

News

Security

Soaring thefts prompt police to issue warning

HORSE theft in the UK has risen and is continuing to rise, according to police and horsewatch groups, who are urging horse owners to take measures to fight it.

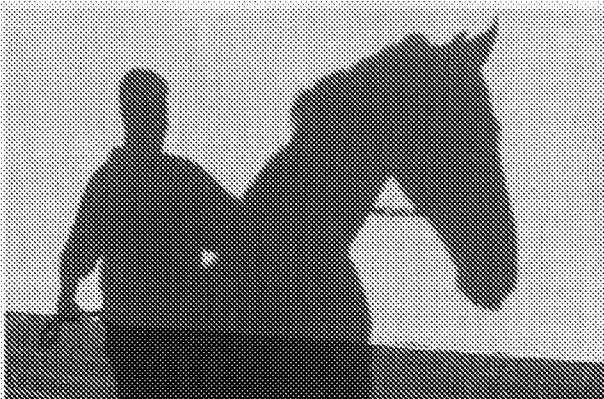
Around 10 horses were stolen nationally in August, representing a hike in numbers, according to Garry Porter of the National Horsewatch Alliance.

Between 12-15 August, three young coloured fillies were stolen from Somerset, a yearling cob from Telford and a 13.2hh children's pony from the Thames Valley area.

H&H has also heard of two botched attempts at thefts during that period, including one in Biggleswade where one of two stolen ponies fell through the floor of a stolen trailer and had to be put down.

David Collings, Horsewatch coordinator for Hampshire, said: "The main targets are cobs and miniatures, as they are easier to pick up."

But over 1-2 September a Belgian warmblood worth £4,000 was taken from a livery yard in Iwer, Bucks.



Horse thefts nationally are continuing to rise

Helen Evans from Thames Valley Horsewatch said the theft of a quality horse is unusual.

"They usually get found pretty quickly," she added.

Mr Porter agreed, adding: "We've never seen so many young foals going, either."

He also urged owners to take extra security measures.

He said: "We see property identification as the main weapon. Microchipping is unique, but it's not visible — it's much more difficult to steal and sell a freeze-marked horse."

What to do if your horse is stolen

- Contact the police immediately
- Get in touch with your local Horsewatch group
- Circulate your horse's description on posters
- Don't advertise any sort of reward
- Prevention is better than cure: freeze-mark and microchip your horse

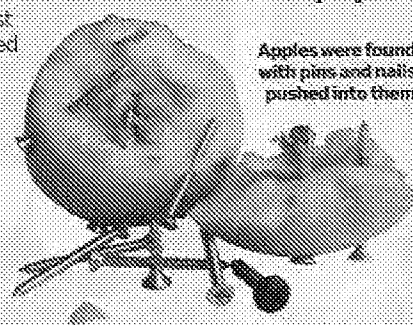
Welfare

Police hunt after apples spiked

HORSE owners in East Sussex are being urged to be vigilant after apples studded with pins and nails were found half-eaten in a field full of horses in the county last week.

Police are investigating after more than 15 apples were thrown into a field in Whiteway Lane, Rottingdean, on Saturday, 18 September.

The fruit had been spiked with dressmakers' pins and 2in screws and nails. Some of the apples had been half-eaten and nine horses were checked for internal injuries. Results from veterinary tests took a



Apples were found with pins and nails pushed into them

week to come through, but a police spokesman confirmed to H&H at the weekend that the horses were unharmed.

"This attack sounds horrifying," said World Horse Welfare chief executive Roly Owers. "These pins could have inflicted severe pain

and caused immense damage.

"I hope the perpetrators are identified and prosecuted. This is nothing other than an act of wanton cruelty."

An RSPCA spokesman added: "This is an appalling incident and we would warn horse and pony owners in the area to be vigilant and urge anyone with any information to come forward."

A spokesman for Sussex Police said: "This is an alarming incident. We are carrying out house-to-house enquiries."

Anyone with information should contact Sussex Police on 0845 60 70 999

Crime

Owners on guard after violent attacks

POLICE and the British Horse Society (BHS) are warning horse owners to be vigilant after the violent deaths of two horses. And as H&H went to press on Monday (16 January) there were concerns over a third possible attack, writes Amy Mathieson.

On 9 January, Dawn Jewell's two-year-old Friesian stallion Erik was killed in his field near Truro. His genitalia had been cut off, an eye gouged out and teeth smashed in.

