

Harry Steele-Bodger Memorial Scholarship 2018

Raptor Rehabilitation in Florida Informal report by Helen Inzani

This March, thanks to the generosity of the BVA and the Harry Steele-Bodger Memorial Scholarship Fund, I travelled to the United States for the very first time. My destination was the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. The centre has been running in the very same location in Maitland Florida since 1979. It has become a world-renowned place of excellence in raptor rehabilitation, treating everything from miniature Eastern Screech Owls to dauntingly large Bald Eagles.

Having already performed a study with a specialist raptor centre in the UK, my aim was to compare the procedures and rehabilitations rates between the UK and US. The centre staff and volunteers made me feel welcome and were incredibly keen to get involved with this project. I would like to give a special thanks to Sam Little, who was instrumental in getting me to the centre in the first place.

My first impression at Audubon was walking through the door straight into the clinic, immediately met by the interns hand-feeding an osprey. Being only the second osprey I'd seen in flesh, I could already see this was going to be a brilliant experience. The magnificent bird of prey was a patient admitted for electrical burns from pylons a few weeks earlier. He was one of many patients I was to meet and learn from during my experience.

By the end of the first day I had been taught how to safely administer subcutaneous fluids and hand feed many owls, hawks, vultures and eagles; all the while learning the best handling techniques for each species. To top it off, I had the privilege of being part of a bald eagle release. The adult eagle was transported hooded, but not enclosed, being held on an experienced volunteer's lap. It sat peacefully for 30 minutes, only perking up when we turned the corner at the reserve that was to be its new home. Witnessing it fly away back into the wild was a rewarding experience to all and clearly made all the centre's hard-work feel worthwhile.

For the next nine days I was given a whistle-stop tour: triaging new admissions, treating wounds from other birds, dealing with road-traffic collision cases, assessing avian blood smears and managing fledglings. All cases were brought in by caring members of the public or other rescue centres.

By my last day I was assisting with a direct blood transfusion. The recipient was a red shouldered hawk, who had come in with a significant head trauma and evidence of shock. The patient was immediately given a subcutaneous fluid bolus, and oral fluids via a crop tube, while the blood was being assessed in the onsite laboratory. The veterinary technician in charge quickly identified that the PCV was dangerously low, therefore a transfusion was necessary. One of the centre's healthy resident red shouldered hawks was selected as a donor and blood was taken via the brachial vein. The recipient patient was anaesthetised for

the insertion of an intraosseous catheter. Once recovered from the anaesthetic, the blood transfusion process was started. The bird responded brilliantly to treatment, all thanks to the quick assessment and treatment on-site by the fantastic staff. After just over a week, he was set to be moved to the flight cages before full release.

Working with the team at Audubon was an incredible experience. The techniques I've learnt have already proven invaluable, with my very own emergency tawny owl patient earlier this month. Additionally, the centre was kind enough to send me plenty of data on all their recent admissions before I left. So, now it's on to the number-crunching and analysis side of the experience. Hopefully, further interesting and useful comparisons are just around the corner for us in the UK and Florida, within this project and many more projects to come.

