# Essex’s former police officers lead fight against £31m celebrity catfishing scams



In a world where the line between reality and deception often blurs, two Essex mothers have transformed from police officers to covert operatives, deftly navigating the murky waters of private investigation. Sam Hutchinson, 56, and Emma Coles, 40, who founded their agency, Verity Henton, in April 2020, have built a reputation for tackling everything from infidelity cases to complex catfishing scams. As they embrace their unusual roles, their charm and appearance often lead them to blend seamlessly into their surroundings—an asset in a line of work marked by discretion.

Both women bring invaluable skills honed during their time in the Essex police force, particularly in anti-corruption. This background, Sam suggests, is reminiscent of the popular TV series "Line of Duty," where hidden agendas intertwine with personal narratives. It was during a chance encounter at Tesco that they realised their shared ambitions and the potential for a new venture. They describe their service as essential, catering not only to the everyday individual but also to high-profile clients, with some even being Arab princes and celebrities seeking discreet assistance.

Their business model rests on their ability to navigate the intricate dynamics of trust. Clients approach them for reasons that range from suspicions about their partners’ fidelity to perplexing stalker situations where their safety is in jeopardy. In one instance, they worked with a well-known celebrity, ensuring their stalker was effectively monitored and contained. Yet, the intricate web of identity deception they often unravel highlights a pervasive issue in contemporary society—catfishing.

According to reports, victims in the UK lost nearly £31 million to romance scams in 2021 alone, a staggering 79% increase from the previous year. Many of these scams involve fraudsters impersonating celebrities to elicit emotional investments and, subsequently, money from their victims. These criminals often rely on deepfake technology to create convincing interactions, making it increasingly challenging for unsuspecting individuals to discern truth from illusion. Emma shared the painful story of a woman who believed she was in a committed relationship with Marti Pellow, only to lose thousands to a fabricated romance—a narrative echoed in cases involving other celebrities like Luke Evans.

The pair’s work is not without its challenges. They’ve uncovered cases where victims have lost significant sums, sometimes due to the prosecution of perceived emergencies or obligations created by the scammers. Their role expands significantly when the police, constrained by resources, are unable to take action. As criminals evolve their tactics, so too must private investigators, amplifying the importance of their services in contemporary crime-solving.

However, the emotional toll of their profession is palpable. While celebrating their successes in exposing infidelity or deceit, Sam and Emma are equally affected by the heartache they encounter. They invest time in supporting clients, acknowledging the psychological ramifications of unearthing such personal truths. The difficulty of assisting someone who desperately clings to the belief in a false romance illustrates the delicate nature of their work.

Verity Henton stands apart from conventional private investigation firms, largely due to their empathetic approach and understanding of the emotional landscape that accompanies their cases. While many traditional investigators tend to follow a more perfunctory method, focussing solely on the logistics of surveillance, Sam and Emma centre human experience in their methods. This distinctive ethos has allowed them to forge meaningful connections with their clients, often leading to continued support even after cases conclude.

Five years into their venture, the spy mums are not only managing a growing business that now employs around 100 operatives but are also preparing for future expansion—hinting at potential developments in New York and even a new TV drama. Their success has undeniably eclipsed their former lives in law enforcement, leading them to affirm that each day in this profession is a learning opportunity.

