

BVZS

BVZS celebrates 50 years

Delegates at this year's autumn meeting of the British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS) had a chance to learn about birds and bees – as well as mammals, reptiles, fish and invertebrates – and to discuss their experiences of dealing with creatures that don't all appreciate being close to human beings. The meeting marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the BVZS.

Gill Harris reports

SAVING species from extinction was the subject addressed by Lee Durrell, honorary director of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, who was the plenary speaker at the BVZS's 50th anniversary meeting. She began by talking about the life of her late husband, Gerald Durrell. His interest in animals had grown after his family moved to Corfu when he was 10 years old; these experiences were recounted in his book, 'My Family and Other Animals' published in 1956. She explained how Gerald had founded Jersey zoo in 1959 – now known as the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust – and the problems he had to overcome in order to do so. She described it as 'a modest little zoo and a major force in species conservation', a fact confirmed by its involvement in 50 projects in 14 countries.

The trust had achieved much because of Gerald's beliefs and determination, she said. During her talk, she described some of its remarkable conservation stories, beginning at home in Jersey saving the red-



Lee Durrell, who discussed some of the successes of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

billed chough. A project further from home concerned Round Island, close to Mauritius,

where just four Mauritius kestrels remained when Gerald was asked to help to save the species in the 1970s. Arriving on the island, he discovered that it had been ravaged by rabbits and goats which were thought to have been left by visiting sailors. Once these were removed, she said, the island 'greened up', the insects returned, reptile numbers recovered and captive-bred kestrels could be returned to the island. The captive breeding centre that had been set up to save the birds went on to become a pioneering research institution for tropical raptor and small falcon conservation.

Dr Durrell was particularly proud of the part played by the zoo in education. All children schooled in Jersey visit the zoo as a formal part of their curriculum. The trust also organises a variety of courses for veterinarians, conservation biologists, zoo managers and students from around the world who work to save endangered species.

The two-day meeting, which was held at the Carden Park Hotel, near Chester,

Working with wildlife and zoo animals

Much work with wildlife and zoo animals involves making decisions as events unfold, often without the benefit of published information to refer to. In a paper entitled 'Giraffe caesarean', which was presented at the BVZS meeting, Patrick O'Doherty used a video to present a case of dystocia that resulted in a non-elective caesarean in a giraffe.

In the case described, Noelle, a four-and-a-half-year-old giraffe, was in her second pregnancy. Her first pregnancy had resulted in an assisted delivery under sedation. The calf had been delivered per vaginam alive, but failed to stand or suckle voluntarily and was euthanased five days later. Postmortem examination revealed a number of fractured ribs and aspiration pneumonia.

Complications were not expected in the second pregnancy and Noelle was monitored via video link for some weeks leading up to the expected due date. She began calving, but having shown little progress after several hours, it was decided to investigate further.



Mr O'Doherty described the sedation protocol and, despite a failure in the compression system of the crush, Noelle had settled and he was able to assess her. It was quickly established that the calf was dead and had been for some time; it was also breach and oversized.

In a precarious position in the crush, the team reversed the sedation and then induced anaesthesia immediately before releasing Noelle. Once recumbent,

anaesthesia was maintained, antibiotics and analgesia were administered and the caesarean was relatively routine, with a total knockdown time of three to three-and-a-half hours. The giraffe was left to recover overnight, but the following afternoon she collapsed and apparently suffered a massive heart attack.

Mr O'Doherty said that he welcomed comments, criticisms and contributions on the protocols and the period of recumbency and how they might have affected the eventual outcome.

His paper, together with all the others presented at the meeting, was made available to delegates in bound form as 'Proceedings of the 50th anniversary autumn meeting 2011', edited by Victoria Roberts.



Fred Frye, who held a one-day masterclass on clinical herpetological medicine and surgery

on November 12 and 13, was split into short half-hour papers in five subject areas – large mammals, herpetology, aquaria and invertebrates, small mammals and birds. This year, for the first time, bees were included in the programme, with a presentation of the work of the Food and Environment Research Agency's National

Bee Unit being given by the unit's diagnostics manager, Selwyn Wilkins.

On the Sunday, alongside the scientific programme, invited speaker Fred Frye held a one-day masterclass on clinical herpetological medicine and surgery, presented as if in a clinical situation to mimic what vets encountered in practice, and with a self-assessment element.

The meeting also heard from BVZS founder member, Ian Keymer, who described how, as a result of a letter by Oliver Graham-Jones in *The Veterinary Record* in 1961, calling for the formation of a society of wildlife veterinarians, 36 vets with experience of working with wild and captive non-domesticated species had gathered for an inaugural meeting on July 14, 1961. Dr Keymer went on to describe the society's activities and achievements over 50 years. As one of the BVA's smaller divisions, the BVZS has 379 members, with 58 members having joined in the past year – 170 members attended the anniversary meeting.



At a dinner marking the 50th anniversary of the BVZS, founder member Ian Keymer (centre) was presented with a certificate, the 'BVZS golden jubilee special merit award', recognising his commitment to the society, along with a photograph of a lilac breasted roller. The presentation was made by BVA President, Carl Padgett, and announced by BVZS president, Victoria Roberts

■ The BVZS's spring meeting – on avian medicine and surgery – will be held from April 21 to 22, 2012. There will also be a visit to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, on April 20. Details from www.bvzs.org

doi: 10.1136/vr.d8270