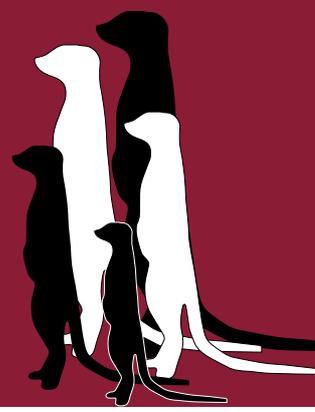




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# The Meerkat

Official newsletter of the OPVSC



For the students, by the students

Issue 1 : Autumn 2019

## Note from the Editors

Welcome back Opiates, and a special welcome to our new additions, the NewVs and BVN 1s!

Knowing what lies ahead, we want to kick off the year with this:

"I'm not telling you it is going to be easy — I'm telling you it's going to be worth it" (Art Williams)

Take some time to ruminate on that.

We at the Meerkat believe that you are going to have an exceptional year! You will soar above and beyond all expectations! Whether you're in the home stretch or just starting out, you can achieve anything with hard work and your fellow Opiates at your side. Just remember to have some fun on the way!

The Meerkat wishes you a prosperous 2019!



Natascha Rothauge



Sarah-Olivia Nunn

## Falconry: A fowl-filled sport

What exactly is falconry? To put it in an nutshell, falconry is when people use raptors to hunt prey, such as small birds and hares. It is believed to have originated in the Middle-East, as far back as 3500 BC.

Hunting birds can either be caught and tamed, or they can be bought. Falconry takes years to master, not to mention the hours you have to spend with your bird to form an unbreakable bond. Once a bird has successfully undergone "manning", it can be used for hunting or it can be flown in competitions.

What makes hunting with a bird so different from hunting with a horse or a dog? We got together with two of Onderstepoort's falconry enthusiasts, 3rd-year BVSc student Nabeelah Rajah, and Dr Dorianne Elliott, to share their experiences of this noble sport.

### From a student's view

In 2012, Nabeelah Rajah moved to Qatar and lived there for a few years. It was during this time that falconry piqued her interest. Everywhere she went, hunting birds were sold at the markets. She was amazed by the strong bond between falconer and falcon. Curiosity got the better of her and by 2018 she had completely immersed herself in the world of falconry. She researched falconers' stories in the Qatar National Library, and contacted other falconers. One of them was Laura Wrede, a German woman paving the way for women in this male-dominated sport. Laura recommended textbooks and provided information to Nabeelah, since "How to train your falcon" is not part of the "For Dummies" range yet.



Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) on display at the Marmi falcon and Saluki hunting festival (2017)

### Bird species commonly used for falconry:

- Lanner falcons
- Peregrine falcons
- Saker falcons
- Golden eagles
- Goshawks
- Harris hawks
- Gyrfalcons



*Nabeelah (centre) with a member of staff (right) and a European tourist who came to enjoy the festivities of the day (left)*

### A vet's perspective

Similar to Nabeelah, Dr Elliott, who works at the Exotics and Bird Hospital, was fascinated by the fact that you can form such a strong relationship with an apex-predator. She describes it as a "hunting partnership", and not slavery or ownership. Falcons are very proud animals, and unlike hunting dogs, are not seen as servants, but rather as equals. But is this sport humane and fair to the falcons? According to her, some owners look after their falcons "like winning racehorses". They will go to extremes, such as weighing the bird every day and adjusting their diet accordingly. Unfortunately, like with any sport, there is potential for abuse. Birds can die, or will abandon uncaring owners. Dr Elliott works closely with the Birds of Prey and Rehabilitation Centre, and thus has a lot of hands-on experience. She also has friends in the South African Falconry Association (SAFA), who taught her the art of falconry.

