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# The Rural Enterprise Crime Complex: Undefendable Rural Space and the Threat from the Fortress Farm

## Abstract

*In response to the concept of the 'fortress farm' and its appropriation of traditional defensible space theory, this article introduces the conditions of undefendable rural space and the rural enterprise crime complex. Perspectives that invert traditional theory to determine contexts conducive to the incidence of rural enterprise crime. Empirical data from extensive fieldwork on crimes against wild animals in rural England is used to argue that the fortress and undefendable rural space can in effect serve to 'design-out' crime control and lock crime in. A dichotomous outcome, which creates a fortress for relatively powerful human insiders and a rural enterprise crime complex for persecuted non-human outsiders. A biocentric species justice perspective is adopted to counter the anthropocentric paradigm that arguably prevails in contemporary rural criminology.*

## Introduction

The concept of ‘the fortress farm’ is a novel advancement for analysis of the situational settings that can contribute to the generation of some types of rural crime (Smith, 2019). In response, this article identifies the potential threats that might arise from securitizing rural property in such a way. Threats that can emerge through shoring up bastions in the countryside for potentially corrupted actors and effectively shielding them in the pastoral panopticon. This article draws from empirical data from extensive primary research on illegal deer poaching in the rural West Country of England perpetrated by compromised meat industry specialists. The case study data exposes startling insights into the crime commissioning process and informs the argument that while the construction of the fortress might design-out crime for law-abiding ethical actors legitimately seeking to avoid victimisation from acquisitive countryside crime, it also risks being exploited as a facilitatory device to *lock crime in* by unscrupulous rural agents. In accordance with the literature on the industry-centric illicit predation of mundane fauna such as foxes, deer and badgers, the fortress creates a problematic eco-centric insider/outsider dualism: the relatively powerful human insiders and their illegitimate business interests are sheltered from interdiction in the fortress, while the non-human outsiders are left vulnerable to routinised persecution by what can be termed *the rural enterprise crime complex*: an efficient structure for degrading biodiverse ecosystems, the over exploitation of natural resources and depredation of wild animals, for financial gain within the continuum of licit and illicit rural-agricultural processes. Agricultural river pollution is more prevalent in the area than anywhere else in the U.K, cruelty to livestock is regularly reported and illicit venison production is entrenched (\*\*\*, 2021a).

This article contends that the terrain and general surroundings of secluded rural regions can create opportune standing conditions that tend to benefit motivated rogue subsets of countryside industry while simultaneously frustrating capable guardianship. These socio-environmental contexts, it is argued throughout, condition the shared dispositions of personnel working in rural commerce. To accomplish this, the original concept of ‘undefendable rural space’ is introduced as a category to signify the causal relationship between materiality of a region and the shared normativity of a group, in conjunction with other mediating determinants. This concept is a comprehensive inversion of defensible space theory (Newman, 1972). The transposition is of note because Smith relies on defensible space theory to advance his blueprints of the fortress farm (Smith, 2019). The fortress enables relatively powerful rural-food industry actors to mitigate crime control practices in sanctuary from effective regulation which acts as armament in the arms race between environmental enforcement officers and compromised rural enterprise actors. The article advances a critical explanation of how a pernicious form of countryside commerce malpractice – the illegal taking of deer – emerges relatively unscathed from the secluded and remote safe havens of the undefendable space within the rural enterprise crime complex. As such a holistic analysis aligned to species justice is offered on rural crimes and the potentiality for their control.

The article begins by reviewing the traditional literature on acquisitive rural crime, defensible space and the fortress farm. It then discusses the methodology used in the research process. The concept of *undefendable rural space* is subsequently offered in close dialogue with the preceding literature, to invert the traditional urban-centric theory of defensible space for analytical gains in the distinct field of rural criminology. Succeeding this theoretical inversion, the potentialities for how the fortress and undefendable rural space establish the preconditions for *designing-out* rural crime

control and *locking in rural crime* is exposed, generalised from case to theory using empirical findings from research on rural crimes against non-human animals. These conditions act as favourable settings that precipitate an emergent structure that is then finally introduced as ‘the rural enterprise crime complex’ – a joined up system constituting the over-exploitation of wildlife and environmental degradation. The article exposes new insights on how deviant operators accomplish the convenience crimes of the pastoral personnel and can be read in conjunction with my previous research that revealed the political economic contexts that enable these offences (\*\*\*, 2021a). New empirical findings and explanatory terms are contributed to the lexicon of critical rural and wildlife crime studies that advance conceptual specificity to both disciplines.

### **Rural crime prevention, defensible space and ‘the fortress farm’**

The following subsection introduces arguments from conventional rural criminology and the countryside crime prevention orthodoxy. The literature is of note so to provide not only an understanding of the general topic, but also as a foundation for critique and subsequent inversion of some of the main principles of the traditional approaches. The relationship between conventional rural criminology, the fortress farm concept and defensible space theory are discussed and subsequently critiqued from a critical species justice perspective identifying actors populating those positions as rural enterprise ‘rogues’, rather than potential victims of property crime. Traditional rural criminology and the countryside security apparatus is focused on deterring crimes against the rural dweller and rural property, generally quantified in financial loss suffered by human victims (Smith, 2019a; NFU Mutual, 2020). This anthropocentric focus is primarily concentrated on interdicting the *urban marauder* construct (Smith, 2019: 215-216). The urban marauder thesis states that offenders invade the mythologised rural

idyll to ransack the peaceful and defenceless regions for the main objective of material gain. The National Farmers Union highlights the financial harm suffered by rural business each year due to purported organised crime groups taking rural private property including valuable livestock, because as Smith notes; *'rural areas and in particular farms with low security make farms attractive targets for criminals because of the fact that there is an endless supply of tractors, diggers and other plant, quad bikes, power tools and fuel, and all are easily accessible'* (Smith, 2019: 216; NFU Mutual, 2020). In an effort to disrupt these problems and to securitise farm property, Smith has advanced an innovative new framework under the engaging term of 'the fortress farm' (Smith, 2019).

