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Sat 16 Mar 2024 16.09 GMT

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Dozens of dead wild animals dumped outside Hampshire shop

Police investigate discovery of about 50 hares, an owl and a kestrel at door of Broughton community shop



Broughton, Hampshire. A spokesperson for the shop said workers had been devastated by the discovery. Photograph: Krys Bailey/Alamy

Police are investigating a series of gruesome wildlife killings in Hampshire after about 50 hares, a kestrel and a barn owl were dumped outside a village shop.

Staff were “distracted” after discovering the animals’ bodies early last Friday morning at the Broughton Community Shop. Blood had been smeared on the shop windows and the two birds had been stuffed on to the door handles.

Last month dozens of hares and pheasants were left outside a primary school in Awbridge, seven miles away, as well as what the *Hampshire Chronicle* described as a “decapitated deer”.

Villagers in Broughton believe that hare coursers may have been involved. Salisbury Plain is a popular location for criminal gangs who live stream events for people who lay bets on which animal will be killed first.

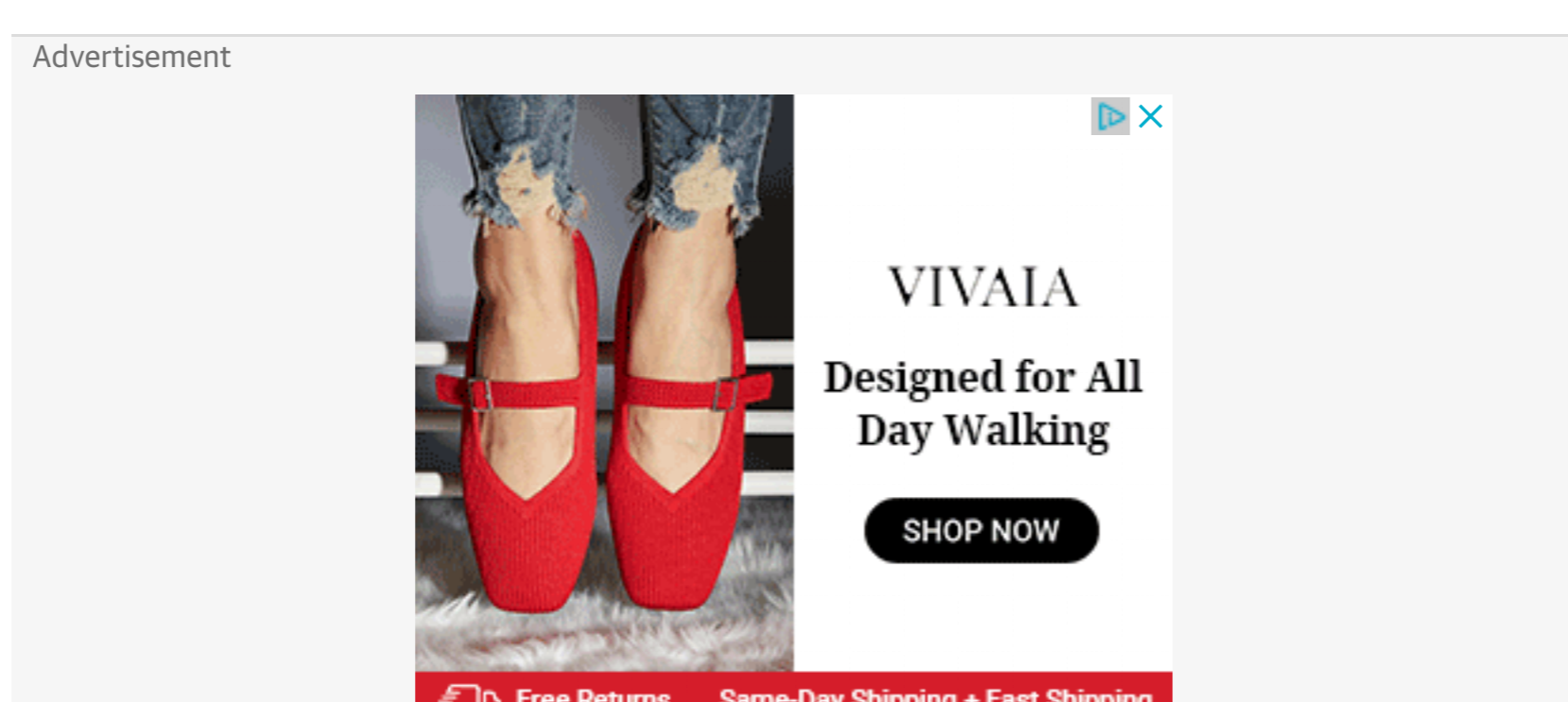
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Police said it was trying to identify the owners of a silver Suzuki Grand Vitara.

Mike Hensman, treasurer of the village shop, said: “There were hares on the patio outside the shop, blood on the doors. [There was] a raptor and an owl stuffed on to the handles of the shop.”



Last month dozens of hares and pheasants were left outside a primary school in Awbridge, seven miles away. Photograph: UKdeertrack&recovery/X

“I don’t know what they’ve done but they’ve made a mess. And they can because there was no one overlooking them. However, we’ve got that on CCTV. We’ve got the whole thing on CCTV which we passed over to police for them to deal with.”



“The guy that opened the shop - he shoots so he’s used to this. And he’s still distraught. He’s struggling to cope with it because it was pretty horrific.” He said that people in the shop were “all really upset”.

The shop was reopened by volunteers six years ago and is “more like Fortnum and Mason” than a traditional village shop, Hensman said. “We get over 100 people a day come in. Broughton is an affluent village - we have a pub, a church, a village school. Lots of walkers and cyclists come in for coffee.” Crime is rare, just “a few break-ins in garages - nothing you wouldn’t expect anywhere else,” Hensman said.

“The countryside is a big place. They’re really interested because of these protected species that have been killed. You can’t stop people hare coursing - it’s been going on for hundreds of years. We’re not going to let this get to us. We’re resilient.”

A spokesman for Hampshire police said: “We can confirm we are investigating following a report that a number of dead animals were left outside a shop in Broughton.”

On 9 February, 25 dead animals were found outside Awbridge Primary School early in the morning, but the investigation has stalled.

Hare coursing was legal until 2004 but still takes place in large flat open areas, such as Salisbury Plain, where **lurchers or greyhounds are set against each other to chase hares**.

Coursers are known to dump animals in farmers’ fields and in villages, something police say is often an attempt to intimidate people into keeping silent. Officers say that gangs cause a great deal of damage by trying to film the chases so gamblers, often in China, can follow the blood sport.

Amid concerns from farmers and police that hare coursing had been growing in popularity, in 2022 parliament introduced legislation to make it illegal to use a dog to search for a hare and officers can stop and search vehicles.

Last week a report by the National Rural Crime Network said that there were around 22 organised crime gangs involved in rural crime in the UK.

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