

A Day in the Life of...

Simone Vitali, Senior Veterinarian



A devotee of Yorkshire veterinarian and author James Herriot from a very young age, Simone has always been fond of animals and intrigued by how they function, their quirks and behaviours.

Graduating from Murdoch University in Western Australia, Simone began at the Zoo in 1998 volunteering one day a week and undertook wildlife field work while completing her postgraduate studies. In 1999 she became a permanent member of staff.

Simone loves working at the Zoo where she can see a variety of animals on any given day.

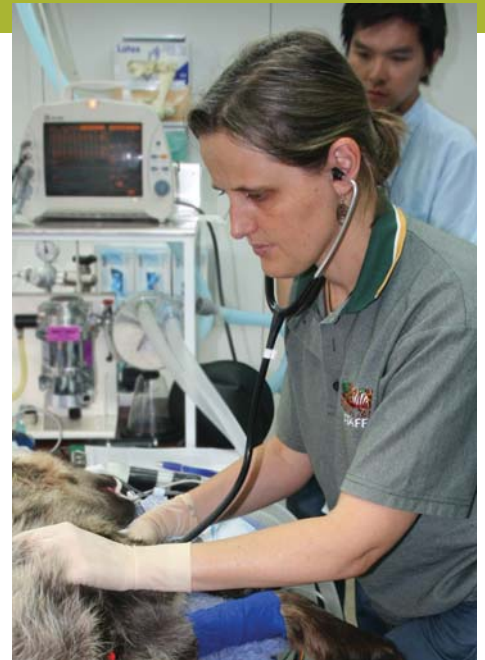
“Working at the Zoo allows you to participate in a range of veterinary work aside from the medicine and surgery. Veterinary staff are involved in looking at wildlife conservation issues and aspects of preventative medicine such as vaccination, disease screening and parasitology (the study of parasites, their hosts and the relationship between them),” Simone says.

“Of course there’s also the wow factor of being up close and personal with the animals. You’re never bored as you continually have to flip your mind between species and approaches. You can be working on a small patient such as a frog in the morning and two hours later you’re tending to a very tall giraffe.

“I’ve got many fond memories of the Perth Zoo animals both past and present. I haven’t missed a Rothschild’s Giraffe birth in 10 years and they are always exciting and breathtaking. I was also lucky enough to record Hecla, one of our Silvery Gibbons, giving birth which is the first time a Silvery Gibbon birth has ever been captured on film that we’re aware of.”

Simone says it is also really satisfying to contribute to the native species breeding for release program and help local conservation efforts.

“Veterinary staff help form conservation recovery plans for such



animals as the Sunset Frog and Numbat to help replenish threatened populations. We also do wildlife rehabilitation work on a regular basis for species such as Black Cockatoos. It’s wonderful when you see them recover and get released back into the wild.”

A Day in Simone’s Diary

My day begins with a morning meeting with my fellow veterinarians to brief each other on current cases and to delegate the day’s tasks. The first clinical session of the day begins after this meeting, when I may perform surgery as needed, assess the hospital patients, or visit animals out in the Zoo grounds. This involves responding to requests from keepers and visiting the larger or feistier animals that can’t come to the hospital.

Aside from the morning meeting the rest of my day can be spent doing many different things. I meet with other Perth Zoo staff on a range of issues requiring veterinary input, including exhibit design, collection planning and breeding management. I also keep curators informed on the progress of complex medical cases.

Along with the rest of the veterinary team, I am involved in many

conservation medicine projects, for example, the investigation into the cause of Woylie population declines in south-western Australia (for more information see page 3). I participate in meetings to discuss policies and preventative strategies and research the latest breakthroughs in veterinary medicine that might assist with Zoo animal care and wildlife conservation efforts.

Another aspect of my job is acting as a mentor and teacher to students from Murdoch University. Murdoch veterinary students come to the Zoo veterinary hospital twice a week as part of a 28-week rotation. They observe procedures, protocols and surgeries and attend lectures to help build their practical knowledge.

I’m responsible for running the veterinary department so I also oversee department budgeting, staff management and respond to inquiries

from external agencies about wildlife and conservation medicine issues.

I oversee the quarantine processes associated with the movement of animals to and from the Zoo as part of regional collection management. This is very important for biosecurity, to ensure that diseases don’t spread and that the animals are in prime health.

How I spend my time from day to day varies quite a lot, but that’s one of the things I love about working at Perth Zoo.

