

Aggieland has zoo—of research animals

By CHERYL CESSNA
Battalion Reporter

Lioness, a wolf and a baboon and like the characters in a fairy tale, actually, all are Texas A&M students in one form or another. The animals are being used in research projects, said Jeff Sanford, manager of Laboratory Animal Sources.

Ninety-nine percent of the research that goes on is with what we call the conventional laboratory animal — rats, mice, guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits, as well as dogs and cats," he said.

"But there are specialty projects where some other species is used. Right now the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has a group of beaver animals they're using for behavioral study," he said. "Here

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Texas they are costing the oil companies a fairly large amount of money each year by chewing through their seismic cables. So you're trying to find a better seismic cable these beasts won't chew through."

Sanford said there are other unusual animals at the facility. "Right now we're holding a Canadian timber wolf. He's used in an artificial insemination study. We also have a young African lioness. Nothing's being done to her — we're waiting until she reaches maturity before they begin any type of project with her."

"We've also got some primates," he said. "Right now we've got six

cynomolgus monkeys in a physiological study. We've got 10 baboons being used in embryo transfer work and five cebus monkeys used as teaching animals to give the vet students some hands-on experience. Wildlife and Fisheries also has some exotic turtles found around South America that they're doing some chromosome studies on."

Sanford said finding appropriate housing for the exotic animals can be a test of creativity.

Sanford said the program was even able to try to help a stork with frostbite.

"We had a rare stork — there are only about half a dozen left in the entire world — owned by the San Antonio zoo. For some strange reason she developed frostbite on her wings and they brought her up here to run her through the hyperbaric pressure chamber."

Unfortunately the stork died. Use of the facilities is not limited to the vet school, Sanford said. "We're the centralized animal care facility for Texas A&M, which means that anyone on campus who's using animals in research can come to us for procurement and holding of those animals, plus any type of specialized technical assistance that's required on those projects. We deal with any college on campus."

"Our basic job is to insure that the animals are properly cared for while the project is ongoing, that they're procured from some type of quality source and to insure that they get the basic day-to-day care that is required, not only by humane practices, but by government regulations, that sort of thing," he said.

"As a research institution, we are governed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. HEW doesn't have

any real regulatory authority as far as the law is concerned; however, they do have the option of withholding funds if you don't meet their requirements."

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"We had a hard time coming up with something for the turtles," he said. "We have a large number of them, about 70. We try to adapt what we have if it's reasonable, and we got lucky enough to have some cages that would work well."

"We try to simulate a natural environment to a point," he said. "It depends a lot on the size of the animal. The USDA puts a limit on the minimum amount of space that any individual animal can have. We're usually well over that — we try to

give them as much space as possible. And there are climate restric-

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tions, certain temperature ranges and that sort of thing."

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Sanford said the supervisors are certified by the American Association of Laboratory Animal Scientists at the technologist level, the highest certification for people who work with laboratory animals.

He said the workers must be aware of the danger inherent in working with wild animals.

"Anytime you're working with laboratory animals, or any animal, there's a certain amount of care that has to be taken. Especially with animals you're not familiar with. You would do things with your own house dog that you wouldn't do with your neighbor's dog, just because you don't know the animal. We don't know any of these animals, so we take extreme care. You have to know what these animals will do to you if they get the chance, and you

have to respect them for that," he said.

