

## Field Notes – Series 3, Episode 1

### Fireworks Special

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**Jude (Host):** Hello and welcome back to Field Notes. The offshoot of our Sounds of the Sanctuary podcast, where we take a deep dive into the topics raised in Sounds of the Sanctuary and consult some of our very own Redwings experts or special guests to pick their brains to get a wider understanding on the topic.

If you are a horse owner or someone who loves and cares for horses, we hope you'll enjoy these discussions. Don't forget to hit, subscribe or recommend it to others.

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In this week's Sounds of the Sanctuary, we spoke to Sarah, a team leader for our Nights team, about the prep to her team put in for Bonfire Night. We also revealed that the measures that we take to protect our horses in fireworks season cost Redwings almost £1,500.

These extra checks are going to every Redwings site affected by fireworks and our Field Notes episode this week begins with Hollie from Redwings Ada Cole in Essex. She shares their experiences, especially given their proximity to Harlow and other residential areas.

*(cut to interview)*

So, anyone that has visited Redwings Ada Cole would know that it is quite unique as our centres go in its proximity to neighbouring houses and buildings and things like that. So, it's in a in a built up area.

And we are chatting today with Hollie, who is our yard manager at Redwings Ada Cole about whether that proximity to people and houses and everything impacts their experience of bonfire night and fireworks in general. So, Hollie, tell us, are there lots of displays? Do you have to be you have to be prepared for lots of fireworks displays?

**Hollie (Redwings Ada Cole Yard Manager):** Yeah, we have quite a lot of firework displays going on in Harlow and actually the town centre isn't that far from the site. So, at the back of the site, in particular on bonfire night, the sky is literally lit up with fireworks and they're incredibly loud. Sometimes it almost feels like we're living in World War Three here.

**Jude:** Yeah

**Hollie:** Yeah. Very loud. And then we also have lots of fireworks on New Year's Eve as well that can sometimes be on par with Bonfire Night. And then we also have sort of different religious celebrations like Diwali, for example, the Festival of Light. We have a lot of fireworks then for that as well. So yeah, we get them pretty much all year round, to be honest.

**Jude:** And how does that impact you is sort of responsible for how many horses are you responsible for the moment?

**Hollie:** We've got 72, but we range of between 70 to 80, 85.

**Jude:** So a lot of horses. So that's a lot of horses to keep safe. So when you're when you're sort of thinking ahead to those particular those sort of flash points in the year, you know, there's going to be lots of displays. What sort of things do you think about and how does that make you feel?

**Hollie:** It makes me and my team feel quite anxious, actually. We always worry about, you know, is a pony going to get stressed and then poorly and potentially colic. So that is always sort of in the back of our minds. One of the things we do to prepare is we write letters to our neighbours and a lot of our neighbours tend to have big firework parties and bonfires. We write letters to them making sure that they're aware obviously, there are horses there are livestock here, and could they not sort of do their displays near their and our fence lines.

And then with regards to our night check, we obviously do our night check normally about 8:00 at night. But what I would do because I live on site, I would head out a little bit later and just go and recheck everybody, make sure they're all ok. I mean, we have at times like New Year's Eve, for example, there'll be fireworks going on until 1:00 in the morning. So, times like that, I will come out and just make sure, you know, take my torch and just make sure everyone is okay. But yeah, yeah, that's what we do.

**Jude:** And have you ever had any concerns or any particular any particular memories that stick out of any times you've sort of been there on checks and been really worried for your horses?

**Hollie:** We have actually come into some of our paddocks the morning after and found rocket cases and sticks in our fields and we've found a few of them actually in the paddocks with our ponies in as well. And so obviously that's, that's a massive concern. Imagine if that hit one of our ponies or if, you know, caught a bale of hay on fire. It'd be a catastrophe, to be honest.

Touch wood. I think our ponies are habituated to it to some extent now, but obviously it's still a worry to us. Like the same with my own dogs, for example. They're habituated to it because it becomes sort of normal. But there is that sort of element of always going to be louder this year and are they going to be, you know, more frightened? But yeah, we do worry all the time, to be honest. Jude.

**Jude:** No, I can I can fully imagine that. And you mentioned you are writing letters to your neighbours. Do you find that that helps with your neighbours? I mean, you've said about finding rockets in the field. but obviously they could have come from quite a long way away. Do you feel like that writing the letters helps to do? Your neighbours seem to take that you know, quite positively?

**Hollie:** We'd like to think it helps, but then we do find the rocket sticks in the paddock next to the houses. So I think for us, prevention's better than cure. Yeah. So anything that's in the vicinity of a neighbour, we just make sure those paddocks and stables are empty. So if anything does, you know, fly over the fence and they're not necessarily going to harm any of our animals. So yeah, prevention is better than cure.

