The UK Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO), Nigel Gibbens, visited the University of Liverpool’s Leahurst campus last month to take part in a mock animal disease outbreak exercise and to talk about his role in disease control.

Gaining new insight into disease control

The CVO spent a day with students studying for the University of Liverpool’s Masters in Veterinary Science degree. For these students, a semester is devoted to learning not just about the microbiology and epidemiology of disease control, but also how to respond to media and public concerns about such outbreaks.

This year, the students are investigating a hypothetical plague scenario, in which disease is imported to the UK through household pets. They must trace the source of the outbreak to ensure that human and animal health is maintained, and write ‘dummy’ press releases for distribution.

The university’s press team, based in the corporate communications department, then runs media training for the participants, allowing them to carry out mock TV and radio interviews to brief the public.

The CVO played himself in a morning of exercises, during which the students briefed him on their investigation so far, and he quizzed them about their plans for controlling the ‘outbreak’.

Professor Gibbens, who has been CVO since 2008, then gave a talk in which he discussed his role in managing disease outbreaks, including the current Schmallenberg virus outbreak, and the role the Government plays in helping to maintain animal welfare across the UK’s agriculture industry.

Malcolm Bennett, director of the MSc programme, commented: ‘The students, as part of this course, are taking part in a real-time disease outbreak exercise. In real life they would be answerable to the Chief Vet, so it’s great that Nigel was not only willing to give a talk but actually take part in the exercise.’

The students also heard from Ellesmere Port and Neston MP Andrew Miller, chair of the Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology. Mr Miller described the role of scientific evidence in policy and how select committees work, before discussing the need for scientists and politicians to interact more.

More information on the University of Liverpool’s MSc in Veterinary Science is available at www.liv.ac.uk/veterinary-science/

The RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council is inviting nominations for this year’s Golden Jubilee Award, which recognises an exceptional contribution to the veterinary nursing profession and/or a positive contribution to animal welfare. The award was inaugurated to mark the 50th anniversary of veterinary nurse training, and the first award was presented to Jean Turner in 2011 for her lifetime contribution to veterinary nursing.

‘VN Council feels strongly that the award should be accessible to a wide spectrum of individuals, so nominees could come from veterinary nurses or veterinary surgeons involved in clinical practice, research, teaching or politics – in fact, any aspect of veterinary nursing,’ says Liz Branscombe, chairman of the VN Council.

Both veterinary surgeons and VNIs are eligible to make nominations, or to be nominated, for the Golden Jubilee award.

Nominations must be received by May 8 and the award will be presented at RCVS Day on July 6. More information, and the nomination form, is available from the RCVS website at www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/vn-golden-jubilee-award-2012-nomination-form/
Ten-minute chat

John Lewis has been a full-time zoo and wildlife vet for the past 27 years, working in a variety of zoo and field situations in an equally wide variety of countries. He is a partner in the International Zoo Veterinary Group and a co-founder of the UK charity Wildlife Vets International (www.wildlifevetsinternational.org), which provides specialist veterinary services to conservation projects. John’s particular interests are the conservation of the larger cat species and anaesthesia of non-domestic animals.

What made you become a wildlife vet?

I never had any ambition to become a domestic animal vet, and had initially intended studying zoology at university. However, a wise biology master guided me towards veterinary medicine. After then studying for a PhD in human oncology, an opportunity arose with the International Zoo Veterinary Group to work in a large Middle Eastern zoo. After that there was no going back.

What activities does your job involve you in?

I consider myself to have one of the best jobs in the world. In several zoos in the UK I provide general veterinary services, which cover the preventive and therapeutic care of a large range of species. Inevitably, veterinary work in zoos encompasses not only medicine, surgery, anaesthesia and other clinical disciplines; it also requires a good working knowledge of the natural history of each species. That alone means that it is impossible to become bored or jaded with work, because it is just too interesting.

I travel to many zoos in the UK and abroad to carry out anaesthesia on species that can be challenging – elephants, giraffe, hippos, walruses, large seals, sea lions, and so on. Many of these animals are being anaesthetised safely, for protracted dental procedures, which take several hours, and, given the variation in the conditions under which we work, no two procedures are ever the same.

I am also involved in a number of field projects within tiger and leopard conservation that demand high-quality work under often unusual circumstances – always a challenge, and always enjoyable.

You recently returned from a remote part of eastern Russia tracking Amur leopards. What were you were you doing there?

