

RURAL CRIME TEAM (RCT)

June 2021

Monthly Update

THE RURAL CRIME TEAM OPERATES FROM HEATHFIELD AND MIDHURST POLICE STATIONS, COVERING THE WHOLE OF SUSSEX. THE TEAM COMPRISES OF TWO SERGEANTS, EIGHT PCS AND SIX PCSOS. THE TEAM SPECIALISE IN AGRICULTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, EQUINE, HERITAGE, AND WILDLIFE CRIME. 62% OF SUSSEX IS RURAL.

June 2021

The flavour of the month has been seizures.

The Team have been busy seizing assets and evidence from rural criminals.

Whether it's recovering a stolen digger or seizing a

suspect vehicle, we've done it.

We've complemented that with some key partnership working.

Illegal Waste Carriers have felt our presence keenly during June with 3

successful operations across the County and more to shortly follow.

We've also raised our profile whilst enjoying a great weekend with the public at the South of England Show.

Seasonal Overview

As the weather warms up our livestock farmers are busy shearing their flocks of sheep and de-horning calves.

Hay making and silaging also begins at pace.

In arable farming crop spraying prior to harvest takes up a lot of the farmers' time.

All of this activity will likely result in more tractors and livestock trailers on our roads and specialist equipment seen in fields.

This increase in activity also tends to equate to an increase in reported thefts of farm equipment and we suggest that it is securely locked when not in use.

In wildlife, we will all begin to hear the recognisable sound of grasshoppers and crickets in meadows and gardens as males vie for the attention of potential mates.

Owl chicks are starting to venture out of nests and onto nearby branches as they get braver, whilst our

native snake species like adders and grass snakes can be spotted basking in the sun on hot days.

As the days get warmer more people are enjoying our beautiful countryside and more also visit our wonderful heritage sites.

This uplift in footfall can cause damage to protected land as well as the increase in ASB associated with such an influx of people.

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Introduction from Insp Oli Fisher

I am the new Rural Crime Team Inspector.

I've been in post for 3 weeks. In that time I have attended numerous events to listen to the views of rural communities. There is overwhelming support for the concept of a rural crime team, but I know that positive sentiment will only last if we continue to prove our worth.

Rural Policing is hard. Being in the right place at the right time only happens if we have good intelligence. My vision for the unit is one driven by intelligence. That means doing 3 things:

1) Gather information from communities and businesses to understand the core issues

2) Identify who is responsible

3) Work with partner agencies to bring offenders to justice and change behaviours

Organised criminals will be involved in many strands of criminality.

The people that steal agricultural plant, may also be involved in organising cruel sports.

It can be a complicated picture. Piecing the jigsaw of intelligence together takes time, but if we

want to bring offenders to justice, we need to have as rich an intelligence picture as possible, so we can target them on multiple fronts. If you have information that will help us target criminals, we want to hear from you.

I recognise that not all issues experienced by rural communities involve deliberate criminality.

Some issues require educating the public to improve the harmony between those that

work in the countryside and those that access it for leisure purposes.

My team will work with bodies such as the NFU to share messaging about issues like livestock worrying, which can cost farmers throughout Sussex many thousands of pounds.

It's a great pleasure to join this team and I look forward to sharing the results with you.



South of England Show

The South of England Show is renowned as one of the nation's premier agricultural shows.

Because of this, it was a real privilege being invited by the show's organisers to man a stall and interact with not only the farming and countryside communities but also the general public.

The Rural Crime Team and Mid Sussex Neighbourhood Policing Team shared the stand and provided advice, swapped contact details and engaged with the wider community in a way that's simply not possible on a day to day basis.

The knowledge of the RCT in addressing

concerns in the rural areas alongside NPT's fantastic knowledge on local issues and antisocial behaviour meant that we could reassure a wide range of our

communities, who all left our chat confident in the knowledge that Sussex Police take their concerns seriously.



Illegal Waste Carriers & Commercial Vehicles Targeted

The Rural Crime Team understands that all communities despise fly-tipping.

Despite this it is often very difficult to catch those committing such offences.

Not only does it blight our environment; but those doing it undercut legitimate and law abiding waste businesses by offering cheap waste removal services, with no intention of disposing of their waste responsibly.



The Rural Crime Team are putting considerable effort into highlighting, educating and prosecuting those that commit waste offences.

We have carried out 3 days of action across the County in June targeting commercial vehicles and waste

carriers.

Working alongside local Neighbourhood Policing Teams, Roads Policing and the Commercial Vehicles Unit as well as local authorities and Trading Standards we set up stop-check sites in Heathfield, Hastings and Brighton.

Between these days the multi-agency approach resulted in 5 fixed penalty notices being issued for waste offences, 3 fixed penalty notices being issued for traffic offences and one arrest for a drug-driver.

Between the Police, Local Authorities and Trading Standards we hold an impressive amount of tools in order to deal with any criminals who may be using the road network.

