

# Community Engagement Newsletter

Faculty of Veterinary Science

Autumn 2013



## THE PIG AMBLE

Candice Ehlers (BVSc II)



Excitement was in the air as six veterinary students and six engineering students eagerly awaited the culmination of seven months of hard work. After many obstacles and trials, the community engagement project, termed the 'Pig Amble', was finally launched.

But where did it all start? Well, one might say that all community engagement projects begin with a compassion for the suffering of others and a will to make a difference. This project was no different. The team, consisting of Fae Adams, Dorette Gous, Candice Ehlers, Sarah Halgreen,

Tara Peacock and Rushda Khan, already had a passion for the welfare of the pigs at Onderstepoort (OP). They therefore gladly accepted the opportunity afforded to them by their CPE 400 project to take action and make a lasting impact.

Having already worked with the Pig Production Unit as part of their curriculum, they were well aware of the many problems faced by the Onderstepoort Training Animal Unit (OTAU) in its endeavour to provide sufficient animals for the proper training of veterinary students.

Upon the acquisition of the pigs not that many years ago, which was a major challenge in itself, OTAU was faced with a lack of facilities in an area unsuitable for outdoor pig farming. The sponsorship of a new pig unit largely solved these issues, but many new ones soon arose.

Intensification of the Pig Unit limited socialisation, as well as the availability of space. The barren environment in which the pigs were now housed also led to great boredom, resulting in the development of stereotypical behaviour.



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This could be seen as the violation of the Five Freedoms of Animals, specifically the freedom to express natural behaviour. A decline in the welfare of the pigs was therefore indicated. Attempts had been made to rectify the situation, but many obstacles, including understaffing, still persisted.

Extensive research revealed that the most effective means of combating such a problem was environmental enrichment, as it aims to stimulate the pigs to express more species-specific behaviour and therefore addresses the core problem. This was easier said than done. The team struggled to find environmental enrichment solutions that were compatible with their specific situation.

The idea finally settled upon was a concept termed the 'Pig Amble', which was inspired by the mechanical horse walker. It involved erecting a fence next to the strip of concrete already in place around the pig unit, thus creating a path for the pigs to walk on. This would allow the pigs to access the outside of their unit and to explore without compromising too much on biosecurity. It would also require little extra labour and avoid incurring the same problems that plagued the initial outdoor farming unit.

Their next challenge presented itself in the team's gross lack of construction skills as veterinary students. This hurdle was overcome by teaming up with a group of engineering students, Vincent Lamprecht, Divan De Wet, Charl Ludick, Jaun-Jacques Renison, Helmo Schutte and Herman Vermeulen, making this the first interfaculty community engagement project.

Following the procurement of additional funds from the Faculty Manager, Dr Paul van Dam, the team's implementation was soon underway. They learned a considerable amount about construction as they assisted the engineers in laying concrete, painting fences and setting up sprinkler systems. However, the digging of holes and welding of poles were largely left to the engineering students' know-how and physical ability.

Three months and much sweat and toil later, the project was finally complete. Spectators gathered round as the Dean, Prof Gerry Swan, said a few words and cut the ribbon, officially opening the 'Pig Amble'. The very enthusiastic sow participant then provided those present with a demonstration of the 'Pig Amble' in action.

The team hopes that this project will go a long way in improving the welfare of the pigs at Onderstepoort, as well as providing students with a greater opportunity to interact with and gain invaluable knowledge about the pigs. In the words of one of their lecturers, "this gives us one more thing to be proud of at OP".

## ADVENTURES WITH ELEPHANTS

**Kivara Luke, Brad Lees, Amanda Waibel, Rowan Leeming, Ross Hendry and Margurite du Plessis (BVSc II)**

Being given an opportunity by the University of Pretoria to make a difference, a group of six students unanimously agreed that they wanted their project to be aimed at wildlife in South Africa. More specifically, they wanted to raise awareness of the crisis that faces many of Africa's wildlife species.

This community engagement project was aimed at a community rather than an organisation and their goal was to provide a local community with a chance to experience something that, sadly, is more readily available to tourists than the people who live there.

