

Exotic Animal Veterinary Internship

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Utica Zoo, Utica NY



Overview



Utica Zoo Welcome Center Sign

Where: Utica Zoo located in Utica NY

The Utica Zoo has been open for over 100 years and is an AZA accredited zoo. It is a regional facility located in the Mohawk Valley of upstate New York and has been considered a “sparkling gem” for the city of Utica.

When: May – August

My internship took place during the summer months, when the zoo has its’ highest number of visitors. Two fundraiser nights took place, as well as two free admission nights during these three months.

Who: Vet Services Team

I was a member of the Veterinary Services Team, which consists of the Veterinarian, and two Veterinary Technicians.

What: Exotic Animal Veterinary Care

I worked 40-hour weeks, Sunday through Thursday, with vet days taking place on Mondays and Thursdays. Normal days consisted of quarantine animal husbandry and putting in clinical record onto our online system. Veterinary days were for medical procedures that required vet attention such as surgery or vaccinations.

Why: Getting out of my comfort zone

I have never had any experience working with exotic animals before, and I wanted to see if that was something I would be interested in when exploring my options pursuing my DVM.

Capstone Goals

1. Learn how to implement daily animal enrichment for a variety of species.
2. Enhance self-confidence in handling exotics and wildlife.
3. Learn history behind zoos and what goes into being an AZA accredited zoo.
4. Discuss Species Survival Plans and the organizations dedicated to them.
5. Discover the different abilities of the online record system ZIMS.
6. Be able to speak to zoo visitors in a presentational setting when giving a Keeper Talk.



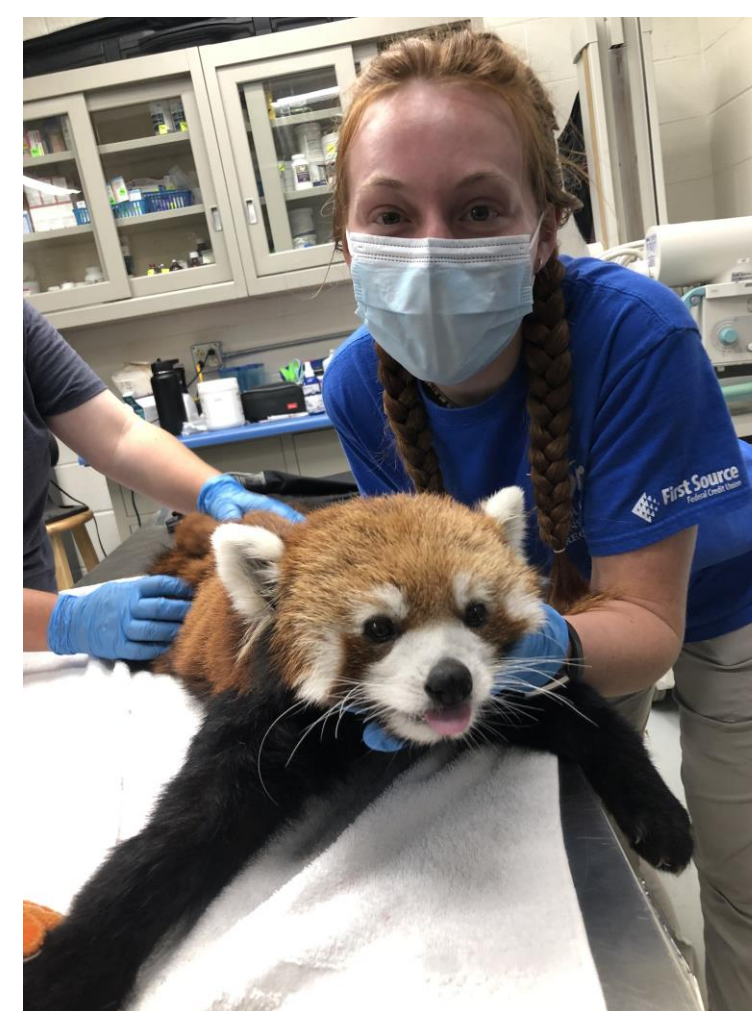
Sloppy Joe (Hyacinth Macaw) and MeiLin (Red Panda)



