

Rural Matters



Rural policing in Kent – a magazine for residents and businesses

Winter 2023



In this issue:



**Kent
Police**



Dead sheep dumped



Wildlife award for team




Keyless car thieves jailed

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

Rural Inspector



Inspector
Tom Mepstead
07977 519099


Rural Sergeant



Sergeant
Darren Walshaw
07870 252185

North Division – 07528 989095

- PC Marc Pennicott
- PC Adrian Goodsall
- PC Paul Williams
- PC Beth Ninnim
- PCSO John Cork




West Division – 07580 236308

- PC Nick Lingham
- PC Anna Verrall
- PC Luke Jordan
- PC Tom Smith
- PCSO James Robinson

East Division – 07980 978202

- PC Harry Callaghan
- PC Mike Sutton
- PC Matt Lehman
- PC Amy White
- PCSO Debbie Bishop
- PCSO Ian Norton

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

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

Unexplained deaths of eight sheep dumped in garden and layby – farmers warned

Rural Task Force officers are investigating the unexplained deaths of six sheep after their remains were found dumped in a garden and layby in the Sevenoaks area. They have warned livestock owners to be alert, to check stock and report suspicious vehicles following a spate of suspicious incidents around Halstead and Chevening.

Kent Police were called after the remains of six sheep were found strewn across the garden of an address in Otford Lane, Halstead between Friday 24 and Wednesday 29 November 2023.

The hides and entrails of two more sheep were later discovered dumped in a layby in Ovenden Road, Sundridge.

Police are trying to identify the owner or owners of the sheep, locate those responsible, and bring them to justice. Rural Task Force PC Marc Pennicott, said: 'The theft of so many sheep and the way they were killed is abhorrent. Our dedicated team is working relentlessly to identify the suspect or suspects and take robust action against them.'

'Kent is home to vast expanses of rural land and the force prioritises the protection of its rural communities and works closely with partner agencies to bring those who offend in the countryside to justice.'



'I urge anybody with information to contact us on **01622 604100** quoting reference number **24-0225**.'

Along with more visible policing in the area, officers are advising people who own sheep to:

- Check them regularly.
- Report any thefts.
- Be vigilant and report any vehicles parked in rural locations and country lanes that are suspicious and may be involved.



National wildlife crime award for Rural Task Force officers

A high profile investigation by the Kent Police Rural Task Force, working with the RSPCA, into animal welfare and hunting offences has won a national award. The Rural Task Force team – described as the driving force behind 'one of the most expansive wildlife crime and animal welfare policing operations in the UK' won the National Wildlife Crime Operation of the Year award at the National Wildlife and Rural Crime conference from 18-20 October. Full story, see [page 5](#).

Sheep may have been deliberately run over – vehicle in livestock field

Three sheep killed in a field near Maidstone may have been deliberately run over. A gate was reported opened before the vehicle trespassed into the field near East Hall Hill, Boughton Monchelsea between the evening of Saturday 4 November and the next morning.

Rural Task Force officers are appealing for information about the vehicle. It is believed the sheep may have been deliberately run over during the distressing incident.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw, said: 'The three dead sheep were found

with horrific injuries. Another was struck but survived. It's likely this vehicle would have been damaged and we are appealing to anyone with information to contact us. 'We're asking motorists who may have been in and around this area to check dashcams for any suspicious activity, which could include footage of the vehicle entering or exiting the field.'

If you have information call **01622 604100** Reference **46/197338/23** or Crimestoppers anonymously on **0800 555 111** or via their online form.



Increase in poaching during darker nights

The darker winter months have seen more poaching reports across the county. To help the Rural Task Force investigate, remember:

- Secure access to any fields where possible.
- Report all incidents quoting Op Galileo.
- If in progress call 999.
- Where possible obtain any vehicle details and a description of offenders.
- Use the 'what 3 word' app to give exact location if not known.



Five-year anniversary of Sarah Wellgreen murder – new appeal to find her for family



Vauxhall Zafira taxi

Detectives have made a renewed public appeal for information into the murder of mother-of-five Sarah Wellgreen – whose body has never been found.

