MAY 2011

Wild Animal Alumni
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RVC Royal Veterinary College University of London
ZSL LIVING CONSERVATION

Graduate Career News

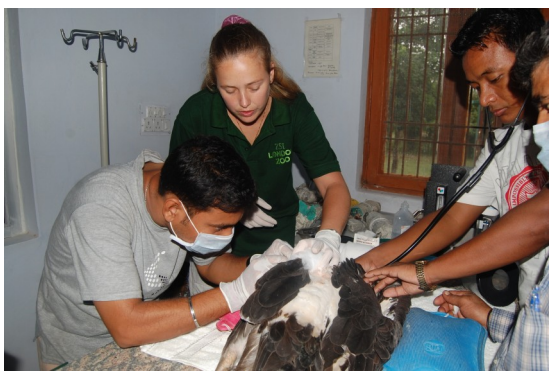
Melissa Nollet, MSc WAH 2009

It was in August 2010 after two sets of interviews, that I received a phone call from ZSL offering me the position of voluntary veterinary intern with the vulture conservation-breeding program in India. A few weeks later I found myself on a flight heading to New Delhi, looking forward to finally meeting these amazing birds in real life.

But first, a recap of what the program is all about. Three species of India's vultures, the oriental white-backed (*Gyps bengalensis*), the long-billed (*Gyps indicus*) and the slender-billed (*Gyps tenuirostris*), have experienced population declines in the excess of 95% since the 1990's. In 2004 diclofenac, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug frequently administered to cattle, was identified as the cause. Though bans on its use were put in place it was anticipated that its elimination from the environment would take time. This meant measures had to be put in place to stop the imminent extinction of the vultures. Thus the programme that started out, in collaboration between ZSL and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), to research cause of decline changed its goal. There was a need to hold and breed the birds in captivity for future release. From one centre in India the project has grown to three fully functional centres at Pinjore (Haryana), Rani (Assam) and Buxa Tiger Reserve (West Bengal). In addition ZSL is working with partners in Nepal where one centre has been set up and there is a further centre in Pakistan.

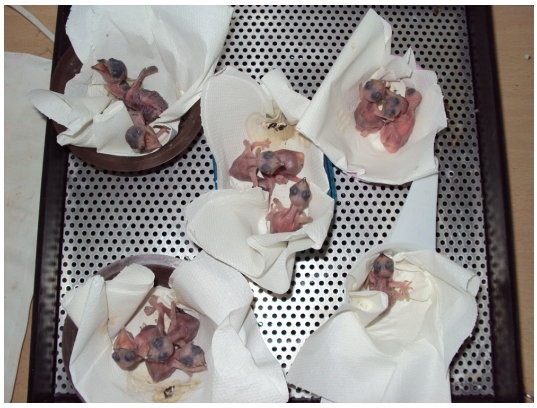
All three species have now successfully bred in captivity. Double clutching, a technique to increase the number of chicks per year, has been successful in a few cases. Through its evolution the programme has grown and undergone changes. Using a grant from the Prince Bernhard Fund for Nature, it was decided to get a veterinary intern, alias me, out here to assist in training of staff setting up and fine tuning protocols to aid in monitoring vulture health and welfare, and to ensure high of veterinary care.

The months have flown by and I am now nearing the end of my time in India and looking forward to working in Nepal for the next month. I really enjoy the interaction with the friendly, helpful and skilled staff, the food and overall the interaction with the vultures. Besides training and the unavoidable paperwork I have been involved in several medical and surgical cases, post mortem examinations and the annual catch up and health checks of vultures in all three centres. The breeding season, a very exciting time for everyone involved in the project, is now in full swing. Double clutching was tried on a larger scale this year and now we have several hungry chicks to hand-rear as well as successful parents in the colony aviaries. Still some time to go before fledging but this year promises to be another successful one for the breeding programme.



I really want to thank ZSL for giving me this opportunity. If anybody would like some further information on the project please do not hesitate to contact me (melissa_nollet@hotmail.co.uk) or have a look at the website www.vulturerescue.org.