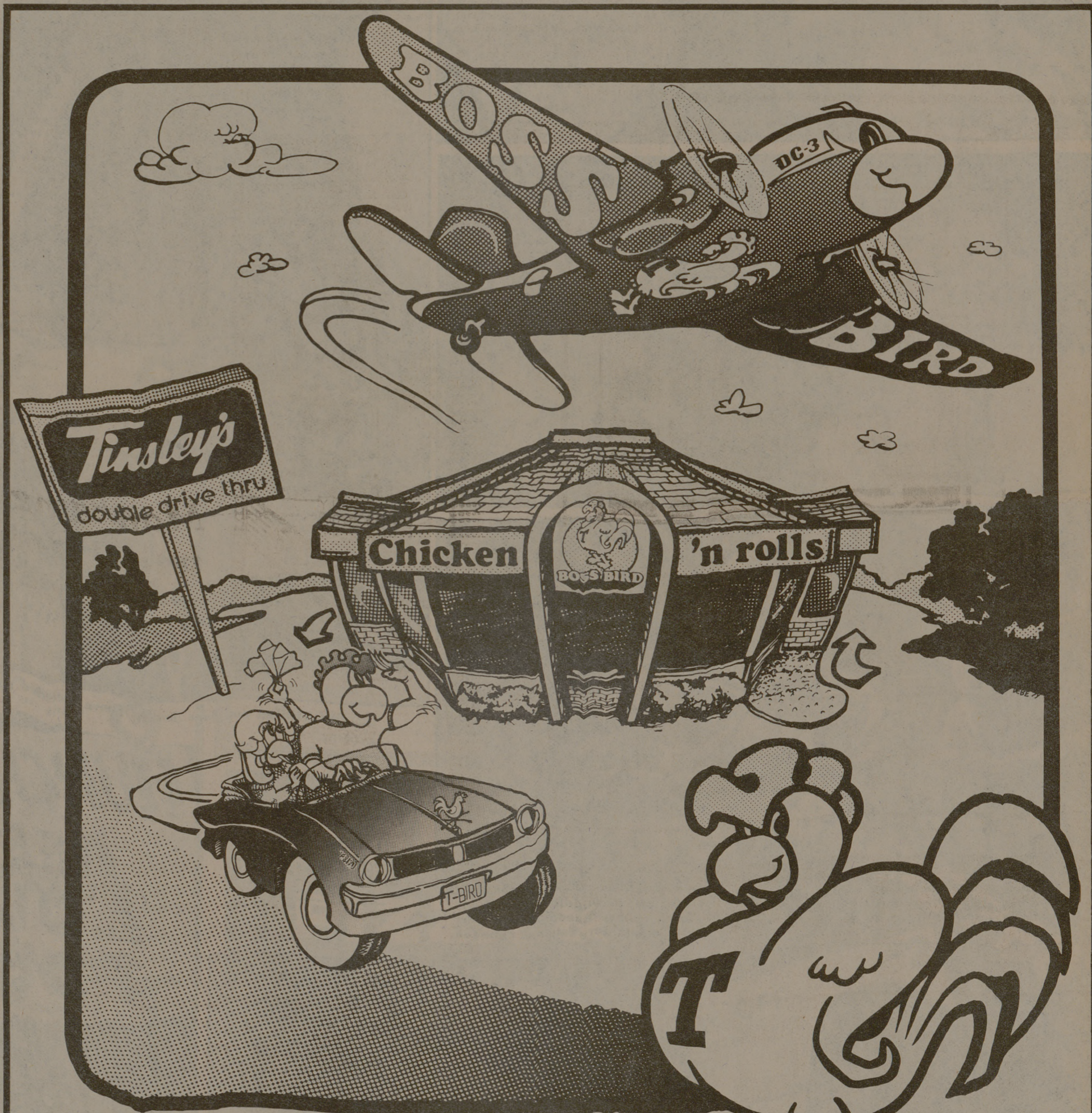
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laboratory animals are put to sleep when the research project they are being used in is finished.

"The USDA has guidelines that regulate how the procedures are run and what happens to the animals after the procedures are over with. Most of the animals, after the investigator is through with them, are euthanized. USDA has stringent guidelines concerning how they must be euthanized. It must be done in a humane manner, and we follow the guidelines to the letter. It's done quickly, with a minimum amount of restraint, pain and antagonism. It's swiftly carried out."

The fate of the exotic animals is better, Sanford said. "It's highly possible that when they're through with the lioness she'll go to a zoo. The Canadian timber wolf will probably go back to where he came from out of Washington state on a game preserve up there."



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