



Operation Randall

tackling rural crime
Newsletter

Issue 43 | April 2024

 @RuralCrimeNfk

Introduction

It seems a long time since I last sat down to write one of these and to be fair it was two months ago. A lot has happened in that time.

The team were incredibly busy whilst I was away for a few weeks and as always, I will touch on a few of those jobs as we go through the newsletter this month.

The weather has been a little kinder, with everywhere slowly starting to dry but there is a long way to go. The fields and hedges are greening up quickly now and the evenings are pulling out which is a pleasure to see.

As always, if you have any questions, concerns or comments on any issues raised throughout this newsletter, please do contact us via email operationrandall@norfolk.police.uk

Hare Coursing – OP Galileo Update

In the last update, we had the recent court results. Since then, the number of calls we get in relation to hare coursing has remained well below the average.

We have had handful of calls again in the west of the county. We suspect the wet weather has possibly had an impact on the number of incidents reported to us. As we move into the traditional off season for such criminal activity, we hope the cases we put before the court earlier this year show that this sort of criminality is absolutely not welcome in Norfolk. Anyone travelling to Norfolk to commit such acts will be most unwelcome.

Dogs Worrying Livestock

It is essential that dogs are kept on leads at all times when any livestock is around. It is even more essential in the coming weeks with many young lambs hopefully bouncing around the spring grass.

Your dog may be fine and have great recall, but it only takes that one incident when they lose concentration and get into the field of cattle, sheep or other livestock and you end up criminally responsible for their actions. It is also important to remember your dog doesn't have to kill to find yourself in a lot of trouble. Simply causing shock or disturbance to the animal is an offence. Do not take chances, do not risk suffering, do not risk becoming a criminal.



NEED TO TALK TO US?

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

Wildlife Crime Update

It is fair to say policing in general is different every day. The past two months have seen a huge variety of wildlife investigations take place. The team have led on several investigations with a couple even proving to not be criminal incidents.

The first was an otter which had reportedly dumped at an entrance to a garden centre. Sadly, it transpired the otter had been hit by a vehicle and moved away from the busy junction. For a small mammal, who is considered to be water based, otters can and will travel huge distances on land. Their typical range is 15 square miles and they will travel 10+ miles a day both on land and water to find food. They are a great sign of a clean river.

We also have two incidents under investigation whereby sea gulls have been intentionally killed. Many people may see sea gulls as a pest however many are now becoming a conservation concern and they can no longer be dealt with under a general licence like some of our 'pest' bird species.

Another slightly unusual one has seen the start of an ongoing piece of work with all our auction houses and antique dealers. We are reminding them of their requirements under the Ivory Act, Wildlife and Countryside Act and CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) to only sell legally obtained specimens (or those that can be proven antique). This has followed one or two bits of ivory appearing but also a very rare taxidermy Hawksbill Sea Turtle, where the age could not be proven to be pre-1947. The three pieces of legislation designed to protect wild species from illegal trade is incredibly complicated and we have enjoyed working with the experts and the auction houses. It is fair to say all parties have learnt a lot and it has been a really positive engagement piece which will continue moving forward.

We have sadly also picked up four dead birds over the last couple weeks including two barn owls, a buzzard and a

sparrowhawk. The two barn owls have been confirmed as NOT being shot and further tests are ongoing under the WIIS scheme (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pesticides/reducing-environmental-impact/wildlife/wildlife-incident-investigation-scheme.htm>) to understand if these were from natural causes or potential first hand or second hand poisoning. We have only just collected the buzzard and sparrowhawk and these have yet to be x-rayed. We cannot release any more details of these birds until we have further test results etc. as this forms part of the investigation. Obviously, if it is found that they have died of natural causes, then we will report to the relevant agencies to help them understand bird populations. We will of course keep you updated.

Again, if you ever find any deceased wildlife which you do not think is quite right, or in an unusual place, please do report it to us. This can be completed online very quickly and anonymously if you wish to. Where possible, please record the exact location using What3Words as it really helps us to find samples.

Of course, it would be remis of me to not mention bird nests in a spring newsletter! We have had several calls already in relation to nests being disturbed or destroyed. We have reports of quadbikes in unauthorised areas disturbing ground nesting birds on the coast – this has only recently come in, so it is in the very early stages. We have also interviewed a tree surgeon for the removal of rook nests.

It is essential before carrying out any work in trees, hedges, roofs and in fact anywhere with birds, that there are no nests being built or in use. If there is, please leave the work till after the nesting season finishes. It is a criminal offence to disturb a nesting bird (some exemptions do apply but these are very strict, and you must fully understand your actions and comply with the licence).

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

Egg Collecting—Conviction—OP Easter

Norfolk man illegally collected almost 3,000 eggs

A prolific egg collector has admitted illegally hoarding thousands of rare birds' eggs in Norfolk.

Daniel Lingham, 71, of Newton St Faith, appeared at Norwich Magistrates Court on Tuesday 20 February 2024 where he pleaded guilty to five offences.

