

Plaits in manes

Suffolk Police at times receive reports of horse owners finding plaits or unusual tangles in their horses' manes.

The opinion on the cause of plaits is varied; a search of the internet will bring up many theories from fairies, witchcraft and a marker for theft. None of these causes have been substantiated. The rumour that the 'plaits' are a marker for the theft of the horse is the reason that causes the most concern for horse owners. If the plaiting is a sign for possible theft then it is reasonable to believe that we would have an increase in horse thefts because horses whose plaits were not discovered would have been stolen and we would have seen a surge of numbers taken. However this is not the case.

This does not mean horse owners should drop their guard. They should always remain vigilant and continue to report any unusual activity concerning their horse. The usual advice is to report the matter to the police and your local Horsewatch. It would be useful if owners took photographs of the plaits and of the horse in full profile showing its mane with the plait in place when they are discovered.

There are a few occasions where the plait may have been "man made" but frequently the cause can be attributed to natural phenomena. Most reports of the plaits materialise around this time of year and is frequently attributed to the mane getting tangled by wind, mud, and dried/ dying plants such as thistles.

What can you do to minimise the risk of your horse being stolen?

- Freezemark the horse – an external identification is your best deterrent against theft.
- Ensure fencing is in good condition.
- If practical, padlock the field gate and/or padlock and chain both ends to avoid the gate being lifted off its hinges.
- Mark the horse's rugs with the freezemark ID.
- Avoid leaving headcollars on horses or on the gate or fence where horses are kept.
- Report suspicious activity to the police, such as unknown vehicles or people showing undue interest in your horse or property, particularly if it is on several occasions. It is important that you make note of the following to pass to the police:
 - Vehicle type, make and colour.
 - Vehicle registration number.
 - Any vehicle markings, such as a business name/livery or damage.
 - Description of occupants.