An extensive investigation into her disappearance from New Ash Green in October 2018 led to her ex-partner Ben Lacomba's arrest and conviction for her murder. He was jailed for life, with a minimum 27-year term. He's never said where her remains are.

Officers believe she was moved in his red Vauxhall Zafira taxi and her body concealed in a rural location near New Ash Green. Sarah was last seen in the Bazes Shaw area during the evening of 9 October 2018, and was reported missing two days later.

Detective Chief Inspector Neil Kimber said: 'Not knowing where she was left continues to cause considerable pain

and distress to her loved ones. We are appealing for any new information which may help us identify new lines of enquiry and are asking people to cast their minds back five years, to anything at the time which may have seen unusual or suspicious.

'Lacomba would almost certainly have moved Sarah's body in his car, a red Vauxhall Zafira taxi, with writing on the side. We believe it is very likely he then concealed her remains in a rural area, surrounding New Ash Green, Longfield or a location towards Sevenoaks.'

The search for Sarah has been one of the largest in Kent Police's history, with more than 1,300 locations examined. DCI Kimber added: 'Any detail, no matter how small or



insignificant it may seem, could be the clue which one day leads to a breakthrough. We will never give up hope of finding out what happened to Sarah.'

If you have information call **01622 654863** Reference **46/XY/9631/18** or Crimestoppers anonymously **0800 555 111** or via their online form.

Joint marine patrols provide small ports reassurance

Protecting the county's marine community and reassuring those using inland rivers and lakes is the focus of joint marine patrols.

The Kent Police Search and Marine Unit, Counter Terrorism Policing Borders and Border Force teams recently spent a day patrolling the Thames Estuary and River Medway.

It included visits to Cuxton Marina, Medway Bridge Marina, Port Medway Marina and Gillingham and Chatham marinas, local sailing and rowing clubs and the RNLI – offering advice on reporting suspicious vessels and people.

The force's RHIB Invicta operates in tidal waters, with



Sgt Richard Job and local ports intelligence officer Julie Howell with the RNLI

smaller vessels used for inland rivers and lakes.

The Rural Task Force also works with colleagues and partners to engage with Kent's coastal communities.

Detective Sergeant Matthew Whitlock said: 'The joint events are extremely important,

providing reassurance that we're working together to mitigate any threat and risk in the small ports environment. We are committed to protect our maritime community against anyone that abuses the water areas to conduct criminal activity.'

Kent Police Rural Task Force wins national award

Officers from the Kent Police Rural Task Force were praised for their response to organised animal welfare and hunting offences across an area spanning four forces.

It follows an ongoing investigation and close partnership working with the RSPCA Special Operations Unit (SOU) into wildlife crime and injuries to dogs and involved multiple suspects – which began in March 2022.

Search warrants across a large geographical area and co-ordinated enforcement across four forces led to six arrests and numerous dogs

being seized along with firearms. The case attracted national media coverage.

The team – described as the driving force behind 'one of the most expansive wildlife crime and animal welfare policing operations in the UK' won the National Wildlife Crime Operation of the Year award at the National Wildlife and Rural Crime conference from 18-20 October.

RTF Sergeant Darren Walshaw, who along with RTF Coordinator Doug Robertson, was nominated by the RSPCA said: 'The award was as a result of joint partnership



Left to right Ch Insp Kevin Kelly (Head of the NWCU) DCC Debbie Ford (retiring national lead for Wildlife and Rural Crime), Kent RTF Sergeant Darren Walshaw, Will Mitchell, RSPCA and WWF representative.

working with the RSPCA Special Operations Unit, neighbouring forces and was a real team effort.'

The RSPCA's nomination said: 'The Kent Police Rural Crime team and the RSPCA's SOU have developed, over many years, a very professional working relationship and understanding of each

agency's expertise. We are therefore able to frequently work together in the investigation of wildlife and animal welfare offences and facilitate and effective enforcement action.'

Three defendants from Kent were due to appear at Folkestone Magistrates Court in December 2023.

