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# OPVSC

## newsletter

For the students, by the students

Issue 1 : Summer 2017

## Bronkies outing

On 9 August, Women's day, the OP Rock Climbing Club decided to take a break from the books and head out to Bronkies, situated just outside Bronkhorstspuit, along the banks of the Bronkhorstspuit River. Bronkies is a popular climbing spot with numerous routes to climb.

As this is my first year with the OP Rock Climbing Club, I haven't been on rock that much and was quite excited to get out there. We left Onderstepoort campus early, hoping to avoid the public holiday rush and make the most of the day.

Upon arrival, I found myself staring at the landscape before me, mesmerised by the beauty. Packed and geared-up, we started our hike down the mountain side to find the perfect routes. By the time we had picked our routes and put on our harnesses and shoes, I was ecstatic. My (chalked) hands were itching to climb. The real fun was about to start.

Within minutes, we were scrambling up the rock, using every nook and cranny we could find as a potential grip or foothold, trying our best not to come tumbling down – which was much easier said than done.

The eager beaver that I am, I dared to lead on one of the routes. Unfortunately, this resulted in me finding myself climbing and falling, on the same spot, not even 2 m above the ground for about half an hour. Eventually, I admitted defeat and descended to the ground, sporting numerous new cuts and bruises (not to mention my bruised ego).

One of the amazing things about this club is the support we provide to each other while we are climbing. I realised this again on this excursion, because, although I failed miserably on my first attempt, the team would not allow me to give up that easily. After resting my muscles for a while, I re-attempted the route – which now stood like a mountain before me. With the help and guidance (and the occasional

boost) from the other team members, I managed to reach the top. Descending for the second time, I felt like a champion.

Although it is fun to climb, it is just as entertaining to watch others climb. You would be surprised how your body can twist and bend when you are clinging onto a rock face for dear life. I don't think I've seen such awkward splits since watching *Cinderella on Ice* as a child.

On the side lines, while some were climbing, others were relaxing and chatting about everything and nothing. We even had a massage train at one point. Throughout the day, poses were struck

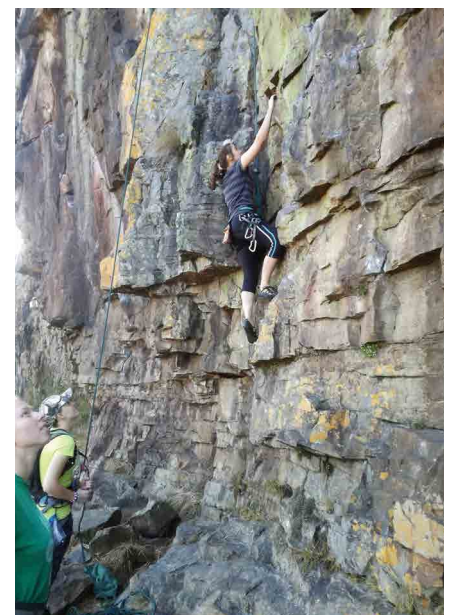
and photos were taken; stories were shared and jokes were told. Before we knew it, six hours had come and gone in a flash. We ended our day by soaking up the mid-afternoon sun while sitting on a rock in the middle of the river; listening to the water trickling past us.

In the car on our way back to Onderstepoort, I wondered why anyone would be crazy enough to do rock climbing with all those cuts and bruises, blisters on your hands, aching muscles and rope burns. But then I thought: Who *wouldn't* want to do it?

*Article by: Alexandra Graham*



*Members of the OP Rock Climbing Club help each other get strapped in.*



*Scaling a rock face is always easier with friends watching your back.*

# Message from the Chairperson

The Onderstepoort Veterinary and Para-Veterinary Committee (OPVSC) has, since its inception, been tasked with representing the student body of Onderstepoort. Being an official representative body comes with its own challenges and these seem to evolve with time. But, as it is with life: the more things change, the more they stay the same.