### Legal eagle?

*Falconry is a common practice in numerous countries, however, many countries require falconers to have special permits.*

### Birds of a feather, flock together

Eventually, Nabeelah got in contact with Dr Elliott. She shared Nabeelah's enthusiasm for falconry and they sifted through any information they could find on the subject. Despite their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn, these two have many obstacles to overcome, since falconry has always been considered

a male sport; carried down from generation to generation, from father to son. Did they let this clip their wings? Certainly not! While neither of them own falcons, they still try to get as much exposure as possible. To be classified as an "official" falconer, you must first become an apprentice and work your way up. A falconer is assigned to a mentor, who must teach them the craft of falconry. Needless to say, if you are not assigned a mentor, you can't begin your

apprenticeship. Luckily for them (and all other future female falconers), there is a wonderful group called the Women's Working Group (WWG), who work with the International Association for Falconry (IAF). They aim to assist and educate woman falconers around the globe. The WWG-IAF is not only focused on the modern female falconer, but also on how women have contributed to falconry throughout history.

*Alexandra Graham*

### Types of Falconry Races

- **Telwah:** This is a classic line race. Falcons fly close to the ground over distances of 400 m (sometimes 600 m) to someone with fake prey.
- **Balloon:** Falcons detach fake prey from small hot air balloons.
- **Aeroplane:** Falcons have to chase an aeroplane with fake prey (without catching it) over long or short distances. These routes range from 300 m to 1 200 m.



*Dr Elliot in her element!*

### Learn the lingo

- **Apprentice:** A falconer in training.
- **Creance:** A long piece of string used for training a bird of prey.
- **Glove:** A protective cover with individual finger sheathes on which the falcon sits.
- **Hood:** A cap placed on the head of a falcon to cover its eyes when it is not flying.
- **Jess:** Thin strips of leather attached to the tarsus of a hawk to help control the falcon, especially when in the field. A variety of jesses are found, each with a different design.
- **Lure:** An object used for exercise or for the falcon to chase. It is traditionally made of leather with feathers or a pair of wings attached to it. The falconer swings it in circles by means of a cord.
- **Manning:** The process by which a hawk is tamed.
- **Mangala:** A protective wrist-sleeve, similar to a glove, on which falcons can be carried.
- **Pigeon harness:** Put on pigeons when used as a lure to catch wild falcons.

### Fun Falconry Facts

- *The peregrine falcon is the fastest member of the animal kingdom, easily reaching speeds up to 320 km/h.*
- *World Falconry Day is on the 16th of November.*
- *Falconry was declared an intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2010.*

### Websites for Wisdom

*International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey: <https://iaf.org>  
 WWG-IAF: <https://www.facebook.com/wwgiaf>  
 Birds of Prey: <http://www.birdsofprey.co.za/>  
 Laura Wrede's Instagram/Twitter: @LauraofArabia  
 Qatari Society of Al-Gannas: <http://www.algannas.net/>*

# ALOHA 2019!

Hawaiian Party 2019 at Chewnz Pub and Grill was a huge success, with the drinks flowing and the dance floor full. Favourite OP beats managed to drown out the off-pitch vocal accompaniment from the students. In true OP fashion, we almost managed to sell out the whole bar.

This year, "Tropic Like It's Hot" was the theme of the party, and even managed to become a hashtag in Hawaiian Party Facebook posts. OP never ceases to amaze me with the effort put into themed events. The array of hula skirts and leis was amazing to see. Hopefully, the number of leis that were littered all over the ground after closing indicates a positive correlation to how crazy the party was. Thanks to everyone for embracing the theme and making it your own!

The NewVs and BVN 1s put in extra effort to impress the seniors, and certainly busted some moves on the dance floor. We are sure that a lot of names have been forgotten in the haziness of the night. Hopefully, your headaches have all subsided by now.

Pre-sale tickets were a huge success, with most students choosing to pay beforehand to skip the long ticket line. Per OP tradition, waiting for the shuttles was chaotic, but all the students ended up at the venue and back home safely... eventually. I guess it's all a part of the true Onderstepoort experience.

Although only one student this year found the time to bust out her hula dance to enter our competition, it was a huge win regardless. Congratulations to Shira-Lee Samson for having the guts to hula dance in front of a full stadium while wearing a pink tutu. You can't win if you don't enter!

I hope everyone enjoyed the Hawaiian Party. It was a high note upon which to start the academic year. We definitely saw how OP students "Tropic Like It's Hot", and this event couldn't have happened without all of you!



