

## **Animal wellbeing – or not!**

Shortly after the end of the first lockdown in 2020 a property I can see from my house was sold. Once the people moved in two mastiff puppies arrived, and not long afterwards two sheep, one white and one black.

The puppies were allowed out to play, and play they did in a very respectful way. They never interfered with the sheep. On the contrary, they would spend a long time just lying beside them or wandering around with them. The first thing that attracted my attention was that the people never came out with them. They were left totally to their own devices with no interaction whatsoever. Thank Goodness they had each other and the sheep!

The same is true for the sheep. Nobody ever interacted with them, even when they approached the people. The shocking thing is that they mowed the grass where the sheep were supposed to be grazing! What were they supposed to eat? The sheep were trying to climb up a tree to reach the leaves. Then a little lamb was seen gambolling around, but suddenly he disappeared. What had happened to him?

Yesterday I saw a visiting car parked beside the house and a medium-sized dog pursuing the sheep round and around the house. The big dogs did not engage in the pursuit but the sheep were frantic.

I went to the vet's close by because I knew that she had their phone number. She called them to tell them what was going on. "Oh, that's normal," was the reply! Normal??? Normal by what standards?

After that I discovered that the lamb had died. In fact, there had been two lambs. One died shortly after birth, but the second one was already growing well. It turns out that the poor soul probably died of hunger. When the large animal vets went to see the lamb before its demise, they saw that the sheep were closed up with the dogs. They pointed out that sheep need to graze almost constantly.

"Oh, they have food."

"What do you feed them?"

"They get straw."

"Straw! Straw isn't food. It is fine for bedding but it has no nutritional value. You must buy hay for them if there isn't enough fresh grass."

I am fully aware that none of us is born knowing all that there is to know about animal welfare – or any other subject for that matter. We have all been there and we had to learn but, when we don't know and the welfare of another living being is in our hands, it is our duty to find out what the basic needs of those animals are. Worse is when we ignore the advice given to us by people who do know about those needs. Sad!