

Digi dogs on the double

The number of Scotland's crime-fighting "digi" dog team is to double after successfully sniffing out almost 150 concealed devices on paedophiles and sex traffickers.

Police Scotland's specially trained Digital Evidence Detection Dogs – Digital Dogs – have unearthed 145 hidden devices after being unleashed 48 times across the country since August.

Now another three dogs are undergoing eight-week training to swell the ranks of the force's complement of canine sleuths.

Police use the dog detectives to help search out digital clues which can help to lead to more convictions for criminals involved in cyber crime and online child abuse.

Their super sensitive noses are trained to detect the scent of electronic storage devices deliberately secreted to avoid detection by cops and help secure convictions against dangerous offenders.

Their finds have included mobile phones, SIM and memory cards, cameras and tablets.

They discovered a USB device in Aberdeen, which contained child sex abuse material, unearthed an air tag relating to a domestic stalking crime in Edinburgh and located a murder victim's phone in Glasgow.

Assistant chief constable Andrew Freeburn, head of organised crime, counter terrorism and intelligence, said: "Police Scotland currently have three dogs, fully deployed nationally

and realising the benefits described within the initial business case.

“The dogs are improving detections across several business areas to support the investigation of crimes and keeping people safe.

“As of 27th August, there have been 48 deployments across 11 divisions and 145 device recoveries which include mobile phones, SIM and memory cards, cameras and tablets.

“Operational Support Division (OSD) are in the process of training another three dogs to increase the overall complement and availability of this resource nationally.”

According to ACC Freeburn, it is common for digital devices to be used in criminal activity and concealed to hide incriminating evidence.

He said: “People and businesses are spending more and more time online and criminals will use any means available to them to exploit vulnerabilities and any method at their disposal.

“Digital devices are becoming smaller in size and those involved in criminal activity are becoming more adept at hiding them.

“Searches by humans can be limited and the dogs will provide an additional capability which make finding hidden devices easier.”

He added: “Police Scotland is committed to keeping everyone safe and this addition to our search capabilities will ensure there is no hiding place for criminals, even in the digital world.”

The force’s original canine detectives have included Zen, a rescue Springer Spaniel and Xena, a Springer Spaniel/Labrador cross, along with Sprocker Max who was gifted by the previous owners who wanted him to have an active home.