

Worldwide curse of

Police baffled by latest mutilations in Hampshire

John McGhie
and Jim Schnabel

HORSE owners in the Home Counties were on full alert last night after a third mare in a week fell victim to a frenzied sexual assault by animal 'rippers', who have attacked almost 30 animals nationwide.

The latest attack, reported on Friday night, took place at stables near Kilmerston, Hampshire, where the 'ripper' got past prowling guard dogs to slash and sexually abuse a 23-year-old mare in foal. It followed two similar assaults earlier in the week in Owlsbury, Hampshire, and Lacey Green, Buckinghamshire.

Details of the Kilmerston attack have not been released, but police say the assault followed 'the usual' *modus operandi*. Although police officers may have found the Kilmerston attack depressingly familiar, there is nothing usual about these assaults. They have a long and mysterious history, and incidents have been reported from California to Sweden. In Britain, the worst cases seem to be found in the Home Counties.

Anita Jones, wife of former Monkees pop star Davy Jones, lives in Hampshire and owns dogs as well as horses. They bark one way for an animal and another for a human; around midnight on 14 July last year, they began barking at a human.

'I put all the house lights on,' said Mrs Jones, 'and I looked around the house. I didn't think to look in the field.'

The following morning Chrissie, the Jones's palomino mare, was found in the paddock distraught and covered in scratches from a wild flight through trees and bushes. Someone had slashed her with a blade across the rump, hind legs and genitals. She had also been sexually assaulted with a long blunt instrument that could have been a broom or fencepost.

Chrissie is slowly recovering from her ordeal. Millie, a 15-year-old thoroughbred mare belonging to David and Olive Gray, was not so lucky. Her assault was similar: someone tried to force a blunt object into her vagina. Five weeks later, the stress on the older horse proved too much and she had to be put down.

'I will never forget the day she was driven away on the lorry. She knew what was going

to happen and she called after me with a whinny. It's going to haunt me for the rest of my days. We don't have children, but Millie was like a child to David and me,' Mrs Gray said.

These attacks, which police say cause as much distress among victims as they have ever seen, have been repeated in the past nine months 22 times in Hampshire, twice in Buckinghamshire and five times on the outskirts of Hull.

Stallions, too, have been interfered with. Hampshire vet Andrew Kennedy, who practises in the Meon Valley, which has borne the brunt of attacks, says he has treated horses whose genitals have been shocked with electricity.

'They've had wire round their penises and there was some evidence that electrical fittings were involved,' he said. Other stallions and geldings have been rectally assaulted, flogged and stabbed. One had a rubber band wound so tightly around his testicles that they became blue.

The sadism of these attacks has angered rural communities. The police freely admit they are baffled. So too is a battery of psychiatrists, psychologists, vets and equine experts, each of whom has a different theory as to who is to blame.

The worldwide phenomenon stretches back hundreds of years. A celebrated case at the turn of the century in Britain interested none other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. After a spate of sheep, cattle and horse ripping in 1903, Staffordshire police successfully charged a young Anglican clergyman, George Edalji, the son of a Hindu, whose coat was found bloodstained and covered with horse hair.

Sir Arthur, preferring to believe demons had done it, thought the police had acted from racist motives and campaigned for his release. A commission exonerated Edalji, who was freed. In 1907 a new wave of rippings began.

Until last year, western Sweden saw a spate of rippings, with 200 horses and cattle slashed. No arrests were ever made. Attacks in the United States have occurred in San Diego, Arizona and Pennsylvania, where investigators point the finger at cults.

Richard Post, a private investigator into cults in California,



Ordeal: Anita Jones's mare Chrissie was slashed and sexu

claims attacks tend to occur at full moon. When a full moon passes without an attack, he suggests it is because a cult has moved on or has found another victim. 'When the animals are not being attacked you some-

times get reports of people going missing,' he said.

Professor David Canter, who heads Surrey University's Psychology Department and is at the forefront of profiling sexual offenders sought by police, dis-