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Goodbye and good luck

By Chloe Hannigan, JAVS editor

With final exams on the horizon, no matter how much I try not to think about them, the time to start facing facts that I will not be a vet student for much longer is nigh (fingers crossed that I pass). Indeed, 2012 is a year for change as far as your AVS committee is concerned too, with the AGM at London's Congress, back in February seeing the election of six new members, and 'us oldies' would like to welcome them and wish them the best of luck (for more on the Congress see the article on page 11). That being said, I would like to introduce your new JAVS Editor, Max Foreman (third year, Cambridge), who will continue to ensure you are represented in the veterinary media. Details of the AGM, along with all of your new AVS committee members, can be found on the AVS website (www.avs-uk.org.uk).



It has been my pleasure to serve on the committee. To be the 'keeper' of your thoughts and experiences is a special role, and one in which I hope I have done you justice. It's been a busy couple of years, and I have been so pleased with how you have engaged with our new 'debate' and 'welfare' sections, and how well JAVS Lite has been received by the recent freshers. Thank you to everyone who has written for JAVS, and please continue to keep writing; your voice does matter. I would also like to thank the BVA, as JAVS would not be able to exist without its support.

My final duty as Editor is to congratulate Sabrina Estabrook-Russett (first year, Edinburgh), who wins £20 for the best article by a fresher, which can be found on page 25; there are more chances to win money by writing for the next issue of JAVS. Good luck to everyone with exams in the summer, and, though it has its moments, I hope you all are enjoying vet school as much as I have; it's been one hell of a ride!

Happy reading,

Chloe

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PS. Musto continues to offer vet students 15% off its Signature range. To take advantage of this generous offer, enter the code: 'UniCode11' at the checkout on Musto's website www.musto.com

CONTENTS

- 2 News and reviews
- 11 AVS
- 13 Sports
- 14 Debate
- 18 Social
- 21 Welfare
- 26 EMS

Come to the BVA AWF animal welfare forum . . .



By Florence Bowman (administrator, BVA Animal Welfare Foundation)

The BVA AWF (Animal Welfare Foundation) hosts an animal welfare forum annually before the Lancaster Final-Year Seminar and students currently in their fourth year are invited to attend this year's event, which will be held from July 6 to 7.

The forum provides an informal opportunity for students to address practical welfare situations that they may encounter in veterinary practice. The event is workshop-based, with delegates working in small groups to consider a variety of animal welfare case studies involving farm and companion animals. The case studies are written by vets and are based on real situations that they have experienced in practice. In addition to applying clinical knowledge, delegates are encouraged to consider current legislation, client communication skills and professional guidelines in reviewing how they would approach the dilemmas raised by each case.

Delegates also have the opportunity to demonstrate their acting

skills as role-play is used to explore solutions for handling real-life situations. To the 'role-play-phobes' out there the experience is not as daunting as it sounds, and you don't have to be the next Orlando Bloom or a budding Kate Winslet. The experienced tutors ensure that the environment is supportive and allay any nerves delegates may have about actively participating in the case studies.

The tutors are a diverse bunch from all walks of the veterinary profession, including vets working in small and large animal practices, in Government, in the research sector and AWF trustees. They bring a wealth of experience and a huge amount of enthusiasm to help in the development of the next generation of vets. Delegates are encouraged to ask as many questions as possible throughout the forum.

The promotion and development of welfare education is one of the BVA AWF's key objectives and the welfare forum aims to actively support the ongoing work of veterinary schools to strengthen the animal welfare and ethics elements of their teaching.

Feedback from previous years has been extremely positive, with delegates highlighting the practical value of the forum and its refreshing and original approach to welfare education. If you are interested in attending the Forum, you will be pleased to hear that the BVA AWF is able to fund free places for approximately 50 students.



Students participate in role play

The Foundation will also pay travel expenses to and from Lancaster, plus accommodation and meals during the Forum. So, if you plan to attend the Lancaster Final-Year Seminar, why not come up a day earlier and experience the welfare forum at no extra cost?

BVA AWF aims to get a balance of attendees from all of the vet schools. Places are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis and early booking is advisable. To reserve your place contact Florence Bowman, BVA AWF administration manager at florenceb@bva.co.uk or by telephone to 020 7908 6375.

The event is recommended by previous attendees; this is what they have to say:

'The Animal Welfare Forum was not only a really useful learning experience but also a brilliant way to kick off the Lancaster Final Year Seminar.'

'Over the two days we had the opportunity to discuss various, very relevant, animal welfare topics within a fun and relaxed environment; something the packed veterinary medicine syllabus doesn't always allow a lot of time for!'



'Through ethical debate and role play, I came away with an increased awareness of how to deal with welfare issues I might meet on day one in practice. There was plenty of time for socialising, pub quizzing, networking with vets from all walks of the profession and visiting some of the finest clubs Lancaster has to offer!'

'Everyone that I spoke to last year who attended the forum had an amazing time and I would definitely recommend it to anybody attending the final-year seminar this year'

Naomi Fitzgibbons, Final-year Nottingham



... and stay on for the Lancaster weekend – you'll get more than you bargained for

By Emma Howson (Final-year, London)

Last July, our rotation group made a road trip to Lancaster for the Lancaster weekend for final-year vet students, which is organised by the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS).

As great as our friends from the years above had made the seminar sound, I don't think we were prepared for the epic four days that followed. We'd booked it partly because it had seemed such a bargain to be fed, housed and entertained for four days for under £100, and also because it counts as a week of EMS.

No sooner had we got our room keys, than we were greeted by friendly faces and lunch; after which we all filed into the lecture hall for a lovely introduction from the SPVS president. Having settled into our rooms, we reconvened for dinner, where we were surprised to find we had been allocated seats. Any apprehension was totally unfounded, however, with the table plans giving a mix of students from all the UK vet schools and Dublin, practising vets from all areas of the profession, reps from various animal health companies, and other sponsors, not to mention SPVS stalwart and legend, Des Thompson.

Something for everyone

The weekend got off to a fantastic start, and was only to get better, with various entertaining talks and team challenges, and chatting with vets and reps from the BVA's divisions and societies, animal health companies, charities, the RCVS Trust, and not forgetting SPVS itself.

The topics covered weren't just repeats from the vet school curriculum, but instead a whole host of things we would need to know to help us get our first jobs and how to make the most of them. We were advised on finances, dealing with complaints and how to write a CV. We learned about alternatives to traditional practice careers, and a group of experienced employers discussed what it is they're really looking for in a new vet. A highlight of the weekend was the recent graduates' question and answer session, where they gave an invaluable honest, and often pretty hilarious, account of their first year or two in practice, discussing everything from how they picked their first practice to what went down at their first solo caesarean.

All work and no play is just not the SPVS way

Mixed with the educational elements of the weekend was a lot



At the evening dinner with SPVS stalwart, Des Thompson

of R&R! We had delicious dinners each night, rotating round the tables so that everybody got to meet as many people as possible. The evenings' entertainments included a party in the SU bar, with a live band (which even did requests), a trickier-than-it-sounds close-up objects quiz, the incredible 'Universally Challenged' games night and, for the true party animals among us, a night (or two) out and about in Lancaster. We even met Ricky Martin in a taxi (well, almost). He looked a lot like him, but he wouldn't discuss his plans to release new material or tour again, however much we pestered).

Despite having headed off to Lancaster in our rotation group, we now all have vets and vet students we keep in contact with whom we had not known before the event.

It was a testament to the variety and quality of the lecture and seminar programme that so many slightly weary-looking individuals with sore heads turned out in the mornings to listen to the speakers and join in with the challenges. There were plenty of opportunities for a bit of healthy competition, with group tasks such as the MSD Animal Health Business Challenge, stimulating some out-of-the-box, entrepreneurial and at times, downright worrying ideas



including, 'Replace all tablet-form drugs with sugar pills – cut costs, hope for placebo effect!'. Credit must go (if you'll pardon the pun) to the girl who answered the financial adviser's question on the most important things about a graduate bank account with, 'my face on a credit card'.

Need more convincing?

Basically, I can't recommend the Lancaster seminar enough. It's a fantastic opportunity to meet new people, pick up tips for getting your first job and surviving your first year in practice, while having a ball.

There's no other event on this topic – this one offers great speakers, advice from other vets, the chance to meet potential employ-

ers and dazzle them with your conversational skills over a nice dinner (or a couple of glasses of wine). The organisers who give up their free time to put on this event are such lovely people, and they do all this work altruistically because they are passionate about the importance of us all enjoying our first jobs and getting off to a great start in our professional lives. Our rotation group is still cracking the in-jokes: if you get the chance, don't miss out – there were still some spaces left at time of writing, but book your place ASAP to avoid disappointment.

For more information or to book your place, contact Lancaster@spvs.org.uk, speak to your vet school's student rep or visit the website www.lancaster.spvs.org.uk.



If you have a particular area of interest (such as Lindsay Thomas who on the next page introduces us to good fish husbandry) and want to help the rest of us out by raising our awareness regarding it, write to javseditor@hotmail.com. Peer education can be a great resource, and JAVS would love to use it. Make sure you include decent references, and we will give £20 to the author of the best informative article, which may be printed in the next edition.

– Editor

Why bowls are bad: keeping fish healthy

By Lindsay Thomas (3rd Year, Bristol)

I think we can all agree that when it comes to vet school, fish aren't exactly high on the agenda. But why?

In terms of numbers, fish are the most popular pet in the country, and with the release of films like Pixar's 'Finding Nemo' the number of more expensive, and difficult-to-keep, marine fish being kept in the UK is on the rise (as well as the number of fish being flushed down the toilet by well-meaning children). There is a lot that we can do for fish these days, thanks to the growing pet trade and an increase in farmed fish over the past few decades. However, none of this is any good if vets don't know the basics of fish care. This article attempts to give a brief overview of one of the most important aspects of fish husbandry – water quality.

It's a chemical thing

Fish in aquaria live in a closed system so are susceptible to changes in water quality. The most important chemicals in a fish's environment are chlorine and chloramines, dissolved oxygen, ammonia, nitrite, and nitrate.

Chlorines and chloramines are added to tap water to make it safe for human consumption by destroying microorganisms. However, these chemicals are harmful to fish and may cause gill necrosis and haemolytic anaemia, leading to hypoxia. They also destroy the nitrifying bacteria needed for biological filtration, which I will talk about more later. For these reasons water must always be dechlorinated using a commercial preparation before it is added to the tank.

Dissolved oxygen is important for obvious reasons, and low levels cause fish to gasp at the surface of the tank. It is decreased in warm



water and water with a still surface. Using 'airstones' or having the outlet of the filter rest slightly above the water's surface in order to agitate it are both good ways to get oxygen into the water. Plants, on the other hand, are not – yes they produce oxygen through photosyn-

We all know that while five years is a decent stint at university, it is nowhere near long enough to cover everything there is to know about all of the animals known to man. Luckily, we're a diverse bunch with lots of different interests, and it's always great when those of us with more knowledge in a particular area can share that with the rest. Even if fish aren't your thing, read on, as Lindsay helps us to be better informed for the sake of fish, our clients, and ourselves!
– Editor

thesis during the day, but they also use oxygen when they respire at night. Plants are good for aquariums (they make a tasty snack for the fish as well as using up nitrates – see later) but not in this context.

For ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels, it all comes down to the nitrogen cycle. Fish produce ammonia as their waste product which is excreted via diffusion from their gills. Nitrifying bacteria convert ammonia to nitrites, and nitrites to nitrates. These nitrifying bacteria live on biological media (usually a sponge) inside your filter. Insufficient filtration, or an imma-

Goldfish Myths

Myth: Goldfish grow to the size of the tank they are kept in
Fact: Actually true but missing one important fact – the fish will then die when they can't get any bigger. This leads us nicely on to the next myth.

Myth: Goldfish only live for a couple of years
Fact: Goldfish can live 15 to 20 years in the right conditions, unfortunately not many are kept in the right conditions.

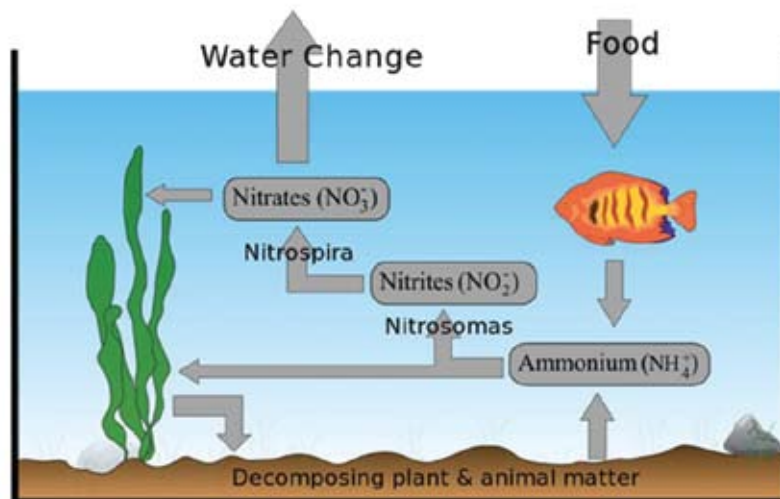
Myth: Overfeeding goldfish will kill them
Fact: Goldfish will not eat themselves to death, they are not that stupid, however uneaten food left to rot in a tank or bowl without a filter may lead to poor water quality and this could kill the fish.

Myth: Goldfish are hardy so don't need any special equipment
Fact: Goldfish may be reasonably hardy, but they also produce more waste than almost any other species of fish, definitely one to break out an extra filter for.

ture filter which doesn't have an adequate population of bacteria, may lead to increases in the levels of ammonia and/or nitrites. High ammonia levels in the water will prevent diffusion from the gills, leading to increased blood and tissue levels of ammonia which may result in mortality or clinical signs such as lethargy, abnormal behaviour, secondary infections and respiratory signs (gassing). High nitrite levels can lead to absorption through the gills and oxidation of haemoglobin to methemoglobin, resulting in hypoxia and gassing behaviour. High nitrate levels are much less toxic, but can lead to algal blooms which may cause further changes to the water chemistry (as well as looking pretty awful). High nitrates indicate that the filter is working well, but that nitrates are not being effectively removed from the system. This can be done using live plants which will use nitrates as a food source, or by regular water changes. Water changes should be done on a weekly basis and should never be more than 50% of the total volume.

Good tank management is essential

There are many reasons your filter may not effectively remove these chemicals. Filters that have not been matured will not have a large population of nitrifying bacteria and won't be effective. Maturing filters is done by running the filter in the tank before any fish are added, sometimes using a commercial preparation which encourages a population of bacteria to establish. Once this has been done, fish can be slowly added to the new tank. Fish should always be added more than a week apart in order to allow



The Nitrogen Cycle in a Fish Tank (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aquarium_Nitrogen_Cycle.svg)

the bacterial population to grow to accommodate the increase in waste (especially if you are keeping goldfish). Stocking the tank too quickly can lead to increases in ammonia and nitrites called 'new tank syndrome'. High stocking densities at any time can be problematic if your filter can't support enough bacteria to remove all the waste produced. In this case, either a second tank to house the excess stock or a second filter should be considered. Another common problem is using tap water to clean the filter, effectively killing all the bacteria you have worked so hard to raise! Filters should also be cleaned in old tank water, which is being removed as part of a water change. The filter is the most important part of the tank set up and the most difficult to get right. If you manage it properly, the rest is easy.

Testing water quality is relatively easy and there are many commercial kits available from most aquatics shops. Inadequate water quality is one of the most common causes of problems in fish tanks and

it is important that we understand and are able to advise our clients on how to improve it. It's also an easy consult, when you know what you're doing. There are many places to go for information, which I have included below, along with a few references in case you want to know more.

Hopefully this article has shown you how fascinating fish really are and spawned a new generation of fish vets. Otherwise, I hope it has taught you something useful, and that next time a fish comes in when you are on EMS you can impress the vets with your knowledge!

Further information

The Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association, Code of Conduct
 The Fish Veterinary Society, membership is free for students.
 British Veterinary Zoological Society
 HADFIELD C. A., WHITAKER B. R., and CLAYTON L. A. (2007) Emergency and Critical Care of Fish, The Veterinary Clinics of North America Exotic Animal Practice, **10**, 647-675
 ROBERTS, H. and PALMEIRO, B. S. (2008) Toxicology of Aquarium Fish, The Veterinary Clinics of North America Exotic Animal Practice, **11**, Issue 2, 359-374
 SALES, J. and JANSSENS, G. P. J. (2003), Nutrient Requirements of Ornamental Fish, Aquatic Living Resources, **16**, 533-540.

Water Quality Criteria	Cold Water and Tropical Freshwater	Tropical Marine
Dissolved Oxygen	Min - 6mg/l	Min 5.5mg/l
Free Ammonia	Max - 0.02mg/l	Max 0.01mg/l
Nitrite	Max - 0.2mg/l	Max 0.125mg/l
Nitrate	Max - 50mg/l	Max 40mg/l

Water quality criteria recommended by the Ornamental Aquatics Trading Association (OATA Code of Conduct Appendix A)

BVZS 50th anniversary congress – a world of opportunity

By Matthew Bridge (3rd Year, Nottingham)



Ever wondered how to perform a giraffe caesarean? Or found yourself pondering the latest treatments for sea horses? Wildlife and exotics based medicine is a specialist area that has always drawn an abundance of aspiring, competitive and enthusiastic students looking to experience something a little out of the ordinary. Well, in my opinion there's never been a better time to get involved.

Last autumn the British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS) celebrated its 50th anniversary at its bi-annual weekend congress. From humble beginnings, when 36 colleagues first met in 1961, the organisation has steadily thrived and now consists of over 370 members. These members comprise an array of experts in the field, with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences that stem from all corners of the globe. And what's the best part? BVZS is eager to open its doors for students to play a part!



To its credit, the BVZS offers students a highly discounted membership rate (£28.50 per year), as well as discounted attendance fees to its meetings. Still not convinced? Students can also attend meetings for free by volunteering to be a steward at the event, providing an excellent opportunity for students to access a professional field.

I attended the BVZS 50th Anniversary Congress as a steward last November and thoroughly enjoyed the experience, listening to specialist speakers present on a diverse range of topics. Whether it crawls, squawks, snorts or flaps you could be sure there was a session appropriate! From megavertebrates to Mongolian gerbils, the talks were highly stimulating, informative, challenging and thought provoking. However, make no mistake; all the content presented is representative of the latest in research and case-based experiences. Indeed, the talk presented on 'Surgical approach to scent gland tumours in Mongolian gerbils' featured as the cover article in a December 2011 issue of

Veterinary Record. Throughout the weekend there was also the opportunity to join in a series of smaller round table discussions, as well as a parallel-running practical workshop.

As a newcomer you could be excused for feeling the slightest bit anxious delving into debates with worldwide experts, which could be a daunting prospect to any less experienced individual. However, I can gladly report that such feelings are entirely unnecessary. All the attendees I spoke to over the weekend had a genuine interest in student opinions, certainly exhibiting no judgemental feelings or passiveness to an understandable lack of experience. You may well be rubbing shoulders with giants but the reality is they are actually just like anyone else and, dare I say it, a lot of fun.

Over the course of the weekend I managed to rather conveniently find myself talking with Andrew Routh, a gentleman kept busy by his role as Chief Veterinary Officer for the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). During the conversation,



amidst a dizzying myriad of exotics-based anecdotes and opinion swapping, Andrew highlighted a clinical EMS scheme that ZSL runs for students entering their final year (applications accepted from 3rd year students only). This is an invaluable opportunity for any aspirational wildlife vet (applications close April 13, see link at the end for further information).

If you want it, go for it!

You see, for a while I wondered whether my ambitions had begun with a handicapped start. I don't come from a particularly well-off family, and as such found expensive projects abroad a daunting financial climb. Neither was I born in a far-away exotic land (unless that happens to be your opinion of Kettering). Well, I can tell you that as vet students you're already half way there, as nearly all the vet schools in the UK have a respective zoological society that you can join, each with committee representatives dedicated to sourcing you the best speakers and opportunities,



and then bringing them right to your doorstep. In fact BVZS has a direct link with these societies and has endeavoured to create a role for a Veterinary School Liaison Officer within its council.

Rarely can so many members of the exotic and wildlife community be seen to gather in one place than at a BVZS congress. Whether you have a career set in mind or are just looking to explore an interest, then I thoroughly encourage you to take

a look at what the BVZS is doing. Based on my experience at the last congress it certainly won't be the last one I attend. Bring on 2012. I'll see you there.

Further information

www.bvzs.org
www.zsl.org/science/veterinary-department/veterinary-extra-mural-studies,538,AR.html
www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/sb/societies/UNVZS/

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Books for Belgrade

By Sophie Bromilow (IVSA Rep, 3rd Year, Nottingham)

The International Veterinary Students Association is run by volunteer veterinary students from around the world. Its last international meeting was held in Belgrade in December 2011.

IVSA's aim is to improve the standard of veterinary education internationally through the exchange of ideas, knowledge and culture. Arriving in Belgrade for the 60th IVSA symposium, my friend Eva (from Germany) and I were met by two friendly Serbs who immediately started chattering at us in what we assumed was Serbian, a language which neither of us spoke. After guessing that they were asking us our names and replying tentatively, they fell about laughing and began to explain, in fluent English, that they had been playing a practical joke on us by speaking Russian – just in case we were able to speak Serbian! The next moment, the chivalrous Serbs were carrying our luggage and whisked us off to the airport cafe where they treated us to a shot of rakija, the national drink. Well, when in Serbia . . .!

That night, we were taken to the vet faculty in Belgrade, the larger of two institutes teaching veterinary medicine. The IVSA office was a hive of activity, the organising com-

mittee of the symposium buzzing around us, putting the final preparations in place. Having accepted their offer of Snickers and energy drinks, we were buzzing until the small hours. We slept in a very traditional apartment in Belgrade, where we were given stiff, woollen house socks to keep our feet warm as we padded around making up our beds with several thick blankets. The next morning, Dejan, our host, had made a breakfast feast. We enjoyed a meal of polenta and natural yoghurt – the Serbian equivalent of cereal and milk, along with bread, cold cured sausage, gherkins and ajvar – a tomato, pepper and



Traditionally-dressed Serbian girl offering bread, salt and rakija

aubergine-based sauce served with most meals.

