Welcome to our new-look Roundhouse.

I have a lot of people to thank for supporting me in setting into the faculty Dr Jennie Churchill is first on the list. The Board of the Veterinary Science Foundation (VSF) also rolled up their sleeves and helped with this transition. Two of them discovered they were not bad fundraisers themselves. I am also very fortunate that two key industry members have become mentors to me – special thanks to Ian Russell of Provet and Tony McGloon of Apex Laboratories.

The very first challenge was to ensure the success of Animalia. Thanks to a host of people, especially the Committee, led by James Balfour. The night was a huge success.

James Morrison, supported by the Australian Youth Orchestra and jazz singer Emma Pask, was spectacular as he entertained nearly 300 guests supporting this year’s Animalia Fundraising Concert. Jonica Newby of ABC TV Catalyst fame, who is also a vet, did a gallant job as our special guest MC. The event was once again held at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and thanks to all our sponsors, donors and friends, who raised $50,000 for the Veterinary Science Foundation.

We have some terrific plans for this year’s Animalia concert. So please put Thursday 22 November, 2007 in your diary.

In early October 2006 a small group of the Faculty got together with a facilitator to look at partnership opportunities for companies interested in having their brand associated with ours. We created an assets register that highlighted the features of the asset and how it may benefit interested companies. We had this document commercially valued and we were pleasantly surprised. I have begun the process of contacting companies that have shown a past interest in working with the faculty.

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In this issue you can read about the opening of our new Centre for Wildlife Conservation and Education. As well, we focus on the faculty’s global research program and some of the new state-of-the-art equipment which will make Camden’s equine facilities among the best in Australia. We’ve given Roundhouse a fresh makeover, making it easier to read without compromising the high quality of technical information it imparts.

All of which has made the faculty an exciting place to work and garner support for.

JACQUELINE BOOTH
Director
Upgrades to the University’s Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Camden will make it the best-equipped centre of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

State-of-the-art equipment worth $5 million will revolutionise the treatment of large animals, in particular horses. The new equipment includes a High Speed Treadmill, a standing MRI Scanner and a new facility for nuclear scintigraphy which together will place Camden at the forefront of veterinary science in Australia, with unique clinical diagnostic services and facilities for groundbreaking research.

“We have a first-rate team of staff at Camden in both teaching and research,” said Professor Leo Jeffcott, Dean of Veterinary Science. “We now have equipment which will support all these areas of our endeavours. The faculty’s vision is to be a leader in veterinary science in the region and this is a major step towards this goal.”

The nuclear scintigraphy facility will be the most sophisticated in Australia. Its ability to scan the entire skeletal frame of a horse will assist in the diagnosis of injuries contributing to poor performance.

The MRI Scanner is the first for treating large animals in Australia. Described as the ‘Rolls Royce’ of the new equipment it will be essential for providing clear images of areas of lameness localised by the nuclear scintigraphy facility.

An upgrade to digital radiology and two state-of-the-art ultrasound machines will make the Teaching Hospital a “one stop” diagnostic facility for poor performance and lameness.

Upgrades of the anaesthesia equipment and surgical systems and facilities will ensure the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Camden is equipped with technology comparable to leading human hospitals. The spectrum of services is wider than ever before and positions the facility at the top of industry standards.

“The new equipment places us as the best-equipped large animal teaching hospital in the southern hemisphere and comparable to the elite North American Universities,” said Professor Dart. “We’re in a great position to be a referral clinic that can provide full diagnostic services and treatment, 24 hours a day.”

The equipment will be installed at the Hospital during 2007 and is the result of a generous investment from the University aimed at increasing Camden’s self-sustainability.

“The equipment comes under an initial five year lease funded by the University. After five years the Hospital will continue the lease themselves through income generation,” said Associate Professor Andrew Dart, Director of the University Veterinary Centre at Camden. “It’s an incredibly supportive undertaking by the University to ensure it exceeds international teaching and research standards.”