The fortress farm concept is aligned to crime prevention through environmental design and is comprised of some of the central tenets of the theory of defensible space within that subdiscipline (Newman, 1972). Newman argues, as Smith observes, that a core proposition of defensible space is that inhabitants of a geographically bounded locale, such as a street or neighbourhood, form symbolic attachments to the space. Such attachments rouse the lawful inhabitants to guard the area from external threats which in turn stimulates a pride of place to be internalised and manifest in shared normative conventions such as territoriality and vigilance. Proponents of this perspective argue that those with a physical stake in an area will care for it, protect it from intruders, and take pride in it thus maintaining a level of security. Newman further argued that the way built environments are designed is of critical importance in establishing the conditions to design-out crime from a space (Newman, 1972). Clear distinctions between private and public land can contribute to enforcing social norms and mitigating disorder; the minimisation of 'confused', overly complex or contested space is said to reduce the likelihood of incivility. These propositions are significant in relation to the dialogical elaboration of new concepts in later subsections.

The key here is that fortifying the security for an inhabitant of a defended space or fortress farm means dispensing justice for *the insider* and inhibiting the opportunities of *the outsider*, the paradigmatic case of which being dwellings and persons located within the inner-city social housing estates constructed during the 1960s and 70s. This is problematic when framing the problem of rural crime from a perspective that foregrounds the plight of non-human animals that are illegally harvested during the course of routine countryside commerce by those very ‘insiders’ (\*\*\*, 2021b). From within this context the *insiders* are persecuting the *outsiders*, rather than the internal community keenly guarding the space from the potential for insecurity caused by motivated outsiders. This intervention is thus necessary, because as Smith recognises, the alternative criminal construct advanced in contemporary rural criminology literature is that of the ‘rural rogue’ (Somerville et al., 2015). These types of ‘insiders’ are comprised of corrupted specialists who use their insider status and professional knowledge, from the seclusion of their dwellings to commission crimes, rather than ward off would-be assailants. Their lawful enterprises or occupation provides the appearance of legitimacy, validates their clandestine operations, and enables them to conceal offending processes amongst licit work such as countryside management (Lord et al, 2017; \*\*\*, 2021a).

Smith has previously revealed that deviant farmers are embroiled in insider livestock crimes and allow their isolated property to be used for illegal dog fighting events (Smith, 2004; 2011). Smith and colleagues were seminal in the formation of the research sub-discipline of rural enterprise crime and developed a typology of illicit rural enterprise activity due to the sheer variety of offending processes relating to illegal pluractivity (Smith and McElwee, 2013). Enterprise crimes are of increased frequency and higher in volume than acquisitive rural crime originating from external threats such as

the policy construct of the organised crime groups targeting rural regions (Smith, 2019a). This is due to their normalised embeddedness in rural working cultures, the complex licit-illicit continuum of processes within value chains that are void of regulation and the position of the offenders as informal guardians holding social capital within rural communities (Dalton, 2019; Carrell et al., 2022). The gamekeeper and estate owners, for instance, are extolled as the bearers and dispensers of justice in the Night Poaching Act 1828, not the violators, and farmers are generally regarded as symbols of trustworthy authority in the countryside (Jones, 1979). These authority figures have been shown to be engaged in large-scale subsidy fraud, the illegal killing of badgers during agricultural work, the trapping and poisoning of protected birds of prey, pervasive industrial pollution of rivers, and severe cases of animal cruelty involving the starvation of livestock (Enticott, 2011; Croall, 2007: 210; Nurse, 2011: 46; BBC Somerset, 2017; Case, 2020; Crisp, 2021). These practices and processes are not episodic but historically endemic to countryside and meat production commerce and nominal rural stewardship (Hartung, 1950; Murray, 2001; Animal Aid, 2017; \*\*\*2021b).

While Smith's early work advances analysis of rural rogues and rural enterprise crime, or what we can term *the misconduct of the pastoral personnel*, who legitimately yet unscrupulously work in rural and meat processing operations, his current project brackets those critical advancements. Despite stating that the fortress farm offers the potential to deliver a holistic analysis and deterrent device that merges the urban marauder and rural rogue positions, there is a firm barrier to achieving this objective. This is due to the ontological distinctions between the two categories of offence; as discussed earlier, the fortress protects those within its walls from those on the outside. It is a black box, a blind-spot, or empty classification as to what types of social categories are harboured within. In the case of the deviant rural operator, it is providing



opportunities for colluding specialists to accomplish rural crimes against relatively lucrative wild animals. The subsequent sections will explore the ramifications of the threat posed by the fortress farm and the role it can play in generating the standing conditions for illicit activity against mundane fauna situated in what shall be termed 'undefendable rural space'.

## **Methodology**

The key concepts advanced in this article were inverted, adapted and constructed using empirical data from a revelatory case study (Yin, 2018). Data is derived from 36 semi-structured interviews conducted during fieldwork which lasted roughly two and a half years. Interviews were conducted with senior level experts working in the fields of rural, animal and food crime prevention. Repeat interviews were conducted, data and findings were discussed at length and trips out into the field with officers reviewing the credentials of hunters, for participant observation experiences were achieved. For a comprehensive list of interviews please see the interview table contained in 'figure one' in the appendix. The probe sampling model was used in this research to access respondents. Probe sampling is a style which relies on the uniformity of a relatively small pool of respondents that are representative of a wider population (Collins and Evans, 2017). The population in this case being enforcement and regulatory agents. Quality of expert informants with thorough knowledge is prioritised by the probe approach over a larger sample pool of potentially less informed masses. Respondents were engaged in half hour to three-hour long discussions in the semi-structured interview format on how crimes and harms are commissioned in the U.K and particularly the West County region that the case study area covered. Motivations for crime, tactics used by offenders, types of offences, personnel involved, general trends, history of the topic, response operations

