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A Glimpse at a Zoo Practice
by Gary Karlstad

"All aboard for the safari" is a familiar sound heard at Busch Gardens as the tourists board the monorail for an exciting sky-rail safari through the Wild Animal Kingdom. From their overhead ride they can view and photograph Africa's rare and vanishing species which roam freely in a replica of the famed African Veldt. There are over four hundred species of mammals in the Wild Animal Kingdom ranging from the smallest specie of antelope to the mighty and powerful elephant. For the bird watchers the tropical gardens is the home for over sixteen hundred different species of birds. This unique zoo at Tampa, Florida, is growing rapidly as a tourist attraction, a nucleus of supply to other zoos throughout the nation, and as a center of study of the wild animals.

With the wide variety as well as the large number of animals at Busch Gardens, a veterinarian's services are constantly in demand. Since very little literature is published on many of the animals, creative thinking is required by the veterinarian to diagnose and handle the new and challenging cases that occur. During this past summer, I had the opportunity to work for Dr. E. E. Schobert (ISU '52) in his small animal practice and observe him at his work at Busch Gardens. When working with wild animals, new problems arise every day. This article shall only touch on a few of the more common obstacles a zoo veterinarian must encounter in his practice.

Intestinal parasites are generally present in zoos where new animals are being introduced into the herds. This is especially true in the tropical Florida climate. On necropsy of several animals, intestinal parasites have been found to be the cause of death. To help control this problem, it was recommended that the animals be fed in bunks up off the ground. Dr. Schobert also set up a program whereby a low level of thiabendazole is constantly fed in the feed on an experimental basis.

Incompatibility of the animals sometimes causes costly deaths at a zoo such as Busch Gardens where the animals are not placed in small pens or enclosed in cages but are permitted to roam freely. Since fences are not used, the incompatible animals such as the lions are placed on a small island surrounded by a deep moat. These moats, however, present a hazard at times to the other animals when one falls into them and suffers a fractured limb.

Since the animals have a natural fear of humans, restraint presents a challenge in itself. Whenever an animal must be caught to be shipped to some other zoo, a veterinarian must be on hand. At Busch Gardens Dr. Schobert is using the experimental drug M-99 (American Cyanamid) as a tranquilizer to restrain the wild animals. He does this with the aid of a tranquilizer gun, shooting from a distance of forty to fifty feet. Heat stroke must always be on the veterinarian's mind when trying to capture an animal. In the Florida heat, hyperthermia can often be fatal when an animal is over exerted. This must also be considered when the animals are shipped in small crates without proper ventilation. A lion was received this summer in a comatose condition. The rectal tempera-

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ture measured higher than what the thermometer could measure. All efforts to revive the lion with cold water and fans failed and he died later that day.

Many of the zoo animals are inquisitive and will eat almost anything fed to them. On the other hand some people enjoy feeding these animals anything they may have in their pockets. This can range from pennies to marbles to cigarettes. Dr. Schobert related one case of an ostrich that was having a severe diarrhea. The condition never cleared up and on necropsy several pennies were found in the gastrointestinal tract. This situation was partially remedied when a monorail was installed which eliminated most of the contact between the animals and the tourists.

When an animal is shipped out of Busch Gardens, a veterinarian must examine that animal and sign a health certificate stating that it is in good physical health. The United States Department of Agriculture maintains a strict control over the interstate shipping and entrance of new animals into the United States from foreign countries. Most of the animals that come into the United States have been quarantined in Europe for sixty days and are then quarantined in Clifton, New Jersey, again for thirty more days. From New Jersey they are shipped to their final destination in the United States where they will spend the rest of their lives unless otherwise granted by the federal government.

So far this article has not included anything on the birds at Busch Gardens. This surely is not meant to imply they never need veterinary aid. On one occasion Salmonella was found to be the cause of a gastro-intestinal disturbance going through most of the birds in the Gardens. The birds made an uneventful recovery with treatment, but Dr. Schobert’s job wasn’t over yet. In an attempt to uncover the source of the Salmonella, the feed was analyzed and found to be negative. After more work and study it was found that mice were carrying the pathogen into the Gardens and contaminating the premises and feed. Throughout the year there are several fractured wings and legs that require pinning or splinting. To keep the migratory fowl in the Gardens, their wings are pinioned when they are only a few days old.

In this article I have briefly mentioned only a few of the many duties of a zoo veterinarian. With such a wide variety of species to work with, one can easily understand why there is no such thing as a routine day for a zoo practitioner.

Clinical Quiz. Continued from page 23.

Case #5:

A female cocker spaniel is presented to your clinic for her annual distemper vaccination. You note a friction burn over the dog’s left eye and ask the owner about this. He replies that she has been rubbing her head on the carpet. You start to examine the eye more closely and on necropsy it is congested. The pupil is widely dilated and not responsive to light. You make a tentative diagnosis and proceed to confirm it.

Your diagnosis is: _______________ To confirm it you: _______________

Answers:
1) gastric torsion, surgical repositioning of the stomach, unfavorable
2) feline infection anemia, find the Haemobartonella organisms on a blood smear
3) salicylate (aspirin) toxicity
4) the cat is “in heat”
5) acute glaucoma, use ophthalmoscopic examination and tonometry (“cupping” of the optic disc, congestion of the vessels of the fundus, increased intraocular pressure)