The Mission

(Continued from cover)

foods and increasingly intolerant of potentially dangerous food additives and of poisons which contaminate and defile the environment, veterinary medicine has come to assume greater responsibility and greater leadership in preventive medicine and public health.

Today, more than half the families in the United States own a pet, millions of citizens derive pleasure from horses and other sporting animals, and we are increasingly aware that, beyond companionship, pet animals may in some fundamental way protect against somatic disease and early death. As a people, we have become more accepting of our animal nature and of the fundamental qualities that unite all animals. Among other things, this has led to a vigorous animal rights movement, one element of which clearly aims to eliminate the use of

animals in medical research. Thus, the ancient profession of veterinary medicine has responsibility for the delivery of highly sophisticated care to our pet and sporting animal populations and for guiding society through the highly politicized thicket of animal rights vs. scientific need, to a sensible and appropriate value system on how animals may be used.

Despite austere financial circumstances and the realization that veterinary medicine lacks the third party payments and subsidizations taken for granted in other medical cultures, we believe that our school is on the threshold of its most productive era and that we must continue to take broad responsibility for matters relating to the health and welfare of animals and humans. We shall continue and amplify our contributions:

- To the health care and protection of food and fiber producing animals, companion and sporting animals, and laboratory animals;
- To the health care, protection, and preservation of zoo animals and wildlife, including aquatic species;
- To the diagnosis, surveillance, and control of diseases transmissible from animals to humans, and to protection against environmental hazards which threaten animal and human health and safety;
- To the health aspects of the production, processing, and marketing of foods of animal origin;
- To veterinary and comparative medical research and the application of research findings to animal and human health needs; and
- To expansion of veterinary medical interests, encompassing virtually every significant aspect of the interactions of animals with human beings and with the environment.

Thus, stated in simplest terms, the mission(s) of the School of Veterinary Medicine is to:

- **Train** a highly qualified body of general practitioners, appropriate numbers of specialists, and bio-medical scientists equipped to meet society's present and future needs;
- **Create** new knowledge through fundamental and applied biomedical research, including behavioral with particular emphasis on diseases of domestic animals and on animal homologues of human disease through systematic development of the School as a center for comparative medicine;
- **Develop** and maintain facilities and systems for the delivery of veterinary medical services on a regional basis, especially sophisticated care not generally provided by veterinarians in private practice;
- **Offer** quality continuing education programs aimed at refreshing and advancing the knowledge and skills of practicing veterinarians;
- **Broaden** the contributions of veterinary medicine to society through the development of new disciplines and specialties, for example, aquatic veterinary medicine, veterinary social work, and advanced animal technician training programs.

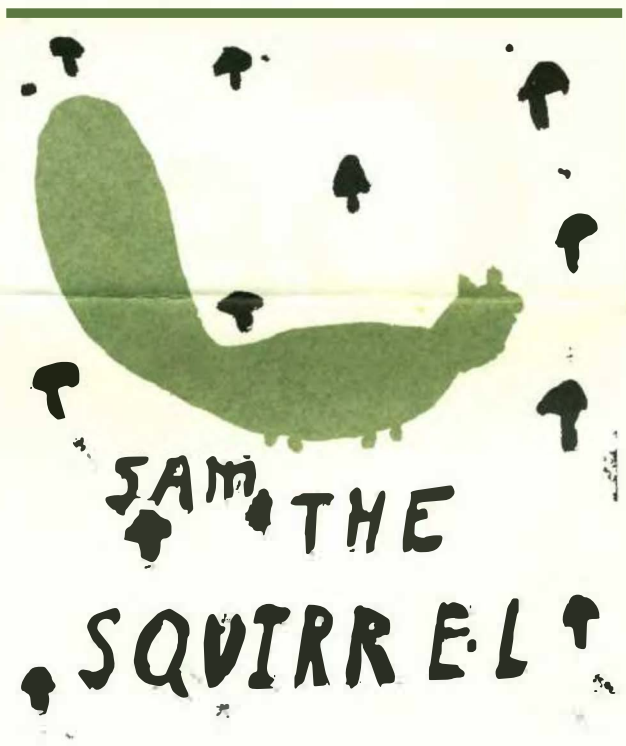
We take cognizance of the fact that in our complex School, as in our complex larger society, we must satisfy legitimate and essential needs which may at times may be incompatible with one another—either on philosophic or operative grounds. We must find our way, meeting the demands for research, teaching, and patient care, by means of information sharing, throughtfulness, tolerance, and a long-range collegial view.

This statement was prepared by the Long-Range Planning Committee of the School of Veterinary Medicine.

One day in February more than thirty get-well cards, each handmade by second graders from a suburban Philadelphia school, arrived at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania for a furry patient which had been admitted earlier that week. The mail was unusual, the presence of the patient, a squirrel, was not.

It was one of the many wild animals cared for by the Wildlife Service, a student-run organization which treats and nurses small unowned, wild animals until they have recovered and are ready to be released into their natural habitats or placed in a rehabilitation center.

The Wildlife Service came into being after an emergency—the oilspill on the Delaware River in 1975 which soiled many birds. At that time, Eileen Hathaway (V'77) organized a



group of students to help wash 500 birds, mostly Ruddy ducks. During these efforts, the Penn team found that little was known about proper medical care for birds. Eileen began to organize a wildlife committee, and with the help of the Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Medical Association (SCVMA) she raised funds and solicited supplies from veterinary manufacturers and Philadelphia industry. The school obtained the necessary state and federal permits to house and treat wildlife and the service was born.