Dawn found Erik in his field. "I thought he was just lying down, but then I saw his injuries," she recalled. "It was horrific. I'm so upset. He was my baby, my perfect horse."

Devon and Cornwall Police are still investigating.

And on 5 January, Linda Vickerage found her seven-year-old stallion Barney dead in his field in Carmarthenshire.

Linda's daughter Nicola Mann told H&H he'd had his eyes and genitalia removed and his body slashed open.

Police said the case is now closed, after two vet reports deemed the cause of death "inconclusive" and a third cited "natural causes".

But Ms Mann told H&H she still thinks it's "highly suspicious".

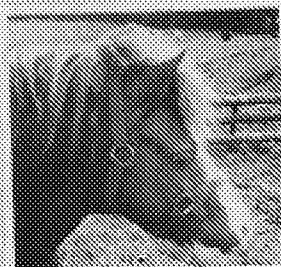
"My mother's distraught. In my eyes there's no evidence of a predator, there's a clean — almost surgical — cut down his abdomen two feet long."

On 16 January H&H spoke to the owner of Sammy — a three-year-old Welsh cross Arab stallion, who was found dead and mutilated in Devon.

Owner Tanya Ingram told H&H he was missing his right eye, left eyelid and his tongue and genitalia had been cut. He was three and she was intending to breed from him.



Erik was mutilated in his field in Cornwall



Barney was found dead in Wales

It was horrific. I'm so upset. He was my baby, my perfect horse

Dawn Jewell, owner of three-year-old stallion Erik who was found dead

But a spokesman for the RSPCA told H&H: "No foul play is suspected".

Devon and Cornwall Police added "this is not a crime" and that he died of "natural causes" — but the owners are unconvinced.

"It does not look like he died of natural causes to me," Ms Ingram told H&H.

"He was fit and well. And the cuts were so clean it doesn't appear to have been animals.

His penis was cut off. We're just so shocked, it's so distressing."

Lee Hackitt from the BHS reiterated police calls for vigilance. "Our advice is not to panic unduly, but for those who live in the areas where attacks have taken place it might be sensible to step up security."

Investigative psychologist Dr Keith Ashcroft told H&H that, while it was hard to comment on specific cases, people who attacked horses in this way often display similar traits.

"Regrettably, the torture and mutilation have clear parallels with the behaviour of offenders who victimise humans," he said.

"Therefore it's highly likely that those responsible for such attacks on horses have similar sexually sadistic motives."



A Shetland pony was found with slice wounds and an ear cut off in Kent earlier this month

Welfare

Are horse attacks on the increase?

SHOCK and anger surrounded the death of a pony drowned in a Hampshire lake as H&F went to press on Monday (11 July).

But the incident was just one of a frighteningly large number of attacks on horses this month. Initial reports were that the pony, harnessed to a trap, was forced into Hawley Lake on 9 July in what appeared to be a travellers' feud.

A passerby jumped into the lake to try to save the animal, but was kicked and was taken to hospital. The pony's body was later recovered by divers.

A spokesman for Hampshire Police said: "Conflicting reports surrounding the exact circumstances of the incident were given to officers. This incident may have been a tragic accident, not a deliberate act."

Police and welfare groups are appealing for witnesses.

But there have been other,

conclusively cruel attacks in the past two weeks.

On 5 July a young Shetland pony was euthanased in Gravesend, Kent, after it was found with an ear cut off and slice wounds all over its body.

The RSPCA is at a loss to explain why the pony was targeted in this way.

A spokesman said: "Any deliberate act of cruelty is shocking — and one incident is one too many. It's beyond belief why anyone would want to harm animals in this way."

Any deliberate act of cruelty is shocking — and one incident is one too many

An RSPCA spokesman

And on 2 July two ponies and a cow were shot dead as they grazed in a field near Tideswell, Derbyshire (news, 7 July).

A 52-year-old man was arrested by police, who described it as a "senseless act".

Other attacks this year include a mare shot with a crossbow in Surrey in April, a Shetland allegedly sexually assaulted then hacked to death in Essex and a man seen attacking a horse in a field in Liphook, Hampshire, in May.

There seems no link or reason for this spate of horse attacks but it has shocked welfare organisations.

Thames Valley Police equine liaison officer Helen Evans said: "You should visit your horse at least once a day. Report any suspicious sightings to the police and make sure your neighbours are also on the look out."

News

Theft **Equine**

Equine crime reaches 10-year high

With tack theft on the increase and equine crime at an all-time high, horse owners are warned to be on their guard. **Amy Mathieson** reports



EQUINE-related crime is at its highest level for the past decade. That's according to rural insurer NFU Mutual, which is urging horse owners to be vigilant this summer.

