

Rural Matters

Rural policing in Kent – a magazine for residents and businesses

Summer 2026



In this issue:



**Kent
Police**



Anti-social behaviour –
summer action



Catapult incidents latest



Cable thefts – be alert

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

Rural Sergeant



Sergeant
Ross
Haybourne

North Division

- PC Marc Pennicott
- PC Paul Williams
- PC Beth Ninnim
- PC Matt Amos

West Division

- PC Anna Verrall
- PC Tom Smith
- PC Jim Elkin
- PC Laura Bournazian
- PCSO Millie Smith
- PCSO Chris Ward-Davies



Email your Rural Task Force team
rural.task.force@kent.police.uk

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.



X account

Your Rural Task Force PCs have a X 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 Task Force input into national discussion on catapults

Damage to property and attacks on wildlife and livestock using catapults has increased. Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne recently joined local MPs, animal welfare charities, government officials and policing representatives for a meeting at the Home Office to discuss the impact of catapult incidents.

In Kent there has been vandalism at churches and shops. Local people and farmers have reported injured, maimed and dead animals.

Campaigners have called for tougher laws around possession of a weapon in public and sales to children.

A particular concern is social media trends involving young people using catapults and sharing videos.

In the UK catapults are not illegal to own or carry in public, but if they are being used to harm people, animals, property or for anti-social behaviour, their use could be illegal under existing laws.

There is a police national response to the issue, Operation Lakeshot, with a focus on anti-social behaviour. The Rural Task Force also seize catapults and ammunition used in poaching.

Sgt Haybourne said: 'It is encouraging to see the Government taking our concerns seriously regarding the rising misuse of catapults and their links to social media. We are currently receiving reports of wildlife being targeted almost daily across the county, which is deeply concerning. While we welcome the potential for stronger legislation and enhanced enforcement powers, there is also a clear need for education. Parents, schools, and young people must understand the seriousness of these offences – harming or killing wildlife is a crime. We will continue to investigate these incidents thoroughly and are committed to bringing offenders to justice.'



Animals are protected under laws including the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which makes it an offence to inflict unnecessary suffering on wildlife. Property is protected by laws around criminal damage.

Wildlife killed in suspected slingshot attack

Two ducks found dead along with a pair of injured ducklings were believed to have been attacked with a catapult. The incident was reported near a Sheerness waterway around 11.30am on 30 May. Steps were taken to protect remaining birds. Police are investigating after reports of two boys, aged 12-14, seen in the area at the time. Inspector Julia Bassindale said: 'We suspect the birds were injured by a catapult.'

Summer action to tackle anti-social behaviour across Kent

Police teams will be tackling anti-social behaviour this summer as part of key plans to keep disruption to a minimum.

Officers have been preparing for an expected increase in reports of ASB between June and September, as expected higher numbers of visitors come to Kent coasts, open spaces, towns, villages and parks.

High-visibility patrols, targeted operations, use of dispersal orders and other powers are planned. They were effectively used during the recent hot weather, with large numbers of people visiting Kent's coastal areas. Over the late May Bank Holiday weekend officers moved

on a total of 52 people in Broadstairs and Margate and made eight arrests – resulting in positive local feedback.

Supt Rob Marsh, Head of Kent Police Strategic Prevention, said: 'We will also carry out proactive operations targeting the issues we know matter most to local people such as the use of catapults to damage property and wildlife, abusive street drinkers and nuisance vehicles, including e-scooters.'

In the last financial year Kent Police used a total of 1,090 preventative orders countywide including 227 dispersal orders, 13 property closures and 562 Community Protection Warnings and Notices.





Rural Sergeant Darren Walshaw moves to pastures new

After over 20 years dedicated to serving rural communities, Rural Task Force Sergeant Darren Walshaw is moving to pastures new.

A familiar face countywide with the Rural Task Force, the majority of his policing career has been focused on issues affecting the countryside.

He said: 'After more than two decades serving the rural communities of Kent, the time has come for me to step away. I joined the Rural Task Force on 1 May 2017 and officially left on 1 May 2026 – nine years that have been nothing short of a privilege.'



'My connection to the countryside is far deeper than policing. Born and raised on a farm, I left school to work as a shepherd and stockman before joining Kent Police in 2000. My love for the rural way of life has never left me. It has been one of the great honours of my career to spend the majority of it working alongside and for the rural community.'

He joined Swale RTF fresh from probation, served with Faversham Rural Neighbourhood Team and after a return to response policing in 2007 in pursuit of promotion, came back to neighbourhood policing in Swale as the first Community Policing Team Sergeant. He also spent time at Medway Local Policing Team and Medway custody.