As we are challenged with new matters, some old ones manage to work their way in there and remind us that “quick fixes” have not, and will never be the solution. We need to ensure sustainability through improvement, evolution and transformation, which needs to transcend the lifetime of one committee.

Another important facet at play here is communication. Our committee aims to be in contact with its main priority: every single student of Onderstepoort.

If we cannot address and improve communication with our students, we have failed in our task overall, because then we would have only served ourselves and our own ideas.

Another major influence that we have identified as a key role-player in achieving these ideals is trust (something that seems to have been taking a punch with the

passing years). A sustainable change in this area is crucial, as we believe that trust is essential for moving forward and evolving efficiently. In order to restore this trust, we are pushing for a transparent culture in which relevant information is not hidden from stakeholders.

Our students deserve to know how they will be affected by the decisions made about their studies and their campus environment. In the spirit of our ideals of sustainability, improved communication and transparency, your OPVSC is taking a more holistic approach by partnering with House Onderstepoort House Committee to bring these ideals to you in a feasible and lasting manner.

We will challenge anything and anyone that stands in the way of these ideals and, in our partnership, we will be stronger.

Watch this space.



*Riaan Crafford  
Chairperson of the OPVSC*

## OPRC grading

On 20 June, the Onderstepoort Riding Club (OPRC) organised a grading event for all of its members. These grading events take place annually to assign new members a grade ranging from one to four. This grade is representative of their level of skill, and will help in assigning them an appropriate pony.

Current members are also given the opportunity to be assessed with the aim to improve their grade. Grading takes place twice a year. The February event is often attended by an external judge, who helps in assigning a grading to new members.

The mid-year event then only serves to “grade up”, which is why fewer people typically attend. At this time, an external judge is usually not present and gradings are increased by committee vote.

Most recently, we had six participants at the mid-year event. The event at the beginning of the year was attended by closer to 20 participants.

A lot of preparation goes into setting up these events. They are usually organised by the person in charge of the “Allocations” portfolio. In preparation for the event, the arena must be set up in accordance with the test that the attendees will take, and feedback sheets must be printed and filled out on the day for participants to take home.

The last grading went smoothly and all participants graded up. We even had a few beginner riders who graded up so that they may ride by themselves without being accompanied by an instructor.

This is a sign that our beginner rider programme is improving. As the OPRC, we hope to see many more participants in future.



*An OPRC rider during her grading.*

# OPRC lunging clinic

The OPRC has a lot of riders that are currently in the process of backing ponies (breaking them in so that they are ridden for the first time). This year, we noticed that the riders have not made as much progress as in the previous two years. In order to help the riders, we arranged a lunging clinic with Anika de Witt, a fellow veterinary science student and a very experienced equestrian rider and handler.

The clinic was offered to all of the students working with young horses. A total of 16 students attended the clinic, which took place at a yard located 17 km from Onderstepoort. The OPRC covered 60% of the costs for the clinic and provided transportation to all members attending the clinic.

The clinic covered topics on how to teach a young horse to lunge, basics on the different lunging equipment, as well as more advanced lunging exercises to teach the more experienced horses. Every OPRC member also received a booklet at the clinic with all of the information that was covered.

In general, the students all enjoyed themselves and the feedback we received was positive. We are hoping that the riders will be able to try the new lunging techniques on the Onderstepoort ponies and, hopefully, make quicker progress with the backing process.

The OPRC committee would like to arrange more clinics in future covering other topics that the riding club members may be interested in. We will also try to get instructors to come to Onderstepoort to offer clinics using the OPRC ponies. We are happy to see that the first clinic offered to OPRC members was a success.



*OPRC members working hard to acquire their new skills at the lunging clinic.*

# SANBS and OP students' blood plasma drive against rabies a huge success

A drive at the Faculty of Veterinary Science's Onderstepoort Campus to recruit hyperimmune blood plasma donors to alleviate the shortage of rabies immunoglobulin in South Africa attracted over 200 students on Monday, 18 September 2017. Rabies immunoglobulin is a key ingredient in the prevention of the disease.

