

Community Engagement Newsletter

Faculty of Veterinary Science

Spring 2012



“Save the Rhinos” education programme

Megan Scrooby (BVSc I)

In the plight of the rhino, we thought what better cause than to create awareness about rhino poaching, with the aim of finding a solution to it. We decided the best way to move forward was to set up an education programme for local schools because, as Mr Nelson Mandela put it, “Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world.” We contacted Kirsty Brebner from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, as well as Warrick Wragg, a trainer of anti-poaching sniffer dogs, to collaborate with us on this project.

On 25 May, we set off to Irene Primary School, where we were met by very enthusiastic children and their teachers. We had arranged with the school that the children would have a civvy day to raise funds for the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s Anti-poaching Unit, which was a great success, with the children raising a lot more money than any of us could have expected. In addition to this, Lizz Wragg also offered to assist and sell Rhino Force bracelets to the children and teachers on the day. This money also went to the Endangered Wildlife Trust. We then had a session with the Grade 1–3 learners, which started off with each child getting a Save the Rhinos sticker. This was followed by a talk by Rynette Coetzee from the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Warrick Wragg and his assistant, along with one of their anti-poaching sniffer dogs, Rico, then did a demonstration,

which allowed the children to choose where to hide some rhino horn shavings for Rico to sniff out. It was amazing to watch Rico in action as he managed to sniff out the rhino horn in less than a minute each and every time, and this after only two weeks of training.



The demonstration was received with great excitement from the children, and even those who were previously afraid of dogs, took to Rico very quickly. Next up was our presentation, which consisted of a short video clip, a children’s story about rhino poaching, and then telling them what they, as children, can do to help save the rhinos. We had lots of sweets and goodies to give out at the end, as well as a colouring-in competition for them to do over the next few weeks, upon which we selected a winner.



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continued from page 1



After a short break, we had a session with the Grade 4–7 learners with a talk by Kirsty Brebner from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, another demonstration by Rico and his trainers, as well as a presentation from our group, in which we taught them some basic facts about rhinos and what they can do to help save them. Once again, lots of sweets and goodies were given out, and we held a competition to design a poster to create awareness about rhino poaching. A postbox was also put up at the school

for children to write letters to the government, urging them to do more in our country's battle against rhino poaching. In less than a week, it was literally overflowing with letters that we then forwarded to the Union Buildings.

The day was a great success and I feel we made a difference, not only by raising money for the Endangered Wildlife Trust, but also by educating the young citizens of our country, because the only way we are going to get out of this crisis is if we, young and old, stand together and fight rhino poaching as a country.

Following the day spent at Irene Primary School, we have had requests from some other local schools to educate their learners as well, which we will be doing in the near future. We would like to extend our thanks to Kirsty Brebner and Rynette Coetzee from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Warrick Wragg, his assistant and Rico, Lizz Wragg, Miss Jadie Rose from Irene Primary School, who helped us tremendously with organising this event at the school, as well as all the other teachers and learners who made this day a great success.

MONKEY BUSINESS

at Johannesburg Zoo: community engagement

Rosalyn Steyn (BVSc I)

Many of us have exciting childhood memories of a visit to the zoo, whether it was of the pink flamingos standing on one leg, the monkeys with the blue posteriors or toffee apples and picnics under a huge tree. These memories warmed our hearts and put a smile on our faces.

A large percentage of kids will unfortunately never have the opportunity to visit a zoo during their childhood and some won't even have contact with animals in a pleasant way at home or at a specific facility. Animals enrich our lives, bring joy, calm us, comfort us and give us their unconditional love. On the other side of the fence, animals need enrichment, love, attention, basic care and wellness, especially when taken out of their natural environment and having limited space and decreased activity. Human-animal interaction, as well as the importance of educating the public – especially children regarding animal needs, welfare and care – is an area that deserves a lot more attention to promote responsible ownership and proper animal care, and to eliminate poor welfare and cruelty.

The purpose of our community project was to give the disadvantaged kids the opportunity to visit the zoo, educate them on the ecological role of animals, why we need

to conserve them, and the importance of environmental enrichment (especially animals in captivity) by involving them in several fun activities. The Solidarity Helping Hand initiative referred us to

Ms Celia Smit, a teacher at Laerskool Generaal de la Rey in Johannesburg. The school selected a group of children that is less fortunate, some of them with cognitive disabilities. The zoo trip was a reward for them for good behaviour during the previous school term (in ethological terms, positive reinforcement!).