Darren said: 'Within Faversham RTF, I developed Operation Tree, our response to hare coursing. The Op Tree mobile was, in many ways, the first version of FarmWatch. Op Tree evolved into Operation Salmon before we joined Operation Galileo, the national policing response to poaching and hare coursing.'

'FarmWatch remains something I am deeply proud of. We took an idea, built on it, and introduced it countywide.'

Today, it has grown to nearly 2,000 members, all able to directly communicate with each other and with the RTF – sharing intelligence, support and strengthening our collective response to rural crime.

'Tackling livestock worrying has always been a personal passion. I am incredibly proud of how we have developed Kent Police's response to this issue. The use of DNA capture – well before the recent legislative changes – demonstrated forward thinking that has put Kent Police ahead of the curve. Over the years, the team has helped secure compensation for many livestock owners, although no amount can truly lessen the impact of an avoidable incident.'

He's also worked closely with the Joint Unit for Waste Crime and the Environment Agency to challenge those responsible for the escalating problem of waste crime – an ongoing priority through Operation Assist, building



close partnerships with local authorities. Darren added: 'I've been fortunate to work with a huge number of committed partners: the NFU, RSPCA, DVSA, Historic England, CLA and many more. I've been touched by the messages of thanks I've received.'

In the last decade the RTF team has doubled in size. Darren said: 'We now have PCSOs within the unit, FarmWatch continues to thrive, we've expanded property marking and the RTF has won national recognition.'

The team and people across the rural community have made this job meaningful, rewarding, and something I will forever be proud of. Thank you for the support, the partnership and the trust.'

People urged to report suspicious activity after man jailed for substation thefts

Disruptive power loss and costs to business of over £220,000 resulted from a series of burglaries targeting electricity substations across Kent.

After the offender responsible was jailed earlier this year following a police investigation, members of the public are urged to be vigilant this summer and report any suspicious activity around equipment which brings power to their home or business.

The actions of Mark Baker, 40, of East Hall Walk, Sittingbourne, who was arrested last December, led to disruption to dozens of homes.

He had posed as a workman to break into several electricity substations, including Ashford, Canterbury, and Herne Bay, to steal copper and safety equipment.

Searches at his property led to the recovery of bolt croppers, metal cutters and several large batteries.

He was jailed earlier this year for two years and nine



The offender dressed as a workman to target sites across the county

months at Canterbury Crown Court, after pleading guilty to multiple offences.

Lee Craddock, head of security at UK Power Networks said: 'Tampering with electrical infrastructure is extremely dangerous and also causes significant disruption for the wider community. We appeal to the public to inform police about any suspicious activity around the equipment which brings power to their home or business. Reporting a concern could prevent a power cut or even save a life. Our thanks go to Kent Police for bringing this individual to justice and protecting public safety.'

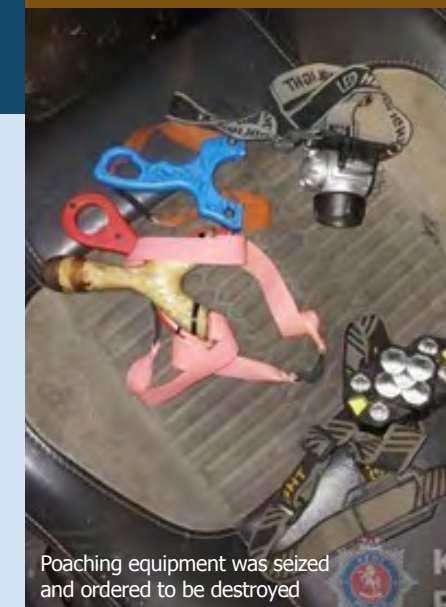
Crimestoppers recently launched an appeal following a number of incidents, including one in

Watlingbury, where three vehicles were used to remove cables from fields, affecting landlines for vulnerable customers in the local village. The issue often affects rural communities, with isolated sites targeted and cables pulled out of the ground and laid out in fields to be cut up and transported.

A knock-on impact is often damaged or destroyed crops, meaning farmers face harm to their livelihoods as well as their connectivity.

Since April 2024, more than 100,000 people across the UK have lost the use of their landline and/or broadband due to copper theft. If you see anything suspicious contact Crimestoppers anonymously on **0800 555 111**.

Night poachers – Rural Task Force investigation



Poaching equipment was seized and ordered to be destroyed

Patrols who became suspicious of a car parked near farmland near Canterbury at night after bright lights in the area had been reported, arrested two night poachers.

