

Otjiwarongo Veterinary Clinic – Namibia

Report by Andy Morris

Travelling during the summer break whilst still studying for the veterinary degree can sometimes prove difficult, especially with EMS to fulfil, but many students still succeed in doing so. After intercalating in the new BSc (Hons) in Veterinary Conservation Medicine at Liverpool University, I was keen to do some wildlife veterinary work, and, if possible, to combine this with gaining experience of veterinary work in developing countries. After hearing from a friend about a veterinary clinic in Namibia, South West Africa, I emailed the practice and organised to see some EMS there. My flight took me out from London and via Johannesburg into Windhoek, the capital of Namibia.



Andy Morris with Levi, a worker at the Otjiwarongo Veterinary Clinic

The pet meercat, “Scratchy”, at the hostel where I was staying was my first introduction to some of the new species that I was to meet over there. After several days in the capital and an “interesting” journey up to Otjiwarongo, about 300 Km north of Windhoek, I arrived at the guesthouse where I was to stay for the next three weeks. In the morning I cycled to the practice and it was a great time to experience the town and take in some of the culture, as well as helping me to wake up. My first morning began with a typical cat bite abscess although the victim, a calf, and the perpetrator, a leopard, were somewhat more unusual. Mortalities through big cat related injuries are a real problem for many of the extensive beef farms in the area. Several charities, such as Africat and the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), have helped to reduce these problems by educating local farmers on methods to reduce the incidents of big cat attacks and by removing problem cats in certain areas. As well as victims of these attacks, both cheetahs and leopards are themselves occasionally presented to the practice with various ailments and clinical conditions, often not dissimilar to those seen in the domesticated cat.



A “zebraid” (above) with suspected tetanus

A white rhino in Etosha National Park

Otjiwarongo veterinary clinic is a three vet, mixed practice. Doctor Mark Jago qualified from Cambridge and vets Doctor Axel Hartmann and Doctor Ingrid Spitz both qualified from Onderstepoort vet school, South Africa. During my time at the practice, I was lucky enough to see many interesting cases. Early in my stay we were called to a rhino on a private game reserve that had gone lame. The owner was keen to instigate a treatment regimen and relocate the animal to a smaller enclosure with a “pet” rhino that had been bottle reared. The vet darted the animal from within a helicopter and together with a team of workers we tracked the rhino until recumbency was achieved. The variety of scratches I suffered during this event was an early lesson on the perils of not wearing

proper bush clothing. During my second week we were called to a guest farm some 250km from the practice. It was a great time for me to take in some of the great expansive landscapes and learn more from the vets about work in Namibia. Although Namibia is not classified as free from foot and mouth, a “red line” barrier near the northern border maintains the foot and mouth disease virus free status for beef reared south of the line. This is vitally important for export. This particular call out involved a “zebroid” (a randy zebra stallion had got in with the mares several years previously!!) with severe ataxia. Tetanus or poisoning was suspected in this case. It was particularly interesting for me to see how a veterinary service operates in such challenging situations, which often require innovative improvisations under tight financial constraints. Work in less developed countries does also provide experience with diseases that are thankfully no longer seen as frequently in the UK, for example distemper, rabies, and even anthrax. This is invaluable firsthand knowledge and is one of the many advantages of experiencing some clinical work in another country.

Andy Morris BSc (Hons)

December 2002