*OP students enjoying themselves at a Hawaiian party!*



*Lilianne Tran*

*Smiles all around!*

## Biosecurity: The Real OP Soapy

Biosecurity. It's a buzzword that we as veterinary staff and students should all be aware of. Biosecurity! An omnipresent entity that we are constantly reminded of verbally and through signage – but do we even know exactly what it is?

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines biosecurity as: "security from exposure to harmful biological agents", as well as: "measures taken to ensure this security". Then why do we not practice biosecurity as we should?

The recent emphasis on not wearing greens and gumboots on campus has put the spotlight on biosecurity again.

During the recent, although short-lived, imposition of quarantine on the Onderstepoort Beagles, we should all have

become aware of how vitally important this process is. Biosecurity is important to protect animals and humans from contracting potentially dangerous diseases. It can also play a vital role in food safety and security, a country's trade and your own personal livelihood.



*A final-year student demonstrating how to use the footbaths*

These are all questions to consider when regarding biosecurity and the need for its implementation. One can also implement biosecurity on a small scale: washing hands and disinfecting tables between patients. These are simple but effective measures of small-scale biosecurity that may save the life of a beloved pet or prized bull.

The question we should now be asking ourselves is the following: If this is such an easy measure to implement, why then do we see regular breaks in biosecurity ranging from failing to wash one's hands to entering the cafeteria in greens and gumboots? The answer is simple: It's too inconvenient. We forget. Sometimes, we are simply lazy. These are not excuses. We should all make a more concerted

effort in adhering to biosecurity measures, especially considering the broad range of species veterinarians deal with.

To this end, I implore you: Wash your hands between patients, disinfect your consulting room table, wipe clean and disinfect any instruments you have used and consider how your actions may affect your next patient. These few measures to ensure biosecurity, although in no way exhaustive, can go a long way in preventing future outbreaks of uncomfortable diseases that could be much nastier than those of the past.

With this in mind - happy scrubbing!

*Alexander Hollender*

## Raising the steaks

"Experience is the teacher of all things." So it was said over 2 000 years ago by the infamous Julius Caesar, and still it stands to the present day. A quote that every 5th-year student for the last 12 years has had the pleasure of living through. How may you ask? Why, the Feedlot Challenge of course!

The Feedlot Challenge was introduced to the Faculty in 2007 by the current Deputy Dean, Prof Holm. It forms a part of the curriculum for the module Bovine Health and Production (BHP). The aim is to teach the specific topic of feedlot theory to students. To alleviate student boredom associated with this topic, a more practical approach is needed.

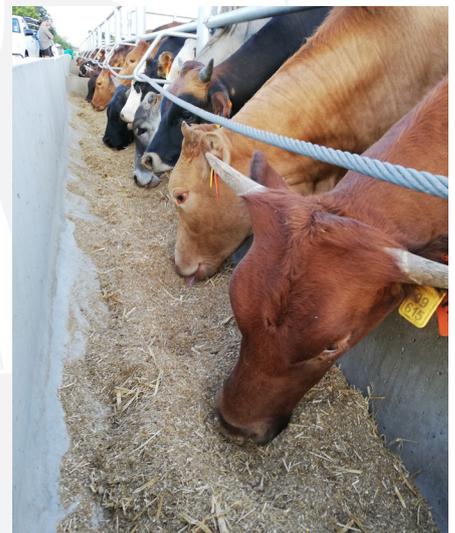
In addition, the Ruminant Veterinary Association of South Africa (RUVASA) had shared their concerns about the lack of student interest in rural and production animal practice. The Feedlot Challenge addresses this issue by garnering interest of the participating students in production animals and veered them towards those fields. According to research by Prof Holm, some students change their career paths depending on their experiences while studying. This has proven to be a great advantage for the rural and production veterinary medicine division within South Africa.

The development of soft skills was among the objectives for the Feedlot Challenge. At the time, the Veterinary Professional Life (VPL) module did not exist, so the Faculty depended on the Feedlot Challenge to teach students the value of group work and management skills. Nowadays, the Feedlot Challenge presents unique situations to the students that allow them to put what was taught during previous VPL lessons into practice.

