

HEALTH AND WELFARE REPORT

FALLOW DEER AT CLISSOLD PARK, HACKNEY

9th June 2011

This report should be read in conjunction with the reports of August 30th and 22nd October 2010.

1] Recent history

In November 2010 arrangements were put in place for regular visits to the deer in Clissold Park by an experienced deer manager, Rodney Day. These visits were to be monthly unless events or circumstances demanded more frequent attention. A veterinary inspection visit was made on November 30th 2010, at which time it was clear that the completion of the new deer enclosure would be delayed. Notwithstanding this delay, the deer were found to be in good condition and were both settled and stress free. The temporary refuge of woven willow hurdles was being used regularly, the screening on the heras-type fencing was providing a good visual barrier and the two late-born fawns were thriving. The feeding regime was altered to include deer-specific concentrates, quality haylage and fresh vegetables. Mineral blocks were installed and were soon used by the deer.

In February 2011 two deer were lost as a result of an incursion into the deer enclosure by a dog or dogs: one doe was killed by the dog[s] and the other died subsequently. In the light of this distressing incident, the frequency of deer manager visits was increased to twice weekly in order to monitor the security of the fence and to supervise the contractors working on the new permanent enclosure. No further problems have been encountered with the deer. Rodney Day has visited the park twice weekly between February and May 2011. There has been considerable correspondence with members of the public concerned for the welfare of the deer, in particular with a local resident who has repeatedly pressed Hackney Council to remove the deer and has sought to obtain a great deal of detailed information about the animal management and their welfare. I have assisted the officers of the Council in responding to these enquiries to the best of my ability and have responded to the individual resident directly, giving assurances that the welfare of the deer was being safeguarded. I have been informed that a group called Clissold Park Zoo Watch have found an alternative sanctuary for the deer, but the nature or location of this site has not been revealed.

The deer manager, Rodney Day attended a demonstration at the Park on Saturday March 19th 2011 when Clissold Park Zoo Watch picketed the deer enclosure and demanded that the deer be removed on welfare grounds. In fact, on the day, the deer were contentedly lying in the sun ruminating, with no evidence of any stress or suffering whatsoever.

Two veterinary inspection visits have been undertaken in May and June 2011 as the new deer enclosure neared completion. A few final details of construction and groundwork were identified at the first visit and the park staff were briefed about the optimum way in which to release the deer into the larger new enclosure. The new metal fence is to be screened with polypropylene mesh, which will gradually be removed as the deer become accustomed to the new area. The base of the fence will be reinforced with gravel boarding to increase security and to provide a ground level visual barrier in the areas where there is public access up to the fence. The new permanent deer refuge has been constructed and approved, although the temporary refuge will be retained for a month to allow the deer to become habituated to the new structures. Tree work has reduced the potential access for vandals and improved the safety of the enclosure for the deer.

2] The current health and welfare of the deer

There are at present seven fallow deer within the enclosure at Clissold Park. This group consists of one mature buck, four mature does and two yearling doe fawns.



Photograph taken on June 7th 2011 showing the fallow deer in Clissold Park

At the time of the visit on June 7th 2011 the buck had shed his antlers and was in the process of growing the new set, which will be cleaned of velvet in August. All the deer were in very good condition, with rounded pelvic contours and evidence of subcutaneous fat deposits, as would be expected in June. The summer coats were almost fully developed. The two doe fawns were well grown and are thriving. There was no evidence of disease or injury. The deer were not stressed by the presence of a small group of observers within the enclosure, indeed the park rangers who regularly feed the deer report that they approach to within a few feet when carrots are offered.

A fresh faecal sample retrieved from ground revealed no evidence of significant internal parasitism.

As the two fertile bucks were not removed from the enclosure until late September 2010, it is possible that there may be one or more pregnancies within the doe group, although both does examined post mortem in February were not pregnant.

In summary, the small herd of fallow deer at Clissold Park is currently in very good health. There are no signs of any compromise of their welfare.

3] Future management

In the short term, the transfer of the deer into the larger new enclosure will be supervised by the deer manager and the mesh screening on the fences will be gradually removed. Thereafter the daily management duties of the park staff must include

- Daily counting and close observation of the deer for any signs of abnormal behaviour, injury or disease.
- Careful daily scrutiny of the perimeter fence to ensure security from dog incursions. This will also include checking for excavation beneath the fence by foxes and regular stopping up of any such passages.
- Removal of litter and rubbish from within the enclosure [fallow deer are notorious for eating plastic objects].
- Daily inspection of the water trough and cleaning to prevent accumulation of bird faeces, leaf litter etc.

The daily feeding regime for the deer should consist of

- Ad libitum provision of good quality haylage in the racks situated within the enclosure.
- Constant availability of appropriate mineral licks, properly placed on the posts designated for the purpose
- Deer-specific concentrate nuts fed at the rate of 0.33kg per deer per day between May 1st and September 30th and at the rate of 0.5kg per deer per day between October 1st and April 30th.
- Succulent root vegetables such as carrots, fodder beet or potatoes offered at the rate of 0.33kg per deer per day and preferably chopped.
- The deer nuts and vegetables should be distributed widely or placed in several shallow troughs so that dominant deer do not monopolise the feed.
- These feed levels should be adjusted according to the weather, the apparent condition of the deer and any evidence of feed being left uneaten.

Each visit into the deer enclosure should be undertaken quietly and all activities should be low-key and calm. Footwear should be dipped in disinfectant when

entering and leaving the pen, feed troughs and buckets should be regularly disinfected and hand-washing hygiene rigorously observed.

There will be monthly visits from the appointed deer manager and regular veterinary welfare inspections.

4] Wider park management to safeguard the welfare of the deer

The deer enclosure at Clissold Park is clearly only one of the amenities within this open space, maintained for the benefit of the community. Other activities will inevitably occur and be organized. The deer are already habituated to large numbers of visitors passing on the outside of the enclosure but there are specific hazards that have the potential to cause stress to the deer within an urban park and if possible these should be minimized:

The number of loose dogs should be restricted if possible, especially in the vicinity of the deer. It may be advisable to make the pathway immediately adjacent to the fence a "dogs only on leads" zone and clearly no dogs must be allowed on the pathway through the new animal houses.

Any large public events, particularly those involving loud music, public address systems, exuberant childrens' activities or energetic games should be organized as distant from the deer as possible. In this context, the old bowling green in front of the new education centre may be rather too close to the deer for any loud or disturbing events.

There should be no firework displays anywhere near the deer.

Nighttime or evening events at the house, after dark should be carefully monitored to make certain that visitors and any audience or groups leave quietly by a designated route that takes them away from the deer enclosure. The park gates should continue to be locked between dawn and dusk except for such supervised events.

5] Conclusion

Hackney Council has given considerable attention to the deer enclosure at Clissold Park and has significantly modified the design and management of the new enclosure to improve the welfare of the deer. All the veterinary and animal husbandry recommendations have been adopted and are being implemented. The deer are currently in very good health and there is no evidence that they are being stressed or harmed in any way. The Council has given firm undertakings that the welfare of the deer and other animals at the park will remain a high priority and that specialized supervision and veterinary monitoring will continue to be provided.

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