and wider contexts were all discussed at length during interviews. Experts were accessed through grey literature reviews of wildlife crime and poaching cases that appeared in the media between 2015 and 2018. I contacted the offices of the agents mentioned in the media articles and they agreed to be interviewed – all were keen to get their story out and raise awareness of this deprioritised and over-looked signal-less crime. Respondents then kindly provided contact details of their peers and small-scale snowballing of respondents took place. Key documents retrieved from reliable media sources, third sector groups and NGOs were also used to advance the thesis and generalise data to theory elaboration. This was considered beneficial in respect to accessing the views of experts interviewed within those sources or reportage on past criminal cases that validate the other data. Some of those experts were also interviewed for the research, but their views were expressed concisely in the cited documentary sources and made accessible to all via online news media articles. Analysis of secondary documents supplemented the primary data collection procedure because existing literature within this still developing academic subfield is notably scant and local media tend to report the issues of relevance, such as regional cases appearing in magistrates' courts. It is generally agreed within methodological practice literature that when a research field is still developing, using reliable grey literature sources reporting evidence of court cases and other verifiable events is acceptable (Bryman, 2016: 554-561).

Documentary data was retrieved from reputable organisations and analysed in line with the adaptive theory model. The approach entails oscillating between emerging data and (existing) theorisation, to form concepts in a constant iterative motion constituted by the dialogue between research and theory construction. Layder's adaptive approach ensured that the work was not confined simply to empirical observations associated with alternative models, such as Grounded Theory (Layder, 1998). Adaptive

theory thus aided the accurate identification of primary causative determinants, such as the insider status of offenders and the synthesis - inversion approach, that aided the construction of concepts and theoretical propositions. A post-positivist critical realist epistemology is applied in the work to determine the social and material relations between aspects and actors of relevance, such as material contexts and social relations (Sayer, 2000; 2010). This approach identifies causal mechanisms and the contexts conducive to their emergence, such as offending processes and their standing conditions (Edwards, 2016; Edwards and Levi, 2008). The ontology and philosophical approach to justice adopted is one of biocentric species justice (White, 2008; 2014 Foster et al, 2010). This approach prioritises the welfare, needs and rights of non-human animals, biota and ecosystems in contradistinction to the general interests of humans. The model conceives of non-human entities as holding intrinsic worth and specifies their parity with other living species (White, 2008: 11-15). The biocentric approach contrasts with the anthropocentric model which contends that non-human nature exists for the benefit of and to be subordinated to the instrumental agendas of people, property and profit (ibid). The critical position adopted coheres with critical realism and adaptive theory in moving beyond empiricist descriptions and seeks to transform the conditions of persecuted non-human species and emancipate them from the instrumentalization processes bound up with anthropocentric activities and perspectives.

### **Undefendable rural space**

A key concept to emerge from this research and adaptive theorisation process was the notion of what can be termed 'undefendable rural space'. This subsection outlines the core aspects of the category in synthesis with and contrast to original defensible space theory. Primary data is used to foreground its applicability for research

on crimes and harms in such spaces of wilderness. It can be applied to describe the situational surroundings from which rural crime tends to emerge, the cultural dispositions and social relations that sustain it (and it sustains), and why formal guardianship is constrained. Earlier some of the fundamental dimensions of the traditional environmental design theory of defensible space were revealed (Newman, 1972). One of the precepts of original defensible space was shown to be that dwellers are assumed to develop an attachment to a place, which is expressed through strategies amounting to self-responsibilization. This formula is inverted for the purposes of presenting a new concept for critical countryside criminology that can analyse the illicit rural enterprise activity associated with the rogue rural actor category (Smith, 2004). Some rural stakeholders, employees and local landowning elites who are perpetrators of wrongdoing, rather than victims or rural property crime, contradict the expected propensity for moral territorialism. In pockets of the rural West Country where research for this article was conducted, it is the locals, with intergenerational lineage and firm stakes in the area, who violate laws. They systematically plunder common wildlife with the core motive of illicitly obtaining stock as financial assets or neutralise it in acts of revenue protection on farms and shooting estates. Those with attachments to the region demonstrate their sense of territoriality not by protecting the space from deviancy, as Newman contended, but by exploiting it for transgressive instrumental gain. The threat to the space and its (non-human) inhabitants, is internal, not external. In the rural West Country, it is the guardians, reporters and researchers who are the external actors. Therefore, it is non-residents, such as the operator of the League Against Cruel Sports sanctuary or Food Standards Agency on site vets, who are attempting to guard fauna from an organised deviant subsection of its own population. The following quotes from experts emphasize this proposition:

Expert: *'The other lads could be people who are living and working locally, they've got a little bit of shooting rights, they could be gamekeepers who are out foxing...*

Researcher: *There's speculation in the press about 'organised gangs' rampaging across the moors coming from elsewhere, but that's not the case in your experience?*

Expert: *No, they're local lads, that live relatively close to the moor.'*

(Head park ranger).

*'I don't think they're particularly 'anti-wildlife', so to speak, but those kind of people, they tend to be people who have been in the farming community for a couple of generations maybe, or certainly all their lives, so it's probably something they've grown up in and just accepted as being, 'this is what we do'. And farmers are a bit like that, especially if they're multi-generational farmers, they'll be very set in their ways, 'oh I've done this for years', sort of thing.'*

(Police Officer, South West Illegal Meats Group).

*'There's a kind of smug self-satisfaction that we can get away with it, and no one can touch us, we'll do it because our dad did it.*

*The major driver really is, this is an easy way to make money and means they don't have to work on the farm or go and get a job.*

*We know two local farmer's sons in their mid-twenties who earn a good living by killing deer at night, if you're shooting 200 deer [a year] and you're selling them for £150 each, you've got an undeclared cash income of £30k PA. These lads aren't working, they're not working on their father's farm.'*

(Deer specialist and vet).