Since 2006 I have spent a month or two in the far east of Russia every year, working with a team of biologists who catch and radio-collar some of the rarest cats in the world – Amur tigers and Amur leopards. This is necessary to understand more about the cats’ behaviour and what is required for their conservation. My role is to ensure that the animals are anaesthetised safely, to carry out medical examinations in the field, to determine what diseases may be posing a threat to their existence, and to advise on the proposed reintroduction of the Amur leopard into areas where they no longer exist. I also teach young Russian wildlife vets as much as I can. The trapping, which is done from simple, tented base camps, is carried out without vehicles and everyone shares in all the activities involved. Although the work is inevitably somewhat physically demanding – and cold as the winter approaches – it has been a genuine pleasure to work within a team of such skilled and dedicated people. Last autumn we caught and collared two large male tigers, and however professional one has to be during such events, there is always a little time to reflect on how fabulous these animals are, and how impoverished we would all be if they became extinct in the wild.

What do you like about your job?

Working with so many different people, in so many different places, within so many different cultures and conditions, and being involved with some of the rarest and most wonderful creatures on the planet. Working with and learning from some of the best field biologists in the world is a particular pleasure.

What do you not like?

The constant pressure to raise money for conservation activities; not having enough time to document my work sufficiently; dealing with customs; carting endless boxes of equipment around the world; and the frustration of being a poor linguist.

Why is your job important?

As wildlife populations shrink (for a number of reasons), the threat from disease and the need for veterinary support increases markedly. Integrating veterinary work in zoos and in wild populations is becoming more and more relevant. Furthermore, the need for training the next generation of wildlife vets in range countries is crucial.

Ten-minute chat

John Lewis has been a full-time zoo and wildlife vet for the past 27 years, working in a variety of zoo and field situations in an equally wide variety of countries. He is a partner in the International Zoo Veterinary Group and a co-founder of the UK charity Wildlife Vets International (www.wildlifevetsinternational.org), which provides specialist veterinary services to conservation projects. John’s particular interests are the conservation of the larger cat species and anaesthesia of non-domestic animals.

What made you become a wildlife vet?

I never had any ambition to become a domestic animal vet, and had initially intended studying zoology at university. However, a wise biology master guided me towards veterinary medicine. After then studying for a PhD in human oncology, an opportunity arose with the International Zoo Veterinary Group to work in a large Middle Eastern zoo. After that there was no going back.

What activities does your job involve you in?

I consider myself to have one of the best jobs in the world. In several zoos in the UK I provide general veterinary services, which cover the preventive and therapeutic care of a large range of species. Inevitably, veterinary work in zoos encompasses not only medicine, surgery, anaesthesia and other clinical disciplines; it also requires a good working knowledge of the natural history of each species. That alone means that it is impossible to become bored or jaded with work, because it is just too interesting.

I travel to many zoos in the UK and abroad to carry out anaesthesia on species that can be challenging – elephants, giraffe, hippos, walruses, large seals, sea lions, and so on. Many of these animals are being anaesthetised safely, for protracted dental procedures, which take several hours, and, given the variation in the conditions under which we work, no two procedures are ever the same.

I am also involved in a number of field projects within tiger and leopard conservation that demand high-quality work under often unusual circumstances – always a challenge, and always enjoyable.

You recently returned from a remote part of eastern Russia tracking Amur leopards. What were you were you doing there?

Since 2006 I have spent a month or two in the far east of Russia every year, working with a team of biologists who catch and radio-collar some of the rarest cats in the world – Amur tigers and Amur leopards. This is necessary to understand more about the cats’ behaviour and what is required for their conservation. My role is to ensure that the animals are anaesthetised safely, to carry out medical examinations in the field, to determine what diseases may be posing a threat to their existence, and to advise on the proposed reintroduction of the Amur leopard into areas where they no longer exist. I also teach young Russian wildlife vets as much as I can. The trapping, which is done from simple, tented base camps, is carried out without vehicles and everyone shares in all the activities involved. Although the work is inevitably somewhat physically demanding – and cold as the winter approaches – it has been a genuine pleasure to work within a team of such skilled and dedicated people. Last autumn we caught and collared two large male tigers, and however professional one has to be during such events, there is always a little time to reflect on how fabulous these animals are, and how impoverished we would all be if they became extinct in the wild.

What do you like about your job?

Working with so many different people, in so many different places, within so many different cultures and conditions, and being involved with some of the rarest and most wonderful creatures on the planet. Working with and learning from some of the best field biologists in the world is a particular pleasure.

What do you not like?

The constant pressure to raise money for conservation activities; not having enough time to document my work sufficiently; dealing with customs; carting endless boxes of equipment around the world; and the frustration of being a poor linguist.

Why is your job important?

As wildlife populations shrink (for a number of reasons), the threat from disease and the need for veterinary support increases markedly. Integrating veterinary work in zoos and in wild populations is becoming more and more relevant. Furthermore, the need for training the next generation of wildlife vets in range countries is crucial.
Ten-minute chat

John Lewis

*Veterinary Record* 2012 170: iii
doi: 10.1136/vr.g7206

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/170/16/iii

**Email alerting service**

*These include:*

Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

**Topic Collections**

Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections

Ten Minute chats (132)

**Notes**

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/