Six dead pheasants, along with one fatally wounded bird, were seized along with four catapults, 200 ball bearings, three head torches and a large lamp.

Two men, aged 18 and 19, were arrested and charged. They admitted trespassing on land at night and taking and destroying game. They both received community orders, requiring them to complete 100 hours of unpaid work, pay costs and a victim surcharge. The poaching equipment was ordered to be destroyed.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'We are committed to protecting our countryside from this type of illegal activity and continue to work closely with landowners and residents to ensure offenders are brought before the courts.'

Tributes to Rural Task Force PC Harry Callaghan

Colleagues and the rural community have paid tribute to long serving Rural Task Force PC Harry Callaghan, whose death was recently announced.

Kent Police Head of Strategic Prevention, Superintendent Rob Marsh said:

'Throughout his distinguished career, PC Callaghan became a familiar and reassuring presence within our rural communities. His dedication to public safety and his willingness to go the extra mile earned him the admiration of colleagues, residents and rural communities alike. Whether tackling rural crime or supporting local initiatives, Harry's

passion for making a difference was always evident. He will be greatly missed.'

Rural Task Force Inspector Tom Mepstead said: 'Harry was such a prominent figure in our rural communities, so well known and respected far and wide, and he earned that by being a genuinely good person. Harry was the heart and soul of our team and defined everything rural policing should be.'

Farmer and former High Sheriff, Sir George Jessel Bt DL, said: 'Harry represented the very best of what the Kent Police Rural Task Force stands for. He will be greatly missed by the rural community.'



Rare miniature horses stolen – appeal for information

Police are investigating the reported theft of two rare miniature horses near Edenbridge.

A gate was damaged in the incident which happened overnight at a farm in Marsh Green Road between 8pm on 27 May and 1am on 28 May.

The horses are a breeding pair of Argentine Falabellas and are just 2ft 8in tall. The stallion is white with brown spots, and the mare described as black.



Local residents with private CCTV or drivers with dashcam, who may have been in the area at the time of the incident, are also asked to



check for footage.

Anyone with information call the west Kent appeals line **01622 604100**, quoting reference **46/85133/26**.



Plant operations – £200,000 worth of machinery recovered

Kent Police Rural Task Force officers regularly work with specialist partners to tackle the theft of plant machinery and farm vehicles.

Earlier this year machinery worth around £200,000 was recovered in Dover following an operation led by the Rural Task Force working with Port of Dover Police, the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service and the National Construction and Agricultural Theft Team.

Drivers were detained

suspected of attempting to leave the country with stolen machinery. Officers made three arrests over a two-day period.

A woodchipper was recovered, along with an excavator and trailer, diagnostic equipment and a tool to change VIN numbers.

A lorry was also stopped after it was suspected that the Volvo G930 grader it was towing had been stolen. The value of the grader was estimated at around £150,000.

A suspected stolen John Deere baler was also seized.

Rural Task Force Sergeant Ross Haybourne said: 'These positive outcomes show what can be achieved when police officers and specialist partners work closely together.'

'Through working collaboratively, we were able to recover valuable agricultural and construction machinery, disrupt organised criminal activity and safeguard farmers, businesses and livelihoods.'



Rural Task Force at Kent County Show

The Rural Task Force regularly attends events like the recent Kent County Show in July. Members of the team explained to visitors how they tackle rural crime and their specialist roles, such as investigating wildlife and heritage crime.

Rural Task Force officers are specially trained to investigate offences where animals or habitats may be at risk of harm, including protected species, animal welfare, wildlife persecution and the illegal trade in endangered species.

Road op targets unsafe vehicles and illegal waste

Eight vehicles were seized in an operation in East Kent in June.

Along with 30 traffic offence reports, including for disqualified driving, speeding and using a mobile phone at the wheel, a man whose van was found not legally roadworthy, was banned from driving it on public roads until essential repairs were carried out.

He was also issued with a fixed penalty notice by Folkestone and Hythe District Council environmental enforcement officers for transporting scrap metal without appropriate documents.

The Rural Task Force and Kent Police colleagues work regularly with local councils to target illegal waste transportation.

Cllr Polly Blakemore, Folkestone & Hythe District Council's Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services, said: 'Too often we are seeing waste being fly tipped on our roadside verges and blighting our towns and villages. We remain firmly committed to working with other agencies in protecting our district.'



Beware of fraudsters – victims tricked out of over £750,000 in Kent

Police are warning people to be alert to telephone scammers posing as police officers or bank staff.