Researcher: *'I'm interested in learning about who might be responsible for these offences.*

Expert: *Most of it is in the genes, it goes from one generation to the next.*

Researcher: *So it's a 'way of life', of sorts?*

Expert: *It's the same families, it jumps from one generation to the next.*

Researcher: *Father and then son?*

Expert: *Yes, and Grandson.'*

(National Trust Deer Warden and Head Gamekeeper).

To elucidate this type of shared working organisational culture of persecuting wildlife perceived as a utilitarian resource, rather than inhabitants protecting the local environment, as posited by Newman, the literature on poaching directs thought towards both instrumental and expressive drivers of deviance emerging in secluded regions (Nurse, 2011; Von Essen et al, 2014). Elaborating an instrumental analysis of the rational acts of compromised industry-centric offenders exposes how a variety of rural enterprises are degrading the security of the countryside and the wellbeing of optimally

functioning ecosystems (\*\*\*, 2021a). As previously outlined, working in legitimate rural businesses affords offenders a platform to conceal wrongdoing within their valid employment practices and integrate any offending or contraband stock, such as illegally killed carcasses, with properly dispatched fauna. The traversal of a licit-illicit continuum while relying on a pool of willing collaborators and social relations within conducive contexts is fundamental to the process (\*\*\*, 2021b). Analysis of these preconditions of rural enterprise crime is the central premise of key enterprise crime literature, which is a more precise and nuanced account of wrongdoing than that of the corporate and organised crime categories (Edwards and Gill, 2002; Lord et al, 2017). Gamekeepers are prone to destroy the natural prey of artificially raised and released game birds, in illicit acts of revenue protection (Nurse, 2011: 46). Protected species such as owls are illegally killed within the enclosed fortress grounds of shooting estates to preserve the stock of grouse and pheasants that clients of estates shoot for recreation. It is also this sector of the nominal countryside stewardship industry that is responsible for catastrophic destruction of carbon sequestration materials. According to UNESCO; The Flow Country blanket bog found in Caithness and Sutherland in Scotland is *'widely considered to be the largest area of blanket bog in the world... it is of international importance as a habitat and for the diverse range of rare and unusual breeding birds it supports'* (UNESCO, 2012). These essential landscapes cover only 3% of the Earth's land surface but are estimated to contain 30% of terrestrial carbon storage. They are regularly burnt for the purposes of creating feeding grounds for grouse and the conditions for their dispatch - practices which releases centuries old carbon matter stored in the deep peat bogs. Only 10% of the peatlands on Exmoor in the rural West Country remains intact due to historical agricultural practices (Carell, 2020). In conjunction with this, the quote below emphasises the cruel and violent professional misconduct relating to the official

badger cull programme, which employs rural stewards, that I have discussed extensively elsewhere (\*\*\*. 2021a):

*'In [midlands region] where I was before, if you saw two young men driving around in a pick-up at midnight, you could be pretty certain they were up to no good.*

*But around here [in the rural West Country], that's common place. There's so many people out lamping foxes, hundreds and hundreds of foxes are shot at night, with a lamp and if they see a deer they'll shoot it.*

*That's one of the worrying things about the badger cull. You're giving rifles and night vision equipment to people who we know are involved in deer poaching, so they're going to be legitimately out at night with rifles, ostensibly culling badgers for the government, but they'll be knocking over deer as soon as they see them.'*

(Deer vet surgeon, expert witness, resident in the region of 30yrs).

Differential association is helpful to pose the nature of the relationship between rural dwelling industry rogues and why they exhibit isomorphic behavioural patterns or shared characteristics when accomplishing some illicit goal within rural enterprise cultures (Sutherland, 1983). On this matter, in the context of crimes against wildlife in rural regions, Von Essen and colleagues (2014: 5) argue: *'interactions with others and their broader environment socially condition the individual with both a set of practical techniques (such as hunting, trapping, hiding game, evading capture) and those values'*. Here it can be argued that the new concept of the undefendable rural space is the proximal or situational precipitating aspect of the 'broader environment' underlined in



the above quote to coincide with other causative co-determinants, such as market forces and budget cuts to rural crime prevention departments, to generate rural roguery and accelerate offending. Accordingly, it can be argued that offenders absorb and habituate deviant perspectives from rural enterprise peers and working associates located in *undefendable rural spaces*.

In addition to identifying the potential mechanism that actualises and sustains habituated group-norms in remote regions, the concept of defiance is of utility to this ongoing elaboration (Von Essen et al, 2014: 13). According to an account based on defiance theory, those subcultural groups, such as rural criminal collaborators in remote regions that are deviant subsets of wider norms, engaged in acts of badger baiting or illegal taking of animals, are doing so as a concerted protest against various statutes written in Westminster or codified norms that might also be perceived as representative of the metropolis - ones that staunch rural traditionalists perceive to be an affront to their heritage and traditional values. Von Essen further highlights the coherence of this approach with our interests by arguing; *'[w]hen isolated from the dominant culture, pockets of traditionalism, defensive localism and rural holdover values often framed in opposition to 'urban outsiders' and game legislation may be perpetuated in such a way as to become a socially organized and patterned deviance'* (Von Essen et al, 2014: 5). The following quotes from experts appear to show how rural dispositions manifest in opposition to perceived mainstream cultures, to offer a more holistic explanation for how industry-centric illicit activity can arise from undefendable rural spaces:

*'He's [key suspect] got away with it so many times, he just puts two fingers up to the authorities. And if you question some of these lads about their activities, they're very open about it, and they describe the various laws as 'red tape', you*

*know all this bloody red tape, we know what we're doing, as though it was sort of overzealous legislation from the civil service or pen pushers'.*

