

# Our duty to our dogs

Marc Jackson, rural crime officer for Wiltshire Police, explains how owners can deter potential thieves and keep their gundogs secure

**W**iltshire has, like most rural counties, suffered with the theft of dogs and, on occasion, the theft of gundogs. It is thankfully not that common and most dogs turn up as being lost rather than stolen.

In law, dogs are classed as property and as such the taking of someone's property comes under the Theft Act 1968. As a result any person found guilty of theft could receive an unlimited fine or be imprisoned for six months to seven years, depending on the circumstances and severity of the theft. Dog theft is a problem for owners of all breeds; however, it is recognised that gundogs are biddable, well trained and often pedigree, so are at particular risk. The most commonly stolen gundogs are cocker and springer spaniels and Labradors, with the south-east and south-west of England cited as particular hot spots for the crime.

## Blackmail

There are usually two ways in which this occurs: "opportunistic", where someone might see a dog, steal it and sell it in the pub or blackmail the owner for money; and "professional", where the theft is planned. The latter tends to be true for gundogs, especially those that are well known in the gundog world so are likely to produce good-quality puppies, which in turn generates further income for the offender.

It is also not unusual for working dogs to be stolen by those who may be opposed to hunting sports as a whole, so seek to remove the dog from the environment to prevent its use.

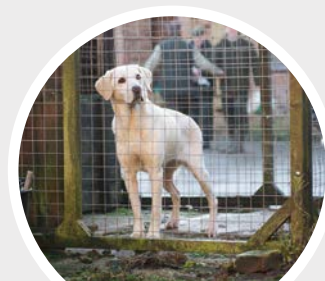
Stolen gundogs can end up on puppy farms but can also be sold on as valuable commodities in themselves. They can be stolen to order and even shipped abroad to prevent them from being traced. It is every gundog owner's duty to ensure their dogs are as protected as much as possible. Prevention is better than cure. 🐾

## Keeping your gundogs safe

There are many steps that you can take to improve the safety of your dogs, both at home and while attending shoots or gundog trials. The reason many gundog thefts occur is because the dogs are typically kept in kennels outside the house, or in vehicles left unlocked or with tailgates or windows left open — an easy target for thieves. It is important to think like a criminal. Look at your property as if you are trying to steal your dogs. How would you do it and how could you be stopped? Be sure to test your security arrangements regularly to ensure they work.

### To maximise security you could:

- 🔒 Build your kennels as close to your house as possible and try to disguise your ownership. This not only means making the kennels less visible, but also not boasting about your well-trained gundogs — word travels fast.
- 🔒 Use of adequate security lighting, ideally placed where it cannot be tampered with.
- 🔒 Consider using alarmed padlocks or passive infrared padlocks or sensors that send text messages to your mobile phone when tampered with.
- 🔒 Install remote access CCTV, which allows you to regularly check on your dogs from your mobile phone.
- 🔒 Consider the use of tinted windows on your vehicle — these help to obscure the view into the rear of your vehicle.



**Build your kennels as close to your home as possible**



**Use alarmed padlocks on crates**

- 🔒 Dog transit crates secured with alarmed padlocks could be considered when out working your dog, if other dogs have been left in your vehicle.

- 🔒 Don't always take the same route to your dog-walking location, shoot or working dog club and events in case you are followed. Be aware of vehicles that may be following you.
- 🔒 All dogs must now, by law, be microchipped, so ensure your details are up to date. Take photos of your dogs from several angles and keep them with your dogs' documents. These can then be circulated quickly in the event of theft and passed to the police.
- 🔒 The use of social media is great to spread the word if your dog is stolen, making them "too hot to handle", but be aware of hoaxers claiming to know where your dog is if you provide money. Always speak to the police for them to follow up potential enquiries.
- 🔒 Speak to your local crime prevention officer or rural crime officer about ways to improve the security at your property.
- 🔒 Remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity either via 101 or 999 in an emergency.