As the team believes that the children of South Africa are the answer to the current dilemma facing our wildlife, and that knowledge is power, they decided that their project would involve taking a group of underprivileged children to

Adventures with Elephants, a project near Bela-Bela in Limpopo. Here the children would be allowed to interact with the elephants. More importantly, it would give them a chance to teach the learners about these magnificent creatures, that truly are the symbol of African wildlife.

Adventures with Elephants is a family-run operation that has been working with elephants since 1988.

### MEETING

Community Engagement Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, 14 May 2013 at 13:30.

# DONATIONS

Please contact one of the following people if you would like to donate money, dog food, collars, leashes, blankets or your time:

<b>Sr Sarah Johnson</b>	012 529 8387 / 079 183 1878	sarah.johnson@up.ac.za
<b>Mr Jacques van Rooyen</b>	012 529 8339 / 083 289 1312	jacques.vanrooyen@up.ac.za
<b>Mr Eugene Machimana</b>	012 529 8100 / 083 687 0181	eugene.machimana@up.ac.za

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It offers much more than the usual 'touch and feel' elephant safari experience. The owners pride themselves in spreading awareness and educating people about the elephants through their educational lectures and demonstrations for all guests. Their slogan, 'Conservation through educative interaction', encompasses what they stand for and what their aim is. Unfortunately, giving value to wildlife is an important part of ensuring their survival and the Adventures with Elephants Project is aimed at providing an economic benefit as well as developing an emotional value. Without the help and support of the Hensman family, this project would never have been possible.

The children were chosen from the Bela-Bela area with the help of Carel Coetzee from the Bela-Bela Spar and Josias Ramalekana, the youth leader involved in the organisation Light of Africa. Due to financial constraints, the students could only take 17 learners on the elephant adventure. The learners were selected from three different schools and had to report back on the experience and what they had learnt, thus influencing the community at large. Transportation and food was provided by the Bela-Bela Spar, which was incredibly generous and enthusiastic about the project.

When the students arrived in Bela-Bela to pick up the learners, they were all ready and waiting. There was a lot of enthusiasm and a slight hint of nervousness in the air, as some of them had never seen an elephant before and could not believe that they were actually being taken to see elephants, let alone touch them. So they set off for Adventures with Elephants. They arrived slightly early, which gave the students a chance to socialise with the learners. Their ideal future professions ranged from being a pilot to a jewellery designer! Once the elephants arrived, they were given an educational talk by Sean Hensman, who answered all the learners' questions about the elephants. Some of the facts are that an elephant's brain weighs five and a half kilograms on average and elephants are known for their long-term memory. An elephant can also recognise and



respond to over 70 different commands and they need to eat about 5% of their body weight a day. The learners were also taught about the need to control elephant population numbers in closed areas such as the Kruger National Park, as well as the poaching crisis all over Africa.

The group was then split up into two smaller groups for the interaction session, which involved meeting each of the six elephants and getting to know more about them and their unique personalities. The learners soon forgot about their nervousness and the air was filled with shrieks, giggles and smiles all around. While some climbed onto the back of a young female called Nuadendi, others played football and memory games with a big male called Chisuru.

From the post-interaction discussion and the questionnaire they filled out afterwards, it was evident that the learners had really learnt a lot and formed bonds with the elephants through their interaction, which changed the way they viewed wildlife. They realised just how devastating poaching can be and that it was their responsibility to make their friends realise that too. They were all given information booklets about the Faculty of Veterinary Science and the students explained what becoming a vet was all about in the hope that they could inspire some of the learners to become future vets. All in all, they felt that their project was a great success and, leaving that day, they all felt like they had made a difference, however small. The day ended with listening to 17 very happy but tired learners saying goodbye to each elephant as they headed back to the buses.

# FIGHTING PREJUDICE TO SAVE A BREED

Robyn Moll (BVSc II)

When one says the word 'pit bull', one can expect a variety of reactions. Mostly people simply assume that one is referring to vicious, baby-killer beasts that are often wrongly labelled in the news.

In collaboration with the Faculty of Veterinary Science and Underdogs South Africa Rehabilitation Centre, the CPE 400 Community Engagement group decided to focus its attention on dispelling the prejudice regarding the American pit bull terrier (APBT).