As they navigate the complexities of modern-day deception and personal safety, Emma aptly summarises their journey: “Every day is a school day.” Their commitment to delivering results, coupled with an unyielding passion for seeking the truth, has positioned them as not only investigators but trusted allies in a landscape where trust is increasingly hard to come by.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14783947/spy-mums-Essex-school-mum-catfishing-cases.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.businessinsider.com/celebrities-catfished-online-fake-identities)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14783947/spy-mums-Essex-school-mum-catfishing-cases.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.refundee.com/blog/refundee-identifies-celebrity-face-swap-impersonation-scams), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/oct/14/online-daters-warned-of-fraudsters-posting-fake-celebrity-profiles)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://celsolicitors.co.uk/7-celebrity-faces-used-to-catfish-victims/), [[6]](https://www.tlwsolicitors.co.uk/2023/12/13/latest-news/police-warning-after-woman-loses-5000-in-fake-celebrity-romance-scam/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.refundee.com/blog/refundee-identifies-celebrity-face-swap-impersonation-scams), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/oct/14/online-daters-warned-of-fraudsters-posting-fake-celebrity-profiles)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14783947/spy-mums-Essex-school-mum-catfishing-cases.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://celsolicitors.co.uk/7-celebrity-faces-used-to-catfish-victims/)
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* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14783947/spy-mums-Essex-school-mum-catfishing-cases.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.refundee.com/blog/refundee-identifies-celebrity-face-swap-impersonation-scams), [[3]](https://celsolicitors.co.uk/7-celebrity-faces-used-to-catfish-victims/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14783947/spy-mums-Essex-school-mum-catfishing-cases.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.refundee.com/blog/refundee-identifies-celebrity-face-swap-impersonation-scams> - In 2021, UK residents lost nearly £31 million to romance scams, marking a 79% increase from 2020. Scammers often impersonate celebrities, using their images to deceive victims into believing they're in a relationship. These fraudsters build trust over time, then request money for fabricated emergencies. A new tactic involves using 'deepfake' technology and celebrity filters to create convincing video calls, making the scam more believable. Victims are advised to be cautious of unsolicited online interactions and to verify identities before sharing personal information or money.
3. <https://celsolicitors.co.uk/7-celebrity-faces-used-to-catfish-victims/> - Scammers frequently impersonate celebrities to defraud individuals. Notable cases include: Paul Hollywood, who warned fans of fake profiles offering explicit photos in exchange for money; Olly Murs, whose likeness was used to con nearly £200,000 from unsuspecting women; and Katy Perry, whose image was used to deceive a man into spending a quarter of his life savings on a ring for a non-existent relationship. These incidents highlight the importance of verifying online identities to prevent falling victim to such scams.
4. <https://www.businessinsider.com/celebrities-catfished-online-fake-identities> - Several celebrities have been victims of online impersonation scams. For instance, Brad Paisley and his wife, Kimberly Williams-Paisley, were deceived by a woman claiming her daughter was ill, leading them to send money and personal messages. Similarly, actor Thomas Gibson was tricked into an online relationship with someone misrepresenting herself. These cases underscore the prevalence of such scams and the need for vigilance when interacting with individuals online.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/oct/14/online-daters-warned-of-fraudsters-posting-fake-celebrity-profiles> - Police have issued warnings about fraudsters creating fake celebrity profiles on dating platforms to deceive users. In one instance, a woman lost approximately £5,000 to a scammer posing as TV chef James Martin. These fraudsters often move conversations to less monitored platforms like WhatsApp, request intimate images, and demand money under various pretenses. Authorities advise users to be cautious and verify the authenticity of online interactions to avoid falling victim to such scams.
6. <https://www.tlwsolicitors.co.uk/2023/12/13/latest-news/police-warning-after-woman-loses-5000-in-fake-celebrity-romance-scam/> - A woman lost £5,000 to a romance scammer posing as TV chef James Martin. Similar scams have targeted celebrities like Gary Barlow and Urs Bühler. These fraudsters often request intimate photos and money under false pretenses. Authorities advise individuals to avoid sending money to people they've never met in person and to be cautious of unsolicited online interactions. Legal experts emphasize the importance of verifying online identities to prevent financial loss.
7. <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/news/2024/07/martin-lewis-celebrity-scam-warning/> - Scammers are increasingly impersonating celebrities on social media to defraud individuals. In the past two years, victims have reported losing over £20 million to scams featuring Martin Lewis. Other celebrities, including Taylor Swift, have also been targeted, with fans losing an estimated £1 million since July 2023. These incidents highlight the growing issue of celebrity impersonation scams and the need for consumers to exercise caution when interacting with online profiles claiming to be celebrities.