

Bison Deaths Reveal Discord

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European bison have been living at the reserve since the Soviet era. **WARNING: NEXT PHOTO IS GRAPHIC.** **Vladimir Filonov**

Conservationists have demanded an investigation into the death of two European bison at a Moscow region nature reserve.

One male and one female at the Prioksko-Terrasny reserve's bison nursery died from food poisoning on Jan. 7 after eating rotten fruit, according to an announcement on the reserve's website.

Two KaMaZ trucks dumped several crates of rotten mandarins and tomatoes in the Bison enclosure sometime before New Year's, according to a statement on the reserve's website.

"Responsibility for the death of the animals from eating rotten mandarins appears to lie with the administration of the park," the statement said, which went on to demand an investigation into who allowed the poisoned food into the enclosure.

The victims were a 16-year old male called Shponti, who had been brought from a German

reserve in an effort to increase the gene pool at the Russian reserve's breeding program, and one adult female.

Greenpeace Russia said on Tuesday that it had appealed to the Prosecutor General and the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry for an investigation into the deaths, which it said were the second and third at the reserve in recent months.

The Priosko-Terrasny reserve has been at the center of efforts to save the European Bison since Soviet times, but has been scandalized in recent years by apparently open warfare between employees and the park's management.

The report on the website, which appears to be written by disgruntled employees, lays the blame for the deaths squarely on the park's director, Andrei Ivonin, a former paratrooper and veteran of the war in Afghanistan.

"The Environment Ministry continues its experiment called 'Can a former paratrooper who is under investigation for major theft manage a nature reserve?', " the statement said.

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