*(Deer vet surgeon, expert witness, resident in the region of 30yrs).*

*'It's a very lawless part of the country. Because the area is lawless people settle scores themselves without recourse to the law. Just like [key suspect] and the like don't respect the law with what they do [taking deer], the victims of these crimes, this poaching, the farmers, they won't go to the law for redress or sanction, they will sort it out themselves'.*

*(Local animal welfare expert).*

Expert: *Most of it [deer poaching and illegal killing of deer] is with a rifle, most of it probably shot with a sound moderated 2-4-3 or even a sound moderated 1-7-HMR, or a 2.2 rimfire, which can be very quiet indeed, and our local farmers, my neighbour at home has two deer shot on his land after the end of the season and had a gate broken to retrieve them - two piles of blood, head and legs and a gate broken.*

*I said to him, "why don't you report this?" And he said, "oh I don't want police involved, I know who it is, I'll have a word with them the next time I see them". That's the attitude of the farmer.*

Researcher: *it's tolerated?*

Expert: *they don't want to be involved in going to court*

*Researcher: is that for reasons of not wanting to appear vulnerable and to show a display of strength, or..?*

*Expert: Partly that, but it's also rural independence. The people in the extremes of our nation, you go to North Wales, go to Pembrokeshire, the Highlands of Scotland, North Devon, they're very suspicious of authority or central government, or the establishment as they perceive it.*

*And they just think I'll deal with this myself or they think there's no point because no one will do anything about it.*

*(Deer vet surgeon, expert witness, resident in the region of 30yrs).*

The purpose of this subsection has been to emphasise the causal mechanisms which generate tendencies that can arise from undefendable rural spaces and condition the type of heterodox rural offender that benefits from or exploits those surroundings. It is those internal to rural regions, who are part of the lineage and their subversion of the expectations of traditional defensible space theory is noteworthy. Smith (2019) hints at the rural rogue category offender during the elaboration of the fortress farm but does not provide any real discussion about its ramifications for the fortress. The rationale being advanced shows that by incorporating key concepts from both instrumental enterprise and expressive cultural crime literature, the novel concept of the undefendable rural space can co-condition the perpetration of crimes and harms against nature in secluded locales. This is significant because while the NFU Mutual crime report purports to the existence of organised crime groups, interdictions of those groups are still yet to be made. The only prosecution for the rural crime of sheep rustling or organised livestock theft has indicted two rogue farmers (Savage, 2016). The inhospitable and sparsely

populated rural surrounds provide the conditions for these crimes to emerge and with the assistance of the fortress, deviant operators can *design-out crime control and lock in crime*.

### **Locking in rural enterprise crime, designing-out rural crime control**

It is being argued that undefendable rural spaces can provide propitious conditions for rogue rural agents that can propagate high deviance cultures and that building a 'fortress' within these socio-environmental contexts will only further reinforce the risks posed to non-human victims. This subsection elucidates a key facet relating to this dimension of the undefendable rural space proposition – that of *designing out crime control* and thus impeding capable guardianship, while locking rural crime in and amplifying offending. The fortress risks increasing favourable conditions for the commission of rural volume crimes, such as digging, coursing, trapping, poisoning and shooting animals (BBC, 2022). The types of crimes that are accomplished behind the closed gates of the fortress are discussed by a chief inspector of the RSPCA special investigations unit, who was interviewed in the research for this article. Quoted here in a news media article in reference to badger persecution crimes situated on private property and in 'undefendable spaces', the expert states: *'it's extremely difficult to detect. These people are going out into secluded woodlands, sometimes on to farmland with permission of the owner, which makes it extremely difficult to investigate*' (Morris, 2018). The problem of offences being conducted on privately owned rural land with the permission of the owner is frequently observed by experts: *'Conservationists fear the protected bird is being illegally killed by some gamekeepers because it eats red grouse. However, because the birds are killed in remote places, often on private estates, there is seldom evidence of wrongdoing and prosecutions are rare*' (Barkham, 2019).

A notable sitting Member of Parliament and frequent Cabinet Minister is alleged to have hosted events on his sprawling West Country estate that involved contraventions of the Hunting Act 2004 and the Badgers Act 1991 (LACS, 2019). The latter of which is a criminal offence involving persecution of a protected species. The MP hosted the renowned Mendip Farmers Hunt and footage was gathered of the offences (Dalton, 2019). Due to the topographical element of seclusion often within inhospitable terrain, far from human habitation and the natural landscape frustrating surveillance, offences are rarely observed. As a consequence of this, animal welfare NGOs such as the RSPB have little option but to trespass to retrieve evidence of offences ensconced on private estates. The problem of operators locking crime in is further enabled by criminal justice agents who privilege property ownership and the laws of trespass over the welfare of wild animals. Recent footage of a gamekeeper acting unlawfully in the entrapment of a protected species was dismissed by courts due to the RSPB investigator obtaining it through the act of trespass within a fortress (BBC Shropshire, 2015). Rural crimes against animals committed by specialist gamekeepers working within countryside estates are regularly identified by enforcement and intelligence agents (Carell, 2019; NWCU, 2021). The issue of property ownership laws taking legal precedence over animal welfare legislation has indirect consequences for the capacity of enforcement agencies to conduct optimal rural crime prevention measures. The fortress is thus given more protective rights and resource allocation than non-human victims of persecution which is an outcome of the underlying anthropocentric justice model adopted by the criminal justice system and exposes the tension with species justice as an alternative vision of justice.

