



08th May 2020

Dr Denis Montebello
Commissioner for Animal Welfare

Report on inspection of animals kept at the Kitchen Garden, Attard.

An inspection was carried out today the 08th May 2020 at the Kitchen Garden within San Anton Gardens, by Reuben Montebello and Ian Vella, both from the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare. This inspection was instructed by the Commissioner as a follow up and complementary to the previous inspection held on the 02nd May 2020 at the lower San Anton Gardens. The primary aim was to investigate if the animals kept within the Kitchen Gardens are also kept well, if there are any signs of neglect and bad management, to check if the animals are in good health, and to assess the welfare conditions that the animals are kept in. It is important that the distinction between the Kitchen Gardens and the Lower San Anton Gardens is clearly emphasized in view of the fact that some criticism has been levelled at H.E. The President because of the alleged shortcomings at the Lower San Anton Gardens.

The animals and premises inspected today are all within the Kitchen Gardens which is situated on the other side of San Anton gardens and these gardens fall under the responsibility of the Office of the President of Malta. The other gardens, inspected last week, are administered separately by the Ministry of Tourism and its maintenance and care entrusted to a private enterprise - Environmental Landscapes Consortium Ltd.

Findings on inspection

The inspections started at 11:00am and we were introduced with Mr Olaf Terribile, Chief of Staff within the Office of the President, and with Mr Sandro Micallef, officer responsible for the care of the animals. We informed Mr Terribile and Mr Micallef with the aim of our visit and that we need to see all the animals and their enclosures within the gardens.

We were briefed that there are various animals kept within the Kitchen Gardens, and these include Shetland ponies, donkeys, 4 deer and 3 llamas, a considerable number of pigmy goats, two cranes, some chickens, and a big pond with ducks and koi-fish,

From our initial observations, all animals on site had good body condition score, clearly indicating that they are being properly looked after and being given a balanced diet that is appropriate for the species. All animals were very alert, friendly and no signs of neglect were noted.



Animal Enclosures

The animal enclosures we inspected are all kept in very good conditions, these are kept very clean, and all of them had fresh bedding within. All equines on site are kept in individual stables, each one with its own paddock area. This individual separation of the equines is advisable since males tend to fight when kept together, especially since there is one mare within the group and incidentally was on heat.

Within the area of the stables there is one large paddock with a big carob tree right in the middle, that provides enough shade for any animal kept within. Within this paddock there is also a good-sized shelter with insulated roof panels.



We have been informed by Mr Micallef, the manager of the animals within this garden, that all equines on site are moved for a couple of hours each everyday in the big central paddock where they can further exercise themselves within. We have suggested that when considering the small size of the equines kept, compared with the size of the paddock, the same area can very easily accommodate two big paddocks and so each animal will have his allocated time in the bigger paddock doubled. This suggestion has already been considered by the management, and in fact, we were shown the wooden poles and the other material needed to divide this area.



All stables where the equines are kept had fresh good quality bedding within the covered areas, and all horses had generous portions of fresh hay, which is very good for their health. The stables are all covered with insulated roof panels, which is the best and appropriate material for our climate.



All equines had access to fresh water, and it was also noted that the hay is properly stored in a dry place. When we asked for the type of feed the equines are given, we were shown a bag of balanced mixed feed which is ideal for light work horses. We also noted that there is a good supply in store of high-quality bales for bedding.



Within a nearby area there are the enclosures where the deer, goats and llamas are kept. These enclosures are also spacious enough to house all the animals within, all of them have the appropriate shelters, and all enclosures are equipped with automatic drinkers which guarantee constant supply of fresh water to the animals within.





Ducks and fish pond

At the furthest part of the kitchen garden there is a big pond with a number of ducks living there, and a big number of koi-fish as well. The pond has 3 main water features where water is being continuously flowing and circulating. The ducks have access to a shaded area under the trees, just adjacent and with direct access to the pond. The living environment for the ducks within the area of the pond is ideal for these species, and all the birds were observed to be in very good body condition which indicates that they are comfortable in their environment and are being taken care of appropriately.

The large number of koi fish present in the pond also indicate that there is proper and sufficient reproduction of this species, and this normally happens because they find their living environment to be perfect for reproduction.

The areas around the pond was noted to be kept in very good conditions, very clean and well maintained.





Feed store

We also demanded to see the feed store where the feed for all the animals is kept. There we found different types of feed which is appropriate for all the species present on site, and there is also a good supply of high quality hay.

Pest Control

It has also been noted that pests bait boxes are fixed in scattered areas within the garden, but more concentrated within the areas where the animals are kept. We have been informed that there is a specific contract with a licensed pest control company which takes care of replenishing the bait boxes and so the pest population is kept under control.



Recommendations

The only recommendation which was verbally communicated on site to the management was that to divide the big paddock which is currently used on rotation to accommodate all equines on site for a few hours everyday. This recommendation has been made because the paddock area is too big for the small sized equines kept there, and could be managed better by providing two separate paddocks which can accommodate two equines at the same time.

This recommendation was however already within the plans of the management, because the material to divide the paddock is already bought and we were informed that the works will be done very soon.

Conclusion

After conducting a thorough investigation of all the animals and their enclosures within the Kitchen Gardens, and the management of these same animals, which fall under the responsibility of the Office of the President, it can be positively concluded that these animals are being cared for with good management and great responsibility. At the time of inspection, all animals on site were found to be in very good condition, with no signs of neglect and being kept in good welfare conditions. The general environment and surrounding areas where the animals are housed were found to be very clean and in excellent conditions.

One very positive observation that was made was that Mr Micallef, who is responsible for the management of the animals, has a very long experience with animal management, he is currently on loan from the Agriculture Department, and used to work with animals in the Government Farm. The fact that the management of these animals are trusted in the hands of an experienced animal husbandry officer is a relief because with his knowledge and experience he can foresee and prevent general health and welfare issues.

It has also been positively noted that the management was very keen to listen to all our comments and asked related questions.

Reuben Montebello
Principal Veterinary Support Officer

Ian Vella
Inspector

