

Call 101 to help stop illegal off-roading in the countryside

People witnessing illegal or anti-social off-road driving on paths in the countryside are being called on to report it to the police using the new 101 phone number.

Sussex Pathwatch is a special service set up to help protect the safety of everyone using rights-of-way, fields and woodland to prevent the damage that illegal offroading can cause. A similar service called Countrywatch has been set up in Hampshire. Anyone can report an offence by calling 101 or emailing contact.centre@sussex.pnn.police.uk in Sussex and countrywatch@hampshire.pnn.police.uk in Hampshire.

Angela Ward, ranger for the South Downs National Park, said:

“Most people driving off-road do so legally and with consideration for other people. Unfortunately there are a small minority driving illegally. They put everyone’s safety at risk, give legal drivers a bad name and cause damage to the countryside.

“That’s why we’re working with the Police and local authorities on this scheme. If illegal off-roading isn’t reported then the police can’t take any action.”

Just one example of Pathwatch success was in a case of illegal off-road motorcycling on a Site of Special Scientific interest near Small Dole in West Sussex. The site, which holds three nationally rare habitats and supports a rich community of rare butterflies and moths, was blighted by off-road motorcyclists who had even brought in equipment to dig tracks. Following calls from the public, Sussex Police were able to catch them in the act and serve notice – meaning that if they reoffend in the next 12 months their vehicle will be impounded and possibly crushed. This led to the activity stopping.

Angela added:

“Off-roading can be great fun so if you want advice on how to do it legally speak to the Land Access and Recreation Association, the Trials Rider Fellowship or ask us on Twitter @SussexPathwatch or Facebook.”

Find out more about Countrywatch at www.hampshire.police.uk/internet/advice-and-information/rural-crime/country-watch or Sussex Pathwatch at www.pathwatch.info.