Rustlers round up 300 Synod Inn sheep

Police are investigating the theft of around 280 sheep and lambs from a Cardiganshire farm last weekend amid fears that a new outbreak of large-scale rustling has begun.

Geoff and Doreen Sutchiffe of Gafryn Farm, Mydroilyn, discovered the loss of 139 ewes and their followers when they went up to the accommodation land they own at Banc y Mount between Synod Inn and Talgarreg on Saturday morning to bring in the flock for shearing.

"As we were gathering them we realised there was only half the flock there", said Mrs Sutchiffe. "It's absolutely terrible. You can't take it in and it makes you very nervous for the rest of your stock".

Up to £10,000 worth of sheep and lambs were taken through a gate that was left unlocked because it is in use by contractors working on the new water reservoir at Banc y Mount. All other entrances to the field were locked.

"We're only seven minutes away from the land and we go there two or three times a day to check the stock. We also drop by on the way home whenever we are out in the evening", said Mrs Sutchiffe. "The only other thing to do is sit guard up there all night".

With the theft a fortnight ago of about 100 sheep in Ponthyrdfendigaid some people believe a new wave of large-scale sheep rustling is under way.

Mr Emry Hughes, Cardiganshire county secretary of the National Farmers Union said it was difficult to know what farmers could do against threat.

"You can secure your gates and fences as much as you like but if one individual or an organised gang, as I view this theft, are hell bent on taking something the best security in the world in terms of chains, padlocks and fences is a mere slight inhibiting factor".

Police investigating the theft estimated that it would have needed between six and ten men to round up the sheep, and a large vehicle to take them away.

Rustling seemed to happen in waves, said Mr Hughes. Things had been quiet lately except for isolated incidents of small scale rustling or butchering, but there was always increase activity around this time of year when lambs are approaching slaughter weight.

The 139 Welsh cross speckled ewes were marked with a red 'S' on their right sides. The lambs around the same number - were unmarked. Police are appealing for information, saying a very large vehicle must have been used and may have been spotted by someone locally.

Mr Hughes appealed to people living in the country to keep a look out for strangers or unfamiliar large vehicles, especially near remote farmland. Meanwhile the Sutchiffe's are wondering whether to call a halt to the annual Synod Inn trotting races that have been held on Banc y Mount for the last 25 years.

The last event was held there three weeks ago and Mrs Sutchiffe said it could have attracted people from far away "on the look-out" for easy pickings as well as the authentic race-goers.