Murdoch team effort saves dog impaled on stake

Bonnie, a three year old Labrador, was discovered by her owner Susan Gravner in her backyard impaled with a 40cm stake through her chest.

Susan shares, “I arrived home from work and was quite surprised that the dogs weren’t there to greet me. I began to worry. When I went into the back garden, I found Bonnie under a tree with a yellow stake sticking out of her chest. She was sitting up and began wagging her tail when I approached—she tried to move but the stake kept her from being able to stand up or lie down.”

Luckily, her owner Susan didn’t panic and try to remove the stick. Instead she took Bonnie to her vet—stake and all. The vet quickly assessed her and told Susan that Bonnie needed to have the special skills and equipment at Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital.

“I can’t believe how calm I was during the drive, I kept talking to Bonnie and petting her as we drove from Port Kennedy to Murdoch University. The vet nurses met me at my car with a trolley to move Bonnie from my car to the emergency room. It wasn’t until I went inside and I began filling in the paperwork that I lost it. My dogs are my family—it was a terrible shock to find her like that and the thought of losing Bonnie was awful. When I gave her to the people at Murdoch, I could finally let go.”

Upon Bonnie’s arrival at Murdoch Pet Emergency Centre, Dr Katrin Swindells, Emergency Medicine and Critical Care specialist veterinarian, began the care which would save her life. Dr Swindells began procedures to manage Bonnie’s shock and monitor her vital signs, keeping her stable while diagnosing the extent of her injuries and assembling a team of veterinarians with specialised skills to carry out treatment.

“If it weren’t for Murdoch and the vets here, Bonnie wouldn’t be alive”

Once stable, the Murdoch team needed to know what damage the stake had done before they made definitive plans to remove it. Deciding what surgical approach to take was essential to a positive outcome for Bonnie as well as evaluating the damage to any of her organs.

Bonnie was examined by Dr Susan Lewis, using computed tomography (CT scan). The CT scanner has the advantage over traditional X-rays because it enables a three dimensional assessment of the patient rather than the two dimensions offered by plain radiographs. When Bonnie was examined using imaging of a CT scan, the images revealed that the stake had punctured Bonnie’s lungs but only on the left side. Dr Lewis was able to use the CT images to create a 3-D model of Bonnie’s injuries and provided advice to the surgical team.

(Continued over page…)

Bonnie in the emergency room.
Susan says, “Based on the CT model, Dr Snow spoke with me about Bonnie’s prognosis. She let me know that even though the stake had pierced her lungs, it had missed her heart, major blood vessels and arteries and her diaphragm. Bonnie needed a complicated surgery to save her life—luckily, we had pet insurance so money wasn’t a concern. It meant we could do what was best for Bonnie without worrying about cost. We could just worry about getting Bonnie better.”

Based on this model, the veterinary anaesthetists and surgeons’ planned the surgery. The surgery would be difficult. Dr Griet Haitjema, a specialist veterinary anaesthetist, had to work with a patient with a severely compromised respiratory system. Once Bonnie was anaesthetised, Dr Lynn Snow, a veterinary surgeon, would need to remove the stick and the damaged lung tissue, sealing the lungs as quickly as possible as well as assessing for any other major trauma.

Fortunately, as a teaching hospital and referral centre, Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital has a range of specialist veterinarians and an array of specialised tools available for the surgery. Featured in this surgery was a “thoraco-abdominal stapler” which fires a row of 30 titanium B-shaped staples/min to seal the removed lung tissue. Once the stake was removed, Dr Snow had to remove approximately 50% of Bonnie’s total lung volume, the maximum volume of lung that can be removed in one surgery without major complications.

Following her surgery, Bonnie recovered in Murdoch Pet Emergency Centre’s 24 hour Intensive Care Unit. Bonnie had a chest tube for 24 hours after her surgery. This allowed the ICU team remove any residual air or fluid that accumulated in the chest after surgery in order to help Bonnie breathe comfortably.

Susan says, “I went to visit Bonnie in the Murdoch’s Intensive Care Unit. I was so surprised it looked just like an emergency ward in a human hospital. I didn’t expect the emergency equipment or all the staff, students and nurses. It was so amazing. Bonnie looked pathetic with half her coat shaved and bandaged up like a sausage, but already her tail was wagging. By the next day, she was back to our old Bonnie.”

Bonnie was released just 48 hours after her dramatic accident. Two weeks after the surgery, Bonnie’s staples were removed and she was given a clean bill of health. With only 50% of her original lung capacity, she will have to adjust to tiring more easily but already she has regained enough energy to break out of her confinement 3 times.

Susan continues, “If it weren’t for Murdoch and the vets here, Bonnie wouldn’t be alive. People aren’t aware of how important it is to have Murdoch here. Our local vets can do a lot of good things, but we need Murdoch to do the exceptional things.