The range of equipment is extensive. As a world leader in the field of exercise physiology the new Swiss-made treadmill will ensure a greater success rate in diagnosing problems such as poor performance, lung problems and lameness in horses.

“The faculty’s vision is to be a leader in veterinary science in the region and this is a major step towards this goal.”

“THE FACULTY’S VISION IS TO BE A LEADER IN VETERINARY SCIENCE IN THE REGION AND THIS IS A MAJOR STEP TOWARDS THIS GOAL”
Nestled in the Camden Valley is a University Centre that has taken a major step forward in wildlife conservation. The Wildlife Health and Conservation Centre (WHCC), the first of its kind in Australia, is dedicated to the health and welfare of native fauna. You can almost hear the local shingle backs, cockatoos and joeys breathe a collective sigh of relief.

The centre was opened in front of more than 100 supportive members of the community and the University on 2 May by Pat Farmer, the Federal MP for Macarthur. It was conceived by Dr Jennie Churchill and Professor Tony English from the Faculty of Veterinary Science as a holistic centre for native wildlife conservation. Mr Farmer praised their vision, reminding people of the “infectious nature of dreams”.

The centre’s new director, David Phalen, gave an inspiring presentation saying that the new centre was much more than a building. He said it was “a catalyst to bring together all those united in their commitment to conserving wildlife for our descendants”.

The Dean of Veterinary Science, Professor Leo Jeffcott, and the Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor

Three days after the official opening the centre opened its doors to the public. Dr Phalen said he wanted the centre to be community-based and the open day attracted thousands of interested visitors. The day offered something for everyone with tours, the opportunity to meet native wildlife close-up, and experts on hand to answer questions. Children were kept entertained with a jumping castle, face painting and a Community Day blessing of the animals.

Top left hand: Green tree frogs.  
Top middle: Bearded dragon.  
Top right hand: Tariq Perkins brings his own pets to the Community Day.  
Middle left: Gabby, Chantelle & Matthew Dalton doing surgery on a stuffed wombat.  
Bottom left: Gabby, Chantelle & Matthew Dalton make friends with an alpaca.
Don Nutbeam, both praised the University’s support for the endeavour, emphasising its strategic importance and the potential for research and teaching that the new centre now offers the Camden Campus and the greater community.

The centre is an indication of the growing awareness within the general and scientific communities, both in Australia and overseas, of the urgent need to conserve and protect native animals. Dr Phalen said it would become a world class scientific, teaching and veterinary medical centre devoted solely to the health, welfare and conservation of native fauna.

The WHCC will also develop relationships with relevant government and non-government organisations and with the community, for the purposes of research, education and the provision of clinical services.

Dr David Phalen

David is the director of the Centre. He spent five years in private practice and a further 17 years teaching exotic animal medicine and surgery to students at Texas A&M University. David is fascinated by all animal species but is particularly passionate about birds. He has published widely on infectious diseases of birds and other exotic pets and many other aspects of exotic animal medicine. David is a Diplomat of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners Avian Specialty.

Dr Anne Fowler

Anne is the senior clinical veterinary registrar at the Centre. She has worked with both large and small animals but her passion is for the health and wellbeing of exotic animal pets such as birds, reptiles and small mammals. Anne has an excellent reputation as an exotic animal and wildlife veterinarian. She also holds prominent positions in a number of industry organisations such as the Association of Avian Veterinarians, the Australian Veterinary Association and the Unusual and Exotic Pet Special Interest Group.

Neil Loomes

Neil is the administrative assistant at the Centre. His experience includes owning a pet store as well as working at Taronga Zoo for the past 16 years. Neil has extensive knowledge of animal husbandry and care which has proved a valuable resource for the Centre. He is the first point of contact for people using the Avian, Reptile, and Exotic Pet Hospital, and also plays an important role in the care of hospitalised animals.

