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Summer Snapshots of Penn Vet Students

Summer as a Penn Vet student does not mean long, lazy days sitting poolside or vacationing with families. Instead, several students take these nearly three months to continue their classroom and clinical education with real-life experiences in the field.

Here we highlight a few students' summer stories spent traveling the world and nation ...



India Summer

Penn Vet V'13 students Audrey Barker, Kathryn Dalton, Shannon Kerrigan and Jamie Rettig spent part of their vacation in India, where they traveled to observe some of the veterinary issues there and help the locals provide basic wellness care to shelter animals.

This summer we had the opportunity to visit and explore the veterinary needs of Kolkata, India and to work with a human medical non-governmental organization (NGO) founded by a Penn medical student that is running clinics in the impoverished slums. In addition, we worked with the NGO to help them with their childhood educational program aimed at health awareness.

We also had the chance to run our own clinic at a local animal shelter that housed both dogs and cats, where we provided physical exams, rabies vaccinations and administered

de-worming medications. For research purposes, we were able to obtain fecal samples from the shelter animals to determine their parasite load and were surprised to learn that it's not much different than that of our own shelter animals!

We visited the Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, the largest coastal mangrove forest with the highest population density of tigers in India, where we had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a wild Royal Bengal tiger, the national animal of India, being released back to the forest after it snuck into a local village.

The village we stayed at, Pakhiralaya, was hospitable and friendly. We were warmly welcomed into people's homes, where we were invited to dinner and to hold their babies. The natives there told us that after cyclone Aila hit in 2009, their cow population was reduced to one-tenth of what they'd previously had, and the soil composition changes have severely decreased the available vegetation for these animals.

All four of us were so moved by the plight of these kind people, that we decided to establish an NGO based in the Sunderbans, which would bring veterinary care, animal husbandry education, human health clinics and childhood education to these deserving people. For more information about this initiative, or if you would like to be a part of this exciting project, please visit www.meresaaathi.org.

—KATHRYN DALTON

Adventures in the Kalahari

Penn Vet V'13 student Ben Golas spent his summer as part of the Botswana-UPenn Partnership, a program that aims to use an interdisciplinary approach to train health-care personnel in Botswana in prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS with an end-goal of developing post-graduate training programs at the University of Botswana and offer global health experience to Penn trainees while developing joint research programs that address issues relevant to the

health and welfare of the citizens of Botswana. There, Ben shadowed both small- and large-animal veterinarians and also spent time doing wildlife work.

The Kalahari at first glance is little more than flat grassy veldt far as the eye can see. However, this ecosystem, comprising the majority of Botswana, is anything but empty. Before beginning my third year at Penn Vet, I spent my



summer working with Dr. Mark Bing, a private practice owner in Botswana. I came here to study the interactions between man, agriculture and environment in Africa's oldest democracy.

There is no summing up the huge experience of three months in so few words. When we were not treating tick fevers and baboon bites on dogs at the small animal clinic, we were rushing across the country performing pregnancy diagnoses on various cattle ranches. We also worked with feedlots and the Botswana Meat Commission to prepare the country to export beef to the European Union, all in the midst of a spreading foot and mouth disease outbreak.

The highlight of the experience was our wildlife work. Few countries are so inextricably linked with their natural ecology; we have seen kudu, giraffe and cheetah just driving through farms. Some landowners purposefully keep wild animals on the farm to shape the flora, thereby retaining the natural Kalahari environment and minimizing effects of cattle grazing. We collared a leopard and lioness to study predator interactions with people and livestock, a key component of research towards conservational movements.

Integrating efforts of scientists, farmers, and veterinarians: this is how we preserve our future. Please visit bengolas.wordpress.com to read more about my adventures and insights.

—BEN GOLAS

Understanding Dairy Management in Thailand

Brittany Gross, a third-year Penn Vet student, received a 2010 Penn Vet Student Inspiration Award to develop a Dairy Education Center (DEC) in Thailand. This summer, Brittany returned to the country, and met up with key collaborators from the US and Thailand to begin preliminary research necessary to begin her work toward fulfilling this endeavor. For more information on the DEC and the progress Brittany is making, visit www.dairyeducationcenter.org/.

This June I returned to Thailand to resume in-country work on the Dairy Education Center (DEC) project. Eventually, I will work toward the construction of a dairy farm teaching facility, but the priority for this summer's trip was to research and analyze dairy management and farming practices specific to Northeast Thailand (a region referred to as "Isaan").