They were:

Taking eggs from a non-schedule 1 wild bird namely a Nightjar on 9 June 2023 at Holt

Possessing an egg or its parts of a non-schedule 1 wild bird – namely 2429 eggs on 25 July 2023

Possessing an egg or its parts of a schedule 1 wild bird – namely 22 Schedule 1 bird eggs on July 2023

Possessing articles capable of being used to identify and take eggs
Breaching a Criminal Behaviour Order on 9 June 2023

Lingham, who has two previous convictions for similar crimes, was captured on a wildlife trap camera on 9 June 2023 sealing two eggs from a Nightjar nest in Holt Lowes.

Investigators were shown the footage and were able to identify Lingham by his distinctive walking stick which is seen in shot.

A police search of his home on July 25 2023 subsequently revealed the extent of his hoard.

Within the property a total of 2995 eggs were found. A large collection was in his bedroom including some non-native species, alongside 2429 native birds' eggs protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Of those 548 were from native birds on the amber list of birds of conservation concern and a further 546 were of the most serious concern on the red list including Linnet, Green Finch, Yellowhammer, House Sparrow and many more.

A further collection of eggs - which looked much newer - was found behind the bath panel including a box containing a pair of Nightjar eggs with a label 'Nightjar 2, Holt Lowes June 9.'

Officers also found identifying books, binoculars, and an egg blowing kit.

In interview Lingham said all of the eggs, bar the Nightjar ones, had been taken before his previous conviction in 2018 - although the way they were stored suggested otherwise.

He further claimed a collection on display in a cabinet in the bedroom had come from an Essex house clearance and while they were his he had not taken them himself from the wild.

He said he had been looking for adders and tiger beetles when he was "tempted" by the Nightjar eggs due to his egg collecting addiction, which was a mental health issue.

Lingham has previously been investigated and prosecuted.

In 2005 he was jailed for ten weeks after police found a collection of almost 4,000 eggs in his home.

Then in 2018 he was found to be in possession of over 5,000 eggs for which he was jailed for 18 weeks and handed a 10-year Criminal Behaviour Order aimed at stopping him from committing similar crimes in the future.

Under the CBO he is banned from entering Holt Lowes between 1 February and 1 October as well as many other sites across Norfolk and nationally – many of which appeared on place name labels among the boxes.

PC Chris Shelley from the Op Randall Rural Crime Team thanked RSPB investigators for their huge support throughout the investigation and also the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU).

He said: "Egg collecting should be a hobby that is confined to the history books having been made illegal in 1954. The illegal collecting of eggs is tackled every year under Operation Easter with forces and partner agencies nationally taking part in bringing those involved to justice, all overseen and facilitated by the NWCU.

"Thankfully there are very few individuals now committing this crime but these few, including Lingham, cause a huge amount of harm to 1000s of birds including some of our most at risk species - in this case Nightjar, Linnet, Yellow Hammer and House Sparrows to name just a few.

"We would always encourage anyone who sees suspicious activity around bird nests in the coming months to report as much detail as possible using our online form or 999 if in progress."

Tom Grose, RSPB Investigations Officer, said: "The scale of egg theft which Lingham has committed over the last 20 years is shocking. Sadly, his obsession with collecting wild birds' eggs has ultimately resulted in thousands of breeding birds, which have invested huge amounts of energy into rearing young, to fail.

"We're relieved that this type of crime is now relatively rare in the UK, but this latest case has revealed that the breeding success of the Nightjar, a species of conservation concern, has again been targeted in Norfolk by Lingham's illegal actions.

"We'd like to thank Norfolk Police for an excellent investigation which has again led to Lingham's prosecution."

He will appear for sentencing on 3 May 2024



Operation EASTER - 27 years of stopping egg thieves

The national enforcement campaign to protect our nesting wild birds is underway for 2024.

The taking of wild bird eggs is a serious crime, yet it remains an illicit hobby for some determined individuals.

Whole clutches of eggs can be taken from some of the UK's rarest birds and stored in secret collections. New risks to wild birds have also emerged in recent years with criminals taking eggs or chicks from bird of prey nests and trading them illegally across the world.

Detective Inspector Mark Harrison from the UK NWCU says: "Thankfully, egg collecting as a hobby has declined over recent years due to effective law enforcement and a change in attitude, particularly as younger generations realise the negative impact that this crime has on our wild birds and biodiversity. But the problem still persists and new related risks have also emerged, including the increase in wild taken birds of prey, chicks and eggs that are being illegally laundered into the legitimate falconry industry. Recent examples of these crimes are the convictions of Daniel Lingham in Norfolk for prolific egg collecting and during Operation Tantallon, the father and son duo, Timothy and Lewis Hall who were stealing wild peregrine chicks from nests in Scotland, in order to sell them on.

