

Exotic animals help researchers answer reproduction questions



Photo by Dean Saito
Texas A&M is home to this llama. The animal is used to teach hoof trimming, physical exams and immobilization.

By Fiona Soltes
Staff Writer

African antelope, coyotes, red sheep, a llama, a lioness, an ostrich and other exotic animals are helping Texas A&M researchers find the answers to questions of reproduction.

Dr. Duane Kraemer, professor of veterinary medicine, physiology and pharmacology, said the animals, which are kept in a wildlife center near Agronomy Road, are used in several University research projects.

"A lot of our work concerns embryo transfer," Kraemer said. "We're interested in the continuation of many endangered species."

The African antelope are among the endangered species.

Dr. Jim Jensen, clinical associate professor of veterinary medicine, physiology and pharmacology, said that A&M owns two types of antelope: African addax antelope and scimitar-horned oryxes.

"The addaxes are believed to be extinct in parts of their former range of the Sahara desert," Jensen said. "But there are several hundred in North America in captivity. We have one breeding pair."

"The oryxes are an endangered species. We presently have two."

One of the oryxes is owned by the Houston Zoo, Kraemer said.

"We've got the scimitar on breeding loan," he said. A&M works with several zoos, Kraemer said, including the Dallas Zoo, where suni antelopes are kept and used for research in conjunction with the University.

Antelope are just one of many kinds of animals used in University research, Kraemer said.

"In the past, we have used baboons, domestic cats and dogs and livestock

species for embryo transfer studies," he said. "Currently, we work with the animals here as well as several chimpanzees in Bastrop."

Among the animals at A&M is a lioness who has been used in studies for more than 10 years.

"The African lion is a logical host for many of our implantation studies," Kraemer said. "But we're not cross-breeding so much as performing interspecies transfer, which maintains the purity of the species."

Kraemer said that A&M has kept male lions in the past but has none now.

Not all animals are used in the reproduction studies, Jensen said.

"We have close to 45 animals, about 50 percent of which come to us as orphans," he said. "We incorporate them into research however we can. We have about 20 white-tailed deer in captivity that we use for a food selection project. We hand-feed them to see what types of foods they prefer."

Jensen said that more animals will be coming to A&M, but nobody yet knows what kinds.

"By early 1989 we will have completed a new treatment facility as a result of a \$150,000 donation," Jensen said. "This will allow more animals to come in from various ranches around the state for medical treatment."

Jensen said that various species of antelope and of ostrich are often available.

"We've done experimental surgery on ostrich in the past and we're working on improving our techniques," he said. "Leg problems in the species are very common in young ostrich chicks. Basically, it means correction or death, as the chick cannot stand up to find food."

A&M has one chick, he said, which is now in intensive care.

Dallas police forced to drop lawsuit; release internal affairs documents

DALLAS (AP) — A judge on Thursday signed an order dropping a police suit against a newspaper, a county commissioner and the Texas Attorney General as authorities agreed to release reports previously kept from the public.

Police said the department also agreed to release all available Internal Affairs Division documents sought by the Dallas Times Herald and Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price under the Texas Open Records Act.

Judge Jerry Dellana of the 201st State District Court in Austin signed an order of nonsuit as the city dropped its legal action against the Times Herald, Price and the Attorney General Jim Mattox, and Paul Pearce, Dallas assistant city attorney.

"Based on the legal ramifications, it's the only thing we can do," said Dallas Police Chief Mack M. Vines.

"In light of the attorney general's ruling in this matter and similar cases, I agree with the City Attorney's Office that the release of these documents is the correct and proper thing to do," Vines said in a prepared statement.

"I've said on many occasions that we have an obligation to be as open as legally and ethically possible," Vines said. "I took over as chief in August, said."

"We have one of the best police departments in the United States and the decision to open these records represents another step toward making us even better."

City Attorney Analesie Muncy said the decision reflects the philosophy of Kenneth Vines brought to Dallas when he took the chief's job in August.