After relocating to our hostel, we had a meeting followed by some sightseeing. Our hostel overlooked a botanical garden and we strolled around taking in Belgrade and its rather unpredictable landscape. As you walk along the street, the buildings change drastically – grandiose governmental buildings, centuries old, are close to towering 1970s apartment blocks with, perhaps,



Eating palačinke at the Christmas markets

a ramshackle house squashed between the two – which, it was explained, would remain there until it was too dilapidated to be ignored any longer. The sad fate of these buildings was that they would be knocked down and replaced by new apartment blocks and offices, but no-one, including the government, has the money to maintain them as they are or to repair them, so for the meantime they are left standing.

Later in the trip, we were driven past several enormous buildings which had been destroyed in the 1999 NATO bombings. These buildings were the Yugoslav Ministry of Defence building and neighbouring governmental departments, and the damage was appalling. To see this level of devastation was truly shocking, and the fact that Serbia was still reeling from the impact of a war that took place over a decade ago was almost unbelievable.

The rest of the capital city was beautiful, bustling and brimming with an intriguing cocktail of modern Eastern European and old Soviet cultures. Belgrade is surprisingly green for a capital city; it has 59 parks within its boundaries. We continued exploring, did a bit of shopping, visited some Christmas markets where we ate palačinke (pancakes) to get in the festive spirit, and then we happened up on the St Sava Temple. White marble



St Sava temple

pillars and green domes adorning the roof, this stunning building is the largest Christian Orthodox church in the Balkans, and the second largest in Europe. Building commenced in 1895, but has been postponed on many occasions due to several wars, and is now funded entirely by donations, so the interior is progressing slowly.

On the first official day of the symposium, we met all 80 delegates at the vet faculty, and were given a tour. It was very much what we're used to – a small animal clinic and surgery, a farm animal clinic, pathology and biochemical labs, dissection rooms, an x-ray room and other treatment rooms. However, facilities within these areas were minimal; for example, an ex-army generator powered the monitoring machines in surgery. Considering that Serbia is not an affluent country, and that in this faculty they were struggling for money to provide better drugs for their patients, we were surprised to see a phototherapy machine, which looked incredibly modern and which many of us had never seen used.

Students were entrusted to do group consultations, and took part in offering a free animal birth control service to dog owners in Belgrade.

IVSA Denmark had been collecting hundreds of books for the university in a project called 'Books for Belgrade'; the collection had been shipped to coincide with the symposium and the Serbian students were

grateful for the donation to their library. The IVSA auctions which take place during the symposium and congress also helped to raise money for the IVSA's charity, the Development Fund.

One particularly chilly day, we drove a long way through the countryside to a remote monastery, tucked into the Fruška Gora Mountains, behind a dense forest where the fir trees were thick and black. As we meandered around the sacred grounds of the Novo Hopovo monastery, admiring the beautiful, gold-embellished chapel within, it began to snow. It felt so atmospheric, especially when we saw the rakija stall on the way out. Rakija made by monks? It'd be rude not to try it.

The cultural evening is the most important night of any IVSA event, where each country showcases its best food and drink. We were provided with lively entertainment by two dance troupes (wearing gorgeous traditional Balkan costumes), who showed us the different folk-dancing styles from Eastern and Southern Serbia.

The next day we were whisked off to a bull farm in Velika Plana where we watched the collection of bull semen, and later saw a rotary milk-



Rotary milking unit

ing unit, which was enormous, and the largest dairy farm in Serbia – the carousel milked 50 cows at a time. On the same evening, we visited a veterinary high school (the Serbs have to decide on their career path early) where we were to stay the night. We visited Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia, where we enjoyed an astonishingly beautiful view of the city's skyline across the river Danube.

Thousands of sendvič (sandwiches), an electrifying visit to the Nikola Tesla museum, an entertainingly fat dog and a few birthday celebrations later, we arrived at the formal dinner, the farewell party of the symposium.

Two days before Christmas in the UK, we arrived home to a rainy, cold England . . . but at least we had rakija to warm us up!



Snow on the mountain roads



The UK & Ireland crew: Chloe Brown (Glasgow), Sophie Bromilow (Nottingham), Jimmy Bost (Cambridge), Ali Gallie (ex-Nottingham), Catherine Boeree (RVC) and Will Chandler (RVC)

Vets on top at AVS congress

By Lucy Jerram (Congress chair, 4th Year, London)

AVS Congress – so often dismissed as the unpopular little brother (or sister) of AVS Sports Weekend – has been proven by the RVC to be a great event. What a weekend!

AVS Congress started with a pub crawl on the Friday around the exciting hotspot of Potters Bar, which is definitely more appealing after a few drinks and a stop at 'Bargain Booze'. Vet students from all over the country came together to show the locals how to party.

Saturday morning dawned bright and the organising committee were up and about early. The lecture hall soon filled with students nursing hangovers, but nonetheless eager to see what the day had in store. Stuart Reid (RVC Principal) managed to wipe many of the cobwebs away with an inspiring and witty opening speech. The day continued with a variety of lectures, seminars and practical sessions. Highlights included a practical series on farriery and biomechanics entitled 'No foot, no horse', which included a competition to remove a horse-shoe faster than a farrier, with prizes awarded for the fastest.

Martin Whiting's debate on the topical issue of 'slaughter welfare' saw delegates still discussing the ethical issues in their lunch break, while Noel Fitzpatrick and Karen Perry's joint lecture on orthopaedics and bionics also raised some interesting and controversial points.

Special thanks go to Renate Weller who masterminded a diagnostic imaging quiz, which included having to guess the various objects present on radiographs, with the answers being anything from cereal to different fruits, and a phone.

Other events throughout the day included the Careers Fayre which, following on from its initial success at Bristol last year, saw the return of

a number of exhibitors, all of whom were on hand throughout the day to offer useful advice and (every student's favourite thing) freebies. The lunchtime AGM was well attended and provided a platform for the outgoing AVS President, Myfanwy Hill, to update members on AVS activity over the past year, details of which can be seen via the minutes on the AVS website.

The RCVS president, Jerry Davies, also took to the floor and spoke about the importance of teamwork within the profession, with emphasis regarding our various para-professionals. The meeting culminated with the election of six new members of the central AVS committee: Junior Vice President (JVP), secretary, treasurer, JAVS editor, marketing officer and web editor.

The Congress Ball is always a highlight of the weekend, and this year saw the event held at the stunning Porchester Hall. Both Carl Padgett (BVA President) and Jerry Davies gave speeches before the meal, with Carl demonstrating the interest and care of the profession with regard to us, the students, as its future. The AVS Presidency was handed over to Chris Ogden (Nottingham), who will no doubt do a superb job over the next year

if his success as JVP is anything to go by. Music was provided by the University of London Big Band, and it had the whole crowd dancing with a variety of swing and funk numbers. There were no doubt some very tired feet by the end of the night, but the majority could easily have continued the fun long into the early hours of the next morning.

On leaving the venue we were shocked to see how much snow had fallen, and the bus company did an excellent job of getting everyone home safely. It is testament to the organisers and participants of the weekend that, despite the two-and-a-half hour journey home, the only comments that I heard (over the snoring) were positive ones.

I hope that the success of AVS Congress 2012 'Vets On Top' will make many of you realise that this is just as much of a social weekend as Sports Weekend, but with the added benefit of learning a thing or two along the way. There is no better way to shift a hangover than by eating bacon butties and drinking copious amounts of tea, while hearing from some of the leading members of the profession and making friends with students from other vet schools.



AVS President, Chris Ogden with BVA president, Carl Padgett at the Congress ball

Join us on the BVA community forum

By Jenny Brazier (AVS Treasurer, 2nd Year, London)

Have your say on the BVA's new Community Forum, a way to network, debate, and influence important decisions being made about our profession.

Don't leave it up to others to represent your views, otherwise you may end up missing out on the decisions that will shape your veterinary career. With topics such as the hidden costs of EMS placements, to how successful the Nottingham Sports Weekend was, you will find something that you will be able to contribute to, and perhaps even make an important change to benefit all veterinary students across the UK.

Follow the step-by-step guide below to sign up and have your say today. It really does only take a few minutes.

Signing up

- Go to www.bva.co.uk
- Register with the BVA website (link on top right-hand side of the page);
- Click on the 'I am a BVA Member' link (you all should be by now, if not – join);
- Enter your membership number (found on all BVA emails you have been sent) and surname;
- Click register;
- Now you can log on to the BVA website;
- Once you have logged in click on the BVA community link on the left hand side of the page;
- You should then be taken to your community forum home page where you can see the forums you have access to.

Editing your profile

- Click the my profile link or your name on the home page;
- On your profile page click the 'edit profile' button on the right-hand side of the page;



- You can change or add a picture by clicking the 'change avatar' link under the picture box;
- Here you can add a short biography;
- Once you have made any changes click the 'save profile' link on the right-hand side of the page;
- On the main profile page you can change your community settings such as e-mail notifications;
- Under the basic options tab you can enter details such as your birthday, gender, screen name etc.

Forums and posts

- You will have access to the general, a regional and the students' forum;
- Click on the forum name to enter it;

- Clicking on the post will take you directly to the post;
- To add a post click the 'new post' button;
- Give the post a subject and you can then write the post content;
- You can attach documents and pictures to the post as well;
- Click the 'post' button and your post will be added to the forum;
- You have 15 minutes to edit your post before it is permanently added to the forum;
- To respond to a post click the 'reply' button at the bottom of the post;
- Draft your response and click 'post' to save it to the forum;
- You can now have your say about the major discussions in the veterinary profession.

Nottingham's sports, a quiet success

By Anna Briggs (outgoing Marketing Officer, Final-Year, Nottingham)

November 2011 saw our first vet sports celebration at the University of Nottingham, just a few months after the graduation of the first ever school intake. And what a celebration it was . . .

Organising the weekend involved grappling with the police, two local county councils and the university powers that be in order to obtain the necessary permission for the weekend to go ahead. Approval eventually came, with the proviso that we obtained the biggest and best security and first aid that the event has ever seen, and add new initiatives such as the 'Shh . . .!' campaign (remember the assortment of lollipops we gave you when you came off the buses?), as well as a 24-hour dedicated emergency phone line for potential irate locals. Having overcome this scuf-

fle, we were champing at the bit to turn 'Sports Weekend' into a real 'Sports Fest'...

The first night was held at the Mirage nightclub, conveniently located at an out-of-town industrial estate. It was little prepared for the 1500 impassioned Christmas trees, tigers, pink panthers, unicorns, babies, lumberjacks, glowstick men, big fat gypsy wedding-goers, old people – and heaven knows what else. Luckily, it came supplied with fairground rides and a photo booth, and if you haven't viewed the photos yet they are available online at www.onlinepictureproof.com/pictureblast/albums/photo_booth_images/215067 – the password is 'pb8'.

After crawling back into bed (quietly, with a lollipop), there was an early start on Saturday morning. Sportsman's breakfasts and vegetarians' eggs were collected from the local butchers, and delivered frantically to those awake by a trusty 1998-reg red Polo, aptly named 'The breakfast-mobile'. Then it was time for the real Sports Fest at Sutton Bonington – a local farmers' market, banging music, free Yorkshire Tea and the tussle for vet school supremacy in showcase sports matches. The inclusive lunches from Subway also went down a treat.