Crimes against most wild mammals are summary offences due to their status as non-notifiable offences and consequently dealt with by the criminal justice system in local magistrates' courts. However, the scale and severity of offences uncovered within

an outhouse building on a secluded farm was the cause of the first case involving livestock processing crimes to be brought before a Crown Court and the Proceeds of Crime Act successfully deployed. The farm operator of an underground abattoir located in the rural West Country was charged with 16 food hygiene offences at Exeter Crown Court. A bonfire of animal parts was alight outside the door of the cutting room when inspectors conducted their visit and the room, which was said to be covered in the debris of animal carcasses, did not have running water, thus contravening basic hygiene protocols. The rural enterprise actor was ordered to repay an estimated £40,000 profit and alleged to have *'slaughtered animals from hundreds of farms all over North and Mid Devon, before cutting them up and returning them to the farmers'* (BBC Devon, 2017). This case not only highlights the threats from building a fortress around these types of clandestine operators but also calls into question the characters and working practices of the operators of 'hundreds of farms' across the region using the enterprise and the potentials of securitizing their activities from regulators. Another farmer within the same geographical region has been arrested and sentenced when *'caught with piles of bones, dead animals and sick cattle on his farm in Devon twice in 11 months by trading standards inspectors'*, showing that these rural enterprise offences are not isolated incidents (BBC Devon, 2018). Further north but still in the rural West Country, a 72-year-old farmer has been prosecuted on multiple occasions for repeated severe farm animal welfare violations relating to the starvation of sheep and general neglect of livestock (Hughes, 2021). These cases are also not confined to the secluded South West of England (Case, 2020). Evidence from NGOs obtained via secretly filming from within slaughterhouses in Britain shows that fourteen of the fifteen under surveillance were breaking the law and that zero of those reviewed were in compliance with statutory regulations when audited (Animal Aid, 2017).

This leads us to a further notable aspect of the inversion of defensible space that the novel concept of 'undefendable rural space' presently being advanced utilises. As noted earlier in the review of literature, a key precondition for the satisfaction of defensible space is clearly demarcated land and the avoidance of *confused space*. This requirement poses a serious problem for disrupting deviance in many rural landscapes. Exmoor, as an example of an ideal typical rural expanse, is a patchwork of dense forest, boggy valleys, park land, nature reserves, farms and ancient dwellings. It is a mixture of natural and built environments, which has developed over centuries during differentiated socio-cultural milieu, not from an architect's office as envisioned by Newman. The area is (dis)connected by confusing and outdated one lane country roads, which enable quick getaways for those with experience of them, such as locals, but hinders pursuit for those without such experience. While this observation is not revelatory, it is significant, and its consequences were discussed during research with enforcement experts who told stories of car chases down country lanes and mistaking suspected poachers for struggling citizens trying to 'move a deer carcass' from the highway into their pickup vehicle. It is these complex and confused spaces that Newman sought to avoid due to their potential contribution to crime causation.

Moreover, due to the vast expanses of moorland and countryside with a rich history, the ownership of land is not immediately perceptible or clearly distinguishable. From my own experience of walking in the area, one moment you are standing on National Park owned land, then National Trust land, then Devon Wildlife Trust land, then private land with a public right of way, then unwittingly within the borders of a vast private country estate. This element of 'confused space' has serious outcomes for the legalities of fauna predation. It is lawful to shoot deer during daylight hours, season permitting, with the correct calibre firearm, in accordance with shooting rights or official

accreditation, on one's own property or with permission of the landowner, but otherwise illegal. Therefore, in a strict legalistic and criminal justice reading of the problem, criminal acts are separated from lawful ones by imperceptible interlocking property boundaries on harsh unbuilt terrain. Problems relating to confused space and property boundaries were identified by experts in the field:

*When [key rural enterprise crime suspect] was prosecuted 6 or 7 years ago, a local guy gave evidence against him who had filmed [the suspect] and his colleague henchmen shooting a stag on National Trust land and then moving it and I think that video footage is still available.*

*It's amazing how good they are at what they do, that deer was shot and moved off the National Trust field in seconds, they put it over the fence and put it on to his land quicker than you could have whistled.*

(Deer expert and local).

This notable empirical insight evidences the distinction between poaching and illegal taking of deer and how it is in part determined by land ownership (\*\*\*, 2020). It matters, in conjunction with the following observations, because it displays signs of offenders constructing their own fortresses. Countryside enterprise suspects in the rural West Country are purported by experts to be industriously purchasing land, fields and small holdings that are adjacent to habitats rich with commercially valuable wild fauna. Land that runs parallel to National Trust estates, National Parks and League Against Cruel Sports wildlife sanctuary enclosures that all have many large (high value per kilo) red deer within their grounds is being acquired. Once this land has been legally



purchased, suspects are said to plant cover crops with food that are appetising to deer. The food is used as bait to lure the animals over ill-defined property boundaries and onto the makeshift shooting range. As the following expert from the National Crime Agency and Trading Standards states:

*'They will put swedes down to encourage the deer down onto their land, because swedes and turnips are like sweets to deer. So they would put all of that down to encourage deer onto their land. It's alleged they've bought land down the [road] toward [location], just to get the deer.'*

(National Crime Agency Financial Intelligence Officer and Senior Animal Health Trading Standards Officer).

*'There are two generations of [suspect family] that are doing this. They bought land alongside the National Trust land and deliberately drive deer out of the woods to be shot and one of the things that's going on at the moment is the planning officer has got involved, because they put up a big tower in the field next to the National Trust property from which they shoot deer, which contravenes planning regulations.'*

(Deer surgeon and local animal welfare specialist).