The drive – ahead of World Rabies Day on 28 September – is an ongoing initiative of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) and the Faculty, and is aimed at increasing the number of eligible plasma donors in the country.

Rabies immunoglobulin is produced from plasma collected from hyperimmune donors – the term used to describe donors who have been vaccinated against rabies. All veterinary students have to be vaccinated due to the threat of exposure to animals infected with the rabies virus, making Onderstepoort Campus the perfect recruiting ground for hyperimmune donors.

South Africa requires 2 300 litres of plasma (from 3 650 donations) a year to produce the necessary amount of rabies immunoglobulin. According to the National Bioproducts Institute, the SANBS collected just over half of this (1 450 litres) last year, forcing the Department of Health to incur great cost and waste time importing equine immunoglobulin from the European Union.

Ivor Hobbs, regional marketing manager for the SANBS, hailed the drive as a huge success. 'More than 200 students registered to be tested to see if they are eligible to be plasma donors, which is absolutely fantastic. Of course, not all will be eligible, but even if only a fraction are eligible, that will help us boost the number of hyperimmune plasma donors in the country, meaning we can provide more plasma to the National Bioproducts Institute, which manufactures the rabies immunoglobulin, among other much-needed plasma products,' he said.

Kelley Greenland, a first-year veterinary nursing student, was the first to be tested. She said she wanted to donate plasma as 'rabies is becoming more prevalent and a lot of people can get infected and die. If I can help someone else, why wouldn't I?' she asked.

Her friend and fellow first-year veterinary nursing student, Zanari Oliver said she was a regular blood donor, but wanted to donate plasma after hearing about the great shortage.

'It really doesn't hurt, so why not take a few minutes out of your day to save someone's life?' she asked.

Dzunisani Ngobeni, a sixth-year veterinary science student, said donating plasma is a way to contribute. 'It's about caring for other people. This is a way I can help others survive without spending a cent, and I hope someday that someone will do the same for me,' she said.

Phakamisa Tolibadi, a first-year veterinary nursing student, said he is a regular blood donor who wants to make a difference. 'Our blood saves lives. It's amazing to realise the importance of our blood, so I am really excited at the prospect of being a plasma donor,' he said.

Addressing the Onderstepoort students, Professor Lucille Blumberg, deputy director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, said: 'The big

problem [in South Africa] is availability and supply. We run out [of rabies immunoglobulin] because we don't have enough supply. Your role is really about preventing rabies, which is a totally preventable disease.'

Pam Larkin, head of strategic resources and marketing development at the National Bioproducts Institute, said that South Africa needs around 295 plasma donors who donate at least 12 times a year to meet the demand, but currently there are only between 280 and 320 donors who donate around seven times a year.

'We need more people to donate as soon as they qualify to join the panel. That's why we were so excited to be part of this drive,' she said.

Plasma donors can donate every two weeks and it takes about 45 minutes. So far, the partnership between the Faculty and the SANBS has not only delivered exceptional results but it has become an ongoing project. The SANBS has since returned to the Onderstepoort Campus every second Monday and will continue to do so in 2018.





# An inspiring trip to uShaka Marine World in Durban

uShaka Marine World is the largest aquarium in the Southern Hemisphere and, given its size, we struggled to find the exact spot where we were supposed to meet the veterinarian on the first day of our adventure.

With some help, we eventually found the veterinarians' office, located right behind the dolphinarium. We arrived at the office just as they were discussing the active cases. Everything was a bit of a blur as they went through every case quite comfortably, while I was still struggling to figure out what drugs they were administering. We were introduced to Drs Caryl Knox and Francois Lampen, as well as other staff members.

To understand the veterinary practises applied there, you have to understand the mechanics of uShaka Marine World. The huge aquarium is made up of three entities that include the theme park, the marine research department and the aquarium. We predominantly worked with the staff at the aquarium, including the trainers, aquarists and veterinarians. On the first day, we were taken on a quick tour through the facility and were introduced to some of the people who work there. The dynamics of the veterinary set-up at uShaka is very different to what you will find, for example, at a small animal veterinary practice.