This year saw the long-awaited revival of the milk-drinking contest, not seen since 2007; there was no clear winner to this challenge, but partakers all passionately

and swiftly knocked back six pints of semi-skimmed milk without too much consequence. The university cheerleaders were forced to abandon their routine due to the quagmire that formed on the rugby pitch, though the rain did little to dampen spirits. The showcase rugby match saw the AVS amalgamated rugby team beat Nottingham.

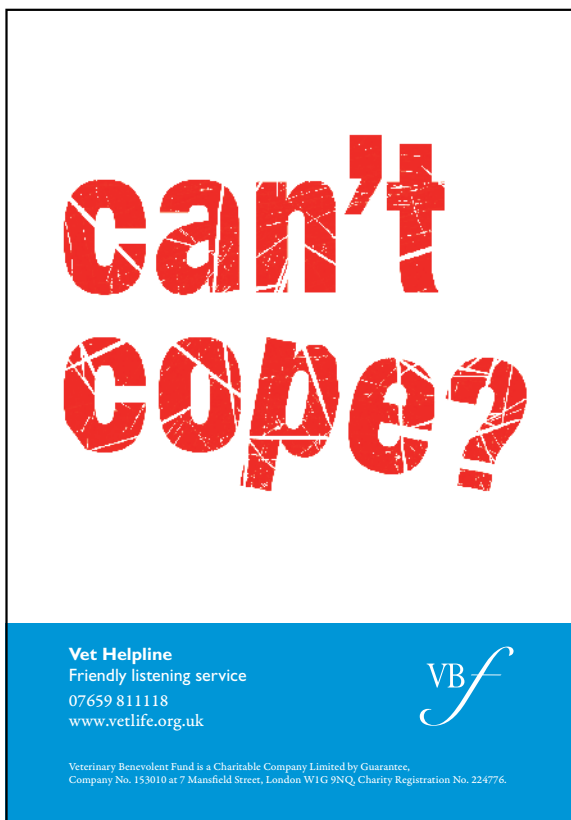
The traditional AVS bar crawl took participants to bars filled with canals (The Canal House), strange shots (Baa Bar), quality burgers (Lloyds No 1), ghouls (Pit and Pendulum) and more . . . and then on to Walkabout and back to Mirage to party in ultraviolet splendour with acclaimed DJ Benji Boko, followed by the Nottingham (slightly cheesy) favourite, DJ Marshy. Glowstick-induced enthusiasm, rave attitude and spirits all ran high.

Our official photographer, Lamar Francois, managed to capture the charged atmosphere and photos are available on the Facebook group.

Lazy Sunday morning came, and breakfast was provided in the nearby student town of Loughborough. Bacon cobs were much appreciated by the face-paint tinged, tired and unclean vet students we saw before us; and the return home ran efficiently, other than the few Bristol students that missed the bus.

In terms of the aftermath on campus, we're not sure the rugby pitch will ever be the same, but clean-up was otherwise uneventful. The only local re-sident to ring the emergency phone line rang to say that she hadn't heard a peep from the plethora of vet students in the village. So thank you: to all organisers, bouncers, paramedics, sponsors (especially the main sponsor, Vets4Pets), the university and campus, and most of all to you, the attendees, that made it happen.

See you all at Glasgow 2012 then, yeah?



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Badger culling: an abuse of power or a positive step forward?

The issues surrounding the badger cull trial in areas of the UK have had their fair share of media coverage of late, and understandably provoke emotive responses and strong opinions. Since we invited you to take to the pages of JAVS with your thoughts and views on the plethora of veterinary-related topics, you have come up trumps. Here two students express personal points of view from opposite ends of the spectrum ...



Against culling

Larissa Garnermann, First Year, Dublin
Reading through some veterinary journals it pains me to see so many articles not concerned with animal welfare, but more with how the health of animals affects humans. When we have a medium such as this, one that can bring to light pressing issues that genuinely affect animal welfare, where are all the examples of how humans benefit from animals? When this selfishness and favouritism for our own species starts to effect animal safety on a much grander scale, I feel that the professionals that have supposedly dedicated their lives to the welfare for all animals should step back and reflect on what is ethically right.

When I first heard of the proposed badger cull I felt it should be our duty as protectors of animal

The 'debate' section in JAVS is a place to share your thoughts on issues of interest. Please note that the opinions expressed by individual students may not reflect the official position of the AVS or the BVA.

welfare to avoid the killing of animals at all costs. Why should badgers be served a death sentence, simply because they may or may not be suffering from a disease that, we should be reminded, humans also contract? When human lives are in danger a solution is found, whether it be through a cure or through vaccination.

The mindless killing of innocent animals will never be an appropriate response, and just because something is easy, and in the interest of humans, does not mean it is right. Vaccination of cattle or badgers would be more effective than culling, but rather than working to find a more humane solution, people are taking the easy option. It should not be a case of trading the life of one animal for another; we should be working on a solution that will save the lives of both badgers and cattle, without resorting to such drastic, and possibly ineffective, measures. It is our responsibility to protect all creatures, great and small, and not be diverted from this ultimate goal.

For a cull

Jonathan Hobbs, Final-Year, London
Personally, I am pleased with DEFRA's recent announcement to

proceed with two pilot badger culls in autumn 2012 in an effort to tackle bovine TB. Coming from West Somerset, I live in one of the worst affected regions in the country, and have many friends who have had their livelihoods severely affected due to constant cattle movement restrictions.

For beef farmers, movement restrictions pose huge economic strains; stock is fattened, primed, and ready for sale, and then suddenly can't be moved for at least 60 days. This leads to additional feed costs, and potentially having to overstock animals, which in itself is a welfare issue.

For dairy farmers, slightly different problems occur, and I recently experienced these first-hand when TB testing at a 400-head dairy farm in mid-Devon. It was probably the hardest day I've spent on EMS, seeing the farmer break down when we told him that 40 per cent of the herd, which he had spent the past 15 years establishing, had to be culled for being reactors. Having previously been a closed herd, he then had to buy cows in to meet his milk quota and as a result now has Johne's disease and BVD on the farm, when he used to be clear of both.

In 2010, 30,000 cattle were culled because of TB, costing the taxpayer £100m in that year alone. *Farmers Weekly* predicts this cost will rise to £1 billion over the next decade if no further action is taken. Many of you may well be thinking that this is not the badgers' fault. Well, I accept they are not wholly to blame, but there is unequivocal evidence that badgers play a role in spreading TB. As badger numbers have increased (since becoming a protected species), so has the incidence of TB. At a talk by Andrew Cobner, a former British Cattle Veterinary Association president, I learned that, unlike in other species, TB concentrates in the kidneys of badgers and as a result is shed in urine on cattle feed, pasture, and so on. Granted TB is also occurring more regularly in the deer population, but they do not have this issue. People also forget that badgers are top of their food chain; humans have eradicated all of their predators (bears, wolves, etc) and as such there is no natural control of the population. Furthermore, TB can hardly be a pleasant disease for the badgers, and with a reduction in numbers the incidence of TB will fall in the badger population, therefore making it a healthier one.

The only way we will ever get TB under control is if we simultaneously target TB in the cattle and badger populations. I have found this view to be the most common among vets in practice and at the VLA. Farmers are becoming increasingly frustrated with the constant movement restrictions and culling of their animals, while nothing seems to be happening with regard to the wildlife population. As a result, there is a danger that some might take unregulated action, and it cannot be good for the welfare of the badger if untrained persons are 'culling' them. One can understand the concerns against culling, such as the perturbation effect resulting from infected badgers into unaffected areas as demonstrated in the Krebs trial, which found TB incidence in previously unaffected

areas to rise. However, other studies have since shown that this is not prolonged.

While the tuberculin skin test may not be brilliant, it is the main tool we have in the UK, and although work is under way to develop a cattle vaccine as well as better vaccines for badgers, these may not be available for a number of years. Personally, I feel that vaccination will be the best option for everyone concerned, and I certainly don't want to see the end of badgers! However, the situation has become dire and if an agreement is not met soon we may be completely unable

to control the disease. With TB spreading more regularly into other species, (with alpacas particularly affected, for example), we must act now, and act decisively.

■ **What are your thoughts on the ethics of culling? Should it be stopped, or do you think that the culls are necessary? Add your voice to the many talking about this contentious issue and respond by e-mail to javseditor@hotmail.com. The best response could be printed in the autumn edition of JAVS – Editor.**

What is the future for mixed practice?

By Vikki Wyse (Final-Year, London)

For some people 'mixed practice' refers to varied farm animal medicine with equine clients. However, many of us at vet school believe that to be a genuine general practitioner it must include small animal work.

If you survey vet classes through the years, the numbers vary but the majority still seem to want to be mixed practitioners. Worryingly, scouring the recruitment pages of veterinary journals and magazines, such positions seem to be increasingly rare, and many call for experienced vets, not new graduates. Many practices have specialised in only one or two fields, or have created separate departments. The new graduate nightmare seems to be working for a practice in one field but being expected to be on-call for all the others. There also seems to be a perception (and only a perception)

that practices that have maintained 'all-rounders' may be less progressive or advanced in any one area.

When asking qualified vets for advice on which area(s) to go into, I seem to get two categories of answers; the older vets, who have spent most of their careers in traditional multi-disciplinary practices, encourage following a similar line. Younger vets who graduated into the more segregated system tend to advise against it, using the 'jack of all trades but master of none' argument. Add to this the increase in specialisations, particularly in the small animal field, and the conundrum of where to start gets ever more complicated.

For many of us, it may not be where to start that is the question, but rather where the start will lead? Personally, I would like to go into mixed practice with mainly farm animal work, some small animal and preferably no horses. I feel my main

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skills are in farm work but I enjoy small animal surgery and developing relationships with companion animal clients. If I take a farm internship, I worry that I will forget my small animal medicine. If I take a mixed practice job, will I learn either discipline quickly or thoroughly enough to progress? Does specialising or maintaining a broader field close doors in the future? Some people seem to interpret the desire to stay broad as indecision or lack of direction. But generations of veterinary surgeons before us worked in all fields and the division is relatively new, so why should such choices interpreted so differently now?

The delicate balance between work and life

What about lifestyle? I hate to conform to the cliché, but with an 80 to 90 per cent female bias among new graduates, many of us will want to have children, which will necessitate a change in if not a break from employment. In small animal practices it seems readily feasible to adapt the working pattern while pregnant and to work part-time with children, but what about farm and equine practitioners? Will we have to change discipline, temporarily or permanently, to allow this to happen? Many job adverts also promote lifestyle benefits, for example, the location being close to coast, mountains or cities; number

of weeks' holiday; and, most interestingly, the lack of out of hours work. A regular, 9-to-5-style job may seem appealing, particularly when allowing a new graduate to socialise and maintain established, long-distance friendships from vet school, but will lack of experience with emergencies limit our progression?

