



SARCIS officers found evidence of 'overbranding'—changing existing brand marks—on stolen cattle.

Detective Inspector Robertson said one of the difficulties SARCIS often faced was the time delay between a theft occurring and police being alerted.

“Some big properties may only muster once a year, and by the time they’ve noticed the losses, the trail has gone cold,” he said.

“In offences such as *Unlawful Use of Stock*, where an offender takes an animal for ‘profit, pleasure or convenience’, a thief could steal cows, breed from them and then push them back onto the owner’s property once they’d had their calves.”

Other offences that fall under this category include taking somebody’s horse for an unauthorised ride, taking a cow and milking it, or even stealing a sheep, shearing it and then returning it.

Detective Inspector Robertson said another common offence was *Killing an animal with intent to steal a carcass*.

“Usually this only involves a single beast. However there was a case at Harvey’s Range, west of Townsville where 26 beasts were killed in one paddock. At the time the local meatworks were on strike—SARCIS was faced with having several hundred suspects.”

The normal SARCIS case involves the theft of beef cattle; however,

sheep, goats and horses are sometimes stolen. And then there are the unusual cases. In 1999 SARCIS encountered a company west of Mungallala that had more than 3,000 ostriches in pens over hundreds of acres.

“Ostriches were selling for \$40,000 a pair at the time. The company involved were selling the birds overseas in places like Germany and Denmark but they were actually selling each bird several times. Every bird had an electronic chip implanted that could be read by an electronic reader—much like cats or dogs—and SARCIS had to round up each one and read the chip to identify it.”

Theft of gall stones from slaughtered cattle is another example of the array of crimes SARCIS deals with. Detective Senior Sergeant Terry Hanly, Northern Area SARCIS Coordinator, oversaw an investigation into two meatworkers who had collectively stolen more than forty gall stones.

“Offenders are usually meatworkers. They slaughter the cows and then cut open the gall bladders and put any stones they find in their pockets,” Detective Senior Sergeant Hanly said.

“The stones are purchased by recognised dealers throughout Australia. With a current price of \$22,000 per kilogram for good

quality stones it is a massive business. They are then sold on to the Asian market where they are used for herbal medicine.”

Besides investigating stock theft, SARCIS also carries out search and rescue operations, drug searches, and investigates other rural crimes including fraud, illegal shooting, trespassing, and theft of fuel, fertiliser and farm equipment.

All SARCIS officers are trained as conservation officers and have unique powers to help National Parks and Wildlife Service officers uphold the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Exotic Diseases*

equine flu or foot and mouth disease, and animal welfare cases.

Despite the variety of cases and landscapes, SARCIS investigations still require painstaking attention to detail and a proven scientific approach.

“Like all police work it can be incredibly detailed. We were recently called on to inspect 17,000 head of cattle destined for Indonesia. They were inspected before being loaded onto ships at Karumba and Townsville,” Detective Inspector Robertson said.

“But it wouldn’t be a typical day for SARCIS without some unexpected excitement.

“On this particular occasion five cattle escaped. One was out for a bit of holiday and it caused a bit of chaos in the town. He went for a



Ostriches were sold several times over at \$40,000 a pair in an unusual case of fraud.

Act 1981. These powers involve policing the macropod industry, arresting illegal ‘roo shooters, removing dogs from National Parks and enforcing laws against stealing wildlife.

The Squad also works in conjunction with other government agencies such as the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries on biosecurity issues, such as

dip in the Ross River then headed over to the casino to try his hand at blackjack. It was up to SARCIS to help round them up.”

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