickers and pens!

Harvest is underway (sort of!) which has seen the rural community step into one of its busiest periods of time. This month has seen us picking up several investigations and jobs which I will touch on later in the newsletter. As always please do get in touch if you have any suggestions for the newsletter or if you wish to speak to any of the team. The best way is to drop us an email (OperationRandall@norfolk.police.uk) and one of the team will get back to you as soon as possible. Crimes should not be reported via this method and should be reported using our online form on our website <http://norfolk.police.uk> or via 101. Always phone 999 in an emergency.

Tractors in the Countryside

We have received a couple of complaints around the speed of tractors in residential rural areas. We would like to remind all tractor drivers they must abide by the Road Traffic Act and Highway Code. Most tractors are unable to reach high speeds but even at lower speeds it's important that you drive to the conditions and be able to break within the distance you can see.

If the tractor is fitted with the correct braking system and can go above the 'normal' tractor speeds (ie JCB Fastrac's) they must be driven to the road conditions and again able to brake safely in the distance you are able to see, and must stick to the speed limits. Tractor drivers are also not exempt from being prosecuted for driving whilst using a mobile device, this is something that is sadly seen all too regularly and is not acceptable. These are big machines that sadly could do some serious damage and harm!

Another polite reminder for other road users around tractors, please be patient when behind a tractor. Taking unnecessary risks could result in fatal consequences. Remember being stuck behind a slow-moving agricultural machine for 2 miles is the equivalent to being stopped at 2 red traffic lights.



NEED TO TALK TO US?

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

Norfolk Fire Wildfire Planning

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service are this week rolling out 2" banjo to fire and rescue adaptors. Every fire appliance in Norfolk is being issued with both male and female adaptors for use at rural incidents especially during harvest at field fires.

These will enable us to connect to water bowsers provided a 2" banjo is available, they will allow us to access water quicker, enabling us to attack fires more efficiently and effectively.

Other things we would like Farmers to consider are:

The rule of 30's; extreme wildfire conditions exist when the temperature is over 30°C, winds are over 30kph and relative humidity is below 30% we would ask you to consider harvesting when these conditions subside.

Once headlands have been cut, consider cutting firebreaks through sections of the field e.g through the middle then the quarters. Should a fire occur, this will slow the rate of spread.

The wind will be the driving force if a fire starts, commencing harvesting from a downward position will mean that any fire will only affect stubble rather than standing crop.

Consider that fire will spread uphill quicker than downhill so, if possible, start at the top and work downhill.

Early cultivation close to property is the best course of action you could take to prevent any fire crossing from the rural to the urban interface.

Have a bowser, cultivator or slurry tank close by whilst harvesting. If you do need to cultivate a firebreak or spread water, ensure that have a clear escape route- Do not put yourself in danger.

If you notice smoke from a Combine or Tractor, stop

the engine before investigating but make sure that you do not leave your mobile phone in the cab. If there is a fire, contact 999 before attempting to extinguish.

When calling 999, give the best access to the field using the What3Words location system (it would be a good idea to have these recorded for all fields on a card in every farm vehicle). Send someone to the nearest road to direct fire crews to the scene.

Heritage Crime Update from PC Chris Holmes

This month saw PC Holmes hold the first 7 counties Nighthawking working group. This is a collaborative effort, across the Eastern Region, to tackle the issue of illegal metal detecting in Norfolk by recognising that suspects will travel great distances to plunder Historical sites. This was shown to be the situation with the recent prosecution of four Norfolk males who were caught illegally detecting on the scheduled Monument at Baylham in Suffolk. It is hoped that through better awareness of how to tackle this we can make some more arrests and send the message that this will not be tolerated. To this end, we ask that landowners report any individuals seen detecting on their land without permission via 999 as a theft in progress.

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

News From Across the Border

Four men who were arrested after being found at a scheduled ancient monument with metal detecting equipment in October last year have been given a suspended sentence after appearing at Suffolk Magistrates' Court on Wednesday 28 June.

The four men, all from Norfolk, were discovered and arrested at the site in Mid Suffolk which is protected. Metal detecting on sites scheduled as ancient monuments is illegal without permission from the secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport.

The men were spotted by an officer using a thermal imaging camera on Wednesday 12 October last year and subsequently arrested on suspicion of using a metal detector on a site scheduled as an ancient monument, contrary to Section 42 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. The group was also found in possession of items suspected to have been from the site.