Enric Fuste, MSc WAB 2008



Since I finished MSc WAB, I have been involved mainly in wildlife rehabilitation. My dissertation project, supervised by WAH graduate Elena Obon, initiated a strong relationship with a particular species, the Common Swift (Apus apus). Until 2008, Torreferrusa Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Barcelona was using a diet based on rat mince to hand-rear hundreds of orphan swifts arriving to the centre every season. In order to assess the performance of this diet, growth rates and body weight at release were compared to those of wild parent-raised birds. The results showed significant differences in final weight, being remarkably lower for hand-reared birds on the rat mince diet. In 2009 we extended the diet study by including three additional diets: one based on a high protein-low carbohydrate cat food, a second based on crickets (90% Acheta domesticus, 10% Galleria mellonella) and a third one using exclusively mealworm larvae (Tenebrio molitor). The results in both the insect diets groups were highly satisfactory, with values close to those on the wild. The results for the cat food formula were really poor, similar to those observed on rat mince. Last season, 2010, the centre established the mealworm formula as a diet base for the more than 800 swifts arrived to the centre. We obtained great results when compared to previous seasons (rat mince and cat food). Survival rate increased nearly 30% and the final body weight increased around 7g (a lot for a bird that weights 42-45g when adult). An optimal body condition is critical for survival in a bird that migrates to Africa straight away after fledgling.

The relevance of these findings is really important. Many wildlife rehabilitation centres are currently using non-insect based diets (mainly cat food formulas) to hand-rear insectivorous bird species. Also, the internet is full of resources, theoretically reputable, which advise the use of such wrong formulas to hand-rear insectivore chicks. Certainly, insects produced commercially are very expensive items, thus many rehabilitation centres may not take on this cost when hand-rearing large number of insectivorous orphans.

The results of the investigation have exposed how wrong diets may jeopardy not only the birds' survival during the hand-rearing process, but also their survival once back to nature. In addition, the results of the two insect diets discard any sacrifice protocol based on clinical condition at admission. There is no logic then, in the professional context of wildlife rehabilitation, the use of wrong diets when the outcome is known.

The option of using a proven successful well complemented mealworm formula, a relatively cheap insect (~20€/kg) compared to other insects such as the domestic cricket (~80€/kg), should help to move wildlife rehabilitation to insect diets when hand-rearing insectivores.

The complete results of the diet groups will be published shortly in the Zoo Animal Nutrition V. In the website www.falciotnegre.com I explain in detail the investigation experience and a protocol to hand-rear Common Swifts.

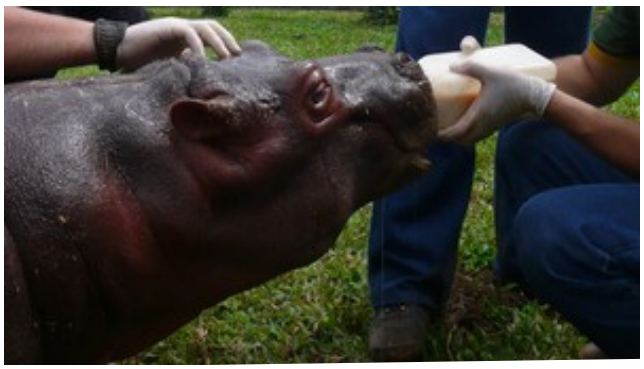
Kathryn Pintus, MSc WAB 2007

After completing the M.Sc. in Wild Animal Biology at RVC, I went on to work for a wildlife charity in London for a year, before being offered the post of Junior Professional Associate with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). I'm based at their headquarters in Gland, Switzerland, and work for the communications section of the Species Programme, which is very busy, but certainly never dull! The IUCN's Species Programme works closely with the Species Survival Commission (SSC), which is made up of hundreds of experts, all belonging to specific Specialist Groups. Our job in communications is to write press releases and develop products to help promote the work of the Species Programme and of these Specialist Groups, in order to spread the conservation message as widely and effectively as possible.

Some key events we are involved in include the major CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) meetings, as well as promoting our key conservation tool, The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™.

Working in communications is very stimulating and varied, as there is always a story breaking somewhere or a factsheet that needs writing. Having a solid biological background helps immensely, and I would recommend this career path to anyone who has an interest in writing as well as a solid knowledge of, and passion for, conservation issues.

Carlos Valderrama, MSc WAH 2007



Carlos participated in a hippo documentary for National Geographic which premiered on 6 May and will be repeating throughout the month.

The documentary is called Invaders: Cocaine Hippos — more information on the programme can be found at http://natgeotv.com/uk/invaders/about

Rea Tschopp, MSc WAH 2003

Congratulations to Rea Tschopp, whose PhD on 'Bovine tuberculosis in Ethiopian local cattle and wildlife: Epidemiology, economics and ecosystems' has been published and can be accessed at http://edoc.unibas.ch/1256/1/full_version_final_rea_2010.pdf

Notice: Graduate Publications

Please would all graduates check the attached lists of publications and let me know about any publications based on your Masters case reports or research projects for which the information is incomplete or if I have forgotten to include one? Please send any updates/ amendments to ktung@rvc.ac.uk

Notice: New post created at the Royal Veterinary College—Professor of Wildlife Health and Emerging Diseases

Professor Richard Kock has joined the Royal Veterinary College London as Chair of Wildlife Health and Emerging Diseases.