"Over the past 10 years, crime in the countryside has become more organised and sophisticated," said Nick Whittaker from NFU Mutual. "Thieves are very aware of the value of items on or around livery yards."

"She added that equine crime "dropped slightly" in 2012 (news 8 August 2013), but had been "growing steadily" before and since.

"It could be that the recession has caused people to opt for second-hand tack rather than new and the demand has increased," she said.

With the show season just around the corner, owners are urged to remember the theft of tack and personal belongings from shows is also increasing year-on-year.

Last year, a woman was charged with a number of offences, including the theft of a handbag that she admitted stealing from an unsecured vehicle at a show in Epworth, Humberside (news 5 September 2013).

Other thefts were reported from unlocked lorries at Milton Keynes and Larkhill (news 30 May 2013).

"Tack is not cheap and it is important to remember that not everyone in the crowd [at a show] will be concentrating on you and your performance," said Alison Cox of NFU Mutual.

Garry Porter from Horsewatch Alliance UK urged riders to use common sense.

What you are saying



"I think tack thefts have actually reduced in

Cambridgeshire — but there has been an increase in hay, feed and diesel thefts from garages, livery yards and garden sheds."

Julie Magnus



"I had two Albion saddles stolen recently. They were

on chunky lockable saddle racks. They jammed them off the wall and had even knocked down a brick wall to get into the tackroom."

Katie Smith-Harcock



"I found my saddle on eBay, I had to buy

it back though, as the police were too slow to react, £649 for a saddle worth £2,200."

Natasha Kaldereen



"A friend of mine had a stable rug stolen from the back of her horse recently — what horse person would be so cruel? I've also heard of electric fence batteries and even poop scoops from fields going here in the south-west. It's

too easy to sell things on nowadays with eBay and similar sites."

Jenny Pickup



"One problem that seems to come up regularly is the theft of electric fence

energisers, particularly in Suffolk."

Brian Osman

"Don't leave your saddle resting against the box. Don't leave your handbag lying on the front seat of an unlocked lorry," he told H&H.

"You assume you're with like-minded people, but that's when you're vulnerable and thieves take advantage. Don't drop your guard."

Tack thefts up, horse thefts down

TACK thefts have risen since last October, with a spate reported recently across the country.

"Over the past five months, tack theft claims accounted for 58% of all equine-related crime," said Ms Whittaker. "This has changed since

our rural crime results last year, where trailers and electric fencing were most commonly stolen."

The average theft claim is £1,921, but it can be much higher.

"Last winter, we had all of our tack stolen from our tackroom, which is just 50ft from our bedroom window," said one H&H

reader from South Wales, who didn't want to be named. "They took just over £8,000 worth of tack — it really shook me."

However, with the rise of tack thefts, horse theft is decreasing — which is also thought to be linked to the recession.

"Although every case is distressing, horse theft is nowhere near the level it was a decade ago," added Ms Whittaker.

David Collings, Hampshire Horsewatch co-ordinator, said horse theft is now a "rare occurrence".

"However, it does happen — four were stolen last month in Hampshire," he said.

"Take note of what you see and go with your gut reaction if you see something suspicious."

"If you have a phone camera and it safe to do so, film/photograph what you have seen. Riders should also consider a head camera."

Diesel theft — with it being siphoned from lorries — is also reportedly on the rise.

Mark your property — whatever the size

DON'T discount thieves taking more cumbersome items.

H&H reader Caroline Mosely from Midlothian had a Centaur three-horse heated rug dryer — worth around £400 — and a mounting block stolen three weeks ago.

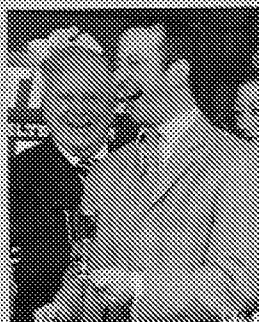
"It was broad daylight, so they must have

High-profile cases

WHILE Gold Cup-winning trainer Jim Culloty was at Cheltenham, thieves broke into his Co Cork racing yard. They took more than €15,000 (£12,500) in equipment, including a 4x4 and tools.

"The number of thefts is definitely on the increase. The whole thing has gone beyond a joke. Something has to be done," the trainer told the *Irish Independent*.

Eventer Sir Mark Todd's Wiltshire yard was broken into in earlier this month (news 13 March). Fortunately, no tack was stolen.



