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www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2015, 24: 391-397
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.24.4.391

Flight distance and reaction to fawn handling are greater in high- than in low-ranked pampas deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*) females

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Abstract

The flight distance from humans and the reaction of the mother to human handling of their offspring are measures that can be used to assess the quality of the human-animal relationship which could vary according to animals' position in a group. The objective was to determine if the flight distance and the mother's reaction to human handling of her fawn during the first 24 h after birth differ according to pampas deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*) hinds' social rank. A complementary aim was to compare the mothers' reaction to their fawns being handled relative to its sex. Studies were carried out on a semi-captive population. Animals were classed as high- or low-ranking individuals according to agonistic interactions between hinds recorded during autumn (breeding season) while animals received rations. In the first part of the study, the flight distance was determined in high- and low-ranked hinds. In the second, the minimum distance that the mother stayed from her fawn was recorded while the fawn was weighed and sexed during the first 24 h after birth, and the latency period for the dam to return with her fawn was also recorded. High-ranked hinds presented greater flight distance than low-ranked hinds. High-ranked hinds kept a greater distance from their fawns compared to low-ranked hinds and more high- than low-ranked hinds remained at a farther distance. In summary, high-ranked hinds seem to perceive humans as a greater threat, and thus be more fearful of them. The sex of the fawn did not affect the hinds' reaction to human handling.

Keywords: animal-human relationship, animal welfare, cervid, dominance, hierarchy, maternal behaviour