Local communities and volunteers help catch keyless car thieves who targeted Kent

Investigators have thanked Neighbourhood Watch volunteers and local communities who provided important evidence after a spate of keyless car thefts. Range Rovers, BMWs and Mercedes were among 29 vehicles stolen countywide from Hawkinge and Tenterden to Tonbridge and Maidstone. The offenders used an electronic device to gain access to steal them. Detectives discovered vehicles with cloned plates were used to travel from east London to Kent to drive stolen cars out of county to be sold for parts. Alminas Satas, Maksims Seluks

and Olgierd Golubovski were charged following a Kent Crime Squad investigation. The men admitted conspiring to steal vehicles and were jailed for a total of more than seven years at Canterbury Crown Court on 13 November. Phone evidence linked them to the thefts but investigating officer Detective Constable Scott Drake also thanked local residents. He said: 'I would like to thank the local Neighbourhood Watch coordinators who worked tirelessly to obtain crucial CCTV footage and for the support of the local communities in providing important evidence in this case.'



Left to right: Alminas Satas, Olgierd Golubovski and Maksims Seluks

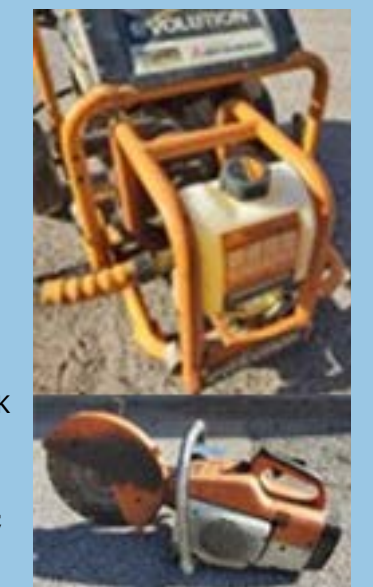
Rural equipment thefts – power tools, trailers and ride on mower recovered

A large number of items including power tools, chain saws, trailers and a ride on mower were seized by Rural Task Force officers investigating rural thefts.

Investigators are appealing to owners of the suspected stolen items to contact them. It follows the arrest of a man in August in connection with reports of burglaries in the Canterbury area.

A total of 57 items were recovered. RTF Sergeant Darren Walshaw said: 'We suspect all these items are stolen and are appealing to victims of crime who recognise anything to call us.' A 35-year-old man has been bailed pending further investigation.

Items recovered include: STHIL, Husqvarana and EMAK chainsaws; Kiam post drill; Mitsubishi power washer; orange and yellow garden strimmers; Paslode nail guns; Wes welding supplies; a Makita angle grinder; double



Beach hut break-in alert

Beach hut owners are being urged to make sure they are secure following a break-in at Greatstone.

Police were alerted to padlocks being cut from beach huts next to the car park on Coast Drive. It's believed to have happened around 8pm on Sunday 26 November 2023.

Folkestone Community Safety Unit Detective Inspector James Wyles, said: 'We'd like to remind beach hut owners to review their security and take simple steps to protect against burglars and vandals now that the summer season is over.'

If you have information contact Kent Police **01843 222289**, Ref **46/210306/23** or Crimestoppers anonymously **0800 555 111** or via the online form.

Keep beach huts secure:

- Don't leave anything of value inside at any time.
- Lock doors and windows with at least one good quality closed-shackle padlock.
- Consider fitting a bar lock and/or a monitored alarm.
- Security-mark property inside and keep a photographic record.
- Don't store flammable substances or matches inside.
- Don't leave materials around the hut which could be used to commit crime, such as tools.



Vintage traction wheel still missing



A distinctive heavy wheel stolen from a vintage traction engine this summer is still missing.

Police believe it would have been loaded on a van or flat-bed truck because of its large size.

It was taken from a 1901 Burrell traction engine in a field in Woodchurch around 7pm on 23 August.

Anyone with information call **01843 222289** Reference **46/153564/23** or Crimestoppers anonymously 0800 555 111 or via their online form.

Power tools stolen from vans overnight

Van owners are advised to protect vehicles and tools after three overnight break-ins in the Romney Marsh area.

