

A Whale of a Zoo Path Program, Right Here in Illinois

For nearly 20 years, the college's Zoological Pathology Program has been making waves, initially in the Chicago area and increasingly around the world.

"The program was started in 1993 to provide comprehensive diagnostic services to three Chicago institutions—Brookfield Zoo, Lincoln Park Zoo, and Shedd Aquarium—to assist them in managing the health of their animal populations," recalls program director Dr. Mike Kinsel, who was one of the program's first residents.

Today the program serves these core institutions and a great many more, from federal wildlife agencies to zoos and conservation organizations on three continents.

"Our program has earned an international reputation for excellence in diagnostic service, education of residents and veterinary students, contribution to worldwide conservation, and original scholarship," says Dr. Kinsel.

All faculty in the Zoological Pathology Program, which is part of the college's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, are engaged in teaching, research, and service. Service encompasses fee-for-service diagnostics, service in national and international programs that support the conservation of threatened and endangered species, and service to the veterinary pathology profession. Scholarly contributions of the program's faculty and residents since its inception total more than 100 refereed publications and 80 meeting abstracts.

About one-fifth of the program's 1,300+ cases in the past year have dealt with marine mammals. Dr. Katie Colegrove focuses on those species, including researching diseases of wild pinnipeds—seals, sea lions, and walruses. Dr. Kinsel also works extensively with marine mammals and most enjoys cetacean cases—whales, dolphins, and porpoises. Both have served on investigative teams when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) identifies an "unusual mortality event" among marine mammals, as happened when hundreds of dolphins stranded along the northern Gulf coast in the past several years.

Dr. Karen Terio has developed a research and diagnostic focus on exotic feline species and free-living primates, including the chimpanzees studied at the Jane Goodall Institute in Tanzania. Dr. Terio is also currently a member of the examination committee for the American College of Veterinary Pathologists and will serve as its chair in 2013.

Dr. Jaime Landolfi, who has a half-time appointment within the zoo path program, is investigating tuberculosis in elephants as part of her PhD degree. She has a joint appointment with the University's Chicago campus to conduct training for lab animal residents.

The highly competitive, three-year zoo path residency program accepts a new resident each year, and boasts eleven program graduates who have gone on to positions in laboratories, zoos, and universities in Australia, England, France, Spain, and the United States.

“Our training program enjoys an incredible diversity of species, and that’s a plus when it comes to the board examination,” says Dr. Kinsel. “Residents see domestic species on the necropsy floor of the diagnostic laboratory in Urbana during their first year in the program, while they are also completing coursework for the concomitant master’s degree. In the final two years they see, in addition to many other zoo species, a large complement of fish cases from the Shedd Aquarium.”

The zoo path program also offers an externship program that takes six veterinary students each year. Residents in the zoo medicine residency program jointly run by the college, Brookfield Zoo, and Shedd Aquarium have one month of training with the zoo path program.

What’s next for this prestigious program with an international profile? Something a little closer to home:

“In the coming year, we plan to expand our work with the Cook County Forest Preserve District and the Cook County Department of Rabies and Animal Control,” says Dr. Kinsel, “studying free-ranging wildlife locally.”