Sharon Andronicos

Sharon is the Centre’s veterinary nurse. She has extensive nursing experience in private practices, including emergency clinics and zoo and wildlife medicine. Sharon has a passion for all animals and is an important addition to the medical and surgical team at the Centre.
and in Vietnam a joint project is underway to improve pig production. Projects such as these involve close cooperation with institutions in the host countries, often including joint research initiatives and cross-country training programs which have broadened the output and influence of the faculty’s research.

The faculty also has a strong rural research program which has profound effects on rural industries. The farm animal health project is the major national research group looking into Johnne’s Disease, a wasting disease common to sheep and cattle. The research group collects samples from properties throughout NSW and often works in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture. Such is the strength of this program that the University’s combined rural research grants – between the faculties of veterinary science and agriculture – are double that of its nearest rival, the University of Melbourne.

The success of the research expansion is also evident in the increased funding and grants, with research facilities now “bursting at the seams”, according to Professor Evans. Grant funding has increased two and a half times in the last four years and continues to grow. Rural and veterinary industry grants contribute the majority of funding towards these research projects with direct government grant contributions totalling a smaller 15 per cent.

The success of the research program over the past two years has been a collaborative effort. “Everyone in the faculty can share in the credit for a collective effort, including those researchers who are increasingly busy raising funds to support the students and their research,” said Professor Evans.

The University has also assisted the faculty’s research by supporting lectureships in strategic growth areas which made the faculty a leader in

On a farm in southern NSW, vets collect samples from sheep to research Johnne’s Disease. In Gujurut in India, researchers have manufactured protein feed supplements which will increase milk production in cows; while at Camden on the outskirts of Sydney, scientists are looking at genetic susceptibility to disease. These projects share something in common: they are all initiatives of the University’s Faculty of Veterinary Science.
cutting-edge technologies. One of these projects is FutureDairy. Based at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute and considered a gold standard project, it has established the first robotic milking facility in Australia. Cows literally present themselves at automated milking machines, removing the need for human contact.

So where to next for veterinary science research? Opportunities exist in a whole catalogue of growth areas where veterinary science finds itself at the centre of some of the world’s most pressing concerns: bio-security and epidemics such as bird flu; bioinformatics – the mining of genetic information to implement advanced breeding technology; and veterinary public health which looks at diseases transmitted between animals and humans. “Australia currently enjoys a relatively high disease-free status and veterinary research and training are essential to maintain this economic advantage and biomedical security,” said Professor Evans.

With such important issues to address it is hard to see how veterinary science will not remain vital in our increasingly globalised environment.

Dr David Collins from Seaforth Veterinary Hospital has been chosen as the 2007 Cenvet Partner Practitioner in Residence.

This program has been made possible by the generous support of Cenvet, the Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association and the Veterinary Science Foundation.

David graduated from Sydney University in 1995 and is a Member of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in both Medicine of Dogs and Medicine of Cats. In addition he holds a Diploma in Business Administration.

Seaforth Veterinary Hospital has hosted a number of interns since the inception of the faculties new final year program and David feels a strong responsibility to ensure new graduates are ready for private practice.

“I remember too well how intimidating it was to be a new graduate and feel strongly that as many procedures and as much clinical decision making as possible should be done in the safe setting of final year rotations.”

Selected from an impressive list of candidates, David will undertake a 12 week program at the University Veterinary Centre, participating in the management of cases from primary care, anaesthesia, surgery and referral medicine as well as supervising final year interns.

“The Cenvet Practitioner in Residence will be a wonderful opportunity for me to be involved in state-of-the-art clinical practice and for me to contribute to the education of students and help facilitate their transition to private practice.”
FREE RANGE HENS MUST SURELY BE LESS STRESSED THAN BATTERY HENS, RIGHT?

But in an increasingly heated and politicised debate the answer might not be so simple according to Dr Jeff Downing of Sydney University’s Poultry Unit.