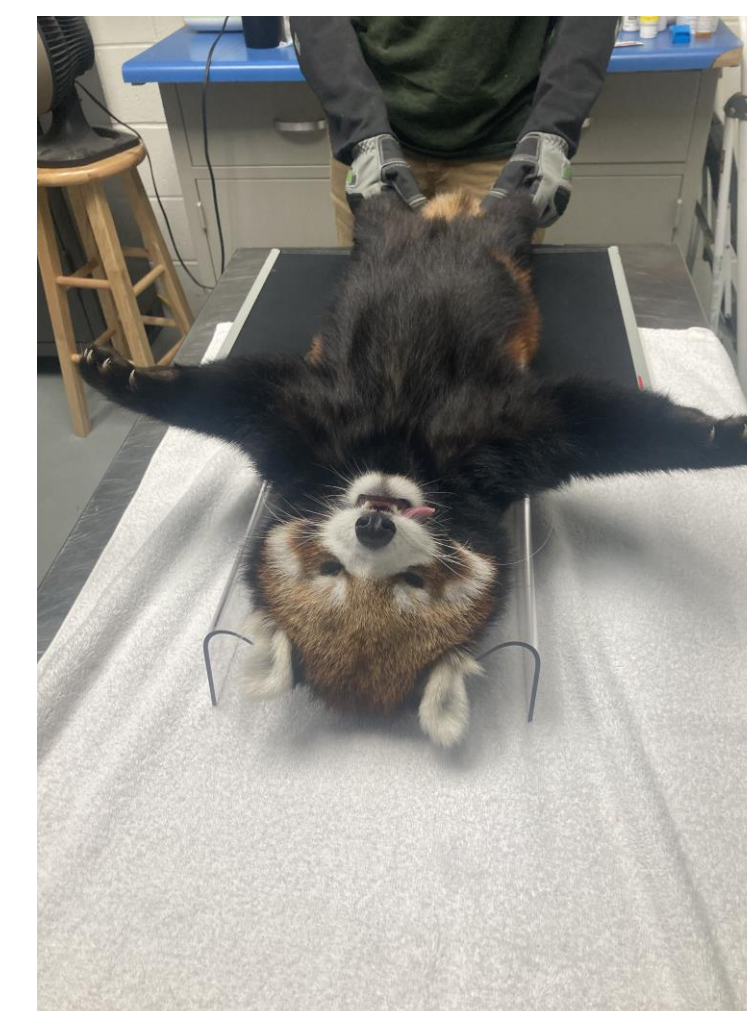
Utica Zoo Welcome Sign

Experience

The Utica Zoo has vet days on Mondays and Thursdays, and as part of the veterinary team we would assist in any veterinary procedures on those days. A main task this summer was providing COVID vaccinations to all mammals at the zoo, as they are at risk due to being in contact with the public. Administering these vaccines took place by either hand injection, pole syringe, or blowdart. There would also be sedation days for physical examinations, beak/nail trims, dental exams, and bloodwork.



Veterinary check up on MeiLin our Red Panda. The procedure included a physical examination, bloodwork, and radiographs.



Turbo the six-banded armadillo

The vet team also takes care of quarantine animals, which are new animals that come into the zoo. New animals must be quarantined for at least 30 days with 3 clean fecals before they can be put on exhibit. This is to avoid the spread of any diseases between new animals and previous animals. Quarantine animals I took care of this summer included a red fox, Jacob's sheep, Patagonian caviars, a red panda, hedgehogs, African bullfrogs, and a six-banded armadillo.

On non vet days we would complete other tasks such as going over diets, doing animal welfare checks, taking radiographs, fecal tests, and refilling prescriptions as needed. UZ does fecal exams in institution, which means we were the ones setting up float tests and examining results under the microscope. Throughout my time here I was able to see strongylidae, coccidia, eimeria, and hookworms when examining fecals.



Radiograph of our Chinese Alligator



I was also responsible for filling out medical records on an online program called ZIMS. These medical records included prescription administration, anesthesia records, clinical notes, bloodwork, and fecal results. This program has records on every animal that resides at the zoo, as well as animals from other zoos that use ZIMS!



Container for turtle radiographs

Red Fox Keeper Talk



Our partially sighted foxes Theo (on the left) and Todd (on the right)

On top of regular day to day tasks, I also provided a keeper talk on our two red foxes twice a week, every week during my time at UZ. This was typically a 5–10-minute presentation at the red fox exhibit, where visitors could ask questions about our red foxes. The number of visitors present during these keeper talks ranged from 2–20 people depending on the day.

Intern Project



Interns also were required to complete an intern project for an animal in their section. So, I decided to make a project for our six-banded armadillo Turbo. I created a tunnel out of a cardboard tube, and I attached broom bristles to the entrances of the tunnel. This helped scratch his back as he walked in and out of the tunnel. I gave it to him on the final day of the internship and he absolutely loved it!

Conclusion

When I first started this internship, I felt extremely nervous. There was a lot of terminology, technology, and husbandry techniques I was unfamiliar with. My mentors were super informative in explaining the various tasks that they are responsible for. They also made sure to answer any questions I had when I was confused. It took me about two weeks to finally grasp those concepts, but after those two weeks I felt very comfortable doing more tasks on my own.



Najla and Furlow our Bactrian Camels

Questions?

Ask me about:

- Different types of daily animal enrichment!
- What procedures I was apart of!
- How this experience changed my future career goals!



Xiao our Chinese Muntjac

Contact Information

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Keep Up with the Utica Zoo!

Website: <https://www.uticazoo.org/>