SEVEN publicações acadêmicas
EM PARCERIA COM: IEMS UNIASSELVI

Practical internship experience in a zoological park: experience report

José Mykael da Silva Santos[1], Valeria Araújo Vilar[2], Mayra Linhares Bezerra Ferreira[3], Amanda Luísa Teixeira Leite[4], Débora Rochelly Alves Ferreira[5], Vanessa Diniz Vieira[6]

ABSTRACT

The internship at the zoo provided practical immersion in the routines of handling, welfare, and veterinary care of wild animals. Under multidisciplinary supervision, students participated in feeding, enclosure cleaning, diet formulation, falconry activities, and the creation of environmental enrichment programs. In the clinic, they observed clinical care, procedures such as penectomy in turtles, amputation in birds, and neonatal care. They also observed reptile handling, the release of a rehabilitated primate, and educational activities. The experience highlighted the complexity of working in zoos and reinforced the essential role of veterinarians in promoting the health and conservation of wildlife.

Keywords: Well-Being. Environmental Education. Management.

1 INTRODUCTION

The presence of veterinarians in zoological institutions is essential for performing functions that extend far beyond individual clinical care. Their responsibilities include population and sanitary planning, epidemiological monitoring, nutritional management, reproductive control, and ex situ conservation initiatives. In recent years, the work of these professionals has been re-evaluated based on principles of animal welfare and the One Health approach, expanding their role to include interactions between animal health, public health, and conservation (CRMV-SP, 2017). The implementation of standardized evaluation protocols, environmental enrichment programs, and close collaboration between management and veterinary teams is fundamental to reducing stress, preventing diseases, and encouraging natural behaviors. These practices require specialized scientific and technical expertise, as well as ongoing training and capacity-building within institutions (Saad; Saad; França, 2011). Beyond direct care, veterinarians also play an educational and institutional role. By participating in environmental education programs, public engagement activities, and research initiatives, they help transform zoos into centers of conservation,

[1] Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP). Paraíba, Brazil. E-mail: josemykael@fiponline.edu.br
[2] Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP). Paraíba, Brazil. E-mail: valeriaaraujovilar@gmail.com
[3] Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP). Paraíba, Brazil. E-mail: mayralbferreira@gmail.com
[4] Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP). Paraíba, Brazil. E-mail: amanda34luisa@gmail.com
[5] Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP). Paraíba, Brazil. E-mail: deboraferreira@fiponline.edu.br
[6] Centro Universitário de Patos (UNIFIP). Paraíba, Brazil. E-mail: vanessavieira@fiponline.edu.br

education, and scientific production (Rodrigues; Sereia; Haas, 2023). In the area of species conservation, veterinarians contribute to assisted reproduction programs, rehabilitation, reintroduction, and the management of scientific collections, which demands knowledge in wildlife medicine, population genetics, and bioethics (ABRAVAS, 2022). Another relevant aspect is the veterinarian's role in institutional administration and strategic decision-making. These professionals are crucial in developing biosafety policies, designing contingency plans for infectious disease outbreaks, and implementing preventive measures aimed at collective health particularly in environments where animals, staff, and visitors interact continuously (Sulzner *et al.,* 2021).

2 OBJECTIVE

To report the activities carried out in a zoological park during a supervised internship through an experience report.

3 EXPERIENCE REPORT

During the internship week at the zoo, students were supervised by professionals responsible for the sectors of veterinary medicine, reptiles, nutrition, animal welfare, and neonatology. Activities began with the division of interns into pairs to accompany animal keepers in routine feeding and enclosure cleaning, strictly following safety protocols. Only animals considered less aggressive were accessed directly, and always under the supervision of experienced keepers, whose familiarity with each species' behavior ensured proper task execution. The animals' diets were planned according to species-specific requirements and sourced from accredited suppliers to ensure quality and safety. After completing this initial phase, the interns attended a briefing with supervisors and were then sent to the ambulatory sector, where they observed clinical care provided to various sick animals, including primates, birds of prey, chelonians, mustelids, and neonates. In parallel, daily falconry activities were performed with two birds of prey one young bird trained for free flight and one adult kept under controlled restraint to prevent escape allowing interns to observe specific handling and conditioning techniques. Throughout the internship, a rotation system among sectors ensured that all participants experienced the different routines of the zoo. Students were also introduced to the diet formulation process, including nutritional calculations, supplementation, and evaluation of food quality. Additionally, they were tasked with developing environmental enrichment proposals for specific enclosures to promote

appropriate behavioral stimulation and enhance animal welfare. In the ambulatory sector, interns observed a range of clinical and supportive procedures, such as neonatal tube-feeding, care for debilitated animals, and conditioning techniques applied to reptiles and mammals. During the internship, a rescued chelonian with penile prolapse was admitted and underwent penectomy due to extensive necrotic tissue, enabling students to observe a low-complexity surgical procedure performed on-site. They also accompanied the continuous monitoring of a neonate requiring frequent assessment of vital signs. Furthermore, the students observed an amputation surgery on a bird with an irreversible limb injury. Activities also included the release of a rehabilitated primate and the collection of natural materials from a forested area for enclosure enrichment. Toward the end of the internship week, students accompanied additional clinical procedures in the ambulatory sector, including medication administration, and attended a short course on reptile restraint offered to environmental police officers. The experience concluded with observations of snake feeding, handling of docile species, and the finalization of planned enrichment activities. Overall, the internship provided a comprehensive immersion into the routines of a zoo, highlighting the importance of multiprofessional collaboration and reinforcing the essential role of veterinary medicine in promoting health, proper management, and welfare of wildlife species.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The internship provided students with a unique experience, distinctly different from the typical academic routine, offering practical immersion in the management and care of wildlife. This opportunity enabled a deeper understanding of species-specific needs and biological particularities, facilitating the application of knowledge acquired throughout their veterinary training. Additionally, the experience highlighted the importance of the veterinarian’s role within a zoological institution and emphasized the value of interdisciplinary collaboration among professionals from various sectors to ensure health, welfare, and quality of life for animals.

REFERENCES

ABRAVAS. (2022). Boletim técnico: Medicina de animais silvestres e Saúde Única. Associação Brasileira de Veterinários de Animais Selvagens. https://abravas.org.br/conteudo.php?go=149&file=anais-2022.html

Conselho Regional de Medicina Veterinária do Estado de São Paulo. (2017). Zoológicos assumem papel primordial na conservação da biodiversidade. CRMV-SP. https://crmvsp.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/info_crmv_68.pdf

Rodrigues, K., Sereia, D. A. O., & Haas, J. (2023). Potencial educativo e importância do zoológico para a Educação Ambiental. Revbea, 18(3), 265–282. https://periodicos.unifesp.br/index.php/revbea/article/view/14244/10439

Saad, C. E. P., Saad, F. M. O. B., & França, J. (2011). Bem-estar em animais de zoológicos. Revista Brasileira de Zootecnia, 40, 38–43. https://www.sbz.org.br/revista/artigos/66256.pdf

Sulzner, K., Fiorello, C., Ridgley, F., Garelle, D., & Deem, S. L. (2021). Medicina da conservação e Saúde Única em zoológicos: Escopo, obstáculos e potencial ainda não reconhecido. Zoo Biology, 40(1), 44–51. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/zoo.21572