Opponents in the hen-rearing argument are divided over the process by which stress in hens is measured, and over the results of studies.

Typical stress assessments have involved taking blood from laying hens, a procedure that is stress provoking in itself. But Dr Downing has devised a non-invasive way of measuring stress in laying hens by determining the corticosterone concentration in egg albumen.

A good proportion of a hen’s egg is made up of albumen, the so-called egg white. By administering corticosterone to laying hens, studies were able to establish that a relationship exists between plasma and albumen corticosterone concentrations.

Corticosterone is a steroid hormone released from the adrenal gland when a hen is stressed. A high corticosterone concentration therefore is one of the main physiological measures of stress levels in hens. And because corticosterone in egg albumen is a reliable indicator of the concentration in blood, measuring corticosterone concentration in egg albumen avoids many of the problems associated with taking blood samples from hens.

“Chronic stress is associated with poor welfare and therefore measures of stress are one of the physiological measures of hen welfare,” said Dr Downing.

His testing procedure has been used across a number of commercial and experimental housing conditions for hens. One study, undertaken by the University of Sydney Poultry Research Unit and collaborating institutions, found no differences in the corticosterone concentrations of hens housed in different production systems.

The studies took into account temperature, floor space, cage density, age, type of housing and the provision of furnished cage features. Interestingly, some hens in all housing environments were found to have high levels of corticosterone concentrates, suggesting further study should focus on what is happening to individual hens rather than comparing the attributes of the different housing systems.

Other results from controlled environment studies indicate that heat can be stressful for hens and that it is difficult to control the environment of free range systems. One study also found that the provision of nests or dustbaths in cages had little effect on hen welfare and that the number of hens in a cage was more likely to have an impact on stress levels than the cage space available to them. Conditions that result in biological dysfunction are also more likely to adversely affect hen welfare.

The average hen lays 257 eggs a year, feeding a world population with a yearly consumption of more than a billion eggs. It’s stressful enough to warrant increased attention from various interest groups intent on monitoring modern production systems and ensuring hen welfare. This requires continued study into how hens cope with the environments created for them.

What makes a hen stressed? Well it’s just not that simple!
When these failed to find the cause of Zuri’s abdominal pain, Dr Christine Smith, a University of Sydney equine specialist, and Dr Larry Volgnes from Taronga Zoo, attempted a more intrusive procedure, an exploratory laparotomy. This involves cutting into the abdominal cavity to allow an examination of the organs to take place.

Surgery on an animal weighing 450kg is never easy. In the space of about three hours Zuri was darted with a tranquillizer, transported to Taronga Zoo hospital, fork-lifted on to the operating table, operated on, and placed back on her feet again.

“The operation itself is quite routine. The circumstances certainly were not routine,” said Dr Smith. “I suppose if the zebra woke up during the procedure, which is highly unlikely, it may have been dangerous for us. Our biggest concern was that Zuri was not going to able to be confined to a small area to minimize stress to the incision, and could only have one dose of antibiotics at the time of surgery.”

The laparotomy found coarse and dry feed and a small amount of sand backed up in the large colon. “We think Zuri might have been having repeated bouts of mild impactions which caused the abdominal pain,” said Dr Smith.

Despite the dangers and the unique set of circumstances, Zuri is now fit and back in the giraffe enclosure at the Zoo.

What happens when an animal as large as a zebra gets a stomach ache?

Over the course of a year, Zuri, a zebra at Taronga Zoo, endured a series of medical procedures in an attempt to get to the bottom of his recurring stomach ache: a rectal palpation, abdominal ultrasound, abdominocentesis and an endoscopy of the urinary bladder.
What are you studying at the University?
I'm a first year Bachelor of Veterinary Science student but I actually started in a business degree. It was always a choice between business and veterinary science. I initially chose business thinking I would keep my love for animals as a hobby. But my experiences in Africa really focused my passion for wildlife and conservation and I changed over to the veterinary science degree. I haven't regretted the change at all.