Once the deer are unassumingly grazing on the strategically planted bait, rural enterprise snipers shoot the targets from camouflaged hides atop towers that are constructed on the assailants' properties - video footage of which has been obtained and

disseminated by animal welfare civil society organisations. Local planning authorities were said by experts to be in dispute with the suspects, as the shooting towers contravene planning permission. This reveals not only a significant tactic used by offenders to corral and illegally kill animals in undefendable rural spaces but also highlights how governance of eco-centric rural crime is beyond the immediacy of situational crime prevention techniques. It highlights how recourse to other enforcement agencies and local authority bodies can contribute to thwarting some types of violent rural volume crimes. The falling price of military grade thermal imaging, powerful rifles and silencers are exacerbating factors that could be mitigated with stricter gun ownership regulation. These insights emphasise that it is those who are in legal possession of guns and those with official ownership accreditation such as firearms licences or shotgun certificates that are key operators in this case. To obtain those credentials in rural regions actors will generally do so with recourse to their employment and therefore tend to be embedded in rural enterprise and countryside caretaker professions. Typical property crime offenders or urban marauders who do not hold legal firearm licences are less likely to risk traversing the countryside while heavily armed given the repercussions of immediate and lengthy incarceration, findings which implicate rural industry specialists and not acquisitive criminals.

### **The Rural Enterprise Crime Complex**

The sheer systematisation of lawful environmental harms and illegal animal killing bound up with the variety of rural enterprise activities and facilitated by designing crime control out of undefendable rural spaces, culminates in the creation of what can be designated *the rural enterprise crime complex*. The fortress farm situated within the wider surrounds of the undefendable rural space is a dichotomous phenomenon – from

a conventional anthropocentric criminal justice position focused on the prioritisation of human-centred interests, it generates a safe zone for endogenous inhabitants: the human insiders. While simultaneously and from a biocentric species justice perspective which equalizes concerns for non-human species, it shores up the conditions conducive to persecute non-human victims (White, 2014). From this critical inversion the fortress is an operational facility within the wider structure of the rural enterprise crime complex.

The complex is a system of lawful but damaging eco-harms coupled with crime commissioning processes and deviant cultures. Harms such as the general mistreatment of livestock regularly documented by NGOs, but also the persistent degradation of vital CO2 sequestration materials and the diminishment of soil nutrients as a result of industrial resource extraction processes. Soil fertility and ‘robbing the land’ of natural nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus during harvesting and its replacement with fertilizers has been a concern of critical scholars since the second agricultural revolution (Foster, 1999). In conjunction with these non-criminalised harms the complex is constituted by multifarious offending processes. Strategies relating to the illicit dispatch of deer for the venison production industry have been exposed in this article alongside crimes against many other protected species. Meanwhile gamekeepers use Larsen traps, snares, poison, glue traps and shooting to kill all manner of wild fauna (Animal Aid, 2009; Carrell et al., 2022). Those operatives use what is termed in the industry as a ‘stink pit’ to lure, trap and discard animals from estates to minimise biodiversity on manicured shooting grounds. One gamekeeper alone pleaded guilty to *‘shooting and trapping badgers, an otter, goshawks and buzzards and installing 23 illegal snares in a small wood on a grouse- and pheasant-shooting estate’* (Carrell, 2019). While another was convicted of shooting two protected short-eared owls (NWCU, 2021). Meanwhile domestic cats have been found dead in the so-called stink pits – strangled and tossed on

piles of dead squirrels and even hedgehogs (McGivern, 2019). A raptor expert noted that 56 protected hen harriers have been *'illegally killed or inexplicably "disappeared" since 2018, many of which were on or close to grouse moors'* (Barkham, 2021). In one of the counties in the region where this research took place, badger numbers have declined by over 50% and farmland bird species by 30% in the last 25 years (State of Nature Cornwall, 2020). 75% of the county's land coverage is used for agricultural industry (ibid). It is also pertinent that the West Country has more official badger cull zones than any other region on the U.K and that the illegal aspects of the controversial cull programme have already been revealed (\*\*\*, 2021a).

The rural industrial complex is so efficient at its objectives of rationalising wild habitats, valorising countryside ecosystems and annihilating large swathes of wild species that ecologists are observing the migration of wild fauna from rural environments to bustling urban areas. More species of wild animals are being identified in inner city London and Sheffield than in the surrounding rural areas. A hypothesis for this currently being forwarded by ecologists is that the fauna is deserting the rural regions due to the threat from the fortress farm; industrial levels of over exploitation and the pervasive degradation of biodiverse habitats, as these experts maintain: *'[w]ildlife struggles to flourish in the Peak District, Snowdonia and Exmoor as they are so heavily "exploited and degraded,". Yet areas of habitat in London boroughs such as Peckham burst with life as they are largely left alone.. The peregrine falcon, a species completely absent from many wild grouse moors, is thriving in cities'* (Armstrong, 2020). Evidence of this was identified by other natural scientists who found evidence of otters, which are targeted by gamekeepers, thriving in inner urban areas: *'We were in one of the most urban areas you can imagine. There are steelworks, factories, trains going past, and yet we were getting footage of otters'* (Teasdale and Hendry, 2020). Interpreted from within the wider context

of the U.K being one of the most nature depleted countries in Europe, principally due to agricultural intensification and land use systems change, these findings are remarkable (Davis, 2020). While this currently fringe assertion requires more research in the fields of critical ecology and rural species justice before being a fully accepted phenomenon with necessary external validity, these observations could be signs that the rural enterprise crime complex is so successful at achieving its aims that animals are naturally migrating to regions generally regarded as incompatible with their flourishing and natural habitats, in processes of natural threat avoidance. In bustling urban areas fauna are out of the reaches of the rural enterprise crime complex; they are free from the predation and persecution of countryside stewards, there are more guardians due to increased population levels, and they are less likely to fall victim to the processes, operations, traps and shooting of the motivated offenders of the countryside.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of the fortress farm is an important contribution to traditional rural criminology and the rural security sectors. This article has argued that the concept contains a problematic deep insider/outsider dualism. It provides corrupted rural and food processing stakeholders with the preconditions to lock-in deviant practices while simultaneously designing-out crime control, thus leaving non-human targets vulnerable to the routine predation of specialist personnel. This dichotomy is an outcome of the fortresses grounding in an anthropocentric model of justice, which valorises non-human species in instrumental terms and frames the environment as a primary resource. In response, this article has been elaborated from a biocentric species justice perspective to extend what constitutes the victim in rural crime studies – nonhuman species, biodiversity and wild animals constituted by the concept of mundane fauna. It has been

shown that rural commerce overly rationalises nature in processes of hyper-exploitation and persecution: animals are trapped, snared, poisoned and shot – annihilated to create the conditions required for some types of rural industry such as shooting estates and illicitly processed into food supply chains for others.

