



Amateur Radio Gains Significant Boost in UK by Connecting People During Lockdown

An April BBC news feature outlined how ham radio has gotten a significant boost by connecting people during the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK. The article, by Vanessa Pearce, quotes the Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB) — the UK’s International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) member-society — as saying that many former hams are now returning to the hobby.

Mark Rider, G3VHJ, a retired engineer who lives alone in North Warwickshire, said that during the lockdown restrictions, he decided to dust off his ham radio equipment “to seek out some other social interaction.” Rider said that ragchewing has become one of the highlights of his day.

RSGB General Manager Steve Thomas, M1ACB, said the society has experienced a three-fold increase in license examination applications since social distancing rules were put into place. The UK has about 75,000 amateur licensees.

Eleven-year-old Anne-Marie Rowland, 2EØRUX, of Cornwall, worked with the Cornish Amateur Radio Club to conduct informal twice-weekly nets to help keep people in touch. “We have some regulars, but also some new people join in,” she told the BBC. Her father, Bill, MØNXF, runs a net that has attracted older radio amateurs who are self-isolating, to help them feel connected.

The RSGB recently instituted its “Get on the Air to Care” (#GOTA2C) campaign in conjunction with the National

▶ Mark Rider, G3VHJ.

▼ Ann-Marie Rowland, 2EØRUX.



Health Service (NHS) and its GB1NHS amateur station to promote amateur radio use during the pandemic lockdown. Some stations have been adding “/NHS” to their call signs to encourage the effort, which aims to support the emotional health and well-being of the amateur radio community.

The RSGB introduced remote administration of entry-level Foundation-class amateur radio exams in mid-April. Pete Sipple, MØPSX, told BBC News that he’s seen a “massive” surge in demand for training courses and exam sessions and has had to up the number of course offerings.