A need to be better informed

I am not yet a vet and I do not have the answers to these questions and many more. So this begs the (further) question; are we sufficiently advised on career paths and options while at vet school? I am a final-year student due to graduate in July, but feel I've had little official careers guidance. Is it too little, too late? How much have the decisions I have made over EMS, rotations options and electives already limited my career path, if at all? What can the industry do to allay our fears and concerns? How can we be convinced that there is a future for mixed practitioners and that it's still a valid career choice? Firstly, I'd like to be convinced that mixed practices are here to stay and that we won't all be forced to choose one way or the other in 10 years' time. But I suspect that no-one can really answer that. I'd certainly like job advertisements to include allowance for training and progression monitoring; prioritising sup-

port and opportunities over salary every time.

These are just my musings, no doubt incompletely thought out, but I suspect many other students have similar questions. I am generally an optimist so am hoping that I can and will find a job with my desired balance and a reasonable lifestyle. We are told there is a shortage of vets, but I don't know if that is across all fields. I believe vet students need greater guidance and information earlier in the course, on the likely future directions of the industry and how our decisions pre-graduation may or may not affect those afterwards. I am also hoping that there is a future for GPs and that we are valued as much as the specialists.

As always here at JAVS we want to know what you think. Do you want to go into mixed practice? Do you share these concerns or have different opinions about the value of mixed practice in the modern day profession? Let us know how your vet schools prepare you for life post-university. E-mail javseditor@hotmail.com and you could win £20 and perhaps have your response published in the autumn edition of JAVS.

– Editor

Put Iceland on your map

By Victoria Argent, (4th Year, London)

**Anyone who has read the EMS section of JAVS, or checked out a few of our photos on Facebook, will know that vet students just love to travel. Escaping vet school for a break – and an actual break, involving no work – can sometimes be just what we need. Read on to see if this ‘in a nutshell’ guide to Iceland is enough to tempt you...!
– Editor**

I think I finally know why mums go to Iceland! It's partly because Iceland understands customer service; the people there couldn't be friendlier, and they also know how to tempt you with the strangest of items, while continuing to work despite everything around them being frozen. Wait ... you don't think I'm still talking about the shop, do you?

Just before the festive period last year, my parents announced that none of us would be going out on New Year's Eve, because instead we would be using the money to go to Iceland. In fact, I was informed it had already been booked for the middle of January, so 'I hope you're free'. Excuses followed: 'Um, I don't exactly have time . . . I mean, I have lectures . . . It's my pre-rotations teaching! I'm pretty sure I'm not supposed to miss it . . .', and yet,



Icelandic horses – hard to resist

a few weeks later, I found myself aboard Iceland Air. As my friend recently stated, the recorded podcasts of lectures, which the RVC provide were made for occasions like this.

Day one in Iceland was spent exploring the capital city, Reykjavik, where we stayed. It was snowing heavily (perhaps even blizzard-like in proportions) as we trawled through the centre of Reykjavik yet we all noted that the roads, however, were snow-free. While the landscape in Iceland is unbelievably beautiful in its simplicity, and is rich with natural phenomena, Iceland does not have many native animals. The one polar bear that ventured across from Greenland was shot, but that doesn't stop Icelanders putting polar bear statues outside their shops, and selling the stuffed toys to tourists. (The most ridiculous souvenir that I came across, however, was a ring-pull can of mountain air. Literally, air, and it would set you back about £3, but apparently it is great for the person who's got everything. I'm pretty sure that very same person will also have access to air, but you never know). Near to where we stayed, birds seemed to dominate: Whooper swans, pigeons, Icelandic geese

and ducks. They filled the air and the ground and were a spectacular sight at sunset.

How four gaits become five

On our last day in Iceland, we made an early start and a 40-minute car journey to meet the only horse breed native to Iceland, appropriately named the Icelandic horse. Before I went to Iceland, I would have said that I was not a 'horsey person'. I really liked them, and I was well aware that they are intelligent and impressive, but my answer to the question 'Oh you're a vet, so what animals are you going to work with?' would always have been 'small animals'. But even I have to admit, seeing these horses caused me to re-think that decision. Just like their human counterparts, these Icelandic beauties were charmingly friendly and loved a big cuddle. Okay, perhaps the analogy doesn't totally fit, but I couldn't stop raving about them afterwards, and have since found out that there exists an Icelandic Horse Society of Great Britain.

The horse itself is small and sturdy, and our tour guide informed us that it has five gaits. The canter and gallop are considered one gait in Iceland, and then there is the walk, trot and the additional tölt and flugskeið. The latter two are, respectively, a lateral ambling gait, and a fast, smooth 'flying pace' used

in pacing races. Additional trivia surrounding the horses, though, is that Jeremy Clarkson's wife owns a herd of them in Iceland and the pair go to visit them regularly. Disappointingly, he wasn't around when I was there.

A natural light show

Iceland is a place full of dramatic landscapes; from the geysers ('geysir') where water at 100°C explodes into the air from bubbling pools in the ground, to the enormous rocky waterfalls that splutter in the gusting winds at a temperature of -12°C. But our trip to Iceland had always been about one thing in particular: hoping to see the Northern Lights. It took two nights of staying up until after midnight in the freezing snow with a coach-load of strangers and our tour guide before we were lucky enough to witness this incredible event, but we were rewarded on the second night. It is genuinely one of



The aurora borealis – Iceland's natural light show

the most beautiful things I have ever seen, and is completely indescribable. It makes you feel like you are standing in the sky having some kind of supernatural, unearthly, religious experience. The lights were green, silver, orange and purple, and they swirled and folded in the sky, shimmering and darting among the stars. It is something I will never forget.

I wanted to put Iceland on your map of 'places to go', in case it wasn't there already. It only took three hours to get there by plane, but I felt like I'd moved to a different planet. I wholeheartedly recommend it, and perhaps you'll be lucky enough to spot Mr Clarkson. And on that bombshell, I'll leave you to book your flights.



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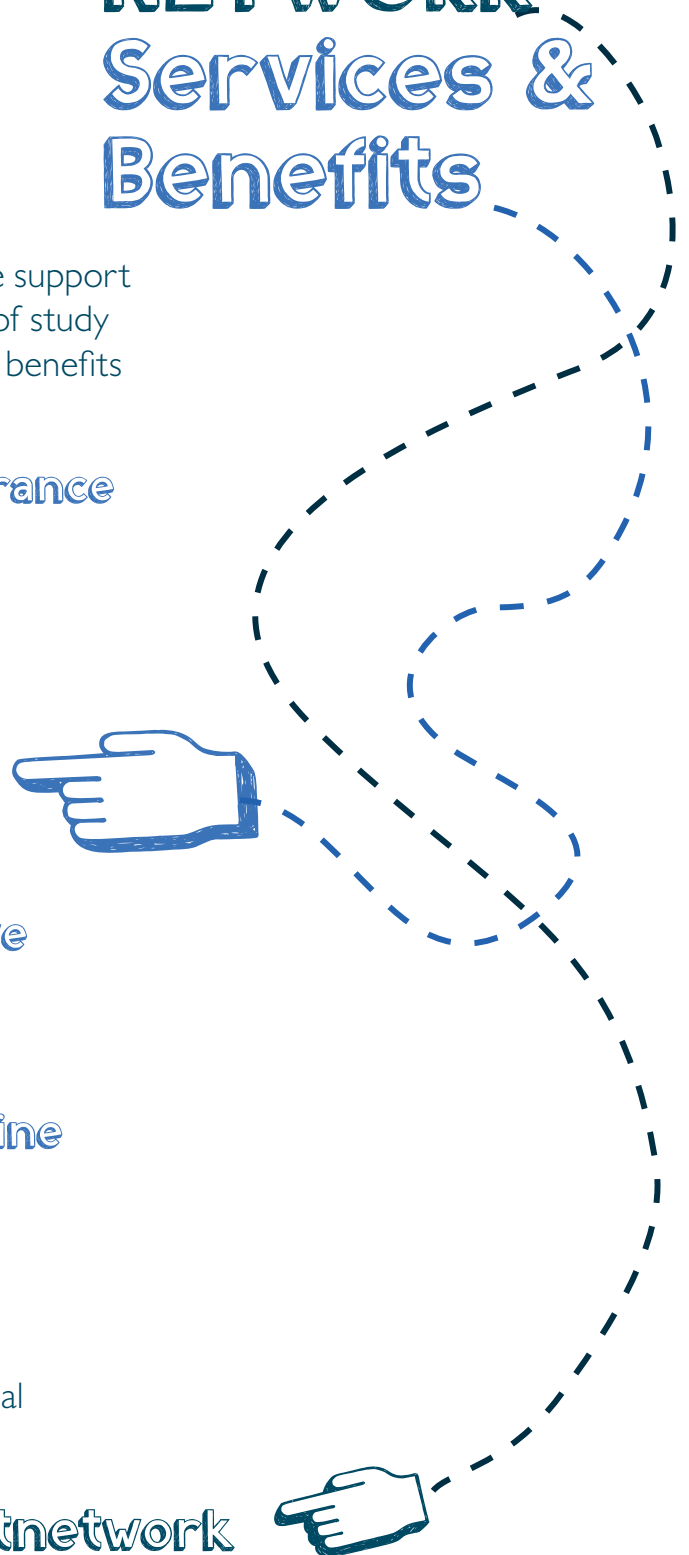
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Coping with chronic fatigue syndrome (myalgic encephalitis)

By Rachel Spittle (1st Year, Nottingham)

CFS/ME (chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalitis) is an immune deficiency condition; diagnosis needs to be made through clinical examination carried out by a specialist team.

Before being diagnosed with CFS/ME, there are recognised tests to be carried out. Symptoms can mirror other conditions so it is important to rule those out before diagnosing CFS/ME. Unfortunately, it's often the case that patients have suffered from the condition for a while before diagnosis; in some cases it has even been years before a diagnosis was made.

The main recognised symptoms are decreased cognitive function; inability to engage socially and occupationally; difficulties in dealing with emotions/emotional life stresses; and detrimental effects on physical functioning. This is a wide-ranging illness and there are many different levels: mild, moderate and severe (not all people are bed-bound).

Before diagnosis, signs of 'booming and busting' can often be seen in patients. 'Boom' is where you have a period of feeling better, maybe even normal. In this situation there is a tendency to do too much. This is followed shortly by the 'bust', where symptoms are exacerbated, often resulting in a few days or weeks of bed rest, after which you start again from square one.

After diagnosis a baseline of activity is established by a specialist team, which enables you to do a little every day at your level. Graded activity is introduced to allow activity of some sort each day without over doing it.

CFS/ME is quite common in our age group (ages 20 to 40), especially students. I was unaware of this until I became a part of that group



myself. Symptoms can include a combination of almost anything, and it differs from person to person. Most warning signs can be stamped out by a few good night's sleep and a bit of a break; getting out and about, going to visit some friends or family, having some 'me' time. Art work or creative things are good too; a hobby is a lovely way to keep you feeling like yourself.

A lot of people don't understand CFS/ME. Most eventually realise that people with this condition can't always do what others can, and when they say they need to stop, they really do. Lots don't believe I have the condition; they say 'how can a 19-year-old student study veterinary science and do all the things she does, and claim to have this condition?' Even some doctors are sceptical, as there is a lot that as yet remains unknown about CFS/ME. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to prove that this is a recognised, diagnosable medical condition. CFS/ME is not treatable by medication alone: that is mainly done through lifestyle management and pacing oneself.

