Veterinary work at Howletts and Port Lympne

by Chris W. Furley

The African elephant group at Howletts were remarkably free of medical problems with the exception of the newest calf, Swana. She fractured the left tibia the day after Christmas. Overriding of the distal segment was moderate. However, no surgical intervention was undertaken in view of the immaturity of the bone tissue and the thickness of the soft tissue surrounding the fracture. Both the mother Masa and Swana were sedated on three occasions for radiography of the fracture. The results of conservative treatment were most successful. After three months the fracture had healed completely, leaving a large callous at the distal end of the tibia. The calf walks normally and has been introduced back into the main group after being isolated with her mother until April.

Basic foot treatment was begun on all Indian elephants at Port Lympne. Both adult bulls had to be sedated to allow paring of the cuticle. However, the cows were more manageable and paring of both the cuticle and soles was begun in three animals; Rani in particular has poor soles on the hindfeet.

Plasma and urine samples are taken every month and every week from Motki and Pugli respectively for pregnancy testing. Pugli has suffered from two periods of haemorrhage in the first half of this year, apparently from the reproductive tract. The cause is unknown.

Our adult female black rhino, Rukwa, developed a very severe acute mastitis of both halves of the udder, caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*. She was immobilised a total of six times for treatment with long-acting antibiotics. A full recovery ocurred without tissue loss, though in healing the udder tissue may have lost a proportion of its structure.

The newly arrived male Sumatran rhino, Torgamba, has settled into his new quarters excellently. A dung sample revealed a very mild infestation with the trematode *Fasciolopsis buski*. This parasite is normally carried by wild pigs in the Far East, though it may occur in tapirs, and also in man.

An adult female Malayan tapir at Howletts developed a severe cystitis associated with *Streptococci*. She also expelled some placental tissue, so a septic abortion may have occurred earlier. However, no evidence of this was found. She was treated daily using antibiotics in the food and made a good recovery.

Throughout the summer more than twenty Przewalski horses were immobilised by dart for hoof-trimming. Their hooves tend to overgrow due to both the nutritious diet and lack of hard ground for wear.

The nilgai group at Howletts fared badly over the winter. One cow was lost due to chronic renal obstruction caused by calcium oxalate crystal formation. Another cow prolapsed the vagina the day after birth and had to be immobilised for repair. However she died overnight. The calf was also lost overnight, found caught in the mud.

Black rhino cow Naivasha and her calf. This fine cow has successfully reared two calves to date.
(Photograph by Terry Whittaker)

The blackbuck in the same paddock also encountered problems. A male died from an intussusception in the small intestine. A female died from dystocia due to a breech birth presentation. One of this year's fawns died suddenly showing chronic hepatic damage, possibly due to a former umbilical abscess.

Of the Calamian deer, a stag succumbed to a *Salmonella indiana* infection which caused a haemorrhagic gastroenteritis. Following a history of poor fawn survival outdoors, the entire group was immobilised and transferred to a sheltered enclosure at Chilham.

At Port Lympne two barasingha females were successfully treated for infection of broken hooves by surgical amputation. Both individuals had to be kept isolated in an empty animal house for three months for healing. Successful re-introduction into the main herd was completed in June. In August a stag was immobilised for amputation of a broken antler in velvet.

The eland group at Port Lympne are struggling to hold their own. A calf died in March due to *Clostridium perfringeus* infection. The whole group had to be wormed for *Nematodirus* parasites found in one animal.

The primate section at Howletts produced some interesting cases. Severe anaemia was diagnosed in the Javan langur group, possibly nutritional. Affected animals were treated with iron and vitamin B12 injections. The diet was supplemented with minerals. One of the young langurs in quarantine arrived from Indonesia with a louse infestation. An adult female in the resident group of Javan langurs suddenly died from obstruction of the pylorus by leaf stem fibres. This animal also showed a severe ascending pyelonephritis associated with *E. coli* and a Gp., 1. *Streptococcus*.

The gorilla group goes from strength to strength. Minor problems with infectious coughs and colds arose in the colder months. Several births occurred without complications. Only one animal, a young male, Djala, posed medical problems. He suffers from an apparent periodic arthritis or pseudo-arthritis, particularly affecting the wrist, elbow, knee and ankle joints. When the limbs were examined radiographically no major abnormalities were found by our consultant orthopaedic specialist.

A small fire at Howletts destroyed the Saki monkey house near the cafeteria. The group was saved, apart from one animal. However, a young male was badly burnt on the face, hands and feet, and had to be treated for shock and plasma loss. This animal slowly recovered over several weeks.

The Port Lympne cat section was kept busy. Possible kidney insufficiency was suspected in a male African golden cat. The male cheetah who had for a long time been unable to consume red meat without vomiting suddenly prolapsed the rectum. This was replaced under anaesthesia, but within a short time it had re-occurred. The damage to the prolapsed tissue was considerable. Euthanasia was performed. This animal had a history of poor condition, skin problems and probable renal insufficiency.

A massive infestation of ear mange was discovered in the desert cat group, affecting all fourteen individuals. All were caught, sedated and cleaned. It is highly likely that ear mange has ultimately been responsible for the demise of occasional kittens in past litters.

Salmonella spp. was isolated from a tigress, Khala, suffering from diarrhoea. One adult male Siberian tiger aged 18 years was put to sleep following a progressive ataxia caused by spondylosis of the spine.

A Siberian lynx cub fractured the right tibia proximally. Support using a plaster cast lasted only six days followed by elastic bandage. The fracture later healed well without twisting, without support. The cause of the fracture was not established.

At Howletts an adult female African leopard dislocated the left elbow joint. No treatment was offered. Coccidiosis was successfully treated in a male ocelot and a newly arrived male marbled cat. A female marbled cat in quarantine has recovered with time from poor bodily condition and hair loss, into a remarkably beautiful animal.

Two clouded leopard cubs in quarantine were discovered one day comatose following consumption of a leg of meat. Barbiturate poisoning was suspected. The cubs recovered over the next two days, requiring regular fluid therapy to aid hydration and excretion of the causal agent.

A female Indian tiger cub removed for hand-rearing died following a *Salmonella typhimurium* infection with complications. Its litter mate, also hand-reared, was treated successfully with appropriate drugs.

The outlook for both collections of animals is extremely promising. Medical problems appear to arise only from occasional trauma, food associated enteric infections, and indigenous parasitic problems. One or two sporadic unusual cases add spice for variety. Problems in breeding and rearing appear, as in many captive collections, to be a result of harsh weather conditions and inexperienced mothers.

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