

VERDERERS COURT 17TH MARCH 2021

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DECISIONS

DOGS ON LEADS

At our January court we received a presentment from Lucy Rowe on the subject of dogs in The New Forest.

Miss Rowe correctly identifies two Forestry England bylaws which cover the behaviour of dogs in the Forest. There is, in addition, specific criminal legislation in the form of the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 which provides that the owner or person in charge of the dog commits a criminal offence if the dog worries livestock on agricultural land.

Whilst the Verderers believe that there are many responsible owners who keep their dogs under proper control, there are an increasing number who do not. The Verderers applaud the efforts of NF Dog to promote responsible dog walking in the Forest. Many others such as the Forestry England and National Park Rangers do what they can to encourage responsible dog walking.

I should also say that when the owner of a dog that has been seen chasing or attacking stock has been identified we have found the Police very supportive.

Ms Rowe suggested Forestry England should amend its bylaws so that all dogs should be kept on leads at all times. The Verderers have long thought it anomalous that under the Countryside and Rights of Way ("CROW") Act dogs have to be on short leads during the bird nesting season which runs from 1 March To 31 July and at all times near livestock but that Act does not apply to the New Forest. The Verderers would support a similar provision applying to the New Forest as we believe It would significantly improve the breeding results of ground nesting birds.

AVERAGE SPEED CAMERAS

We support the introduction of average speed cameras on Roger Penny Way and indeed I wrote again to the Hampshire Police and Crime Commissioner shortly before receiving Gilly Jones's January presentment urging this. Regrettably I have received no reply to my letter and I will chase for a response. As noted in my January announcement when the candidates for the post of PCC are known for the May election, we will lobby them to support this proposal and we urge others to do likewise.

CATTLE FEEDING

A limited number of areas are allocated to commoners, allowing them to feed their cattle on the Forest. Feeding cattle outside an allocated feeding area is a breach of the Verderers' bylaws. The Agisters monitor the use of feeding areas and in the light of Mr Ingram's presentment at our January court we have asked the Agisters to be particularly vigilant. If evidence to the required standard can be obtained, the Verderers will prosecute any breach of our bylaw 16.

Details of anyone driving across the roadside ditches instead of using a barrier or gate should be passed to Forestry England.

HIT & RUN RTA

On the morning of 3rd June last year, a pony was found dead by the roadside at Hilltop, Beaulieu. The pony had been killed some time the night before by a driver who failed to stop and report the collision. A vehicle with front end damage was later spotted in Holbury and following an investigation by the Police, Mr Oliver Atack admitted he was the driver and that he had been involved in an accident with a Forest pony. Mr Atack was taken to court and convicted of the offences of failing to stop and failing to report. He was given 10 points on his driving licence, a community order of 100 hours of supervised unpaid work to be completed over the next 12 months and was required to pay £85.00 court costs and £95.00 victim surcharge. Had Mr Atack reported the accident at the time it occurred, the owner of the pony would have claimed for her losses from the driver's insurance and that would have been the end of the matter.

NOT JUST CARROTS

In our February Court, I explained the potential dangers of feeding carrots to ponies. It seems that some members of the public have now decided that rather than feed carrots, it is a good idea to buy and feed the small bales of hay that can be purchased from pet shops. Feeding such small quantities of fodder encourages ponies to fight for the meagre offering or hang around hoping for more instead of foraging naturally. Such ponies often then lose condition.

We are coming to the time of year when people will start cutting their lawns. We expect this will be the next problem for the Forest stock. Grass cuttings heat up when left in heaps. If ponies or donkeys eat that grass, it causes excruciatingly painful colic and the animal often dies.

The other foodstuff we regularly see put out on the Forest in the spring and early summer, is bales of old hay. Those responsible are often horse-owners who have hay that they deem unfit for their own animals because it is mouldy or excessively dusty, so they think a good way of disposing of it is to feed it to the Forest animals. This again risks the health of the animals which eat it and encourages aggression.

At the risk of sounding like a stuck record, I want to stress once again, that members of the public, including residents, should never feed the Forest animals or put out on the Forest anything which the stock may eat. The animals have all they need on the Forest. Those which lose condition are taken home by their owners and provided with supplementary feed.

PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS OR LEAVE ANYTHING ON THE FOREST FOR THEM.

March 2021