The first term of the veterinary medicine course is hard enough as

it is, without having a long-standing medical condition to monitor as well. After having had a *Cryptococcal* infection for 12 days, going back too early, not eating proper meals, sleeping approximately only two hours a night, and worrying about failing the January exams, I lost track of myself, and it wasn't until the last day of term when I realised I was going home that it finally all caught up with me. I had a panic attack in the lymphoreticular cell biology mock, from the build-up of stress pushing down on me from the first day of term.

The pressure that was so crushing all stemmed from me. Like many vet students, I have often pushed myself too hard. In summer 2011 I was diagnosed with CFS/ME and I thought that was it, I'd had my chance and now I have a potentially lifelong illness. Yet, now more than ever I feel like myself. Having this condition has taught me to listen to my body, and that my health is the most important thing. People have been telling me this for years, but it's one of the things in life that you have to work out for yourself.

Noticing the symptoms, knowing when to stop and learning how to manage it are what I find imperative to coping. I enjoy relaxation, yoga, deep breathing, taking 'me' time and getting fresh air every day. These are the things that enable me to continue my daily life and keep that vital balance. I eat well, and at regular intervals (small amounts, up to five times a day) whenever I feel hungry.

Due to my long-term sleep-related medication, I have to avoid alcohol, as it is not advisable to mix them. I did it once – never again. Most people with CFS/ME have an increased sensitivity to alcohol and in many it exacerbates the symptoms of the condition. Luckily,

when I was home, I was almost always (voluntarily) the designated driver on nights out, and I can't tell you how much money I've saved, but it's a lot! I have just as much fun, if not more, than those who are drinking; I go to dance, to socialise and to forget about stress. I prefer not to drink myself into oblivion, and then spend the rest of the night

either on the floor, crying, or chundering . . . but hey, whatever floats your boat.

I think the hardest thing about having this condition is limiting myself, and accepting I can't just do what I used to and I can't keep up with the rest all the time. Before my diagnosis I was doing a different hobby every night after school/col-

lege as well as striving for 100 per cent in all things academic. I have had to learn about pacing myself and setting achievable goals. A day or two in bed when I feel a little ill/down is better than trying to ride it out and spending months in bed a few weeks down the line.

It's a steep learning curve, but I have always loved a challenge!

Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

By Emily Ratsep (AVS Junior Rep, 2nd Year, Liverpool)

When we started our classes on animal welfare I realised just how complex the issues were around that seemingly simple concept. Even being able to establish whether or not an animal is experiencing a good welfare standard is complex, and in many cases difficult to do.

How does one create standards, evaluate those standards, and ensure compliance in the face of today's current economic challenges? In class we've been introduced to one basic way of measuring the welfare of an animal species. The 'Five Freedoms' (which can be found listed on almost every animal welfare site) were established in 1967 in the Brambell report for the UK government's Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. We know these to be freedom from: thirst and hunger, discomfort, pain, injury and disease, fear and distress, and freedom to express normal behaviour. These are, in theory, a rather effective way to establish whether or not an animal is experiencing a welfare friendly life. Yet, when it comes to applying them we tend to like the idea more than the cost of ensuring it.



Compromise between costs and welfare

Addressing issues of animal welfare can be expensive, and, when it comes to domestic food production, we like our food affordable (or should I say cheap). How many times have you gone to the supermarket to purchase eggs and reached for the value eggs rather than paying more for the free range ones? I have to be honest, on a student budget I am guilty of this quite often. I, like many families, want to save that extra 50p a week, but I have started to wonder – at what cost? There exists a great divide between



implementing the appropriate acts to ensure animal welfare and the actual cost of production. Medical treatment may have a positive benefit on the animal but a negative impact on the end product. For instance, there are legitimate concerns about medicinal withdrawal periods when treating meat, egg or milk producing animals. We need to treat these animals, but we don't wish to consume residues of those medications. Also, costs associated with treatment and improved welfare can be prohibitive. For example, flocks of relatively low market-value animals, such as sheep, can experience an increase in easily

treatable problems such as footrot, but the cost of treatment can exceed any possible return, making it difficult, if not impossible, for farmers to make a living. In such cases, we could say that good welfare does increase production; a healthy animal delivers a better product. However, the market demand for affordable products creates major economic problems for farmers. The difference between the cost of production and possible return may be too great.

In effect, not treating or managing the medical problem costs so much less than the economic return for doing so, the conclusion might easily be in these cases, why treat? I like to believe that no farmer wishes to see their animals in poor health, but culling curable animals, or even ignoring a problem, could become a much more attractive option.

Recent changes to animal welfare law geared towards improving standards have tremendous cost implications. One poultry farmer with whom I had the opportunity to work told me that the changes were costing him over £100,000 per barn. That was on top of the cost of running the business, including marketing and general production-related costs. What's more, this cost could not be recouped through his product sales, because while the changes were mandatory the product price would not be increased sufficiently to pay for them.

Role of welfare initiatives and farm assurance schemes

There is some good news. Certain welfare standards and assurance programmes run by supermarket conglomerates, and individual industries or countries, could assist in the maintenance of good welfare standards in intensive farming. In an informal e-mail discussion I recently had with Dr Caroline Hewson (a veterinarian and former Research Chair in Animal Welfare, Atlantic Veterinary College), she spoke of a colleague of hers in farm animal practice, with work-

ing knowledge of farms, whose farm supplies such supermarket companies as Waitrose and Marks and Spencer.

These farmers were reportedly content, well paid and treated fairly. Such corporate arrangements offer real benefits to farmers, and increase public confidence through quality branding, resulting in an increased market for that product. While not guaranteed, it is perhaps more likely that animals through associated market branding are recipients of better welfare practice. However, this possible benefit still relies on the establishment and monitoring of welfare standards and the quality of assessment (training, measures used, frequency of unannounced inspection and actions taken to address failure to meet the standards).

Currently, these standards are voluntary. Farms need only comply with UK welfare legislation (The Animal Welfare Act 2006, Mutilations [Permitted Procedures], Welfare of Farmed Animals 2010 regulations and the individual species-based welfare codes). Although these regulations provide good coverage for many welfare concerns, there are some ways in which they do not suffice to ensure welfare standards are met. Assessment may be carried out, equipment and resources may be provided, but just because the resources are there doesn't mean that they are being used.

Farmers get a raw deal

The issue of compliance is closely linked to the economics of farming. Food produced in 2011 costs very much the same as it did 40 years ago. However, in that same period of time the cost of living has increased. For example, the cost of a pint of milk in 1970 was 5p per pint, compared with today's cost of around 45p. But, when taking into account the increased cost of living and inflation, in today's currency the 1970 cost of milk was the equivalent of 44p to 56p per pint (calculated using share of average earnings, per capita

GDP and share of GDP). Farmers are essentially receiving less for a product that now costs more to produce. As of January 2010, producing a litre of milk cost 26.4p, but the average price paid to the farmer for that same litre is 20 to 21p. The farmer's share of milk price has fallen from 58 per cent in 1995 to 36 per cent in 2005.

'We take our food and its easy availability and affordability for granted. We have lost respect not only for the food we have, but the effort to produce it as well.'

When the profit margin is so small, how can farmers afford to make the changes in favour of greater welfare?

More than a little depressing isn't it? Essentially our desire for affordable products has created a welfare issue. Can we really continue to expect the production of our food at such an immoral cost to another living being? In our conversation, Dr Hewson summed this dilemma up very well:

'In 2010, my impression from the sidelines is that the economics of the survival of the farm animal may trump questions of their being pain-free, largely because, as consumers, we are beguiled by the idea of cheap food – cheap everything in fact. We seem to know the price of everything, and to have forgotten the value of having nothing.'

We who have everything have lost that respect for the value of things that others have to work hard to produce. We take our food and its easy availability and affordability for granted. We have lost respect not only for the food we have, but the effort to produce it as well. Now that's food for thought.

Neglecting 'one health' leads to neglected diseases

By Peter Moore (5th Year, Cambridge)

Stepping into the yurt, the odour of mutton flesh and skin is overwhelming and the smoky fire does little to dull your senses. In the corner lies Ganzorig, his wife, Goyo, tending to his undulating fever with their children sitting nearby watching their father writhe in pain. The fever is not fatal, but it can last for many months and is exacerbated by incessant arthritic and muscular pain. Ganzorig is suffering from brucellosis, a bacterial disease that has become a growing problem in Mongolia, but one which the world seems unmotivated to eradicate or even control.

Brucellosis is a zoonotic disease – one that can be transmitted from animals to humans (and occasionally vice versa). Over 60 per cent of pathogens infective to humans are zoonotic, and the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies brucellosis as a 'neglected zoonotic disease' (NZD). What makes a disease 'neglected'? There are many reasons, but a general rule of thumb is that their impact appears, to most, to be insignificant. But with 40 per cent of the world's poor dependent upon making a living from agriculture and being hit with the double whammy of a zoonotic infection, can we afford to continue this neglect and simply hope that these diseases will eventually disappear?

A 2006 WHO report suggests that because NZDs cross the boundary of human and animal medicine, we struggle to compartmentalise them, with neither side accepting responsibility. As a result, countries that already have poor medical infrastructure further marginalise the

disease burden. Poor communication between the veterinary and medical communities leads to no real appreciation of the impact and consequently there are no programmes for control. The result is a neglected disease that continues to spiral uncontrolled.

Jim Scudamore (Integrated Control of Neglected Zoonosis, ICONZ) suggests that as well as having no real knowledge of disease incidence (the occurrence over time), there is no information on the costs to animal production or human health nor any indication of the most successful methods of control. Jim is a veterinary surgeon specialising in Veterinary Public Health and he believes that vets have a good broad range of expertise to deal with the animal side of the NZD equation, but that they cannot solve it on their own.

In the ICONZ project (www.iconzafrica.org/) he assesses the incidence of disease before intervention, then an intervention to control it, followed by measurements to see the outcome. From the results, ICONZ will prepare policy papers on costs and benefits, and attempt to persuade policy makers to take action.

So are we missing a key member of the team? Is there an unseen player that could make a real and lasting difference? Perhaps veterinary surgeons are the missing piece in international development.

By treating animals, can we truly treat people? Ganzorig is likely to have been infected from one of the small flock of sheep that he farms to supply his family with meat and

wool and which, in hard times, can be sold to keep the family above the poverty line. Brucellosis was almost eradicated from Mongolian animals in the 1980s, but, following the political turmoil after the break up of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, has reared its ugly face once more.

If the WHO had been able to continue vaccinating animals, perhaps Mongolian livestock and wildlife would be disease-free, and so would Ganzorig.

WHO sees the control of neglected diseases as a real and cost-effective opportunity for alleviating poverty and includes it in the plan to achieve Millennium Development Goal 6 (eradication of disease). Why then don't aid-donating countries, such as the UK, focus on programmes linked to NZD control? A call to Dr Alex Thiermann from the World Organization for Animal Health (which goes by its French acronym OIE) sheds some light. 'Many of these diseases have been eradicated in the developed world and there appears little incentive for us to help control them elsewhere, yet they continue to be a major issue. Vets can play a role in communicating the importance of NZDs to the world and also in helping design, implement and assess control programmes.'