Last year you spent 3 months in the Congo. What did you do there?
I worked in a chimpanzee orphanage, basically it was a half-way house for baby chimpanzees. It’s hard to find sanctuaries for chimpanzees as many of them have already reached their full capacity. So the half-way house was a kind of temporary abode where the chimps could get food, love and care and psychological support. Baby chimpanzees need 24 hour contact otherwise they don’t develop, so part of my job was to be an alpha male figure. But I also played with the chimps and built enrichment tools in the garden.

What experiences were a highlight?
In one case there was a baby chimp who contracted meningitis. I was quarantined with the chimp for a week as I was the only person there with the correct blood type. We ate, drank and slept together. It really challenges your ideas that humans and animals are intrinsically different to each other. I really don't believe they are. I'd look at his facial expressions, his mannerisms and we would really be interacting with each other.

What are your aims for the future?
I'd like to work in wildlife and conservation and I think my experience in the Congo really focused that. I know you can’t help every animal but I'd really like to work with Australian wildlife. I’ve just joined WIRES and I’d love to work in educating children about wildlife and conservation. I’d like to set up a wildlife sanctuary in Australia, a kind of resource centre but also with a public face and an education element.

What is your position in the faculty?
I’m the Director of the Small Animal Section at the University Veterinary Centre at Camden and I’ve been in the position for eight months.

What training have you done?
I qualified as a vet in 1985 in South Africa. I then worked in England for two years before returning to South Africa to gain a specialist qualification in small animal surgery in 1995. After that I owned and managed a large small animal specialist referral centre in Johannesburg until moving to Sydney eight months ago.

What type of work did you do in South Africa?
Specialist referral surgery. I focused especially on orthopedics and developed the first total hip replacement system for dogs in Southern Africa. I performed this procedure on more than 400 dogs over the last 10 years.

Why did you choose veterinary science?
It’s a vocation really. I’m a very lucky in that from the day I could walk and talk I knew I wanted to be a vet. I never questioned my vocation. Growing up on a farm, I was always surrounded by animals. I have also spent a lot of time in the African bush, which further cultivated my interest in animals.

What has been the biggest influence on your career?
Probably the personal satisfaction of repairing something in an animal which is suffering. Seeing that instantaneous improvement surgery can provide an injured animal. For example I might see a paralysed dog with a slipped disc and after operating on the injury the animal can get up and walk again within three days – that is most satisfying.

What is the University Clinic at Camden all about?
We are trying to establish a surgical and medical referral veterinary centre at Camden. We have a staff of four vets, two nurses and a kennel assistant. Our niche is really the ability to provide top expertise and resources that are perhaps beyond the capability of most general practice veterinary clinics. We also train surgical and medical registrars and provide resources for veterinary science students to come through on a voluntary rotation basis.

What is your current position?
I’m a Specialist Surgeon at the North Shore Veterinary Specialist Centre. I did an undergraduate degree in Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney, graduating in 1975. I also did 28 months of postgraduate clinical training as part of my specialty in small animal surgery at the University.

Do you maintain links to the University?
I am a board member of the Veterinary Science Foundation. I’m also part of the Surgery Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Sciences which holds monthly meetings in Sydney. Undergraduate students from the University also do training at my practice.

You have a state-of-the-art practice?
Well the practice is as much about the people and training as it is about the building and equipment. For me it is important to use the equipment well and work for good patient outcomes but we certainly have good resources and equipment.

What does the practice consist of?
It’s a general practice as well as specialty referral practice. We also have a boarding kennel for cats and a dog pound for the North Sydney Council. We have extensive facilities including a pharmacy, two surgeries and a library. Basically we have the same equipment here as you would find in human hospitals.