Empirical materials have been used from field work to argue that these practices emerge from the undefendable rural spaces of rural Britain and coalesce into what can be termed the rural enterprise crime complex: an efficient system and enduring illicit structure that degrades nature for commercial gain. The complex is able to function relatively unscathed in secluded remote regions due to what is being termed the ‘undefendable rural space’. Suspects were shown to invert the behaviours expected of local inhabitants of a bounded territory as contended by traditional defensible space theory, plundering the local natural environment for criminal gains, instead of nobly guarding it from outsiders. The policy implications of these findings should entail disrupting suspected fortresses containing illicit activity, while properly resourcing state based and third sector guardians and granting their permission to enter fortresses should suspicious behaviour be detected. Research applying the undefendable rural space concept in rural criminology from a biocentric perspective should be developed and the nuanced elaboration of aspects of the rural enterprise crime complex concept is required to confirm the preliminary propositions relating to it. It is hoped that these novel contributions towards designating the criminogenic conditions of the countryside, focused on the welfare of non-human victims and the flourishing of biodiverse ecosystems, counters the anthropocentric perspective predominant in conceptions of what constitutes crime and its control in traditional rural criminology.

## **Declarations**

*The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.*

*The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.*

*The author certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.*

*The author has no financial or proprietary interests in any material discussed in this article.*

## **Data availability statement**

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study from which the included quotes are derived from are available from the author on reasonable request.

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## Appendix

### Interview Table

| Respondent  | Location       | Length | Date       |
|---|----------------|--------|------------|
| Wildlife Crime Police Sargent                                   | Telephone      | 01:42  | 05/01/2016 |
| Wildlife Crime Officer (1st)                                    | Police Station | 3hrs   | 27/01/2016 |
| Wildlife Crime Officer (2nd)                                    | Police Station | 01:43  | 13/12/2016 |
| RSPCA Barrister   | Telephone      | 35mins | 17/03/2017 |
| National Wildlife Crime Unit Investigator                       | Public Venue   | 2hrs   | 23/03/2017 |
| Devon National Park Head Ranger and Rural Crime Initiative Lead | Office         | 01:21  | 12/04/2017 |
| National Trust Head Deer Warden                                 | Telephone      | 01:33  | 21/04/2017 |
| RSPCA Special Operations Unit Officer                           | Telephone      | 58mins | 25/04/2017 |
| Trading Standards Animal Welfare Senior Investigator            | Office         | 3hrs   | 26/04/2017 |
| 3x Rural Police Officers  | Police Station | 02:45  | 10/05/2017 |
| Wildlife Crime Police Officer (3rd)                             | Telephone      | 01:25  | 20/06/2017 |
| Expert Deer Stalker Poaching Witness                            | Home           | 3hrs   | 22/06/2017 |
| National Wildlife Crime Unit Chief Inspector                    | Telephone      | 33mins | 05/07/2017 |

| Respondent                                    | Location       | Length | Date       |
|---|----------------|--------|------------|
| Deer Surgeon Local Expert                     | Telephone      | 1hr    | 11/07/2017 |
| Rural Police Officer                          | Police Station | 01:15  | 13/07/2017 |
| British Deer Society                          | Office         | 01:30  | 14/07/2017 |
| Environmental Health Manager                  | Office         | 01:15  | 28/07/2017 |
| Police Chief Inspector                        | Telephone      | 01:45  | 07/08/2017 |
| Environmental Health Officer (1st)            | Office         | 45mins | 08/08/2017 |
| National Gamekeepers Organisation             | Telephone      | 25mins | 09/08/2017 |
| Deer Stalker and Licence Assessor             | Telephone      | 01:25  | 15/08/2017 |
| Food Standards Agency                         | Telephone      | 50mins | 16/08/2017 |
| Deer Stalker                                  | Home           | 01:30  | 21/08/2017 |
| Environment Agency Technical Expert           | Office         | 01:45  | 22/08/2017 |
| Deer Stalker, ex first Wildlife Crime Officer | Telephone      | 2hrs   | 25/08/2017 |
| Environment Agency Officer                    | Telephone      | 1hr    | 29/08/2017 |
| Wildlife Crime Officer (repeat w'#2)          | Office         | 1hr    | 29/08/2017 |
| League Against Cruel Sports                   | Telephone      | 2hrs   | 05/09/2017 |
| Wildlife Crime Officer (repeat w'#3)          | Office         | 2hrs   | 23/10/2017 |

| Respondent   | Location              | Length | Date       |
|--|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| Rural Police Officer Force Lead  | Office                | 01:15  | 10/11/2017 |
| Deer Initiative  | Telephone             | 1hr    | 30/11/2017 |
| Senior Environmental Health Investigator   | Public Venue          | 01:30  | 06/12/2017 |
| Environmental Officer Meat Produce Specialist  | Office                | 2hrs   | 07/12/2017 |
| Natural Resources Wales Investigator   | Telephone             | 1hr    | 26/01/2018 |
| Wildlife Crime Officer (2nd repeat w'#3)   | Telephone             | 20mins | 19/03/2018 |
| Deer Stalker and Licence Accessor (repeat)   | Telephone             | 30mins | 26/05/2018 |
| Roundtable Respondent Validation Lunch:<br>National Trust Deer Warden, Local Deer Surgeon, National Park Head Ranger, Wildlife Crime Officer | National Trust Office | 3hrs   | 13/06/2018 |

*Figure 1*