I am working with veterinary students and professors from Penn Vet, Minnesota's Veterinary School, Khon Kaen Veterinary School (in Thailand) and the University of Vermont to collaborate on this project.

This summer we were welcomed onto the farms of 20 dairies, all of which are family-owned and average 15 to 35 lactating cows. We spent the afternoons getting to know the

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Summer Veterinary Exploration Through Science (VETS)

For the third consecutive year, the Penn Vet admissions team hosted its week-long Summer Veterinary Exploration Through Science (VETS) non-residential day program, during which potential future veterinarians spend their days learning about what it takes to be a vet student.

This year, the admissions team received 162 applications to fill a total of 90 slots; 54 were college/post-baccalaureate students, while the remaining 36 were comprised of high-school-aged students. A total of five one-week sessions were held, during which participants joined faculty, staff and current students on clinical rotations, attended lectures and visited both Penn Vet campuses.

“The main goal of this program has been to give these participants a meaningful, yet realistic, experience in veterinary medicine both academically and clinically,” said Rob DiMeo, recruiter/counselor, Penn Vet Admissions.

Added Rosanne Herpen, associate director, Penn Vet Admissions, “The VETS program allows students the opportunity to determine if a career in veterinary medicine is something that they wish to pursue.”

The following is an essay written by VETS participant Katelyn Laury, a senior biology major at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Although many people are unsure of this answer until right before college graduation, a student looking into veterinary medicine must put a great deal of thought and preparation into their future career.

As a senior at Washington College, the vet school application process is now upon me, and although I have spent countless hours aiding creatures in the veterinary clinic, vivarium, the Lehigh Valley Zoo and animal shelter at which I work, I still felt that I could use additional animal experience before plunging into veterinary school. After hearing about the Summer Veterinary Exploration Through Science (VETS) program at Penn Vet, I knew there would be no better way for me to receive additional knowledge than through the renowned faculty at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Veterinary Medicine.

Now that I’ve completed the week-long camp and have had time to reflect on my experience at Penn Vet, I can honestly say that the VETS program not only met my original expectations, but exceeded them.

When I originally envisioned going on rotations with fourth-year vet students, I imagined I would simply be along

for the ride, catching tidbits of information here and there. During my time on the surgical and oncology rounds, I found that I could not have been more wrong. On both rotations, all faculty members actively included me in the cases.

Patient histories were shared, as were descriptions of the animals’ ailments and medications. Staff members also encouraged questions, which allowed me to better understand how complex treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation work and when it is best to use them.

In addition to the clinical rotations, the labs offered were also informative and interactive. During the anatomy and pathology labs, for example, I handled different organs and portions of skeletal systems from animals of varying species. These up-close experiences made it easy to envision the internal aspects of differing medical conditions, such as navicular disease, cancer and ovarian cysts.

Aside from the medical knowledge I gained during the VETS program, I also learned how to stay positive during the admissions process, and most importantly, I realized that I could not imagine having a job other than being a veterinarian.

When current Penn Vet students were asked what they thought the most difficult part of getting into vet school was, the unanimous answer was that you have to believe you can be accepted. Indeed, with only 28 vet schools in the country, the competition to get into one is quite high, and that is one of the first things people point out when you tell them that you want to be a vet. By hearing how these students overcame this obstacle, it helped me have faith that if I spend enough time with my books and a variety of animals, that my dream is, in fact, attainable.

No matter how difficult the academics may be, after seeing the happiness on the faces of animals fighting for their lives and the enthusiasm each of the doctors had to help these courageous pets, I was reminded of my own passion for animals. I cannot envision a more rewarding career than becoming a veterinarian and I have the VETS program to thank for that reminder as I pave my own path to vet school.

—KATELYN LAURY

Katelyn Laury is a senior at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland. With plans to earn her bachelor’s degree in biology in spring 2012, Katelyn hopes to continue her education and will be undergoing the vet school admissions process throughout the 2011-12 school year.



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families and workers, watching milking procedures and then meeting to discuss farm protocols on reproduction, nutrition, production, milk handling/sanitation and veterinary care.

Visiting the farms, but more importantly speaking with the farmers, has helped us better understand the intricacies of dairy farming in Isaan, where the DEC will be constructed. The majority of the families began dairy farming less than 10 years ago and most of their training consisted of a two-week dairy management course provided by the government. Our goal for



the DEC teaching facility is to merge existing methods of Thai farming with efficient dairy practices, adopted from countries that have been dairy farming for centuries. The result will be a teaching facility that will model profitable dairy farming methods that are implementable on the family farms in Isaan.