**Jude:** Absolutely. Nail on the head there. Yeah, prevention is definitely better than cure but sounds like that's like a logistical, you know something that extra. on top of everything that comes into caring for 80 horses. That sounds like an extra logistical thing that you have to think about this time of year in terms of where you can put your horses, that they're going to be safe and things like that? So extra extra mental strain on you, I'm sure, trying to work that all out?

**Hollie:** Yeah, definitely. And so, for example, our quarantine stables are right next to one of our neighbours. We try our hardest to make sure that we don't have anything in those quarantine stables at all during the sort of bonfire period obviously, sometimes it's inevitable if we get a rescue in and

then we make quarantine. But 99% of the time, we try to leave that empty during bonfire week especially.

**Jude:** Yeah. It's interesting. You called it bonfire week rather than Bonfire Night. You kind of hit the nail on the head. It's and it sounds like for you especially, it isn't even just around that time of year? It can be other times as well. But do people let you know that there are displays happening or do you just have to assume there will be something potentially every night is that week pretty much?

**Hollie:** We just take the assumption that it's going to be the whole week, the whole week leading up to sometimes the weekend before Bonfire Night and the weekend after. So, it can even be extended sort of a ten day period.

I mean, we're quite lucky. A lot of us live in the surrounding area, so if we do see any signs of big displays, then we communicate with each other like, "oh yeah, know this is happening on that night, just be aware." But yeah, that sort of weekend before and weekend after, yeah, we sort of bite our fingernails in anticipation, you know of what's going to happen.

**Jude:** Yeah. And extra resources I guess for your teams as well. If there's extra staff on site for the extra check and things like that, do you ever find that you have to give them any extra sort of forage or anything to keep them keep them happy when there's things going on overhead?

**Hollie:** Definitely. If we know we've got sort of a big display going on, then we'll make sure they've got extra forage to last a little bit longer into the night. So they're, you know, kept busy and preoccupied and they've got lots of enrichment activities in their paddocks and woodchips as well. So we just make sure that they're all where they need to be really.

**Jude:** So, Hollie after everything you've said I guess potentially a final question would be, as someone who's responsible for so many horses as well as your own pets, do you have any plea for people that might be thinking about having a fireworks event at any time of the year?

Hollie: Please, please, if you've got livestock or neighbours with pets, dogs, cats, any animals, just let them know, give them enough pre-warning so they can put the procedures into place to ensure that keep their animals safe.

And actually, go and buy some fireworks that don't make noise. You know, the less noise, the better. But yeah, please pre warm people with enough notice so that they can make sure they keep their animals safe and calm and settled or go to an organized event. You know, don't necessarily have them in your back garden next to somewhere with livestock. Go to an event that's actually dedicated for fireworks, you know.

**Jude:** So like you said, if it's an organized event, you and your team, the chances are you would know it was happening.

**Hollie:** Yeah exactly.

**Jude:** So you can be prepared for that as much as possible, where someone in their back garden, you don't necessarily get that that advantage of notice.

**Hollie:** Definitely.

**Jude:** Hollie, thank you ever so much for spending time of your busy day to tell us about this. And we can only wish you and your team hopefully a peaceful you know coming up bonfire period festive period and we yeah we wish you a peaceful one and that you and all your residents stay stay safe and well.

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**Jude:** Next up, we talk to Catherine and her team from Redwings Mountains in Forfar. Mountains is very much the other end of the spectrum and being so remote, they luckily don't have the same issues with fireworks displays. However, as Scots, they are also subject to different regulations around fireworks, which have been recently introduced and are different from the rest of all sites in the UK.

Thankfully, Mountains is surrounded by those who also keep animals and therefore would either understand or share our concerns around fireworks displays. This, together with Catherine's thoughts on attitudes she has seen towards the new Scottish legislation, could show the link between fireworks and empathy and whether those who host displays understand the consequences they can have on others.

This shows that the work that the Redwings Campaigns team is doing alongside other animal and human charities still vitally important.

**Jude:** So, Catherine, you don't have any real issues with fireworks, actually. For for the centre there at all.

**Catherine (Redwings Mountains Centre Manager):** No, thankfully we're in in a we're in very rural position And with that the neighbours around us also are animal keepers. So, there's there's nothing like that goes on up here at all, which is a good thing.

**Jude:** Yes. And it's interesting because Hollie spoke about how much you know, how much worry, and there's quite a lot of mental strain that goes into making sure the horses are in certain paddocks and and things like that ahead of the event and, and everything. So, do you actually feel a sense of relief that that isn't something you have to worry about?