Today it is an active organization treating about 180 cases annually. The patients are birds, squirrels, chipmonks, turtles, raccoons, and other small wildlife animals that are found injured or ill along roadsides in the city and surrounding counties. Sometimes the animals are brought in by people who discovered them, as was the case for the squirrel, or at other times by game wardens. Animals not only come from the the Philadelphia area but also from neighboring states, as has a recent patient, a turkey vulture, which was brought from Delaware with a dislocated shoulder.

Helping, Caring, and Learning.

The Wildlife Service does not, however, go out to catch an injured animal. Dr. William Medway, faculty adviser for the group, related the story of a resident of this city's Pennypack Park section who called and asked that someone be sent to capture an injured deer. "She had observed the deer from her window and thought it had a wound. She wanted us to catch it and bring it here for treatment. That is one thing we cannot do. Animals have to be brought here." An exception to this rule is when oilspills occur. In these instances members of the service will go to the treatment centers to help wash and treat the oiled birds brought there. The Wildlife Service is part of the Tri-State Bird Rescue and serves as its medical corps.

Wildlife Service headquarters are Ward E, in the old veterinary hospital in a windowless and quiet room. Old animal cages are used to house the sick small wildlife, larger birds are kept in sturdy plywood pens on the floor. Students go about their tasks as silently as possible to minimize stress on the wild animals. Students treat the sick, clean cages, act as physical therapists, and raise food supplies, such as mice, for the raptors which are frequent patients.

The Wildlife Service is part of the student chapter of the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians. Virginia Niebuhr, a second-year student, is chapter president. She is quite interested in wildlife management and preservation and has experience with birds. After her undergraduate work at Penn, she studied at Oxford University, England, and observed herring gulls on an island in the Irish Sea for two years. This summer she, along with four other members of the Wildlife Service, will participate in Aquavet. Virginia joined the wildlife service during her first year at the Veterinary School and explained that the program currently has forty members, of which twenty-five are actively involved, six are applying their experiences to an elective course, and the others pitch-in whenever extra help is needed.

Five groups of students, who rotate duty daily, staff the Wildlife Service around the clock. They are led by second- or third-year students who are responsible for taking incoming calls and admitting animals. Injured wildlife is brought to the Emergency Service where it is picked up by the group and then treated in Ward E. Sometimes the service knows in advance of the arrival of an animal, but at other times an animal is just dropped off. This, according to Ms. Niebuhr, makes it difficult to obtain a case history. "We call the person who brought the animal and try to find out as much as possible. Most of the time very little information is available and we have to figure out things from the appearance of the animal and the signs it displays." Ms. Niebuhr said that when an animal is first admitted the students try to calm it, then perform a complete physical examination, and, if necessary, blood tests, cultures, and radiographs are performed. She pointed out that these animals have to be handled carefully since they may be disease carriers and often are infested with parasites. Students frequently have to survey literature and consult with the various specialists at the hospital to arrive at a diagnosis and a course of treatment. "It takes a lot of initiative and time by the student, but we do receive help from many different specialists here."

One of those frequently consulted is Dr. Charles Newton, associate professor of orthopedics. His services are much in demand because many birds brought here have fractured limbs which are often the result of gunshots or collisions with wires or buildings. Dr. Newton repairs these fractures by pinning the bones and by immobilizing the injured limb. The healing process is slow, and progress is monitored through radiographs. During the recovery period students gently exercise the animal's limbs to minimize muscle atrophy. Once the injury is healed, the animal is taken to a rehabilitation center to regain full strength prior to being released.

Participation in the Wildlife Service provides students with an opportunity to garner practical experience. "This is the only student group which gets extensive hands-on experience early in veterinary school," Ms. Niebuhr pointed out. "We learn to examine animals *and* deal with people professionally. It is a great preparation for the clinic in the fourth year." The learning experience goes beyond this. Students have bi-weekly rounds where cases are discussed in depth, and they keep detailed patient records where diagnosis, treatments, and changes are noted. They learn to cope with the disappointment of not being able to help when an animal that is too ill to recover must be humanely destroyed. Even then the involvement does not end as the dead animals are further studied to learn as much as possible about the disease or injury. Students do necropsies, tissue studies, and cultures to find out why they couldn't help. The findings are discussed during rounds or at the weekly group meetings. The service also exposes students to many hospital and school resources since they must utilize different specialties to help each patient. They are guided by their adviser, Dr. William Medway, professor of clinical laboratory medicine, who acts as liaison between the Wildlife Service and the school, hospital, and administration. He also helps to find proper rehabilitation centers for recovered animals, and handles many of the in-coming calls regarding the Wildlife Service.

Dr. Medway explained that funding for the service is very limited. "Sometimes donations are received from people who bring animals. There is little money, but we manage. Food, for example, can be a problem. So we make arrangements with a number of supermarkets to obtain the wilted, but edible, vegetables. The raptors, which require animals as food, are fed killed mice which are raised by the students, or killed chicks which are obtained from laboratories at the University."

Ward E is a humble facility, but it is a step up from the time when members of the Wildlife Service had to keep patients in their own apartments. Now plans are being made to move the service to a larger ward in the old hospital building where more cages and three flight cages—fashioned from exercise pens—will be available. Both Dr. Medway and Ms. Niebuhr hope that one day soon the Wildlife Service will be expanded to have its own clinician. That is still a dream, as are the flight cages at New Bolton Center for the rehabilitation of birds, and facilities for the rehabilitation of other small wildlife.

For now the Wildlife Service continues its work in Ward E, providing a service to the public and the wild animals in the Delaware Valley, and being a special learning experience for students and faculty members.