On Friday 29 June 2012, 26 kids, accompanied by two teachers, arrived at Johannesburg Zoo early in the morning, already super excited by the bus trip that they had just had (some had never been on a bus before, according to their

MEETING

Community Engagement Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, 23 October 2012 @ 13:30.



teachers). There was huge excitement and a rumble of “ooe”, “sjoe”, “wow”, “aaawh” and intelligent and interesting comments when we accompanied them from the main entrance through the zoo to the Education Centre. There each kid received a printed T-shirt and cap, as well as a “goodie bag” filled with treats (to sustain energy levels throughout

the day) and a mug with steaming hot chocolate. We kicked off the morning with a puppet show on water conservation, sponsored by Rand Water. This very interactive show produced so many wise answers on how to be water wise! Following this very educational (and entertaining) session, it was time to get down and dirty!

The kids were divided into two groups at a sunny picnic spot where they had lots of fun making enriching treats for some of the animals. The one group made pine cone seed dispensers with peanut butter and Marmite (this became a seriously sticky business), while the other group made fruit kebabs for the monkeys by pulling apples and oranges through a rope with the aim of hanging them in the enclosures. This was great fun for the kids, but even greater fun for the monkeys! The fruit kebabs were hung in the various enclosures and there was great excitement when the kids observed the monkeys playing with and struggling to get to the dangling fruit treats they had made for them.

We also made some blended fruit ice lollies and sugar-free jelly beforehand for the larger apes. Watching the cheeky chimps demanding more treats and catching them in the air caused some laughter and amusement! Watching Makoko, the Lowland Mountain Gorilla, enjoy his jelly oranges was a highlight.

All this monkey business and hard work called for lunch and the boerewors rolls were just the thing to replenish energy resources. Following lunch, they were taken on a guided tour through the zoo, where they learned some interesting facts about the animals. The day was almost over, but thanks to our great sponsors, each child received a backpack filled with amazing gifts to make their lives a little bit easier. A private sponsor donated amazing storybooks on animals for each kid and four beautiful colour atlases of the animal kingdom were donated to the school’s library.



The day was enriching and heart warming for all parties involved: the children, teachers, zoo staff, animals and students (Rosaly Steyn, Monica Burger, Lizelle van Staden and Anne-Marth Mullins). The kids already crawled deep into our hearts and although we could only spoil them for a day, we believe some great memories were made to take home with them.

The visit to the zoo was not only a fun day with sweet treats and sticky fingers, but our objective was to teach the children (and adults) that animals are sentient beings that need to be taken care of and protected to maintain and conserve our beautiful animal kingdom. Based on the feedback we got from these little people, they definitely learned something and, who knows, maybe one of them will follow an animal-related career or a career in the veterinary or paraveterinary sciences one day!

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Early on the Saturday morning we arrived at the zoo again with sore feet, but this time we brought a couple of (strong) adults with to assist in building an environmental enrichment structure for the new Samango monkeys. There was some hard core cleaning up to be done, as well as holes to be dug, wooden poles to be carried, knots to be tied, hammering, sawing and

structures to be designed. After a few hours of serious physical labour (to the amusement of the public calling us “big monkeys” on the other side of the fence), our hard work paid off. The two monkeys were released into their new, enriched environment and, although initially unsure of all the human smells in their home, they soon began to swing and jump carefree in their brand new enriched home. Their happy little faces: priceless!

The two days spent at the Johannesburg Zoo doing our community engagement project was truly a great experience, leaving each of us with tired feet, but a warm, fuzzy feeling of fulfilment.

DONATIONS

Please contact one of the following people if you would like to donate money, dog food, collars, leashes, blankets or your time:

Sr Sarah Johnson	012 529 8387 / 079 183 1878	sarah.johnson@up.ac.za
Mr Jacques van Rooyen	012 529 8339 / 083 289 1312	jacques.vanrooyen@up.ac.za
Mr Eugene Machimana	012 529 8100 / 083 687 0181	eugene.machimana@up.ac.za

VET STUDENTS helping cats and humanity alike

Azeemah Parker (BVSc I)

Our group consisted of myself, Kashmeel Singh, Abdur Rahman Kadwa, Raeesa Khan, Yulishia Devnath and Anndrea Yelliah. We worked on two separate community projects concurrently. One of the projects created awareness of veterinary science and the other involved directly helping animals. For community engagement, our group had decided to collaborate with the Onderstepoort Primary School. Much to our surprise, the school had not previously been approached by a body of students from Onderstepoort, even though it is in such close proximity to the campus. Being a previously disadvantaged school, the main goal of our project was to create awareness of veterinary science and to promote it as a viable future career prospect for these eager young minds.

