



7-1-1995

Veterinary Volunteer

Joseph Gaydos
University of Pennsylvania

Veterinary Volunteer

Veterinarian Joseph Gaydos, V'94 and his wife, Julie Brunner, embarked for Bulawayo, Zimbabwe last September for a year-long stint as volunteers at the Chipangali Wildlife Trust. Biologist Vivian Wilson and his family founded Chipangali more than 20 years ago as a center for wildlife rehabilitation, research and the captive breeding of endangered African animals. Unable to afford the "luxury" of a permanent veterinary program, the Wilsons accepted a proposal by volunteers Joe and Julie in conjunction with the Philadelphia Zoo's ONE WITH NATURE program to conduct a pilot volunteer project...

When I first imagined working as a veterinarian at the Chipangali Wildlife Trust, I really didn't know what to expect. Finishing my last days of clinics at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, I wondered what it would be like to work in Zimbabwe. I imagined spinning micro-hematocrit tubes on Land Rover cooling fans and having to re-sharpen disposable needles to keep from running out. Occasionally, I even wondered if I would have any drugs to use. I once visited a rural health clinic in Tanzania where the physician's only drug was aspirin. She gave it for machete wounds, fungal infections, anxiety attacks — you name it.

Fortunately, conditions were not as primitive as I had scared myself into believing. Although Chipangali has not had a resident veterinarian since its inception over 20 years ago, many things were already in place to facilitate my work here. The Wilson family has done an amazing job of providing top-notch care for their animals without the benefit of a veterinarian.

After arriving and evicting the rats from the dormant veterinary clinic and laboratory, I was ready for work. My first patient was an injured vervet monkey. Someone at a local farm had found the

monkey lying under a tree with a large wound to its thigh. It was an old wound and the infection had obviously spread through his body. After anesthetizing the monkey, an intravenous drip was started and the leg was scrubbed for surgery. All the old infected tissue was removed and the skin was stitched closed. He didn't seem to mind the bandage on his leg, but he sure hated the daily antibiotic injections.

Chipangali functions as the wildlife rehabilitation center for Zimbabwe. Animals like the little vervet monkey



arrive almost on a daily basis. Some have been shot, others hit by cars, attacked by dogs, or just found orphaned. It still amazes me the distances people will travel to bring animals to Chipangali. One day a woman who had driven five hours brought us an injured secretary bird. Another time a man walked 20 kilometers through the bush to bring in a litter of three orphaned black-backed jackals.

Many of the animals brought to Chipangali are later released back into the wild. It is my job to examine them prior to release to be certain they are capable of surviving on their own and that they are not carrying infectious

diseases that could be transmitted to other wild animals. I also tattoo all released animals so we know if they have become nuisances or cannot survive on their own. Since my arrival, we have released a troop of 27 vervet monkeys, two hedgehogs, three genets, seven barn owls, a gabar goshawk, and a bush squirrel. Soon we will be releasing a troop of 18 baboons and nine black-backed jackals.

Animals that cannot be released are kept here at Chipangali. Rare captive animals are encouraged to breed and behavioral research is conducted. Thousands of people a year visit the park to see African wildlife up close and learn about natural history. Caring for the resident animals is a time-consuming task. All animals receive routine vaccinations and dewormings. Also, like anywhere animals are kept, emergencies arise. Just last month I arrived at work to find that one of the spotted hyenas had chewed through its enclosure and into that of the neighboring lion. Maybe there was a leftover bone he wanted, or maybe he was just tired of being in the same old pen. Needless to say, the lion was none too happy about having a new cage mate, and proceeded to give the hyena quite a beating. Surprisingly, the hyena held its own. I still spent

over an hour cleaning and stitching up claw wounds, but would certainly have expected much more damage to an animal only a quarter the size of its attacker.

Life as a volunteer veterinarian is not often easy or glamorous, but it is certainly exciting for me to assist in the development of a permanent veterinary care program at Chipangali. This story would be incomplete, however, if I didn't mention my wife, Julie. She has put her career on hold for a full year to be my constant companion, keep me laughing, and share in the challenging work.

By Joseph Gaydos, V'94

Reprinted with permission from *ZOO-ONE*, a publication of The Zoological Society of Philadelphia.