

# Savage 'horse ripper' spawns panic amid English countryside

By JOHN DARNTON

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ALTON, England — Something is wrong amid the lush, rolling hills and storybook cottages of Hampshire — something sick and twisted.

Over the last three years, more than 30 horses have been savagely attacked. The attacks have happened in open fields and inside stables, in broad daylight and on moonlit nights.

In at least half the cases, the horses' genitalia have been mutilated.

Ten police officers assigned to the case have handled 3,800 frantic calls, employed a computer to search for patterns and turned to a psychiatrist to come up with a psychological profile. They have questioned numerous people — 27 at last count, all men — and turned information over to the crown prosecutor in one case.

But still the sadistic attacks continue. They have sown panic among the owners of 55,000 horses in the county, which lies southwest of London. Even more distressing, police believe copycat attackers are operating in other counties: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Dorset, Essex, Glamorgan, Kent, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Surrey, Wiltshire and Yorkshire.

"The attacks have become more and more horrible," said Sally Grover, who helped organize the Hampshire Horse Watch.

Many of the attacks have sexual overtones. In some cases, mares' ovaries have been cut out.

"It's done by somebody who knows about horses. . . not everyone knows where the ovaries are," Grover said.

Dr. Richard Ryder, who heads the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, is also a psychologist. As in Peter Shaffer's 1973 play, "Equus," in which a stable boy worships and blinds horses in a sexual frenzy, he comes across patients "with a sexual interest in horses — both men and women."

In the Hampshire case, the possibilities range from someone acting out a revenge for some perceived slight — a groom who was fired, perhaps — to a paranoid psychotic who believes horses are threatening, Ryder said.

"Of course with sexual perversion along the line," he added.

Police agree.

They believe some of the "attacks" are accidents magnified by hysteria. But they do not deny the existence of a "horse ripper" and feel he is among the people they have already questioned. One case

is particularly strong, they say.

"I'm reasonably confident we've spoken to him," said Detective Chief Inspector Des Thomas, who heads the investigation.

The motive?

"You have people who rape a woman and then turn against the woman for what they've done. Here we may have a person who has a sexual attraction to a horse who then feels disgusted with himself," Thomas said.

John Archer, a senior lecturer in history who has written a book on animal maiming in the 19th century, said that "if the past is any judge, they rarely catch anyone."

Historically, horse attacks occurred in times of economic stress, like the agricultural depression of 1849 to 1852, and were thought to contain an element of class revenge, since "horses were viewed as symbols of wealth."

"Of course that wouldn't explain the sexual attacks," he said.

"I can't help think, a lot of these horses are owned by wealthy people, young girls riding through the villages. Before you had an act of symbolic murder, transferred murder. The laborer couldn't actually murder the large landowner so he got his horse. Could this be a case of transferred rape?"