

MP urges caution with fireworks this New Year

Jardine urges residents to take care with any Hogmanay fireworks.

Christine Jardine MP has asked residents should help “minimise the distress caused” to communities and animals when letting off fireworks this Hogmanay.

Baby red panda, Roxie, was three months old when she choked to death on vomit on Bonfire Night during local incidents of anti-social behaviour, and continuous noise surrounding the zoo.

Ms Jardine, who represents the West Edinburgh constituency, raised the issue in a recent debate on a petition signed by more than 50,000 people to control the use of fireworks, describing the impact fireworks also have on pets and their potential for injury and harm.

She hopes the Government will support a Private Members’ Bill coming to parliament in January, which includes new noise limits for private fireworks.

Christine Jardine MP said: “The whole county has been touched by the death of baby red panda Roxie in the Zoo and it reinforces how dangerous the stress of events like Hogmanay can be for all animals, many of them household pets.

“Coupled with the rise in anti-social behaviour we have seen in recent months, it is clear our communities need Government at all levels to work together and tackle the issues fireworks can cause.

"I share Edinburgh Zoo's concern and would echo their call to do everything we can to minimise the distress caused to their animals, and all pets by fireworks in the forthcoming Hogmanay celebrations.

"More broadly we need the UK Government to look at legislating for quieter, indeed silent fireworks, and for both The Scottish Government and our Councils to take a different attitude both to sales and noisy displays."

Ben Supple, the wildlife conservation charity's deputy chief executive, said earlier: "Edinburgh Council cannot create a fireworks exclusion zone around the zoo in time for Hogmanay due to the minimum consultation period required, so we are asking residents to help by not setting off fireworks which may frighten animals.

"As always, we will do all we can to protect animals in the zoo from fireworks, including keeping them indoors and providing deep bedding where possible to reduce the impact of the noise."

The charity's call for tighter restrictions on fireworks has received enormous support since Roxie's death in November.

Ben added, "We have been inundated by messages from people who were shocked by what happened to Roxie and believe the UK government should ban fireworks from being sold to the public due to the severe impact they can have on animals.

"Firework control zones are a positive step but only part of the solution as the noise from explosions can carry over long distances. So-called silent fireworks are also an improvement, though they can emit low frequency sounds which can cause distress to animals.

"We believe displays should be restricted to organised events which use the latest light and drone technology and are completely silent. This would help avoid devastating

consequences for animals while ensuring that people can still enjoy traditional celebrations like Hogmanay.”

In Parliament Ms Jardine [contributed to the debate](#), saying then: “It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) for securing this debate, which has a specific resonance in my constituency. When Edinburgh Zoo told me what happened to the baby red panda whose birth we had all welcomed and celebrated just a few days before, my stomach dropped. It was heartbreaking. What terror she must have felt alone in the dark, bombarded by loud noises she could not have understood and with no comfort. We later learned that her mother had also died probably as a result of stress caused by fireworks.

“I thought about other animals, not just in Edinburgh Zoo but across the country. My dog had paced the floor barking, running in from the garden terrified when the first of what seemed like hundreds of fireworks began going off. Worse, I thought about the accident and emergency departments that would deal with burns. I thought about instances like the heartbreaking story of Josephine. I pay tribute to her family and thank them for allowing her story to be shared here today.

“I, too, am reluctant to ban fireworks, partly because I loved bonfire night as a child. When we were parents of young children, our group of friends loved the annual firework display, with hot drinks and snacks organised by the school. Hogmanay for me is defined by the awe-inspiring firework displays from Sydney to New York to mark their respective midnights, and Edinburgh is of course always a highlight.

“I have always believed that the availability of fireworks for those spectacular organised public displays was part of a valuable expression of celebration, but now I am not so sure. That is why I welcome the private Member’s Bill of the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen). We need to somehow limit noise levels, especially of fireworks sold to the public, so

perhaps the time has come to question our attitude to fireworks, if not through legislation. We need to think about how we prevent celebrations descending into antisocial nuisance. Many people agree that something should be done—they signed the petitions, after all—so it is time we listened.

“We know from official figures that around 2,000 people visit accident and emergency departments with firework-related injuries every year, many of them severe burns that require long-term treatment. Sadly Roxie, the red panda cub, is not the only animal casualty. The Kennel Club says that around 80% of dog owners notice their pets shivering, barking excessively, hiding, howling and crying as a result of stress caused by fireworks. The British Veterinary Association says that some animals suffer such terror that they have to be put down.

“It may seem unusual that the death of one baby red panda in a zoo should cause such outrage, but perhaps it is the irony of an endangered species being legally protected across Asia, carefully looked after and bred by one of the world’s respected zoological societies and yet utterly defenceless against noisy fireworks, or perhaps it is the innocence of a tiny orphaned creature that tugs at our heartstrings. Whatever the reason, it is time that the UK Government paid attention to the people who have signed this petition to say that we must find a way of preventing the damage that is done every year.”



Female red panda born at Edinburgh Zoo
Photo RZSS