

Dogs kill rare animal at city zoo

Stray dogs have killed a vicuna, the smallest member of the camel family, at Belfast zoo.

Four dogs gained access to the vicuna paddock at the north Belfast zoo on Wednesday and attacked two of the animals before staff could intervene.

One of the animals, Emma, died as a result of the attack and a six-month old calf sustained severe injuries to his abdomen.

Three of the dogs were captured by zoo staff, but the fourth escaped.

The calf that was injured, Boris II, required extensive surgery to his abdomen and is being monitored by staff at the zoo.

Belfast Zoo Curator Alyn Cairns said that the paddock after the attack was a "distressing sight".

"It was horrific," he said.

"I've been at the zoo for 15 years now and it was one of the most unpleasant sights I've ever seen.

"Really it's been quite distressing for all the staff, especially the keepers that look after the vicuna."

The animal that died was 12 years old and came to the zoo in 1995. She had bred five calves before she was killed by the pack of dogs.

In a statement the zoo said staff would care for Emma's six month old calf, Maxine.

Paddock

The dogs dug under two fences to get into to the paddock and Belfast City Council Dog Wardens and the PSNI were called in to help with the situation.

Police have warned the public not to approach the fourth dog that escaped zoo staff.

The dog is described as an large Alsatian cross-breed with a very pale coat. It has no identifiable collar.

Anyone who knows of the dog's whereabouts is asked to contact police on 0845 600 8000.

Vicunas, which are originally from the Andes in South America, were almost hunted to extinction in the late 1970s for their very valuable fleece.

However, with conservation efforts and careful management the animals are now reasonably safe, but are still classed as an endangered species.

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