What’s the most unusual case you have dealt with?
What I find unusual probably doesn’t sound like that to anyone else. The other day I had a small dog with a collapsed trachea; basically its windpipe was soft and couldn’t stay open. We had to place a stainless steel collar around the windpipe to keep it open so the dog could breathe. It will stay there for the rest of its life. Last year I also operated on a dog that got shot protecting its owner during a home invasion. There was a lot of news coverage due to the unusual circumstances. He was called Rocky the hero dog and one of the bullets went through on a voluntary rotation basis.

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The first person with a veterinary qualification to receive the Nobel Prize, Professor Peter Doherty, will deliver the 2007 JD Stewart Address at the University, entitled ‘Hooked on Research’.

Professor Doherty received the Nobel Prize in 1996, sharing it with Swiss colleague Rolf Zinkernagel. The prize was given in recognition of their work on how the immune system recognises virus-infected cells.

After graduating in veterinary science and working as a veterinary officer, Professor Doherty moved to Scotland where he received his PhD from the University of Edinburgh Medical School. In 1997 he received further recognition for his work when he was named Australian of the Year. Professor Doherty has since been commuting between St Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis and the Department of Microbiology at the University of Melbourne.

Professor Doherty’s research is mainly in the area of defence against viruses. He also devotes his time to ensuring that research is high on the national agenda.

Professor Doherty will deliver the annual J.D. Stewart Address at the University’s Veterinary Conference Centre. The event takes place on Thursday 5 July at 6pm. If you are interested in attending please call 02 9351 8026.

Genetics Society of AustralAsia’s 45th Annual Conference

The latest news from the field of genetics will be aired when the University hosts the Genetics Society of AustralAsia’s 54th annual conference on 27–29 June.

The conference convener is Dr Kathy Belov from the Faculty of Veterinary Science. Well-known for her work on the first marsupial genome, Dr Belov is enthusiastic about this year’s conference: “It is a great honour for us to host such an event and we are expecting to hear about new and exciting research both in Australia and overseas.”

The conference brings together speakers from around the world. The opening address will be given by Dr Jim Peacock, the Chief Scientist of the Australian Government, and other speakers include Professor Richard Gibbs, Professor Scott Edwards, Professor Dave Burt, Professor Win Hide, Professor Paul Herbert and Dr Marilyn Raymond.

The conference is a joint effort involving a number of leading institutions in Australia including the University of Sydney, the Australian National University, the University of New South Wales, the Australian Museum and Taronga Zoo.

For more information and to register for the conference, visit http://gsa2007.org/

The 2007 Partners in Veterinary Education Conference

The Veterinary Science Faculty will be hosting the fifth annual Partners in Veterinary Education Conference, on Thursday 19 and Friday 20 July.

The conference involves accredited partners in the fifth Extramural Intern Program and Educational Support Practice Program for first and second year students, and is generously supported by our principal partner and co-host Provet.

The 2007 continuing education focus will be Oncology, led by Professor Tony Moore and Dr Angela Frimberger. Other topics will include: Why treat cancer? and Are mast cell tumors really bad? There will also be presentations on equine tumors, endocrinology in cancer, clinical use of radioisotopes and much more.

This year Emeritus Professor Brian Farrow will be our guest speaker at the dinner on Thursday 19 July. Our Educational Partner Forum will be continuing for the second year, with four partners presenting: Oncology in private practice, A case I have treated.

The Faculty looks forward to welcoming its Partners to the 2007 conference. For further information, please contact Ms Melanie Robson, Co-ordinator Extramural Placements on phone (02) 9351 3550 or email: extramural@vetsci.usyd.edu.au.

Thursday 22 November, 2007 at 6.30pm

Animalia 2007, the annual fundraising concert for the Sydney University Veterinary Science Foundation, continues our tradition of delivering a unique, intimate evening of music. This year we feature Jane Rutter, the brilliant and versatile flautist performing a program of Gershwin and other great composers. This memorable musical experience will be held in the University of Sydney’s magnificent Great Hall, followed by a delicious supper in MacLaurin Hall.

For more information and to register for the conference, visit http://gsa2007.org/
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