Working with the Water Bailiffs

June sees the end of the course fishing closed season, which ended on 15th June.

The closed season is a ban on almost all fishing in rivers and streams to allow fish stock to replenish.

Around this time each year we see an increase of illegal fishing on our rivers, whether it be through people fishing before the closed season is over or people beginning to fish without having

obtained a rod licence from the Environment Agency.

The fees from rod licences help pay for vital projects supporting anglers and fisheries across England, such as stock surveys, improving waterways and replenishing stocks.

An annual rod licence costs as little £30.

Anglers who fish without a rod licence could be fined up to

£2,500, so it really is worth the investment!

You must always carry your rod fishing licence when you're fishing or you could be prosecuted by police or the Environment Agency, with whom we work closely with.

During June the Team conducted joint patrols with the Environment Agency in both West and East Sussex.

Throughout these patrols 7 people received fixed penalty

notices for fishing offences, the most common being fishing without a rod licence.

Illegal fishing also goes hand-in-hand with other illegal activities such as recreational drug use and drink-driving.

Our message is clear: Take care of our waterways and wildlife or risk a large fine and potentially appearance in court.

Stolen Property Recovered

The Team are always on the lookout for stolen plant, machinery and equipment.

When these expensive items are stolen, it results in hard working people being unable to earn a living.

Often the items stolen are portable and easy to sell on such as chainsaws. Other items can be much larger and may have

an end buyer in mind, like a tractor or digger.

We often find there's a cross over between those stealing from our rural communities and those who steal from building sites. The type of items taken are so similar it would be foolish to think that the same criminals are not causing both issues.

You can rest assured that if we see a piece of plant being moved at strange times, we'll

stop and check it out.

You can also be certain that if we have a tracker activation we will act upon it.

A case in point is when a tracking firm pinpointed the location of a stolen mini-digger near Horsham and the team suited up and recovered it.

In the process of recovering the digger, a number of other stolen items on the site raised suspicion

and were seized, including a twin axle trailer, some digger buckets and specialist tools.



Suspect Van Seized

Rural Burglaries can occur in remote places where no-one else is around to witness the theft.

They can leave businesses and homeowners at a loss and feeling vulnerable and unsafe.

Rural Burglars are one of our top priorities.

It is rare to be able to disrupt a burglary mid incident but that it was happened to a farmer in Hartfield recently.

3 men were caught breaking into a shipping container and he chased them off.

The Team attended

along with local officers.

Due to our ongoing work in building relationships with the community we managed to ascertain images of the suspects on other farms in the area earlier in the day and identified a vehicle which was parked nearby as being used by them.

Checks into the vehicle led us to spark up a conversation with our colleagues in the Kent Rural Task Force who identified the vehicle as having been involved in 2 burglaries in Kent during the same week.

This was seized as

evidence and will undoubtedly prevent further acquisitive crime from being committed by this group for days to come.

Although the suspects weren't caught at scene that day, the footage is so clear that we are confident that colleagues somewhere in the South East will recognise them. We will be ready to pay them a visit and show them the hospitality of our police custody centres using appropriate powers.

Incidents like this always highlight how important it is to secure your property away, record serial numbers

of all your equipment and take photos of it so as to provide police with the best possible chance of recovering your property.

The proper advice is of course to use deterrents e.g. locking your gates, installing CCTV and property marking hardware.

This type of response would not have been possible without the community coming up trumps with the intelligence and evidence and we ask that people continue to report all suspicious behaviour to us as soon as possible.

Livestock Worrier Makes Hefty Settlement

Livestock worrying continues in Sussex despite a huge amount of work and publicity.

This has culminated this week with an ITV

Meridian piece with the Rural Crime Team, the NFU and the South Downs National Park to raise awareness to the masses.

Our #TakeTheLead message is clear:

Keep your dogs on a lead in agricultural fields to prevent harm coming to livestock and avoid getting a criminal record and fine.

that people take it as seriously as we do.

We do however have occasions where a farmer may be against taking formal action and as such we will always listen to their wishes and accommodate this in our decision making.



We will take every opportunity to see justice is done for our farming community as we seek to prosecute wherever possible.

In one such circumstance recently near Rye, a farmer and a dog walker came to an agreement after a dog broke free of its lead and mauled a ewe.

People need to be aware that injury does not need to be caused to complete the offence.

The agreement to pay almost £300 as compensation for the ordeal was fulfilled immediately.

The maximum fine is also £1000 so we ask

Team Secure Police Property Act Fund Donation

The Police Property Act Fund (PPAF) is made up of monies received by the police from the sale of found property or from property confiscated by order of the court and then sold.

The main aim of the fund is to help support local projects and charities.

After receiving reports that Crowborough Rugby Football Club had some

unwelcome visitors overnight it was felt that it would have been devastating to the huge community that the club supports if equipment was stolen.

An application to the PPAF secured a £500 donation for the club to help upgrade their security systems.

