

Op Falcon - we are watching you

Rural criminals have been issued with a stark warning as part of a new crackdown on rural crime.

Operation Falcon was launched today to target criminals operating in rural areas.

Officers from the New Forest, Test Valley, rural Basingstoke, East Hampshire, Hart and Winchester have spent the day at beauty spot car parks across the county talking to members of the public about theft from motor vehicles.

With over 85 per cent of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight being rural, the area presents unique policing challenges, and being able to prevent and detect crime is often harder with fewer witnesses to criminal activity coupled with greater opportunities for criminals to target isolated properties and businesses.

In addition to rural policing activities, each month the force will undertake operational activity to target a key issue that has been identified as affecting rural communities.

A full analysis of all incidents, criminality and seasonal trends has been conducted to help ensure an effective focus on those issues that cause the biggest concerns.

The first operation will target theft from motor vehicles at beauty spot car parks.

Over the last three years, there have been a total of 503 occurrences reported to the police – 139 in 2012, 184 in 2013 and 180 in 2014. The easiest targets are vehicles where items are left on display; it only takes a few seconds for a window to be smashed and phones, bags and money to be stolen.

Chief Inspector Simon Tribe, the force strategic lead on rural policing, said: “We are launching Op Falcon today as part of our continued commitment to make the region a no go area for criminals.

“By using information provided by members of the public we can assess what the seasonal crime trends are and it enables us to be really targeted and focus our activity on the right people, in the right places and at the right time.

“We know at this time of year we start to see a rise in thefts from cars in beauty spots, so we have a range of activities planned to target those responsible, as well providing crime prevention messages and visible patrols in vulnerable locations.

“Criminals operating in these areas have told us how they target nice areas and can easily find up to 50 insecure vehicles to steal money and valuables from.

“Even more concerning is that they will regularly return to the same places and find the same vehicles, again insecure and again with valuables left inside.

“Anyone coming here to commit crime will be pursued and prosecuted and by working with the local community and partner agencies we can be really effective in make our rural communities a

hostile environment for anyone coming here to commit crime.

“There can sometimes be a perception that because action isn’t seen to be taken at the time, that nothing is happening. We are listening, we do take action and we are committed to tackling, disrupting and ultimately preventing criminal activity across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Please continue to report incidents to us.”

A recent example of this partnership working is the conviction of a family of criminals who travelled across six police force areas stealing from vehicles in beauty spots.

Wilfred Wells, aged 60 and his three sons Lenny Wells, aged 27, Edward William John Wells, aged 26, and Nicholas John Wells, aged 22 and all from Eyres Way, Salisbury, were jailed after admitting more than 90 offences.

Offences were committed in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, Thames Valley and Avon and Somerset force areas.

Operation Falcon also supports the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Rural Policing Strategy, which was designed as part of the PCC’s challenge to the force to deliver a consistent policing service across both urban and rural areas, with a specific requirement to close the gap between rural and urban solved crime rates.

Commenting on the launch of Operation Falcon, Simon Hayes, Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire said: “I am delighted to see the launch of Operation Falcon which will see regular targeted patrols in rural areas across Hampshire and Isle of Wight. Operation Falcon has been initiated following my challenge to the Chief Constable to improve policing for rural communities and deliver against the rural policing strategy, by adopting a more targeted approach to dealing with rural issues and crime.

“Through this initiative, all those living in or visiting rural areas should feel safer and less at risk of becoming a victim of crime. I would though urge all members of the public to report anything or anyone they consider to be suspicious to the police, by phoning 101. I would also recommend to those living in rural areas, to sign up to Hampshire Alert at www.hampshirealert.co.uk to receive latest information about crime in their area.”