In this new post, he is working to establish and promote a One Health and conservation medicine programme including: research on emerging disease systems arising from pathogen flow between wildlife, livestock and humans. The geographical focus is Africa and South Asia and will involve working with regional and international partners. Capacity building is seen as central to achieving these goals and will include module development in professional training in UK and abroad working with partners and providing leadership in RVC teaching and post graduate programmes.

Richard is a leading expert in the health of free-ranging wildlife, particularly in the tropics, and has a strong interest in the role of wildlife in infectious diseases of livestock. Amongst his other work, Richard lectures on the Wild Animal Health and Wild Animal Biology Masters courses on sustainable use of wildlife, anaesthesia of pachyderms, and epidemiology of infection in wild artiodactyls.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

RICHARD A. KOCK (MA, Vet MB Vet MD MRCVS)

1983-1990 Veterinary Officer Zoological Society London Whipsnade
1991-1998 Secondment to Kenya Wildlife Service to develop veterinary unit now a model in the region with a department of ~ 72 permanent staff.
1999–2005 Secondment (ZSL-CIRAD) AU IBAR working on rinderpest and other transboundary animal diseases in wildlife (implementation of research, sero-surveillance and disease investigation in wildlife species in Africa). Elucidated the epidemiology of rinderpest in buffalo and other antelope species, identified and diagnosed of the last globally known epidemic of rinderpest.
2006-2010 ZSL London UK Programme Manager African, Asian and Middle Eastern field conservation projects in deserts and rangelands/Wildlife Health
2011 Professor Wildlife Health and Emerging Diseases at the Royal Veterinary College London.
2004–2012 Co-chair of the IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group.

Notice: WAVES UK

WAVES UK is the sixth international chapter of WAVES (Wild Animals Vigilance Euromediterranean Society). WAVES has membership across Europe, and their aim is to create opportunities to share knowledge with one another and develop new links with colleagues working with wildlife in a wide variety of disciplines and settings, including wildlife biology, wildlife management, animal behaviour, wildlife ecology, population health, veterinary medicine, and epidemiology.

Their first venture is to organise a UK-based conference in Edinburgh in October 2011 to establish the WAVES UK chapter and firmly establish links with our European colleagues

They now have a WAVES website up and have some further information about their upcoming conference on the site (www.wavesuk.org). If you would like to join WAVES UK, membership is free until the time of the conference, and gives you discount on conference registration. The form to apply for membership is also posted on the website.

Vacancy: Rabbit, Exotic Animal and Wildlife Clinician, £29,972 to £35,788

Applications are invited from highly motivated veterinary graduates with relevant clinical experience for the post of Rabbit, Exotic Animal and Wildlife Clinician based at the Hospital for Small Animals, Roslin, Midlothian. You will work as a member of the staff team of the Exotic Animal and Wildlife Service (EAWS), responsible for a share of the medical and surgical first opinion and referral caseload of the Service and clinical teaching. You must have post-graduate experience in rabbit, exotic animal and wildlife practice, preferably RCVS CertZooMed or equivalent. This is a new post, created in response to an increasing need for clinical cover and to assist in the generation of new clinical income within EAWS.

The position is available from July 1st 2011. Informal enquiries are encouraged. Please contact Ms Anna Meredith, tel: 0131 650 6247 or email: Anna.Meredith@ed.ac.uk

Application Procedure

We encourage all applicants to apply online at www.jobs.ed.ac.uk. The application process is quick and easy to follow, and you will receive email confirmation of safe receipt of your application. The online system allows you to submit a CV.

Alternatively, call our recruitment line on 0131 650 2511 or email jobs@ed.ac.uk for an application pack. Please complete and return the Application Form, including a statement addressing how your application meets the person specification, Additional Personal Information Form, Rehabilitation of Offenders Form and your curriculum vitae including details of two referees to Poppy Kemp, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Easter Bush Veterinary Centre, Roslin, Midlothian, EH25 9RG by the closing date of 6 June 2011. Please complete the equal opportunities form and return in the separate prepaid envelope. We cannot guarantee to consider late applications.

Please quote reference no: 3014348
Closing date: 6 June 2011