Operation Easter is one of the NWCUs longest standing operations for the protection of wild birds and at this crucial time of year when the birds are breeding, we need to ensure that we are alive to the risks and ready to respond. The NWCU will continue to support all the UKs police forces to prevent further crimes and pursue those criminals that commit offences. We will help to co-ordinate the policing response, ensuring dedicated Police Wildlife Crime Officers from the participating UK police forces receive up to date intelligence, operational support and access to specialist investigators from the NWCU. This year we will also be elevating Operation Owl

with the support of key partners to ask the public to be our eyes and ears across the country to increase reporting of suspected incidents and intelligence. This will also help us to raise the profile of these wildlife crimes."

If you have any information on egg thieves, or those who disturb rare nesting birds without a license, you should contact your local police by dialling 101 - ask to speak to a wildlife crime officer if possible. Get a description/photo and vehicle registration if safe to do so. Nesting will be in full swing in April so please contact the police if you see anyone acting suspiciously around nesting birds. Information can also be passed in confidence to Crimestoppers via 0800 555 111.

Lovelock in the West (West Norfolk Rural Crime Beat Manager)

Another month has gone past and it has been a relatively quiet one for the west of Norfolk. The wet weather not only stopped work being completed on the land but also seems to have kept the hare coursers away, as we see the last of the hare coursing season. This gives us plenty of time to get to all parts of the district and touch base with all members of the rural community. One thing that I have noticed in my travels is that GPS units are still being left on tractors overnight. I know at the end of the day climbing up to take the GPS units off can be a pain, but this small act potentially could save your unit being taken. As the clocks go forward and we begin to get the evening sun, please be vigilant to anyone on the farm that you do not recognise and report either on 101, online form or to your local rural crime officer to investigate. It may seem like a small bit of information, but it could be a bigger part of the puzzle.

Again, I thank you all for your support in tackling Rural and Wildlife Crime in the west of the country.

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

STOP...
this is a scam!

THE
TRAP

Kingy in the South (South Norfolk Rural Beat Manager)

Hello!

I am PC 475 James King (Jimmy) and since October 2023 I have been the Rural Crime Beat Manager for the South Norfolk area. Since taking on the role, I have been meeting and talking with as many farmers, landowners, and gamekeepers as I can. I am always looking to speak to anyone else I have not gotten to yet. I talk about crime prevention advice, reporting methods for crime and intelligence, suspicious vehicles and people, and wildlife crime to name just a few topics. I think that it is very important to keep the lines of communication going between the public and the police and this is certainly the case in the rural community.

We have seen and do see yearly thefts such as red diesel, heating oil, tools, and equipment to name just a few. The message I want to get across is - please report these thefts. You are not wasting anyone's time and even if we cannot link a suspect, it is vital we have all the information we need, as it could help us link it to another crime or crimes and build the bigger picture for us. If we have not met yet, please do get in touch with me, or if you see me out in the truck, I'm happy to stop and speak to you then. Have a great spring season.

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April in the Countryside

April in the countryside

April brings a big change in the countryside, with the farms incredibly busy in so many ways and then everywhere just brightening up.

The arable farms will be making slow progress with the spring drilled crops. The fields are finally starting to dry and the machinery can get on the fields. This time of year sees most of the barley and wheat being drilled. Spring wheat and barley tends to be a higher quality but lower yielding, especially in Norfolk, which often attracts a premium at market. The barley will be going to brewing companies and the wheat is generally for bread. The winter barley and wheat (planted in the autumn) tend to yield higher but lower quality and is often used for animal feed, biscuits etc.

Some will be assessing the autumn drilled crops and working out what to do with them, given many have been under water all winter and some looking very thin in places. That said, in the last week or so I have seen some of the oil seed rape starting to come into bloom and we are probably a couple mild days with plenty sun away from fields full of yellow - a true sign spring has sprung!

Once the cereals crops are in, many will also be looking at getting the sugar beet in, especially in the east and west of the county. Sugar beet is a great break crop for many of our arable farms with it being a broad-leafed crop rather than a cereal crop. This means it creates a natural break in disease and pests which can building up in the field.

Livestock farms will be working around the clock, in particular our lowland sheep farms, who will be flat out with spring lambing. Whilst many lambs, especially in lowland areas like Norfolk, will be born earlier than April, the tradition is for the ram to go in on the 5th of November to have lambs on the 1st of April (although with a leap year this year could be a day earlier ☺). Many still follow this tradition plus it is a less input type of lambing with lambs often turned out quickly onto fresh spring grass, full of goodness for them and the ewe to produce high quality milk. If lambing earlier, you often have to feed a large quantity of supplementary food which can be expensive to get the same results. On the flip side of that, the lamb is finished much earlier which can often return a higher price at the Easter market.

Our wildlife really bursts into life. The blackbirds are in full chorus first thing and last thing at night - an unmistakeable sound. Some of our migratory birds start to return throughout April and one sure sign towards the end of the month that summer is around the corner, is the return of the swallows. I could spend hours watching the species over a water meadow swoop up and down collecting insects.

We are now well into bird nesting season as mentioned earlier and as such, it is important to remember all nests are protected once construction starts and are in use. It is a criminal offence to destroy or damage such a nest. There are some exceptions to this but these are very strict and not often applicable in built up areas.

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