I’d like to raise awareness for other pet owners to help Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital. When it’s your pet, a member of your family, you’ll want Murdoch to have the right equipment and the right people to save your pet’s life. Your donation can be a part of saving an animal’s life.”

One Bonnie saves another: Crommelin equipment part of life-saving surgery

In 2006, Terry Crommelin’s Westie, Bonnie, was run over and needed the specialised care and equipment at Murdoch Pet Emergency Centre to save Bonnie’s life. Since then, Terry has been donating much needed equipment to the Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital. This year, Terry donated a new piece of surgery equipment (an electrocautery unit) that was used to remove the stake from Bonnie Gravner’s lungs.

Because of the care his dog Bonnie received, Terry made a gift that was a part of the life-saving surgery that ended up saving Bonnie Gravner when she impaled herself on the stake.

“You never know whose pet may be involved in an accident...or what pet’s life you could save with a gift to the Murdoch Veterinary Hospital. Knowing that I have been a part of saving this dog’s life is an incredible feeling. Not everybody can afford to buy a big piece of equipment, but all of us dog lovers can be a part of ensuring Murdoch has the staff and equipment it needs. You can donate towards a specific piece of equipment, give a little bit every month, or put a gift in your will. You can be an animal life-saver too.”

Student Sandy Smith observes animal welfare practices overseas

Final year student, Dr Sandy Smith was given an opportunity to join Wellard’s MV Ocean Drover to observe animal handling and welfare aboard a live export vessel on a journey to the Middle East. The trip included opportunities to experience pre-boarding health checks, work with AQIS inspectors, transport, and efforts to improve feedlot and abattoir conditions abroad. Sandy returned to Murdoch to share her experiences with Murdoch students and staff.

“The Wellard Travel Award presented me with the opportunity to accompany 70,000 sheep and 1,200 cattle on their journey from Fremantle to the Middle East – an experience that would otherwise have been out of reach of my student budget. As part of the award, I was also was shown the workings of Middle East feedlots, abattoir operations, post arrival handling and care, and given many opportunities to experience the local culture. One of the many highlights for me was being able to see first hand the impressive work being done by Australians based in the importing countries to ensure ongoing improvements in animal welfare and handling of Australian livestock. Working along side a range of people from various cultures was a lot of fun and very rewarding. I found myself both learning and teaching – and I am very grateful to Wellard for the experience.”
**Murdoch Ph.D student wins prestigious Fulbright Scholarship**

Dr Kathryn Napier has been selected to spend 12 months in the US to study birds and mistletoes in US. Mistletoes are a keystone resource in Australian forests and woodlands, being an important native food source and providing shelter for a range of animals. Birds play an important role in mistletoe ecology as they act as pollinators of the flowers, and after they consume the fruit, as agents to disperse the seeds through their droppings.

Kathryn says, “The aim of my project is to identify bird species that consume mistletoe fruit and assess the nutritional importance of mistletoe to the bird community, and to also gain a better understanding of mistletoe biology”. This project, whilst concentrating on mistletoe distributions and dispersers in Western Australia, also has national significance in increasing the knowledge base for the management of mistletoes as a keystone resource.

**Peculiar pets get special attention at Murdoch**

For Joe Porter, a Murdoch student studying Conservation & Wildlife Biology, reptiles are more than just pets, they are his passion. Joe currently has 6 pythons and 2 frill-necked lizards, several frogs and a gecko. He has a category 4 Reptile Licence, works for Pet Magic looking after their reptile section and hopes to do an Honours project on reptiles in the future.

Over the winter, Joe had bred one of his Woma pythons and was looking forward to greeting new hatchlings this December. The expectant python shed her skin, (a sign she is getting ready to lay her eggs) but laid only 1 egg before becoming anxious and restless. Joe turned to the expertise at Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital to help with this unusual problem, “I’d heard good things from other reptile lovers about Murdoch, especially Dr Lisa Winters and Dr Tim Hyndman. I was in the middle of exams but Lisa was great—called me back straight away and arranged an X-ray and ultrasound around my exam times.”

The radiograph showed that the python was egg-bound, with another 8 eggs waiting to be laid. After an injection of oxytocin, calcium, and a pain reliever, Joe waited patiently to see if this treatment would be effective. The next morning, the python passed all her eggs, and Joe brought her in for a check up to make sure she was all right. Three of his python eggs have survived the incubation period and Joe has welcomed 3 new pythons to his unique menagerie. “I’m glad Murdoch was here to help. Lisa was so helpful and knowledgeable. I don’t know too many people that are excited to work on snakes. It’s great to know Murdoch can help all sorts of pets.”
Our Wishlist

Each year with thanks to donors like you, the Vet Trust helps to improve how we treat and care for animals by purchasing new equipment, improving our education programs, and investing in new research and equipment. There is always more that could be done if only we had the equipment, facilities, research or expertise. While our wishlist is long, here are 6 projects that could really make a difference.