Gold Cup winner Jim Culloty was burgled on 14 March

News

Crime

Equine crime on the rise

Of all crimes reported to the police last year, thefts of horses and ponies were the most common, according to a survey by the NFU Mutual.

The cost of equine-related thefts have risen by 55% since 2012, with total losses from all 90 in 2013 according to the NFU Mutual.

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In 2013, thieves mainly focused their attention on horses and livestock trailers and electric fencing equipment, said Victoria Walton of NFU Mutual.

However, in the past year, theft of tack and equipment has risen dramatically, with over 1,000 items stolen, compared to 700 in 2012.

Farms and holiday parks are a favourite hunting ground for thieves because they are often unattended at night.

"Unfortunately horse owners and farmers, continuing to feel



Equine related thefts are up by 16% from 2012 according to NFU Mutual

the financial pinch, the threat of essential items such as tack, fencing, trailers and feed is a further blow to their pockets, particularly if the items are untraced."

Ms Walton added:

"Earlier this year, 70% of reported equine thefts were reported on a spot of high value, including at Olympic level, showing that thieves are targeting high value items."

Victoria Walton said:

"We have seen a number of large theft claims up to £20,000 recently," said NFU's Nick Whitham.

"The last time we saw large claims like this was in 2011."

"We have seen a number of large theft claims up to £20,000 recently," said NFU's Nick Whitham.

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Owners are urged to be vigilant and protect their belongings.

"The owner is on horse owners to act to prevent as much as possible — by installing equipment — but also to report it to the police if things are stolen," said David Collier from Hampshire Horse Watch.

Security

Bold thieves think big

POLICE and insurers are warning horse owners to ramp up their security after ambitious thieves stole a horse-walker and a field shelter from separate yards, writes Caroline Barnes.

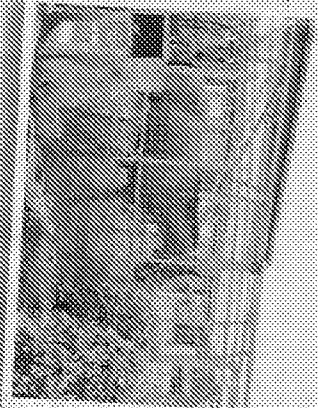
The 16x12m mobile field shelter was stolen from a field near Alton, Hants, on the night of 13 November. Thieves had to break through three sets of padlocked gates to get to the premises.

The owner found just the harnesses left when she went to check her horse the next morning.

"We have had shelters stolen from fields before but not for a long time," said David Collier of Hampshire Horse Watch. "It was an exceptional theft and there is every chance it was stolen to order."

"This theft was unusual as the shelter was dismantled, the thieves took their time and went in with the right tools and vehicle to remove it."

Nick Whitham, equine and rural affairs specialist at NFU Mutual, told riders that horse owners should paint their postcode on the roof of their field shelter.



A horse-walker and a field shelter have been stolen

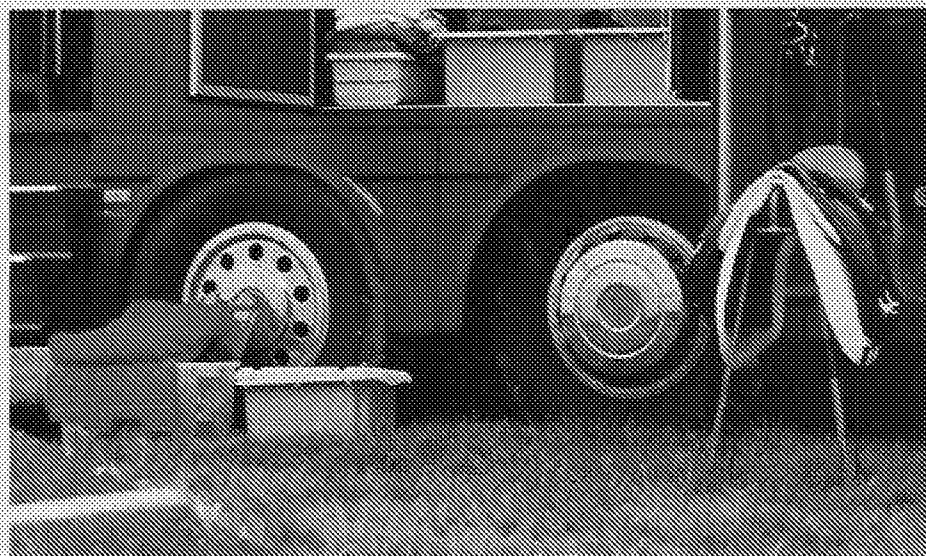
She warns that, as people have become better at protecting tack, thieves are now shifting attention to other equine equipment, especially electric fencing units and trailers.