It seems fitting, having just celebrated the 250th anniversary of the veterinary profession, we should look to vets to help build the infrastructure and programmes needed to alleviate rural poverty. The days of James Herriot style vetting have gone and the world has changed;

'The World Health Organization classifies brucellosis as a "neglected zoonotic disease"'

vets can now play a key role in helping humans as well as animals. When I tell people I am a veterinary student their reaction is invariably that it must be hard to treat an animal if it can't tell you where it hurts. This is when the most important principle of veterinary medicine comes into play: communication. If we can liaise with our clients and get a good history leading up to the illness, we can get a rough diagnosis. 'Vets aren't the pioneers of good communication!' continues Thiermann. 'OIE are developing a project with the One Health concept to illustrate the multifaceted work of veterinar-

'Their devastating consequences [neglected zoonotic diseases] are not easy to solve and they are killers of animals, people and communities'

ians called "Vets in Daily Life".' One Health aims to bring together the disciplines of human and veterinary medicine with environmental science. It appreciates the interface between people and animals (both domestic and wild) and the need to look at all three areas to create one plan that will help both people and animals. In common with any development package, money is a necessity. Aid agencies need to look afresh at where they target their resources and determine whether NZD control really can provide a cost-effective and lasting means towards alleviating poverty.

Initially a legal and political framework needs to be implemented, followed by infrastructure and, finally, programme delivery. But few, apart from a small section of WHO and independent NGOs, have set NZDs as a priority. These diseases aren't 'sexy'; the epidemiology is complex involving people, wildlife and domestic animals all at one interface. Their devastating consequences are not easy to solve and they are killers of animals, people and communities. We must first identify the communities suffering from these hidden diseases and provide effective treatment. Motivation for action must come from inside the medical and veterinary world. Only by working together in a consistent and manner will we ensure that Ganzorig's children will not face the same fate as their father.

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Milking and musing: dairy experiences in rural Vermont

By Sabrina Estabrook-Russett (1st Year, Edinburgh)

I was up before the alarm at precisely 03.21, mostly because it was too hot to sleep. The temperature in Vermont, USA, had become oppressive and it had stayed pretty hot throughout the night.

When I crawled out of my house in these pre-dawn hours it was during a particularly amazing morning lightning storm. The temperature had cooled, and I was lucky enough to spend the entire 45-minute drive to Shelburne watching high voltage dance across the sky. I pulled into the dairy at 04.30 and immediately found Sam, the herd manager, standing outside looking star-struck. Sam and I sat and watched the storm, with its low-lying purple clouds and bright lightning bolts, roll over the lake as the cows came in from pasture.

Although I'd spent only a few days with Sam, I'd come to expect rather sublime musings from him. He did not disappoint that morning. Sam is one of those people you feel lucky to spend time with, even if you know it's only for a few hours a week. I don't know where he's from, but I would consider him one of the most genuine people I've ever had the pleasure to meet. I hope that telling you about him will make you reconsider the private minds of all dairy farmers.

Sam has a scraggly white beard and lines on his temples hard-won from years of smiling. He has eyes that betray him; when you make his acquaintance they seem to pulse with a notion of being full – 'I am overflowing; I am happy; I am hard-worked and weathered; in love with this land and these cows; I have figured out exactly how this "grace" thing works'. Meeting Sam made me long for whatever it is that he has.

This, incidentally, has nothing to do with his lake-view cottage, situated among 1400 acres of the most enviable pasture lands that the state has to offer. I think that Sam could live in a broken little shack and still show up just as happy every morning.

Sam talks slow, like most older farmers, and you are left wondering, in the great pauses of conversation, what kind of evaluation he's making of you. He seems to have an ability to peek into you and assess what you're made of; I think he hopes it is hard work and an affinity for manure! As the cows settled into their routine in the parlour, and the machines drone on with their click-click-click suction sounds, we worked in unison to clean the udders of his 'girls' and gather the day's milk. Our conversation may have sounded strange as our chores and appearances were probably deceptive. We wore muck boots and dirty baseball caps, and allowed the manure to dry on our arms as we worked.

I have come to appreciate that simple farming doesn't necessarily translate into a simple mind; Sam had one of the most extensive vocabularies I've heard outside university. This morning, he chats with me about genetics and research, as he knows these things pique my curiosity. I let him in on the joke of earning a bachelor's degree in anthropology, and we swap stories about how we respectively fell in love with Scotland: he in the 1970s and me in 2009.

We are finishing up when Sam starts talking about the farming bug. I smile, as I have heard of such an affliction in the animal science circle. Sam says that he is only pontificating, but he believes that farming grounds you. He says we are plagued by a society that is more virtual than real, and that doing this work reminds you of what is most authentic. I agree



with him. We have fake fingernails, expensive purses, virtual friends that we'd never bother having coffee with, and Twitter, Facebook, and Linked-In profiles that are carefully painted so as to deny the humanity of our failures and embarrassments. But Sam's argument, insightful in its simplicity, is that we don't know, for example, how cheese is made. The underdeveloped musculature of our forearms would make milking cows a real hardship, if we could figure it out at all. We don't know how to till the land or gather eggs or where to find wild fiddleheads. We have somehow lost the connection to farming – civilisation's oldest occupation. This makes me appreciate these weeks of 'food animal' experience even more. I feel as though I have been let in on a secret; given a way to come back down to earth, if I so choose. I am overtired and sunburned and have sore arms, but I feel more grounded than I have in a long time. This hard, dirty work is good for the soul.

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The Asian elephant is in need of friends

By Sophie Bagnall (AVS Senior Rep, 4th Year, Nottingham)

Last summer I went with some friends to carry out a clinical veterinary placement with Friends of the Asian Elephant (FAE) Foundation. FAE is located in Lampang, Thailand, and was founded by Soraida Salwala. During our time at FAE, we not only gained a large amount of hands-on veterinary experience with elephants, but also learned about the huge conservation problem threatening the current Asian elephant population.

To give you a brief history of FAE, Soraida Salwala is (in short) one gutsy woman! The moment you meet her you can feel her drive, passion and solemn determination to help the endangered Asian elephant. Soraida told us the idea to found FAE first came to her at eight years old, when she saw an injured elephant lying on the side of the road. It outraged her that nothing could be done to help and that there was nowhere for that elephant to be taken to for veterinary care. From that day forward she has committed her life and soul to setting up FAE – the world's first elephant hospital.

What does FAE do?

Since its opening in 1993, FAE has treated over 3000 elephants; protecting them from injury, sickness and abuse from humans. The most common presentations encountered at FAE are elephants that have stepped on landmines crossing the border from Burma to Thailand. These landmines cause brutal injuries to elephants – often involving the partial/total loss of a limb. During our placement, five



of the nine patients were landmine casualties, some of which had been recovering at the hospital for over 10 years. Motala, a 48 year old landmine survivor, was the hospital's very own 'celebrity elephant'. The media attention that her injury received generated a large amount of funding – leading to the development of the world's first elephant prosthetic limb.

Every day we were at the hospital was spent working alongside elephant vet Dr Preecha. No-one has more experience with Asian elephants than Dr Preecha, and it was a privilege to learn from him. As well as teaching us to perform routine treatments (a favourite memory was treating an elephant head wound from a precarious 15 foot platform), Dr Preecha also gave us lectures about the history of the Asian elephant and

its contact with human beings. He referred to us as 'the children' – instructing staff to 'eat with the children tonight' or 'cook for the children'. We felt even more like children when he sat us in front of the Disney classic 'Dumbo' one evening, in an attempt to help us consider how the elephant is portrayed in Western countries. By the end of the placement, we couldn't help but look up to him as our Thai 'father'.

On a more serious note, it is important to emphasise the problems facing Asian elephants in our world today. The current main threats to the Asian elephant population are:

- Illegal poaching;
- Loss of habitat;
- Abuse of elephants in tourism.

Humans versus elephants

The key issues here seem to be based on a tussle between humans and elephants. As man tears down more forest (often illegally) the land elephants can occupy shrinks. To make matters worse, elephants in the wild are regarded as a pest in rural areas of Thailand; they feed on and trample crops, thereby having a detrimental effect on the livelihoods of farming families.

As well as the fate of wild elephants being of concern, there is also the illtreatment of elephants in captivity. A century ago approximately 100,000 elephants worked in the logging and transport business, too often being abused by their keepers and worked to death. Dr Preecha was the resident vet with a logging group for 20 years. He described the brutalities of many badly-trained keepers towards their elephants. He explained how



Landmines cause brutal injuries to elephants

the elephants sometimes retaliate. He told us he had seen men have their heads ripped from their necks by elephants. He said he had even seen a keeper eaten whole by his Asian elephant: 'One minute he was there, the next all that was left were his shoes and watch!' (We gasped in horror at the idea of an elephant eating a man, but he seemed to find it quite amusing . . .) What this proves, however, is that these strong animals are not meant to be tamed, and that perhaps they were not meant to be used as working tools for our industries.

It was recently common in Bangkok to see elephants being paraded through hot and noisy streets for the purposes of tourism. They would be expected to pose for pictures and were often struck by vehicles.

What can we do?

In the past 10 years, Soraida and her organisation have been successful in getting the use of elephants in logging and in tourism banned. But, it appears that enforcement of these

laws has been next to impossible. It also does not help us solve the problem – where can the elephants go? What can they be used for in Thailand besides tourism? Can they ever exist peacefully in the wild, or has man left no room for them to survive? Soraida's fight for the welfare of elephants has gained her few friends. She has received death threats, anonymous phone calls and a gang even planted a king cobra in the hospital. Through this her strength has never wavered: 'We do our best and things have certainly got better for elephants, but we know we are up against a tremendous problem. God willing, I will devote my every waking hour to helping our elephants.'

Spending two weeks with these beautiful, and, in my experience, gentle animals has been a life-changing experience. It has truly highlighted to me the plight of the Asian elephant, something that I wasn't aware of before this placement.

There appears to be no single, easy answer to Thailand's elephant problem. In the meantime, FAE has

set an example to the world of the need to conserve Asian elephants. Since it started, further sanctuaries have opened in other countries in an attempt to care for these amazing creatures.

For those who are moved by this issue, I would ask you to look at 'The Eyes of Thailand' project website. Its film crew is making a documentary about FAE to raise awareness and encourage governments to ban the use of landmines and cluster bombs. To quote the writers: 'Ultimately, the film hopes to convey the added sense of urgency for people and organisations worldwide to pressure Thailand to change the law in order to protect the dwindling number of Asian elephants. If nothing is done, the species will become extinct within the next 50 years'.

FAE's work is in a constant battle to continue with little funding available to support the needs of its elephants. In the meantime a vital question urgently needs an answer: What is the future of the Asian elephant?

Panda watch: China's national treasure

By Amy Coakley (AVS Junior Rep, 3rd Year, Dublin)

Last summer, after attending the IVSA congress in South Korea, I and fellow vet student, Frank, decided to backpack around China.

We thought it would be great to try to arrange some work with giant pandas in the Sichuan province of western China, and visiting the home of the panda was high on our list of priorities. Frank did some research before we left Ireland and found an American vet online who had connections with the Bifengxia Panda Base in Ya'an. He e-mailed Dr Wang, the chief veterinarian, and arranged for us to visit the base for three days.