Bradley Ling, 24, of Pond Lane, Surlingham, Kyle Mickleburgh, 25 of Barnham Road, Norwich, Michael Travell, 38, of Beverley Road, Norwich, and Aaron Williams, 25, of Fleeters Hill, Hingham, all admitted going to a scheduled monument equipped for theft and were each given a 16-week jail sentence, suspended for 18 months.

They were also tagged for 90-days with a GPS tracker to monitor their movements, ordered to pay £399 compensation and costs and given a variety of rehabilitation activity requirements. The court also ordered the forfeiture of the coins and destruction of the metal detectors.

Sergeant Brian Calver of Suffolk Constabulary's Rural and Wildlife Crime team said: "This crime was not an opportunist moment. This was organised, planned criminality, targeting our heritage. We'll never know just how much history and knowledge has been lost as a result of their offending, purely for selfish gain.

"I hope this result will make them think about their actions in future and will send a message to others that we take heritage crime seriously.

"These are not victimless crimes, and we'd encourage any landowners that know they are suffering from illegal metal detecting to report it, so we can target those involved."

Mark Harrison, Historic England Head of Heritage Crime Strategy said: "Illegal metal detecting is not a victimless crime. This site has been identified as the Roman town of Combretovium and is designated as a scheduled monument, a nationally important archaeological site which requires careful managing.

"Unlawful metal detecting and excavation can cause damage to the buried archaeological deposits and the loss of historic artefacts and objects. We will continue to work in partnership with the police and the metal detecting community to identify those offenders who are intent on stealing from our past and to bring them to account, so we can protect these remarkable historic places for current and future generations."

Councillor Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Protected Landscapes and Archaeology, said: "Our Archaeological Service assisted the police to bring about this successful prosecution, and in turn helped to protect our local history. This is a warning to anyone thinking that illegal metal-detecting is acceptable.

"The council's responsibilities include protecting our environment and collecting and curating archaeological material from excavations across Suffolk. Such illegal activity damages what we are able to understand about our local and national history."

GPS Thefts

Sadly, we have seen a handful of further GPS system thefts over the past couple weeks. Interestingly, of the couple of farms which have been hit, they have only lost 1 or 2 systems when there were more on the farm. It could be a simple case the suspects have been disturbed however it should be noted the tractors left untouched were parked closer to residential areas on the farm and covered by lights/CCTV. Please carefully consider where you park machinery at night and where possible remove the dome and absolutely remove the screen every night. Finding replacements at this time of year is not easy and prevention is key to this offending currently. We remain part of the national operation in tackling this criminality – these are not local criminals and are suspected of travelling to Norfolk to commit this crime before swiftly leaving.

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

STOP...
this is a scam!

THE
TRAP

OP Galileo—Hare Coursing

As harvest gets underway, sadly, it provides opportunities for criminals to start hare coursing again when the fields are turned to stubble fields or freshly drilled fields. Whilst our year-on-year figures remain on a sharp downward trend, we will not get complacent. Anyone wishing to come to Norfolk to partake in this illegal 'sport' will find they are very unwelcome and we will use all the powers available to us to prosecute and disrupt this criminality over the autumn and winter period.

If you see what you believe to be hare coursing and it is in progress, please phone 999 immediately and provide as much detail to our call takers as possible including descriptions of those involved, dogs, exact location (ideally using What3Words), location of any vehicles involved and any other information you feel will assist officers. If you are able to safely record or take photos then do, but never put yourself in danger or confront those involved.

Wildlife Crime Update

The last 2 months have seen no let-up in incidents reported to us. This is a double-edged sword when we look at it because clearly you, members of the public feel confident to report such matters to us but also sadly means crimes involving wildlife and animals are continuing. We remain committed to fully investigating these matters and taking appropriate action.

As expected over this period, we have seen several reports of nesting birds being disturbed and destroyed. These can be very hard offences to prove beyond reasonable doubt. That said, we will always have a look and make enquiries. We do have a couple, currently under active investigation, where sadly we have picked up dead chicks, or destroyed eggs/nests which will be

subject to further enquiries in coming weeks. It is essential if you plan to do any roofing work or hedge cutting, at this time of year, that you double check no nests are present. Most birds will have finished nesting by mid-August but it is not a fixed date as it can depend on the weather.