While the objectives have remained somewhat the same, the challenge itself has greatly evolved over time. What started out as a small group task has evolved into a large multiplayer project involving 120 calves and 148 students. Major sponsors this year include Beefcor, a major feedlot company, the famous pharmaceutical company, Zoetis, the SA Feedlot Association and Plaas Media. All of them have played an integral part in marketing the challenge to the public. In addition, they offer unique and vital intellectual information through lectures that can only be sourced from individuals within the industry.

Groups are encouraged to market themselves on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Each group has even come up with their own funny name, some of which include Moochachos, steakalot.com, United Steaks and Wookie Steaks.

While on the surface it may seem like all fun and games, the Feedlot Challenge is ultimately a formal part of the curriculum of the BHP module. The year kicked off with a Feedlot Bootcamp, which ended with a simulated auction – the first for many! Each group is then fully responsible for the health and management of these cattle. This includes ration formulation, feed mixing, treating sick cattle and kraal management. The challenge will run for 105 days, after which students must submit a scientific article for the academic aspect of



*Happy Moos munching away!*

the challenge. Couple this with trying to outdo your neighbours, and the 5th-years find themselves living an breathing the challenge

In the words of Prof Holm, "The feedlot itself has been very successful. We've had very good production in this feedlot for relatively inexperienced people. To manage a feedlot like this successfully is quite good. It shows how students can adapt and perform if you challenge them." With these positive words, we wish all 5th-years, both present and future, a prosperous and worthwhile challenge.

*Aaminah Vahed*



*The senior rugby girls team and their coaches*

## Real girls play rugby

I must confess one thing: I pitched up half an hour late to the event I was supposed to report on. This is because I refused to fall for the prank we pull on the NewVs (by telling them the event starts at 18:00 and then making them wait forever). Alas, I overestimated the waiting time this year. It would be great if someone could inform me which WhatsApp group tells the seniors the starting time of the Ladies Rugby.

Anyway, there I was, excited to introduce my Hatfield friends to the event. It felt good to be back at OP, at least now that I have recovered from what I witnessed during Welcoming Week. I was purely focussed on the game before me, when I heard Hatfield Friend #1 say: "Wow, this is peak redneck." At first, I was offended, but then I looked through the eyes of an outsider:

On the one side, you have a massive gathering of tired-looking people in their mid-to-late twenties, wearing overalls with sippy cups in their hands. On the other, you have a small cluster of younger people in red shirts just standing there looking bewildered.

The tired-looking side also features a half-human catapult that shoots condoms at the other spectators (and occasionally at the athletes on the field). With every try that is scored (incidentally, always by the same team), large whips sound from the shadows to intimidate the opponents.

I look back to the field to watch the soccer... oh wait, upon closer inspection, this is rugby!

One team consists of aggressive-looking girls with black and white shirts. You can tell they're seniors because there's a lot of frustration being taken out on the other team.

The NewVs are putting on a brave face, but because I waltzed in here late, they already look a bit battered. Then again, the seniors just seem to keep respawning...

It was an exciting spectacle to watch. I heard a few impressive thuds and it was interesting to hear such a low grunt coming from a women's scrum. Just because those spaghetti arms look fragile, doesn't mean they can't catch a ball. They can't kick though.

The game ended, and being the good journalist that I am, I went about trying to find out the score. I got several different accounts ranging from 35 to 87 for the seniors, but at least all of them agreed on one thing: The NewVs' score was zero.

As we stood in the big OP-embrace after the match, I couldn't help but feel proud: As much as every Hatfield Friend Number X likes to insult us, we know that's just because they don't understand. Onderstepoort has a culture as unique as the industry we are about to enter, and I can't help but think that that is something special. The #onlyatOP handle exists for a reason, and this event was certainly an Instagram-able offense.

I would like to congratulate Marenée Botes, as well as the coaches, on their winning team. For the seniors: Heinrich Hensen, Carel Engelbrecht, Ryan Walton, Johan Moolman and Gerhard Gregory. "True legends," in the words of the captain. For the NewVs: Daniël Swarts, Daniël Saayman, De Wet Vorster, Jan-Karel Limbach and Liam Best. Well done all you gentlemen on producing two rather formidable teams. Next year you should enter them for Bulleltjie Rugby.

