

# Dog owners be alert!

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

DOG owners are warned to be on the alert for a fake animal control officer stealing dogs in the North King Country.

Several incidents involving a man wearing a uniform and driving a white Toyota ute with 'Animal Control' written in blue on the sides have been reported in Tokoroa, Tirau and Cambridge and the week before Christmas a dog was stolen from New Plymouth.

It is thought valuable purebred dogs are stolen for sale while others are taken for possible use as dog-fight bait.

A nasty incident on a beef farm just north of the Eight Mile junction on SH3 late last year resulted in two valuable huntaway bitches being shot by a man posing as an authorised animal control officer.

Waitomo animal control officer Lucas Koroheke says a man drove a white 4WD Hilux ute with a canopy and blue 'Animal Control' signwriting in mid-November.

Described as Caucasian with sandy

blonde hair, a goatee and moustache, about 1.8m (6 foot) tall, of average build and in his 50s, the fake officer drove up to the farm kennels where he was confronted by the farm manager.

He was not wearing a uniform.

The fake officer said two of the farm manager's eight dogs were undernourished and were being seized because they had to be destroyed.

The farmer and his wife - who wish to remain anonymous for fear of retribution if the dog snatching is linked to organised crime - assumed the man had the authority to seize the dogs.

The farmer says the man seemed to know what he was talking about because animal control officers can seize dogs which are improperly fed, watered or sheltered. He was threatened with an \$8000 fine per dog if he refused to surrender them.

The man then took the dogs from their kennels saying he was taking them away to put them down. However, the farm manager said if his dogs had to be destroyed he wanted to see it done cleanly.



**BE WARNED:** Waitomo animal control officer Lucas Koroheke is warning dog owners in the region to be aware. A man posing as an animal control officer has been in the North King Country attempting to take dogs and, in one case, shot two valuable huntaways in front of their owner.

The fake officer took a rifle from his vehicle, loaded it and shot both dogs in front of their owner.

He then began taking more dogs from their kennels, at which point the farmer demanded he

leave the property.

The fake officer said he'd be back in a few weeks to get the rest of the dogs, but to date hasn't shown up.

TO P7

# Crash victim's parents in court

THE parents of a 12-week-old baby who died following a car crash in Kopaki last year have admitted joint charges of failing to protect their child.

On May 19, **Alexandria Grace Navacilla** suffered severe bruising to her forehead after being flung from her mother's arms while riding unrestrained in the back seat.

She was airlifted from the scene in critical condition and died the next day.

An unused car seat was found in the boot of the car.

Her parents **Rey Titus Cezar Navacilla**

(29) and **Mary Grace Navacilla** (29) appeared in Te Kuiti District Court on Tuesday facing joint charges of manslaughter and failing to protect a child under the age of 18.

Police withdrew the charge of manslaughter.

The court heard neither parent was driving the Honda hatchback that crossed the centreline on a bend on SH4 and crashed into a bank.

The four other adults and a three-year-old child also in the car were properly restrained.

The driver **Nilo Jr Galimba Frias** (29) appeared in Te Kuiti District Court in November charged with reckless driving causing death. He was remanded at large without entering a plea to reappear in court on January 22.

## "MAJOR DEPARTURE"

In court on Tuesday, Judge Glen Marshall told the Navacillas that failing to place their daughter in a proper restraint was "a major departure from the standard of care expected of a reasonable person".

"The only restraint she had was her mother's arms," he said as Mrs Navacilla wept.

"However, the family has suffered greatly in the loss of their daughter.

"This has had a severe impact on both parents and they will have to carry that with them for the rest of their lives."

Judge Marshall indicated a sentence of possible supervision and community detention.

The Navacillas were remanded at large to reappear for sentencing in Taumarunui District Court on February 12.

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# Dog owners be alert!

**FROM P1**

Mr Koroheke says he informed Te Kuiti police about the incident as soon as he had visited the couple and gathered the full details.

"I talked with them again in the New Year, but they have no leads to date," says Mr Koroheke.

"The farmer is understandably upset and I can see how he was fooled by the fake animal control officer.

"It happened out of the blue and being caught off guard he didn't think to get the vehicle's licence plate number or ask for a council ID card."

**VEHICLE & CLOTHING**

Mr Koroheke says his pale silver council ute is easily identifiable by large red 'Animal Control' lettering with the Waitomo District logo and 0800 number on the front doors.

His uniform is a bright orange polo shirt with a black striped collar and silver hi-viz stripes on the sleeves, worn with an orange hi-viz vest which bears council's logo above a clear plastic pocket showing his photo ID.

He wears black shorts and a black cap with council's logo.

"I work between 8.30am and 5pm except on Thursdays when the council's pound manager Mark Ammon is on duty," he says.

"After hours we use a white Hilux Inframax ute which is signwritten the same as council's animal control ute ('Animal Control' again in red, council logo and 0800 number)."

**WARRANT & PHOTO ID**

Mr Koroheke says an authorised animal control officer will always have a warrant showing they are authorised to uplift or impound a dog as well as their photo ID.

"Do not hand your dog over to anyone who cannot show a warrant and photo ID," he says.

"If they can't produce both, ring the police or Waitomo council so I can come down and have a talk to them.

"Also make sure you get their vehicle registration number."

Taking a photo of the man and his vehicle with your cell phone may be an option.

If this isn't possible get a good description of the person and vehicle.

Mr Koroheke says: "The person or people operating in the region are very brazen and their actions are despicable.

"They need to be stopped."

The owners of the dogs shot by the fake animal control officer agree.

"This guy was very aggressive and used abusive language from the moment he stepped out of his vehicle," says the farm manager's wife.

"He told my husband the dogs were in very poor condition and he'd intended to take all of

them if he hadn't been home.

"Our top huntaways are worth up to \$5000.

"We look after them, they're all registered, we obey the rules and try to do everything properly so my husband was taken aback by the guy's attitude.

"We thought this guy was the real council animal control officer . . . until we met Lucas who is such a nice young man."

The couple says they are grateful to mayor Brian Hanna and chief executive Chris Ryan who visited them soon after the event and have pledged to do what they can to uncover the identity of the fake animal control officer.

They are also grateful Mr Koroheke has liaised with the police on their behalf and kept them up to date.

The police have visited the property twice.

Te Kuiti Police sergeant Craig Lindstrom says there have been no further reports in the district.

He says police have not been able to identify the person responsible and don't know what his motivation was despite extensive inquiries.

"We are concerned about the use of a firearm and the man's false representation of his role."



**RIGHT GUY:** Lucas Koroheke is the only official animal control officer in the Waitomo district. Heed his warnings and remember his face.



**CREDENTIALS:** Real animal control officers are warranted and carry official identification – make sure you ask to see it.

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