The vans were targeted between 7 and 8 November and power tools stolen from inside in Greatstone, Brenzett and New Romney.

Anyone with information call Kent Police on **01843 222289** Reference **46/198679/23** or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or via the online form.

Parcel of £4,000 cash intercepted after phone fraud on pensioner

Officers intercepted a parcel containing £4,000 after a pensioner was tricked into posting cash by someone pretending to be from her bank.

Residents are reminded to be on guard against phone fraudsters following the scam attempt on the woman, aged in her 70s, in the Tonbridge area.

She'd been phoned on 2 November by someone claiming to be from Santander, saying they needed to help her prevent fraudulent transactions.

They gained remote access to her computer, manipulated her online account to appear money was deposited which she was then persuaded to withdraw and post for 'investigation.'

Kent Police was alerted by a relative and swift action meant officers were able to recover the cash parcel from a local post office. The Economic Crime Team is investigating.

Detective Constable James Burr said: 'Criminals will go to great lengths to appear genuine, and this can include obtaining personal information which they then disclose to the victim to give an



Preventing fraud

Together, let's stop scammers.



Remember, ABC:

 never Assume

 never Believe

 always Confirm

Get the latest scam advice @KentPoliceECU

appearance of legitimacy.

'Never give personal information in response to an incoming call, particularly if the caller is asking you to do something that will affect you financially. The police or your bank will never request money from an individual, nor will they ever direct a person to make a transaction on their bank card.'

'If you receive such a call, end it immediately. Wait for five minutes for the phone line to clear and contact Action Fraud or the police,

if you think you have been scammed. If possible, call from a different number. Remember the ABC rule.'

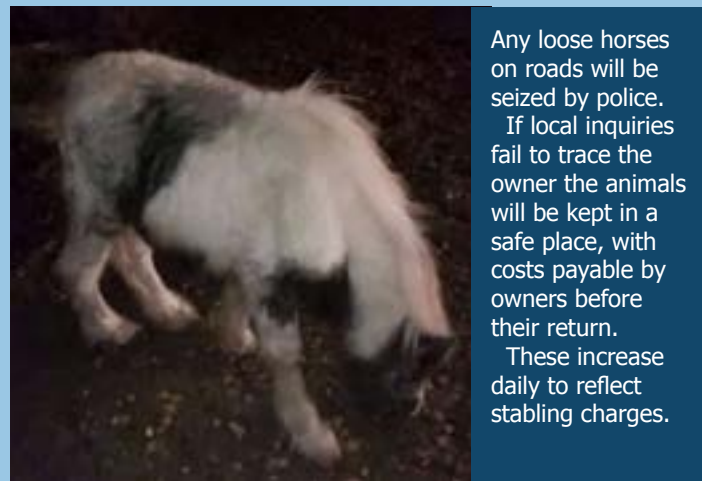
Loose animals alert – horse found in High Street

Rural Task Force officers were called to the High Street in Bean after a horse was reported loose in the road.

The young animal was found wandering and a lane had to be closed near the Bean interchange while officers worked to get it back to safety.

Attempts have been made to trace the owner of the animal, which is white with black markings.

The incident highlights the disruption loose horses cause – posing a danger to their welfare as well as motorists.



Any loose horses on roads will be seized by police.

If local inquiries fail to trace the owner the animals will be kept in a safe place, with costs payable by owners before their return.

These increase daily to reflect stabling charges.

Fishing event – positive response from young people

A project to encourage young people to enjoy fishing and respect the angling environment attracted plenty of interest.

Fish Fest, arranged by Police Community Support Officer Kirsty Greaves of the Maidstone Community Safety Unit, involved Kent County Council youth hub and local businesses.

Nine local teenagers joined up to Fish Fest, funded by Golding Homes Housing Association.

They attended two educational sessions at InfoZone in the Maidstone Youth Hub, which also provided bait for the practical days. After successfully completing these, they took part in an event at Monks Lakes, Staplehurst, on 28-29 October.

Cast A Thought, which provides fishing activities as a way to support mental health, helped run the weekend – coaching the children and lending them the relevant equipment.

