

Re: SERIOUS NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC INTERACTION WITH LIVESTOCK

Jacqui Vanderhoek, Practising Commoner

An incident at Cadnam Cricket Ground was filmed by a visitor (14th November 2020) and demonstrates the consequences and impact of Forest ponies repeatedly being interacted with and fed at Forest car parks.

This incident was captured by a visitor who posted the video onto a social media entertainment channel which was viewed almost two million times in ten days. The creator is heard during the footage quoting "Awesome" as my Crabbswood mare becomes trapped by the opened car door and jumps it to escape aggression within the pony group. She then becomes straddled at her stifle and lands across the bonnet, breaking the window seal, the door mirror and denting the bonnet. My mare returns to the vehicle, which appears to be owned by the person capturing the images. Quotes from the publisher state there was a bag of food in the off side foot well.

The incident was raised by my Agister who asked me to check the mare over. I found her with no obvious injury in a different part of the Forest in her pony group. All the ponies were being fed bags of apples at the road side, by teenagers, at dusk. I have noticed my mare, who has always had a calm temperament change in her behaviour over last Summer. She now bites my hands when I check her on the Forest. The pony groups have learnt, especially since the Summer post lockdown explosion of Forest visitors to gather around the cars for constant petting and feeding. Changes to our mare's behaviour as a consequence of public interaction is depressing and has negative consequences for our commoning practises.

Like many car parks within the Forest, breaches in byelaws with commoners' animals have become a daily nuisance regarding the welfare of our animals. The ponies are regularly fed unsuitable foods, cuddled, children placed on their backs or left to roam underneath them. This year I turned up at Cadnam Cricket Ground to witness a Shetland with front feet inside the camper van for photographic purposes, encouraged with food.

When discussing such issues with the public their response is always "...there are no signs?" Our animals have the right to be free from exploitation and abuse and therefore I urge for action. I would like to see enforcement of byelaws and particularly would like to see improved signage, however inaesthetic. As welfare concerns for our livestock I feel our land owners have a duty of care to ensure there is no physical engagement with our animals and avoidable conflict with the public. I would like to see signage that displays a clear, firm and effective message in all Forest car parks.

The next wave of the lockdown release of visitors and tourists flooding back into the Forest this Spring interacting with our animals in the same manner as last year is alarming. Further action must be taken to end a culture of disrespect.