To the NewVs: Don't worry too much about the result, you put up a great fight and we look forward to seeing you in the winning team next year! "These NewVs were the best I've played in my years at OP," says Captain Botes.

And lastly, thank you to all the spectators, who are just as much part of the entertainment as the players on the field.

Now, let's get back to work. Welcoming Week was a marathon...

*Suné Olivier*

# The Year of the PIG

The Pig Interest Group was started as a student initiative to help the pigs at Onderstepoort. It lets students gain some experience and sparks an interest in pigs that will last throughout one's career.

The P.I.G. has a unique working system. A group of 6 students is assigned one of 10 sows. They must now look out for their pig, from vaccinations, to helping with farrowing and looking after the weaners; the students will do it all. The students will also be granted the opportunity to visit other piggeries and see how they work first-hand.

P.I.G has recently constructed their first committee and they are planning on making positive changes in 2019. The group is putting great emphasis on the health and welfare of pigs. It is constructing necessary training protocols with interactive training sessions and virtual tutorials. Savanna Stutchbury, the education representative, will exercise veterinary skills of the students by giving them challenges. This is with the help of people from industry and our very own lecturers.

As we all know, pigs are smart and curious creatures. We therefore encourage students to think of creative and intuitive ideas to improve the pigs' welfare.

Students will have a chance to learn about pigs in a fun and interactive way. They will also get a chance to meet role-players in the pig industry. The P.I.G. will also be making sure that the social appetites of students are satisfied with exciting social events.

To stay abreast of all things P.I.G., follow us on our social media platforms. Facebook: OP Pig Interest Group, Instagram: @op\_pig.

2019 – The year of the pig!

Riaan Crafford



Reece Terblanche demonstrates a pregnancy diagnosis in a sow.



An OTAU sow pouting for the camera!

## Student creative writing

### Onderstepoort

The lush fever trees make their presence known through their thorns beneath bare feet.  
 Secretly we don't mind the pain, because they possess a beauty few could beat.  
 The sun sets behind the nearby mountain and brings a darkness that's thick and warm.  
 Amongst us grows suspicion of more loadshedding, or another summer thunderstorm.  
 We're surrounded by animals, but don't forget the shorts, slops and bakkies.  
 Our heads held high, we know just being here means we're far beyond lucky.  
 We learn how to sokkie, we learn what it means to really drink.  
 We start to talk about taboo subjects, we start to freely think.  
 Our dreams become our reality, as we realise who we truly are.  
 We all aimed for the heavens, and landed amongst the stars.  
 We are every colour, every culture and every word.  
 We are proud, we are united, we are Onderstepoort.



Sabrina van Blerk

# Student creative writing



## *Drowning*

And I wish you could see  
 I wish you would take some time to help me  
 But you got things, I guess we all do  
 So I guess that means you're drowning too  
 But I'm drowning and I need a lifeguard  
 And I wish that lifeguard was you  
 But I can't expect you to rush in and save me  
 When you don't even know that I need saving  
 I say it's 'cause I don't want to worry you  
 But maybe its 'cause I'm scared to tell you  
 What if you run away, I can't lose you too?  
 So, I hope that you will magically see  
 And ask if I'm ok  
 Or hug me so tight the pieces fit in some weird sort of way  
 But maybe I should ask you  
 Because you're drowning too  
 But why do I instead just drown with you?  
 Maybe it's part of the human condition  
 Some weird from of self-preservation  
 Because I'm not okay I'm broken right?  
 No matter what try as I might  
 As I lay in bed at night  
 I still feel hollow  
 But no, you know what I choose not to wallow  
 I choose to fill this hold with things  
 With light and love and joy life brings  
 Because it's okay to not be okay  
 Perfect is overrated anyway  
 So, lets make that out goal for today  
 Change your mindset think a different way  
 Don't be afraid to say I'm not okay  
 Help is there you just have to ask  
 Seems like a simple enough task  
 Its easy enough to do  
 But it starts with me  
 Just like it starts with you

*Kimelle Krishnalall*



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