These cats provide an essential service to the community by providing cats in need with blood.

On 27 March, we went to the Onderstepoort Primary School donning our best veterinary professional gear, bearing educational posters, booklets and, of course, sweets. The students were a class of Grade 7 learners who listened attentively as we spoke about what veterinary science is, the different fields of specialisation, the curriculum, as well as the admission requirements. We then passed the posters around and answered a few questions from these enquiring young minds. When it was our turn to ask the questions, all of the answers were correct and voiced in unison. Before we started our talk, we asked the learners who of them would like to be vets one day. Only three put up their hands. After our 30-minute talk, more than half of the class wanted to be vets. Leaving the school that day definitely gave us a sense of satisfaction in knowing that we had made an impression. What we also realised is that, as veterinarians and vet students, it's not always just being in a clinic or an operating theatre that defines one. The knowledge we receive at the faculty is indeed power and can most certainly be used to better the communities surrounding us.



Our second project was a little closer to home. It involved environmental enrichment for the blood donor cats at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital. We worked closely



with Sister Sarah Johnson. Sister Johnson has known the cats since they were kittens and is actively involved in trying to improve their quality of life. These cats provide an essential service to the community by providing cats in need with blood. Our group decided to give our "hero cats" a better living environment. We installed wooden shelves for the cats to jump on, planted new plants, took out the weeds, bought new toys and brushes and gave them a brand new scratching post. The scratching post was graciously donated by the Cat Interest Group. This project took days of planning, hard work and manual labour. However, the end-product left us very satisfied and the cats indeed looked happier in their improved home. This project definitely taught us a lot as a group. We learned how important environmental enrichment can be, we learned patience, how to deal with a few mishaps and most certainly some woodworking. Needless to say, we developed a great love for our "hero cats" and developed a deeper appreciation of what it is they do for our community.

An inspirational day at the Pretoria Zoo

Tania Vermeulen, Karen Niszl, Keagan Boustead, Kirsty Pearson, Julian Kampman and Marc van Wijk (BVSc I)

For our community engagement project, we arranged with the Pretoria Zoological Gardens to introduce the Zoo Club to the basics of veterinary science. We were six students who participated and we each presented a different aspect of the veterinary field.



Mr Parks Leshaba, Educational Officer at the Zoo, organised that we could come in for two days a few weeks apart to do our presentation. We were fortunate enough to be able to clarify the role of a veterinarian to many enthusiastic children.

Julian Kampmann started off our presentation by interactively discussing all the different species a veterinarian has to deal with. Various bones of different species were handed out to be looked at. He was followed by Keagan Boustead, who got the children very excited about blood smears and parasites. He designed a very innovative “jugular vein” to show how a blood sample should be taken. Mark van Wijk then entertained the scholars by showing them what it takes to be a veterinarian and incorporated various video clips. The last presentation entailed the more explicit detail of veterinary practice. It was presented by Kirsty Pearson, Karen Niszl and Tania

Vermeulen. They discussed some cases that had made headlines, such as Asha, the baby rhino, Piglet, the baby aardvark, and Phumbi, the zoo elephant, among others. We played the Zoo Club some canine heart sounds and they were pleasantly surprised when we handed out a stethoscope and a pair of gloves to each scholar at the end of the presentation. Among other props, they got to see a preserved horse brain, parasites, such as ticks and flies, a blood smear through a microscope and what a needle and syringe look like. In some of the presentations we asked questions and handed out prizes, such as books.

When our presentations were done, we gave the children a tour through the zoo hospital and got to show them the equipment, rooms and regulations that the veterinarians there have to follow. The enthusiasm of the children made us realise how much this project meant to them and how we can help them to make their dreams a reality.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Event	Venue	Date
Agri Educational Spring Show	Tshwane Events Centre	1–6 September
Production Animal Outreach Clinic	Makapanstad and Ratjjejan Project	Wednesdays
Mamelodi Animal Health Care (MAHC)	Mamelodi Campus	Mondays to Fridays
Loate Community Veterinary Clinic	Winterveldt	Bi-monthly on Wednesdays



DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO PUBLISH?

The Community Engagement Committee invites you to submit short articles to be published in the next newsletter (Summer 2012). The community engagement article should not be more than one page long. Contact person, Mr Eugene Machimana, Tel: 012 529 8100 (w) Cell: 083 687 0181 Email: eugene.machimana@up.ac.za
 Visit the UP Community Engagement website regularly for updates about projects and funding opportunities.