

CAUGHT BLUE-HANDED!

Thieves found with sacks full of 8,000 wild bluebell bulbs

IT'S not just nature lovers who like bluebells, it seems. Thieves have illegally uprooted 8,000 of them from a woodland beauty spot.

Police discovered large sacks and mail bags filled with the wild flowers after receiving a call about strangers acting suspiciously on the property.

Bluebells are protected under the

By **Chris Brooke**

Wildlife and Countryside Act - and it is an offence to intentionally uproot them without permission.

The owner of the wood near Fakenham, Norfolk, is now replanting the bulbs. Two men in their 30s and two women in their 20s from Lincolnshire have been inter-

viewed in connection to the attempted theft on March 23, although no arrests have been made.

Dr Trevor Dines, botanical specialist for Plantlife, said the bluebells would have been stolen for sale on the black market, but low levels of fines are not acting as a deterrent to plant theft.

He added: 'Targeted plant thefts are usu-

ally undetected as there's no "smoking trowel". The first sign of a crime is usually a gaping hole in the ground where once there was a breathtaking petalled spike.'

A demand for wild flowers has led to a rise in thefts as people look to 'rewild' their gardens and lawns.

Almost half the world's bluebells are in the UK. They usually bloom in early May.



Feeling blue: Demand for wild flowers has led to a rise in thefts



Found dead: Mary McLaughlin

By **Connor Gordon**

A MAN accused of murdering a mother 36 years ago confessed to his ex-wife that he had killed 'a woman' he met in a pub, a court heard yesterday.

Mother-of-11 Mary McLaughlin, 58, was found dead in her Glasgow home in 1984.

At Graham McGill's trial yesterday, his ex-wife Suzanne Russell told the court he had told her he 'just wanted to know what it felt like to kill someone'.

The High Court in Glasgow also heard from a forensic scientist that DNA matching that of McGill, 59, was found on the inside of a knot on the dressing gown cord believed to have been used to kill Miss McLaughlin.

Miss Russell, 55, from Glasgow, and McGill were in a relationship from 1985 and married in 1993.

The court heard that the alleged incriminating conversation took place in 1988.

Miss Russell told prosecutor Alex Prentice, QC: 'He said he was round the pub for a drink and he said a woman kept pestering him.'

'He decided to go back to her flat. He said he murdered her. He said he strangled her and said he just wanted to know what it felt like to kill someone.'

'He said he used her tights and said he was shocked how long it took to actually murder her.'

She also said: 'I didn't believe

Man accused of murder 'confessed killing to his ex-wife'

him. He threatened me and said if I ever told anyone he would kill me and if I ever reported it or tried to leave him that's what would happen.'

Under cross-examination by defence counsel Sarah Livingstone, Miss Russell was asked if

'Wanted to know what it felt like'

she wanted McGill to get into trouble and she replied: 'No.'

When Miss Livingstone asked: 'The confession didn't happen, did it?', Miss Russell replied: 'I didn't know if it happened but he said it did.'

Miss Livingstone then asked

her: 'You didn't believe he murdered anyone?'

Miss Russell replied: 'I didn't believe him, I was only told and I wasn't allowed to report.'

Earlier, forensic scientist Joanne Cochrane told the court DNA attributed to McGill was found on the cord allegedly used to strangle Miss McLaughlin.

The DNA was also found on Miss McLaughlin's dress, on a cigarette butt and on a black bra found outside her home.

The court heard that Miss McLaughlin was found dead on her bed with the cord wrapped tightly round her neck on October 2, 1984. The last reported sightings of her were on the evening of September 26, 1984.

Mrs Cochrane said the latest

analysis found a mixed DNA profile with a major profile attributed to Miss McLaughlin and a minor one to McGill.

She told jurors the chances of the DNA on the cord belonging to someone other than McGill was 85,000 to one. The chance of DNA on the cigarette butt and the dress not being from McGill was one billion to one.

The court heard the cord was wrapped round Miss McLaughlin's neck three times and the cause of death was ligature strangulation.

McGill denies assaulting Miss McLaughlin with intent to rape and murdering her on September 26 or 27, 1984.

The trial before judge Lord Burns continues.

Sheriff set to probe deaths of men after boat capsized

By **David Meikle**

THE deaths of two fishermen are to be probed by a sheriff.

Skipper Duncan MacDougall, 46, and crewman Przemek Krawczyk, 38, were working on the Nancy Glen when it sank in Loch Fyne, Argyll, in January 2018.

It was three months before their bodies were found in the submerged wreckage by salvage teams.

A third crewman, John Miller, was able to run along the deck and leap into the water seconds before the boat capsized - a move that saved his life.

A criminal probe into the incident was dropped but a fatal accident inquiry will now be held at Oban Sheriff Court.

The inquiry is mandatory because both men, of Tarbert, Argyll, died during the



Loss: Mr MacDougall and Mr Krawczyk

course of their employment. A preliminary hearing will be held today, with the full inquiry set to begin next month.

The 40ft Nancy Glen was brought to the surface after the Scottish Government stepped in to cover the £1million costs, so that £300,000 raised by a crowdfunder could go to the men's families.

A report into the incident by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) in 2019 found modifications to the Nancy Glen reduced its stability.

It said it capsized when a net became filled with mud as it tried to turn.

Changes to the vessel, including a new crane which was more than double the weight of the old one, meant it could not perform the manoeuvre.

The MAIB concluded that 'life modifications' to the Nancy Glen such as the crane replacement had 'reduced the vessel's stability, significantly increasing its vulnerability to capsizing'.

Traders' fury over 'crazy' road layout

A NEW road layout has been branded 'crazy', with parking spaces forcing traffic into the middle of the road and cyclists 'too scared' to use a bike lane.

The Spaces for People initiative was brought in by the City of Edinburgh Council as a response to the pandemic.

But business owners have criticised changes to the capital's Longstone Road, saying they are putting lives at risk and killing footfall. The road has been given a

By **Calum Loudon**

new cycle lane and 'floating' parking bays that jut out into the carriageway.

Hair salon owner Diane Johnstone, 47, said: 'It's an accident waiting to happen.'

Gino Cortellessa, 58, has owned a chip shop on the street for 36 years. He said: 'Dangerous isn't the word... It's just crazy.'

'It's affecting my fish and chip shop, with no parking for my customers. But most of

all it's the safety issue. I've spoken to cyclists and they are terrified of using it.'

Edinburgh transport and environment vice convener Karen Doran said: 'We are still in the process of implementing this scheme. We will also be reducing the speed limit to 20mph to create an even safer, calmer environment.'

'Floating parking spaces may feel unfamiliar, but they... are regularly used successfully in many other cities.'