After months of planning and organisation, the project group held a pit bull and dog fighting awareness talk at the Onderstepoort Campus. Veterinary science students, lecturers and other representatives of animal welfare and the veterinary profession joined them in listening to the talk presented by Underdogs South Africa. Response to the advertised talk was overwhelming, indicating the largely professional interest in the issue. The topics, including the history of the breed, the realities of dog fighting in South Africa, how to recognise the injuries of fighting dogs and how to go about reporting dog fighting, were informative and well received. After the talk, two short demonstrations were given to display the APBT's use in the South African Police Service to sniff out drugs, and a pit bull pulled a truck to demonstrate its unique strength and desire to work.

Audience members were then given the chance to interact with the dogs and to see the true nature of this strong, devoted and loving breed. The day's events turned out to be a huge success, generating a fair amount of interest and positive feedback from those veterinary students who attended the talk and have had very little exposure to the breed.

As an added aspect of the project, the students invited a group of Grade 9 and 10 learners from Hoërskool Akasia to join them for their pit bull talk. On the morning of the talk, they were also given a detailed tour of the Onderstepoort Campus, which included a tour of the Onderstepoort

Veterinary Animal Hospital and the beagles of the Onderstepoort Teaching Animal Unit.

The project had an impact on the Underdogs South Africa Rehabilitation Centre, the Faculty and learners alike. Underdogs South Africa relies on building awareness and educating people who can help their cause. The opportunity to educate future veterinarians was thus invaluable to the organisation.

Through the project, the project group was also able to donate building materials to Underdogs South Africa that will be used to build kennels to house the dogs rescued from the dog fighting industry. Before this talk, the group members were both ignorant and fearful of pit bulls. However, they have come to realise what devoted and beautiful animals they are. As veterinarians, it is important to understand those animals that man fears, and the students now feel far better equipped to deal with the abused pit bull that may one day walk through their doors.

Finally, seeing the enthusiasm of the high school learners who had never before considered veterinary science as a profession was certainly the cherry on the top of a very successful day. The opportunity to engage with the community and to share some of the knowledge and skills that the students have gained at Onderstepoort served as a very refreshing reminder of the real joy of their proposed career. The project was implemented by Liezle Crous, Debbie van Dyk, Nadia de Beer, Ashleigh Knowles, Jade Clark and Robyn Moll.

# RUN4RHINOS

Stephnie de Villiers (BVSc II)

For their community engagement project, the Run4Rhinos project group focused on a topical issue: rhino poaching. They organised a 5 and 10 km run, called Run4Rhinos, to raise awareness of the Rhino DNA Index System (RhODIS) project and to raise funds for it.

In the fight against rhino poaching, the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory (VGL) of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the Onderstepoort Campus of the University of Pretoria is collecting DNA samples from rhinos across the country to create a database using the unique DNA profile of individual rhinos. In just over a year, the RhODIS database has grown to include the DNA of over 4 000 black and white rhinos from South Africa.

The run was a huge success! The students counted 1 493 entries, which was almost 50% more than they were aiming for. The event received great support from the staff of the Faculty of Veterinary Science and the staff at LC de Villiers.

The team raised just over R65 000, which they deposited directly into the account that was specially opened for



the project. On Faculty Day, the money was handed over to Dr Cindy Harper of the VGL.

Stephnie de Villiers, Monique Engelbrecht, Martin Jansen, Andrew Rissik and Stacy Whitehead would like to thank everyone who was involved in the organisation of this event. Also, thank you to everyone who showed their support by getting up early to do the run at 06:00.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Event	Venue	Date
Production Animal Outreach Clinic	Makapanstad and Ratjiepan Project	Wednesdays
Mamelodi Animal Health Care (MAHC)	Mamelodi Campus	Mondays to Fridays
Loate Community Veterinary Clinic	Winterveldt	Bimonthly on Wednesdays



### DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO PUBLISH?

The Community Engagement Committee invites you to submit short articles to be published in the next newsletter (Winter 2013). The community engagement article should not be more than one page long. Contact person: Mr Eugene Machimana, tel: 012 529 8100 (w), cell: 083 687 0181 or email: eugene.machimana@up.ac.za. Visit the UP Community Engagement website regularly for updates about projects and funding opportunities.