In Northern Ireland, thieves are also becoming more daring, stealing a horse-walker from a private yard in Downpatrick. Police are investigating the theft of the four-beach-Porter horse-walker which was dismantled and removed some time overnight between 28-29 November.

Field shelters and horse-walkers can be insured under home or equine insurance.

Could thieves escape with a £30k haul from your yard?

A survey of claims by a rural insurance company shows thieves are increasingly targeting yards, taking tack with an average value of £30,000 in each haul. Amy Mathieson reports



Thieves target shows as items are often left out in the excitement of the event and vehicles left unlocked

TACK thieves get away with an average haul worth £30,000, according to new crime figures.

A survey by insurers NFU Mutual, based on claims at more than 300 of the company's rural branches, suggests that tack is ninth on the top 10 list of items stolen in the countryside. Number one is quad bikes.

And 70% of agents say rural crime is on the up. The survey was based on claims from January-June this year and agents were asked to compare claims against the same period in 2009.

"Since our last survey in 2007, horse thefts have decreased — due to a combination of microchipping, visible security markings and better traceability of horses as a result of passports. Nine were recorded last year and none so far this year," said Nicola Whittaker from NFU Mutual.

"But tack thefts are on the rise and different people are being targeted. A couple of years ago we found most tack theft was opportunist — a bridle here, a saddle there. Now thieves are aiming for livery yards and businesses and the average theft has risen to around £30,000.

"Thieves plan very meticulously, and theft on a grand scale can ruin careers and businesses."

Tack and rugs cleaned out

SUSSEX was found to be one of the worst affected counties, with over a dozen tack theft claims in May alone. East Anglia and Wales are also recorded to have been badly hit.

West Sussex-based dressage rider Amy

Stovold had her tack room raided while she was competing in Saumur (news, 13 May).

"We had really tight security — but they got past all the cameras and alarms. If thieves want to get in, they will," Amy said.

All Amy's saddles were bespoke and their loss could have made a big impact on her career.

"I had to go a week with no saddles at all and then it took a few weeks to break in the new ones — it was a complete nightmare," she added.

But lower-value items are also vulnerable. Just after the snow this year, 46 Rambo rugs were stolen off the backs of racehorses at trainer Evan Williams's Glamorgan yard.

"It was cold, so they had turned out rugs over their stable rugs and all the top rugs were taken. They were stabled away from the main yard but these people must have known what they were doing and have been used to handling horses — they had to go right past the stable lads' flats. There must have been a fair few of them too, as they had to carry 46 rugs across a 14-acre field."

Mr Williams admitted the yard may have had a slightly blasé attitude about theft before, but they have now labelled all property and put security fencing and cameras around the perimeter.

Check second-hand tack before buying

THEFT at horse shows is also on the rise. "If someone is carrying a saddle [at a show], no one will think twice. Don't leave your tack unattended," added Ms Whittaker.

NFU Mutual warns against buying tack at car boots and online auction sites and suggests

Equine crime statistics

70%
of NFU Mutual agents say rural crime is increasing

65%
believe better security would reduce crime

300
NFU branches surveyed

9th
— tack is 9th on top 10 list of items stolen from the countryside. Number one is quad bikes

£150,000
worth of trophies stolen from Raymond Mould

46
rugs stolen from racehorse trainer Evan Williams

9
claims for stolen horses to NFU Mutual in 2009

0
claims for stolen horses so far in 2010

checking on new website www.itsbeenstolen.co.uk (news, 8 July) before buying second-hand.

"We recently had a case where a £1,000 dressage saddle was stolen and later bought at a car boot sale in a neighbouring county for just £50. Fortunately, because the saddle was marked — and the buyer was honest — the saddle was recovered," said Ms Whittaker.

Gary Porter from Horsewatch warned: "People need to stop buying second-hand tack without knowing exactly where it has come from. If it's too good to be true, it probably is."

NFU Mutual also suggests keeping tack at home rather than at a livery yard.

The survey also found trailers are at risk, as thieves will steal them to transport stolen goods. And thefts for scrap metal also appear to be on the rise, such as the theft of a lifesize bronze horse statue at Addington (news, 27 May) and the £150,000-worth of trophies from racehorse owner Raymond Mould (news, 22 July).