



Press release

Wednesday 7 May 2014

For immediate release

Durrell and the Animal Health Trust help blind lemur to see again

Durrell is known for its ground-breaking work around the world but now, together with experts from the Animal Health Trust (AHT) near Newmarket, it has performed something of a miracle at its headquarters in Jersey - giving a blind lemur his sight back!

An excerpt of the operation can be viewed here: www.durrell.org/blind-lemur

Sam, the red fronted brown lemur, underwent two hours of surgery to have cataracts removed from both his eyes. It's the first time the AHT has carried out such an operation on a member of the lemur family.

Veterinary surgeons Claudia Hartley and Rachael Grundon from the AHT visited Jersey to perform the revolutionary operation.

The AHT houses the largest ophthalmology unit in Europe and treats more than three thousand ocular patients each year. Typically, the team are treating horses, dogs and cats but from time to time it is able to use its expertise to help more exotic animals with sight problems.

Claudia Hartley, Head of Ophthalmology at the AHT, said: "In the past, we've helped

elephants, bears, lions and even eagles to see again. Whether it's a beloved family pet or a more exotic animal, there is nothing quite like the feeling of restoring sight to an animal – especially witnessing them see again for the first time. It really is the best job in the world!”

Andrew Routh, Durrell's Head Veterinarian said “We approached Claudia and Rachael of the AHT as they specialise in animal ophthalmology and have considerable expertise in this very specific type of surgery. The AHT also provided the specialist equipment required for the surgery including a phacoemulsification machine and operating microscope.”

Sam was originally noted to be suffering from some ocular inflammation in January 2014, having been examined by a local human ophthalmologist, Bartley McNeela, who has previously helped with ocular problems in other animals. After a thorough examination it was concluded that Sam had developed cataracts in both eyes and, due to the decreased quality of life associated with visual impairment, the Durrell staff decided the best option would be to remove the cataracts surgically.

The last six weeks have been nerve-racking for keepers whilst he has been recovering from his big op – the first three days were critical and his keepers had to monitor him carefully to make sure he didn't damage his wounds. Cataract surgery in humans usually requires several applications of eye drops on a daily basis to prevent infections and inflammation after the surgery, in this case Sam has been receiving oral medications which will help to prevent any post-operative problems.

Six weeks on Sam is now enjoying a new lease of life, and has been showing dominant behaviours in his mixed-lemur group, indicating that he is feeling more like his old-self again. Leaping from branch-to-branch requires excellent vision and accuracy, and Sam appears to be on fine form in both respects, easily reaching his favourite spots high above Durrell's *Lemur Lake* exhibit.

Durrell, the world-renowned conservation charity has been working with the striking looking primates since 2008. They are native to Madagascar where they are at risk of extinction in certain parts primarily due to habitat destruction. Hunting and trapping for food or the pet trade also constitute a major threat to this species, which is one of the

most commonly hunted in the country.

Durrell's Kelly Barker said: "Our staff are really attached to Sam, he's a real character. But we'll do anything we can to improve the quality of life for any of our animals."

Ends

Press contacts:

Georgie Shevki
PR & Communications Officer
Animal Health Trust
Tel: 01638 751000 ext: 1572
Email: georgie.shevki@aht.org.uk

Kelly Barker
Head of Marketing and Commercial
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Tel: 01534 860081
Email: Kelly.barker@durrell.org

Rick Jones
Communications Officer
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Tel: 01534 860026
Email: Rick.Jones@durrell.org

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Animal Health Trust

The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk

Surgeon profiles

Claudia Hartley

After qualifying from Bristol University, Claudia spent nine years in general practice, both in large and small animal practices, during which time she gained her RCVS Certificate in Ophthalmology. Claudia spent a year as a clinical scholar at Cambridge Veterinary School, undertaking clinical research in the tear film of dogs. The following year, Claudia took up a residency at the AHT in veterinary ophthalmology. She completed her residency in 2007 and in the same year successfully passed her European Diploma exams in Veterinary Ophthalmology, gaining RCVS recognised specialist status in 2011. Claudia is chair of the British Association of Veterinary Ophthalmologists and is involved in the Education and Residency Committee of the European College of Veterinary Ophthalmology. Claudia has also been an examiner for the RCVS certificate exams as well as contributed to textbooks on Veterinary Ophthalmology

Rachael Grundon

Rachael qualified from Cambridge and then spent some considerable time in mixed general practice, where she gained the RCVS certificates in veterinary radiology and ophthalmology. Rachael's residency was in Melbourne, Australia, where she gained extensive experience with zoo and wild animals, as well as domestic pets. During this time she also achieved the Australian membership in small animal surgery. She is currently preparing for the Australian Veterinary Boards in Ophthalmology. Rachael joined the AHT in August 2013.

Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

www.durrell.org

Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust is an international charity working globally to save species from extinction. Headquartered in Jersey, in the Channel Islands, Durrell focuses on the most threatened species in the most threatened places.

Durrell's philosophy emphasises the need for our three core conservation pillars to work together: a wildlife park in Jersey as a centre of animal husbandry and knowledge, disciplined management of conservation programmes in the field and a Conservation Academy to build conservation capacity. Durrell's belief is that lasting and effective wildlife conservation can be achieved where these three components are in harmony.

Durrell makes a difference

Our pioneering and dedicated approach has saved some of the world's most threatened species, many of which are now on the road to recovery.

Durrell is dedicated

Conservation only achieves results through dedicated leadership and with a track record of over 50 years we lead some of the world's longest-running and successful endangered species recovery programmes.

Durrell is pioneering

Through our approach of long-term field projects, training conservation leaders, empowering local communities and specialised captive husbandry and breeding; we save some of the most threatened species in the most threatened places on earth.

Durrell's work is vital

With the natural world facing unprecedented pressures that threaten wildlife and people, Durrell's conservation work is more vital than ever before.