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07 June 2021

Dear Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands,

We are writing to you to express our concerns in relation to the recent revelations of several animal deaths at Blair Drummond Safari Park. These include two lionesses in 2016 who had to be euthanised as a result of injuries inflicted by a male lion due to alleged improper introductions, a hand-reared nilgai antelope who staff reportedly stated, “*shouldn't have been [housed] with other males*” and was left with internal organs protruding from an injury inflicted during an altercation with another male, a lemur killed after escaping into the tiger enclosure in 2018, and a Barbary macaque who was mauled by lions in front of visitors in 2020 after escaping its enclosure.

The events at Blair Drummond seem to be indicative of endemic problems at the Park dating back several years, that have only now come to light thanks to whistle-blowers within the organisation. In their most recent inspection in 2018 by the local licensing authority, Blair Drummond scored ‘Yes’ for ‘*Are there satisfactory measures in place to prevent the escape of animals?*’ and ‘*Are animals of social species normally maintained in compatible social groups?*’ We believe this reflects serious flaws in the current inspection process and raises the question of whether these issues would ever have come to light if it wasn't for staff making their concerns known, and whether similar incidents might be going unreported at other licenced zoos in Scotland.

The British & Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) has launched an inquiry into the incidents. Born Free however believes that the organisation is seriously conflicted, and the local licensing authority likewise, and is calling for such an inquiry to be carried out by an independent body. We believe that the Scottish Government should initiate an immediate independent, transparent and public inquiry into the events at Blair Drummond, with a mandate to provide recommendations to the Scottish Government on changes to the licencing and inspection of zoos in order to prevent future incidents.

The conservation and education value of zoos may be a matter of debate, but one thing the public expects of zoos is that the animals they house are safe. Improving zoo standards was included in DEFRA's recent Action Plan for Animal Welfare, and we also understand that a review of the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice is planned for later this year. These events at Blair Drummond raise fundamental concerns about the wider zoo industry. Born Free calls on the Scottish government to take the lead on this issue and undertake a wider review of zoo standards in Scotland as a matter of urgency.

Co-Founder Virginia McKenna OBE | **Executive President** Will Travers OBE | **Managing Director** Karen Botha
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We thank you for your attention to this important matter and urge you to implement an investigation without delay.

We look forward to your response and stand ready to discuss this issue further with you.

Yours Sincerely,

C. Lewis

Chris Lewis

Captivity Research Officer

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