- **Hospital Equipment:** In 2011, the veterinary hospital is seeking donations to support key diagnostic and life-saving equipment. Current items on our wishlist include portable oxygen machines, laryngoscopes, ophthalmoscopes, anaesthesia monitoring equipment, an oxygen cage, infusion pumps and more expensive projects like an MRI. Costs for this equipment range from $300 to $50,000; more expensive equipment and facilities can cost $1m-$2m. Whether you are a pensioner or a Lotto millionaire, your gift can be a part of ensuring our patients have the right equipment and expertise available for their treatment. ($300-$1m)

- **Shelter Medicine Program:** Murdoch partners with animal shelters to help provide health assessments, preventative treatment, de-sexing operations and surgical after-care to deserving animals in need of a home. The Shelter Medicine program benefits our students by educating them about the issues faced by animal shelters, providing clinical and surgical experience in a closely supervised environment and by developing a commitment to community service. This program requires funds for teaching & staff supervision, transport of students & animals, veterinary equipment & materials. ($2,000-$100,000)

- **Student Prizes/Scholarships:** Murdoch’s veterinary & biomedical courses are incredibly demanding. Students not only have long days of lectures and labs, they have demanding study requirements including gaining experience on farms, in veterinary clinics, in laboratories, in shelters and wildlife centres and in government. Because these demands make working difficult, many students struggle to make ends meet. You can encourage a student to succeed with a prize for their achievements or a needs or academic based scholarship. ($1,250-$5,000 over 5 years)

- **Outback Veterinary Health Clinic:** For many animals in rural and regional Australia, veterinary care is largely unavailable or unaffordable to owners. Each year, Murdoch University takes a small co-host of students to regional towns to provide health assessments, provide preventative treatment, de-sexing operations and community education about responsible pet ownership. The costs include staff supervision, travel & lodging, and veterinary equipment & materials. ($5,000-$10,000)

- **Upgrading of our Veterinary Farm facilities:** With the help of Alcoa Farmlands, Primaries of WA, Mitchell Livestock Transport, Craig Mostyn Group, and National Australia Bank, Murdoch has begun upgrading our production animal teaching experience with the purchase of a mobile ultrasound, refurbishment of our reproduction lab, and improvements to our sheep and pig yards. We need to raise an additional $25,000 to complete the project with installation of new sheep yards. ($25,000)

- **Supported positions:** Murdoch University, like many other veterinary schools, has found that government funding for core operating costs like staff positions has not kept pace with the requirements of veterinary education. While Murdoch University will continue to fund the key positions to ensure that every Murdoch veterinary leaves with a quality veterinary education, we seek additional support for staffing to ensure we continue to remain at the highest standards for international excellence in veterinary education. Funded positions can range from residents and interns that develop specialised skills, research officers that help write grants or work in labs, additional tutors and support for students that need additional help or funding for professorial chairs to attract the highest calibre of veterinarians to Murdoch. ($30,000-$200,000 annually)

Donations to the Murdoch University Veterinary Trust can make a real difference to the lives of animals

Your donation can fund the next research breakthrough, prepare new veterinarians to deliver world-class care and provide equipment and expertise for the most difficult veterinary cases.

100% of every dollar given goes to key priorities in the School and you can earmark your donation for a project that is important to you.

Please help us help animals.

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Murdoch Vet Class 2010 raises $2,000 to support memorial prize for classmate

On 3rd December 2010, Murdoch final year students celebrated Registration Day 2010 with 450 of their friends, families and colleagues. Registration Day marks the day when final year students are eligible to register with Australian Veterinary Surgeons Board and begin practicing as veterinarians. Registration Day includes tours for parents and friends, a prize ceremony, a School barbecue and culminates in the Graduation Dinner, an event organised by the students themselves to celebrate their day.

Registration Day 2010 was tinged with sadness as the School remembered Celina Chua, a final year veterinary student that passed away in a tragic car accident earlier in the year. Celina was remembered in many ways. The University awarded her degree posthumously, the School placed a memorial plaque in the School and the Graduation Dinner Committee held a silent auction to raise money to support the Celina Chua Award at the Murdoch University Veterinary Trust and the Perth Zoo. The Graduation Dinner Silent Auction was a tremendous success raising $2,000 to support the Celina Chua Memorial Award, and an additional $2,000 for the Perth Zoo.

The Veterinary Trust is hoping to raise enough funds to establish the Celina Chua prize in perpetuity, and is seeking to raise an additional $3,500 to achieve this goal. (If you would like to help remember Celina, please note Celina Chua Award on your donation form).