—BRITTANY GROSS

Searching for an “Aha” Moment on the East Coast

Adam Seth Yoskowitz is a third-year Penn Vet student who spent his summer exploring an array of paths open to him in veterinary medicine. Beginning in Vermont, Adam made his way down the east coast, stopping in New York and ending his summer stints in New Jersey.

For the past two years I have searched for an “aha” moment, when I would be sure of what path to take in veterinary medicine. I wanted to use this summer, between my second and third years at Penn Vet, to gain as much and as varied experiences as possible, with the hopes of finding that very moment.

My summer began with an externship at the Vermont Large Animal Clinic, an equine hospital serving a vast area of northern Vermont and New York, providing ambulatory services as well as in-house surgery. The average day could range from lameness exams at a nearby barn, to routine vaccinations at a small hobby farm in the Adirondacks. It was rewarding to see cases in such picturesque settings.

Next I traveled home to New York for an externship at the County Animal Hospital, a small animal hospital, where I worked as a teenager. Here I joined Dr. Robert Weiner (V'80) and Dr. Susan Rothstein with their primary caseload of dogs, cats and the occasional bird. I saw many of the usual wellness patients, but there were a few out-of-the-ordinary cases including the diagnosis of a thymoma in my 7-year-old rabbit, Chester.

The last stop for my summer adventure was at the New Jersey Equine Clinic with Dr. Scott Palmer (V'76), and Dr. Jennifer Smith. This practice is an equine referral hospital catering primarily to racehorses. Throughout my stay, I was lucky enough to see some very interesting cases such as severe corneal ulcers and several locked stifles. Each of these summer experiences has given me a firsthand look at paths I could take in my career, but, now that they are over, I realize the more I see, the more I just want to do everything! It seems that the hunt for my elusive “aha” moment continues...

—ADAM SETH YOSKOWITZ



Setting a Tradition in Thailand

For the second summer in a row, a group of Penn Vet students traveled to Thailand where they participated in a community outreach project sponsored by Government Housing Bank (GHB) that offered spays, neuters and vaccination services to underserved cats and dogs. During their stay, the 16 students performed approximately 105 spays and neuters and vaccinated about 285 animals.

Here, Christine Caro, a third-year student and vice president of the International Veterinary Student Association (IVSA), which works to plan the trip, shares her experience.

The morning was hot (though not as hot as expected) and humid. Sweat already beginning to wet our scrubs, we began to set up at the temple in Ayutthaya, Thailand for our fifth day of surgery. Unlike other surgery days in Chiang Mai and Kanchanaburi, Thailand, where all animals were owned, the patients we would treat that day were all strays, cared for by the temple's resident monks. Animals roamed the grounds freely, many of them scarred and hairless, nearly all emaciated.

By now we had our set-up routine down. Mobile clinic supplies were unpacked, IV fluid bags were hung and prep and surgery tables were set.

The Thai clinic we partnered with, Vet4 Polyclinic, had a mobile clinic/surgery suite so we were able to have three surgery tables of inhalant anesthetic. They also had at least two of their own vets present each day – Dr. Chaiyaporn Phonsuwan, or “Dr. Nao” as our group called him, was always there to assist with surgeries, and there was always an associate vet in charge of drawing up all pre-med and post-op drugs.

We also had the guidance of Dr. Molly Northrop, a Penn Vet grad and an emergency vet at Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, who provided invaluable teaching and skills, as well as peace of mind whenever we got flustered.

Because the monks have a working knowledge of all of their resident animals, they pre-determined which animals they wanted us to treat. These animals were scattered throughout our surgery area, tied to poles or trying to escape their cages.

Each student group had a designated surgeon, assistant and anesthetist. Our group consisted of primarily rising third-year students with a handful of rising second years. In these roles, third-year students talked through their surgeries, playing a dual role of surgeon and teacher to the second-year students.

Teaching the other students increased my confidence and reinforced everything I'd learned both in class and on my previous surgery trip to Thailand.

In addition to honing my surgical skills, this trip taught me about my fellow classmates and working as a group under less-than-ideal situations, about understanding a completely different culture and religion, and about providing the best possible medicine within the provided means.

And, as I eagerly anticipate starting clinics next spring, I can't help but feel a little jealous of the students that will be traveling to Thailand next summer.

—CHRISTINE CARO