We have also had a gin trap found which sadly had a magpie caught in it. Gin traps have been illegal for many years and must not be set. It is important to remember it is not illegal to own these and they are often seen hanging on barns as decoration but once they are set, they are illegal. We are continuing to make enquiries around the trap as to how it has come to be where it was found (it is possible the bird has moved with the trap) and if we can, identify person setting such a trap. We have also had several reports of wild birds being injured or killed. All birds are protected unless you are acting under a licence to kill some pest species. Likewise, many will have seen the awful story in local press of a cat being dumped in a bin and also a hedgehog being tortured. These investigations are being led by the RSPCA but if you have any information that can assist, please get in touch or alternatively, you can contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

As a team we have also conducted two warrants in the past couple of weeks. One of them was an animal welfare warrant which was conducted alongside RSPCA and the other was a wildlife persecution which was conducted alongside RSPB and National Wildlife Crime Unit. Whilst we cannot release further details on these currently due to the nature of the investigations, both were 'positive' warrants and have resulted in further investigations. Both of these jobs also show the importance of working with our partner agencies who have provided so much expert support and experience.

YANA

RURAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Helpline

0300 323 0400

helpline@yanahelp.org

Arsons in the Countryside

There has unfortunately been a number of arsons reported in recent weeks. Obviously there have been the high-profile ones in buildings but there has also been a number in rural areas and on farms.

Some of these will clearly be accidental however some will be intentional. We need the support of the rural community to report any suspicious behaviour around fields, farm buildings and straw stacks.

When out and about, there are some precautions you can take to avoid accidentally starting a fire which could rapidly get out of control:

Don't drop cigarettes or any burning item onto dry ground,
Don't use barbecues in fields, open grassland, parks, and forests,

Make sure embers are fully extinguished and cold, then dispose of them safely,

Avoid driving on or leaving your engine running on long dry grass and fields,

Always take your litter home, never leave glass laying around.

In The Countryside in June

So, our rural communities will be extremely busy at this time of year getting in the harvest. This summer has currently not been playing ball with some very wet and frustrating showers which have caused plenty of issues. Once we get a prolonged spell of dry weather, I think it is fair to say we will see a number of fields knocked down very quickly as so much of our cereal crop is just about ready to harvest. I have no doubt alongside the harvest, farmers will be keen to get next year's crop back in the ground as quickly as possible after last Autumn's very wet drilling season - they won't want a repeat of that.

Many of our livestock farmers also double hat as arable farmers too, so whilst the work involved with livestock is lesser at this time of year, they too will be busy with harvest. They will also be looking to the weather forecast for a dry spell to make the summer hay or silage. This is essential for feeding stock over the winter months and provides a

welcome reminder of summer in the cold dark months! This is now the time of year many of our shepherds will be starting to look at their breeding stock to make sure the tups (male sheep) are in pristine condition. He will generally have a job of covering around 30 ewes so will need to be at his best. The breed sales will start to occur where you often find the ewes who have done a couple of tougher seasons rearing lambs on the hills in the north are sold to lowland farms to continue their breeding success but in an easier climate down here. A lot of our cattle farms still have their stock on their summer grazing, making the most of the 'free' food in the meadows on our marshes. If you drive along the Acle straight to Yarmouth currently you will see the fields full of stock enjoying the warmer weather.

For wildlife, August generally signals the end of the breeding season for most of our birds especially our migratory species as they will need to have strong enough young to start the long journeys back to winter grounds. Some of our native species may well have a further clutch into August, so do bear this in mind when carrying out garden or roof maintenance work. Unfortunately, we will start to see the Swifts heading back to the warmer winter climates of Africa by the end of this month. Make the most of getting out onto places like water meadows, river meadows etc. as watching the swifts and swallows swooping around eating the flying insects really is a special sight.

There isn't much colour in the countryside as August goes on, as many of our native flowering species start to head to seed to repopulate ahead of next summer, but with that it does bring our hedgerows to life with blackberries and other fruit bursting into colour and flavour.

Final Words

Thank you again for taking the time to read. Please do get in touch with any concerns or issues.

I hope you enjoy the summer weather (hopefully) in the coming weeks and will catch up again next month.

PC Chris Shelley