'Courier' fraud starts with an unexpected phone call from someone claiming to be a police officer or bank employee.

They tell victims their account is at risk or they are assisting an investigation, before being instructed to withdraw money, purchase valuable items or disclose sensitive information.

A courier is then sent, often by taxi, to collect property that can include jewellery, cash, bank cards and PINs. Anything handed over to the courier is stolen.

The scam caused 86 victims

in Kent to lose a total of £766,544 in 2025. Kent Police is supporting a national awareness campaign.

Detective Inspector Ian Sanderson said: 'Fraudsters frequently target people who are elderly or vulnerable and may pretend to be from a trusted organisation before persuading them to hand over their valuables. They can also make contact by WhatsApp and pretend to be a relative in need of urgent cash.'

'Between 1 and 10 June this year, we received 30 reports of this type of offence of which 18 were to residents in the east of the county. The criminals were successful in



only three of the incidents, managing to steal more than £9,300. We investigate reported frauds based on the evidence that is available and will always seek to track down those responsible and bring them to justice. We also have specialist staff who pay regular visits to banks and community groups to educate people on the warning signs. In this way, we hope victims will feel confident to stop, question and deter suspicious callers.'

Crime prevention advice

- A bank or the police will never call to ask for verification of personal details or PIN by phone or offer to pick up a card by courier. Hang up, wait a few minutes and call your bank on a number you know is genuine (such as the one on the back of your card) or 159.
 - Police or your bank will not contact anyone out of the blue to participate in an investigation; or send a courier to a home address to collect bank cards, cash, or other valuable items. Any such requests are a scam.
 - Do not trust the caller ID display on your phone – it is not proof of identification.
- Anyone who thinks they have been a victim of fraud should contact their bank immediately and call Report Fraud on **0300 123 2040** or via the www.reportfraud.police.uk

Keep fuel secure – action against oil thefts

Oil tanks can be a target for thefts during the summer months.

Many homes not connected to mains gas supply are often in isolated locations. Rural households can take steps to keep supplies secure.

They include:

- Install oil tank locks as thieves may carry tools to access the tank. Install a high-quality all weather padlock, locking bar system or lockable filler cap.
- Fit an oil tank alarm to alert to a sudden dip in the tank level.
- CCTV cameras to deter thieves and record suspicious activity.
- Position a tank so not easily visible or accessible or protect it with strong fencing.
- Install security lights and/or lockable gates.
- Gravel around a tank will discourage thieves and defensive planting, prickly hedges and thorny shrubs are natural deterrents.

Report suspicious large vehicles or activity to police.



Horsebox returned within 24 hours thanks to marking

An owner was reunited with her stolen horse box within 24 hours thanks to the Rural Task Force's property marking scheme.

The box was reported stolen from a farm in Wingham. Officers investigating followed up reports of a possible sighting and discovered the stolen box on a plot of land. It was identified as the stolen property due to unique markings recently applied by the Rural Task Force.

The marking scheme helps officers promptly identify stolen items and increases opportunities to make successful arrests and pursue prosecutions.

Free property marking

The Kent Police Rural Task Force offers free property marking to help protect a wide variety of items.

Their equipment can mark different surfaces including steel, metal, aluminium, leather and plastic with the property name and postcode and can be used on plant machinery, tractors, trailers, horse boxes, generators, and hand tools.

If you are interested in having property marked email rural.task.force@kent.police.uk



Kent Police Rural Task Force – protecting rural communities

The Kent Police Rural Task Force works to tackle rural crime and engage with local communities. The specialist team also includes Police Community Support officers in each part of the county and is supported by a Rural Special Constables' unit.

They are dedicated to protecting rural communities and ensure offenders face justice, working with partners, neighbouring forces and local residents to prevent crime and act on their concerns.

This includes proactive and high visibility operations and building on strong links with other agencies, Kent Police and cross border police colleagues and farming, equine and rural business communities.



FarmWatch alert system

The FarmWatch app gives members a dedicated tool to pass on information to the Rural Task Force team quickly. Anyone interested in joining their local FarmWatch group email the RTF at rural.task.force@kent.police.uk. FarmWatch 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 via the Kent Police website.

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



My Community Voice

Protecting the neighbourhoods of Kent and Medway

MCV is a two-way engagement tool brought to you by Kent Police

Use the QR code to find out more.

Or visit the website

www.MyCommunityVoiceKent.co.uk



Find out what's happening in your area



Receive alerts from your local officers

Tell us what matters most to you



Sign up



Sign up today and make your voice count

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