After a frightening journey up a mountain in a rickety minibus, we arrived at our destination. Dr Wang greeted us and gave us a tour of the research centre. It was during the tour that I met my first panda. Unfortunately for me, I wasn't born when Dublin zoo had its own resident pair of pandas, Ming Ming and Ping Ping – for 100 days – in 1986. I read online that Ming Ming went on to become the longest living panda in the world. Living to 34 years old



(the average lifespan of pandas in captivity is 22), I'm guessing the Irish air contributed to her longevity! The first panda I met was blind and quite old, meaning that she could never be returned to the wild and was in an enclosure, but she came up to us when we got nearby. As she approached I heard a noise that sounded like a dolphin clicking! I couldn't believe it when the vet informed me that pandas make that

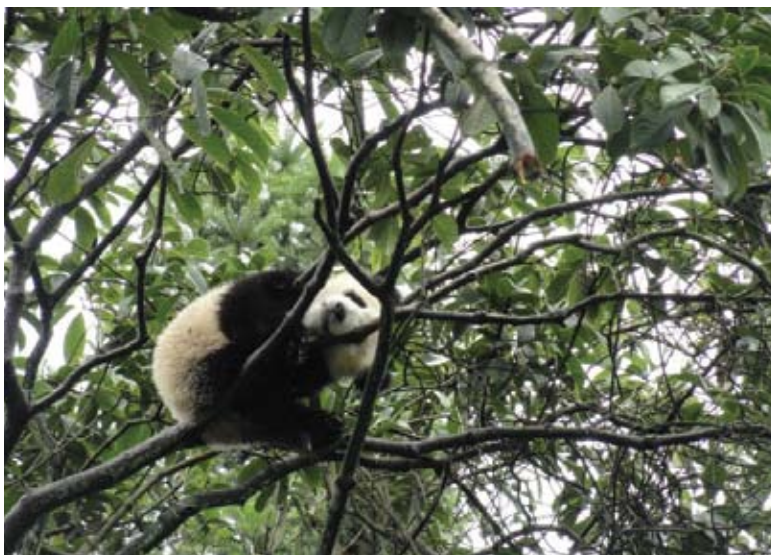
odd noise when they are looking for bamboo.

While at the base, I found out a lot about giant pandas. There are now only less than 2000 of them left in existence. The majority of these are wild, but many have been rescued from the wild after injury or sickness, and now live in specially designed panda bases in Sichuan. The Chinese people are proud of their national mascot and in the past have used pandas as gifts to other countries in an attempt to improve international relations, in a practice known as 'panda diplomacy'.

The base we visited in Bifengxia was primarily a research base, which focused on the breeding of pandas until an earthquake struck the main base at Wolong in 2008. There was one panda casualty and another panda went missing during the disaster. The remaining pandas were moved to the Bifengxia base where newly-designed enclosures were created for them. These days pandas are no longer given as gifts but are loaned out to countries for an annual sum of money. Recently, Edinburgh Zoo was given a loan of two pandas, Tian Tian and Yang Guang (whose names translate as 'Sweetie' and 'Sunshine'), for 10 years. Pandas, however, don't come cheap! It will cost the zoo around a million US dollars a year to keep the pandas on loan. I was lucky enough to come across Yang Guang, the male panda, while I was in Bifengxia. Little did he know as I watched him munch on his bamboo, that he'd very soon become a celebrity.

Conservation is a big issue when it comes to the giant panda. A panda's staple food is bamboo, which often goes through periods of poor growth, but their diet was supplemented at the centre by special bread, made in the 'panda bakery'.

Pandas are slow breeders both



in captivity and in the wild. A lot of research goes into predicting their oestrus cycles and finding them the right mate. Pandas are very picky when choosing a mate and this can lead to vicious fights between the sexes at mating time. Before the researchers and keepers in Bifengxia can focus on reintroducing pandas back into the wild, they must first increase the numbers in captivity from the mere 300 that exist now. Edinburgh Zoo has insisted that 90 per cent of its loan money must go back into panda conservation. It is hoped that the two 'Scottish' pandas will breed in Scotland and

therefore contribute to raising the world's panda population.

The Chinese are very protective of their national bear (known as xiong mao or 'bear cat' in Mandarin) and insist that every panda cub born abroad must be returned to China when it reaches maturity. While walking around the base, we came across a woman from Texas who had followed the progress of a female panda born in San Diego zoo called Hua Mei which translates as 'China/USA'. Hua Mei was returned to China in 2004 where she has now mothered many baby pandas of her own. This woman

had sponsored Hua Mei and had come all the way from the USA to visit her in Bifengxia. She was delighted to see her doing so well.

Although I didn't manage to see pandas in their natural habitat, I am happy that I got to learn about them in their own country and to see the work that the Chinese people are doing to preserve one of their national emblems. I'm looking forward to visiting Yang Guang in Edinburgh Zoo in the near future, but somehow I doubt he'll remember the fascinated Irish girl who was staring at him as he ate his bamboo in China!

Catching up with the fastest cat in the world

By Katie Meacher (AVS Junior Rep, 3rd Year, Edinburgh)

By the time you've completed 12 weeks of animal husbandry EMS, you most definitely feel ready to enjoy a restful 2nd-year summer. But, with a looming summer without EMS, and taking the advice from older years to make the most of it, I decided it was about time I became slightly more adventurous and ventured out of my comfort zone to do something that turned into, quite frankly, one of the best 'holidays' I have ever had.

The Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre in the Limpopo province of South Africa is predominantly a rehabilitation centre for sick, orphaned and breeding cheetahs, but is also host to other weird and wonderful animals such as the ground hornbill, caracles, nyala and African wild dogs, to name but a



few. With slight apprehension, I arrived at the centre along with three other British vet students to learn that our accommodation – thatched huts in a fenced-off camp – was actually in the middle of the Kapama Big 5 Game Reserve. Throughout our time there, we were informed that lions had been round the camp at night, and we were regularly visited by warthogs while having breakfast.

Our three weeks at the cen-

tre were incredibly hands-on, and involved getting up at 4 am to prepare raw meat for the cheetahs and then feed them; feeding the other animals at the centre, including the vultures, and watching the vet whenever he was around. On one of the days, we saw the vet dart two wild dogs that were to be taken to another reserve, and watched him do a postmortem examination on a black-footed cat that had died suddenly. Another day, we got to play with the incredibly adorable six-week old cheetah cubs, and I was lucky enough to get to feed one of them.

When we weren't buzzing about at the centre, we were taken on lots of trips to the surrounding area. One of these involved a trip to the Kruger National Park where we were lucky enough to see all of the Big 5 twice over (buffalo, elephant, lion, leopard and rhino) as well as giraffes, baboons, ostriches and many more!

Another day, we were woken up very early under the impression we were going to dart cheetahs at a local reserve, to then be told that we were actually going to Camp Jabulani to ride elephants. This was an amazing experience that I will never forget, almost made better by the surprise factor!

My three weeks at the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre definitely brightened up my 2nd-year summer. If you have a passion for the fastest cat in the world, want to get really hands-on with cheetah and are looking for something to fill up your summer, I would most definitely recommend the HESC.

For more information visit: <http://www.hesc.co.za/index.html>



Let's hear it for tea breaks

By Jennie McMullen (AVS Junior Rep, 3rd Year, Glasgow)

EMS is an important part of every vet student's life, taking up holidays and spare weekends to mark off those crucial weeks. What is it that we love about this never-ending slog? Is it the early starts on frosty, drizzly mornings? The all-consuming mind-blank when asked a clinical question? The piercing fear of holding a scalpel over something that actually has a pulse, with anxious owners waiting? For me, the highlight of EMS is not the quest for knowledge and perfection, it's the tea breaks!

You may be wondering where I'm going with this, but, in my opinion, there's nothing better than washing the 'caesarean-slime' off your arms/face/hair etc, and stretching out the ache in your back from hefting a kicking, swinging calf over a barn door, only to hear the shout across the yard: 'Will you come in for a cup of tea, will ya?'

Farmers and horse owners have to be some of the most eccentric people in the country, so pulling up a seat at their kitchen table with a dog's chin resting on your knee is going to be interesting. Out comes the battered, ancient biscuit tin; in comes the jug of straight-from-the-cow milk, complete with the dubious 'unpasteurised' foam on top, and on goes the kettle. Sitting at these well-scrubbed tables across the countryside, you'll learn more about animals than any vet journal will tell you, usually along with a fair few hair-raising things about the locals you never needed to know.

Being a vet is so much more than fixing broken budgies, or jabbing furious cats with boosters; it's about being a part of the community. Being a vet you join that exclusive club of the postman, the milkman, the police and the pub landlords – getting a wave from every passing car and stopped in the shop every time to be consulted on an under-the-weather hamster. And that's one of the reasons why



Picture: Christian Bridgewater | Dreamstime.com

I keep getting out of bed on those frosty, drizzling mornings – for as long as there's animals, vets will be a valued, respected part of the community, able to make a difference to people whose lives are centred around those of their furry friends.

Now how could you say no to that? You've a better chance of turning down a third slightly stale hobnob, or the last fruit scone from the tin.

Membership rates

Please note that some universities provide varying levels of subsidy for their students' BVA membership.

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

■ All veterinary schools..... Free

SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS AND ABOVE

■ Cambridge and Nottingham Free

■ Liverpool £33.50

■ Bristol, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow and London £36.00

The small print...

Membership of the Association is open to all members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), to those on the Supplementary Veterinary Register, to students studying for a degree entitling them to membership of the RCVS and to holders of EU veterinary qualifications which would entitle the holder to membership of the RCVS under the terms of the EU Professional Directives. I would like to become a member of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and agree to abide by the rules as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association (copy available on request). I agree to pay my subscription by the renewal date, and if at any time I wish to resign from membership undertake to send my resignation to the Secretary the year which I wish to resign.

Please complete this form and return it to: Membership office, BVA, 7 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NQ.

Your details

FULL NAME (INC. TITLE): DATE OF BIRTH:

UNIVERSITY: YEAR OF STUDY:

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POSTCODE: POSTCODE:

SEND JOURNALS TO: TERM-TIME ADDRESS HOME ADDRESS HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY BEEN A BVA MEMBER? YES NO

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We occasionally provide members' details to companies screened by BVA. If you would not like your details to be given out please tick here

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BVA membership is **free** for all first-year vet students and is **just £3 per month** for those in the second year and above



Supporting you while you study

Free BVA journals

Personal copies of the BVA's world-renowned journals, *Veterinary Record* and *In Practice*, including access to the online versions via the **BVA Publications website**—an invaluable scientific resource.

Free EMS insurance

Going out on EMS each year can be stressful enough, without having to worry about what will happen if you have an accident while on your placement. This is why the **BVA provides free insurance cover to all BVA student members**. So you can be confident you have the right cover when you need it most.

EMS guide

Making the most of EMS—this student guide is a practical resource to help you get the most out of your EMS experience.

Online student centre

A dedicated section on the BVA's website (www.bva.co.uk) designed to be a quick access point for all of your **veterinary-related queries**.

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Through Lloyd & Whyte, the BVA's insurance and financial affinity partner, you can get fantastic discounts on **specialist travel insurance**, which includes cover for working and EMS abroad.

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The BVA offers **four annual student travel grants**, which all have a relevance to research and the improvement of animal welfare, especially in the developing world.

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