On Sunday they competed for three prizes, donated by local businesses, Ashford Angling Direct and Maidstone Angling Shop, which included vouchers to spend on fishing equipment.

PCSO Greaves said: 'Fish Fest was a success, providing a focused learning opportunity for young people in the Downswood area. We initially anticipated the attendance of six children but were pleased when more turned up.



'Speaking to the group, it's evident they now feel better equipped to pursue this hobby both safely and legally. I am extremely grateful to local services and businesses for their efforts and generosity and look forward to coordinating future events.'

The Kent Police Rural Task Force works closely with angling groups and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure fishing in the county is carried out legally.

Imitation firearms in public – warning to owners

Owners of BB guns and other imitation firearms are being reminded of laws around their use in public.

While not illegal to own certain weapons for sports including airsoft and paintball, it is an offence to carry them in public without a reasonable excuse.

Doing so has the potential to cause alarm and confusion that it is a viable firearm.

In a recent incident a man was reported to have a handgun inside a Deal pub. The incident prompted specially-trained armed officers to attend. When he was arrested nearby on suspicion of possessing a firearm in a public place it was established he had two airsoft guns he'd collected from being repaired.

The incident was resolved through a

community resolution and apology.

Detective Chief Inspector Patrick Milford Directorate said: 'While it is an unfortunate fact criminals will sometimes arm themselves with imitation firearms to commit robberies and other serious offences, there are also incidents every year where members of the public, who'd otherwise consider themselves law-abiding, find themselves in handcuffs.'

'This can be avoided by never taking an imitation firearm out in public and by transporting it inside a bag or case if planning to play a combat sport at an approved location.'

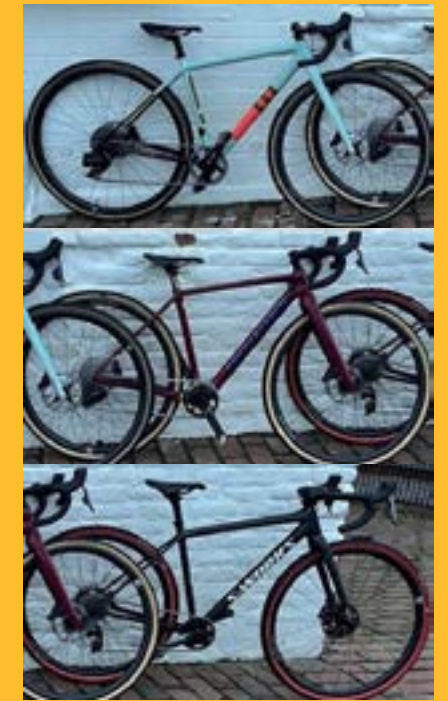
'As well as being illegal to possess in public, air weapons including BB guns also have the potential to cause serious injury in the wrong hands.'

Bikes stolen from barn

Police are appealing for help tracing three bikes and tools stolen from a van and barn in an East Kent village.

The Specialized S-Works Crux bikes; a Stihl disk-cutter, hedge trimmer and chainsaw and DeWalt compressor were stolen from Grove Road, Wickhambreaux between 9pm Sunday 12 November and just after midnight Monday 13 November.

Anyone who saw anything suspicious; has CCTV or dashcam footage or been offered the items for sale, call **01843 222289** Reference **46/201561/23** or Crimestoppers anonymously 0800 555 111 or via their online form.



Property marking

Rural crime can increase during the darker winter months and marking property helps officers trace and return it if people are victims of crime.

Check security measures are appropriate and in good working order and that property is marked, recorded and records retained. Anyone interested in having property marked free of charge email **rural.task.force@kent.police.uk**

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.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**

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**

FarmWatch helps track crime through fast alerts

FarmWatch WhatsApp is an effective way to share information with Rural Task Force officers directly.

Since the scheme started it now has 1,798 members. The alert scheme enables The Rural Task Force to act quickly – resulting in stolen property

being recovered fast and offenders stopped. Anyone interested in joining their local group email the RTF at rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

Farm Watch WhatsApp is a tool to share information directly with the 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.



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

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