**Catherine:** Very much so. It can be hard at times about weather without having to relocate horses just because of noise. So yeah, it's a real benefit to be in in this position.

**Jude:** Have you have any of you had experiences with your own animals and any issues?

**Catherine:** I haven't because I've got two dogs and they're pretty used to the sounds of the country like shooting and things like that so they're not, they are not troubled by things like that. But I can imagine if maybe they'd been brought up in the middle of the town, there might be a whole different scenario for them.

**Jude:** Yeah. But you mentioned that actually in Forfar you do get New Year's fireworks especially?

**Catherine:** Yes. Yes we can. Well, from where I stay I can hear fireworks going off in Forfar. From where I live, I'm about six or seven miles and yeah, I can hear that it does carry.

We're also quite fortunate as well that our neighbours close by, well, they either have livestock or they have horses themselves. So, they're very respectful with each other. They're very understanding, we wouldn't be we wouldn't be setting off fireworks and neither would they. It's not some thing that's done up here.

**Jude:** Yeah. And as our centre in Scotland you actually are under different legislation from the rest of the UK. And this year Scotland has brought in measures to bring in zones where it would be prohibited to set off fireworks. So somewhere like mountains could apply to be part of that. zone if you had an issue with fireworks, which would mean that people wouldn't be able to let them off. And also, the government is bringing in licensing for members of the public so people wouldn't be able to

own certain types of fireworks or let them off without a license. And likewise, it would be restricted to certain times of year around different celebrations. As Scots yourselves, do you think that legislation is useful? Do you think that would be helpful for people in your situation with animals?

**Catherine:** I think it could be useful and helpful. but I'm not sure how easy it would be to police.

**Jude:** You haven't noticed a shift in anyone's attitude to it, like within, you know, friends or people that you know in your communities, anything you haven't noticed a shift in attitude at all?

**Catherine:** I think what I've noticed well on social media platforms is that people have a lot to say and people feel that they've been told that they're not allowed to do something. They are getting a bit outraged about it. And and are demanding the rights to have firework displays in areas that probably never had them before anyway. But it's just, it's the nature of people as well isn't it.

**Jude:** Yeah. That's interesting to hear though Thank you very much.

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Lastly, having heard these two very different accounts, it's worth reminding ourselves why fireworks is an issue that Redwings feels so strongly about. This interview with Policy and Research Officer Helen was actually recorded as part of our fireworks episode in 2022 but is a timeless reminder about what those passionate about the topic can do to voice their opinion.

*(cut to interview)*

So next up on the podcast, I'm having a chat with Helen of Whitelegg who works in our Campaigns team here at Redwings. And Helen, I wonder just to kick us off just as a summary. Why are fireworks so dangerous for horses? Why is it something that Redwings is so passionate about?

**Helen:** I think in in general, we have to remember that horses are their wired differently to humans. They are flight animals, prey animals. So their instinct is very much to run away from things and to be easily scared because they have survived by not stopping to check out something they're un sure of. They run away from it just as a primary instinct.

They have very highly attuned senses. So their their sense of smell, their sense of hearing is different to ours as well. So they're extremely sensitive to loud noises. If you think about it, horses are actually a very quiet animal. They don't vocalize the way that we do this sound isn't, they don't use sound in the way that we do. So they're always listening out for a sound that might be something they need to worry about. So the really loud noises of fireworks are completely off the scale to most horses in terms of it being an unknown and it being a really terrifyingly loud noise in the case of some fireworks.

And that can very easily trigger what we would call a fear response. So it comes out of nowhere. There's no lead up to it. Those explosions are just the can can take a horse by surprise as much as anything. And being so loud, their instinct is then just to get away from it and horses can then potentially run and run. And obviously most horses are contained in an area. Even a big paddock is still a contained area - they have to be for their own safety. And so if they can't, if the fireworks display going off continuously, their inability to actually get themselves to a point where they feel safe is hampered by the fencing. So they will just keep running quite often, and that is when they can become dangerous to themselves. They can run through fences, they can jump fences. And that's reported quite commonly by owners whose horses have been stressed by fireworks. They can also be dangerous too, if you try and get in a field with them, obviously, they're running in panic. So they are

they're going to run through you or over you equally. So they can be dangerous to themselves and other animals and humans around them.

And they can also run themselves simply to a point where they make themselves exhausted, even unwell.

