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**REPORT TO HACKNEY COUNCIL ON THE DEATH OF TWO DEER IN CLISSOLD
PARK ON FEBRUARY 13TH AND 20TH 2011**

Report dated 23.02.11

1] Background and introduction

This report should be read in conjunction with my Health and Welfare Report upon the deer in Clissold Park dated August 30th 2010. The small deer enclosure at Clissold Park has been subject to redesign and reconstruction works for many months and the deer have been enclosed by temporary building-site weldmesh panel fencing for some time. Although construction of the secure permanent fence has been started, a considerable extent of the perimeter is still bounded by temporary panels.

My report of August 30th records the fact that I was at that time given a firm undertaking that the deer enclosure would be completed by Christmas 2010.

The staff of the park and officials of Hackney Council adopted and implemented all the recommendations of the report of August 30th and a series of follow-up visits in the autumn of 2010 indicated that the welfare of the deer had improved considerably. The fencing was made secure and was screened to reduce the exposure of the deer to disturbance, a refuge was installed within the enclosure, the feeding regime was altered, mineral licks provided and full time access to professional deer management advice was put in place, including 24 hour veterinary cover. The two subordinate bucks were removed to the deer park at The Royal Gunpowder Mills at Waltham Abbey. Evidence of the success of these improved management and welfare measures was provided by the fact that two late fawns, delivered in September and October, both survived and thrived, when such out-of-season neonates often succumb in other parks. Construction work around the deer enclosure was suspended for ten days after the birth of each fawn to reduce disturbance and encourage bonding between dam and offspring.

The staff at the park were given strict instructions in respect of the daily management tasks necessary to safeguard the welfare of the deer. These included feeding regimes, daily assessments of the deer and daily security checks of the integrity of the perimeter fence. A regular routine health and welfare visit by a professional deer manager was implemented in addition to full time access to advice.

2] The death of the deer in on February 13th and 20th 2011

On Sunday February 13th a dog was seen to gain access to the deer enclosure and the deer were chased around. Factual details of this incident provided to me are inconsistent, but it appears that after the dog was removed one doe was seen to be

recumbent but alive as darkness fell. By first light on Monday 21st February she was dead and the carcass had been partially scavenged by foxes. The doe was submitted to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency [VLA] laboratory at the Royal Veterinary College [RVC], South Mimms for post mortem examination. Inspection of the deer did not reveal any evidence of injury to other animals and both pairs of fawns and their respective dams appeared uninjured.

On Sunday February 20th a doe was seen collapsed within the enclosure. The contracted professional deer manager was called as an emergency and veterinary advice was sought. By the time the deer manager arrived the doe was dead. The carcass was taken to the VLA at the RVC.

3] The post mortem evidence of the cause of death of the two fallow deer

Doe 1. February 13th 2011

This animal was in good bodily condition and weighed 47kg. Post mortem examination revealed that the cause of death was traumatic injury to the head and throat caused by a carnivore, presumed to have been a dog. By measurement of the bite wounds and teeth marks it was established that the dog responsible for killing the deer had jaw and tooth dimensions approximately twice the size of those of a large fox. The pathologist was able to distinguish post mortem scavenging by foxes [mainly around the rear of the carcass and one shoulder] from the fatal injuries inflicted before death, which were around the head and neck. Samples were sent for routine bacterial culture from some small and incidental foci of low grade infection of the lungs and liver, but these were not related to the cause of death of the deer.

The examination post mortem therefore confirmed unequivocally that this deer had been killed by a carnivore, presumably a dog, which was approximately twice the size of a fox.

Doe 2 February 20th 2011

This animal was in good bodily condition and weighed 42kg. Post mortem examination revealed no signs of traumatic injury that would have accounted for the collapse or death of the deer. There were some minor lacerations and bruises associated with the terminal struggling of a dying animal. There were focal haemorrhages typical of severe septicaemia and/or toxæmia throughout the internal organs. The small intestine was intensely inflamed and diseased, with severe haemorrhage and red-black haemorrhagic intestinal contents. The spleen was grossly enlarged and congested.

The post mortem examination therefore revealed that this deer had died from a severe, per-acute haemorrhagic enteritis. Further tests are underway to attempt to establish the causative agent.

4] The interpretation of the post mortem results in the context of the Clissold Park deer enclosure.

The death of these two deer is extremely distressing and disappointing from a veterinary point of view in the light of the considerable efforts made to safeguard the welfare of the Clissold Park fallow deer herd in recent months.

The first deer was killed by a dog. There is therefore no doubt that the temporary perimeter fence had been allowed to become insecure and that it was possible for a

dog to gain access on February 13th 2011. It is impossible to come to any conclusion other than that there was a failure on the part of the staff or contractors to ensure that the fence was fully dog proof, despite daily fence-checking having been made a mandatory part of the husbandry of the deer. The visits made by the contracted deer manager after the dog attack on February 13th indicated that the fence was still insecure in places, with gaps beneath and between the panels sufficiently large to allow a dog to squirm through.

It is also very disappointing indeed that the arrangements for emergency call-out and for 24 hour veterinary attention were not implemented on the evening of February 13th when the deer was seen to be recumbent but still alive and when the dog attack was known to have occurred.

The death of the second deer can also almost certainly be traced to the incident on the 13th February. There are several bacterial and viral pathogens that can flare up into overwhelming and fatal haemorrhagic enteritis in fallow deer and the trigger for such disease is often stress. During the week between the 13th and the 20th the deer were unsettled and nervous and had reverted to the state of agitation that was apparent in August 2010 before all the palliative measures were put in place during the autumn. It is therefore entirely possible that the second doe succumbed to a condition precipitated by the extreme stress of the dog attack on February 13th. Further tests may determine the precise pathogen involved, but such disease is rare in adult fallow deer unless they are subject to stress of some kind.

5] The lessons to be learned from this episode

In my report of August 30th I indicated that I believed that it was possible to maintain an exhibition herd of fallow deer in an inner London park without compromise of their welfare, but that "every effort must be made to allow the animals to behave normally and to be free of stress, distress, disease and injury". I continue to believe that the proposed design of the new deer enclosure at Clissold Park will provide a first class environment for the deer and will safeguard their welfare.

I am, however, very concerned that the reconstruction work has fallen so far behind schedule and that the deer continue to rely for security upon a temporary fence, which either the staff or the contractors have been unable to maintain in a dog-proof condition.

It is impossible for me to defend or to justify the lapse in basic husbandry that allowed a dog access to the deer enclosure. It is therefore clear to me that the temporary fence must be replaced as soon as possible with a permanent, secure and vandal-proof barrier. Further delays will inevitably expose the deer to further risk.

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