They have enough funds to spend on their animals, which means that they have a variety of state-of-the-art equipment, such as mobile x-rays. It furthermore enables them to perform expensive tests on a regular basis, including on-site biochemical tests. The other big difference is that these veterinarians don't deal with animal owners, but rather with trainers. These people are passionate about the animals that they work with, even though most of them do not want the animals performing. However, they all realise that the animals will never survive in the wild.

These trainers uphold themselves to the highest possible ethical standards, even in light of getting rebuked by people who don't agree with animal shows. These people are amazing, given the fact that they both hate and love their jobs at the same time.

Because the trainers spend hours watching the animals, including documenting bowel movements, they can be hard to deal with if you need to perform procedures that might seem invasive or unnecessary.

Before the veterinarians can embark on any procedures, they have to conduct plenty of research, which sometimes still ends in vain. This is because there isn't enough data available on each animal that they have in the aquarium, especially not in veterinary terms. For example, when the veterinarians are asked to treat a sea horse with a distended abdomen, they may scratch their heads, but they do not fret, because they are used to thinking on their feet.

The diversity of the animals in the aquarium is, of course, the biggest difference when compared to other veterinary practices or clinics. We were treating unique animals ranging from sea horses to rays and from turtles to tiny crocodiles, each one with its own quirk. One of the highlights was assisting with medicals for the rays (*Superorder Batoidea*), which entailed anaesthetising the rays, following sonar with gill checks.

This was a very strange set-up. Two huge containers hosted the rays as they were being anaesthetised. While someone reversed an animal, someone else was

either taking a ray back or fishing for another one. All the while, Venecia and I were just holding what was asked to be held. It was definitely a first for me to hold the ultrasound machine and press the buttons, while at the same time avoiding getting the machine wet from the splashing elasmobranch. Flying rays are fascinating creatures with soft noses. Interestingly enough, sharks are close relatives of rays.

Another interesting case was a constipated turtle on which we performed a Barium procedure. This meant that we had to initially x-ray the turtle to see what was wrong and a few times after that to see if the barium was passing through the bowels. We got so good at setting up the x-ray equipment that the veterinarians entrusted us with handling the equipment on our own.

We also had some interesting post-mortem examinations. These included an examination of a huge nurse shark, a 35 year-old penguin, as well as a juvenile penguin. We were privileged to be there when Dr Brett Garner consulted in that week. He performed the turtle medicals, which entailed an x-ray and an ultrasound, and he performed abdominal surgery on two baby crocodiles who consumed silicon, causing bowel obstruction.

My trip to uShaka was inspiring. It was both an adventure and a great educational trip at the same time. We learned a lot and are very grateful for the opportunity.

*Article by: Riaan Crafford*

# House Onderstepoort chosen as Faculty House of the Year at UP

On 28 September, House Onderstepoort made the Faculty proud when it received the Faculty House of the Year award during the annual Day and Faculty House Awards of the University of Pretoria, hosted at the Hatfield Campus.



*The chairperson of the OPVSC 2016/17, Thandekile Maseko, receiving recognition of service and SRC colours on behalf of the OPVSC from the DSA representative, Carel Willemse.*



*The chairperson of the OPVSC 2016/17, Thandekile Maseko, receiving recognition from Dr Rina Wilken for the community engagement efforts of the OPVSC.*



*The faculty house guardian, Dr Sarah Clift, receiving recognition for serving as house guardian from Dr Rina Wilken.*



*Photos by Craig Murrell*

*The representative members of the OPVSC, as well as the faculty house guardian receiving the Faculty House of the Year award from Dr Rina Wilken*

*Left to right: Jurgens Barnard, Dr Sarah Clift, Trisha Mwewa, Thandekile Maseko, Dr Rina Wilken, Pieter Kieviet, Riaan Crafford.*

# OPVSC Committee

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## 2017



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