"We, as attorneys, represent our clients, and we give them advice," said Muncy. "Chief Vines chose to take our advice in a different way than the chiefs before him."

Vines said last week that two police officers had been accused of purging and destroying internal documents "without authorization."

One officer, Capt. Roger Duncan of the Internal Affairs Division, is no longer with the department, while the other, Capt. Dwight Walker, head of the division, has been placed on administrative leave, officials said.

The newspaper said Oct. 8 that some of the missing documents were those requested under the Open Records Act by the newspaper, Price and Mattox regarding Dallas police shootings. The police department filed suit against the three in an attempt to keep the records secret.

Times Herald Editor Roy E. Bode, who called the suit "frivolous and in bad faith," commended the city attorney's office and Vines for dropping it.

"Unfortunately, a substantial amount of time and money has been required to ensure that the public's rights were protected," said Bode. "We are studying our posture on further litigation concerning this subject."

Price had asked for copies of all complaints against Dallas police officers since 1980. Department sources said

most of the complaints filed before September 1986 were found to have been destroyed when the city was preparing to surrender them to the county commissioner's attorney.

Vines said last week he did not know what records were missing. The investigation into the purging of documents has been in progress for at least a week.

The Times Herald reported last week that City Attorney Edward Perry publicly denied knowing which records were purged.

Supreme Court halts execution of Huntsville death-row veteran

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — The U.S. Supreme Court halted the execution Thursday of convicted killer Walter Bell, who was scheduled to die by injection early Friday for a robbery 14 years ago that left a Port Arthur couple dead.

The court indicated no vote tally in its order, issued some seven hours before Bell was to be put to death.

"The application for stay of execution of sentence of death, presented to Justice (Byron) White and by him referred to the court, is granted pending the timely filing and disposition by this court of a petition for a writ of certiorari," the order said.

Bell, 34, ranks third in seniority on the 283-inmate Texas death row, where he has lived nearly 13.5 years following his conviction for the deaths of Ferdy and Irene Chisum, both 59, during a robbery of their home.

On Thursday, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans rejected a request from Bell's attorneys for a stay, sending the case to the Supreme Court.

Earlier in the week, a federal district

judge and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals also refused to halt Bell's execution scheduled before dawn Friday.

Attorney Eden Harrington of the University of Texas Law School's Capital Punishment Clinic, who is helping represent Bell, contended the inmate should not be executed because he is mentally retarded.

State attorneys disagreed, insisting the arguments should have been raised earlier.

The high court already has agreed to review another Texas capital punishment case that challenges the constitutionality of executing mentally retarded people.

Asked to describe Bell's attitude, Harrington replied, "I wouldn't say 'happy' is the word. Obviously, he's nervous."

In 1974, at the time of his arrest, Bell — one of 13 children in his family — said he could neither read nor write and never had any schooling except for some special education classes in his home state of Louisiana.

The bodies of Chisum and his wife were found in their bathtub. Chisum had been stabbed and his wife strangled and raped.

Bell was arrested after he tried to cash a check from the Chisums' bank account.

"Another guy had the checks that belonged to the people," he said in a death-row interview. "I told them (police) the checks weren't mine. But they convicted me. I'm not a cold-blooded murderer."

Police also found at Bell's residence a container of coins taken from the Chisum home. His fingerprint also was found at their home.

"They didn't prove I killed these people," Bell added. "There were no eyewitnesses. No one had seen me."

Bell first was sentenced to die in December 1974 for Mrs. Chisum's slaying. That conviction, however, was vacated in January 1984 and the sentence was commuted to life. Before the commutation, he was convicted of the Ferdy Chisum slaying and sentenced to death.

Bell said he rejected a plea bargain that would have resulted in a 15-year prison term.

"I'd have to live with the fact I copped to a murder I didn't do," he said. "I feel I was framed."

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