It's important to recognize that horses are also very adaptable. A lot of horses are not bothered by fireworks because over the years they can become used to them, which is why, you know, thankfully, even with so many horses in our own care, the case of the Sprite and Percy, which was rare, you know, it doesn't happen every year by any instance, but it's also good to know, to remember that horses can react differently in different circumstances. So a horse, for example, that's been fine with fireworks in the past may react differently on another occasion. Maybe they're in a new home and you feel they've got new friends, so they've got other stresses in their life. And the fireworks might just be something that escalates their ability to cope to a point where they don't feel they can deal with it in a way that they have in the past. So I don't think we can say these horses cope with fireworks - they will always cope with fireworks that that's a given. So I think even for any owner, they're always something of a worry.

We have first hand experience of the tragic consequences that fireworks can cause. In addition to losing Sprite and Percy, we've also we lost a rescued mare called Cinders. to a fireworks related injury. And also our Oxhill Rescue Centre in Warwickshire had a very near-miss with stray fireworks causing a fire hazard. And very nearly luckily, somebody spotted it very nearly setting alight to a barn with eight donkeys in it.

**Jude:** So taking that all into account, your work in the Campaigns team what work has Redwings done so far on this issue with fireworks?

**Helen:** It's something that we feel very strongly about in the past. We've always shared tips the owners can try and use to minimize the risk for their horses. And that information is still available on our website. But unfortunately, if fireworks are being let off close to your property where you keep your horses, obviously there's a limit to what you can do. They can be extremely loud and, you know, you can't move them miles and miles away. In most situations. You can't mask the sound of the fireworks very readily.

We would very much like to see a review of the fireworks regulations across the country, to try and just limit the ease with which fireworks can be bought and let off. There are regulations in place, but we feel it's time, with the amount of evidence on the distress that they can cause, that they are subject to better control.

**Jude:** So as a campaigner yourself, Helen, people might be listening to the podcast. thinking how, if they if they don't agree with the use of fireworks or if they'd like to see it change, what can they do to make change in their local area and things like that?

And we recently heard of a decision that had been taken by a local retailer to us here at Hapton HQ, so Redwings' HQ in Norfolk, and that retailer was Roys of Wroxham. And they have said that they're not going to sell fireworks this year. I wonder, can you tell me a little bit about that, Helen?

**Helen:** Yeah, we were delighted to see the story. I grew up with Roy's, to be honest. So I was I was very proud of them.

**Jude:** They're quite a local institution.

**Helen:** They are. Yes. It's reportedly in response to sort of customer feeling. So, it goes to show that the power we have as individual shoppers shouldn't be underestimated. And I think expressing your concerns around fireworks is a really valuable thing we can all do.

We were pleased that in 2019 Sainsbury's took the decision to stop selling fireworks, which obviously massive, you know, one of the really big supermarkets taking a major decision. And I think you can hope that this is the start of a movement, if you like, because the more people see that they can make a difference, the more people are likely to speak out and communicate with the places that they shop. And the more people do that, the more retailers are going to get a sense of the public feeling.

You do get the impression that the public feeling really is escalating quite significantly in the past, sort of four or five years, the numbers of people signing petitions around trying to request that the Government in England and Wales reviews firework use has escalated. I know a lady, a very passionate lady who runs a petition every year, has, for the first time this year reached over well over a million signatories, which is which is huge. And every year it gets tabled for discussion by the the Government Petitions Committee. I would urge anyone who hasn't signed the petition yet to do so.

**Jude:** We want people to come away from listening to this podcast thinking that things can be done. And I think the Roys case study is a really good example on a local level of people, you know, hopefully politely putting their views across to these retail retailers to to show them what they think and retailers responding. And like you say, the strength of feeling is there. So like I say, one thing I hope people take from this podcast is things that they can they can go away and do to hopefully, you know, make it feel like they're making a change themselves.

**Helen:** Yeah, absolutely, and please do write to your MP as well. I think the more MPs are aware of the strength of feeling in their constituency. It's desperately sad that it takes tragic incidents to show the evidence of what we know as horse owners, the distress that horses can experience but by hopefully turning those tragic stories into something positive, by protecting horses in the future. People can feel empowered, and they're voice does and it can be heard.

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**Jude:** As you've heard through our Sounds of the Sanctuary and Field Notes episodes this week. Redwings is much like many horse or pet owners this time of year, and the season is often viewed with a sense of worry and concern for our animals.

It is great to remember the example of Roys of Wroxham and the power of consumers expressing their views. It's also great to see examples of warnings about fireworks in public media.

Just last week, the Archers, the very popular Radio Four soap opera, covered the issue when the livery yard was impacted by a fireworks display and a horse injured whilst trying to flee. Whilst this account may be fictional, it is all too recognizable for horse owners across the country and it is great to see it represented on such a popular platform.

For more information about Redwings' work on the issue and how you can help, please visit our website. Thank you.